MORGAN CLEVELAND, Navajo
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Ganado, Arizona

This transcript is one of a series of interviews with American Indian people throughout much of the United States by S. I. Myers of the History Department of St. Louis Community College at Florissant Valley, St. Louis, Missouri, 63135.

The purpose of these interviews is to bring the Indian peoples' own comments to students in classrooms, and to foster greater understanding among the peoples of the United States by providing Indians the opportunity to express their ideas and opinions to a wider audience.

This transcript has been edited for clarity and ease of reading, but every effort has been made to preserve the original feeling. Conversations and opinions were encouraged on any subject of interest to interviewees; questions and responses do not necessarily reflect the viewpoint of the interviewer, the National Endowment for the Humanities, or St. Louis Community College.

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Sam Myers:

Today I'm at the College of Ganado, and I'm talking to the security officer here in his office on campus, and he's taking time out from his rounds to talk to me for a few minutes. Your name is Morgan Cleveland. Do you suppose your name comes any way from old Grover Cleveland, the President of the United States?

Morgan Cleveland:

I don't know. It's hard to tell where Cleveland came from.

SM: There are lots of other Cleve lands, of course. Anyway, you're Navajo, aren't you?

MC: Yes, I am.

SM: Were you born here in this area?

MC: Yes. I was born over here at Project Hope, Sage Memorial Hospital.

SM: Oh, the Project Hope, the hospital over there. Then you were born within two, three blocks from here. Have you lived here all your life?

MC: No. I lived close to 30 mile out from here, they call it Navajo Station.

SM: You lived out there when you were growing up?

MC: Yeah.

SM: Where did you go to school, Morgan?

MC: Well, I went to all different kinds of schools. I went to Navajo Station Day School.
SM: That was a day school, government run that?

MC: Yes. And I went to Greasewood Boarding School, and I went to Kin­
lichee Boarding School.

SM: Are these all BIA schools?

MC: Yeah. And I went to Fort Wingate BIA school, and to Intermountain
Indian School, and I went over here to Ganado public high school.

SM: You did go to quite a few, didn't you? Was that a good experience or
tough?

MC: Good experience, not tough, and seem like I been all over to school,
and you know all these students around the schools, the different
places. I couldn't believe every time I go to somewhere, I go to
town, some place out, I allus see that everybody knows me. Say, "Hey,
here's so and so." Then I keep wonderin, "Where did I know 'em?
Oh, way back over at so and so, Fort Wingate or Intermountain."

SM: You get them mixed up sometimes. You see somebody from Wingate, and
you think of Navajo Station maybe. I know the feeling sometimes.
Well, which one of those was the last school then?


SM: That wasn't very long ago. You're not a very old man, are you?

MC: No, I'm not a really old man.

SM: That's a big plant over there, isn't it? A big high school?

MC: That's a big school, yeah.
SM: I came by there yesterday on the highway, and it's really a big physical plant. Do they have a lot of students there?

MC: Elementary has lots of students, yeah. Elementary and high school both.

SM: The people here support it too, don't they?

MC: Yeah. The Hopi students are going to school from Keems Canyon, too.

SM: They come all the way down from Keems Canyon to go to school there?

MC: Yeah, they have their own bus by the Hopi Tribe.

SM: How far is that?

MC: About 29 or 28 miles.

SM: Do any of them come farther than that?

MC: Not so. That's all.

SM: Well then, after you finished high school, Morgan, did you go anywhere else to school, like to college here?

MC: No, that was the end of it. After I finished school I just went straight to the silversmith business. I was a silversmith teacher and instructor over at Tempe for one year.

SM: In what school over there?

MC: It's a private school.

SM: You taught silversmithing. Where did you learn that?
MC: I learn it in school back over here, at Ganado.

SM: At Ganado High School? They have classes in silversmithing there then?

MC: Yeah. I learn it from a Hopi.

SM: You're Navajo, but you learned silverwork from a Hopi. And you have different traditional designs you use?

MC: Yeah.

SM: Which one do you like better?

MC: Well, it's all kinds of designs; hard to tell in this part now. Everybody starts silversmithin' it's hard to tell.

SM: They copy each other's work and ideas?

MC: Yeah, copy each other's work, and these days, hard to tell by the stone too. I would say like these car and everything, automobiles are made by white man, but just sit back and wonder and think, how did it made, and who it made by. And this turquoise business, like for instance, there's a really stone here, a really good one, and one's made by plastic that's stabilized. Stabilize it and match it together, they look the same, but this one's a really stone, but this one would be plastic.

SM: So they can make plastic stones now that look like the real thing?

MC: Yeah. It's hard to tell.

SM: That makes it bad for the buyer, 'cause he doesn't know which one to
buy then. He doesn't know when he is getting a good one or when he isn't.

MC: I could buy lots of these stones, I would say stone, but it would be plastic, and I could make some nice jewelry out of it, and go out, way out towards Washington or Illinois, where nobody doesn't know what's a turquoise or what Indian jewelry looks like, just so I'm a Indian that I would say it's made by Indian, hand made, genuine Indian hand made. But I could sell it easy, but at the same time, I would be cheatin', the way I think.

SM: But a lot of people do it?

MC: Yeah. They wouldn't tell it straight.

SM: If you want to buy a Navajo ring, for example, what's the best way to do it then, so you get something good?

MC: Well, you have to look at the stone first.

SM: But a lot of us couldn't tell the difference. You might be able to, but I would have a hard time. Of course, unless it was obviously plastic.

MC: Yeah. The stones runs by first grade, second grade, third grade, fourth grade. This first high graded will be Landers Blue.

SM: Landers Blue, from the Landers mine?

MC: Yeah, most expensive one. Then there's another one, second grade, next highest price would be a Spider Web.

SM: Do you mean Landers Blue is higher than Spider Web? Spider Web is very expensive too.
MC: Yeah. Spider Web is very expensive too, and Landers Blue, kinda the same. And then third would be Battle Mountain.

SM: That's from Nevada, isn't it?

MC: Yeah. And then there's all kinds of stones, Kingman, Morenci, yeah.

SM: Number Eight Mine, and so on, but these that you mentioned are the most valuable. Bisbee Blue, is that pretty valuable?

MC: Yeah.

SM: And of course then, like for example, the Bisbee turquoise, you can find that almost plain blue and you can also find it with lots of matrix in it, can't you?

MC: Yeah.

SM: So you can't always tell. It isn't standard, by any means, and so on, with the others. Well, when you teach silverwork, how do you start?

MC: Well, first thing we start cutting. Cutting the silver. And then you learn how to use the torch.

SM: And you have to keep the temperature carefully under control, don't you?

MC: Yeah. Learn how to solder the silver, and then learn how to set the bezel for the stone and designing. It's all kinds of designs, I don't know what kind the people like best, but designs makes more expensive sometimes.

SM: I think the Navajo designs are generally the most popular, aren't they?
MC: Yeah.

SM: I was talking to a Zuni lady a few days ago. You know the Zunis make that very fine, intricate work.

MC: Needlepoint.

SM: Needlepoint and petitpoint and so on, but she liked the Navajo designs better. She's a rather famous silversmith, and she had bought a lot of Navajo work because she likes it better, and then she also is influenced by it in her own work now. Well then, you don't work in silver any more?

MC: I work a little bit, but it's just too much now.

SM: Do you mean with your job and the silverwork both?

MC: No, I like the job working, just sitting around, but making jewelry and finish it and running around with it is the hard thing. Running around tryin' to sell it good, next door to next door. Some people would just turn you down, see, "Go to the next door. Go to the next door, see if he like it, or if he don't like it, just turn it back to me."

SM: So that's the kind of thing you didn't like about it. You like making it though?

MC: Yeah, I love makin' it.

SM: Well, can't you get a job like at one of the trader's plants, making silverwork?

MC: I like to do it that way. The only thing I can't afford it.
SM: Do you mean you don't make enough that way?

MC: Working for one of the traders? Well, I been to all over to the traders in the stores around here in this area. I would go to some stores, "Hey, so and so, I like to work," "Who are you?" I told 'em, "So and so". "Where have you been working?" "I've been working, I've been in silversmithin' shop," and then they would say, "Oh, let's see, we'll start you about $2.00 an hour, or $1.50." Some time they just go by piecework. Say, "How many rings could you make in one day, how many what you can make in one day?"

SM: So that's not all gravy either, working in those shops. How do you like being a security officer instead? Do you like that better?

MC: I like better. Nobody's pushin' me around here. Just sittin' around.

SM: Do you drive around and check over the campus and make sure everything is O.K., and check the doors at night and lock up? How long have you been here Morgan?

MC: I've been here about a month now.

SM: You're kind of new on the job then. Do they have other men working here as security officers also?

MC: Well, I have Max, he's chief of security, and David Williams, he's off today, and myself, and Donald Lee, he's night shift on 12:00 to 8:00. Four men. One guy quit.

SM: Are you going to have to replace that one man?

MC: We have to.
SM: So then you patrol the campus 24 hours a day?

MC: Sometimes.

SM: Sometimes you close and you don't check it at night?

MC: I don't work 24 hours, but I just went in and work eight hours.

SM: I mean all of you together.

MC: Yeah, 24 hours.

SM: There is somebody here all the time. Like for example, at 2:00 o'clock this morning I hear somebody breaking into my car, I could come over here and there'd be somebody here?

MC: Yeah.

SM: That's good. I imagine everybody likes to know that. But then on this campus you don't have much of that kind of trouble, do you?

MC: Yeah. No trouble.

SM: Because you have the students and the instructors and the administration, and that's about it at night; I suppose a few visitors in the daytime. You're off the beaten path. You're not like downtown. Would you like to be an officer in a city, or do you think you'd prefer it here at the college?

MC: I think I'd rather just go to . . . 'course if they pay more in town I would stay in town.

SM: Now your wife and family live nearby?
MC: Yeah, just across the highway, about two blocks from here.

SM: What's the main kind of problem you have on the campus that you have to watch out for?

MC: Well we have to watch out for the people around this area, like somebody might be comin' in drunk, so we'll have to chase 'em off the campus.

SM: Somebody who doesn't belong here?

MC: Yeah, chase them off the campus. Or some boys might be comin' in drunk, drivin' around, speedin' around. Students or some students from some other area. They'd be comin' around speedin', drinkin'. Mostly at night.

SM: Who causes you the most trouble, the people on campus that belong here, or those who come from outside?

MC: I would say people from outside. Like if some people give us trouble around this campus area, we would just report them to the college president, and then the president would get them by the neck and take them to the office and talk to them, straighten 'em up, see. "You've been reported like this last night, you do it again once more, you'll be movin' out of that house," or, "Calm down," or "No more what's goin' on over there." They'll be drinking or havin' parties. So they warn 'em.

SM: Do you have very much of that sort of trouble?

MC: We used to, no more.

SM: The kids behave themselves pretty well?
MC: Yeah.

SM: You live right across the highway, you and your wife. Do you have children?

MC: Yeah, three children, six, five and 16 months, boy.

SM: Are they going to school here some day do you think?

MC: The two girls going to school, six and five, at Ganado Elementary School.

SM: Oh yes, that's down at the other end of town, isn't it? On the east end. You graduated from high school there too?

MC: Yeah, mine is from farther way up there.

SM: Well, this silversmithing, do you ever plan to go back into it?

MC: I'll go back into it, but not as business, just as my own hobby, like.

SM: Like for example, when you're off duty here as an officer, you could, if you felt like it. Do you enjoy making silver things?

MC: Yeah.

SM: Kind of fun to create something attractive, something beautiful?

MC: I'd like to make buckle, and show it around; and summertime, go to rodeo meetings.

SM: Do you go to rodeos quite a bit?

MC: Yeah.
SM: Do you ever compete in them?

MC: I used to compete in bareback riding. I started in high school. The most dangerous is saddle bronc and bull ridin'.

SM: More so than bareback riding?

MC: Well I allus say bareback ridin', that would only be a balancin', and how strong your arm is, that's all.

SM: And how you can grip with your legs?

MC: And saddle bronc you have to sit on the saddle and put your feet in the stirrups, and some guys are afraid of it. See, you might get hang up with that.

SM: Bareback that doesn't happen. You just go flying. Did you ever get hurt bad?

MC: Not really. In bull ridin' sometime these cowboys they got hang up there too. You can ride this mean bull, I don't know what to do. I wouldn't sit on it.

SM: That looks to me like one of the most dangerous things anybody can do, but you used to do that at rodeos. Did you win any prizes?

MC: I never win a prize, but at this meet I won money, yeah, little bit. First money in a high school rodeo.

SM: Do you plan to be in any more rodeos?

MC: Yeah, in summertime. I would like to start.
SM: Maybe next summer. Now can you participate in rodeos and keep your job here too?

MC: Well, the rodeos will be on Saturday and Sunday. I can go there.

SM: You can sort of arrange to have Saturday and Sunday off.

MC: I think one of these guys has a bronco machine over across the highway that's about four blocks away from the house.

SM: A bronco machine where you can practice?

MC: Yeah. I'm gonna go over there and ask him to ... see, I'm interested in raisin' money for him and for myself. I would like to have a little talk with him. Go over there and say, "Hey, that's a nice bronco machine. How about you and me take it to college and let them use it. They'll pay us, instruct them."

SM: Are there quite a few kids here on campus who participate in rodeos?

MC: They will be pretty soon, yeah, 'cause this organizer was just here.

SM: They got a club going?


SM: This is a college organization? And they've got horses just off campus here too?

MC: I think so, yeah. And I'd like to be a rodeo sponsor too, try to get ahold of these two sponsors, see if I could get 'em. If they let me I would be happy to help them.

SM: Which do you like best now? Silverwork or rodeo participation or police work?
MC: I would say police work would be just working durin' the day or night.

SM: Do you work the year round as security man here? All summer, all winter?

MC: Yeah.

SM: They don't close down or anything during the summertime? They have students here straight through?

MC: Let's see. I think they might close it down sometime 'cause, I... I don't really know about it.

SM: Because you haven't been through a summer yet, have you? You just started this fall? Have you had any scary moments this fall with any bad problems that you had to take care of?

MC: Well, one time while I was checking classroom around about 10:30, I would say about 10:30, I was checking these classroom, then I opened one door, the door was open, I opened the door and I couldn't find the light switch, so I just went in there straight, I forgot my flashlight outside. While I was walkin' there I went straight into this science class, it was science class. You know, those skeletons! By the time I turned into it, I see this face, the whole thing, the body. Awh, I almost faint there.

SM: Walked right into a skeleton. Well, as long as you can keep your troubles like that it isn't so bad even though it's scary. And no flashlight! I'll bet you take it now.

MC: Yeah, I take it now. I check the classroom when it's light, daylight, 'round about 5:00, 6:00, don't have to go there durin' the dark time,
when it gets dark.

SM: You've had worse accidents in rodeo work than you've had here on the campus as a security officer?

MC: Well, I was thrown once before, in 1971. I didn't know how to ride this bull, but I sit on it, and I was kinda scared, I didn't even know how to ride a bull, so I rode a bull over at a junior rodeo, and it was a big bull. The first jump it throw me away. While I was lying there he kicked me, so I was unconscious for about two or three minutes.

SM: That was a close call. They have people there like clowns and so on to distract the bull so he doesn't gore you or stomp you or anything?

MC: Yeah. I recovered from that, and I quit too in the bull riding.

SM: Then you rode bareback after that?

MC: Yeah. I was bareback riding at the time too.

SM: It seems like an awfully scary rough activity to me.

MC: But as soon as you learn it good, it's really fun.

SM: Exciting. Have you been doing it a long time? Did you do it when you were a teenager?

MC: I was doin' it a teenager, yeah.

SM: Where did you learn to ride?

MC: From my home at Navajo Station. Had sheep and cattle and everything.
We used to herd sheep on horseback.

SM: And some people herded walking, but horseback is easier? So you got pretty used to riding anyway. Was that back home with the family?

MC: Yeah.

SM: Are they still down there?

MC: Yeah, the family's down there. My father.

SM: He has horses and sheep?

MC: Yeah.

SM: Do you like that life pretty well?

MC: Yeah.

SM: Do you think you might ever go down and sort of take over the ranch down there?

MC: I might, yeah. See, my father used to be a rodeo hand back in ... long time.

SM: Oh, he taught you?

MC: No, he didn't taught me, but I kinda got interested by tellin' his story.

SM: He would describe the exciting life of a rodeo rider, and so you thought you would like to try that, and then you learned to ride at home and you were with the horses every day anyway, I suppose?
MC: Yeah.

SM: Well, I often wondered, you know, what a guy thinks about when he gets on one of those big, powerful bulls, or a young, bucking horse, it's scary. You've got to have the kind of temperament that enjoys that kind of thing, don't you? And not be afraid of a broken leg or something?

MC: Yeah, I suppose.

SM: Well, anyway, you've got things pretty well worked out now. You've got this job and you like it, and your wife and the family right across the road here, and everything's going pretty well right now.

MC: Yeah.

SM: And you're checking the clock, I can see, you've got duties to take care of, so I'll not keep you, but I appreciate your talking to me. I hope everything goes very peacefully for you here on the campus. Good luck.