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Reflections on Urban Migration

Margaret Pollak

On the first floor of the American Indian Center, sunlight illuminated and warmed the office where "Elmer Pierson" and I talked about his life and history as a resident of the greater Chicagoland metro area.[1] Born in the late 1940s during his parents' journey to Chicagoland from their northern Wisconsin reservation, and seventy-seven years old at the time of the interview, Pierson is a citizen of the Bad River Band Chippewa—which, he took care to remind me, is not a rock band. While discussing his early life in Elgin, Illinois, Pierson recalled the Urban Indian Relocation Program that began several years after his parents migrated to the Chicago region:

> Now with the urban Indian relocation, yes and that was a disaster, I saw Indians relocated even out in Elgin and just it was such a disaster. . . . These people were uprooted and transplanted without any fertilizer, well even any ground, just transplanted on the rocks out there and it was a disaster. . . . They finally ended up shipping these people back or getting out or bringing them to Chicago where they died. It was almost like their continuation of genocide. Unjust. Unjust.[2]

The relocation program that Pierson likens to continuing state genocide was run by the United States Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA) from the 1950s to the 1970s. Yet the federal government's support for the migration of Natives away from reservation life began much earlier, with the "outing system" that originated with the Carlisle Indian Industrial School in the 1880s. Developed by Richard Henry Pratt, the outing system sought to acculturate Native children by placing them in white homes.[3]

In contrast, the Urban Indian Relocation Program that began in 1952 assisted Native adults and families to migrate to cities away from the poverty and high unemployment

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rates plaguing many reservations. Ultimately, however, the program aimed to reduce federal obligations to Indian nations, open up access to natural resources on tribal lands, and assimilate Natives into broader American society. Indeed, in subsequent conversations, Pierson referred to Native "cultures of survival": despite centuries of federal policies and programs aimed at conforming Natives to white American culture, Native peoples and cultures continue to survive both in cities and on reservations.

Contributing to current scholarship on urban American Indian migration, community, and identity, this article documents and explores the reflections of contemporary Chicago Natives on urban migration and cultural survival in city spaces. Previous scholars have demonstrated the role played by urban job opportunities and the Urban Indian Relocation Program in American Indian urbanization.[4] This paper extends these studies by taking a closer look at some additional factors that motivated people both to relocate to cities and to continue to live there. Following a description of research methods, this article will situate the development of the Urban Indian Relocation Program within the larger political context of the time. Then, drawing from accounts from first- and second-generation urban Native Americans, it investigates what factors motivated their move to Chicago and other cities and what led them to stay. Lastly, this article analyzes how the theme of survival is employed in the accounts of three generations of interviewees as they narrate their and their families' experiences in the city. I trace this survival narrative not only in in the choices people made to relocate, but also in the survival of Native identity in this urban space, and focus on how the work of community centers greatly supported this cultural survival.

Research Site, Population, and Methods

Nearly 80 percent of people of Native ancestry live outside of reservations areas today.[5] The Chicagoland area is currently home to tens of thousands American Indians.[6] This multigenerational, multitribal population consists of individuals of diverse economic and social classes whose ancestors originated in distant geographic locations. This article is primarily based upon twenty-seven oral history interviews conducted with first- and second-generation urban Natives whose families moved to Chicago between the years of 1945 and 1984. Conducted from 2007 and 2014 with nine men and eighteen women between the ages of fifty and eighty-seven, these oral history interviews were part of a larger twenty-six-month ethnographic study on diabetes in Chicago's Native community, "Diabetes Concepts and Care in an Urban American Indian Community."

Participants for this study were recruited using the snowball method of sampling. First working with the wellness program of the American Indian Center in the Uptown neighborhood of Chicago, in my capacity as an anthropology graduate student interested in learning about diabetes care in this community, I met with several medical practitioners, diabetes patients, and caregivers.[7] Those first interviewees introduced me to other research participants, including oral history interview participants. I completed a total of 120 interviews with ninety-five participants for this larger study. Interviewees identified themselves as citizens of American Indian nations from across the United States and Canada, including the Apache, Akimel O'odham,

Arikara, Assinibione, Cherokee, Chippewa, Choctaw, Covolo, Dakota, Ho-Chunk, Lakota, Menominee, Meskwaki, Micmac, Navajo, Odawa, Ojibwe, Omaha, Oneida, Ponca, Potawatomi, Pueblo, Sac and Fox, Seneca, Sioux, and Stockbridge nations. In addition to the twenty-seven oral history interviews, this study included forty-six interviews with forty people living with diabetes (fifteen men and twenty-five women), thirty interviews with thirty family members of diabetics (thirteen men and seventeen women), and seventeen interviews with thirteen medical professionals (of the one man and twelve women, five self-identified as Native and eight as non-Native).

In addition to their life histories and experiences in the city, interview participants discussed the history of Chicago's Native community, when and why they moved to Chicago, what types of work they did, where they lived, and family and community life. Interviews were recorded and transcribed; when interviewees did not consent to recording, notes were taken instead. I interviewed participants both at the American Indian Center of Chicago and in their homes. Each interviewee received twenty dollars for their time. In addition to the oral history interviews, some related discussions on urban Native life and identity arose in interviews on diabetes and in informal conversations.[8] This article also draws on the Chicago American Indian Oral History Pilot Project materials housed at the Newberry Library in Chicago. The Pilot Project took place in the early 1980s, directed by Herbert Hoover, David R. Miller of the D'Arcy McNickle Center at the Newberry Library, and Dorene Weise. It documented twenty-three interviews with Native Americans about the history of Chicago's American Indian community and personal experiences in the city.[9] However, the 2007–2014 study is the source of all direct quotations about relocation in this article, as well as the majority of what follows.

Urban Indian Relocation and Postwar American Indian Policies

In the late 1940s the Indian Claims Commission and the Zimmerman Plan emerged as federal Indian policy aimed at reducing federal obligations to tribes.[10] Among several programs during that era was the Urban Indian Relocation Program, which supported the migration of American Indians from reservations to cities. The Indian Claims Commission of 1946 was developed to enable tribes to bring past grievances to federal courts and be compensated for past offenses against the tribe with the underlying goal of ending all claims on government services by court adjudication.[11] In the following year, acting Indian Commissioner William Zimmerman sorted tribes into four categories according to his evaluation of their level of preparedness for the withdrawal of federal services.[12] This Zimmerman Plan, as historian Peter Iverson explains, was the result of a dilemma: Zimmerman had been put on the spot in a Senate committee hearing and was torn between the Senate's desire to scale back funding for the BIA and his knowledge that reservations had a range of different needs. The ramifications were enormous for the tribes Zimmerman selected as better prepared for the reduction of federal services; his on-the-spot sorting meant that they were among the first to lose their federal recognition as sovereign nations when their status was terminated in the 1950s, including the Menominee and Klamath nations.[13]

In the decade following World War II, the plans and actions of the commissioners of Indian Affairs and Congressional laws and resolutions show a tendency to favor the termination of the trust obligation between the federal government and American Indian tribes. In place of this trust obligation, plans and programs designed to assimilate American Indian peoples were cultivated. In 1950, President Harry Truman appointed Dillon Myer, who had directed the Japanese-American internment during World War II, to the position of commissioner of Indian Affairs. In 1952 Commissioner Myer launched the development of the Urban Indian Relocation Program.[14]

While Myer was developing relocation plans, in 1953 the Eighty-Third Congress laid the foundation for the termination of tribal sovereign status when it passed House Concurrent Resolution 108, which declared, "at the earliest possible time, all of the Indian tribes [listed on the resolution] and the individual members there of . . . should be freed from federal supervision and control from all disabilities and limitations specifically applicable to Indians."[15] In framing termination of tribal status as "freeing" individuals from supervision and control, this resolution glosses over the negative impacts of termination of federal tribal status.[16] That same year Congress also passed Public Law 280, which effectively reduced federal involvement in American Indian tribal concerns by turning criminal and civil jurisdiction of Indian tribes in six states and territories over to state governments.[17] Even as power changed hands in Washington during this postwar era, the aims of Indian policy did not shift. According to historian Larry Burt, President Eisenhower's commissioner of Indian Affairs, Glenn Emmons, had developed an agenda for all American Indian tribes to be gradually terminated by the year of the United States bicentennial.[18] The Urban Indian Relocation Program, then, was one among several policies and programs during the postwar era striving to reduce federal obligations to tribes.

Even before the development of the program, American Indians in search of work had migrated to cities for decades.[19] During World War II, for example, Natives moved from reservations to cities both to work in factories supporting the war effort and to be in a central transportation hub if a family service member had leave.[20] Many of those who relocated chose to remain in cities after the war ended.[21] Three years after the war, the BIA assisted Navajo and Hopis relocating to cities in order to escape starvation and overcrowding on reservations that were due in part to a particularly rough winter.[22] Based upon these events, in 1950 the Navajo-Hopi Long Range Act was passed. In addition to supporting the rehabilitation of Navajo and Hopi reservations through funding for education, health, construction, and resource development, this act also increased support for relocation of Navajo and Hopi people to urban areas. In 1952, extending this program to other reservations, the BIA's "Operation Relocation" initially offered financial assistance for housing and employment officers who helped relocatees find work.[23] To encourage and recruit Native Americans to relocate, the BIA set up field offices in large cities as well as near reservations nationwide.[24] In 1952 Congress appropriated funds for the opening of field relocation offices in Los Angeles, Denver, and Chicago. This early version of the BIA program not only offered transportation and employment placement services

to American Indians relocating to cities, but also financial assistance for subsistence needs in the interim before their first paycheck.[25] Between 1952 and 1972, 100,000 American Indians relocated to cities through the program.[26] During the early years of the plan the BIA assisted in the relocation of American Indians to Chicago, Cleveland, Dallas, Denver, Los Angeles, San Francisco, and San Jose, and by 1968 extended the locations to Tulsa and Oklahoma City.[27]

Officially, the BIA claimed they sent those most able to survive in urban areas. Chicago BIA office director Kurt Dreifuss explained that "all who come here under the program make application before they leave the reservation and have assurances of jobs and housing. Upon arrival they are advised how to shop, health service is provided, and they receive a grant for initial purchases of food, housewares, and clothing."[28] However, in reality the agency offices would send any person willing to move.[29] The majority of Natives who moved through the BIA's program were single men and families. Comparatively few single women participated in the program, and as Nicolas Rosenthal documents, pregnant and single women with children typically were not accepted. When single women with children joined the program, they were required to leave their children behind.[30] Iverson reports that among the Navajo who relocated in the 1950s, those least familiar with Anglo culture and language moved to cities.[31] A Chicago American Indian Oral History Project interviewee recalls that an agency officer asked if he would like to move to a city and just a few days after this passing conversation he found himself on a train to Chicago.[32]

Today, members of Chicago's Native community reflect on the aims of the program with indignation. Harriet McClean, a second-generation Ojibwe relocatee, describes the program as an involuntary one that attempted to divide her family. McClean, fifty years old at the time of our interview in 2013, retold the experience of her grandmother, who lived on the Lac du Flambeau Reservation: "My grandmother who lived on a reservation in Wisconsin, she was brought here by the Relocation Act. And then her kids were put in foster homes on the reservation, until they all snuck away and they made their way here to Chicago to find their mother. . . . She was forced here. She was forced off the reservation." Among interviewees in this study, Elmer Pierson uses the strongest language. Based on what he witnessed as a child during the early years of the program, he views the program as genocidal because it meant that the death of significant numbers of Native people went unnoticed.

Though people are resoundingly angry about the attempts at assimilation and reduction of federal obligations, not everyone reflects on the program with the same sentiments as do McClean and Pierson. Many first-generation urban Natives recall that during that era they viewed the program as a boon to them and their families and were active agents in their decision to move. Therefore, the next section focuses on the aims for survival that motivated people to move to Chicago—both with and without the assistance of the Urban Indian Relocation Program. Oral history interview material is utilized in concert with archival material and secondary publications to show that individuals who chose to move and to stay in cities considered multiple and overlapping factors in their decisions on whether and where to migrate.

Moving to Chicago

Frances Archer and her late husband, both citizens of the Sisseton Wahpeton Sioux, moved to Chicago in 1958 from the Lake Traverse Reservation in South Dakota. Eighty-four at the time of our interview in 2013, having worked for forty-five years while raising eleven children, Frances describes why they chose to relocate through the federal program, which provided assistance to set up her family in the city:

> We had a choice between Chicago and Los Angeles, but we took Chicago because you know it's closer to home, you can travel home and the other way would be too far and stuff, yeah . . . I thought it was good. Because that's the way you can learn to what trade they give you, schooling that you have to go take up some kind of trade or something you know, that's one good thing. That's what my husband went under. He went, became a barber, he went to barber school. Yeah they offer you jobs and stuff, school, training, training. That was good, I don't mind it. Otherwise we could have been living all the old ways yet. We came a long time ago when nothing was good over there [the reservation] yet, but now it is. Everything's all up to date like at home [the reservation].

In addition to opportunities for a better quality of life, the Archers sought a locale close to their reservation, which Frances continues to visit each year.

American Indians did not merely migrate because there were programs prepared to help them relocate; rather, those who came to cities did so for a variety of reasons. In the context of the harsh poverty of reservation life, resulting from a century of federal policies and programs, many American Indians opted to relocate to urban areas in search of stability and employment.[33] Survival was a primary motivation. While the Urban Indian Relocation Program assisted some in their migration to Chicago, many more Native Americans moved to the city on their own. Of the twenty-seven interviewees in this study, only three moved to Chicago through the relocation program; seventeen moved to Chicago on their own, and seven were born there. Five of those were born in Chicago because their parents or grandparents had moved to Chicago through the program. The parents of the remaining two had moved there on their own.

Participant responses in the recent study mirror those of the majority of participants in the 1980s Chicago American Indian Oral History Pilot Project, who described their reason for moving to Chicago as better life opportunities, which were ample in the city but scarce on reservations.[34] Deborah Davis Jackson's account of Native American life in a mid-sized Midwestern city named "Riverton" shows that many moved for employment opportunities in the booming automobile industry of the 1940s.[35] Historian Douglas K. Miller likewise demonstrates that many Native Americans moved to cities like Chicago both before and during the era of the Urban Indian Relocation Program for employment opportunities.[36] During World War II 46,000 American Indians left reservations for wartime work in cities.[37] Thus, the Urban Indian Relocation Program that began in 1952 only increased the rate of American Indian relocation to cities.

Though this program was supposed to be "completely voluntary," in that no one was forced against their will to relocate, it was also involuntary in the sense that during this period the federal government was offering more services in the designated relocation cities while economic help on reservations was greatly scaled back.[38] In reservation field offices posters, informational handouts, and advertisements portrayed cities as welcoming American Indians and offering opportunities for training, employment, housing, family life, and financial security.[39] As Frances Archer described, there were fewer employment opportunities on her reservation in South Dakota in the late 1950s, and the same was true for many reservations across the United States at that time. Alan Sorkin describes the economic situation of reservations in the mid-1960s as one of "abject poverty." Sorkin explains that the median income on all reservations and the unemployment rates were respectively below and above the median income and unemployment rates for the rest of the nation.[40]

Almeda Cortez, a seventy-seven-year-old Choctaw woman, moved to Chicago in 1961 to follow her future husband. Cortez describes the hardship she faced on the Mississippi Choctaw Reservation near Philadelphia, Mississippi, though, like the Lake Traverse Reservation described by Frances Archer, the situation on her reservation has greatly improved in recent years:

> I think it [the Relocation Program] did a lot of good for a lot of people, because it was, you know Philadelphia, Mississippi is such a small town, and it's not that many jobs at that time. Now the, our tribe has two casinos down there and the school is bigger than when I was going there and the tribes take care of that.

As Cortez notes, while the economic situation on many reservations has since improved, in the mid-twentieth century the living conditions on the reservation were poor. The job scarcity and low employment rates Archer and Cortez saw on their respective reservations during the 1950s and 1960s were two of many issues faced by Natives living on reservations; other problems included poor housing conditions, low quality food, limited access to higher quality foods and medical care, and high rates of alcoholism.[41] During the second half of the twentieth century, American Indians moving to cities were actively engaged in life choices aimed at survival.

Other difficulties beyond unemployment on reservations prompted individuals to relocate to cities. Two interviewees in this study spoke of distancing themselves from physically and emotionally abusive family relations. The decision to move to escape abuse was also reported by participants in the 1980s Oral History Pilot Project.[42] Alcoholism was another aspect of reservation life that some families hoped to leave behind in migrating to a city. Sandra Harrell, a sixty-one-year-old San Carlos Apache woman, described how her father participated in the Relocation Program in 1954 as a means of moving his family away from what she described as a dangerous environment for her mother, who was then battling alcoholism:

> My father came out of the service and then he wanted to move to the c—get away from the reservation because it was too many drinking going on. He tried to get my mother away from there so we moved to Phoenix, but it didn't work, so he took

> a part in the Relocation Act and they asked him what city would he like to go to, and he had his choice of cities that he can go to. So he chose Chicago, and then we all came on a train over here. And the Bureau of Indian Affairs helped us get situated by finding my dad a job and food, furniture, clothing, and whatever necessities we needed, they helped. And then we were here, my father and my family had to be on our own after that.

Unfortunately, moving to Chicago did not resolve Harrell's mother's addiction to alcohol. In the late 1960s Harrell dropped out of high school to take on the role of homemaker, raising her younger siblings and cooking for her family while her dad worked the overnight shift. Her mother continued to struggle with alcoholism, which has been and continues to be a significant social and health concern in urban Native communities.[43] Research participants describe "bars galore" in Native neighborhoods in Chicago and that some became known as "Indian bars." Although bars were important places for socialization in the early decades of the Urban Indian Relocation Program, urban Natives also sought out Native community centers and churches in Chicago that supported Native cultural survival in the city.

Finding employment was a primary factor in moving to Chicago for seventeen of the twenty-seven oral history interviewees, who worked a variety of jobs with widely different training and educational requirements. People did not have to move through the program itself to find work, which was then abundant in cities. Agnes Harrison, an eighty-two-year-old Odawa woman, moved to Chicago for work in 1958. Harrison describes how easy it was to find work when she first moved to the city, although she worked at only two factories during her forty-one years of working there: "Oh jobs were so plentiful. . . . You could work at one job and if you didn't like it, walk out and you'd have another one tomorrow. But I stayed with mine." Interview participants worked as factory workers, truck drivers, daily pay employees, office workers, pharmacy technicians, nurses, employment officers, police dispatchers, customer service representatives, and employees of Native organizations in the city, including the American Indian Center of Chicago and the Anawim Center supported by Dominican sisters of the Catholic church, now known as the Saint Kateri Center of Chicago.

In addition to greater opportunities, motivations for migrating included proximity to family and home reservations, an important factor for those who migrated to Chicago. Some intentionally moved far away from family, as noted above in cases of abuse, while others first came to Chicago to be near family, as in Almeda Cortez's account. Similarly, Sylvia Kistler, a sixty-nine-year-old woman who was born on the Leech Lake Chippewa Reservation in Minnesota, describes how one by one, she, her siblings, and her mother relocated to Chicago as each became enticed by living close to family members already in the city, just as Frances Archer and her husband relocated there from Los Angeles to be near to their reservation and family. Many first-generation relocatees visit their home reservation one or more times a year to see family, seek medical care, and participate in their nation's cultural and political activities. They pass on this practice of return to younger generations, who join their parents on visits to the reservation in childhood and then continue to visit with their own families as they grow older.

A wide variety of individual interests and experiences could also spark the initial move, including intertribal American Indian activism in the city. In the 1970s, Randall Leary was drawn to Chicago after having read about the Chicago Indian Village protest against the poor housing conditions many Native people of Chicago faced during that time.[44] Sixty-eight years old at the time of our interview in 2013, in 1974 Leary was almost thirty when he moved to Chicago from the Menominee Reservation: "I saw on the news, I think it was in the paper, a cousin of mine was demonstrating outside of Wrigley Field, and I wanted to come down here to see what was going on." Leary did not take part in the Chicago Indian Village protests, but after finding work he continued to live in the city. For some the impetus to move to the city occurred by chance. Tammy Lowe, a sixty-eight-year-old Oneida woman, describes that she moved to Chicago in 1961 on a dare after taking a "joyride" to Chicago with friends from the reservation near Green Bay, Wisconsin. As in others' accounts, Lowe also had no trouble finding work once she arrived. She continued to live in Chicago until she passed away in 2013.

Yet not everyone who relocated chose to remain in the city. An eighty-seven-year-old Turtle Mountain Chippewa, Alfred Stewart, moved to Chicago on his own in 1953 after hearing about the work opportunities in the city from a brother. Stewart lived in Chicago for sixty years. In our interview he described how another brother did not adjust to city life in California and returned to their North Dakota reservation:

> A lot of Indians went back, a lot of them. . . . My brother from Belcourt they sent him to California. And that's what they promised him. He had four kids. Finding those jobs, find you a job, you get a check, you pay for your bills, but [after] the first pay check, you're on your own. So he stayed there one year. . . . [He said] I get my check, I pay the rent, I pay for this, [and] there's nothing to even feed my family. He said to hell with that, so he came home.

As Stewart mentions, his brother's experience was shared by many. Correspondence sent by Gerard Littman to Father Peter Powell, the longtime director of Saint Augustine's Center for the American Indian, documents that in 1964 between 14,000 and 16,000 Natives were in Chicago at some point during the year, with as many as 40 percent returning home after attempting city life for a year or less.[45]

Many Native migrants faced financial hardship after moving to Chicago. They also faced bias in job placement and job training. Despite the BIA's goal of assimilating Native people into American society, it did not strive to assimilate American Indians into middle-class society: it sponsored training for blue-collar work, but not white-collar employment or higher education.[46] Though some returned to the reservation, others continued to reside in Chicago and made their way with the support of other Natives and Native organizations. Rebecca Mastin, a fifty-three-year-old Odawa/Omaha woman and second-generation urban Native, describes how her parents lived with their infant Rebecca in a one-bedroom apartment along with eleven other adults at one time. However, while growing up Rebecca did not realize that her family struggled financially:

> I never knew we were poor. One time I asked my mom, and this was like ten years ago, mom you used to make really good potato soup. I said how come you don't make that anymore, and she said because we were poor. We were poor? We were poor, but we always had food from the garden and I remember [my father would] buy a half a beef at a time. We never went without anything. I just didn't realize.

Other significant challenges after relocating to cities included finding clean, affordable housing and feeling lonely due to distance from other Natives in the urban space. The BIA's aim was to scatter American Indians around urban areas, but the housing situation in cities thwarted the BIA from fully achieving this goal.[47] In cities along the west coast, the BIA had planned to spread American Indians far from one another, hoping to prevent contact and promote assimilation. Due to limited budgets, however, the BIA ultimately created all Indian apartment complexes, failing to fully meet their original intent.[48] By the 1970s, Uptown was well known as the "Indian neighborhood" of Chicago.[49] Those who relocated faced problems with the houses and apartments themselves, ranging from unclean homes with broken windows, mold, and roach infestations, to homes that were too small to fit large families.[50] This poor housing situation prompted a group of American Indians to protest against living conditions in Chicago's northside Wrigleyville neighborhood in the 1970s—the protest that incited Randall Leary's move to Chicago.[51]

Though Alfred Stewart's brother chose to return home upon finding it nearly impossible to maintain his family on a city income, others migrated from the reservation to the city and back to the reservation multiple times. Joshua Parker first moved to Chicago in his thirties for work, but he was no stranger to urban living. Sixty-four at the time of our interview, Parker moved multiple times during his childhood:

> I grew up many places. I grew up on the White Earth Reservation 'til I was about seven or eight and then we moved through Indian Relocation Act. . . . the Bureau of Indian Affairs would place my father into a job and get us an apartment and then after a couple months, we'd be on our own. So we moved to Minneapolis, things didn't work out. We went back to the reservation. Then we moved to Los Angeles. Things didn't work out there, so we came from California back to Billings, Montana where my other uncle had obtained a job in construction. . . . So we lived in Billings, Montana for a year after Los Angeles, and then we moved from there back to Minnesota and then we moved to Milwaukee. And then I went through high school and college in Milwaukee.

Experiences like Parker's were not uncommon; Orlando Garcia remembers that during the Relocation era, many who migrated to the Chicago area moved multiple times.[52]

Some scholars have argued that this trend of multiple movements is due to the BIA's failure to adequately prepare people for city life, and yet the causes underlying this pattern are more complicated.[53] Rather than understand multiple migrations simply as evidence of a failed relocation system, we should consider that Native migrants sought the opportunities that best met their desires and needs at the time—whether these needs and desires were to be nearer to family or their reservation, to be

able to find work or gain an education in a specific field, or to be closer to a vibrant and active intertribal Native community. Further, although second-generation relocatee Harriet McClean describes her family's relocation as one of forced movement, nearly all first-generation relocatees describe themselves and their families as active agents who moved to the city in order to survive and find work. Significantly, they were driven to seek this survival because of the detrimental federal Indian policies that led to extreme unemployment and harsh living conditions on reservations. Finally, the choice to remain in the city is also influenced by employment opportunities and family relationships, and the activities and activism available in the city also promoted and enabled long-term residence for many Chicago Natives.

Although urban loneliness prompted many relocatees to return to the reservation, it also led to the development of Native community centers.[54] The next section focuses on the role of community and intertribal social centers in supporting Native survival in the city space.

Stories of Cultural Survival and Success in the Urban Space

Rosanna Poni, a twenty-eight-year-old Oneida woman sat on one end of a turquoise velvet couch in the American Indian Center of Chicago in April, 2013. A few weeks earlier a group of Lakota citizens and filmmakers from the Pine Ridge Reservation had come to the Center to screen the poignant documentary film *Red Cry*, which depicts the history of colonialism and its continuing detrimental effects on the Pine Ridge Lakota. More than forty Native Americans attended the screening and discussion. During the evening the event's atmosphere shifted from initial excitement to grief, as the audience learned about the past and the present situation on Pine Ridge. When reservation Natives in the film described urban Natives as having lost their culture in the city space—a belief that was repeated in the conversation that followed—the mood became angry and uneasy. Within five days of the film screening, the center held a healing circle to resolve the issues brought up that Friday evening.

Interim conversations arose, both in person and online on Facebook, in which Chicago Natives voiced their anger over the way in which the film and its representatives spoke of urban Natives. In my interview with Rosanna Poni, I asked what it means to be Native in a city like Chicago, and she voiced her own disagreement with the views expressed by the visitors to the center:

> Other people might think we're assimilated, we don't know our culture, we don't know about being Native, but since, I mean, I don't think that's ever been true. I think people struggle with that a lot, but I think no matter what, we still have different worldviews and ways of relating to the world no matter where we are. . . . Our original medicines still come through the cracks of pavements. . . our animal and plant relatives are here with us, like we're not devoid of that. It's always been here.

Urban Natives stand in a unique position. They are, as Poni describes, enmeshed in city life while embodying and enacting Native identity. Poni's response challenges the notion that urban Natives have assimilated in the ways that some reservation Natives

believe they have. Urban Natives enact and cultivate their culture and traditions in individual households and as part of larger tribal and intertribal networks. Like Elmer Pierson, who likened the Urban Indian Relocation Program to uprooting and transplanting Natives without any soil, Poni employs an organic metaphor, but one that instead emphasizes that today, Native people and culture are surviving in the city.

Several months after this interview, a founding member of the American Indian Center led the community in prayer at the annual Giving Thanks Feast. This first-generation urban Native elder described how she was thankful for the survival of Native communities from the first Thanksgiving to urban Native communities today. Her sentiments, taken together with Pierson's comments on Native cultures of survival (a second-generation urban Native) and those from Poni (third generation) demonstrate how three generations of Chicago Natives take pride in their own and their ancestors' strength and persistence in surviving centuries of colonialism, oppression, and assimilation policies as they highlight Native perseverance through individual agency and community support. Survivance narratives like these oppose mainstream stories of absence and victimhood.[55] In particular, first-generation urban Natives, as seen in Frances Archer's and Almeda Cortez's accounts, highlight their agency in making life choices aimed at survival: migrating to cities to escape the harsh conditions of reservation life at the time. In contrast, second- and third-generation accounts focus on individual and community survival within city spaces.

With individuals from more than 140 tribes from across the United States and Canada, Chicago's Native community today is a set of overlapping networks wherein individual membership is multiple and fluid—it is not a single cohesive group. Maintaining individual tribal identities and contact with tribes is important. Many Chicago Natives visit their reservation one or more times each year: some go to visit family, while others may go to participate in ceremonies, to vote in political elections, or to fish, hunt, and gather foods on traditional tribal lands. The road between the reservation and the city is traveled both ways, with both urban and reservation Natives actively maintaining the relationship. Some tribes offer services to their citizens living in the city. For example, the Ho-Chunk Nation Chicago Branch Office provides tribal loans for education and housing.[56] The American Indian Center receives support from several local tribes, including the Menominee and the Potawatomi nations, which offer both financial and personnel support for some of the center's programs.

The network of relationships among urban Natives in Chicago forms one of the largest support systems, a network supported by organizations promoting intertribal Native community and traditions. In addition to the American Indian Center of Chicago, other Native organizations promoting cultural and individual survival include the Saint Kateri Center, Saint Augustine's Center for American Indians, the Mitchell Museum, American Indian Association of Illinois, California Manpower Consortium, and American Indian Health Services of Chicago. One aspect of Chicago's intertribal community is its support of one another in times of need, as community elder Veronica Hanover, a second-generation urban Native, explains:

> It's just that when things occur to us, we try to pull together as a community or as a group, or as a family to help each other out. Like if someone's gets, one time there was somebody that had a fire in their apartment, so we were going around getting things that they needed to set up and somebody was helping them find an apartment. You know we try to be there to help when we know somebody is in trouble or needs some kind of assistance. We try to be there and do what we can. Sometimes if it's not physically possible, at least we try to encourage them to, to hang in there until times get better. And of course you know we have our—when someone dies in the community, we have their memorial service.

This practical support may come from individual community members or community centers. Saint Augustine's has offered Native families financial support for loans, rent, transportation, food, medicine, funeral expenses, and clothing since the 1960s.[57]

Native organizations also offer social and cultural support. The oldest center of its kind in the nation, the Chicago American Indian Center has been an Indian-run organization since 1953, when community members established it as the All-Tribes American Indian Center. It began as a social gathering place, but over the years developed a social service function and eventually became central to the identity of the Chicago Native American community.[58] In their interviews in the 1980s, Chicago American Indian Oral History Pilot Project participants explained that had they not found the center, they likely would have left the city because of the loneliness they experienced.[59] Chicago Natives, as well as those living in California's Bay Area and Rochester, New York, explain that participating in intertribal organizations makes it easier to maintain Native identity in the city because they promote cultural values and traditions.[60] Later in life, community members recalled the Chicago American Indian Center not only as a place that brought people together from tribes across the United States, but also where they grew up. Through these intertribal networks, many Natives met future spouses. In the urban space people both partnered with citizens of other Native nations and shared traditions and practices, which Renya Ramirez writes has also been occurring in the Santa Clara Valley.[61]

In Chicago, Native community members are interested in learning about and participating in cultural traditions and activities not only as a way to connect with their own ancestry, but also to engage with the intertribal community and indigenous American culture more broadly. Some of this engagement develops from sharing traditional foods. During lunches that I observed between 2007 and 2014, elders praised most highly those meals that incorporated Native foods such as venison, bison, squash, beans, corn, hominy, walleye, berries, and wild rice. In such contexts, food is a cultural connector: consuming traditional foods, even those of a tribe not one's own, connects individuals to their indigenous American ancestry as well as to the Chicago intertribal community.

When in January 2015 an Ojibwe language class began in Chicago, students included not only citizens of Ojibwe-speaking nations, but also citizens of unrelated tribes. Diane Bauman, a twenty-seven-year-old Arikara/Omaha/Odawa woman,

explains that one of the great things about growing up as an urban Native is learning about other cultures through intertribal organizations:

> You learn not only your ways [but] a whole bunch of tribes' ways, like I know a lot of Navajo ways or Ho-Chunk ways, or Potawatomi, Menominee ways that I know there's a lot of different ways to do things, so I've learned some of the different, so if I go to travel to different areas, I kind of know what you can and can't do when you're over there.

Knowing different ways has been useful for Bauman as she and her family travel the powwow trail each summer. As they visit different locales around the United States and Canada, she feels more prepared to participate in events at each site than if she knew only the traditions of her own tribes.

Native identity in the city is performed and negotiated in the present, while at the same time it is deeply rooted in history and politics. Chicago Natives factor genetic heritage, history of oppression, contact with reservation communities, language, food, religious beliefs, behaviors, and relationships with non-Natives into their concepts of identity.[62] Many younger urban Natives strive to learn about tribal culture, history, and language on their own and through participation in the city's American Indian organizations because the elders do not always teach this knowledge due to the discrimination and oppression they faced in the past. Younger generations whose parents faced discrimination both on the reservation and in cities feel that, compared to those born on the reservation, they have to work harder to get involved in their traditions because they have to achieve Native identity through study and performance, whereas those born on a reservation are ascribed Native identity.[63]

Chicago's intertribal Native community is made up of smaller networks of people that despite occasional disputes, pull together in times of need, as they did for the healing circle that followed the uneasy Pine Ridge documentary screening and discussion in April 2013. When members of Chicago's Native community reflect upon urban migration and the longer history of Natives in relation to European powers, above all they articulate a story of survival.

Conclusion

The greater Chicagoland area is home to the eighth largest American Indian population today. US government programs and policies from the nineteenth century to the post–World War II era played a significant role in the migration of American Indians from across the United States and Canada to Chicago. American Indians who relocated to cities did not passively assimilate into American city life as Washington, DC policymakers had hoped. Native Americans survived, and more: they participated in intertribal alliances and activities and maintained tribal contacts, effectively reasserting Native identity in an urban context and making a home in the city space. Urban Natives identify both with individual tribes and an intertribal indigenous community in which members practice traditions, learn languages, and eat traditional foods. This sharing of Native traditions in the urban space not only works to bind the community

together as an ethnic enclave in the city space, but further works to connect individuals to a broader indigenous American history and identity.

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Notes

1. Elmer Pierson is a pseudonym. In this article, the names of all research participants who gave oral interviews have been changed. The twenty-seven oral interviews cited and discussed in this article are part of a larger research study titled "Diabetes Concepts and Care in an Urban American Indian Community"; see Margaret Pollak, "An Ethnohistorical Study of Diabetes in an Urban American Indian Community," in the Phillips Fund for Native American Research Collection (Philadelphia: American Philosophical Society, 2012). In addition, all interview transcripts are on file with the author. This study was approved by the Social and Behavioral Sciences Internal Review Board of the University of Wisconsin Madison under protocol number SE-2009-0188, and then transferred and reapproved under the Minimal Risk Internal Review Board of the University of Wisconsin Madison under protocol number 2012-0345. All participant ages noted are their ages at the time of the interviews.

2. Elmer Pierson interview, "Diabetes Concepts and Care in an Urban American Indian Community." Hereafter, all quotations are from this study unless otherwise noted.

3. Robert A. Trennert, "From Carlisle to Phoenix: The Rise and Fall of the Indian Outing System, 1878–1930," *Pacific Historical Review* 52, no. 3 (1983): 267–91, doi 10.2307/3639003.

4. Deborah Davis Jackson, *Our Elders Lived It: American Indian Identity in the City* (DeKalb: Northern Illinois University Press, 2002), 27; Douglas K. Miller, "Willing Workers: Urban Relocation and American Indian Initiative, 1940s–1960s," *Ethnohistory* 60, no. 1 (2013): 51–76, doi 10.1215/00141801-1816175.

5. Tina Norris, Paula L. Vines, and Elizabeth M. Hoeffel, "The American Indian and Alaska Native Population: 2010," in *2010 Census Briefs*, (United States Census Bureau, US Department of Commerce, Economics and Statistics Administration, 2012), 12–13.

6. The American Indian Center of Chicago estimates a population of 65,000 Natives in this greater Chicago area, while the United States Census Bureau estimates just over 14,000 within the city limits. Community organizers from the American Indian Center of Chicago argue that the census undercounts the city's Native population due to low Native response rates to both mail and door-to-door census counts. See http://www.aicchicago.org/who-we-are/ and https://www.census.gov/quickfacts/table/PST045214/1714000/accessible.

7. American Indian Center of Chicago, currently located at 1630 W. Wilson Avenue, is "the oldest urban-based Native membership community center in the United States"; see www.aicchicago.org/history/.

8. Because the research protocol grew in the fall of 2012 to include observations of medical appointments, a new protocol on medical appointment observations was submitted to and approved

by the Minimal Risk IRB. In order to reduce confusion, the entirety of this research protocol was transferred from the Social and Behavioral Sciences IRB to the Minimal Risk IRB in March of 2013.

9. From these interviews, the project drafted a manuscript "Native Voices in the City,"available, along with twelve of the twenty-three interview transcripts, in the Ayer Collection at the Newberry Library. Chicago American Indian Oral History Pilot Project, "Native Voices in the City," in Ayer Modern MS Oral History (Chicago: Newberry Library, 1982–1985), box 1; Chicago American Indian Oral History Pilot Project, "Chicago American Indian Oral History Project Records 1982–1985 Transcripts," in Ayer Modern MS Oral History (Chicago: Newberry Library 1983–1985), boxes 2–3.

10. Donald Lee Fixico, *Termination and Relocation: Federal Indian Policy, 1945–1960*, (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1986), 21; Peter Iverson, *"We Are Still Here:" American Indians in the Twentieth Century* (Wheeling, IL: Harlan Davidson, 1998), 119–35.

11. Elaine M. Neils, *Reservation to City: Indian Migration and Federal Relocation* (Chicago: University of Chicago Department of Geography, 1971), 6–7.

12. Thomas W. Cowger, *The National Congress of American Indians: The Founding Years*, (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1999), 100; Fixico, *Termination*, 33–34; Iverson, *Still Here*, 122.

13. Iverson, *Still Here*, 122.

14. Robert L. Bennett, Philleo Nash, Helen Peterson, Gerald One Feather, and LaDonna Harris, "Relocation," in *Indian Self-Rule: First-Hand Accounts of Indian-White Relations from Roosevelt to Reagan*, ed. Kenneth R. Philp (Salt Lake City: Howe Brothers, 1986), 164–66; Larry W. Burt, *Tribalism in Crisis: Federal Indian Policy, 1953–1961* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1982), 7.

15. Fixico, *Termination*, 94–99; House Concurrent Resolution 108, *U.S. Statutes at Large* 67 (1953), B132.

16. Between 1945 and 1960, a total of 109 American Indian tribes were terminated across the United States under House Concurrent Resolution 108. The termination of these tribes eliminated sovereign status and terminated the trust relationship between the federal government and the tribes. Some of the terminated tribes have regained their former status, including both the Menominee and Klamath tribes. Cowger, *National Congress*, 99–125; Fixico, *Termination*, 180–81.

17. The six mandatory territories and states include Alaska, California, Minnesota, Oregon, Nebraska, and Wisconsin. Burt, *Tribalism*, 25.

18. Ibid., 108.

19. Jackson, *Our Elders*, 27; Miller, "Willing Workers"; Nicolas G. Rosenthal, *Reimagining Indian Country: Native American Migration and Identity in Twentieth-Century Los Angeles*, (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2012), 11–30.

20. Chicago American Indian Oral History Pilot Project, "Native Voices"; Orlando Garcia, "Urbanization of Rural Population: An American Indian Perspective," in *Native Chicago*, ed. Terry Straus (Chicago: McNaughton and Gunn, Inc, 2002), 194–95; Patricia J. King, "Urbanization and the Evolution of Modern American Indian Tribalism, Los Angeles and San Francisco, 1950–1970," MA thesis, Northern Arizona University, 2006.

21. King, "Urbanization."

22. Burt, *Tribalism*, 6–7; Fixico, *Termination*, 134–35; Peter Iverson and Monty Roessel, *Diné: A History of the Navajos* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 2002), 193–94; King, "Urbanization."

23. Fixico, *Termination*, 136; Intertribal Friendship House, Community History Project, and Susan Lobo, *Urban Voices: The Bay Area American Indian Community* (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 2002), 19.

24. Deborah Davis Jackson, "A Place Where I Can Let My Hair Down: From Social Club to Cultural Center in an Urban Indian Community," *City & Society* 13, no. 1 (2001): 31–55, 36, doi 10.1525/city.2001.13.1.31.

25. Neils, *Reservation*, 58–63; Rosenthal, *Reimagining*, 11–30.

26. C. Matthew Snipp, "Sociological Perspectives on American Indians," *Annual Review of Sociology* 18 (1992): 351–71, 358, doi 10.1146/annurev.so.18.080192.002031; Alan L. Sorkin, *The Urban American Indian* (Lexington, MA: Lexington Books, 1978), 26–27.

27. Sorkin, *Urban*, 25.

28. "Report Indian Families Like Suburban Life: Making Good on Jobs in City Area," *Chicago Daily Tribune*, June 17, 1957, 23.

29. Peter Iverson, "Knowing the Land, Leaving the Land: Navajos, Hopis, and Relocation in the American West," *Montana: The Magazine of Western History* 38, no. 1 (1988): 67–70; Burt, *Tribalism*, 57; Chicago American Indian Oral History Pilot Project, "Native Voices."

30. Saint Augustine's Center for American Indians, "St. Augustine's Center for American Indians Records: 1966–1969 General Correspondence," in Ayer Modern MS St. Augustine's (Chicago: Newberry Library, 1961–2006), box 5; Rosenthal, *Reimagining*, 56.

31. Iverson, *Still Here*, 134; Iverson, "Knowing," 69.

32. Chicago American Indian Oral History Pilot Project, "Native Voices."

33. Grant Arndt, "Relocation's Imagined Landscape and the Rise of Chicago's Native American Community," in *Native Chicago*, ed. Terry Straus (Chicago: McNaughton and Gunn, Inc, 2002), 159–60; Miller, "Willing Workers"; Jackson, "Place," 35–36.

34. Chicago American Indian Oral History Pilot Project, "Project Records," boxes 2–3.

35. Jackson, *Our Elders*, 27.

36. Miller, "Willing Workers."

37. Sorkin, *Urban*, 25.

38. Ibid., 27.

39. Arndt, "Imagined Landscape"; United States Bureau of Indian Affairs, "Indian Relocation Records, 1936–1975," in Ayer Modern MS BIA Relocation (Chicago: Newberry Library, 1975), boxes 1–3.

40. Alan L. Sorkin, *American Indians and Federal Aid* (Washington, DC: Brookings Institution, 1971), 8.

41. The commodity food supplies provided by the United States government has played a significant role in the growing rates of diabetes and obesity among American Indian peoples today. Lorelei de Cora, "The Diabetic Plague in Indian Country: Legacy of Displacement," *Wicazo Sa Review* 16, no. 1 (2001): 9–15; Devon A. Mihesuah, "Decolonizing Our Diets by Recovering Our Ancestors' Gardens," *American Indian Quarterly* 27, nos. 3/4 (2003): 807–39, doi 10.1353/aiq.2004.0084.

42. Chicago American Indian Oral History Pilot Project, "Project Records," boxes 2–3.

43. Rosenthal, *Reimagining*, 86; Snipp, "Sociological Perspectives," 360–61. When I asked interviewees what the most pressing health and social concerns were for Chicago's Native population, diabetes, alcoholism, poor dental health, and unemployment were the four concerns most frequently named.

44. James B. LaGrand, *Indian Metropolis: Native Americans in Chicago, 1945–75* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2002); Natalia Wilson, "The Chicago Indian Village," in *Native Chicago*, ed. Terry Straus (Chicago: McNaughton and Gunn, Inc, 2002), 212–19.

45. Saint Augustine's, "Records," box 5.

46. Blackhawk, "I Can Carry On," 22; Intertribal Friendship House, et al., *Urban Voices*, 24; Rosenthal, *Reimagining*, 56–57.

47. Sorkin, *Urban*, 72–74.

48. Adam (Nordwall) Fortunate Eagle, "Urban Indians and the Occupation of Alcatraz Island," in *American Indian Activism: Alcatraz to the Longest Walk*, ed. Troy Johnson, Joane Nagel and Duane Champagne, (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1997), 52–73; William Willard, "Indian Newspapers, or 'Say, Ain't You Some Kind of Indians?,'" *Wicazo Sa Review* 10, no. 2 (1994): 91–97, doi 10.2307/1409137.

49. Chicago American Indian Oral History Pilot Project, "Native Voices," box 1; Neils, *Reservation*, 94; Sorkin, *Urban*, 72–74. Uptown is a community area on the northeast side of Chicago, bordering Lake Michigan.

50. Chicago American Indian Oral History Pilot Project, "Native Voices," box 1.

51. Garcia, "Urbanization of Rural Population," 199–200; Wilson, "Chicago Indian Village"; LaGrand, *Indian Metropolis*, 233–45.

52. Garcia, "Urbanization of Rural Population," 196–97.

53. Burt, *Tribalism*, 57.

54. Ned Blackhawk, "I Can Carry On from Here: The Relocation of American Indians to Los Angeles," *Wicazo Sa Review* 11, no. 2 (1995): 16–30, doi 10.2307/1409093; Peter Z. Snyder, "Kinship, Friendship, and Enclave: The Problem of American Indian Urbanization," in *American Indian Urbanization*, ed. Jack O. Waddell and O. Michael Watson (West Lafayette, IN: Purdue Research Foundation, 1973), 117–29; Intertribal Friendship House, et al., *Urban Voices*; Chicago American Indian Oral History Pilot Project, "Native Voices"; Arndt, "Imagined Landscape"; Bennett, et al., "Relocation."

55. Gerald Robert Vizenor, "Aesthetics of Survivance: Literary Theory and Practice," in *Survivance: Narratives of Native Presence*, ed. Gerald Robert Vizenor (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2008), 1–24, 1; Gerald Robert Vizenor, *Manifest Manners: Postindian Warriors of Survivance* (Hanover: Wesleyan University Press, 1994).

56. Grant Arndt, "The Nation in the City," in *Native Chicago*, ed. Terry Straus (Chicago: McNaughton and Gunn, Inc.), 337–41.

57. Saint Augustine's, "Records," boxes 1–3.

58. David Beck, "The Chicago American Indian Community," in *Native Chicago*, ed. Terry Straus (Chicago: McNaughton and Gunn, Inc, 2002), 293–307; Rosalyn R. LaPier and David Beck, *City Indian: Native American Activism in Chicago, 1893–1934* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2015).

59. Chicago American Indian Oral History Pilot Project, "Native Voices," box 1.

60. Susan Applegate Krouse, "Traditional Iroquois Socials: Maintaining Identity in the City," *American Indian Quarterly* 25, no. 3 (2001): 400–08, doi 10.1353/aiq.2001.0049; Gordon V. Krutz, "Transplanting and Revitalizing of Indian Cultures in the City," in *American Indian Urbanization*, ed. Jack O. Waddell and O. Michael Watson (West Lafayette, IN: Purdue Research Foundation, 1973), 130–39; Eli Suzukovich, "The Seen and Unseen: Religion and Identity in the Chicago American Indian Community," PhD diss., University of Montana–Missoula, 2011).

61. Renya K. Ramirez, *Native Hubs: Culture, Community, and Belonging in Silicon Valley and Beyond* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2007).

62. Margaret Pollak, "Diabetes in Native Chicago: An Ethnography of Identity, Community, and Care," PhD diss., University of Wisconsin, 2015), 83–114.

63. Pollak, "Diabetes," 83–114.