

**Reforming a Nation: Citizenship, Government and the Osage People**  
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Dissertation Proposal  
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**Title**

Reforming a Nation: Citizenship, Government and the Osage People

**In order to help us identify appropriate reviewers for your proposal, please provide us with three key words about your research project:**

Identity, Nationhood, and Citizenship

**Summarize your research question or research objective (in no more than one sentence):**

This project will document the Osage Nation's current constitutional reform process in order to understand the ways in which stories, emotions, and experiences are hardened into both the membership criteria and form of government adopted by the Osage tribe.

**Describe your research question or research objective. That is, what will the focus of your investigation be? (One page maximum).**

This project examines the mapping of Osage identity within the context of their current effort to reform their membership and form of government. It is driven by three primary concerns: First, to study how the colonial situation has created certain limitations on and possibilities for Osage citizenship and governmental formation; second, to follow the ways in which desires surrounding Osage-ness are created and changed through the reform process; and third, to record how the Osage Nation works through the conflicts arising from these histories and desires within the process of constitutional reform. I thus ask: In what ways have U.S. colonial treaties, laws and policies predetermined the structure of constitutional reform, and in what areas is the Osage Nation open to reinvention? Who is allowed to take part in the discussion about the reformation; what sorts of boundaries are being drawn before the discussion can even begin? What are the key areas of contention, and in what sorts of ways are these contentions resolved? Importantly, who takes on certain perspectives and for what reasons? What sorts of needs and desires are being mobilized and fulfilled in the stories being told about Osage-ness? What are the concepts that are used to define Osage-ness, how are these criteria legitimized, how is consensus mobilized or ignored, especially through the use of conceptions such as "tradition," and what do these boundaries around citizenship mean for Osages' in the future? Through a structured visual and discursive investigation this research will engage these questions through an investigation of the Osage Nation constitutional reform process currently underway.

The Osage Nation Reservation consists of approximately 1,475,000 acres and is otherwise known as Osage County, Oklahoma. While almost all of the land was allotted in 1906 and is no longer predominately held in Osage hands, the Osage tribe owns the entire mineral rights located within Osage County and has an income from all oil and gas found in that territory. When the land was allotted in 1906 the Osage tribal roll had four qualifications for admission: Osage blood in any quantum, local residence or continued affiliation, enrollment prior to December 31, 1881, and proof of birth prior to July 1, 1907 (Burns 2004: 400). The roll and the conflict that ensued over who could be included illustrates that the boundaries around Osage membership did consist, at least partly, of biological understandings of Osage identity, but were also based on concepts such as local residence.

Since the early 20<sup>th</sup> century membership has partially been understood along descent lines. Whoever was descended from these original allottees is considered Osage, at least for the purposes of receiving a Certificate of Degree of Indian Blood (CDIB) card from the Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA). However, this inheritance does not necessarily make one a citizen of the Osage tribe today. The only voting citizens of the tribe are those people who currently hold a headright share in the mineral estate. Thus those people of Osage descent whose parents are still alive or whose parents, grandparents or great-grandparents did not, for various reasons including fraud, pass on their mineral estate are not eligible to vote. This leaves nearly 16,000 of the approximately 20,000 people with Osage ancestry without voting rights and thus generally alienated from tribal politics (McAuliffe 1994). This alienation has been the central motivating factor in the multiple attempts at reformation that have finally led to the 2004 membership bill now signed into law by the United States Congress.

This study assumes that the processes at work in the reform are ambiguous, and have multiple tensions. In order to understand what is at stake, this study will map the various forces at work, including: colonial policies, local histories, authorized and unauthorized stories, biological 'facts', emotions and personal experiences. This study proposes that, through this process of reform, Osage citizenship and governmental formation will be reconstituted, not as something wholly new, but as something more representative of the numerous manifestations of Osage identity in existence today. In addition to including younger Osages who have not yet inherited a headright share, this new polity will include those individuals of Osage descent who have long been disenfranchised from tribal citizenship due to family decisions and/or fraud that kept them from inheriting a share of the headright. Further, the government, which is changing from a resolution to constitutional form of government, will not simply imitate another government, but will bring together many different components in order to make a system that best represents the multiple interests at work within the Osage polity.

**How does your research build on existing scholarship in anthropology and closely related disciplines? Give specific examples of this scholarship and its findings. (One page maximum)**

My theoretical approach brings together ways of understanding identity, nationhood, and citizenship with recent theoretical approaches stemming primarily from Science Studies, Citizenship Studies, and Political Anthropology. Within anthropology many authors have written about the importance of blood, tradition, and culture in the formation and understanding of Indian identity. In their article "'Indian Blood': Reflections of the Reckoning and Refiguring of Native North American Identity" Pauline Turner Strong and Barrik Van Winkle call for research that explores blood quantum as a "discourse of conquest with manifold and contradictory effects, but without invalidating rights and resistances that have been couched in terms of that very discourse" (1996: 565). My research will take up this call by understanding the various components of Osage identity, including blood, tradition, residence, and culture, as not simply products of the colonial situation, but also as manifestations of local efforts to be in the world today, and in many ways, contested outcomes of the reform process itself.

In particular this study is informed by Joseph Dumit's understanding of "objective self-fashioning," the process whereby "we take facts about ourselves—about our bodies, minds, capacities, traits, states, limitations, propensities, etc.—that we have read, heard, or otherwise encountered in the world and *incorporate* them into our lives" (1997: 89). This understanding of identity allows me to witness the ways in which "facts never travel alone," but are laden with stories, experiences, and definitions of human nature (Dumit 1997: 93). Throughout this study I will be building upon Dumit's ideas about self-fashioning to better understand the ways in which Osage-ness is constructed through their Nation building. I will approach the Osage reform process as a place in which a variety of traditions, concepts, desires, and truths come together in ways that don't necessarily compose a unified or coherent whole of Osage-ness. In addition to following the stories that are mobilized within the reform effort, it will be essential to trace where such desires for tradition come from and what the benefits and consequences of such definitions of identity are. Instead of approaching Osage tradition as an already constituted object, I will examine the work that goes into making concepts of tradition, i.e. what gets to be labeled authentically Osage within the constitutional reform process.

In recent years the well-established link between citizenship and the nation-state has been broken apart, allowing for theories of citizenship to emerge from above and below the state. Rather than being seen as purely political or even economical, citizenship has begun to be understood as a social process. Engin Isin and Bryan Turner discuss citizenship as a "social process through which individuals and social groups engage in claiming, expanding or losing rights" (2002: 4). While growing transnational flows and more inclusive citizenship have been the primary focus points of these discussions, indigenous citizenship has also begun to find a place within the growing field of citizenship studies. The limited writings on indigenous citizenship, including a special issue of the journal *Citizenship Studies*, focus more on the ways in which Aboriginal citizenship challenges State authority (Cairns 2002, Ramos 2003, Mercer 2003, Christie 2003). My work will instead theorize indigenous citizenship within their own nation.

Within the field of political anthropology there has been a recent move toward understanding governmental formation, particularly democracy, less in terms of the political institutions or formal regime shifts and more in terms of the “local meanings, circulating discourses, multiple contestations, and changing forms of power” (Palay 2002: 469). In this way Julia Paley, Philip Corrigan and Derek Sayer (1985), William Roseberry (1994) and others have called for a political anthropology that sees governments as enacting a form of power that is “not a shared ideology but a common material and meaningful framework for living through, talking about and acting upon social orders characterized by domination” (Roseberry 1994: 361). My project will build upon this approach to political processes by seeing the Osage constitutional reform as a form of local agency that must work within and through particular limiting discourses, including U.S. governmental policies and conflicting histories and local understandings. Further, these theorists argue that what the state is ultimately silencing are the expressions of difference within a community (Corrigan and Sayer 1985: 198). This project will make its largest theoretical contribution to political anthropology by not taking the state’s silencing of difference for granted, but exploring how the Osage constitutional reform process attempts to create a collective that incorporates its own multiplicities. Ultimately, it will provide insight into the potentials of representative rule among native states within larger polities.

**What evidence will you need to collect to answer you research question? How will you go about collecting this evidence? (One page maximum)**

In order to trace how Osage Nationhood is currently being constituted I will spend from January through August 2006 observing the formal and informal discussions taking place around the constitutional reform process as well as collecting local histories, personal experiences, the official and unofficial stories being circulated as well as their material ends. My methods for collecting this diverse information can be divided into three main areas: interviews, event/meeting observation, and informal observation/discussion. All interviewees and other major participants in my research will sign an informed consent before the interviewing or observing process begins and will be given the option of not being recorded/remaining anonymous within my research.

Interviews: One of the ways in which I will collect local histories, personal experiences, and the various accounts of the process as it unfolds is through interviews. Building on the work of Jean Rouch (Chronicle of a Summer) and others theorize the camera as a provoker of ethnographic material, I will use a video camera to elicit specific information relating to the construction of Osage citizenship and governmental structure within this process. These interviews will provide evidence for the sorts of forces at work within the making of Osage-ness today such as tradition, blood, residence, language, or descent.

Tribal Council: The ten members of the Osage Nation tribal council have played a key role in bringing about the 2004 reform bill, as well as the recently enacted Reform Commission. In addition to asking these council members about their role in the current reform effort, I will ask them about their own desires for the future of the Osage Nation. From these interviews I will gain evidence about the official stories circulating, the particular interests that have motivated the current reform, the sorts of tensions that have arisen from the process, and the hopes these public figures have for the future shape of the Osage Nation.

Reformation Commission: On March 5<sup>th</sup>, 2005, the Tribal Council selected seven commissioners and three alternates to their Government Reformation Commission. Because they will have central control over the reform process, these commissioners will be among my key informants. On multiple occasions I will ask them questions about their role in the process, their desires for the future, and the major problems and successes they see happening within the reform process.

Osage Citizens: In addition to these official Osage figures, I will also conduct formal interviews with a variety of Osage citizens. Because Osages are a heterogeneous group of people it will be important to talk with a wide variety of people. I will collect 10 interviews from each of the three primary residential areas: from those living in Tulsa (the closest major city); the Osage communities that have been established in California; and people who do not live within any of these geographic regions. Five of each of these interviews will come from people who participate in the June dances and the other five will

be people who do not. Within these interviews I will ask how they think Osage citizenship should be determined, and what form they think the Osage government should take. As the reform process continues I will inquire about how they think the reform is progressing and what changes they would like to see in the process. Finally, I will ask them about their desires for the future of the Osage Nation.

Event/Meeting Observation: During this eight-month section of my project all major events surrounding this process of reform will be recorded on video for later transcription, analysis and eventual video production. The events covered will include the Reform Commission meetings, relevant tribal council meetings, field hearings, the constitutional convention, language classes, and any other events related to the reform process or Osage identity. From these events and meetings I will collect evidence about the sorts of things being mobilized as part of Osage citizenship and nationhood today, such as ideas about who should or shouldn't be included and why as well as what forms of government are appropriate for the Osage Nation.

Informal Observation/Discussion: I will spend the bulk of my time doing informal observation and discussion with various members of the Osage tribe during their everyday activities, over lunches, during parties, and other informal events. In addition to following the material and discursive manifestations of the reform process I will select about 10 people from my interviews that represent different perspectives within the Osage nation and spend time with them during their daily activities for at least three weeks' time. Pulling on methods from observational and participatory cinema I will document the lives of various Osages today, focusing on their social practice. Finally, I will find spaces such as the casino, the local ambulance service, and Osage language classes that provide insight into how Osage identity and ultimately Osage National law is being created through everyday lived experience.

**Describe your training and preparedness for this research (examples: language competence, technical skills, previous research, and any other relevant experience). Describe any work you have already done on this project, and/or how it relates to you prior research. (One page maximum)**

My primary training for this research stems from my three years of advanced coursework within anthropology at one of the leading anthropology graduate programs in the United States. During this time I have taken classes on a broad range of anthropological topics including Anthropology of the State, Anthropological History and Theory, Critical Archaeology of Time, Alternative Modernities and Anthropology of Science. I have a paper entitled "Our Heritage, Our Future: Archaeology and the Intersement of Desires," which has been accepted for publication in the edited volume *Critical Archaeology of Time*, and another paper entitled "Blood, Race, DNA: Self-Fashioning and Scientific Facts," which is currently under review. I have presented at three national and one international conference and have organized two panels for the American Anthropological Association annual meetings.

My background in visual communication, both academic and technical, has prepared me to use video as my primary recording method for this project. In addition to my ten years of technical and academic training in art photography, photojournalism and visual anthropology, I have taught community, youth, and college level classes in manual camera, black and white darkroom techniques, documentary video, and visual anthropology. As part of my Masters degree in Anthropology I completed a fifteen-minute video on an American Indian artist and his experiences with tourism. This visual work was shown at the 2003 and 2004 AAA annual meetings and the 2005 Conference on Literature and Film. I also organized the panel entitled "Unraveling (In)authenticity through Imagery" for the 2004 AAA annual meeting. While there has recently been a revival of the Osage language, all members of the Osage tribe currently use English as their primary language and thus all interviews and other discussions will take place in English.

In May-August 2004, and again for several weeks in December 2004 and February 2005, I conducted preliminary research on the Osage reservation. After gaining approval from the tribal council for my project of documenting the Osage constitutional reform process, I conducted initial interviews, attended tribal council and community meetings, collected archival research materials, and held a seven-week youth video training workshop. The training workshop taught local youth the skills of event

documentation, interviewing, and non-linear editing so that they could help with the documentation project. In addition to being paid by the tribe to participate in both the workshop and my larger project, the youth are gaining skills in documentary video as well as becoming involved in the governmental affairs of the Osage tribe, from which they were ostracized under the old form of government.

On February 4, 2005, the Osage Nation held an Independence and Sovereignty Day celebration. I was able to record the general events of the day including the speeches and dances as well as interview 30 Osages about what form of membership and government they would like to see the Osage tribe adopt under their new constitution. In addition to this more formal research, I have had many informal conversations about Osage governmental reform in terms of both the past and present efforts. Based on these conversations and my other preliminary research, it is very apparent that concepts of tradition will play an important role within the reform process. Furthermore, blood, residence, and culture are the central nodes around which Osage-ness is currently being discussed. From May through December 2005 I am going to continue to collect archival research on the past policy reforms that have taken place on the Osage Reservation since the U.S. government annulment of the 1881 Osage constitution. This preliminary research will provide an essential background to the current reform effort by helping me to understand the historical forces at work in creating Osage membership and governmental structure.

This project relates to my previous research on American Indian identity, including my Master's project. My past work has dealt with issues of authenticity, Native American artistic and museum representations, and DNA heritage testing. My primary focus within this past research has been the ways in which Native American identity is created and embodied within multiple realms. This previous work has pointed to a need for a theory of indigenous identity that avoids a dichotomization with the 'modern' and shows the ways in which identity is never fixed, but is always in a state of becoming.

**The goal of the Wenner-Gren Foundation is to support original and innovative research in anthropology. What contribution does your project make to anthropological theory and to the discipline? (One-half page maximum).**

My primary contribution to anthropological theory will be to use approaches from the field of science and technology studies (STS) in order to better make sense of indigenous identity, nationhood and citizenship. Pulling from the work of Joseph Dumit, Bruno Latour, Steve Woolgar, Sarah Franklin, Michel Callon and others within STS, I will use concepts such as "objective self-fashioning" (Dumit 1997) in order to follow the ways in which stories, emotions, and experiences are hardened into both Osage national policies and Osage identity. This approach will allow me to avoid the pitfalls often associated with studies of indigenous identity, which talk in terms of social construction or links to the traditional. Rather than taking categories such as traditional and authentic for granted and seeing where various people fit within these categories, I will investigate how such categories are created and made real within the Osage reform process. Tracing the interactions involved in this process will provide original insight into how ideas such as tradition, blood and culture are being mobilized by indigenous people today.

Further, my project will contribute to the fields of political anthropology and citizenship studies through its focus on a nation within a nation-state. Both of these growing fields have changed radically since the transition to post-colonialism and the growth of transnational spaces. Because of this, however, there has been little focus on the spaces underneath the state. By looking at the everyday lived practice of members of the Osage tribe, as well as the official process of constitutional reform I will contribute unique understandings about state systems and their ability to deal with difference.

Finally, my project will contribute to the discipline of anthropology through its conscientious use of visual methods. In particular this project will use video to innovatively capture the visual displays involved in state formation. These stagings of claims to citizenship and governmental formation are particularly informative to look at visually, as are the everyday spaces of citizenship, because it is only through these performances and material manifestations can we make sense of the nation-state.

## **Budget Justification**

### **Travel:**

Local (\$13,110): Because the Osage reservation is spread out among three communities (Pawhuska, Hominy, and Greyhorse Oklahoma) separated by about 50 miles each, my research will require a great deal of driving. For example while the Osage tribal council is located in Pawhuska, the Reform Commission meets in Hominy. Further, a large part of the reform process will include traveling to remote communities in order to attend field hearings.

Cross-Country (\$936): In addition to holding field hearings in Oklahoma and the surrounding states, the Reform commission plans to travel to various locations California in order to talk with these clusters of Osage citizens. Because these groups have been the most isolated from tribal politics in the past, these sorts of efforts will be very important to the formation of a more representative government.

### **Recording Equipment:**

Sony DSR-PD170 DVCAM (\$3,164): This pro-consumer level camera is necessary for my research because of its high performance in low lighting and its professional audio capabilities. Because I will often be filming in far from ideal conditions, including community buildings and people's houses, it will be very important to have such a versatile camera that allows me to capture high quality sound and image, even when there is little light or when there is distracting background noise.

SONY DVM-60PRL (\$1,047): These mini-dv tapes are necessary in such a large quantity because as part of my project I will be creating a record of all of the community meetings and reform commission meetings, in addition to the extensive interviews and the daily activities of various members of the Osage community.

This recording equipment cannot be obtained from my institution because neither the department nor the college has equipment to loan out for graduate work. Further, the equipment that is available on site is not of the quality that this project requires. When I am finished with my project all recording equipment will be donated to the Osage tribe in order to enable the students I mentor to continue video production.

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