

Lesson 1: Keywords and Phrases

1. Sovereignty (tribal sovereignty)-

Perhaps the most important term in all of NAS, sovereignty is best and most simply defined as the right to independent and unquestionable authority over a geographic area. Accordingly, tribal sovereignty refers to the inherent authority of indigenous tribes to govern themselves within the borders of another nation. This sovereignty has been recognized since First Contact and is afforded to tribal nations not by the U.S. government, but by their own inherent rights, endowed to them since time immemorial. This is important to remember, as tribal sovereignty, while diminished, has never been extinguished.

2.) Economic Sovereignty-

This is defined as the ability to independently practice and regulate economic affairs without interference or prohibition. Although tribes are limited by political practices from exercising complete economic sovereignty, the autonomy they have over their gaming revenues and other sources of income serves as one example of economic sovereignty. Economic sovereignty allows overall tribal sovereignty allows overall tribal sovereignty to expand, as an increase in financial revenues often means tribes are afforded a greater amount of influence in cultural and political matters.

3.) Cultural Sovereignty-

Although the political sovereignty of tribes has been heavily diminished and regulated by the federal government, cultural sovereignty, the ability to regulate, influence, and control aspects of culture, remains strong in many Native communities and continues to be reestablished in many areas of the United States. Individual Native nations are regaining autonomy over their religions, artifacts, artworks, traditions, etc., all of which have been (mis) appropriated in some form by western culture. Unlike

political sovereignty, culture sovereignty can be exercised to a much greater extent and is largely considered the strongest aspect of tribal sovereignty.

4.) Political Sovereignty-

Contemporary Native American nations possess political sovereignty to govern their own affairs and the events that occur with their sovereign borders, but this sovereignty is limited; so much so that tribes are often thought to be politically “semi-sovereign.” Federal authority supersedes tribal government authority, and, although reservation land is not officially state land, some state laws apply to Indian country. Tribes have the political sovereignty to elect their own officials, established their own form of government, levy taxes, and prosecute tribal members for misdemeanors. Of all the forms of sovereignty listed, political sovereignty is the most difficult to assert and is most at odds with the authority of local, state, and federal governments.

5.) Interdisciplinary-

This involves the combining of two or more academic fields into one single discipline. An interdisciplinary field crosses traditional boundaries between academic disciplines or school of thought, as new needs and professions have emerged. By one definition, Anthropology, English, History, Law, Music, etc. are combined to represent NAS, which some say can represent it's own fields.

6.) Essentialism-

Although this term has more than once specific meaning, for our purposes is best defined as: “The view that, for any specific kind of entity of that kind must possess. Therefore all things can be precisely defined or described. In this view, it follows that terms or words should have a single definition and meaning.” This term is dangerous and derogatory in NAS. Many of the images characteristics, or properties, that non-Native people associate

with Indians, are incorrect because they have been essentialized over along period of time.

7.) The Commerce Clause of the U.S. Constitution-

The Commerce clause is an enumerated power listed in the US Congress shall have power: "To regulate Commerce with foreign Nations, and among the several states, and with the Indian tribes." For our purposes, these five words, "and with the Indian tribes," are of fundamental importance to NAS, as this clause expressly grants only Congress the power to regulate the commercial affairs with Indian tribes, who are here recognized as sovereign nations, separate from the states, and the federal government. In many instances of American history, this clause has been conveniently ignored or misinterpreted to serve the needs of those seeking to dispossess Native peoples, acts which were, and continue to be, unconstitutional.