

JENNIFER DENETDALE AND JOE SHIRLEY INTERVIEWS, *WE SHALL REMAIN: THE NAVAJO*

Interviewer: How do the Navajo interpret manifest destiny?

Denetdale: The interpretation of manifest destiny, you often hear—I think it’s still true—that American western history is about American expansionism into the West, acquiring lands and attempting to extinguish indigenous peoples’ claims to the land. And so manifest destiny has meant to the Navajo people the loss of their land, the loss of their liberty, and the loss of their personal freedom. Manifest destiny has meant genocide to indigenous peoples.

Interviewer: How do Navajo perceive the world differently than western worldviews?

Denetdale: One of the most important reasons for retaining the language is because the language has within it a people’s worldview. The language has within it a very distinctive way of seeing the world. And for the Navajo people that way of seeing the world is founded upon the philosophy of Hozhó. Hozhó, the path to beauty and old age—that is the quest. It is the fulfillment of a life well lived. To understand that Navajo worldview, one has to know the language and to understand it, to appreciate it.

Interviewer: How have the Navajo, over the years, managed to maintain themselves as a separate and distinct people?

Denetdale: Integral to Navajo identity is the land. We have managed to keep a significant land base, and I think from that is rooted our identity and our philosophy as Navajo people. I think that’s one of the main reasons for our capacity to remain Navajo.

Interviewer: What does it mean to be a sovereign nation?

Shirley: It means pride, it means independence; it means doing for self, and, if there’s anything left over after having done for self, being a contributing member of society here in the world.

Interviewer: What are the greatest ambitions of the Navajo Nation?

Shirley: What is the greatest ambition of the Navajo Nation, I think is getting back our independence, getting back to standing on our own. I think the Creator created us to be just that; as his children, as being members of the Holy People, and stand on our own. I think that can be the greatest ambition.

Interviewer: What are the obstacles to those ambitions?

Shirley: We’re a different people, and we don’t have the same values as those that are on the outside. Money doesn’t mean the way it means to the outside world. We need jobs, we need revenues, we need infrastructure, we need a lot.

Interviewer: What does culture mean to you?

Shirley: Culture is the essence of being. The Creator created us with our language, with our color, with our land, with our paraphernalia, with our herbs. There’s only one way that we can grow, and this is to be Navajo, this is to speak the language, to have the color, to know the herbs, to know the sacred songs and the sacred stories. Nobody else can grow that way. To me, the difference is culture.

Jennifer Denetdale, Ph.D., interview, n.d., *We Shall Remain*, KUED Public Television,
<http://www.kued.org/productions/weshallremain/pdfs/WSRDenetdaleInterview.pdf>;

Joe Shirley, interview, n.d., *We Shall Remain*, KUED Public Television,
<http://www.kued.org/productions/weshallremain/pdfs/WSRShirleyInterview.pdf>.