

Discovering Self-Identity and Confronting Racism in the Novel, 'Indian No More' by Charlene Willing McManis and Traci Sorell

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Abstract

Indian No More is about the story of a little girl whose identity and world changed circumstantially due to a certain government intervention. Her life of struggle in search of finding her identity in this perplexed world while facing racism is the focus of this article. This entire aspect has been discussed in the article through the four main phases of her life, which can be said to be the turning point. The first part of her life was of an ordinary Indian girl living with her family members in a reservation shelter with her fellow Indian tribes. The second phase of her life was when the United States Congress passed the bill for removing the tribal status of the Umpqua tribe. The third phase of her life was when the government passed the law to settle those tribes in the Urban areas of the United States, where they were dealing with problems like racism. In the final phase, the real character appeared, where she worked with all the challenges and became successful in her life.

Keywords: Tribe, Indian, Umpqua, United States, Government, Racism

1. Introduction

In the book "Indian No More," the author highlighted her pain and the pain of several such girls affected by the federal leadership's decision regarding identity. The story is based on Oregon state of the United States, where a group of Native Indian tribes was living under the reservation shelters. These Native American Indian appear different in both language and culture as compared to modern Americans. The looks, the traditional wearing, and the education of these people were quite different from white Americans.

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Racism has always been a problem in the United States whether it is based on gender, colour, or ethnicity, and in the book "India no more" the author Charlene Willing Mcmanis has tried to depict this with the help of the character Regina which is the central character in this novel.

The novel described the kind of challenges that are faced by the minority community when they lost their identity overnight and are forced to live with those people who are not similar to them. Regina is a 10-year-old girl in this book, and a girl of her age could not even fully understand what is the meaning of terms which the government of the United States in the year 1954ⁱ. The steps that had been taken by the government of the United States for relocation of the native Indian tribal community, especially the Umpqua tribe which was terminated by the Federal government of the United States and



they were made American citizens. The book has shown how a simple division taken by the government affects the lives of tens and thousands of people. Regina, in this novel, which has been depicted as the main character, had a sister as well and her name is Peeweeⁱⁱ. Regina is on the reservation with father, mother, sister, grandmother whose name is Chich. termination decision of their tribes was taken differently by her different family members as her mother was worried and at the same time Regina was also worried. Still, her father observed it as an optimistic step toward their future. Overall, this book tried to explain the different prescriptions of the families of Regina, the perception of Regina herself, and the perception of the government deciding on termination and relocation.

2. Being a tribal Indian

The story of Indian No More has been moving around the identity losses of a girl named Regina, who belongs to the Native American tribe Umpqua in the United States of Oregon. The history of Indians in the United States is old and has been named after the discovery of America, Christopher Columbus. There has been a long history of policies imposed upon the native Indian community starting from the colonization period of 1492 by the Bruisers, Spanish, French, and Portuguese. Later, there was a treaty period starting from 1789 to 1871 and a removal period starting from 1834-1871 iii. From the year 1887 to 1934, there was a period of assimilation that affected the Indian tribe in the United States. After this year, 1934-1958, there was а period reorganization of the native Indians^{iv}. The Indian tribes of the United States are unlike the other tribes of Canada, who were colonized well before the year 1400s. The Spanish invaders of Europe colonized the parts western side of the United States, and these tribes have suffered since that era. Regina is the central character, and she belongs to the Umpqua tribe. Her family has always been a Umpqua for decades.

The Umpqua tribe originated from the name of the river in Oregon state of the United States, and is also known as Umpqua, Umpqua, and Umkwa. Tribal people all over the world are very much concerned about their traditions and their rich culture. They always want to live with the people who belong to their tribe and feel more concerned while meeting with the people of other tribes. The US government had recognized these tribes, and it was a political decision to mainstream them. The decision had been taken just on paper, but the rich traditional and cultural heritage of this tribe had been compromised. Most current US citizens are the ancestors of white Europeans who invaded the American continent long years ago.

In the year 1774, when the United States got independence from the European powers, they started signing treaties with the various tribes of America, including the Indian tribes of the United States of America. Many tribes of the United States had signed a treaty with the government and had become citizens of the country. Still, at the same time, there are many tribes as of now who hadn't signed any of the treaties with the US federal government. The reason is many, but the most significant reason they have described is the protection of their rich cultural heritage. There are a lot of benefits of merging themselves with the mainstream people they will provide better employment opportunities, better standard of living, better education, and respect in society. Regina's father has been shown as quite optimistic about losing the traditional identity and getting citizenship in the United States.

Regina's father's concern is that he wants a better life for their children, a better education, and overall a better career opportunity. Regina herself is not quite satisfied with the decision as she is unable to understand the gravity of the decision that the federal government of the United States



had made^{vi}. She is well aware that they would no longer be living in the Grand Ronde Tribe's reservation for the tribal people like the Indians. The concern of the mother and Regina was how they would be coping with the new people of the city area. Today's Western society is less concerned about traditional and cultural heritage. They came up with new ideas of living with a progressive mindset. On the other hand, the Indian tribes are less educated, and most of their education is from their family members. The appetite for science and technology was something missing from their curriculum as well as from their education part.

Modern science is developing regularly and many new inventions and research are being carried out worldwide, especially in the United States. Being a citizen of the United States is a matter of privilege for someone, as millions of people have given up their native citizenship for better work life and working conditions in the countryvii. In this novel, the main character Regina is unaware of the fact that what kind of benefits they will getting from the United States medical government, like benefits. scholarship benefits, protection from the threats of the enemy, and many more. She had been worried about how her new friends would be and whether they would be treated the same as her tribal neighbor. This mindset describes how an Indian tribal minority thinks when their identity is terminated overnight, and the federal government orders them to relocate.

"I really don't know all the reasons why, but my chich, my grandmother, said this much: "Termination means we're the walking dead." Now I ask you, how can we be dead if we're still walking?"

The above stanza has been taken from the book's first chapter and describes what the Grandmother of Regina said about the termination decision of the government. As mentioned earlier, Regina didn't quite understand the meaning of termination. The

grandmother described the US government's decision to terminate them as they have become dead. The term walking dead is described as a creature that is pretty much similar to zombies in the United States who are dead people but can walkviii. These are imaginary creatures, but they are of no value in society. The grandmother by saying Walking Dead, wants to describe the pain and suffering they will face in the coming years. The grandmother of Regina, Chich, is wellexperienced and is concerned about their cultural identity. This fear forced the Grandmother of Regina to give such an answer to her granddaughter Regina. Regina, on the other hand, is unaware of all these as she replied that they can be dead as they can still walk. Regina is a 10-year-old girl with less knowledge, which is why she asked that question in reply. Hence, it can be concluded that there is a sense of pride in having a cultural identity even if the facilities are being provided by dissolving the cultural heritage. The family of Regina is the best example of this as the grandmother and the mother of Regina's fear of being Indian No More after signing an accord with or without the consensus of all the tribes.

3. Federal laws of termination

Regina's family was not the richest family of the Umpqua tribe as they lived in the reservation areas. The government of the United States terminated the tribe had decided that the tribe Umpqua would not exist from that day and all the people who fall under this tribe will be given US citizenship, employment quarantee bν government, and an education guarantee for the children by the US government. The US government on 13th August 1954 terminated the tribal status of Lower Umpqua, Coquille, Siuslaw, Grand Ronde, Siletz, Coos, and other tribes Oregon. This historic bill was signed by then president of United States, Eisenhower^{ix}. The bill that was signed for the termination of these Indian tribes of Oregon had seen serious criticism in the United States, and there was huge opposition to the



function of this bill.

The termination comes with a huge loss for the tribal people as they have lost their tribal status and would not be getting the benefits from the government that tribal people get in the United States. The land that belonged to them and was owned by them by their ancestors was also not protected by government laws as they are not tribal anymore. In the United States, there is a special law for protecting land that belongs to tribal areas. Overnight, they become an ordinary citizen of the United States. Still, the fact of the matter is that they are not as privileged as ordinary American living in the United States^x. The United States Federal government had a dedicated department for this; this department basically deals with the affairs of the tribal people of the United States.

The department named in the United States as the Bureau of Indian Affairs in 1954 the two white government officials belonging to this government body came to give the news of termination. The public opinion of the tribal area was quite different from the opinion of the government officials. They had somehow got the land in the US from their ancestors and home from their ancestors. The tribes were against the government's decision. They refused to leave their homeland and settled down in the other part of the country where people of different cultures. races. and overall different religions. The quotation below is taken from the book, and its meaning is described below.

"The Bureau of Indian Affairs, or the BIA for short, was the government agency that sent those white men in suits to tell us Grand Ronders we were about to be terminated."

In the above reference taken from *Indian No More*, the author talks about the instant when the two white government officials belonging to the Bureau of Indian Affairs or the BIS came to give information about the termination. The termination had however,

served the purpose of the US government very well by restoring the sovereignty, determination of the rights, and unity among all the stakeholders. After this decision by the US federal government, a ruckus started between the tribal people and the US government, but at the end of the day, the tribal had to turn according to the US. The US is a state that has a bad record of racism and slavery practices, and those have been practiced for a very long period.

Due to the dark history of the US regarding human rights, there is a lack of trust among the tribal population of the United Statesxi. The white population of the US is not the Native Americans, as their ancestors somehow belong to Europe, which had a bad record of racial discrimination worldwide. The government of the United States does provide some of the basic rights to its citizens and among those basic rights there is a right in the constitution of the United States that no person is going to be discriminated against based on caste, religion, race, colour, and ethnicity. The United States does have an independent judiciary that provides protection from all types of discrimination inside the borders. The US is the most powerful country in the economic and military perspective even in the year 1954 as in the second world war the USA was the country whose economy didn't collapse at all. US government after the termination of the Indian tribes sent them to the nearby cities for their relocation and rehabilitation and the responsibility for their residence was to be decided by the government of the United States. government will do all its duties which it had promised but it is the citizens who are going to suffer racial discrimination by the white Americans.

American education is one of the highly specific education models, and the reason behind this is the research and innovation activities that are given importance by the country's higher education. At the same time, education is quite expensive, which is why



most parents in the United States are working and taking education loans. The tribe population is more connected with their roots, whereas the Western society is not less connected with their roots; rather, they have a mentality of white supremacy. The life expenditure and cost of living in the city of Los Angeles are quite high, but at the same time, it has more job opportunities, especially for skilled workers.

The city of Los Angeles is located on the seaside, and it is also known as the Hollywood capital it has been famous for its gorgeous beachesxii. The per capita income of the state of California is excellent. It is the most diverse state in the United States as it comprises people from the Indian community, people from Cuba, people of African-American descent, and people from Latin America. The government terminated them and provided them with citizenship and basic rights. The termination period in the US was around two decades, and only this amount of time was given for the tribals to go with the government's decision or remain dead walking.

The family of Regina was left with no option either to go with the government's decision or to go with the tradition, which is going to provide no adequate options. Regina and her family finally moved to Los Angeles and in the city, Regina faced numerous discrimination based on looks and skin color. It resulted from the government's decision to terminate the Indian tribal community they had become mainstream by challenging all the difficultiesxiii. Today, most of the Indian tribe's looks are also changed, and not every Indian tribe looks similar. The typical look of Indian tribes in the US is stereotyped with long black braids and dark-colored skin. Their looks are, however different from the African tribal people as their skin appearance is dark black. In the US armed forces, more and more Native American are taking part and serving the nation. The languages of the Native Americans are also different; as of now, those languages are spoken in various states in the US. The US government had taken the burden of relocating Native tribal Americans. The government relocated most of the tribal population to urban areas with employment opportunities residence facilities. This is the reason most of the Native American population is in the urban areas. The urban areas that the US government selected for the relocation were Los Angeles, Denver, Minneapolis, Chicago, and San Francisco. During the termination, many of the people found it difficult to cope with the city's culture as they belonged to the lower tribal community. Many of them think that loss of identity, which the federal government brought up through termination, is equivalent to dyingxiv. Many of the native population had made extreme efforts to turn the government decisions of termination, but a vast majority were unsuccessful.

4. Relocation

After properly implementing the Indian termination policy, the Indian Relocation Act was passed, and the sole purpose was to relocate those Native American populations whom the Federal government terminated. The United States government relocated all of those citizens to 5 different cities. However, the government promised to provide them with all types of expenditures like traveling costs, finding jobs, vocational training costs, and housing costs in those cities. The overall standard of living in these cities, especially in San Francisco and Los Angeles, was top class; hence, government's commitments are adorable if all the commitments are delivered properly.

A huge number of the Native American population had shifted to these cities with a heavy heart by abandoning their traditional ways of living and preparing themselves to assimilate into mainstream American society. Tens of thousands of Native Americans started moving to these cities as a result of the Relocation Act that was passed in the year 1956. The population of these cities had increased drastically quickly with and without



the consent of those Native Americans. After signing the act by the US president, the consent of the Native Americans was not as meaningful, along with the opposition that a few groups made. Regina's family was also among those who finally decided to move to Los Angeles and there she got admitted to the school.

She had become an American after a law that the government had passed and ethnically, she belonged to the Umpqua American tribe. In Los Angeles City, she came up with discriminatory behavior by her friends in school and in her neighborhood. There were people of African descent living in Los Angeles, and there were people from Cuba as well. Most of them were facing the problem of racism by the white Americans in schools and the neighborhood. The father thought that if he worked hard and improved the family's condition. He and his family, which consists of five members, will be respected, but he didn't quite understand that it was like daydreaming in that particular time. The year 1957 was the civil rights era, and the families who were living without their tribal community were struggling in most places, whether it was employment or having the right to own land in the United States^{xv}. Children, especially in the age group of 10 years, are more inclined to find happiness in problems, and slowly, the author became used to life in the city.

The one question that strikes the author was a deep one and related to her identity, which somehow vanished externally. Regina could not recognize herself as she belonged to Umpqua tribal community or as an American. For Regina Umpqua Grand Ronde reservation was the place where she and her family were living their life comfortably and but moving to the LA was filled with all types of discomforts. One was like her home and the other was a complete foraging land for her but she had to choose one of them and she had to choose the LA. in both the reservation and in the city of Los Angeles, two things were common to Regina and her

family and that issue was racial discrimination and poverty issues.

The year 1954 to the year 1964 was the period known as the civil rights movement that had begun in America. The movement passed discrimination prevention based on race, color, national origin, sex, and religion and the movement was led by Martin Luther King Jr. Due to the non-violent protest all across the country for the protection of the civil rights of all American citizens within 1964, the Civil Rights Act was passed by both House of American House of Congress^{xvi}. After this movement, the rights of American citizens were pretty much secured by the federal government and strict measures are to be taken against those who are involved in such types of activities. However, making a strong law against racial discrimination is not a guarantee that everything is going to be fine as the mentality of the white American needs to be changed. The author through her book, tried to highlight the challenges which were faced by the author during her days of staying in Los Angeles.

"I stared at the surroundings. Busy asphalt streets replaced isolated dirt roads. Concrete replaced the glass. In fact, there was a concrete path that stretched from our concrete porch to the concrete sidewalk."

The above stanza has been taken from Indian No More and the above sentence describes characteristic features of the city of Los Angeles. The author in this stanza is describing the city in a way like she had started the surroundings of the city of LA. There are busy streets that have more vehicles than required and there are dirty isolated roads as well and nobody cares about those as nobody in the city has time for others. Most of the grass areas in the city were completely replaced by concrete like concrete paths, concrete footpaths, and concrete sidewalks. These words are enough to explain the features of a typical city and as mentioned earlier that people of different races also live in the same city. Regina had a



sibling that is sister and both of them Los Angeles had met with a black sister and brother and thev had their communication by asking who they were. The first answer came from the two sisters that they were Umpqua and then they asked about their identity. Then the black brother and sister replied as they were negroes. Regina had never heard about such a tribe so she asked about their tribe. Both the siblings replied that being negro is not a tribe as they belonged to Arkansas. After having a brief communication both the girls made the maiden friend in the city. Both of them started building bonds over many of the items like black and native television shows and movies.

The black siblings had introduced the two sisters to the Hernandez brothers and they also became the victims of the laws of the federal government and were not able to go to their home in Cubaxvii. Their mother was a Cuba's doctor but had to become a nurse in the United States. Cuba is a country where the language which is spoken is Spanish and both the Hernandez brothers taking accents were pretty much similar to the Spanish. Both the girls in the city of Los Angeles had met with the children of many different countries like Mexico and Cuba. Overall, the place where Regina was lining up had similar people with similar witnessed problems they had faced in the past.

"I knew we were poor in Grand Ronde, but I didn't feel poor. I felt proud. But I didn't feel that way on 58th Place."

The school of Regina appeared with new sorts of problems and the most significant challenge was meeting the expenses of the household. Her friends belonged to a wealthy family and they were having no issues meeting the expenses for their studies as well as living. She described this issue with the help of a reference that has been taken from the book Indian No More. In this context, the author had been talking to her parents and she had been telling that when they were

living on the Grand Ronde reservation they were poor but she never felt that poverty when she moved to Los Angeles things had changed rapidly and now she is recognizing their poverty. The book also provided information on the civil rights era when a country-wide movement was going on for the protection of the civil rights of black people. The story of Regina is all about the racial discrimination in the school that is done by the school children and white teachers. Both the white society and the white children had stereotyped views and this is the reason why there had been a clash between the white and BIPOC (Black Indigenous and people of colour) xviii. The problem here is the Native people like the father of Regina have to do things to themselves just to prove that they are American not the Native people. This is the biggest challenge that appeared in front of the people of those communities who were terminated from their identity and were forced to fully become citizens and relocate themselves in society. In case the society is familiar then it becomes quite easier to establish understanding but if the society has a stereotyped view it becomes tricky for the outsiders to assimilate with them.

5. Finding Identity And Racism

The childhood of Regina was gone because of fighting the challenges which were posed to her by society. The first challenge that had posed to her was that she had been born into a family whose income was low and it belonged to a tribal community namely Umpqua. When she grew up and attained the age of 10 years, the US government passed the termination bill in the US House of Congress to terminate the tribal status of Native Indians and gave them the status of US citizensxix. Terminated tribes were promised that residence and other basic facilities would be provided by the US government. This was the second challenge of life and finally after deciding to relocate the third challenge which arose in front of Regina was dealing with those challenges that had been created by society, which is the societal



problem that includes facing discrimination on the basis based on, and appearance. The final problem that appeared in front of her was the problem of loss of identity which had been created due to the laws made by the US government.

When she met with new friends in the new city some of them were from Cuba, some of them were from Mexico, some of them were from Africa as they appeared black and some of them were from Latin America as well. They were somehow unable to return to their homeland and were given shelter in the United States. Those persons who have traditional white skin appeared like the Europeans face less discrimination, while those whose appearances or skin colour were somehow different from the white Americans are either bullied or face discrimination in their society, in schools as well as in public places. When they all were facing this discrimination on various fronts one thing which came to mind was whether she is Indian anymore or she had been terminated by the government. In this book, the author tried to find that where she was standing was the place to which she belonged. She also talked about the racial discrimination that was at its peak during the period of the 1940s to the 1960sxx. Due to the increase in racial discrimination on the basis of colour, and ethnicity a civil rights movement has been going on across the country. The movement was led by Martin Luther King Jr. who is considered the largest revolutionary leader.

"I was Indian even without my braids. I was Indian even if I didn't own a headdress or a pony. I was Indian even if I was Indian no more."

A reference has been taken from the book which is depicting the thought of the author of this book's identity and here she had been telling about herself. In the reference, she had been telling that she was an Indian without braids. Braids are the traditional hair and complex hairstyle which is practiced by the traditional Indian community of

Americaxxi. The author wants to explain if she did not put her hair in the traditional braids style of the native Indians. She wants to exclaim that even if her hair doesn't appear like the traditional native Indians she belongs to the Indian community of the United States. In the next line, she said that she was an Indian even if she didn't own the pony or headdress. With this, the author wants to explain the traditional and cultural appearance of the Indians living in the United States. Headdress is the type of headgear and traditional head clothes that includes an element of clothes that are worn on the head; it includes hats, helmets, turbans, and many other types. These are mainly worn for specific purposes and those purposes are protection against elements, decoration, and religious and cultural reasons.

Similarly, the headdress is often worn on the head by the traditional red Indian communities for cultural purposes. Apart from the cultural purposes, many think that it is the symbol of strength and bravery for the traditional nation Indian communities of the United States. If a person is the head of a group, then their strength would be described by his headgear. Overall a traditional red Indian can easily be described by the headgear or the headdress xxii. Hence, the statement made by the author is telling that whether she didn't possess headdress she still was an Indian. It means her facing identity didn't decide whether she is an Indian or not. The next statement that had been made by the author is telling deep meaning that she was an Indian even if she was Indian no more.

The third statement has depicted a deep meaning as with this the author wants to tell that after her whole journey of struggle end of the day, she was an Indian even if the US federal government had terminated her tribal status. The author by making this statement wants to say that she had a deep faith and love for her identity as Umpqua tribe and as this tribe has given her the identity in the society to which she belongs. The pain and



suffering she had undergone during her childhood when she faced discrimination on the basis of race. It becomes difficult to keep faith in the traditional identity and it becomes quite easy to lose the identity. Author by statements mankind these recognized easily the author has strong mental power and she had never forgotten the root in which she belonged to. During her childhood period she didn't quite understand about the meaning of termination and what the US government had done to them but as she grows old and started examining the society of the US she started to understand what is the significance of identity for human life. Through her book, I also came to the knowledge that laws are not the actual protector of civil rights in a society like America. American society is composed of people of Spanish descent, British descent, French descent, and Latin American descent. There is a diversity of the population of America but one thing that is vulnerable to the American society is the mindset of the American, especially the white American. White Americans have thought that they are the superior class of society and expect that all the others are inferior to them, especially the BIPOC community.

Hence, the author wants to say if the mindset of American white people would remain the same even after the civil rights movement from the year 1954 to 1964. It is less probable that the situation is going to improve and so the mentality of white Americans needs drastic change, especially in treating people with BIPOC. White American needs to change their mentality of white supremacy and should adopt the approach of collectives and spread diversity in society. The United States is a country that has great opportunities but there was and there is racial discrimination in the society.

The author herself had faced so that she had been describing it in depth with the help of this book. Cultural identity and ethnic identity both have a deep impact on human

as it shows the purpose of their lives. This could be understood with the help of an example if a person was born with the race of warrior then it could easily be understood that the sole purpose of the person would be a warrior. Today, Regina the fictional character that has been created by the author Charlene Willing McManis who through this character is describing her own experiences as determining identity by the law, made by the federal government of the United States. The author was a great warrior as she had served in the United States Navy and she also graduated with a bachelor's degree in Native American studiesxxiv. She had achieved this amount of things in her life even facing racial discrimination during her childhood. It is very sad that this personality is not with us today as she passed away in the year 2018. After her death in the year 2018, Indian No More was published and through this novel, it can be said that she is still alive. She is alive for all those who have ever faced racial or any type of discrimination in the United States or any part of the world.

Through this book, she tried to give some useful lessons which are quite important to remember. Those lessons include having faith and pride in the cultural identity of a person. As she faced in numerous racism from her friends in school and the class teacher she started to find her original identity which she belonged to. Due to the law passed by the government, she had to relocate to a totally new city but she had never forgotten her identity and determined that she can be a better person as well. It can be seen by the future progress that is made by her even after facing all those difficulties in her life. Her story in the book "Indian no more" was an inspiration, is an inspiration, and will always be an inspiration for everyone. The kind of work that she had done for the society she has been a true inspiration as it had highlighted the most important issue of the US society about the racism. If the situation of racism is compared to the current context it could easily be said that there is still racism in the United States. The



society needs more such Regina so then only this society is going to be empowered and strong. Nation are never built by a single identity it needs people of several identity and at the same time it is also important to protect the identity of those people as well rather than discriminate them for their looks.

NOTES

- ¹ A more comprehensive idea can be gained from the novel 'Indian no more, Charlene Willing McManis with Traci Sorell'
- ii The novel 'Indian no more, Charlene Willing McManis with Traci Sorell' is able to provide a complete account of the situation
- iii A proper explanation was gathered from Lee and Books. Teachers Guide. Indian No More Written by Charlene Willing McManiswith Traci Sorell, (2023). https://www.leeandlow.com/uploads/loaded_document/775/IndianNoMore_TeachersGuide.pdf Accessed 7th April 2023
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- Adapted from Indian no more, Charlene Willing McManis with Traci Sorell
- vi Adapted from Indian no more, Charlene Willing McManis with Traci Sorell
- vii Adapted from Indian no more, Charlene Willing McManis with Traci Sorell
- viii Brabazon, Tara. "From bad apples to zombies? Walking dead leadership in the contemporary university." Fast Capitalism 17.2 (2020).
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- X Adapted from Indian no more, Charlene Willing McManis with Traci Sorell
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