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Voices and Votes in the Fields of Settler Society: American Indian Media and Electoral Politics in 1930s Wisconsin

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Abstract

In 1939, Wisconsin readers of a weekly newspaper column by Mitchell Redcloud, a member of the Ho-Chunk Indian community settled within the rural township of Komensky, were greeted with a set of headlines from the imaginary “Komensky News” about an actual local event. The headlines reported that despite opposition from local whites, Ho-Chunk people had successfully elected a Ho-Chunk candidate to the township board. This article draws on studies of Indigenous media and recent efforts to develop field-theoretic accounts of social action to understand the interdependence of Redcloud's headlines and the Ho-Chunk vote as part of an incipient project of Indigenous political action. Using census records, I first describe the positions in the everyday field of race and class relations that Ho-Chunk people occupied in Komensky, based on their incomes, educations, and occupational statuses. I then draw on this description to understand Redcloud's position-taking strategies before the election. I next examine Redcloud's writing career in the newspaper to understand his strategy of self-positioning as a marked Indian voice within a print-based discursive field that denigrated other Ho-Chunk voices. I finish by examining new position-taking strategies manifest in the 1939 vote and in Redcloud's turn to headline register. I argue that both media and electoral mechanisms offered relatively autonomous fields that made these experiments with Indigenous action possible despite the absence of tribal political institutions necessary to transform the positions Ho-Chunk people occupied in their everyday lives. Together, the headlines and the election suggest the interdependence of activism carried out in media and in governmental structures in the production of transformative acts of political self-representation.

Disciplines

Civic and Community Engagement | Demography, Population, and Ecology | Indigenous Studies | Politics and Social Change | Race and Ethnicity | Technical and Professional Writing

Comments

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Voices and Votes in the Fields of Settler Society: American Indian Media and Electoral Politics in 1930s Wisconsin

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INTRODUCTION

In early April of 1939, the Ho-Chunk (or Winnebago)¹ residents of Komensky, a small township in west-central Wisconsin, voted for the first time in local elections, helping to elect a member of their community, Fred Kingswan, to the township board. The next day, one of the Ho-Chunk voters, Mitchell Redcloud Sr., used his weekly column in the *Banner-Journal* newspaper, published in the nearby city of Black River Falls, to depict the event as a political milestone. He did so by publishing ten headlines from the imaginary “Komensky News” commenting on the significance of the vote. The headlines included:

“First Time in History Winnebagoes stand together.”

“Winnebagoes score a devisive [*sic*] victory.”

“Indian vote breaks ring of advocates for depriving the Winnebagoes [of] the privilege to enjoy the rights of citizenship.”

“Democracy wins over Fascism.”²

Nothing like the headlines had appeared in Redcloud’s column before. Their pointed charges and loaded language gave voice to his elation at the results of the election, and depicted Ho-Chunk participation in a vote for a local council as a triumph over white oppression by a politically unified Ho-Chunk people.

Redcloud’s headlines are an example of the sort of “conjuncture of critical discourse and an objective crisis” that Pierre Bourdieu saw as having the

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¹ For the synonymy of Ho-Chunk and Winnebago, see Lurie 1978.

² Mitchell Redcloud, Black River Falls *Banner-Journal*, 5 Apr. 1939: 10.

potential to disrupt habituated patterns of behavior, and to effect “a conversion of the vision of the world” (1991: 127–28). Such issues have been central to a generation of work on the relationship between “self-representation in media” and “Indigenous actions for self-determination” (Ginsburg 1994; Turner 1991; Conklin and Graham 1995; Graham 2002; 2011). In her important early account of “Indigenous media,” Faye Ginsburg made a particularly prescient call to explore how Indigenous media projects—like Indigenous activism itself—are embedded in “a colonial field of power relations” (1994: 366, quoting Fiona Nicoll 1993: 709), anticipating more recent interest in how Indigeneity emerges out of colonial conditions (Fortun, Fortun, and Rubenstein 2010; Cadena and Starn 2007; Hamilton and Placas 2011). Subsequent work on Indigenous activism and media has shown that the search for voice through media and politics is foundational to the formation of Indigeneity as a decolonized vision of identity and action through which marginalized people can externalize their experiences and values as a political agenda, and thereby transform themselves into political actors in contemporary institutional and geopolitical contexts (Bourdieu 1991: 129).³

Redcloud’s headlines and the 1939 Ho-Chunk vote in Komensky illustrate the conjuncture of media discourse and political action during a moment when Ho-Chunk people had only just begun to reclaim voice and agency in settler society. The concept of the social field offers a useful tool for analyzing such events in order to understand the conditions that make creative new political “pre-visions” possible (ibid.: 128). As used by Bourdieu and others, a field is a distribution of resources (capital) mobilized by actors involved in agonistic acts of position-taking (e.g., 1993; 1986; Bourdieu and Wacquant 1992). As a space of possible and potential positions, a field exists when actors are able to derive motivations or impulses for action from the affordances of the situations in which they encounter each other in ways that give coherence to their interactions as part of the “organized striving” for a shared goal, often identified by Bourdieu with a particular form of capital (Martin 2011: 252).⁴

This article uses fields as a framework through which to explore how innovative forms of Indigenous political action can develop from interlinked acts of representation and position-taking available across distinct but coexisting fields. I analyze the conjuncture of Mitchell Redcloud’s headlines and the

³ On Indigenous struggles, see Warren and Jackson 2003; Cadena and Starn 2007; Turner 1991; and Ginsburg 1991.

⁴ For current field theories building on and elucidating the work of Bourdieu, see especially Martin 2011; Martin and Gregg 2015; Swartz 1997; and Gorski 2013. As Martin discusses, Bourdieu’s work drew upon earlier efforts by Kohler and other Gestaltist psychologists taken up in social psychology by Kurt Lewin (1951), who was also the major influence on Victor Turner’s discussion of fields (1975). For this longer history of field theory, see Ash 1998; and Mey 1972. For a recent contribution to field theory in anthropology attuned to its linguistic/discursive dimensions, see Hanks 2005.



FIGURE 1. Ho-Chunk newspaper columnist Mitchell Redcloud, Sr. in an undated photograph. Photo courtesy of the Milwaukee Public Museum, MPM neg. no. A666L6.

1939 election in Komensky in terms of three fields: the everyday field of interpersonal relations; the local discursive field of print media in which Redcloud's headlines appeared; and the local political field of electoral politics in the township within which the vote took place. Each field grounded discursive and embodied acts of position-taking within a different set of relational resources. They thus offered actors different possibilities for self-positioning in the realization of different forms of value. In the everyday field of social interactions, actors drew upon resources that included economic power, encultured capacities (i.e., taste, knowledge), and social connections (the basic forms of capital identified by Bourdieu [e.g., 1986]). They employed these to negotiate their identities and relationships—and thereby their relative positions—in a social field of personhood bounded and stratified by ideologies of race and class, and other modes of marked social identity. This field of everyday interactions provided the foundation upon which both the media field and political field at issue in both Redcloud's headlines and the Komensky election were superimposed. In the media field, actors like Redcloud used voicing strategies involving the manipulation of stance, footing, style, and other semiotic resources (Agha 2005; Dubois 2007; Jaffe 2009) to seek positions in print from which

they could speak with authority relative to other voices present in the field of local news (Bourdieu 1991: 127; Couldry 2010).⁵ In the local political fields such as those created by the annual election for the township boards in Wisconsin, residents could create political constituencies based on racial, ethnic, or other forms of identity, kinship and other social relationships, or a shared sense of need. These were expressed through choices made in the voting booth to invest their political capital in, and delegate it to, particular representatives through whom they could attain, or maintain, a political voice in local affairs (Bourdieu 1991: 194–96).⁶

In what follows, I show how an early moment of Indigenous politics occurred through the conjunction of Ho-Chunk actions in each of these fields as the shifting alignments of everyday life were transformed into innovative forms of self-representation. These took place in the media and political fields where the degree of change possible through acts of positioning was greater than in the field of everyday social relations. In the article's first part I use census records to establish the positions Ho-Chunk people occupied in the field of everyday life that was rooted in the social interactions and economic and social connections between Komensky's Indians and whites. I first document the local distribution of relational resources such as income, education, and occupational status among Ho-Chunk and white residents. I then show how Mitchell Redcloud positioned himself in this field by choosing to downplay evidence of his relatively elite economic and educational status, and his opportunities for social mobility, in order to minimize antagonism from whites and from less-well positioned Ho-Chunks.

In the article's second part I turn to Redcloud's strategy of self-positioning in his writing career in the local newspaper prior to the April 1939 vote. I show how he pursued a homologous strategy that deployed literary skills to position himself as a marked Indian voice within a print-based discursive field that included, and denigrated, other Ho-Chunk voices. He constructed an alternative, generally apolitical persona that presented evidence of his authenticity as Indian to affirm, rather than undermine, his authority as a Ho-Chunk voice.

My final section examines the new position-taking strategies manifest in the 1939 vote and in Redcloud's turn to "headline register." I show how both the vote and the voice represented transformations of established position-taking strategies. Each represented the assertion of a collective political identity as Ho-Chunk, challenged the dominance of white society, and anticipated a struggle for sovereignty and self-government that seemed unachievable in

⁵ For discussions of the history of American Indian print-media projects, see Warrior 2005; Round 2010; and Wyss 2000. For American Indian writing projects during the era of the Ho-Chunk newspaper columns, see Morgan 2005; Lewis and McLester 2005; and Fowler 2004. See Saffley 1930 for an interesting early account of the fields within which American country weeklies like the *Banner-Journal* were positioned.

⁶ On the structure of town government in Wisconsin, see Wehrwein 1935; and Toepel 1952.

everyday life at the time. By examining the relationship between individual and collective Ho-Chunk action in and between these fields, I show one way in which Indigenous media activism such as Mitchell Redcloud's column could contribute to the emergence of Indigenous political strategies before the development of modern institutions of self-determination and sovereignty. It did so by giving voice to Ho-Chunk political subjects who could undertake the actions necessary to the struggle for self-determination.

PART 1: BEING INDIAN IN KOMENSKY: RECONSTRUCTING THE DOMINANT FIELD OF INDIAN-SETTLER RELATIONS

At the time of the election, in 1939, Ho-Chunk people in Komensky and elsewhere in Wisconsin occupied positions in settler society that were the legacy of decades of disruption, dispossession, and defiance. Their ancestors had been forced to cede their land in a series of treaties between 1829 and 1837, and then spent forty years struggling against forced military removal (Lurie 1952; 1978; Onsager 1985). After removal efforts were abandoned in 1875, legislation was passed that allowed Ho-Chunk people who agreed to renounce tribal status to take up homesteads from public lands. These would be kept in trust for them for twenty-five years to give them time to establish themselves as self-sufficient citizens before they became subject to property taxes. By then white settlers had claimed the most fertile farmlands in the state, and most Ho-Chunk individuals had to take homesteads in areas of marginal productivity such as Komensky. The majority of the non-Indian residents in these areas were late-arriving Czech immigrants and their descendants.

The land here was ill suited to productive agriculture, and most Ho-Chunk people survived through a combination of local hunting and gardening, and seasonal migration to labor in the cranberry bogs, blueberry patches, cherry orchards, and other commercial agriculture sites in the region. Many lost their homesteads in the early twentieth century as the trust period ended and the county began to foreclose on their properties for back taxes. Some later regained their land and even managed to have its trust status restored, but the community as a whole remained in dire economic straits, relative even to other residents of the "barren heart of Wisconsin" such as their white neighbors in Komensky (Lurie 1978).⁷

Although his family had connections to the Komensky area, Mitchell Redcloud (b. 1896) was born 100 miles to the east in Hatley, near the town of Wittenberg, another of the main Ho-Chunk settlement areas in the state. He was the youngest son of John (b. ca. 1855) and Frances (Eagle) (b. 1876). His family possessed more economic resources than did neighboring Ho-Chunk families

⁷ A general account of Ho-Chunk history can be found in Lurie 1978, and a detailed description of the removal era is in Onsager 1985. See also recent summaries in Hoelscher 2008; and Jones et al. 2011.

because his father had attended school as a young man and acquired enough English working for local farmers and tradesmen to be hired by the local federal Indian agent as a translator. Redcloud, too, went to school as a young man, attending the Indian Bureau school in Wittenberg and the Indian boarding school at Tomah, Wisconsin. He left the latter just weeks before graduation from the eighth grade, having thus achieved a level of education that was relatively common for contemporary rural populations. In 1917, Redcloud enlisted in the U.S. Army Air Service, one of many Ho-Chunk men to volunteer for service as the United States prepared to enter World War I. During the war he served as a non-commissioned officer in the clerical forces at Fort Snelling in Minnesota. He came to the Black River Falls area “to stay for good” in 1922 and married Nellie Winneshiek, daughter of a family with a homestead in Komensky. He supplemented his formal education with correspondence courses from the LaSalle Institute, an early mail-order school.⁸

By the time of the 1939 vote Komensky was a very different place than when Redcloud arrived in 1922.⁹ The 1920 census reported that of the township’s 457 residents only 20 percent were Ho-Chunk (92 of 457), but by the 1940 census the population had fallen to 334 and the majority was now Ho-Chunk (238, or 75 percent). In 1920, 83 percent of all people with jobs (136 of 164) worked in farming in some capacity, but by 1940 that had fallen to 14 percent (15 out of 109 workers). These changes in demographics and employment were linked to a major ecological catastrophe in early May 1934, when Komensky and the rest of Wisconsin’s central sand region was hit by a devastating confluence of drought, fire, and wind that led to a major dust bowl (Goc 1990). The federal government responded with a rehabilitation project that bought up over 50,000 acres of land in the area and resettled farmers to parts of the state more suitable for agriculture. Between 1930 and 1940, fifty-seven white households left the township, at the same time that many Ho-Chunk residents found work rehabilitating former farmlands in the area on crews of the Works Progress Administration and Civilian Conservation Corps.

⁸ Information on Mitchell Redcloud and his family comes from the following sources: a 1904 Bureau of Indian Affairs census carried out by Axel Jacobsen of the Wittenberg Indian School (see: census entry numbers 601–604; a copy is in Leo Srole’s papers at the University of Chicago); the article “Indians Demand Justice of Government,” published in the *Banner-Journal* in 1931; two interviews ethnographer Leo Srole conducted with Redcloud in 1939 (Srole 1938a; 1938b); autobiographical information in Redcloud’s newspaper column “Heap Teepee Talk” on 22 January 1941; an unpublished and unfinished autobiographical manuscript written in 1945–1946 and prepared as a typescript by Nancy Oestreich Lurie, held by the University of Chicago Department of Anthropology archives; and Redcloud’s obituary published in the *Banner-Journal* on 14 August 1946.

⁹ The 1940 census is a particularly valuable source of information, and includes detailed queries about education and employment. The census enumerator for Komensky was James A. Smoke, a Ho-Chunk resident of Madison and a featured performer at the Stand Rock Indian Ceremonial, a popular Wisconsin Dells tourist attraction.

The 1940 census shows that despite their increasing demographic dominance and new employment opportunities the average Ho-Chunk person made just 61 percent of the average white resident's annual earnings (\$237 to \$383). Ho-Chunk depended also almost entirely on temporary jobs with federal programs, which employed sixty-four of the seventy-nine Ho-Chunk workers, including Redcloud, versus only eight of the forty-six white workers. Although Ho-Chunk households outnumbered white ones in Komen-sky fifty-five to thirty, whites still had higher rates of property ownership. Over 50 percent of Ho-Chunk families lived on rented lands versus less than 20 percent of white families. The average white landowner's land was worth \$374; the average Ho-Chunk's just \$108. Yet, even though their economic status in the township remained lower than whites, Ho-Chunk people were increasingly attaining comparable levels of education. Whereas Ho-Chunks in their forties averaged a fourth-grade education, two grades behind whites of that same age category, those between ages eighteen and twenty-nine averaged less than a grade behind the ninth-grade average of their white peers.

Census data on incomes and property values, education levels, and occupational statuses (as defined in Edwards 1943) provide a map of the everyday field within which individuals in the township were situated. This makes it possible to understand the general possibilities and affordances that shaped their actions and interactions. The data identify a small group of about a dozen white people that was set apart from other residents. One, Frank Pobarsky, age fifty-two, occupied the top position in terms of personal resources. He was a foreman for the county road shop and enjoyed one of the highest annual incomes in the township (\$1,350) and one of the most valuable homesteads (valued at \$1,000). Louise Kippenhahn, forty-eight and a social worker at the mission, also earned a relatively high income (\$1,050) and possessed one of only four college degrees.

Although no Ho-Chunk was among the most elite, several were just below it, which placed them above almost everyone else in the township. Mitchell Redcloud, age forty-three, was one of these figures because of his yearly income (\$468) and his high-status job as a WPA-funded researcher for the local historical society. Other Ho-Chunk elites included forty-four-year-old bus driver Martin Lowe, because of his level of education (tenth-grade), income (\$450), and property value (\$200). John Stacy, age sixty-eight and pastor of the local Indian mission, had the highest Ho-Chunk income (\$900), despite having only a fourth-grade education (which was still among the highest levels of schooling for Ho-Chunks of his generation). Stacy's daughter, Matilda, twenty-seven, was foreman of the local WPA sewing project for Ho-Chunk women, and his son Alvin, thirty-four, was an associate pastor at the mission, and they also stood apart from others because of their occupational status, levels of education (Alvin had another of the rare college degrees in the township, Matilda an eleventh-grade education), and in Matilda's case, income (\$700).

Mapping the relative positions of Komensky's residents clarifies where Mitchell Redcloud stood in relation to other residents and helps explain why his peers selected him to head the Ho-Chunk treaty-claims committee in 1928. That position required him to recruit and consult with lawyers to prepare the tribal claims against the federal government, including claims that the trust funds and treaty annuities of Wisconsin Ho-Chunk peoples had been misappropriated at various points since the 1850s. Although Redcloud was not the best-educated Ho-Chunk person in the 1940 census, he was one of the most educated of his generation, few of whom went beyond the fifth grade.¹⁰ His position as a WPA-funded researcher also suggests that he possessed skills that would be useful for claims committee work.

Another sign of Redcloud's status in the local field of Indian-white relations was his selection to head a six-person delegation to a 1934 conference of Wisconsin tribal leaders held in Hayward. Assistant Commissioner of Indian Affairs William Zimmerman also attended and lobbied for support for the Indian Reorganization Act (IRA) then making its way through Congress (Satz 1994). One of the most significant pieces of federal legislation of the twentieth century, the IRA provided a framework for American Indian communities to organize tribal governments and engage in collective economic development. Redcloud's role on the Hayward delegation was followed in 1935 by his work on an executive committee that drafted a tribal constitution based on the provision of the IRA and collected 159 Ho-Chunk signatures on a petition favoring reorganization.

However important political organization was to Redcloud and others on the constitutional committee, not all Ho-Chunk people shared this goal in the 1930s. In 1935, another Ho-Chunk resident of Komensky, William Hall, Jr. organized opposition to the IRA and gathered 304 petition signatures against the effort to organize a tribal government.¹¹ In the petition Hall pointed to the negative impact of past federal government policies in the Ho-Chunk community and fears that organization would entail removal to a new reservation. His text also spoke of a mistrust of the reorganization effort's leaders, and apprehension that they would use their positions and skills with respect to whites to profit from reorganization at the expense of other Ho-Chunk people. Through these

¹⁰ Redcloud's status as a veteran, while noted in laudatory white accounts such as those cited as biographical sources above, was a less-salient mark of his everyday status due, first, to the high rate of military service among Ho-Chunk men of his generation, and second, his lack of combat experience, which was the most important dimension of military service for status within the Ho-Chunk community.

¹¹ For the petition and correspondence, and materials surrounding the 1935 organizational effort, see the Tomah Agency file, in Box 34, Records of the Indian Organization Division, ca. 1934-1956; Records of the Indian Organization Division; General Records of the Bureau of Indian Affairs, Record Group 75; National Archives Building, Washington, D.C.

tactics Hall was able to mobilize Ho-Chunk people to oppose the reorganization effort and ultimately halted its progress.

This divided Ho-Chunk response to the reorganization effort can be understood by examining the positions of those on both sides of the issue. Of those who signed one of the two petitions, sixty-nine lived in Komensky at the time of the 1940 census. Of these, twenty-two favored reorganization (including candidate Kingswan, columnist Redcloud, and pastor Stacy) and forty-seven opposed it. Evidence of social position suggests a strong correlation between level of education and support for reorganization; the twenty-two in favor generally had more education than did opponents. Because schooling is the key social institution through which individuals acquire the habits, skills, and attitudes needed to deal with the other institutions of contemporary life (Bourdieu 1986), Ho-Chunk with less education and fewer of the other resources providing power in settler society may have been less confident in dealing with the uncertainty and risk of IRA reorganization.

Opposition organizer William Hall had the most education of the residents who signed his petition. Like Redcloud, he reported an eighth-grade education through the Tomah Indian School. Both his salary and occupational status were lower than Redcloud's, however, and matched the tendency for those opposing reorganization to have lower-paying jobs. Hall worked as a laborer on building projects for the Resettlement Administration and reported only fifteen weeks of work in the year prior to the census. Hall also fit the opponent tendency toward religious conservatism; in a community survey taken in 1938 he was described as "tending toward" an affiliation with the conservative religious faction of the Ho-Chunk community. Reorganization supporters were more apt to be affiliated with either the Christian or peyote religions.

As a relatively educated person with a good job, which reflected his ability to deal with white people, Redcloud faced a delicate task of positioning himself relative to many of Komensky's other Ho-Chunk residents. University of Chicago researcher Leo Srole, who interviewed Redcloud around the time of the election, wrote in his fieldnotes that Redcloud experienced "considerable antagonism" within the Ho-Chunk community, as did others like him who were "articulated as individuals to white society." They included the members of the land claims committee and the constitutional committee.

At the same time, Ho-Chunk people in general, even well-articulated individuals like Redcloud, faced challenges in positioning themselves in daily interactions with whites in Komensky and elsewhere, and Redcloud and others told Srole of conflicts with them. They described the discrimination they encountered at hotels and public establishments, and complained that legal institutions interfered in Ho-Chunk hunting and subsistence practices and meted out much harsher sentences to Indian defendants than to white ones for poaching and other offenses. Redcloud told Srole of having come into conflict with a white neighbor whose cow repeatedly trampled his garden patch, and landing

in court falsely accused of assaulting him. “It was,” he explained, “a case of ‘an Indian’s word against a white man’s and the judge took the white man’s,’” and fined Redcloud ten dollars: “That’s white man’s justice for you” (Srole 1938a, 5).

As a result of the complex tensions surrounding his position with respect to both Indians and whites, Redcloud seems to have developed a deliberately non-confrontational strategy in his everyday life in Komensky by downplaying all signs of his relatively high status. Srole observed that he seemed to eschew all the “symbols of white class status” that his education, income, and jobs might have allowed him. He lived, said Srole, “if anything, more simply than do most Indians,” in a one-room plank house deep in the woods, “and he appears not in the least self-conscious on the score of its utter simplicity.... [He] “dresses no differently when he comes to visit me ... than when he is home.” Unlike other educated Ho-Chunks, he drove a car “of ancient vintage.” He also seemed to purposely reject opportunities for social mobility in white society, and turned down an offer of a better paying job because, as he explained to Srole “I prefer it the way I have it now. I wouldn’t give up this hunting, fishing and swimming here with my boys [his sons].” Srole was thus impressed that Redcloud made no effort to “capitalize on his prestige [as a columnist in order] to extend, his relations among whites,” and gave the impression of utterly lacking “the bug to ‘get ahead.’”¹²

By taking up the mode of self-presentation and lifestyle of a Ho-Chunk person with fewer resources than he actually possessed, Redcloud avoided overt conflicts based on his status, but also could act as a role model for what he perceived to be an appropriate moral, cultural, and political response to the challenge of being Indian within settler society. In statements he made privately to Srole (who, although white, could be seen as positioned outside of the local system of race and class struggles), Redcloud expressed disapproval of the quest for social status, especially among younger Ho-Chunk: “All they think of ... is trying to get more property, trying to live better, and if they do get ahead, they think they are better than others.” He noted that the local Indian mission and its leader Pastor John Stacy, the highest paid Ho-Chunk person in the township, “repelled” rather than “attracted” Ho-Chunk people because they communicated a sense that they believed themselves to be “better than others”: “In the old days no one thought of accumulating wealth. Everyone, even the wise men and the chiefs, dressed in the same way, lived in the same wigwams, ate the same food, were the same as

¹² Redcloud did mix with whites of a certain sort—he was a protégé of the *Banner-Journal* publisher and congressman Merlin Hull. Prior to his work with Srole, Redcloud had collaborated with Rachel Commons, another University of Chicago graduate student. He later worked with University of Wisconsin undergraduate Nancy Oestreich (Lurie), whom he adopted while on his deathbed in 1946 (Lurie 1972).

all the rest. All they thought of was the soul and the hereafter, that was their main thought in living.”¹³

Redcloud’s mode of self-positioning in everyday life thus offered a model for contemporary Ho-Chunk identity, as one who could acquire the skills and resources necessary to survival in current conditions, yet self-consciously follow the traditional moral principles that had been modeled by Ho-Chunk exemplars of the past: living simply and behaving humbly while working for the betterment of the Indian community. By emphasizing widely admired aspects of traditional Ho-Chunk culture such as these, Redcloud simultaneously modeled a stance of Indian autonomy within white society and downplayed markers of his class status that might otherwise antagonize whites and Ho-Chunks alike.¹⁴ Yet, in as much as his actions—both on the claims and constitutional committees and in his lifestyle choices—embodied a political vision, he had to communicate them to others if they were to become widely shared.¹⁵ He began to do so in 1936, in the wake of the failed effort to organize under the IRA, through his role as a newspaper columnist, in a media field that presented him with new challenges.

PART 2: GIVING VOICE TO INDIANNESS

Redcloud first began writing his column for the *Banner-Journal* three years before the vote that elected Fred Kingswan to office. As the dominant media technology representing life in Komensky at the time, the white-owned and operated local newspaper offered a readymade vehicle through which people like Redcloud could claim a public voice and disseminate their vision. But the paper constituted a field of colonial power as intricate and complex as that which Redcloud encountered in his daily life in Komensky, one that complicated his efforts to claim an effective voice and required a careful negotiation of his Indian identity.

At the time Redcloud started his column, in 1936, news by and about Indian people was a popular feature of the *Banner-Journal*, a weekly country paper with a circulation of 4,350 in Jackson County. Since 1930, another Ho-Chunk resident of Komensky, Charles Round Low Cloud (1872–1949), had contributed a weekly “Indian News” column to the otherwise entirely white newspaper (Clark and Wyman 1973). Over time, Low Cloud’s column changed from being simply a report about events taking place in the Ho-Chunk community to one that included accounts of local Indian-white

¹³ For other examples of similar discourses in other parts of Native North America, see Basso 1979; Samuels 2001; and Trechter 2001.

¹⁴ See Ramirez (2012; 2013) for a rich account of how the challenges of self-positioning were confronted by a much more prominent Ho-Chunk activist and intellectual of the era, Yale-educated Henry Roe Cloud, one of the founders of the Society of American Indians.

¹⁵ One *CSSH* reviewer usefully commented on the “coordinating discourse of difference” evident in Redcloud’s statements.

conflicts, to one in which he editorialized on the racism Indian people experienced in the overwhelmingly white Jackson County (16,291 whites to 308 Indians). As his columns became more politicized, the *Banner-Journal* stopped editing his copy, which resulted in a voice that was highly marked in both content and style, an “Indian voice” that seemed to affirm racial stereotypes about Indian people as uneducated (see Graham 2011, for another example). At the same time, the newspaper published articles about Low Cloud that suggested readers take the uncopied text as an example of authentic “Indian English” (Meek 2006). Low Cloud’s voice in the “Indian News” thus came to parallel the subordinate status Indians held in local race relations (Arndt 2010).

Low Cloud himself announced the inauguration of Redcloud’s column, which was initially called “Resettlement Smoke Signals.” The announcement exemplifies the voice against which Redcloud would have to situate himself throughout his writing career: “Charles R. Low Cloud, Indian reporter. All times busy farming and work on resettlement projects has Mitchell Red Cloud help write Indian news. Look forward to interesting news. News should be something uncommon, here’s one Every Indians Supt. or Indians Agency always tell a lie to the Indians, never help anythings, always against them” (*Banner-Journal*, 10 June 1936). In response, Redcloud began the first article in his column in a style that imitated Low Cloud’s voice: “Good news! Red Cloud back again help write interesting news. ... Lots of rain at resettlement work. We want bathing suits to push wheel barrows. None of us make a bathing beauty.”¹⁶

Midway through the column, however, Redcloud quoted himself speaking with a tourist in a voice that contrasted with the “Indian” voice he had been using up to that point: “Inquisitive Tourist ask Red Cloud ‘Is it true there is such a thing as a happy hunting ground?’ Red Cloud, he make talk, he say, ‘No, not yet, but after Resettlement administration gets through with Jackson county there will be a real one.’ By exaggerating the marks of Indian English in the linking phrase “Red Cloud, he make talk, he say,” he drew his reader’s attention to the artificiality of the “Indian news” voice he had been using and displayed evidence of the sort of linguistic creativity and self-reflexivity that would characterize his writings from that point forward.

Within a few weeks Redcloud in his column had largely abandoned Low Cloud’s voice, even in passing, and instead used a number of different voices and personas, often deploying two or more in each weekly installment. In addition to the unmarked voice in which he provided straightforward accounts of resettlement activities, some of his most important recurrent personae were the humorous storyteller, the poetic wordsmith, and the Indian mystic. As the

¹⁶ It is unclear why Redcloud says, “back again.” I have been unable to locate any earlier column published under his name.

humorous storyteller, he frequently presented absurdist tales set at the Resettlement Administration project where he worked as a timekeeper, such as in the following paragraph from his third column: “Over on dike ‘17’ we had considerable trouble keeping the dike in good shape for every night deer would trample it down both on top and sides. One day, Jones Funmaker wrote a sign to read thus: ‘Deer and dogs, keep off.’ Then he stuck it[t] on top of the dike. Since then we’ve had no trouble at all.”

A few weeks later, Redcloud took on a more ostentatiously literary voice in a report on the start of hunting season: “The time is Saturday, Nov. 21, 1936. The air is frosty, all is quiet and peaceful. Sinister forms with firearms move in the early light of the morning. Gray forms almost invisible silently avoid these sinister forms. Half-hour after sunrise—crack! The quiet and peaceful atmosphere is shattered. The crackling reverberations of the high power rifle echoes and re-echoes throughout the valley and the woods. The hunting of the deer is on!” (18 Nov. 1936).

Occasionally, Redcloud took on the role of the spiritual Indian in touch with nature and the wisdom of the past, a stereotyped identity much valued by white people in the region. One such self-portrait, from an August 1937 column, drew on his literary skills to depict himself (as the “master of ceremonies” of his column) acting as a bridge for whites to the wisdom of the Indians of the past:

An old Indian sits before his tent, blanket wrapped around his loins, a pipestone pipe with lengthy stem held with brown bony fingers leans against his knee, face stolid and implacable he sits, at peace with his God, and the world. A robin swaying on a topmost branch of a tree sings throatily, lustily, ruling notes of old pathos, pleading for rain. The old Indian sucks at his pipe, sunken cheeks more pronounced, manna of pungent aroma of Indian-cured, willow-mixed, tobacco issues from his mouth, With clear eye of ebony black he squints at the smoke as it feathery rises upward and mutters “We sleep, we rise, another day brings rain.” The master of ceremonies for the “Smoke Signals” takes heed, tells heap pale face “Chuck” Weishapple and Pobarsky Jr. “Rain is coming some time soon. Rain tomorrow.” Both pale faces look at one another, make gestures of unbelief. As the Smoke Signals are being written a breeze, cool, damp, and exhilarating, born of two hours downpour of rain, is livening up all things living. I too am at peace with the world (11 Aug. 1937).

Redcloud made this vision of himself as a cultural mediator “at peace” with his place in the world an overt framework for his column in March 1939, when, just a few weeks before the Komensky election, he changed the title of his column to “Heap Tepee Talk.”¹⁷ In the first article with the new name,

¹⁷ “Heap” is one of most epitomizing markers of manufactured Indian English. Cutler (1994) noted that “the introduction of ‘heap’ and its association with Indian speech” is attributable to Washington Irving and Mark Twain (quoted by Meek 2006: 107). The meaning of the title was subject to reinterpretation: that summer, in the wake of the controversy caused by his headlines, Redcloud wrote, somewhat testily, “Many people have said that they do not quite understand the meaning of ‘Heap Tepee Talk.’ In short it means ‘Popular subjects being discussed frequently by Indians within Tepees.’ Clear? Thank you!” (*Banner-Journal*, 12 July 1939).

Redcloud greeted his readers in Ho-Chunk (although he incorporated the iconic Hollywood Indian English word for “hello”) and translated his words into English:

How! He-chalk-kolo! meaning Hello, friend!
Hump-day-a, Hump-la-pin” meaning “Today is a fine day.

This was the first time he had used Ho-Chunk language in his column. He followed with an announcement of the column’s new mission: “Learn to talk Winnebago Indian language by following this column each week? Why not? The whites have taught us Redskins their language so turnabout is fair play. Each white resident should talk to some extent the Indian language of their community, not that it would get you anywhere in the world, but merely for the fun of it” (15 Mar. 1939).

The new framework built on developments in Redcloud’s everyday relations with whites in which, because of the celebrity he gained through his newspaper column, local organizations invited him to speak to them about Indian culture and history (Srole 1938a). The new column format allowed Redcloud to take up the role of cultural interpreter in print as well as in person. By writing in Ho-Chunk, and translating for readers, Redcloud could simultaneously affirm his literary skills, cultural knowledge, and personal authenticity. As a new voicing strategy for positioning himself in the newspaper, his language lessons made it possible for him to establish his Indian identity in a voice that staked a claim to both authenticity and authority in relationship to white readers.

After establishing his new role and voice, Redcloud in the second half of this column turned to politics, identifying himself as president of the Wisconsin Winnebago Claim Committee and announcing the recent introduction of a jurisdictional bill concerning a Ho-Chunk claim against the federal government. “Providing that this jurisdictional bill introduced in Congress by Senator La Follette should pass and the Winnebagoes receive a favorable decision from the Court of Claims and the Indians receive satisfactory adjustments from Uncle Sam, the state will have benefitted by having the living standards of its Indians greatly lifted and will have benefitted largely also from the monetary viewpoint.” While attesting to his role in Ho-Chunk politics at the state and national levels, Redcloud also carefully pointed out that a political victory for the Ho-Chunk would have benefits for others in Wisconsin. The item marks a rare moment in which he directly addressed his political activism in his column, but he made such work fit within his print persona as an affable and benevolent Indian figure.

Up to the eve of the 1939 election, Mitchell Redcloud pursued a strategy of positioning in the media field that was analogous to the strategy he used to position himself in everyday life. In person, he was modest in his behavior and mode of self-presentation and downplayed his relatively privileged levels of

economic and occupational capital in order to minimize the potential for resentment and opposition in his relations with Indians and whites. This continued even as he worked on Ho-Chunk political organizing and legal claims that would change the collective status of Ho-Chunk people in the state. In print, he drew upon an unusually high level of discursive ability (so much so that a local reader later lauded him for using “the English of a Harvard college professor” [4 Sept. 1946]). He employed it to transcend the denigrated voice of Charles Low Cloud’s Indian news, while telling stories that emphasized his good humor and his pious, somewhat mystical nature as an Indian.

If his literary skill allowed him to escape the subordinate positioning of Low Cloud’s voice, he had rarely used it to voice the sort of political charges that had long been a central theme of Low Cloud’s column. His headlines on the Komensky election appeared less than a month after the first Tepee Talk language lesson. These stand in sharp contrast to his positioning before and after, in person in print, in their confrontational account of the election as a moment in which the Ho-Chunk people of Komensky united as an Indian people against the domination of settler society and the opposition of local whites. It was a dramatic shift and came in response to a local event that might otherwise have gone unremarked: Fred Kingswan’s election as the first Ho-Chunk member of the local township board (and perhaps the first Ho-Chunk candidate ever elected in a general election in Wisconsin). Having traced Redcloud’s particular strategy of self-positioning in the fields of class relations and print media, I now turn to the impact of the 1939 election in Komensky on his voice in print, and the new political vision of Ho-Chunk life he announced with his headlines.

PART 3: SELF-REPRESENTATION IN THE POLITICAL FIELD: VOTING AND VOICING AS EMERGING FORMS OF INDIGENOUS ACTION

Redcloud did not lead his 5 April column with the 4 April election results. He began instead with another language lesson, presenting the second part of a translation of the Boy Scout oath into Ho-Chunk that he had started the week before. He opened with a greeting, “Well boys and girls, and readers of the [*Banner-Journal*], here is the last part of the Boy Scout oath in Winnebago language.” After the lesson, Redcloud turned to the previous night’s events when he announced “Headlines in Komensky News” and offered the list of headlines, each in quotation marks to maintain the illusion that they were being pulled from another source:

“Constitutionality of U. S. Constitution challenged.”

“Efforts made to deprive Winnebagoes the Right to Vote.”

“Winnebagoes meet force with force.”

“First Time in History Winnebagoes stand together.”

“No statesmanship, no foresight, no diplomacy among white populace of Komensky.”

“No denial that all whites were on relief thru acceptance of Red Cross flour.”

“Indian vote break[s] ring of advocates for depriving the Winnebagoes the privilege to enjoy the rights of citizenship.”

“Theoretically, Winnebagoes have more right to challenge the whites their eligibility to vote.”

“Winnebagoes score a devisive [*sic*] victory.”

“Democracy wins over Fascism.”

“Chas. Marek defeats Frank Hryz for chairman by 34 to 41 vote.”

“Fred Kingswan and Frank Roush elected supervisors over Frank Marek and Otto Wagner [no closing quote].¹⁸

With these made-up headlines from a fictional newspaper, Redcloud reported on the unprecedented event that Komensky residents had elected a Ho-Chunk person to public office: Kingswan became one of two supervisors on the three-person board. His election was due, in part, to the emergence of a Ho-Chunk majority in Komensky. Redcloud’s headlines, with their emphasis on Indian-White conflict, presumably reflect his elation at a political victory in the face of white opposition to Ho-Chunk participation in the vote. This event also signaled the first time that the Ho-Chunk had taken political action within settler society and stood in sharp contrast to the failed effort to get them to support reorganization just four years earlier.

Although Ho-Chunk people were the majority of the residents of Komensky of voting age in 1939 (130 of the 193), there had been no guarantee that they would turn out to vote. Few, if any, had participated in previous township elections. This was in part because of discouragement by local white institutions and residents who resisted recognizing Ho-Chunk people as equal citizens. In the weeks leading up to the 1939 elections, in fact, there had been significant white mobilization against Ho-Chunk participation in the election, particularly because of tensions over school integration. On the eve of the election, George W. Eubank of the Tomah office of the Indian Bureau had told Leo Srole that Komensky’s white residents were seeking to prevent Ho-Chunk people from voting as part of state-wide resistance to the integration of Ho-Chunk and other Indian students into local schools following the closing of the Tomah Indian School in 1935. While the state and county had the main responsibility for schools, town boards could “alter, consolidate, or dissolve” school districts, and were also responsible for paying the tuition of youth “attending high schools in nearby cities and villages” (Wehrwein 1935).¹⁹

¹⁸ “Heap Tepee Talk By Smoke Signal Redcloud,” *Banner-Journal*, 5 Apr. 1939: 10.

¹⁹ Srole collected other evidence of white resistance to the integration of Ho-Chunk students at the time: Reverend Sihler from the Bethany Indian Mission in Wittenberg told him of a conflict that broke out following efforts to integrate Ho-Chunk students into local schools following the closing of the Boarding School in 1933. Tomah Indian Agency Superintendent Peru Farver also reported white resistance to admitting Ho-Chunk students to local schools in the La Crosse area (Srole 1938–1939).

While many Ho-Chunk people, like Redcloud, saw education as a necessary tool for Ho-Chunk survival and success in the future, many were also ambivalent about becoming involved in American political institutions. Ho-Chunk people had initially received citizenship status, and thus voting rights, through legal arrangements in which the federal government granted them homesteads and American citizenship with the stipulation that they were agreeing to renounce their status as a tribal polity.²⁰ Exercising their voting rights could thus be seen as a problematic act inasmuch as it marked their acceptance of an identity as Americans rather than as Ho-Chunk.²¹ Yet the framework for township elections was conducive to overcoming such ambivalence. The voting took place in the context of a township meeting in which Ho-Chunk individuals could vote in solidarity with other Ho-Chunk people. With Kingswan as a candidate, they could collectively invest their political capital in a delegated Ho-Chunk representative who could speak for their interests in township government.

Surviving records make it difficult to know how many Ho-Chunk people showed up for the 4 April vote. The returns reproduced by Mitchell Redcloud suggest that 75 of the 193 eligible voters (just under 40 percent) participated. Because only sixty-three of the eligible voters were white, it is clear that at least twelve Ho-Chunk people voted. That significantly more than that turned out is suggested by the fact that not only did Kingswan defeat his white opponents, but he received the largest total vote of all the candidates. Ho-Chunk participation is also suggested by complaints from whites in Komen-sky, published in the *Banner-Journal*, that Ho-Chunk people had brought in Ho-Chunks from elsewhere in the state to participate in the election.²²

Regardless of how many Ho-Chunk people voted, the election results indicate that the majority who did had been mobilized both by the possibility of voting for a Ho-Chunk candidate and, in the case of the white candidates they helped elect, by socio-economic considerations. All three winning candidates were wage earners; both Kingswan and Frank Rousch were laborers on the local WPA projects, while Charles Marek was the foreman at the local gravel pit. Each of the losing candidates was a farmer or farm-worker and reported no wage-based income. Ho-Chunk people had long-standing tensions with local commercial farmers in the region whom many worked for as seasonal agricultural laborers. In 1905, local farmers had tried to pressure the federal government to delay payment of the Ho-Chunk treaty annuities until after the harvest, complaining that Ho-Chunk people would resist working for them if

²⁰ For the links between citizenship, voting rights, and tribal political status, see MacDonald 2010; and Karlan 2011: 1425–26.

²¹ For a discussion of the issues of citizenship and sovereignty, see Bruyneel 2007.

²² Redcloud published the results as: Fred Kingswan 51 votes, Frank Roush 48, Frank Marek 27, and Otto Wagner 26. See *Banner-Journal*, 5 Apr. 1939: 10.

they had other money on hand. So if Ho-Chunk voters were mobilized initially in terms of tribal solidarity, they also voted for a board that represented a vision of the area's economic future as a post-agricultural community.

In drafting the headlines as an immediate response to the success of the election, Redcloud drew on his skill and creativity as a writer and the relative freedom he had to position himself within the pages of the *Banner-Journal*. By using headlines, he spoke in a voice that was characteristic of metropolitan daily newspapers of the era, marked by a “reduced” or “contracted” syntax and filled with loaded words and expressions meant to capture readers’ attention and shape their understanding of the attached news story.²³ By using headline register (a style denounced as “headlines” in a newspaper handbook of the era; Garst and Bernstein 1933: 96), he repositioned his voice in the newspaper, from the usual back-page placement of Indian News as a variant of the “country-correspondence” column, to the front page, as well as from a country-weekly like the *Banner-Journal* to an imagined big-city daily. This contrasted with the *Banner-Journal*'s style, where even the most important stories appeared under simple caption titles that scrupulously avoided sensationalistic elements that might offend local readers. (This was in line with the advice of journalistic experts of the day, such as Safley 1930.) With his headlines, Redcloud transcended in one discursive move the marginality of Indian news in the local public sphere as well as the provincialism of the *Banner-Journal*.²⁴ More importantly, with the “Komensky News” he created an imaginary vehicle for a united Ho-Chunk community acting together as a tribal polity. Through the headlines, he presented the Komensky vote as the political voice of a united Ho-Chunk people, making it significant in a way that transcended the achievement of having elected Kingswan to the township board.

One week after the election, the *Banner-Journal* published a response to Redcloud written on behalf of “the white residents of Komensky.” The author contested Redcloud’s characterization of the election, although he did not deny that whites in Komensky had challenged the Ho-Chunk right to vote. “We the white populace of Komensky, did not try to deprive the Winnebagoes of the right to vote, as a challenged vote is not a deprived vote.” The letter justified white opposition to Ho-Chunk participation in the election by charging Ho-Chunk people with failing to “earn” their citizenship rights, by accepting the responsibilities borne by white citizens—namely the payment of property taxes—and remaining dependent on the federal government. “They want equal rights as the white man has when it comes to voting, holding office

²³ For efforts to define the key stylistic features of headline register, see Iarovici and Amel 1989; Bucaria 2004; and Reah 1998.

²⁴ Redcloud was aware of the difference between the *Banner-Journal* and big-city dailies—in a 21 March 1941 column he wrote about the addition of photo-illustrated stories of world events to the local news and remarked (teasingly) that he had not recognized the *Banner-Journal* because the photojournalism made it look just “like a ‘big time’ paper.”

and other benefits ... but they do not want our responsibilities, such as paying property taxes, financing their own schools, etc. The county expense for Indians only in 1939 was over \$50,000 besides the federal government aid for the schools, etc.”

The author argued that the Ho-Chunk voters had been “secured by the promises of the benefits they would receive if they vote for their leaders,” and had come not just from Komensky, “but Albion, Brockway and even Clark county.” The writer denounced their success in the election as “similar to the victory of Hitler over the Czecho-Slovak Republic,” an event that had happened only weeks before, on 15 March 1939. This indicates just how heated the issue of Ho-Chunk political action was among the township’s white minority, at least half of whom were of Czech descent. The response ended with an assertion of racial power: “When Indians get to be self supporting in all like the white man then we are willing to grant him the same rights.”²⁵ Even though it sought to undermine the triumphalism of Redcloud’s headlines, the response confirmed his depiction of the election as a struggle between Indians and whites in which Ho-Chunk people had succeeded despite white resistance. Redcloud’s headline charging “all whites” in Komensky with being “on relief through acceptance of Red Cross flour” can be seen as a response to the idea that Indians were less self-supporting than whites. The Komensky response is similar to arguments made by whites across the country to justify excluding Indian peoples from the ballot box in areas where they live in sufficient numbers to form an effective voting bloc (Karlan 2011, quoting MacDonald 2010).

And yet, while the conditions of the election had made possible unprecedented acts of Ho-Chunk self-representation, those facing Ho-Chunk people as individuals in the everyday field of race relations in Komensky had not changed. As if in acknowledgement of that fact, Redcloud retreated from the antagonistic voice of his headlines and adopted a more conciliatory tone in his column the week after the election. Speaking again as a cultural instructor, he taught readers to count to ten in Ho-Chunk and then turned to the coming of Easter Sunday, reporting that although “feelings ran high for a few days prior and after the spring election in some localities, particularly in our township of Komensky,” Easter Sunday had come “just in time,” and that “the feeling of Christian-like good fellowship for all mankind” had “even found its way into the wigwam.” He proclaimed, “Christianity binds all races into one brotherhood,” and made it possible for “peace on earth and good will to all men [to] become a reality.”²⁶

Once his initial elation over the vote had faded, Redcloud returned to his established persona and voice, one that avoided overt political conflicts with

²⁵ “Answer to Redcloud’s Smoke Signals,” *Banner-Journal*, 12 Apr. 1939: 3.

²⁶ “Heap Tepee Talk by Smoke Signal Redcloud,” *Banner-Journal*, 12 Apr. 1939: 3.

whites by invoking religion as a transcendent realm of values that united Indians and whites. Speaking in his own voice, he emphasized the positive, non-confrontational attributes of his Indian identity. The return to his older stance in print suggests that however great his jubilation in the immediate aftermath of the election, Redcloud recognized that the context of his daily interactions with whites in Komensky remained the same. He fell silent on political issues for a few months thereafter, and when, in July, another Ho-Chunk candidate, Gilbert Lowe, was elected to the post of clerk for the Komensky District 5 School District, his response was more restrained. Redcloud commended Lowe as “well educated and very well qualified for the position,” and concluded, “The Indians are beginning to realize that in order to learn to swim you’ve got to get right in the water and swim, and this applies to their political and educational welfare” (12 July 1939).

Redcloud’s headlines announced the arrival of a politically empowered Ho-Chunk community capable of standing up for its rights and needs despite white opposition. Yet the goal he had long worked for and that he depicted as having become reality in the 1939 election, Ho-Chunk self-determination, finally found effective institutional foundations only in 1963. In that year, decades of additional organizational work by an array of Ho-Chunk activists led finally to the creation of a tribal government under the IRA, and Ho-Chunk people voted by an overwhelming majority (514 to 5) to adopt a revised version of the sort of constitution Redcloud had helped to draft in 1935 (Gudinas 1974; Lurie 1978). The election of Kingswan in 1939 was an important milestone on the path to the reorganization, and the conjuncture of media and political fields during that time had made it possible for Mitchell Redcloud to create headlines that anticipated the achievement of sovereignty, despite the limits everyday life placed on Ho-Chunk people in Komensky and elsewhere in Wisconsin.

CONCLUSION

The interdependence of the Ho-Chunk vote in the township election and Redcloud’s headlines in the *Banner-Journal* illustrate a central issue in the study of Indigenous activism, one encapsulated in two sentences from Marx’s 18th *Brumaire* that Edward Said chose as the first epigraph for *Orientalism* (1978): “They cannot represent themselves. They must be represented” (Marx 1963 [1852]: 124). Aligned with the interests of Said’s study, the lines speak of problems of colonial representations and ethnographic authority, and testify to the import role activist efforts play in reclaiming powers of self-representation in order to decolonize identities and imaginaries (e.g., Smith 2010; Simpson and Smith 2014). Yet, as John Kelly and Martha Kaplan note in *Represented Communities* (2001: 85–86), Marx was writing not about the importance of discursive self-representation through the media, but rather the lack of political representation for the mass of “small-holding peasants” in

mid-nineteenth-century France, who were “therefore incapable of asserting their class interest in their own name” (Marx 1963: 123–24). For Kelly and Kaplan, then, Marx’s words speak of the importance of “institutional vehicles for effective collective assertion,” including “mechanisms for electing representatives” (2001: 86).

The study of Indigenous media activism incorporates both of these perspectives on representation, given that even successful efforts to assert control over self-representation in media and scholarship have little power to make lasting change unless they are linked to the creation of institutions of self-representation. Yet claiming powers of self-representation in discourse and media has been essential to mobilizing communities to struggle for institutions of political self-representation. That these two forms of representation are interdependent is one of the key lessons of studies of the American Indian sovereignty movement of the past century. While the American Indian movement activism of the 1960s and 1970s, especially the symbolic occupations at Alcatraz, the Bureau of Indian Affairs headquarters in Washington, D.C., and Wounded Knee on the Pine Ridge Reservation, did little in themselves to produce lasting change (Smith and Warrior 1997), such symbolic moments of self-representation helped galvanize individuals and communities across the nation. They energized ongoing legislative and political efforts that by the 1990s had transformed the relatively weak tribal governments envisioned by the IRA into modern tribal governments capable of representing the interests of their constituents in relationship to federal and states agencies (Nesper 2007; Wilkinson 2005; Deloria and Lytle 1984).

Linking media activism and political organization at the very beginning of the Ho-Chunk sovereignty movement, Redcloud’s headlines and the Ho-Chunk vote in Komensky show how Indigenous activism is carried out within “a colonial field of power relations” (Ginsburg 1994: 366). Over the three years that led up to his critical headlines about the Komensky election, Redcloud had sought to create a mode of self-representation in print, to claim powers of representation and recognition denied to other local Indian writers, whose voices were denigrated in the local public sphere (see Webster 2011; Webster and Peterson 2011). By claiming a voice as Ho-Chunk in the local newspaper, he was able to help envision a new mode of Indian identity for himself and for others in the region, as a literary Indigenous person who modeled different ways of engaging with whites and used new institutional means to empower Ho-Chunk people. His voice, like the 1939 vote, reflected possibilities for “reproducing and transforming cultural identity” (Ginsburg 1991) through new agendas of position-taking in colonial fields of power. Redcloud used his work as a columnist to depict the participation of some Ho-Chunk people in a relatively minor township election as the act of a united Ho-Chunk people standing up for democracy and citizenship against white oppression. In the field of local electoral politics, in turn, Ho-Chunk voters represented themselves as a people with

a political voice vis-à-vis whites even before they shared a commitment to developing their own political institutions. If the vote inspired the voice of the headlines, the headlines gave voice to the vote as an act of collective self-determination. Through his headlines, Redcloud represented the 1939 vote as a denunciation of what might have seemed, in prior decades, to be Ho-Chunk people's "tacit contract of adherence to the established order." He thus announced a transformative "program of perception" (Bourdieu 1991: 128) and the possibility of Ho-Chunk self-determination amid the still-recalcitrant field of everyday life in a settler society.

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Abstract: In 1939, Wisconsin readers of a weekly newspaper column by Mitchell Redcloud, a member of the Ho-Chunk Indian community settled within the rural township of Komensky, were greeted with a set of headlines from the imaginary “Komensky News” about an actual local event. The headlines reported that despite opposition from local whites, Ho-Chunk people had successfully elected a Ho-Chunk candidate to the township board. This article draws on studies of Indigenous media and recent efforts to develop field-theoretic accounts of social action to understand the interdependence of Redcloud’s headlines and the Ho-Chunk vote as part of an incipient project of Indigenous political action. Using census records, I first describe the positions in the everyday field of race and class relations that Ho-Chunk people occupied in Komensky, based on their incomes, educations, and occupational statuses. I then draw on this description to understand Redcloud’s position-taking strategies before the election. I next examine Redcloud’s writing career in the newspaper to understand his strategy of self-positioning as a marked Indian voice within a print-based discursive field that denigrated other Ho-Chunk voices. I finish by examining new position-taking strategies manifest in the 1939 vote and in Redcloud’s turn to headline register. I argue that both media and electoral mechanisms offered relatively autonomous fields that made these experiments with Indigenous action possible despite the absence of tribal political institutions necessary to transform the positions Ho-Chunk people occupied in their everyday lives. Together, the headlines and the election suggest the interdependence of activism carried out in media and in governmental structures in the production of transformative acts of political self-representation.