Listening to Indians

LYLE REAMS,
Pima - Papago - Maricopa
December 15, 1975
Tempe, 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.

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

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THE NEW YORK TIMES ORAL HISTORY PROGRAM

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NO. 119

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Glen Rock, New Jersey
Microfilming Corporation of America
1978
Sam Myers:
Today I'm talking with a young Pima man, who is from Sacaton, Arizona, and his name is Lyle Reams. That's an easy one to say. Were you born there, did you grow up there on the reservation?

Lyle Reams:
Not really. First of all, I was born in Phoenix, and we sort of moved out to the reservation after that.

SM: How old were you when you moved out there?

LR: I think it was something like about two years old.

SM: So you don't remember the city?

LR: No. And then we lived there for about, I guess six or eight years, or something like that, and we all of a sudden picked up and moved to Casa Grande.

SM: Casa Grande isn't very far from the reservation, is it?

LR: No, it's only 18 miles.

SM: Now let's get our geography. Sacaton and the Pima Reservation are almost straight south of Phoenix?

LR: Yes.

SM: And Casa Grande is also down there?

LR: But a little farther southwest of Sacaton.

SM: At Casa Grande is that old ruin of the Hohokam?
LR: Yeah, but the town of Casa Grande was named after, you know, the old ruins of the Hohokam, but really the Casa Grande ruins are in Coolidge, but Casa Grande is a different town altogether.

SM: Named after the ruins. Casa Grande means "big house" in Spanish, doesn't it?

LR: Right.

SM: How did you pronounce Hohokam?

LR: Hō-hō-kūm, I just say it like that.

SM: Lots of these things are pronounced differently. The first time I heard it, it was Hohokam, but now it's Hohokum.

LR: I found that usually white people will always mix the words around.

SM: Anyway, you were born here in Phoenix, but you went to live on the Pima Reservation down at Sacaton when you were about two. Did you go to school down there?

LR: For two years I went to the Sacaton public school, but after that we were bussed, the kids were bussed to Casa Grande. I guess that's where I first started going to Casa Grande.

SM: And then later on you moved over there?

LR: Yeah. When I was in 5th grade we moved down there.

SM: Do you remember the reservation pretty well?

LR: Yeah, I remember it pretty well.
SM:  Because you were in your teens when you left there, weren't you?

LR:  No, I was only 12 or something like that. Twelve or eleven.

SM:  Did you enjoy life on the reservation? Hunting?

LR:  Well, really, I didn't like hunting that much. It was pretty boring. I didn't like it.

SM:  Not enough to do?

LR:  No. Most exciting part would come probably on Saturday when we'd all come to town or somethin' like that.

SM:  What town would you go to then?

LR:  Usually back then, it was about 1963 or '64, somethin' like that, we always came to Mesa or Phoenix or Chandler. That was about the closest town.

SM:  Well, so then you came to actually the big city complex when you went to town?

LR:  Yeah, right.

SM:  Did that pose any problems?

LR:  Oh yeah, transportation-wise. If we all came in a bunch, you know, comin' to town, and somebody took off in the car, you're stranded, you know. Like that.

SM:  Then what would you do? Try to hitch-hike home?
LR: Well not really. You would have to wait until your ride came back.
   It's just a matter of waiting, really.

SM: Did you learn to speak Pima when you were a kid?

LR: No, not really.

SM: So you speak only English?

LR: Yeah.

SM: Spanish too?

LR: I had Spanish in high school, but I don't know it really.

SM: So actually, going to the Casa Grande high school, and not speaking
the Pima language, you've been sort of restructured in your culture.
Still, don't the Pima people try to keep their original culture as
much as they can intact?

LR: Well, I haven't seen the stress on the language really myself, you
know, because the young people down in Sacaton don't really care, it
seems, about that.

SM: Some people think the Pimas are the descendants of the ancient
Hohokams. Is that right?

LR: Yeah, I believe so. I had to do a bibliography paper for English up
here at ASU, and I had to look a lot of background up, and I found all
kinds of records like that.

SM: Because they had a highly developed culture here centuries and cen-
turies ago with canals. Somebody said there were over 150 miles of
canals they had dug.
LR: Yeah, most of it's buried under from erosion and junk, but they're still there.

SM: You can still see some of them, can't you?

LR: Yeah.

SM: There's an excavation over here in Phoenix on Washington Street, Pueblo Grande, have you seen that?

LR: Pueblo Grande. Yeah, I passed by that, but I've never been there.

SM: Well, that's an ancient Hohokam village excavated.

LR: Yeah, and there's one more, I believe, eight miles north of Sacaton, is called Snake Town, and I haven't seen nothin' out there that's happened. I heard they dug it up a couple years ago, 1967 or '68, and all of a sudden they just buried it back up for no reason.

SM: To protect it?

LR: Yeah, true.

SM: Because otherwise people come out and steal everything and wreck the evidence, and then the archeologists can't learn any more?

LR: Yeah, true. And they haven't bothered with it since then.

SM: But the word, Hohokam, as I heard it, in Pima language meant "those who had gone." Is that right?

LR: Yeah.
SM: So you know that much Pima anyway.

LR: Well, really, my mom and dad talked a lot of Pima in our house, you know, at home, and they never actually taught us, but you know, like if you live with a Spanish family for so long you start picking up the language. I guess that's what's happening to us--my family, they're finally startin' to pick it up, but we're already in college and all that, you know. But we know, like we can hear somebody talkin' away from a crowd or somethin' and you can pick it up what they're talkin' about. It's just a short language.

SM: Did you go to high school then in Casa Grande also?

LR: Yeah.

SM: Graduate from high school there?

LR: Yes.

SM: And then you decided to go to ASU?

LR: Yes.

SM: Have you been to any other schools?

LR: Well, I've been to U of A. I was in a band program down in Casa Grande, and we always took short trips to Tucson and U of A music festivals, maybe about five times a year, and I was sort of leaning towards down to U of A and then I came to ASU.

SM: You were in the band at Casa Grande high school?

LR: Yeah, that's right.
SM: Made tours with the band?

LR: Yes.

SM: What did you play?

LR: Various instruments.

SM: Tell us all of them.

LR: Well, my major instrument right now is sax, alto sax, and I played baritone horn or euphonium, trumpet, clarinet, various sax, you know, various types of saxes, just about every area.

SM: Are you going to be a musician?

LR: Yes, I'm majoring in music.

SM: Are you going to concentrate on the saxophone now?

LR: Yeah, I'm already concentrating on it.

SM: Are you going to teach it or play it? What are you going to do with it?

LR: Well, music education is really teaching it, but you gotta have a major in instrument to teach, you know.

SM: So in order to get a major in music you have to select an instrument to work on.

LR: Yeah, one.
SM: You can learn all you want, and then you have to learn all the educational methods.

LR: Right.

SM: Are you aiming at a secondary school to teach in?

LR: Yeah, mostly.

SM: Would you go back to Casa Grande or to Sacaton maybe?

LR: Yeah. I heard in a couple more years they're making a high school in Sacaton, but if I do teach down around that area, I'd like to change it, because my little brother and sister went to school there when we moved back to Sacaton. See we used to live in Casa Grande for about five years while I was in high school, and then we moved back to Sacaton and my little brother and little sister got stuck coming to school there. That's the bad thing about the Sacaton school program, that it's a year behind, and comin' back to Sacaton they had to come to school here because they rearranged a couple years back for bussing and they don't bus no more after a certain age level, and so they had to stay down in Sacaton, and they were a year behind for two years, and that sort of affected my sister, but not really. She graduated with sort of like honors from Sacaton because she went to Casa Grande for a couple of years and then came back, and it was nothin' to her really. And my little brother too.

SM: I see. Well, the school at Sacaton, is that a BIA school?

LR: Yes.

SM: And the school at Casa Grande?

LR: Is a public school.
SM: The public school is ahead of the BIA school?

LR: Yes, almost a full year, something like that.

SM: That's why, when she came back, it was . . .

LR: It was nothin' really, so it was kinda hard for her to try to keep up durin' the year she was down in Sacaton, and somehow she managed to keep up, and be way far ahead of most of the Sacaton students.

SM: Well, is your experience going to a couple of schools down there and then moving on up here, more or less typical? Do most of the kids do it now, or are you kind of an exception?

LR: Well, I think I'm an exception, really, 'cause it seemed like I was the only Indian that graduated from Casa Grande.

SM: There weren't a lot of Indian kids in that school?

LR: There was maybe about one or two, but one other girl was from the reservation, the other Indian boy lived in Casa Grande too.

SM: When you were at Sacaton, all the kids were Indians, weren't they?

LR: Yes.

SM: And so that was a comfortable experience, even though you say it was about a year behind?

LR: Yeah.

SM: Now when you went over to Casa Grande, did you run into any problems, any kind of prejudice?
LR: No, not really.

SM: You were treated O.K.?

LR: Yeah. Mainly it was on account of that band program. When I first started, it sort of started friends.

SM: And then you made a lot of friends in the band?

LR: Yeah, really, and we sort of got . . . you know, like, go to each other's houses when I used to live in Casa Grande. The most prejudice I think I saw was from the Indians themselves--my family, from movin' to Casa Grande.

SM: They thought you were going to run out on them?

LR: Yeah.

SM: What do your folks do in Casa Grande?

LR: Well, they just moved there for the schoolin' really, that's the main reason when they first found that out. That was way back when I was in about 6th grade or somethin' like that.

SM: So they thought enough of your educational future to move there so you'd have an advantage?

LR: Yes. It seemed like it happened that way too.

SM: That was good of them. Are your folks still down there?

LP: No, they moved to Sacaton. That's when we moved back to Sacaton. See, everybody's already almost done with high school. Like I have two brothers and a sister still goin' to high school, but they're
goin' to high school all right, and that's the main reason why they moved down to Sacaton.

SM: They're still going to high school in Casa Grande?

LR: Yeah, in Casa Grande.

SM: And then they'll move back to Sacaton with the family, or else go on to school like you did. Are you the oldest then?

LR: No, I have another brother, he's down at U of A. He's a junior.

SM: So you and he can compare notes on the two schools?

LR: Yeah. Well, that's the main reason why I came over here. I heard they didn't have such a hot band program down at U of A.

SM: And what intrigued you is the band program?

LR: Yeah.

SM: It's a good one here, isn't it?

LR: It's tops really.

SM: Good. They have a good Indian law program here too. Is that right?

LR: Yes, I heard about that too, and right now I was kinda inbetween. I didn't know what to do when I first came here—-to major in pre-law or music. They told me to do what I'd been making good grades in high school in mostly, and I figured it was music, but now I'm kinda inbetween again since the semester's comin' up, 'cause you gotta think of your final major before your sophomore year, or somethin' like that, so you don't waste any time.
SM: What year is this for you?

LR: This is my freshman year.

SM: So you've got three more years here now after this one?

LR: Yes.

SM: To get a degree in music. Do you think you might ever go on further for more degrees?

LR: Yeah. When I filled out my form and such I put down I was gonna work for my master's.

SM: In music?

LR: Yes.

SM: There's this big thing now about Indian culture being preserved and restored, with the Indian songs, chants, the drums, and I guess sometimes other instruments like the flute, rattles and so on. Do you ever get any little friendly teasing from the kids about how come you aren't playing a drum or something?

LR: Here at ASU?

SM: Yes.

LR: Well, not really, no.

SM: You have a mixture of people here, don't you?

LR: Yes.
SM: Like, for example, you have Indian students, white students, black students, Orientals.

LR: And Spanish.

SM: And Chicanos. I guess that's about it, the whole world. So it's been comfortable here?

LR: Yes, it really has.

SM: The proportion of Indian students here has increased many, many times. Have you any figures on that?

LR: Once in a while I come to the NASA meeting, that's the Native American Student Association here at ASU, and they brought a figure up that I believe it was somethin' like maybe 500 or 700 Indian students going here. Well, that's what I heard, I don't know, that's what I heard.

SM: Well, that's a lot compared to what it has been.

LR: Yes.

SM: Do you have any idea what percentage of the population of the state of Arizona is made up of Indians?

LR: Not really.

SM: I heard that, in the last ten years or so, the Indian population on campus has grown so rapidly that it has almost equalled the proportion of Indian population to the state population, and if that's true that would be a great piece of progress, wouldn't it?

LR: Yes.
SM: Do most of the people accept the idea that an education is good for you?

LR: What do you mean by that?

SM: Well, do some of the people back at Sacaton, for example, say, "Don't bother with that stuff?"

LR: Like music, or...?

SM: Well, any kind of education. Some of the traditionalists, let's say... .

LR: No, there aren't that many. They think you better get an education.

SM: It's the only way to make it?

LR: Yes, really.

SM: In some instances in the past, there have been, and still are, traditionalists who say, "Don't have anything to do with that white man's education because it will spoil you."

LR: Well, I haven't heard that many, really, but I only remember one old guy. We once in a while talked with him, and he sort of stresses to get an education, 'cause he's sort of in his '60's or somethin' like that. Once in a while we run into him, and he really stresses it.

SM: So now here you are, you come from Sacaton and Casa Grande and up to Arizona State University, and you're in the band program, majoring in music, things are going well. Do you get good grades?

LR: Really.

SM: Great. And it's comfortable and you're having a good experience
here. You have a student union here on campus, and we're here in the Matthews Center.

LR: Yes.

SM: And you have an Indian center, do you?

LR: Yes, that's where we just came from.

SM: Oh, this Native American Students Association?

LR: Yes. Where everybody was sittin' over there havin' a party or somethin' like that.

SM: Well, anyway, then do you have a lot of members here? Do you have any idea how many?

LR: I don't exactly remember. I've heard they increased from over last year. Last year they only had about 25 members, but this year they have somethin' like 44 or somethin'.

SM: But there are many, many more Indian students than that, aren't there?

LR: Oh yeah. They just don't bother to come to the meetings or anything.

SM: Indian students are just like all the others. They just don't bother with it.

LR: Um hm.

SM: What's your pet gripe about the situation in general? Do you have any?

LR: I don't have really no gripe, except I don't got any transportation from home and back.
SM: You need a car?

LR: Yeah, really.

SM: Have you got a job or anything where you could earn enough money to get a car?

LR: Well, not really. I just work over the summer, that's all, I guess.

SM: That's hardly enough, is it?

LR: No. Well, it depends on the BIA grant from Sacaton. It's mostly paying for my education.

SM: How do you go about getting those BIA grants?

LR: Well, really, you have to start gettin' it ready about a year before you plan to go to school. I guess they furnish everything, but you gotta do your own paperwork too, yourself, like gettin' . . . I can't remember. There's so much stuff you have to do to get it, but I got it through.

SM: Maybe it will help some other young Indian people, Lyle, if you'll explain this now. You had to go back to Sacaton in order to start it?

LR: Yes. I started in my senior year in high school.

SM: And you were at Casa Grande?

LR: Yes.

SM: But don't you have to go back to your base, where you're enrolled?

LR: Oh, you mean my tribe? Yes.
SM: And that's where you get the official beginning of these papers that apply for the BIA grant?

LR: Yeah, that's one of the main stresses it makes.

SM: Do they help you fill them out?

LR: Yes. There's an education program in Sacaton where the lady there happens to know my mom really well, and she sort of stressed if you want to get an education, sort of get your money there, but you have to do paperwork and fill out forms and such.

SM: Then she helped you, and so you finally got the papers filled out. Then what do you do with them?

LR: We turn them in there and they do most of the work, and they have to go to different places. I can't remember, the Phoenix area office, and they shoot over to Denver, and they shoot back to Albuquerque. They go all different places. That's why you have to send them in about a year early. The papers really didn't come in, and I was settin' over here for about two weeks on, I guess on temporary credit.

SM: Because it hadn't cleared yet?

LR: Well, really, the main problem was in fillin' out forms, I didn't know which school to come to. I had NAU, U of A and ASU, and finally I scratched out U of A and NAU, but somehow they mixed it up and sent it to NAU. That's the reason why, I guess, the delay.

SM: Then finally all the papers cleared, and then what do they do?

LR: They send the money to the school and the school makes out the check to you.
SM: In other words the check includes tuition and the school takes that out, and then they give you some cash?

LR: Yes.

SM: So that you have living expenses. Do you live in a dorm here?

LR: Yes.

SM: Do you have to live in a dorm, or can you live off campus?

LR: Well, I could live off campus, but it really doesn't pay that much to live off campus. Livin' in the dorm you can make it.

SM: It's a little cheaper that way?

LR: Yes.

SM: There are lots of dorms on campus for young men?

LR: Yeah. I sort of had a little problem gettin' one, though, 'cause they lost my form for housing here, so I had to run through the red tape of waitin' for somebody to cancel out so I could grab it.

SM: So somebody did drop out and you had to move in their place?

LR: Right.

SM: So I suppose those last few days were a little strenuous?

LR: Yeah.

SM: They pay your tuition, and you're a resident, so it isn't terribly high. If you were a non-resident it's higher, but still, I guess the
BIA will pay that too if you move to a different state, won't they?

LR: Yeah.

SM: And then, can you give me some idea of how much money they give you, so other students will know if it's practical for them to try it?

LR: Well, it's enough to cover everything for your living too.

SM: If you're very careful?

LR: Well, not really. I have enough to last over the semester, I can tell you that much.

SM: So then you don't actually have to go out and get a job. You can concentrate on school, can't you?

LR: Right. Well, if I do go out and get a job, it's for spending, that's all.

SM: Or to buy a car.

LR: Right. Or a bike or somethin'.

SM: One young fellow from Florida, a Seminole, said that he had enough money for all his expenses, the necessary ones, and if he wanted any spending money, or if he wanted to buy something, then he had to go and earn it.

LR: Well in this case I got spending money too.

SM: Is it hard to get those scholarships? Do you have to have a good grade point average?
LR: Not really. All you have to be is just an Indian.

SM: That's what the real qualification is. You've got to prove you are one?

LR: Yes.

SM: And that means going back to the tribal roll, doesn't it?

LR: Um hm. But when I was born I was right on the tribal roll.

SM: One fellow out here in the hall a few minutes ago said he was Apache, but he couldn't prove it because all the roll records were burned, so he's in trouble then, I suppose, unless they'd accept testimonials from other people?

LR: Well, not really. If he was an Indian I guess they would have it in the state records too.

SM: Would there be more than one place where it's recorded?

LR: Well, usually on your birth certificate it asks what national origin it is. Usually it says Indian, and the next form it says, "What tribe?" And then it tells it right there. I don't think there's really that much problem. You have to do a little digging up yourself in the state records.

SM: Even if your tribal roll has been terminated you still have a chance?

LR: Yes.

SM: Well, that's good news for a lot of people. Everything else going well?
LR: Yeah.

SM: Got any advice for other students that are starting out like you did?

LR: Well, the only thing I can think of is to find some sort of program that will get you interested in, you know, what you'll stick with, like. Anything that interests you.

SM: In other words, a program in school, like your band program?

LR: Yeah. That takes a lot of time, and it's interesting, and it's fun.

SM: Something you like to do. What other courses are you taking?

LR: Well, I'm taking a humanities course and an English course, but mostly music.

SM: And all the rest of the courses are music?

LR: Yes.

SM: And that you like?

LR: Yes.

SM: Do you like English?

LR: Yeah, it's all right, it's not that....

SM: How about the humanities?

LR: Humanities? I think that's pretty boring, really.
SM: Well, what else can you think of that you'd like to add now. Would you like to express your opinion about anything that you don't like or do like?

LR: Well, what do you mean? Here at school?

SM: Here at the school, or in the nation as a whole, or whatever.

LR: There's nothing really here at the school, but the only thing I can think of is back at home the school program being a year behind. That really messes up the Indian students, I believe.

SM: I wonder why they allow that?

LR: It sort of happened my 6th grade year. That's the main reason why we moved to Casa Grande.

SM: Your whole family moved to overcome that one handicap. That was remarkable that your parents would do that.

LR: Well, my mom really got her education in Phoenix, and my dad the same thing too.

SM: Oh, by the way, your mother is Pima?

LR: Yes.

SM: But your father isn't?

LR: He's Maricopa. Well, that's really the western half of the reservation, Gila River Indian Reservation.

SM: Gila River is where the Maricopa come from?
LR: Yes mostly. Around that area.

SM: This is Maricopa County we're in. It's named after them. So your dad's Maricopa and your mother is Pima, so you're a full-blooded Indian?

LR: Yes.

SM: Half and half of the two tribes. You're a blend. Is that right?

LR: Well not really. It's part three ways, Pima and Papago and Maricopa. Half of it's Pima, 1/4 is Maricopa and 1/4 is Papago, but really it's mostly Pima.

SM: And as far as you folks are concerned the three tribes are related anyway?

LR: Yeah, the same reservation anyway.

SM: So you aren't like the Apaches vs. the Iroquois?

LR: Oh no. Right.

SM: You're all closely related, like cousins sort of?

LR: Right.

SM: So that was the biggest problem you've encountered so far, is the fact that the reservation school was a year behind the public school, and that put you at a disadvantage?

LR: Yes. Well, not for really me. I went to public school in Casa Grande for most of my life, except for that first two years I went to Sacaton.
SM: Do very many of the kids come to the BIA school not speaking English?

LR: Most of them speak English.

SM: So they don't have a language barrier either. Well, Lyle, it's been interesting talking with you. I appreciate your time. Thank you.