Transmotion
Vol 11, No 1 (2026)
DOI: 10.22024/UniKent/03/tm.1474
Pp. 117-149

ISSN 2059-0911

INTERVIEW

WAITING FOR CRAZY HORSE: Recorded Interview and Discussion with Vine Deloria, Jr.

GERALD VIZENOR

Vine Deloria Jr. invited me to record an interview with him at his suburban home in Denver, Colorado. The comments that early autumn more than fifty years ago were direct and heartfelt about native resistance, education, ideology, reservation politics, schemes and federal agencies, and always with humor. The interview and discussions were casual, more conversational than journalistic, and lasted for about an hour in the dim light of his basement office with the scent of laundry soap.

Barbara Nystrom Deloria directed me to the basement, an ordinary scene of sidesteps through the bed sheets hanging on a line to dry, and found Vine at a steel tanker desk under a small window. The author leaned back in a heavy chair, smiled, and with a sense of visionary motion teased me for having aroused the wrath of Dennis Banks, Clyde Bellecourt, and others in the American Indian Movement.

I was a staff writer for the *Minneapolis Tribune* at the time and reported the obvious in an editorial article that two words, *Chippewa Indian,* were common misconceptions. An anxious troupe of natives convened at the entrance to the Minneapolis Star Tribune and protested my commentary about invented *indians,* and then vanished that afternoon when they apparently learned from elders that the Anishinaabe and Ojibwe had been wrongly named the Chippewa. American Indian nominations were relevant at the time, but now the word *indian* and many other invented cultural names are more fully explained in standard dictionaries. Even so the fabrications of natives as romantic silhouettes of victimry continue in the literature of popular culture as a vain compassion.

The first discussion that afternoon in the basement was about his book, *Custer Died for Your Sins: An Indian Manifesto*, published a few months earlier in 1969. Vine declared that "we really need the younger generation to come in and take over the whole structure of Indian Affairs."

Vine was thirty-six years old at the time of the interview, and in the next five years he inspired thousands of young natives to engage in politics and governance, participate in national organizations, and study treaty law and literature, and at the same time he graduated from the University of Colorado Law School, taught at Western Washington State University, advocated for native fishing rights, and published five more books, *We Talk, You Listen*; *Of Utmost Good Faith*; *God is Red; Behind the Trail of Broken Treaties*; and *The Indian Affair*.

Vine served as executive director of the National Congress of American Indians from 1963 to 1967 and praised the younger generation of natives. His generous notice of other natives and organizations was characteristic of his liberal sense of public service, native ethos, loyalty, and his dedication to education. He wrote in *Custer Died for Your Sins*, "Ideological leverage is always superior to violence," and native problems "have always been ideological rather than social, political or economic."

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CC-BY 4.0
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Native humor and irony are other admirable attributes of his literary manner as a visionary storier and in conversations and publications. "The current joke is that a survey was taken and only fifteen percent of the Indians thought that the United States should get out of Vietnam. Eighty-five percent thought they should get out of America," he wrote in *Custer Died for Your Sins*. Vine declared that "irony and satire provide much keener insights into a group's collective psyche and values than do years of research," and concluded that "until we can once again produce people like Crazy Horse all the money and help in the world will not help us."

Vine conveyed native irony and humor on every occasion, in conversations, at conventions, and lectures, and he practiced the communal tease and mockery of poses, once customary in many native communities, mainly with native political leaders, lawyers, and academics. He was invited to address a convention of historians, for instance, and with a perfect ironic gesture told the august scholars that his great aunt was a "white princess."

Natives easily "come together by sharing humor of the past," he wrote, and the most common ironic stories in the past fifty years alluded to cultural anthropologists, federal agents, separatist treaties, General George Armstrong Custer, and the navigational miscalculations of Christopher Columbus.

Vine encouraged native movements that were progressive, clever, and embraced an ethos of governance with recognition, and celebrated the rights of resistance in the ruins of civilization. He declared that it was crucial that natives "pick the intellectual arena as the one in which to wage war. Past events have shown that the Indian people have always been fooled by the intentions of the white man. Always we have discussed irrelevant issues while he has taken our land. Never have we taken the time to examine the premises upon which he operates so that we could manipulate him as he has us."

The New Indians by Stan Steiner was published in 1968, and the concept of *new* natives insinuated the absence of *old* natives and portrayed hundreds of young natives who were active and ready to march, protest, occupy, outmaneuver, overturn, and "overrun" political and racial obstacles with a new sense of presence, natural motion, and resistance.

Steiner told Studs Terkel in a 1967 radio broadcast that Vine Deloria "attended a civil rights banquet in New York and passed out stickers" that natives would not "overcome" but "We shall overrun," and eight years later in a broadcast interview Vine told Terkel the legal status of the tribes had not been established in court, and "so we have a much more difficult time because we have to evolve the theory of where we want to go at the same time that we're doing activist things to attract attention to get people to understand."

Vine read about my advocacy for natives near Franklin Avenue in Minneapolis, otherwise the urban reservation, or existential colony, and my protests and petitions that the Bureau of Indian Affairs change the legal definition of service as "on or near a federal reservation" to include the urban reservation, the largest native community in Minnesota. Representative Donald Fraser investigated the service obstacle and reported that there was no congressional intent to limit federal services to reservations. And, of course, Vine had read my polemical report about Thomas James White Hawk who had been sentenced to capital punishment in South Dakota.

Vine telephoned Arthur Naftalin, Mayor of Minneapolis, and boldly directed him to sponsor my travel to a conference of reservation leaders at the Alvarado Hotel in Albuquerque, New Mexico. Vine was aware of the article in the *Minneapolis Tribune*, 29 September 1966, that Mayor Naftalin had appointed me chairman of the Indian American Task Force, and decided it was time that we met. That was my first native convention and three years later we met again at the same hotel for the convention of the National Congress of American Indians, October 8, 1969. Vine introduced me to many native leaders at the convention, including President Wendell Chino of the

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Mescalero Apache who had created the catchy concept of "red capitalism," and Cato Valandra of the Rosebud Sioux.

"The 26th Annual Convention of the National Congress of American Indians is an event of great meaning and vital importance for all our citizens," President Richard Nixon wrote in a formal letter to the convention. "It pleases me to know that Vice President Agnew, Secretary Hickel and the Commissioner of Indian Affairs, Louis Bruce, will be with you to discuss the challenges we face and the action we must take to meet them."

"This Administration *opposes* termination," Vice President Spiro Agnew asserted at the conference. "This Administration *favors* the continuation of the trust relationship and the protection of Indian lands and Indian resources. Let us now and forever put to rest all fears and begin positive action together."

Vine recounted in the interview that younger natives need to participate "in the organizations, do a lot of the hard field work. And it seems there is so much emphasis today on demonstration and spectacular activism."

The *new* natives, the younger progressive native activists, would have been at the right convention to engage the *old* and established native leaders, and to directly petition the prominent officials of the federal government, including the Secretary of the Interior Walter Hickel and Louis Bruce, Commissioner of Indian Affairs, but many young radical natives were on their way to the Occupation of Alcatraz a month later in November 1969.

Radical occupations became new strategies of native resistance, and three years later the American Indian Movement occupied the Bureau of Indian Affairs at the Department of Interior in Washington, and the following year occupied by force and roadblocks Wounded Knee, South Dakota, on 27 February 1973.

Vine was spirited, calm, casual, and earnest in most of the discussions in the basement that autumn, but he was critical and resolute about missions and missionaries on reservations, the Indian Resources Development Act, or Omnibus Bill of 1967, and the American Indian Chicago Conference. The Omnibus Bill "was very favorable," he maintained, but was ruined six years earlier by the American Indian Chicago Conference in 1961. Vine declared that the "Chicago conference just split the whole thing wide open so that a lot of the ideology," and the older native unity, "went down the drain, and it just became personalities." The native community were "fragmented" and "failed to take advantage of the favorable government claims." He suggested that natives were more cohesive about seven year later in 1968 when President Lydon Johnson established the National Council of Indian Opportunity.

The Omnibus Bill created a "loan fund for economic development activities within Indian Country," Christopher Riggs wrote in "American Indians, Economic Development, and Self-Determination in the 1960s." The measure "would have allowed the Interior Department and Native groups greater power to manage Indian property. With permission from the Secretary of the Interior, tribes could form corporations to facilitate economic development, sell or mortgage tribal lands, condemn land within reservations, and adopt zoning and building codes." This "Great Society legislative initiative provoked strong Indian opposition, and it never became law."

Riggs explained in his essay that those who supported the measure were opposed by natives who "desired economic development but maintained that the Omnibus Bill endangered tribal self-determination by threatening tribal lands and giving the Interior Secretary too many new powers. Moreover, critics argued that the Interior Department had drafted the bill without incorporating suggestions from tribal leaders."

Vine teased anthropology, and his mockery of an academic obsession with natives became a signature style. His portrayal and censure of churchy missions and

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missionaries was similar, unreserved reproach and ridicule, but he seldom named actual individuals in recounts of the deception and treachery on federal reservations.

The American Indian Chicago Conference was initiated by two anthropologists, Sol Tax and Nancy Lurie and with the assistance of Robert Rietz, director of the American Indian Center in Chicago, and encouraged by D'Arcy McNickle, chairman of the Steering Committee. The conference was sponsored by several generous grants from foundations.

Close to five hundred natives from ninety communities gathered for a week in June 1961 to consider the simulations of dominance and separatism, legislative regulations, economic development, and the political sway of federal agencies, health, welfare, housing, education, and other crucial matters that proposed to protect natives for more than a century. The conference produced yet another idealistic and ironic parchment resolution of inequities, a "Declaration of Indian Purpose."

The parchment creed provided a preamble of the inherent rights with constitutional royal pronouns in the first paragraph. "We believe in the inherent right of all people to retain spiritual and cultural values, and that the free exercise of these values is necessary to the normal development of any people. Indians exercised this inherent right to live their own lives for thousands of years before the white man came and took their lands…"

Vine considered that his criticism of missionaries and churchy land grabs would result in at least one ironic outcome, and that actually happened when the land grabs were resolved partially on the Leech Lake Reservation in Minnesota more than a decade after his death on November 13, 2005. "I think the mission field is the greatest single source of racism against Indians that exists in the country," Vine declared in the interview. "And these missionaries have been out in Indian country for hundreds of years."

Vine considered my comment that Clyde Bellecourt and Dennis Banks of the American Indian Movement had demanded reparations from the Episcopal Church, and then he countered with marvelous mockery, "Well, I really hope there won't be any Indian Christians left. I think, you know, I really hope that everybody goes traditional."

Vine continued the discussion, "Now, I know Dennis and Clyde, and I don't, you know, agree that the churches owe us money. I don't agree using their form and format to get it." He pointed out that the church talked natives into signing treaties because natives could not read the fine print. "All of a sudden some church ends up with half a million dollars of land." He contended that "not only should we get money for the land they've taken," but "they should buy back the particular pieces of land that they got out of the treaties and deed it to the tribe."

The Leech Lake Reservation won the right in federal court to hunt and fish on treaty land about fifty years ago, but the urban militants of the American Indian Movement declared war on white fishers on treaty land.

The Episcopal Church provided accommodations for the militants at a resort on the Leech Lake Reservation shoreline of Cass Lake, Minnesota. The Episcopal dioceses had obtained the treaty land for mission duties and native conversions, and later turned the land into a summer resort for churchy city families, and then indirectly supported the armed protest of the American Indian Movement. The Cass Lake Episcopal Camp and other property on federal treaty land was returned six years later to the government of the Leech Lake Reservation.

Vine Deloria Jr. was a singular native philosopher and master of native irony and he changed forever the way natives are considered at universities, in state and federal courts, at protests, and in popular culture. His creative liberal conscience of service encouraged critical, political, and ideological encounters with individuals and institutions about the rights of natives, and his ethos of governance is memorable and continues to inspire natives around the world. He inadvertently described his own ironic prominence as a native advocate when he declared that "irony and satire provide

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much keener insights into a group's collective psyche and values than do years of research," and concluded that "until we can once again produce people like Crazy Horse all the money and help in the world will not help us."

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GERALD VIZENOR AND VINE DELORIA

Edited Transcript of a Taped Interview

Denver Colorado, Autumn 1969

GERALD VIZENOR: Vine, your book has been in print four months now. And one of the reasons you state for writing the book is to involve more Indians, more young people, tribal organizations, and tribal governments. How successful has that been?

VINE DELORIA: I don't know how successful it's been, Gerald. But one of the things that I see is we really need the younger generation to come in and take over the whole structure of Indian Affairs. Work in the organizations, do a lot of the hard field work. And it seems there is so much emphasis today on demonstration and spectacular activism. I'm sympathetic to the new left ideas, but a lot of the techniques they use, to give an example, were at the convention of the National Congress of American Indians.

VIZENOR: Which one, the last one?

DELORIA: The last one in Albuquerque in October. There were eighteen hundred Indians there. And it was really the largest gathering you'd ever seen, twice as big as any previous convention.

VIZENOR: Were there more young people there?

DELORIA: Yeah, there were. Well, you remember the one in 1966, but what would you say, twenty to thirty kids there? This year, they're close to three hundred visitors. Mostly college students, a few high school students, and a lot of kids who've gone through the relocation program are just starting here in the Albuquerque area. I'd say there were easily three hundred kids there. And seven carloads from Berkeley came, and their whole emphasis was to march around with signs outside the hotel, calling them hicks and old racists.

VIZENOR: Calling them honkies?

DELORIA: They called them hicks and honkies. Throughout the convention they kept appealing to some of the NCIA officers to let youth have a say and they wanted a youth panel, the whole thing. And I just think the situation is too critical in Indian Affairs for us to have a substantial number of people playing this youth game for so long. I talked with some of the younger guys who are supposed to be in National Indian Youth Council and others, and I urged them to organize a youth party and run a candidate for president. And they could have racked up two to three hundred votes there. And by doing that, they would have, I think, really reoriented all the old tribal leaders. The guys who have traditionally made policy in National Congress of American Indians. It was a very tough election to begin with. Three major candidates and seventy some resolutions, so they're really fighting over policy for the whole Indian community. And if the youth had come in and put two or three guys on resolutions and offered to write resolutions. I think they could have really reoriented the whole posture of Indians nationally.

VIZENOR: You find that Indian young people sense, object, and involve themselves with the same criticisms of authority that young people across the country are doing. I mean, is it closer to a generation gap? Are young Indian people critical of the traditional means of power within tribal governments? Are they, are they more

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ideological and true believers and responding to a white student rebellion? Or are they? Is there a distinction in their criticism?

DELORIA: Well, I think these students are hitting at a deeper level than the corresponding white students are in their attacks on white society. I was out in Bellingham, Washington, last May, and a lot of these kids are asking very incisive questions that you don't get unless they're two or three guys are really thinking in these terms nationally. We're in the older age group and more accepted as national leaders. But a lot of the kids I talked to are really asking very deep questions, the whole purpose of reservations. What we should be doing? What development is? And so many of the older tribal leaders are caught in this trap. They want to get something for the reservation people, and so they're very eager to accept the first thing that comes along. And these kids were really asking questions about stepping back from the whole situation, taking a look at it. Do we really want a shopping center on our reservation because it's going to bring in traffic and it's going to bring in pollution, it's going to bring in all kinds of things? So I think they're really looking at things in a much deeper level. But no matter how concerned you are or how sincere, you still can't throw the entire structure away, and particularly with our legal status here. Yeah, the tribes are federal corporations, and you may not like the tribal council, but if you abolish the legal statute, status is a federal corporation. Then you're really in trouble, because what is your status in relationship to your county and state? And I think a lot of them are so eager to be activists, that they don't—I mean, they look at the basic political structure as something you take by storm. And I think after you have been in it a while you see it as a whole series of blocks. If you put the right leverage on it, the whole thing revolves for you with a minimum of effort.

VIZENOR: Well, there's that kind of confrontation and politics.

DELORIA: It's somewhat of a crisis type thing.

VIZENOR: But less, less oriented to issues and more toward identity, and…

DELORIA: I think they're just probing the weak spots. Trying to find a weak spot that is an issue without trying to look at the whole setup. Now that, and down in New Mexico I've seen a report that a tremendous thing, this thing they are having at Gallup trying to get the Gallup ceremonial committee, to, you know, be more realistic about what their own relations are. Because as you know Gallup makes a big fuss over Indians one week a year when the Chamber of Commerce has thrown this talent on them, and then the police are beating the hell out of them the other fifty-one weeks of the year, and that's really a bad situation. I've complained about that for years. I'm glad to see younger guys coming in, you know, in a very organized way and really raising this issue.

VIZENOR: In your book, Vine, you offer some advice to young Indian people not to follow the path of the Black militant leaders, that Indians have more identity connected with reservation land status, and that freedom in that sense doesn't mean the same thing for Indian people that, that is, in contrast to what Black people are demanding. How do you respond then to the kind of militancy that some Indians are showing, and many Indian groups are identifying more closely with Black organizations? Particularly in urban centers?

DELORIA: Yeah, what I think is the urban situation is a different kettle of fish since there is at least the organizational split between urban and reservation at the present time. This is probably one route that the urban Indians have to travel until we can get the two put back together in one organization.

VIZENOR: Why is it so, because in urban centers there's no reservation status, so Indian organizations would have to demand programs from the federal government in the same kind of militant attitude as Black people do, is that it?

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DELORIA: No. Well, I think the split at the present time comes because we've had short-sighted leadership in the last two years.

VIZENOR: Reservation leadership?

DELORIA: Reservation leaders who have not even examined what urban Indians can do to help.

VIZENOR: How do you contrast the rest, present reservation leadership and urban leadership, urban Indian organizations?

DELORIA: I think we get—well, I think there's really good leadership in both areas. But there are so many government programs available, or that are ostensibly available and you have to chase them for six weeks, and then you find that you can't qualify anyway, which they should have told you to begin with. But I think the thing that's hanging everything up is reservation leadership is oriented solely to the reservation, and they don't really see what the urban Indians are doing and what they're up to, and just a relief for them, for the reservation leaders to have some of the better guys go into the city. I think the same way a lot of city Indians and leadership there feels alienated from the tribe, because they have the leadership potential and yet they lost out on the reservation. Now I think the whole thing can be put together if both of them will support some kind of a community development corporation status.

VIZENOR: Do you see more involvement now between urban and reservation organizations? Are there closer relationships between leaders? Or has there ever been a serious problem?

DELORIA: [whistling] There hadn't been until the last two years when NCIA sponsored the first urban consultation. We got twenty-six Indian centers to Seattle, and at that point, some of the reservation leaders said, "Well, we don't want urban Indians in NCIA

because they're always talking about termination." Well, this was only true with regard to one tribe, but the net result of that consultation was that most reservation Indians went away thinking urban Indians were out to do them in, and urban Indians went away feeling rejected, and that feeling's been going through things for two years. So, you had some very bad feelings on both sides that shouldn't have been there. Been handled right I think eventually Alcatraz is something that may bring the whole group together.

VIZENOR: Both urban and reservation?

DELORIA: Both urban and reservation Indians.

VIZENOR: Why is that?

DELORIA: Well, you get urban Indians really trying to get a piece of land of their own, which is comparable to a reservation in an urban setting, to have a National Cultural Center. And this center would serve Indians all over the country, and they would have to, in order to get any sustained federal support. We would have to bring the reservation Indians into the urban setting and really make them face what the urban Indian faces. And I think there'd be a lot more understanding between the two groups, and a whole new program can be worked out.

VIZENOR: In the first sentence of *Custer Died for Your Sins* you write that Indians are like the weather, and as the weather, therefore, nothing can be either understood or predicted. Why [laughter] did you begin your book with that statement? Is that tongue in cheek?

DELORIA: I don't know. I don't when I see you know. One of the problems I've noticed over the last few years is so much was vested interest by outside people in what's going on in Indian affairs. If you have a meeting, and Indians get up, and they say, "well, all tribes are different, and we've got to figure out some kind of strategy so each tribe can be itself and still have a national policy." At that point, a lot of non-Indians say, "yes, but

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you have so much in common that you ought to make a pan-Indianism common,"and you've been through this round. And then you go to a different conference, you say, "Well, you know, we're all Indians, we all share the same legal status. We all ought to have a general plan, a strategy for political action." All that consists of is voter education, and you can do that regardless of what tribe it is. At that point, interested non-Indians come in and say, "yes, but all tribes are different, and there's a difference between Flatheads and the Apaches, but they both mark their ballots the same way, and they both pull the lever the same way." And there's so much confusion, I just wanted to set that down. I knew that anybody who tried to write a book on Indians, if he said anything, he was going to be attacked, either, because he was too specific, and you have to generalize or because…

VIZENOR: Yes.

DELORIA: You know, you start out with generalizations, and all tribes are really different.

VIZENOR: Why then did you call the subtitle of the book, "An Indian Manifesto?"

DELORIA: Well, "manifesto" is a tough enough word to announce to the public. There's something going on, but it's not. It's short of a declaration of war (laughter). So, you don't get the whole country up in arms. You know, you don't have the police coming in to shooting you like the Panthers. So, it's a word in between, but it still has a cutting edge.

VIZENOR: How, or what's been the feeling of leaders towards the statement that you've made that the average life expectancy of an Indian leader is two and a half years?

DELORIA: Well, down in Albuquerque, a lot of guys who are trying to throw the incumbents out, agreed with that, and they used that as an ideological basis.

VIZENOR: I think you were kind of generous.

DELORIA: Yeah. You have to have such an Indian constituency to stay anywhere near the top. And that there's such a leveling process that goes on in Indian Affairs. If you're not always coming up with something new. If you're not right a hundred percent of the time, then they'll dump you right away.

VIZENOR: You can generalize how a man from a reservation in his mid-thirties would become a leader and what happens to him. Why he only lasts a couple of years.

DELORIA: Well, let's take… and some of them don't last that long. Let's take the case of Ronnie Lupe, the White Mountain Apache chairman. Now he started out on the council. He went to college for two years, a Korean veteran, came back and was on the council two years, and the younger people in Arizona wanted to put the older guys in a political trap so that they would set themselves up to move on up into the council. So in 1965 a lot of the younger Arizona people got behind Lester Oliver, who was chairman of the White Mountain Apache, and they ran him as the Southwest candidate for president of National Council of American Indians in 1965, and Oliver got beat. Not really very badly. He lost, but he came in third in a three-way race, about twelve votes under the second man, but it was enough of a defeat to place him in jeopardy as chairman of the White Mountain Apache.

VIZENOR: Oh, I see.

DELORIA: So, in early 1965, early 1966, younger Apaches got together on the basis of the fact that Lester had lost the national race they pushed Lester out and put Ronnie Lupe in. And then for two years, from 1966 to 1969, Ronnie built his national political machine, but it turned out he was going against the trend nationally.

VIZENOR: What was the trend?

DELORIA: The trend, we had a tremendously strong coalition of everybody but the Northwest from 1965 to 1967, but then that side won too much and the tribes from

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little states, California, Nevada, Wisconsin, Michigan began to shift over to support the Northwest position against the Plains Arizona combination. So all the time, Ronnie was building up for a race at the National Congress of American Indian presidency. The coalition that he was working with was melting away, and in Portland 1967 we won by forty-four votes out of something like sixteen hundred. And down to Albuquerque by 1969 the coalition had practically vanished. Ronnie tried to run anyway, and he got beat by a hundred and fifty-six votes out of about seventeen hundred, but that was really a resounding defeat in national Indian politics, and the people who beat him were the people who lost in 1967 in Portland.

VIZENOR: What were some of the issues that the group raised, which you might say lead to his defeat?

DELORIA: I think in every national convention or national meeting that you have in Indian country, one or two leading issues come out. These are issues that Indian people feel fairly certain there's a consensus on. They want to make this the sore point with interior, health, education, welfare, or, remember a few years ago, everybody's talking about the Omnibus Bill.

VIZENOR: Yes.

DELORIA: And the thing was already dead; had been dead for six months.

VIZENOR: Well, it was written before it had ever been brought to the attention of Indians.

DELORIA: One was making Alaska the issue, but they continue to talk about that all through 1968, even though there was no conceivable chance the bill would pass. And this is really kind of an offensive maneuver to keep the government agencies and the bureaucrats off guard. Then you get them spending so much time apologizing for

something they've done, that you're really not worried about anymore, but it distracts them. So, this year, two of the issues were, what are we going to do on Alaska land claims and the Pyramid Lake water fight. And the older, the coalition that had been in the Arizona Plains Coalition, simply didn't raise enough crucial issues that would attract smaller tribes and the Northwest had almost pushed through all the hunting and fishing resolutions. Now this attracted a lot of California, Nevada, Wisconsin, some of the southeastern tribes.

VIZENOR: Well, there was a lot of press on that too.

DELORIA: Yeah…

VIZENOR: In other words, it was easy to rally support for that kind of issue. Well, in a way, what you are saying is that national Indian leadership and organization in a sense corresponds to the kind of issues that states and regions on a national non-Indian level organize, or certain coalitions and federal elections correspond to issues in the Southwest or the Southeast or the urban complexes.

DELORIA: Yeah, in a way they do. I think Indians have one thing that you don't see in the other politics. Now the democrats will get in and the second time around they'll promote the message "you never had it so good." And a lot of times, they're getting three, four or five times running on 'you never had it so good." And you can't do that anyway.

VIZENOR: Why?

DELORIA: Because they don't care whether they had it so good. They're interested in what's going on right now. Now, the group that's been in, and each year came up with a different issue. Now this last year, the executive director didn't know what issues to raise, and he was at odds with his political supporters. So, nobody wanted to raise any issues for fear it might put him back in. And so, if you're in any kind of leadership position, you're in the deadly trap of having to raise new issues to keep and attract even

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the majority of people to the organization. But if these issues get crosswise with the people who have been supporting you and are, are really behind this philosophy, then you can quickly get dumped. Helen Peterson [Native American activist from the Pine Ridge Reservation] in the 1950s is the only one who's been able to last more than three years in a national post [Executive Director of the National Congress of American Indians 1953 to 1959]. And this was the 1950s dominated by termination, anti-termination thinking.

VIZENOR: What would you say the 1960s was dominated by at the end of the decade statement?

DELORIA: The 1960s with just an incredible series of foul-ups in national Indian politics.

VIZENOR: The Omnibus Bill [Indian Resources Development Bill] arguments came around 1965, right, first time?

DELORIA: No, that was done by May of 1966, the Omnibus Bill was really a hot issue, but there were no central issues because they were very favorable. The Democratic administration was very favorable, and what really ruined the 1960s was the Chicago conference of 1961, where these anthropologists got forty to fifty thousand dollars and had nine-hundred Indians in Chicago to talk for ten days about Indian politics. And what this really did was break up all the old, we practically had a two-party system through the 1950s, in Indian eyes, and the Chicago conference, just split the whole thing wide open so that a lot of the ideology of Indian Affairs went down, went down the drain, and it just became personalities until, I'd say, the very late 1960s. So, what you really had was a badly fragmented Indian community that failed to take advantage of the favorable government claims, and it wasn't I don't suppose until 1967 to 1968 that the thing was pulled together in any cohesive strength. And by that time, the only

thing we could get was in the spring of 1968, [President Lyndon Johnson established the National Council of Indian Opportunity]

VIZENOR: I would say Humphrey, [Vice President Hubert Humphrey was named chairman of the National Council on Indian Opportunity].

DELORIA: Humphrey, but that was 1967. I mean, you know, it was really a waste of seven years, while the whole new political coalition formed.

VIZENOR: How would you prescribe the best way for Indian leaders to organize to bring them the greatest benefits of federal programs and federal commitment, and resolution to some reservation problems, primarily, most of the legal activism? How would you prescribe, ideally, the best way to approach Indian politics in any organization?

DELORIA: Well, I think ideally, it's on a state level. Although you know, in any way support state jurisdiction or state services. But I think that you got to have voting strength, so that you can get into the national election. And so that whatever leadership comes from your state, they can deliver something, if it's only going to the local caucuses, and they're electing twenty or thirty Indians to go to the county convention. And, you know, just so they're visible in the political process. So, what we talked about in 1967, and then the last two years, this has been shoved to the side, was reorganizing the National Congress of American Indians on a statewide basis. And every organized reservation in every city Indian center, would have a seat on the statewide board.

VIZENOR: Oh, yes.

DELORIA: And then you build statewide offices with a lobbyist at the state level. So, you're protecting the state legislature, and then have a rotating chairmanship. So that there's, so that all of your Indian politics occurs on the national level, but you have very,

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very strong state organizations where there's, where you don't get into political scrambles.

VIZENOR: So, each state in time would have representation.

DELORIA: Right.

VIZENOR: Some representation on the national level.

DELORIA: Right.

VIZENOR: Yes, and leadership.

DELORIA: In this way, say, up in Minnesota, and the Minnesota Indians, both urban and reservation, would pick two guys to go in and negotiate statewide funding to an Indian organization not to the intertribal Council, not to the State Department of Indian education or anything like that. And the senators and congressmen that they are dealing with would realize that these guys represent all Indians in urban and reservation areas, and that they really represent a substantial chunk of voters and this way, you get direct pressure on the system where it affects you.

VIZENOR: One of the impressive arguments from your book is, of course, for Indians to govern their own affairs. And one of the ways they can probably best do that related to a point you make about anthropologists, that anthropologists should contribute something to the community, in a sense, I guess you're saying that all white people who involve themselves with Indians in some way, many of them become experts, to the white community, they become the interpreters of problems in Indian life. Would you comment on this role of the anthropologist which has probably been the most damaging from an Indian point of view, because almost all anthropologists have been white, and they've been responsible for interpreting Indians to white people, and

therefore white people have had a rare opportunity to hear Indians talk about what they think. You're an exception in your book, and there aren't very many books like yours. So, would you comment?

DELORIA: Yeah, well, I ran into… my book was reviewed in *Saturday Review of Literature* by an anthropologist. I don't know where she got her ideas, but she interpreted the whole thing as something that she and another anthropologist had started in 1960.

VIZENOR: She, she claimed credit for something that…

DELORIA: Well, she said that we really started the whole thing, and he doesn't realize it.

VIZENOR: Oh, I see.

DELORIA: And all this stuff that's coming out in his book, is stuff that we've already talked about in 1960, you know, which I really didn't realize that they had anything to do with Indians. You know, because I've been on the inside of the Indian circuit. And, you know, the whole issue of southeastern tribes in their federal relations, you know, I don't care how many anthropologists talked about it, you know, to themselves or to other people. The issue came up in the National Congress of American Indians when we were trying to find a gimmick to fight the termination problem. We decided the best way to keep us from being terminated was to go out and create more tribes. So that we're gaining a tribe every time.

VIZENOR: Everyone terminates one, creates one…

DELORIA: Yeah, and so we're keeping the balance that we have. But anyway, this anthropologist Nancy Lurie, presented a paper this summer, saying that Indians drink to gain their identity, and from an outside anthropological viewpoint, this really looks like it's a sophisticated science, and it explains a lot of Indian behavior. But you know as well as I do, you go into a bar, where there's a lot of Indians, you sit down, and you

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ask one of them his name, he'll tell you his name, and you tell him your name. And then the second question on both sides is always what tribe are you? So, your first two questions before you even talked about drinking or anything else, just establishing identity and relationships and the whole thing. And so, you meet an Indian, and he says, he's from Fort Hall, and then immediately brings up all your knowledge of Fort Hall, and you tell him you are a Sioux, and then talk about the relations and you're immediately in a relationship that both tribes have had with each other for hundreds of years. And so. the anthropologists are really perverting the whole Indian process, if they don't see what's going on. And the next guy in the door is an anthropologist, he sees all these Indians drinking, talking with each other, and he says, well, they have to do this to have an identity. They don't.

VIZENOR: One of the proposals you make, which I think is a fine one, is that anthropologists who obtain money to conduct research on reservations or particular subject areas, in urban centers or reservations, you propose that anthropologists should obtain equal money to pay to the tribe that they're studying. So, for example, should they propose they receive ten-thousand dollars to conduct a study of some tribal process on some reservation, they should obtain an equal amount of money to pay to the tribe so that they are contributing an element in tribal life. Are you going to carry that argument farther?

DELORIA: Well, if I get any more static from anthropologists, I'm really pushing it at some of these national meetings, because...

VIZENOR: Instead of a strong feeling among Indian leaders?

DELORIA: I think it's building up very rapidly. Now, what the tribes are seeing is that they try and get a government grant. And maybe they apply for thirty or forty thousand

dollars for a Headstart program. They can't get it, maybe they can only get seventeen hundred dollars. Well, then suddenly, out comes an anthropologist who's making twenty-five to thirty thousand as a full PhD anyway, and this character is getting six-hundred dollars a week to run around and ask them questions about their identity, or you know, are you all left-handed or some crazy thing like that. And I think you're really getting under a lot of people's skin. So, one of my proposals is that, and I think a lot of other Indians are going to start pushing, is that a financed project is going to come out to the reservation to do a study, then they bring a contribution, a matching grant, if they're gonna spend fifty thousand dollars, then they have to bring fifty thousand, because otherwise, Indians are just ending up with some kind of a tamed zoo for a bunch of people who are making a hell of a good living off.

VIZENOR: Where you say in your book, "laid low by an anthro."

DELORIA: Yeah. Where do you go?

VIZENOR: Where do you go? To a library (laughter). In your book, you're equally as critical of the role of missionaries on reservations and among Indians. What proposal would you offer to improve the relationship between missionaries and Indian people?

DELORIA: Well, I think the mission field is the greatest single source of racism against Indians that exists in the country. That even in the Bureau of Indian Affairs you don't find real arrogant paternalism with relation to Indian people that you do in the mission field. And these missionaries have been out in Indian country for hundreds of years. They still don't have any native clergy trained. It's still kind of some smart, young white men coming out to bare the White Man's Burden among the savages. And they're talking, still talking about converting people to the Jesus road, and some of these Indian families have been Christian for five and six generations, and so the whole thing is just utmost absurdity. And each of the major churches is involved in the Indian field. They're spending in excess of a million dollars on their Indian missions every year. Now, majority of this goes to support white missionaries who can't speak the native language

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and have contempt for the people. They're out there on a big joy ride. It's the only place where you can be a martyr and get in your Oldsmobile and go into the big city in two hours. And so, they've got the best of all possible ego worlds. And I think that if these Christians are really serious that this religion is for everybody, that they should have one gigantic convention, all the Christian Indians in the country and take all the native clergy and just organize them as a board, and say, "Okay, you're going to have an Indian Christian church. All the money we've spent on all this other nonsense, is going to be dumped into a general operating fund, no strings attached, and you can run the whole thing. And you're no longer gonna be a mission. You're eligible to join the National Council of Churches. You're eligible to be on all the boards. This is your church."

VIZENOR: The American Indian Movement in Minneapolis, Dennis Banks and Clyde Bellecourt, made demands for reparations from the Episcopal and Lutheran Church bodies in the United States. I gather, the only significant response was that Christians apparently would like to feel some sense of guilt, agree that that's a good demand, but they didn't get any money yet. Do you see that as a possibility that Indian Christians will organize this next decade and make demands upon the church?

DELORIA: Well, I really hope there won't be any Indian Christians left. I think, you know, I really hope that everybody goes traditional.

VIZENOR: Do you sense a movement in that direction?

DELORIA: Oh, yeah. Even, particularly in South Dakota. You're just on the verge of throwing all the missionaries out there. It's simply that the church, the churches are so involved in Indian politics, that it's bad to throw them out right now because you're going to lose a lot of your leadership that is not yet ready to go fully Indian, and they

might back out on any general move. But, well, when, you know, we talked earlier about Black techniques and Indian techniques. Now, I know Dennis and Clyde, and I don't, you know, agree that the churches owe us money. I don't agree using their form and format to get it. Now, if you go through the treaties, you can see from, about, let's see, 1815 to 1816 on, through the treaty making period and into the period where they have agreements. A lot of treaties, the churches came in and as part of the treaty provision, they were given a lot of land on Indian reservations. You know, whites have been bad to us. So, you always have been going but I think that what Indian people should do is prepare documentation of specific pieces of land that were given to churches earlier. And the church has really went in and talked these people into signing the treaties, and then of course, you know, the chiefs couldn't read the small print in the treaties. All of a sudden some church ends up with a half million dollars of land.

VIZENOR: This was one time obvious when the church and the state has not separated at all.

DELORIA: Absolutely. In the general Allotment Act, all these churches got the right to go in and take the choice pieces of land on the Indian Reservation. I think that not only should we get money for the land they've taken, they should buy back the particular pieces of land that they got out of the treaties and deed it to the tribe.

VIZENOR: That's already a direction of church bodies, they're doing that now?

DELORIA: No, there isn't, but they're in a very vulnerable position because a lot of the land that they got was given to them for a specific purpose. Now, Window Rock, Arizona, there's about twenty-five thousand Indians living in that whole area. Episcopal Church has nineteen acres of prime land down there. That was given to them to set up a hospital.

VIZENOR: That's on the Navajo reservation?

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DELORIA: Right, Navajo headquarters. And on the deed, and I've seen the deed, it says when this stops being a hospital then the land reverts to the tribe. Well, most of the churches on the reservation have deeds, the land is deeded to them to run a school for Indians, and when it stops being a school for Indians, why then it's supposed to go back to the tribe. All these churches have held this land as money-making venture. They lease it out to farmers, or else they have… They raise hay on it, merch in the soil bank. And I think instead of getting up and saying you owe us a half million dollars, you should prepare, you know, we should get some guys together, prepare a general indictment, and say we want this land at Mille Lacs because you know that the Episcopal Church got some good land up north.

VIZENOR: Yes.

DELORIA: And that's Indian land. And all of these things should be returned, that would really help out in economic development, land consolidation and help a lot of the people. This you know, this is what the churches really do owe us. It isn't a generalized thing at all.

VIZENOR: And the conclusion of your book, you say to the reader that you have a lot of other critical remarks to make about government and the church and anthropologists and you will state that as soon as you have documentation to present those criticisms. So my question is, in your next book, which you told me you're working on, do you intend to expose some of these other areas that you've been thinking about?

DELORIA: Well, I don't know. I've been working on this for a year, and in the meantime, while you take the two water rights problems, one Heber River in Arizona, the other Pyramid Lake [Nevada]. Now, there's a lot of ways that you can blow the whistle on

what the government's done there, the government clearly liable for, you know, for just frittering away Indian water rights, and it's probably liable to the extent of fifty to sixty million dollars. But I don't want to be one who goes in with such a general indictment of what the government's done, it cuts the ground out for negotiation…

VIZENOR: The facts?

DELORIA: Or tribes, because if they're willing to overlook some of this in return for a future guarantee of water, then I'd screw it all up by coming in saying, well, this is what you guys did. Raising the ego problem, but you know, sooner or later, there has to be a clear documentation where the small tribes have really gotten the shaft. Many of them never had their boundaries surveyed. They can't lease their land. The government pays no attention to them and they are the first ones put on the list for termination. So, these people never had a decent break from anybody, ever since they came under government supervision. A lot of places the governments walked in where the tribes had money in the federal treasury, the government has used their money to do the things that the government likes, and it's just like me walking into some white man's house and say, I'm gonna take your bank account, and go out and build a bridge here so that your neighbors can go across, and you get a whole series of laws where rights of way for railroads and pipelines have been given to private companies on Indian land where Indians should have had millions of dollars of income off of it. And the government just sat down and gave it away. It's all this that has to come out sooner or later, and whether I'm gonna bring very much of it out in the next book or not. I promise you sometime in the future, I'm gonna get the whole crew and just blow the whistle on the whole outfit.

VIZENOR: Do you see issues in the United States and issues among Canadian Indians to be similar enough to lead to a possible united front ultimately?

DELORIA: I, you know, I hope there are, but you know, we're very unaware of what the Canadian, what the legal status of the Canadian Indian band or tribe is. And it seems

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to me, they don't get nearly as bad as things are down here. They don't have one tenth of the legal protections that we do on our land. We have the Indian claims commission. So, where the government has cheated the tribes, at least they can come in and get maybe ten percent of what was counted. Canada has nothing like that. New Canadian policy is out and out termination. It is going to create the biggest social disaster the continent has ever seen. It's something that was tried down here in 1954. They were creating pockets of poverty out of fairly prosperous tribes, and to see the Canadian government do this, it is really a threat to us, because it means that this same ideology is going to come bouncing back down across the border sooner or later. So, in a way, the United States Indians have a real stake in what goes on in Canada. And we may have to get involved with it just to protect ourselves, but I wish there was some way that we could really understand the Canadian issues and get some Canadian Indians down to a major United States conference and explain the whole situation of what's going on up there?

VIZENOR: What do you think the federal attitude will be toward Indians during the Nixon administration?

DELORIA: I don't think it would be very bad. It won't be very good, from what I've observed this year, the Nixon administration didn't intend to do anything about any domestic problems whatsoever, and so it didn't want to hurt anybody, but it doesn't want to help anybody either. And so there's just going to be a period of consolidation, and there are enough liberals in Congress to keep the appropriations up, and just... I think the Nixon administration is incredibly stupid in the way it is treating minority groups, because there are a lot of Indians were really fed up and disgusted with the Democrats by the end of Johnson's term, and so Republicans could come in with a halfway decent means of cutting some of the red tape. They could have swung a

substantial number of Indians over to the Republican side, but their attitude is you didn't support us in 1968, so we won't have anything to do with it, which is really poor politics.

VIZENOR: What kind of responses has there been to Louis Bruce, the new commissioner of Indian Affairs? Have Indians responded favorably to that?

DELORIA: Well, nobody wants to say anything, because he's an Indian. You know, you don't want to attack any kind of Indian that's in a position that high for fear that you may never get another Indian in that position.

VIZENOR: Was that the same feeling with Robert Bennett?

DELORIA: Well, it was to start, and everybody was very suspicious of Bennett because he'd been a lifelong bureaucrat. And in the middle of his commissionership, I think most of tribes were strongly behind him, and then toward the end, they really didn't care because he was not able to get any major changes accomplished in Interior Department. So, it really didn't make any difference whether he was Indian or not. They had shown enough support for his Indianness.

VIZENOR: Well, the new commissioner is voicing the same arguments that Bennett did and that's let Indians run their own business and Indian self-determination.

DELORIA: Well, that's easy to say unless you take a lot of these white-haired bureaucrats out of the area offices, and you really do a cutting job on them. Yeah, you can talk all day about Indians running their own affairs, if you have the same bureaucratic structure, the same channels of command, the same people that have been in there since 1940. It didn't make a hell of a lot of sense.

VIZENOR: Well, as a concluding question, would you offer some advice to young Indian leaders coming out of colleges and committed to their own identity and to the resolution of problems on reservations, and also some advice to young Indian leaders like yourself with experience, to write books?

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DELORIA: Oh, yeah, I think anything that can be written at this stage of the game is beneficial, even if they take the opposite point of view to what tribal positions are, because all this has to come out, we have to really work out in the Indian community what a tribe is. Right now everybody thinks it's that group of people who live on the reservation, but at least half of the enrolled members of each tribe are off the reservation with the exception of the Navajo and a few others. So, it really becomes a contest for the modern definition of what a tribe is, but the thing I see happening, you can see this happened in the Black community, is that suddenly the national leadership has really gone, you know, after Martin Luther King got shot, the whole thing and even before King, people at the local level, were really building up strong. And that's what you see, there are not gonna be any very well-known Indian leaders from here on out on the national scene, but those people who really consolidated locally, and anybody who thinks these national figures are gonna have to check with them before he can come in their state or their region. So, it's going to be a whole series of very strong coalitions of regional groups, and you can see this, well, in the American Indian Movement in Minneapolis. It really dominates. This, for those of us who are outside really dominates the scene in Minnesota.

VIZENOR: Yes.

DELORIA: And we would have to really be on good terms with those local people, if we were going to come in to any conference.

VIZENOR: If you had the time, in the next year, what would be one or two of the books, which you would write, what you believe are most needed right now to communicate conditions and problems and future directions?

DELORIA: I've been working for three years on what I call Equitable Case American Indian, which is as complete an examination as I can make of the treaties, statutes, all the reported law cases, all of the things that any place any Indian or Indian tribes had a relationship with the government… Get all the recorded cases cross indexed, according to topic, tribe, treaty, and I hope to write about a six to seven hundred page book, and present the Indian side of the legal arguments. Now, the Supreme Court always says that, if you get a case that far, they say either you're wards of the government, or you're a domestic dependent nation. And if you start out your case, on a wardship theory, when you get up to the Supreme Court, they say, "No, you're not wards, you're free people, domestic nation." So you lose. You start out in domestic nation theory, you get up to Supreme Court and they say, "So you're wards of the government, you shouldn't have standing to bring this thing in the first place. Get out of here." So, you can't resolve the Indian legal issues in the courts unless you build a completely new ideology, and this has to be built, I think, around the doctrines of interpretation that the Supreme Court has always used, that all provisions and treaties are construed favorably of Indians because they were the party working out of their own language, and treaties were written in a foreign language. So, any obscurity referred to that. Second, that even though one part of a treaty is broken, the rest of the treaty remains intact, that's been a very important doctrinal interpretation. And I think younger Indians should know this. It'll give them options for activism, and you get to fishing rights up in the northwest and state of Washington comes into arrest individual Indians for fishing. Now, under a hundred different legal theories the Indians could come right back immediately and say, "You can't arrest individual Indians." There's a treaty between the tribe as a political body in the United States. The only thing the state of Washington as another political body can do is to file a writ of mandamus against the tribe, demanding that they police their own member. The State of Washington has no jurisdiction over an individual Indian exercising a treaty right, which is guaranteed by the Constitution. And these are new options to open up for activism, but they

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depend on a treaty ideology that we don't have right now, and then is what I'm trying to do, Yeah.

VIZENOR: Well, thank you very much, Vine. And I hope in a year or two, we'll have access to the ideology.

DELORIA: I hope I can do it.

Gerald Vizenor interview with Vine Deloria, Cassette Audio Tape Recording, Gerald Vizenor Manuscript Collection, Minnesota Historical Society. Professor David Wilkins, University of Richmond, Virginia, provided the funds to transcribe the audio interview with Vine Deloria.