

# Native American Mobilization and the Power of Recognition: Theorizing the Effects of Political Acknowledgment

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A central question in the study of Native American political mobilization is what makes mobilization possible.<sup>1</sup> Scholarly literature emphasizes the dialectical relationship between processes internal and external to Native nations as giving rise to mobilization in the form of organizing, protests, and social movements. Internal forces determine whether mobilization will occur and comprise resources generated from within a tribe, such as the skills and capabilities of indigenous mobilizers, as well as shared or collective identity and the nature and extent of grievances. External forces shape the form mobilization will take and are found in resources obtained from outside the tribe, including factors such as access to and distribution of such resources, as well as the design of governmental regulations and policies that control resources.<sup>2</sup> Furthermore, as an external force in which Native nations may participate, political recognition can reshape the self-awareness, organization, identification, and mobilization of both recognized and unrecognized ethnic groups.<sup>3</sup> Specifically how this recognition may empower or restrain Native American mobilization, however, has not received sufficient scholarly attention and remains largely unexplored and undertheorized.

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This paper intends to partially remedy this gap by explicitly theorizing how political recognition can mediate Native American collective action and lead to differing mobilization outcomes. Building on the models of indigenous mobilization offered by Joane Nagel and Stephen Cornell, this paper contributes to the broader literature on tribal acknowledgment by theorizing tribal status as a factor in Native American mobilization.<sup>4</sup> Due to space constraints, I focus primarily on building theory and on the recognition of Native nations in the United States since 1978, the year in which federal recognition criteria were first standardized. I argue that current perspectives on indigenous mobilization, although indispensable and insightful, present an oversimplified view of indigenous mobilization that underspecifies the power of recognition.

## MODELING NATIVE AMERICAN IDENTITIES, GOALS, AND MOBILIZATION

As seen in the most commonly accepted conceptual model, indigenous mobilization is organized along tribal, intertribal, and supratribal lines. Tribal mobilization involves organization and action by tribal members in pursuit of tribal goals, such as a tribe pursuing its treaty rights. Intertribal mobilization, on the other hand, includes organization by citizens of two or more tribes in pursuit of tribal goals on the basis of tribal association. Supratribal mobilization involves organization and action by citizens of two or more tribes in pursuit of tribal goals on the basis of “Indianness,” such as a protest by the American Indian Movement.<sup>5</sup>

In this three-tiered model, drawn from Nagel’s work (see table 1 below), a shift in scale refers to “a change in number and level of coordinated contentious actions to a different focal point, involving a new range of actors, different objects, and broadened claims.”<sup>6</sup> Indigenous mobilization reflects an upward shift in organizational scale (growing from tribal up to intertribal or supratribal forms), largely due to the competitive advantages of larger organizations and the shifting nature of US–Indian policies.<sup>7</sup> The competitive advantages held by larger organizations include greater ability to exert influence, gaining greater access to scarce resources, spatial proximity, interpersonal networks, and institutional linkages.<sup>8</sup> Shifts in US–Indian policy may result from fluctuations regarding Indianness as a primary ethnic distinction, to recognizing Native nations as distinct political entities.<sup>9</sup>

This model highlights tribal goals, affiliation, Indianness, and United States policy as bases for Native American organization, but implicitly the model is based on how and where tribal lines are drawn. In order for mobilization to occur within tribal lines and be characterized as *tribal* mobilization, first those

TABLE 1  
NAGEL'S TYPOLOGY OF NATIVE AMERICAN MOBILIZATION

Level	Description
Tribal	"Indian mobilization is along tribal lines when it involves organization and action by members of one tribe in pursuit of tribal goals"
Pan-tribal	"Mobilization is along pan-tribal lines when it involves organization and action by members of more than one tribe acting on the basis of tribal affiliation in pursuit of tribal or pan-tribal goals." Except for being renamed, this description remained unchanged in a later text to read, "Mobilization is along intertribal lines when it involves organization and action by members of other than one tribe acting on the basis of tribal affiliation in pursuit of tribal or intertribal goals."
Pan-Indian	"Mobilization is along pan-Indian lines when it involves organization and action by individual Indians on the basis of Indianness and in pursuit of pan-Indian goals." Except for being renamed, this description remained unchanged in a later text to read, "Mobilization is along supratribal lines when it involves organization and action by individual Indians on the basis of Indianness and in pursuit of supratribal goals."

NOTE: Pan-tribal and pan-Indian were later renamed "intertribal" and "supratribal," respectively.  
Sources: Nagel, "The Political," 38; Nagel, "American Indian Mobilization," 4–5.

tribal lines must be drawn legally and politically. Similarly, in order for mobilization to be characterized as *intertribal*, this mobilization must include not only two or more Native nations, but also consider where and how the political divisions have been drawn between them. The implicit assumptions of the model warrant attention to the modern political construction and recognition of Native nations as a foundation upon which Native American mobilization is based.

This typology of Native American mobilization has remained essentially unchanged since its introduction nearly thirty years ago.<sup>10</sup> The typology remains indispensable for specifying indigenous mobilization as it involves Native Americans who are members of one or more tribes and who organize and act collectively in pursuit of indigenous goals. However, using the typology can be cumbersome when mobilization is treated as a single outcome that can be shaped or determined by any of six different variables. These variables include US–Indian policy, tribal membership (whether those mobilizing are legally enrolled tribal citizens), types of goals pursued (tribal, intertribal, or supratribal), the number of tribes involved (one or more), the size of the mobilizing actor (one person or several), and the basis of mobilizing (tribal affiliation or Indianness).

Though not differentiated in Nagel's model, the various tribal levels on which these variables operate all focus on the nature of the actors and the types of goals pursued. At the tribal and intertribal levels, actors are typically

assumed to be tribal members. At the supratribal level, however, it is unclear whether Native American actors are necessarily defined by their tribal membership, or also by being Indian, or both. "Being Indian," of course, is not necessarily the same as being a tribal citizen. The latter is more narrowly defined as a political status, but the former may refer to self-identification (in view of multitribal ancestry, for example), how others view the actor, or any array of characteristics that might compose an actor's identity.<sup>11</sup>

Nagel identifies three types of goals pursued, which may be tribal, intertribal, or supratribal. Tribal goals concern a single tribe, as illustrated by Mohawk tribal members setting fire to a building in 1986 to protest a recent wave of alcohol-related fatalities on and adjacent to their reservation.<sup>12</sup> Intertribal goals, as illustrated by Hopi and Zuni tribal member protests against the commercialization of their spirituality by a group of Caucasians performing their Snake ceremony,<sup>13</sup> involve "the coordination of activities or protests by several tribes concerning an issue common to them all."<sup>14</sup> Lastly, supratribal goals are broader than tribal or intertribal goals and include goals stressing a "common origin" or a "shared exploitation" or a broad identity that transcends the tribe, reflected in identification with one's "Indianness" as an "American Indian" or "Native American."<sup>15</sup> In illustrating supratribal goals, Nagel cites protests held by the American Indian Movement based on "Native Americanness," and "not in the role of representatives of particular tribes."<sup>16</sup>

Importantly, tribal citizenship is not necessarily the *sine qua non* of being indigenous (contrary to some views), and not all Native American mobilization is carried out by enrolled tribal members. Therefore the mobilization of nonenrolled Native Americans, while still indigenous in nature, strictly does not rise to Nagel's tribal, intertribal, or supratribal levels.<sup>17</sup> This "subtribal" mobilization may be characterized in various ways, either in relation to tribal citizenship, as suggested here, or in those cases when the interests of tribal members diverge from those of the tribe as a whole and those mobilizing are but a small group operating within a tribe.<sup>18</sup>

It goes without saying that it would be erroneous to assume that Native Americans will always and only mobilize for strictly Native American goals. Because Native Americans obviously have human concerns, indigenous mobilization cannot be characterized as strictly Native American or strictly concerning tribal matters, which is often how Native American mobilization has been characterized, at least implicitly. For example, Native Americans might participate in or stage a protest in support of the environment or in support of African American civil rights, as occurred in 1988 when two Native Americans took seventeen people hostage in a newspaper office to protest the death of an African American inmate.<sup>19</sup> Neither of these can be characterized as strictly Native American issues or goals; therefore a consideration of

“cross-tribal” goals, which are held by Native Americans but are not limited to or framed as being “owned” by Native Americans, must also be allowed.

Stephen Cornell employs a similar rationale when he writes that Native American organizational structure “may be neither tribal nor sub-tribal, but *cross-tribal*, following ties that are independent of tribal or sub-tribal identities. Certain of these ties may leap the Indian boundary altogether, establishing new links to non-Indian constituencies.”<sup>20</sup> If Nagel’s model is considered in conjunction with Cornell’s, then, it suggests a total of five actor and goal levels. My use of the term *levels* is not necessarily fixed or definite, allowing for various divisions or subdivisions into different dimensions, types, or axes.<sup>21</sup> The categories and levels used here to describe indigenous actors and goals are constructed for analytical purposes; they do not represent bounded groups, and Native American identification may be unevenly distributed, situationally emergent, and multiplicative. The relationship between actors and goals may also be highly contingent, dynamic, reciprocal, and potentially path-dependent, such that the outcome of actors pursuing goals at one event or during one time period may shape or otherwise affect the coming together of future actors, as well as the goals and strategies they pursue.

Native Americans mobilize in active and dynamic systems, systems in which agents and the mobilization of people at different levels may interact with, shape, determine, or be determined by other agents, mobilization at other levels, and by variables and considerations beyond those specified here. In such systems individual or collective actors may act singly or jointly, within or across levels, as they pursue one or more subtribal, tribal, intertribal, supra-tribal, or cross-tribal goals. These considerations ultimately suggest a broader and more inclusive model of Native American mobilization, such as that seen in table 2 below.

Teasing apart elements of Nagel’s typology of Native American mobilization, this model lends itself more readily to theorizing and empirical research, as actors are not implicitly limited to particular goals within a single mobilizational level. As mentioned, Cornell implies a similar analytical distinction between Native American actors and bases of mobilization.<sup>22</sup> Here this suggestion is made explicit and, to address one of several potential bases of mobilization, adds a focus on goals. The model offered here also allows for an examination of interaction between actor and goal levels over time, interactions that are shaped by “tribal recognition status.” As a term, tribal recognition status refers to the political relationship between Native nations and the United States government, a hierarchal relationship based on political recognition, or how different tribes are politically identified, acknowledged, and consequently treated. Each tribe, as a discrete political unit, has a particular level of political recognition or status. Tribal recognition status therefore refers to the political

TABLE 2  
A TYPOLOGY OF NATIVE AMERICAN MOBILIZATION

Level	Actors	Goals
Subtribal	One or more Native Americans who are <i>not</i> tribal members but who identify or are identified with a tribe. Example: A person of Lakota descent who is not a tribal member but who identifies herself as Lakota.	Native American goals held to not concern a person's or a group's entire tribe. Example: The right of a nontribal member to protest his eviction from tribal rolls.
Tribal	One or more Native Americans who <i>are</i> members of a <i>single</i> tribe and who identify or are identified with a tribe. Example 1: An Ojibwa tribal member who identifies herself as Ojibwa. Example 2: A group of Crow tribal members who identify themselves as Crow.	Goals held to concern an entire tribe, but only one tribe. Example: Securing rights for the Santee Dakota tribe to engage in casino gaming.
Intertribal	One or more Native Americans who are members of <i>two or more</i> tribes or who identify or are identified with two or more tribes. Example 1: A Native American group of students who are members of the Diné and Hopi tribes and who identify or are identified with these tribes. Example 2: One or more members of an intertribal association, like the Council of Energy Resource Tribes (CERT).	Goals held to concern two or more tribes. Example: Winning the right for state-recognized tribes to legally possess eagle feathers for their spiritual practices.
Supratribal	One or more Native Americans who are tribal members but who also identify or are identified with or by his, her, or their "Indianness." Example 1: A group of tribal members who identify themselves as "American Indian." Example 2: An organization of Native Americans like the American Indian Movement (AIM).	Goals held to concern all Native Americans. Example: The right for all Native Americans to be treated as human beings.
Cross-tribal	One or more Native Americans who may or may not be tribal members, but who also identify or are identified with something other than or beyond his, her, or their "Indianness." Example 1: A Hunkpapa Lakota tribal member who identifies himself as an <i>ike wicasa</i> or "common man." Example 2: A Monacan tribal member who identifies herself as "a human being."	Goals held common to many people, including but not limited to Native Americans. Examples: Civil Rights or environmental conservation.

NOTE: This table provides an illustrative "flavor" of Native American mobilization. Individual or collective Native American actors may unite singly or in concert within one or across several actor levels in pursuit of goals at one or more goal levels. Descriptions and examples provided are not exhaustive, and actors and goals may be co-evolving and co-producing.

status of entire tribes, not to alternative forms or levels of recognition such as social recognition. In the United States these levels of tribal recognition status range from tribes that are federally recognized, to those that are state recognized, to those that are unrecognized.<sup>23</sup>

While tribes may themselves participate in the recognition process, such as applying for federal recognition or opposing the recognition of other tribes,<sup>24</sup> recognition remains a government-mediated institution controlled primarily by United States government officials at the state or federal levels. At the state level, state recognition is controlled primarily by political insiders. There are no standardized criteria for state recognition of a tribe, but depending on the state, it may require legal recognition of a tribe by the passage of a law, administrative recognition by state agencies, a resolution by state legislature, or gubernatorial proclamation.<sup>25</sup> On the other hand, federal recognition criteria were standardized in 1978 to guide the future federal recognition of tribes, requiring administrative recognition through application to the Bureau of Indian Affairs' Office of Federal Acknowledgment, an act of Congress, or judicial recognition by a federal judge that a plaintiff qualifies as an "Indian tribe" for federal purposes.<sup>26</sup> While federal recognition implies state recognition, state-recognized tribes are not federally recognized and consequently are not beneficiaries of federal trust responsibilities.<sup>27</sup> Unrecognized tribal status is a default political category describing groups that claim collective tribal identities, but have not been politically recognized by a state or the US federal government, whether or not they have sought such recognition.<sup>28</sup>

In effect, recognition status helps to create very different classes of indigenous peoples. Each class tends to have a very different, though by no means uniform, set of rights, protections, resources, and opportunities, and these factors often have greater influence in the process of indigenous mobilization than those factors over which indigenous people might exercise greater control, such as resources generated from within a tribe or between two or more tribes, weakening influences which might otherwise play a larger role. As will be shown, and as suggested by Nagel, recognition status can be critical to indigenous mobilization.

## THE POWER OF RECOGNITION

Native American tribal recognition status is a social construction and resource reflecting cultural-political power relations that have been codified into law. As a social construction, recognition frequently operates as a lens through which tribes are viewed, approached, and treated. Those that lack federal recognition, for example, may view themselves as Native nations, but are generally seen as

nonentities by the federal government or as potentially non-Indian by other tribes. Tribes that are federally recognized, however, are officially viewed as “domestic dependent nations” and, despite their sovereignty prior to European conquest, are treated as wards needing federal protection.<sup>29</sup> Those tribes who achieve recognition tend to gain access to federal resources and political elites on a level and degree not typically available to non-federally recognized tribes. As a result, a tribe’s level of recognition status can be a critical variable in a tribe’s mobilization, since these resources and degree of political access may be heavily based on a tribe’s recognition status, which in turn may determine or otherwise shape how and whether or not tribal members mobilize.

In this light, political recognition seemingly operates as an external force, but as a process in which tribal members may participate, it can also drive changes within a tribe. For example, because federal recognition gives tribes the right to negotiate with states, open casinos, and acquire other health and welfare benefits, two separate factions of the Eastern Pequot tribe in Connecticut (formerly called the Eastern Pequots and the Paucatuck Eastern Pequots) had economic incentives to consolidate their recognition.<sup>30</sup> The desire to obtain recognition can also provide tribes incentives to reorganize themselves politically, to “cast their histories in the mold set for them” by federal recognition criteria, or in order to better meet recognition criteria, attempt to appear “more authentic” by becoming more selective in allowing members to enroll in their tribes.<sup>31</sup> In order to appease legislators and the BIA in its drive for recognition, for instance, the Pascua Yaqui tribe increased its blood-quantum requirements to one-half Yaqui blood.<sup>32</sup>

Once recognized, tribes may utilize recognition as a resource or means by which to gain the ear, favor, and protection of political officials. This occurs partly because of a mutually reinforcing cycle: if a tribe’s political recognition status is higher, its perceived “Indianness” also tends to be higher, and those tribes with the highest perceived Indianness (i.e., those that are federally recognized) not only appear more authentic and therefore gain recognition, but also gain the benefit of the trust relationship that federal recognition entails. Federal recognition status helps to increase perceptions of Indianness in part because the criteria for federal recognition operate as markers of authenticity that the government uses to identify and evaluate claimants seeking federal recognition and because federal recognition criteria are more stringent than those for state and unrecognized tribes. Those tribes meeting federal criteria are therefore less assailable in regard to how “Indian” they appear because federal recognition gives them what politically amounts to the highest stamp of approval.<sup>33</sup>

In this larger social and political context, those who appear less Native American are less likely to be recognized, and recognition in turn affects how likely tribes are to appear Native American.<sup>34</sup> As one former Alabama State



Indian official, a member of an unrecognized tribe, said, "I've also met people in federal tribes that were less blood quantum than I am. So those people are [considered] Indian because they're federally recognized, and I'm not because I'm not federally recognized? I mean, that's all a big joke to me."<sup>35</sup> As this example illustrates, recognition provides tribes that obtain it with a powerful vote of confidence in their claims of a collective indigenous identity. While this vote of confidence carries relatively less weight than that of federal recognition (because state recognition criteria are not uniform or as stringent), the status of unrecognized tribes carries even less than that of state recognition. Because higher levels of recognition mean higher levels of government support for a group's claims to an indigenous collective identity, a tribe's level of political recognition can affect how "Indian" they appear. Those viewed as authentic are those that political elites want to help the most, meaning they are listened to more often and are able to access more resources because they are recognized.

Recognition therefore affects not only how Native American a tribe appears to be, but also affects a tribe's access to resources and also by extension the ability of tribes to mobilize. Although state and unrecognized tribes potentially may generate considerable political and social capital, typically the federal trust relationship, and higher levels of perceived authenticity engendered by gaining recognition, bring greater amounts of capital not otherwise available to non-federally recognized tribes. Because capital is convertible, tribes with higher recognition status can convert it or use it to generate other forms of capital (such as social capital) with which they might gain additional political access, support, and opportunities to mobilize.<sup>36</sup> Recognition status thus can provide not only access to scarce resources and political elites, but also a mechanism by which tribes and tribal citizens can mobilize.

Where resources are critical to mobilization, deprivation or lack of such resources may also be critical to indigenous mobilization.<sup>37</sup> As a variably withheld resource, recognition status can itself be a source of deprivation and therefore may shape the scope and content of Native American grievances. Federally recognized tribes enjoy preferential treatment relative to other tribes, meaning that state and unrecognized tribes are deprived of the same rights and resources. Such differences can generate diverse types, levels, and experiences of deprivation as well as dissimilar experiences, grievances, worldviews, and mobilizational incentives. Such differences can also, in certain contexts, drive tribes apart when the gaps between them are too great to be overcome. Recognition status thus can be viewed as a source of state-mediated difference between tribes that may make indigenous actors less likely to mobilize together in certain contexts or in pursuit of certain goals and needs relative to their recognition status.

Recognition thus operates among and between Native Americans and non-Native Americans as an *act* (when recognition status is formally granted) as well as a dialectical *process* (involving inputs and outputs from tribes and the government) and a *relationship* (denoting differences of power, status, prestige, resources, and opportunities). However, because recognition status is by no means the only force shaping or determining Native American mobilization, it is best understood as a probabilistic force or factor in such shaping. Thus, while recognition does not determine the presence, scope, or content of indigenous mobilization, recognition status does help shape indigenous mobilizational representation and outcomes, that is, which tribes are perceived as legitimate, which politicians listen to, which can mobilize, which can receive certain resources, and which are able to meet their needs, and consequently, whose goals are pursued, and to what extent. Recognition should be identified as a powerful resource and mechanism that shapes the forms Native American mobilization may take.

## RECOGNITION AND THE PATTERNING OF INDIGENOUS MOBILIZATION

Tribal recognition status mediates not only the resources and opportunities available to tribes, but also patterns the relations between indigenous actors and goals at different organizational levels (see table 2). Because tribal recognition status and the resources it brings are based on tribal lines and tribal citizenship by definition, we may anticipate a model in which tribal level goals most frequently dominate in certain contexts. However, because resources may be greater or most attainable when tribes pool them, goals at the intertribal level can be expected to occur more frequently than those at the tribal level. Thus, the need for greater access to resources may occasion possible shifts in scale between actor levels. (Additional factors influencing shifts between actor levels may include spatial proximity, interpersonal networks, and institutional linkages.)<sup>38</sup>

Extending this reasoning, we might also expect that subtribal, supratribal, and cross-tribal goals will be less prevalent than either tribal or intertribal goals because they are not based on tribal lines by which resources and opportunities may become available. We would further expect less mobilization when the goals are subtribal, supratribal, and cross-tribal in nature, and more Native American mobilization when goals are tribal and intertribal. Thus, Native American actors will be more likely to mobilize when they have common goals, under conditions where they compete less with one another. Mobilization based on common goals remains possible at the subtribal, supratribal, and cross-tribal levels, but it will be less common, with the result that

at these levels, mobilization in pursuit of goals may be more susceptible to outside influences.

Outlined thus far, the theoretical model of mobilization suggests that at different levels some clustering of types of actors and goals would likely take place. For example, when Native American actors mobilize at two or more actor levels, it is likely that they will tend to do so at adjacent actor levels (for example, subtribal and tribal) more often than at nonadjacent levels (for example, subtribal and cross-tribal). A tribe's level of recognition status is also likely to shape the actor levels at which tribal members mobilize. It is likely that federally recognized tribes would more often come together at tribal and intertribal levels, because this is where resources, opportunities, and perceived identity legitimacy are greatest. On the other hand, state-recognized tribes have fewer resources, fewer opportunities, and lower amounts of perceived status or legitimacy compared to federal tribes, and thus greater need to pool scarce resources. Because this necessitates broader identification across actor levels, state-recognized tribes would likely come together at a broader range of actor levels.

The same may be said for the goals that indigenous actors pursue: that is, goals will manifest more frequently at adjacent levels than at nonadjacent ones. This is due not only to closer commonalities between adjacent actors and goals, but also to actors' spatial proximity, similarity of resources, opportunities, and networks, as shaped by tribal recognition status. Also, regardless of how they ultimately choose to mobilize, those actors having a higher recognition status will be enabled to pursue a broader range of goals *within* or *across* one or more goal levels, again because higher recognition status is associated with more resources and more opportunities. Therefore, shifts in scale are shaped not only by access to resources, spatial proximity, interpersonal networks, and institutional linkages, but also by political recognition.<sup>39</sup> Federally recognized tribes, for example, may have unique needs and goals occasioned by their recognition status and will mobilize most often for tribal and intertribal goals, where resources and opportunities are greatest for them, while state- and unrecognized tribes will pursue a broader range of goals, as they have fewer resources and opportunities, necessitating broader mobilization across actor levels.

If researchers explicitly consider the mediating force of recognition status, then, it enables them to explore the conditions under which actors cluster, form networks, or come together within one or more actor levels, singly or in concert, and also call attention to scale shift and the possible patterns formed as actors pursue goals at one or more goal levels. While it is not possible in this article to explore fully the conditions under which actors at varying levels might pursue goals at varying levels, in one instance, tribal and intertribal actors might jointly or independently pursue a combination of tribal,

intertribal, and cross-tribal goals, though numerous other actor-goal configurations are possible. Such patterns may also change over time as a function of issue, opportunities, and resource availability, among other factors.

However, given that the level of recognition tends to shape the amount and type of resources available to particular tribes, even if state tribes do pursue or are interested in pursuing a broader *range* of issues, they will do so at a lower relative *frequency* than federal tribes because their recognition level carries far fewer resources and opportunities. The higher a tribe's recognition status, the more often its members will mobilize, and the lower its recognition status the less often its members will mobilize. This means that when other factors are removed, federally recognized tribes will mobilize more often relative to their numbers than either state or unrecognized tribes because they have more resources, more opportunities, and greater status, prestige, and capital as shaped by their higher tribal recognition status.

As an anonymous reviewer of this paper rightly pointed out, because some lower recognition status tribes experience deprivation due to their greater unmet needs, they may be moved to mobilize more often. As examined above, however, recognition is a two-way street, tending to support the mobilization of some tribes with greater recognition (e.g., federally recognized tribes) while inhibiting, if not necessarily preventing, the mobilization of state- and unrecognized tribes with lower recognition status. Hence it is very useful to unpack *how* recognition influences mobilization because different forms of recognition may be differentially empowering and inhibiting.

Strong and charismatic leadership should also be taken into consideration. Such leadership cannot be factored out as a variable, but is a scarce resource, and except in exceptional circumstances, it may not be enough to mobilize a group that does not have the resources or support it needs to mobilize, which recognition can offer. The theory outlined here allows for the possibilities posed by these exceptional cases, but my overall argument is that such exceptions tend to prove the larger rule that recognition status is an additional factor in tribal mobilization, together with other factors such as leadership and deprivation, and that recognition helps to exert a probabilistic force on the forms that tribal mobilization can take.

Indeed, Native American mobilization is heavily shaped by Native nations' dependency on resources. For example, federal tribes may mobilize against state tribes, framing them as a threat to their already scarce resources, rights, protections, and sovereignty. Further, federal tribes may highlight their unique trust relationship with the federal government as they attempt to gain or monopolize resources and preferential treatment or to sway the opinions and actions of political elites in their favor. This is not only a process internal to tribes, but may stem from external sources as well. Resource scarcity may

be said to help drive the social construction of (tribal) differences, where despite their frequent similarities (such as similar worldviews and treatment by non-Natives), federal, state, and unrecognized tribes are constructed as being different. As socially constructed differences become reified, resources may be “legitimately” and differentially distributed. This construction involves dialectical inputs and outputs from both Native nations and the United States government, but in both cases reflects actors acting in self-interest to control resources to ensure a survival that is dependent on such resources.

These observations point to imbalanced power dynamics between Native American actors. This power imbalance is both internally and externally created, and is based on differing levels of tribal recognition status that is manifest with indigenous mobilization. Internally, Native American actors (such as federal tribes) may in various instances embrace and even pursue such a power imbalance in order to realize their particular goals over and above the interests of actors of a lower recognition status (such as state tribes). This can be found, for example, in particular instances when federally recognized tribes oppose the recognition of state tribes, which they may frame as opportunistic and illegitimate, interested only in revenues promised by casino gaming. This power imbalance may stem from external forces as well, such as when the US government grants federal recognition to a tribe and provides them with greater power to realize their goals at the expense of others. Either way, the power imbalance between tribes may have the effect of differentially mobilizing Native Americans as a function of their tribal recognition status, that is, more often mobilizing those with higher recognition status while more often demobilizing those with lower recognition status.

These dynamics are not determining and may be contingent, dynamic, dialectical, and variously embraced or resisted. They may play a significant role in shaping the mobilization of Native American actors based on tribal recognition status. Thus, actors with greater status are not only more likely to band together and mobilize (such as federally recognized tribes), but also more enabled to wield coercive power over state- and unrecognized tribes, making claims that portray the latter as illegitimate and drawing upon political elites to block their recognition (as with Quinault mobilization against the Cowlitz when they sought recognition: see endnote 24). Because greater recognition status can enable tribes to wield some degree of power over others with lower status, in the context of collective action this can enable them to shape both actors and the goals they pursue indirectly (for example, cause a downward scale shift in both), potentially limiting the resources and mobilization of indigenous actors who are of a lower tribal recognition status. Thus, owing in part to their lower recognition status, these tribes are less likely to mobilize, not only because they have fewer resources, opportunities, and perceived

legitimacy than those of a higher status, but also because they may be more susceptible to direct or indirect influence and domination at the hands of higher-status tribes, their members, and their supporters.

In order to mobilize, then, lower-status tribes may need to pool resources or appeal to a broader base of actors (by means of pursuing goals at higher and broader levels, for example). They may need to mobilize in pursuit of goals or on issues that higher-status tribes already endorse (or can be expected to endorse), or make conciliatory or symbolic gestures to placate higher status tribes, or “fly under the radar” by mobilizing less often and less visibly, thus making themselves less of a target. Tribal recognition status thus not only reflects the hegemonic power of the United States government to define, via recognition, *what* is Native American and *who* is to be officially viewed and treated as Native American, but importantly, recognition status can also play a hegemonic role between actors of different tribal recognition status, possibly influencing when they mobilize.

This power imbalance may also have the effect of suppressing Native American mobilization across *all* tribal recognition levels. As a function of their level of recognition status, the power that tends to be invested in or exercised by tribes can, in various instances, help tribes out-compete and even suppress the mobilizational efforts of tribes with lower recognition status. This dynamic can readily create and reproduce hostilities between tribes of different recognition status levels, promoting divisive factions between and within tribes and actors. Such hostilities may dispose many Native Americans *not* to mobilize together in pursuit of common goals or to lessen the ability or likelihood of Native American mobilization. Sources of divisiveness and competition such as these are typically demobilizing to the extent that tribes and their members hold opposing views or goals. As mobilization can be costly for the United States (potentially requiring vast expenditures of time and resources), creating or perpetuating such divisiveness can be said, in some respects, to be in the economic interest of the US government. Indeed, the US government historically set tribes against one another to facilitate conquest, so such interests are certainly not without precedent, if not formally pursued.

The overall theory outlined here comes with several caveats. Even though tribes may be viewed as commensurable in that they may share a common legal and political classification, Native Americans are diverse within and across tribes. Furthermore, the relationship between recognition and mobilization is not uniform: gaining recognition or augmenting a tribe’s recognition status does not guarantee that Native nations will gain or utilize resources. Not only do factors such as leadership, strategy, and choice matter, but resources, rights, and protections might vary in type or amount between tribes with the same level of recognition status. Some tribes may obtain federal recognition yet still

remain ineligible to obtain funding that is typically available to federal tribes. Recognition also does not guarantee greater perceived status, access to influential policymakers, or support from policymakers.<sup>40</sup>

Additionally, a tribe's internal structure may affect the mobilization of its members. For example, a tribe in which a small group has effective control of resources that may accompany recognition status may have a very different dynamic than a less hierarchical tribal structure with much broader participation. Additionally, individuals who identify with a tribe by descent but have been barred from tribal citizenship may have very different mobilization dynamics. Further, when tribal factions or cliques are present, those factions controlling a relatively greater proportion of resources and opportunities are more likely to mobilize. In situations such as these, there may be widely divergent views of needs and goals, and in turn this may affect the levels and patterning by which Native American actors come together in pursuit of various mobilization goals. For example, it is likely that factions with fewer resources will need to pool resources with other factions or to access outside resources, meaning it is likely that they too would pursue a broader range of issues but do so less frequently than factions with greater control over tribal resources.<sup>41</sup>

Also, recognition is not strictly *required* for indigenous mobilization, and the effects of recognition status may be uneven. Typically non-federal tribes and individual Native Americans do not have as wide an array of rights, protections, or benefits, yet sometimes they can gain access to certain federal resources or benefits, which means that recognition status does not strictly determine access to such resources, rights, and benefits, but probabilistically limits it.<sup>42</sup> Furthermore, the desire to attain recognition or to increase recognition status can be subject not only to internal resources and capacities of indigenous groups, such as leadership, but may also provide indigenous peoples with incentive to mobilize. The process of obtaining recognition itself may consume considerable time and resources such as capital and leadership. These resources otherwise might be put to use mobilizing tribal members, suggesting that the process of gaining recognition itself can greatly affect indigenous mobilization. Moreover, once a level of tribal recognition status is achieved, its effects on mobilization are not necessarily permanent. This is partly because tribal recognition status is not necessarily permanent, and tribes may later lose recognition (as happened to more than 100 tribes during the termination era of the 1940s to the 1960s).<sup>43</sup>

Additionally, many Native peoples have mobilized in various ways from times predating the founding of the United States. It is also likely that *prior* to obtaining state or federal recognition, mobilization may have helped tribes to obtain recognition, and that once obtained, recognition helped to support further mobilization. Thus, recognition is best understood as having

a dialectical relationship with mobilization, meaning that recognition and mobilization, acting over time and in conjunction with other forces, may help to produce each other. Ultimately, if the dynamics outlined here play a decisive role in whether or not modern tribes mobilize, how they mobilize, and for what goals, the factor of tribal recognition status *tends* to shape the content, forms, and directions of contemporary Native American political mobilization, but this factor is neither homogenous, static, nor completely determining.

## DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

The ways in which political recognition may variously empower and inhibit Native American mobilization has previously remained largely unexplored and undertheorized, and the theoretical work offered here contributes to the study of Native American mobilization in several respects. By exploring how political recognition and tribal status may intersect and shape indigenous mobilization, this work helps to fill a theoretical gap and captures new insights. Extending and giving subtler nuance to the work of Nagel and Cornell, it provides a more inclusive and comprehensive analytical typology that opens the way for scholars to examine the interaction of actors and goals at different levels that can be shaped by tribal status.

Political recognition and political status, such as that suggested here by Native American tribal recognition status, can have a powerful mediating effect on political mobilization. Tribal recognition status further presents a type of politicization of ethnic identities, a type of social and political boundary construction and activation within and between tribes, one that typically results in different mobilizational outcomes for different groups and patterns the relationship between actors and the goals they may pursue. Native American tribal recognition status also illustrates how political recognition and political status act to distribute power, resources, and opportunities, increasing the representation of certain groups and their needs at the expense of others. It is critical that future research explore mobilization and the mediating power of recognition further.

Native Americans may variously identify with their clan or tribe in particular contexts, but as an additional political aspect of their collective identities, may also draw upon their tribal recognition status level to strategize, gain resources and opportunities, and out-compete Native Americans of different recognition status. Because tribal recognition status is an aspect of Native American collective identity, this work suggests that collective identity, as it operates through political recognition and political status, can mediate the conditions in which actors cluster, form networks, or come together, singly or



in concert, within one or more actor levels. This work also suggests that collective identity can play a role in the scale shift, patterning, and directionality actors might take in pursuit of goals at one or more goal levels.

Future research would greatly benefit from empirical studies aiming to confirm and build upon the theoretical work outlined here.<sup>44</sup> It seems likely, for example, that the needs, resources, opportunities, and mobilizational capacity of tribal citizens (also called “tribal members”) will be different from that of noncitizens, and may vary considerably within and between tribes with respect to a tribe’s political status and internal structure. The theory offered here further suggests that a tribe’s internal structure may be greatly affected by the tribe’s political recognition status, with potentially greater tendencies towards internal conflict and factionalization as tribes move up the political recognition hierarchy. Lastly, it seems likely that different conditions will lead to different mobilizational patterns and outcomes even though there are many permutations possible of actors acting within one or more actor levels in pursuit of goals within one or more goal levels. These possibilities, like the theory offered here, stand as open questions to be answered by future empirical research.

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### NOTES

1. In this paper I use terms such as *indigenous*, *Native American*, *Native peoples*, *American Indian*, and *Indian* interchangeably. I also refer to Native nations as Native American or indigenous tribes.

2. Joane Nagel, “The Political Mobilization of Native Americans,” *Social Science Journal* 19 (1982): 37–46; Joane Nagel, “American Indian Mobilization: Tribal, Inter-tribal, and Supra-tribal Strategic Political Action,” in *American Mosaic: Selected Readings on America’s Multicultural Heritage*, ed. Y. I. Song and E. C. Kim (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice Hall, 1993), 3–11; and Joane Nagel, *American Indian Ethnic Renewal: Red Power and the Resurgence of Identity and Culture* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1996).

3. Nagel, *American Indian Ethnic Renewal*, 29.

4. See Nagel, “The Political Mobilization,” “American Indian Mobilization,” and *American Indian Ethnic Renewal*; and Stephen Cornell, *The Return of the Native: American Indian Political Resurgence* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 1988).

5. Nagel, "The Political Mobilization," "American Indian Mobilization," and *American Indian Ethnic Renewal*; and Rima Wilkes, "A Systematic Approach to Studying Indigenous Politics: Band Level Mobilization in Canada, 1981–2000," *The Social Science Journal* 41 (2004): 447–57.
6. Doug McAdam, Sidney Tarrow, and Charles Tilly, *Dynamics of Contention* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 331.
7. Nagel, "The Political Mobilization" and "American Indian Mobilization."
8. Nagel, "The Political Mobilization" and "American Indian Mobilization"; and Sidney Tarrow, *The New Transnational Activism* (Cambridge University Press, 2005).
9. Nagel, "The Political Mobilization" and "American Indian Mobilization."
10. *Ibid.*
11. Joane Nagel, "American Indian Ethnic Renewal: Politics and the Resurgence of Identity," *American Sociological Review* 60 (1995): 947–65; Joane Nagel, "False Faces: Ethnic Identity, Authenticity, and Fraud in Native American Discourse and Politics," in *Identity and Social Change*, ed. J. E. Davis (New Brunswick, NJ: Transaction Publishers, 2000): 81–106; Resa Bizzaro, "Shooting Our Last Arrow: Developing a Rhetoric of Identity for Unenrolled American Indians," *College English* 67 (2004): 61–73; Amy J. Schulz, "Navajo Women and the Politics of Identity," *Social Problems* 45 (1998): 336–55; Joanne Barker, "Indian™ USA," *Wicazo Sa Review* 18 (2003): 25–79; Hilary N. Weaver, "Indigenous Identity: What Is It, and Who Really Has It?" *American Indian Quarterly* 25 (2001): 240–53; Melissa L. Meyer, "American Indian Blood Quantum Requirements: Blood Is Thicker Than Family," in *Remapping the American West*, ed. V. J. Matsumoto and B. Allmendinger (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999), 231–49.
12. Robert O. Boorstin, "A Tavern Is Burned to the Ground on an Indian Reservation Upstate," *The New York Times*, May 11, 1986, 29.
13. George Hardeen, "Hopis Protest Mimicking of Sacred Dance," *Los Angeles Times*, August 24, 1990, <http://search.proquest.com/docview/420993785?accountid=14512>.
14. Nagel, "American Indian Mobilization," 5.
15. Nagel, *American Indian Ethnic Renewal*, 138–39.
16. Nagel, "American Indian Mobilization," 5.
17. Nagel, "The Political Mobilization," "American Indian Mobilization," and *American Indian Ethnic Renewal*.
18. Cornell, 157.
19. Associated Press, "Siege at Newspaper Ends With Hostages Safe," *New York Times*, February 2, 1988, <http://search.proquest.com/docview/426750462?accountid=14512>.
20. Cornell, 177 (emphasis added).
21. See, for example, Cornell, 144–56.
22. *Ibid.*, 145.
23. Only federal recognition status confers a trust relationship, whereby the federal government acts as a trustee for federal tribes, who as "wards" are afforded certain rights and powers not available to other tribes. See, for example, Winifred T. Gross, "Tribal Resources: Federal Trust Responsibility: United States Energy Development Versus Trust Responsibilities to Indian Tribes," *American Indian Law Review* 9 (1981): 309–43. While it is beyond the scope of this paper to explore what constitutes a "tribe," some question whether the claims of state-recognized and unrecognized tribes to "Indianness" are legitimate. Even though some of these contested tribes have eventually become federally recognized, or may gain recognition in the future, these debates illustrate how deeply recognition status is contested. See, for example, Jim Adams, "Divisions Deepen in Conn. Recognition," *Indian Country Today*, December 17, 2003, A1, and Les W. Field, "Unacknowledged Tribes, Dangerous Knowledge: The Muwেকma Ohlone and How Indian Identities are 'Known,'" *Wicazo Sa Review* 18 (2003): 79–94. See also Carole Goldberg-Ambrose, "Of Native Americans and Tribal Members: The

Impact of Law on Indian Group Life," *Law and Society Review* 28 (1994): 1123–48; Leon Jones and Dan McCoy, "Testimony of Leon Jones, Principal Chief, and Dan McCoy, Tribal Council Chairman Eastern Band of Cherokee Indians Cherokee, North Carolina," testimony on S.611, the Indian Federal Recognition Administrative Procedures Act of 1999 before the Committee on Indian Affairs of the United States Senate, 106th Cong., 2nd sess., May 24, 2000; Gross, "Tribal Resources;" Alexa Koenig and Jonathan Stein, "Federalism and the State Recognition of Native American Tribes: A Survey of State-Recognized Tribes and State Recognition Processes Across the United States," *Santa Clara Law Review* 48 (2007): 79–153.

24. For example, the Quinault tribe opposed the recognition of its traditional enemy, the Cowlitz tribe, appealing to former Assistant Secretary of Indian Affairs Kevin Gover to block their recognition by claiming the tribe had ceased to exist shortly after the 1878 census was taken. James May, "Quinault Appeal Chinook Recognition in Ages-Old Tribal Dispute," *Indian Country Today*, April 18, 2001: A1; and "Cowlitz Recognition Upheld Over Quinault Objections," *Indian Country Today*, June 27, 2001: A1.

25. Koenig and Stein, "Federalism."

26. Federal criteria have changed somewhat since 1978, but currently require: (1) continuous identification as an American Indian entity since 1900, (2) forming a distinct community since historical times, (3) continuous political authority over its members since historical times, (4) a governing document with membership criteria, or a statement describing membership criteria and governing procedures, (5) membership of individuals descending from a historical tribe or one which combined and functioned as a single political entity, (6) membership composed of individuals who are not also members of another recognized tribe, and (7) petitioning tribe and its members have not been terminated or forbidden the federal relationship. See *Code of Federal Regulations*, Procedures for Establishing That an American Indian Group Exists as an Indian Tribe, title 25, section 83.7.

27. Many people have challenged federal recognition standards as being unfair and unevenly enforced. See, for example, Duane Champagne, "Inconsistent Standards Hinder Recognition Process," *Indian Country Today*, August 13, 2008, 4; Gale Toensing, "Gale Norton Told: Reverse Recognition or Be Fired," *Indian Country Today*, January 31, 2007, A1; Jim Adams, "Divisions Deepen in Conn. Recognition," *Indian Country Today*, December 17, 2003, A1.

28. For further discussion see Field, "Unacknowledged Tribes;" Koenig, "Federalism;" Alva C. Mather, "Old Promises: The Judiciary and the Future of Native American Federal Acknowledgement," *University of Pennsylvania Law Review* 151 (2003): 1827–1860; William W. Quinn Jr., "Federal Acknowledgement of American Indian Tribes: The Historical Development of a Legal Concept," *The Journal of Legal History* 34, no. 4 (1990): 331–64; Anne M. McCulloch and David E. Wilkins, "'Constructing' Nations Within States: The Quest for Federal Recognition by the Catawba and Lumbee Tribes," *American Indian Quarterly* 19, no. 3 (1995): 361–88; D. Olin, "Crash Course," *The New York Times*, November 24, 2002, E35.

29. *Cherokee Nation v. Georgia*, 1831, 30 US 1; "Status of Indians Before State and Federal Courts," *Columbia Law Review* 14 (1914): 587–90.

30. "Newly Recognized Pequots Must Next Form Government," *Indian Country Today*, June 28, 2002: A1.

31. Mark E. Miller, *Forgotten Tribes: Unrecognized Indians and the Federal Acknowledgement Process* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2004), 15.

32. Miller, 114.

33. Many people commonly speak of there being 564 tribes in the United States, a figure that changes slightly from year to year. On closer inspection this number refers only to the number of federally recognized tribes in the United States. The omission of non-federally recognized tribes may be taken to imply that the nation's 62 state-recognized tribes and many unrecognized tribes are "less

Indian” or even “non-Indian.” Due to this fairly common practice, lack of recognition status for those tribes not federally recognized seemingly renders entire tribes invisible. More impartial numbers would be either 626, which would include state-recognized tribes, or perhaps a figure over 900, which would include the 291 letters of intent filed by separate unrecognized tribes since 1978. See Office of Federal Acknowledgement, “Letters of Intent Received as of September 22, 2008,” Department of the Interior, <http://www.bia.gov/WhoWeAre/AS-IA/OFA/index.htm> (accessed May 4, 2010).

34. A tribe’s recognition status can be shaped by outside government interests. During the United Houma Nation’s attempts to gain recognition, the BIA scrutinized the tribe’s history to an unprecedented degree. Connections critical to establishing that the tribe was connected to an area were discounted, and known and recorded Indian ancestors were reduced. These actions, drawing largely on conjecture, made the tribe appear less Indian than it actually was, and the BIA’s Bureau of Acknowledgment and Research used the engineered “gaps” to reject any potential connection between the tribe and its ancestors. See Miller 169–70.

35. Renee Cramer, *Cash, Color, and Colonialism: The Politics of Tribal Acknowledgement* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press), 105.

36. See Pierre Bourdieu, *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgment of Taste*, trans. R. Nice (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1984); *The Logic of Practice*, trans. R. Nice (Palo Alto: Stanford University Press, 1990); Pierre Bourdieu and Loic Wacquant, *An Invitation to Reflexive Sociology* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992).

37. Rima Wilkes, “First Nation Politics: Deprivation, Resources, and Participation in Collective Action,” *Sociological Inquiry* 74 (2004): 570–89.

38. Nagel, “The Political Mobilization” and “American Indian Mobilization;” Tarrow, *The New Transnational Activism*.

39. Ibid.

40. For example, the Lumbees of North Carolina have limited federal recognition in the sense that they are officially acknowledged to be a Native American tribe, but are not eligible to receive any of the federal resources made available to other recognized tribes. See Nagel, *American Indian Ethnic Renewal*, 188. The Samish and the Gay Head Wampanoags gained federal recognition, but do not have the same resources or hunting and fishing rights as other federally recognized tribes. See Miller, *Forgotten Tribes*, 109–10.

41. John Markoff, e-mail message to the author, December 22, 2009.

42. Miller, *Forgotten Tribes*; Bruce G. Miller, *Invisible Indigenes: The Politics of Nonrecognition* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2003).

43. Rosemary Sweeney, “Federal Acknowledgement of Indian Tribes: Current BIA Interpretations of the Federal Criteria for Acknowledgement with Respect to Several Northwest Tribes,” *American Indian Law Review* 26 (2001): 203–31; and Field, “Unacknowledged Tribes.”

44. My current work follows one such possibility. I am collecting event analysis data to examine how Native American protest issues and event types (such as rallies and marches) vary by tribal recognition (federal, state, and unrecognized) as well as actor and goal levels (subtribal, tribal, etc.). See also DaShanne Stokes and Sam Potter, “The Role of Political Recognition in Native American Political Mobilization,” a paper presented at the 61st annual meeting of the Society for the Study of Social Problems, August 20, 2011, Las Vegas, NV.