Listening to Indians

WILLIAM KELLY, Hawaiian

October 24, 1975

Provo, Utah

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.

This transcript series was made possible by a grant from the National Endowment for the Humanities, and by support from St. Louis Community College.

Copyright © S.I. Myers 1978
LISTENING TO INDIANS

WILLIAM KELLY, Hawaiian

October 24, 1975

Provo, Utah

Glen Rock, New Jersey

Microfilming Corporation of America

1978
Sam Myers:

Today I'm at Brigham Young University in Provo, Utah, talking to a man I was surprised to find in this job as assistant to the director of the Institute of American Indian Services, and this is Mr. William Kelly. Mr. Kelly is non-Indian, and he is not an Anglo. Mr. Kelly, would you tell me what your background is?

William Kelly:

Yes. I'm Hawaiian from Honolulu, Hawaii.

SM: Working in the institute of Indian services here. Have you been here a long time?

WK: Oh, about six years here at the university, and two years prior to that on a mission to the Indian people.

SM: Oh, then you are a member of the Mormon Church too?

WK: Yes.

SM: Is the university church-related?

WK: It's a privately-owned university, operated with the funds of the church.

SM: It's not a state university?

WK: No.

SM: Utah University in Salt Lake, that's a state university, so that's a little different. This would be similar to St. Louis University in St. Louis, Missouri, which is operated by the Jesuits. Well, back to your own personal experience, Mr. Kelly. You were born in Honolulu?
WK: Yes, I was born in Honolulu.

SM: Many of us would like to go there, you know. Did you go to school there?

WK: I went to the elementary, high school, intermediate, then came to college here.

SM: Were your parents members of the Mormon Church?

WK: They were inactive, but after a while they became active.

SM: Now is it proper to refer to the church as the Mormon Church? Or should we say the Church of Jesus Christ of the Latter Day Saints?

WK: The proper title is the Church of Jesus Christ of the Latter Day Saints, but a lot of people refer to it as the Mormon Church.

SM: Some of my students who are members of the church call it the Mormon Church. When you were going to school out there, did you have any thought of working with Indian people then?

WK: No, that was not even in my mind.

SM: Then how did you become interested in it?

WK: I guess it was because of my mission experience among the Indian people.

SM: Did you start out on your mission from Honolulu?

WK: Yes. I was called to serve in the Southwest Indian Mission, laboring in New Mexico and Arizona.
SM: Then you worked with all the Indians of that area, or any group predominately?

WK: Mostly the Navajos.

SM: Because they were the largest group?

WK: I guess so, but I was called specifically to work with the Navajos, to learn the language, so I came here to the language-training mission, we call that.

SM: Do you speak Navajo now?

WK: Oh, just a little bit.

SM: But you do understand it?

WK: Yes.

SM: And do you speak any other languages?

WK: Hawaiian. Not very fluently.

SM: That's a Polynesian language?

WK: Yes, that's right.

SM: So you speak Hawaiian, the Polynesian Hawaiian language, and the Navajo language and English, very clearly.

WK: I don't speak Navajo.

SM: I was expecting an accent after I learned where you come from, but I don't hear very much of one. Any others?
WK: I'm trying to learn the Japanese language.

SM: That must be difficult.

WK: No, not really.

SM: I've been amazed talking to many Indian people. They're teaching their languages in many schools now in various places, like they teach Navajo down in Navajo Community College in Arizona; they teach Chippewa in some of the schools up north, and they tell me that among the younger students the languages are picked up quite readily, quite easily. So then, you came to Arizona, worked with the Indians for two years, and then did you come to BYU?

WK: Right. After I was released from my mission, I decided I needed to attend college.

SM: You spoke of being released from your mission and being called to it. Do you want to give us a little bit of explanation of those two terms?

WK: O.K. Most young men between the ages of 19 and 20, after they graduate from high school, usually have a year in college or so, maybe one semester, then he gets an interview with his bishop to find out whether he's worthy to be called on a mission.

SM: All people do not go?

WK: No. You have to have a desire to go, and if you have the desire, then approach your bishop and let him know that you want to go. Then he gives you a formal interview to determine your moral standards; whether you're worthy to go; whether you've paid your tithing; whether you're chaste; and then if you weren't, are you getting back into the repentance process so you can get back into the proper attitude or perspective,
and then, after this interview, you are interviewed with the stake president, and the stake president goes over the same kind of interview, but more detailed, and then after that interview your first papers are submitted to the church missionary department in Salt Lake, and they are the ones that go through all of the applications of the prospective missionary, and the president of the church eventually determines where you should be called to a mission. And I was called to the Southwest Indian Mission, working with the Navajo people.

SM: And that was in what town?

WK: Well, the mission headquarters is in Holbrook, Arizona.

SM: On the famous Highway 66 now being called 40. So that's where you were headquartered, and worked out of there.

WK: And you're called on a mission for two years, and if you needed to learn a language like I did—I needed to come to BYU to learn the Navajo language at the LTM, the Language Training Mission—you're here for approximately two months now, at that time it was three. So the months you're learning the language is in addition to the two years, and after the two years of your mission, you're released, so to speak.

SM: Released? You have another conference?

WK: Well, you're automatically released. You go home to wherever you came from, and you have another interview with the stake president, and you're officially released when you return home.

SM: When you finish the two years, does the passage of the time, the two years, automatically bring you to a point of release, or do you have to be accepted as having accomplished a certain amount?
WK: It's automatically, and I might mention too that before you go on a mission you're called, you receive the call from the president of the church, and then you have the option whether to accept that call. Then if you accept it, they have information for you to come up to Salt Lake and take part, participate in a seminar, so to speak, for all missionaries, and there you're set apart as a servant of the Lord to preach the gospel.

SM: Now the time you're in missionary work, you're paid a salary by the church?

WK: No.

SM: How do you get by? How do you make it?

WK: All of the missionaries that go on a mission, they have to have their own finances, pay your own way. The only thing the church will pay for you is your trip home if you're released.

SM: So people do not go on this because it's a lucrative job?

WK: There's a message that needs to be...

SM: And it's an effort that's costly to the person that does it, right?

WK: Right.

SM: After you finished your mission you went back home?

WK: I went home on a Sunday, and I came back to Brigham Young University on Tuesday.

SM: Didn't stay long.
WK: No. I didn't stay long, and I've been here ever since. I've been home for my vacations.

SM: You were here first as a student?

WK: Yes.

SM: Did you graduate?

WK: No. I came to school and met my wife. She's also from Honolulu, she lives 10 miles from where I live, and we never met each other until we came here. And we went home, got married in the temple there in Hawaii, and came back to attend school, and the children started to come, and I had to quit school. So I was in the process of looking for a full-time job when I got this job, assistant to the director of the Institute of American Indian Services.

SM: Now would you describe the university's function in the Institute of American Indian Services?

WK: You bet. The institute was established in 1958, to be an action arm of the university, so that the university could reach out to the Indians off campus, and establish self-help programs to help the Indians help themselves.

SM: The institute isn't for the purpose of just going out to convert Indians to the church?

WK: No, that's not the primary purpose.

SM: The real reason is to help people with practical things that make their life better?

WK: Right, that's what it is. So it was established to reach out to the
reservations, to Indians off campus, and help them with their natural resources, to help them develop the natural resources, and help them in small businesses. A self-help program, I guess that would be the term.

SM: Over what territory does the institute function?

WK: There's four sections, regions that we work with. The Canada region—we have a few there, we're just now preparing to open areas in Alaska too, so we have Canada. Then the Northern Indian Mission up in South Dakota, North Dakota, Oklahoma and that area; and also the Southwest Indian region with Arizona and New Mexico, and then we go down south to Mexico—we have some programs there.

SM: So it's not confined to the United States—you have Canada and Mexico too as mission posts or districts?

WK: Regions.

SM: Mr. Kelly, is it proper to say the university does the work, or the church does the work, or both do?

WK: Both, I guess.

SM: Then you have students coming on campus. You have hundreds of Indian students here, don't you?

WK: Yes, there's approximately, oh, a little over 500 Indian students from all over.

SM: Now does your institute work with them also?

WK: No. We do programs just with Indians off campus.
SM: So the Institute of American Indian Services, as you were saying, works off campus, out there in the field, with the people on the reservations, to help them in whatever way—to grow more corn, irrigate the fields, this sort of thing?

WK: Right. We have over 70 projects in the four areas I mentioned, mostly with agriculture, helping the Indians to realize that fertilizer plays an important role in growing alfalfa, growing corn, whatever they need to. Another project is our fruit tree project, where we are able to get various types of fruit trees at a low discount, and then we purchase it by lots of 5,000, and then we take it down to the reservation, to these people that are willing to plant the trees and to nourish it, reap the crop.

SM: And do you show them how to handle the crop?

WK: Show them how to handle it.

SM: How to keep them from insect infestation, all the things that go with raising a good crop, and having a better crop to live off, to use.

WK: Maybe an important factor in that is that we use the university's various departments. Like through the services of the agronomy department, or the agriculture department, we can go down to the reservation and teach them these important factors—how to grow, how to fertilize. And another important factor is that on the reservation itself we have what we call the mission couple. Now these couples are called to go on a full-time mission; to work with the Indians, and they're the ones that are on the reservation, working with the Indians, showing them how to do these things, and we kind of coordinate our programs with these couples, and with the supervisor, field supervisor.

SM: So it's a broad and extensive program, and you have all the services of the university to help you. And this is a big university. Do you
have any idea how many total people there are involved here in the university?

WK: There are approximately 25,000 students.

SM: And then you have the departments of agriculture, agronomy, and so forth, that work in not only teaching, but research to bring the results of this to the people out there.

WK: Right. Maybe another example would be like if we wanted to start a business, help a family start a small business, we would use the college of business and their expertise to help this family.

SM: There are economics people here?

WK: Right. And the home economics.

SM: This brings a lot of expert assistance then to the people throughout the country, doesn't it? But you do not work with the students who come on campus in an educational sense?

WK: No. The university has what we call the Indian Education Department, and they're the ones that work with all the Indian students that come here on campus.

SM: And by Indian education, that means educating Indian people who come here. It doesn't mean preparing people to go out and teach necessarily?

WK: Both. They have education programs for Anglos to prepare themselves to teach on the reservations.

SM: And also Indian people to teach. But also, Indian education helps prepare people for business life, or in law, medicine, or something else too?
HK: Right.

SM: And then they have a Lamanite center over there too, don't they? Now Lāmānīte, that's a term that refers to Indian people?

WK: To Indian people in general, and also even to Polynesians.

SM: Oh then it would refer to you too?

WK: Right. And people from South America.

SM: Would it be correct to say anyone who is non-Anglo?

WK: No. I think an explanation that could be used is a group of people that lived here in the Americas before Christopher Columbus came, before Christ appeared here on the American continent, could be referred to as the Lamanites.

SM: There's no date or anything for that, is there?

WK: Yes there is. It dates way back in 600 B.C. Six hundred years before Christ, and even back further than that, at the time of the Tower of Babel, when there was the confusion of the different languages, even back to that time. We have records showing that there was a group of people that came over to America, that lived here at that time.

SM: There has been archeological evidence discovered?

WK: Yes, especially down in South America.

SM: And not by the church itself, but by other people, completely separated. That supports this too?

WK: Yes.
SM: A book, *Before Columbus* is the title, was interesting, and then there are several others too which hold forth on these discoveries that bring up evidence of people having been here besides the Indian people themselves.

WK: Now the Indian peoples are off-springs of the people that lived here at that time.

SM: The Bering Strait migration, is that accepted?

WK: We have other views.

SM: All these things are fascinating. Is there anything else you can tell me now? I know you were getting people lined up to fly to Montana just a few minutes ago, and it is a pressing day for you.

WK: Maybe I can just summarize. As the Institute of American Indian Services, our primary purpose is to help Indians to help themselves on the reservation, and using the expertise of the university to go down and help them. And another function of the institute of Indian services is to try to locate funds from individuals or foundations that are desirous to help Indian people. We locate the funds, and take it to these people and help them to establish a business, or get fertilizer for their crops, or fruit trees, and so forth.

SM: That function alone would be quite valuable, wouldn't it?

WK: You bet. And, like I mentioned, we have over 72 projects throughout Canada, the Northern Indian, Southwest Indian and in Mexico, and we're working with over 43 different tribes throughout this area.

SM: Now you went to the trouble and effort of learning Navajo, but no one could learn all those 43 languages.
WK: Right.

SM: Well, that's a tremendous responsibility and project.

WK: I enjoy it though, very much.

SM: Well, it's great to have you here, and I'm glad I ran into you today so that we can bring your views back to our students, so we all thank you.

WK: Thank you.