Listening to Indians

MARJORIE WILSON

December 27, 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. 135

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Glen Rock, New Jersey
Microfilming Corporation of America
1978
Sam Myers:
    I'm talking with Mrs. Marge Wilson. It's actually Dr. Margaret
    Wilson, isn't it?

Marjorie Wilson:
    Marjorie.

SM: But can I call you Marge? Because we start back there in some
    seminars we were in at Arizona State University, and you became the
    first Ph.D. the school has produced in history?

MW: Yes.

SM: So that's a distinction. Was it a difficult time, a difficult experi­
    ence?

MW: Oh, I think working on a Ph.D. is difficult for everyone. You get
    very neurotic while you're doing that. It's an unreal kind of a
    world. It's detached from any kind of practical reality that you're
    used to. There's a lot of fun to it, and the discipline is good for
    you, but there are unusual pressures.

SM: Endless research and the pressures of making it or not making it, and
    all that sort of thing. Who over there was your advisor?

MW: Dr. Karnes. He's excellent.

SM: Good. And since then, you have taken a job over here at the state
capital?

MW: Yes, I work out of the Arizona State Parks Office, and I'm in historic
    preservation. There's federal legislation dealing with historic pre­
    servation, and it's primarily aimed at protecting sites from damage
    by federal projects.
SM: Like reclamation, dams?

MW: Yes, and there's a national register of historic places, and sites that are on the national register are protected, so that if, for example, you had a national register site that was in the path of a proposed freeway, and the freeway, of course, receives federal funds, well, you can't just go in there and bulldoze down the national register site. Some other arrangement has to be made; alternatives are worked out and compromises and so on.

SM: Move the highway a little, maybe?

MW: The sites are protected. So the national register recognizes historic sites; it protects them from things that are federally funded or federally licensed, and it also provides a matching grants program. In each state one person is appointed by the governor to administer this federal program. In Arizona, as in some other states, that person is the director of the state parks, so we are a federal program, and we are not really part of state parks, we are simply under the supervision of the director of state parks in his capacity as the appointed representative of this federal program. That's how we happen to be over there.

SM: Like in St. Louis, some of our people at school have bought homes on LaFayette Square, which is an old part of the city which has been declared a national historic site, and then this kind of office in Missouri--there is one in each state?

MW: Yes.

SM: Would come to the rescue if someone tried to do something that would damage or destroy that area of the city, Lafayette Square?

MW: Right. That is, you can't use federal funds to destroy it. You own
that privately and you want to do something terrible to it, well, it's your property and you may, as long as you don't use federal money, and all that can be done is it's taken off the national register. So it's not designed to interfere with private property; it's simply designed to make sure that the federal government is not destroying historic sites.

SM: Marge, could I ask you some questions about yourself now? Where were you born and where did you grow up?

MW: I was born in Bozeman, Montana, and I lived there for about ten years. My father was in education, he was a high school principal and a superintendent of schools in Montana. He decided that he wanted to be an historian, and he already had an honors degree in engineering, and a master's in education. In the summer of '35 we went to Harvard, and he was taking classes there from Prescott Webb who was there that summer. And Webb told him that the best place for him to study western history would be the University of California, Berkeley. And so, even though it was the midst of the depression, he did what I think was the right thing. He quit his good job and we all went to Berkeley, and he worked for two years there under Herbert Eugene Bolton, and got his doctorate from him, and his specialty was Nez Perce Indians. This is how I became involved in Indians.

SM: You are non-Indian yourself?

MW: Right. This was an interest of my father.

SM: Your father's name is Francis Haines?

MW: Yes.

SM: He's a well-known author of books about horses, Indians, buffalo, and so on.
MW: Yes, and he has a new one coming out this year.

SM: What is going to be that title?

MW: Well, I don't remember what the title is going to be, but it's about migrations of the Indians on the plains.

SM: Can you give me a verbal list of the titles, outside of that last one?

MW: Oh dear. Well, The Buffalo, and The Horse in America. Those are the most recent ones. And he has done the definitive work on the Nez Perce. And he's written an Idaho history textbook and an Oregon history textbook, and he wrote a juvenile novel about an Indian boy.

SM: Do you remember the name of that?

MW: Red Eagle and the Absaroka, about a little Nez Perce boy with the Crow Indians. The Crow and the Nez Perce were friends always. And he's written a book about the Appaloosa. He was chiefly responsible for rescuing the Appaloosa from oblivion. I don't know if it's pertinent to what you're doing.

SM: I think it is, sure.

MW: The Appaloosa is certainly pertinent to the Nez Perce history. Of course it's part of the pattern of Anglo-native relations, that anything connected with war was discouraged. Of course, the Appaloosa was the distinctive horse of the Nez Perce, and so, naturally when the Nez Perce came under U.S. jurisdiction, then one of the first things that happened was that they were supposed to be having plow horses and not flashy horses for riding and buffalo hunting and so forth. So the Appaloosa had just about died out, there weren't very many left. About 1936, I believe, my father got very interested in the
Appaloosa as he was researching the Nez Perce for his doctoral dissertation at Berkeley, and he did quite a bit of research on the Appaloosa, and he wrote an article for The Western Horseman, which was a very small magazine published by Paul Albert out at Lafayette in California. And that article just brought a lot of response from people all over the country who said, "Well, I remember seeing an Appaloosa," or "I have one," and it was amazing that there still were some left. And of course the breed had deteriorated because people hadn't been protecting it, and they had been bred with plow horses and so forth, and they kind of got away from their original conformation. But the article did stir up a lot of interest, and an Appaloosa horse club was formed, and he was at one time a president of the Appaloosa Horse Club, and he was their historian for years and years and years.

SM: Were the Nez Perce people very much involved in the Appaloosa Horse Club?

MW: Now they are much more involved in raising Appaloosa.

SM: This was a case where non-Indians and Indians, and then finally the Nez Perce there, all got back into a real, genuine interest in the horse. Now they're thriving, aren't they?

MW: Right. And it was my father that did the research that determined the history of this very ancient breed of horses and determined their history and their original conformation, so that the breed could be re-established like it should have been.

SM: Some people have said that the Nez Perce Indians were the first tribe of the country to actually breed horses in a planned way for improvement, and that they produced the Appaloosa.
MW: Well, they didn't produce it, no, they had it, and they specialized in it. It was the horse that they preferred, and so they bred these particularly. The Appaloosa is a very ancient horse. There are records of it in the centuries and centuries ago in China and in Persia, and my father's book on the Appaloosa goes all through it, copies of old paintings and records.

SM: Yes, they do go back, but the Nez Perce Indians, nevertheless, were the first tribe ever to take one of these breeds of animals and improve it. And they are bigger and stronger and better here than any place in the world, aren't they now?

MW: Yes, although there are Appaloosa horse clubs and breeders all over the world.

SM: It is a big horse, isn't it?

MW: Um, no. I think you would say medium size, saddle horse, very durable.

SM: They're stronger than, for example, long-legged thoroughbreds?

MW: Well, designed for a different purpose. They're very good in rugged country, very serviceable.

SM: More of an all-around saddle horse. A lot of people will be very grateful to learn that bit of history of the horse. Your father must be a fascinating man.

MW: Well, I think so.

SM: Well, lots of kids don't think that about their parents, but you do. He lives out here in Sun City. Is he retired but still working?
MW: He retired. He's not writing anything at the present.

SM: His last book is already done?

MW: It's in the press and should be out in a couple of months.

SM: Some of the comments he makes in these books, in an off-hand manner, just sort of jolt you wide awake, because they put a whole new insight into some of the situations about Indians and their relations with people, and so on, things that other people seem not to have noticed somehow.

MW: He is very good at that, and I think it makes his work outstanding. He really has made a contribution to scholarship on western history, partly because he grew up in the West, and the homestead situation, and the mountains, and he really understands horses, he understands the West, and understands the geography, the climate, and the effect that those have on history. Too many historians write history without paying attention to the terrain. We see these people simply on a blank stage. Well, that isn't the way life is, because we are shaped by the environment in which we arise and, of course, history is often changed by the shape of the mountains and the location of the rivers.

SM: The vegetation, the climate, the moisture, everything, and you can see it no better than in the western half of the United States.

MW: We are dominated by the land here.

SM: Yes. The Southwest and Northwest coast are just two opposites, and yet they are in the same country, peopled by individuals who are called Indians, yet are quite different. Back to more about you, though. Your father, Francis Haines, and your mother, they're both non-Indian?
MW: Right. One interesting thing about my background is that I have Scottish ancestors on my mother's side, and so does my husband, so I think this is kind of odd that each of us had a grandfather, Angus MacDonald.

SM: Both Angus MacDonald?

MW: Yes. I don't know if Eugene told you about his background.

SM: Well, he mentioned his mother and growing up in Idaho, but your son, MacDonald, said it's an old family name, and I guess it is if you have two grandfathers with the same name.

MW: Well, the MacDonald on my husband's side was the Hudson's Bay factor at Flathead.

SM: Montana?

MW: Yes, and quite an interesting individual, I guess. The Flathead and the Nez Perce were friends, and he married a Nez Perce girl and they had several children who turned out quite well, and a lot of their descendants still live up there around Flathead. And he taught them to play the bagpipes and to wear the kilt and dance the fling. I always thought it would be fun to have a time machine and go back and watch one of those evenings. It must have been a lot of fun. My father always says that the reason the Scots got along so well with the Indians is there's so much similarity between the tribal and the clan systems, and I think we tend to forget that the Scottish clans were very wild up until quite recently and, in fact, the English practiced their native policy on the wild tribes of Scotland and Ireland before they ever came over to this country. They had already developed the reservation system; no liquor, no firearms, and the practice of sending the chief's children away to school in order
to indoctrinate them, this sort of thing.

SM: In Scotland and Ireland?

MW: Yes. They had already done that, but we forget that about 50% of the British Isles was pretty wild country at the time that England embarked on her imperial projects.

SM: And another detail that's connected with that is the Scotch-Irish who weren't Irish at all.

MW: Well, these were Scots who were sent to Northern Ireland in order to hold that country.

SM: For England. And then eventually, when the English laws began clamping down on them, they began migrating to America and were called Scotch-Irish, when they actually were Scots. In your case now then, where did you go to school when you were a child?

MW: I went to school in Montana, then in California, and then in Idaho. We went to Idaho.

SM: Do you remember going to school back when your father went to Harvard?

MW: No, we were just there for the summer.

SM: Oh, and then back to California. And then, where did you run into this big, handsome Nez Perce man, Eugene?

MW: Well, that was very romantic. I met him at a teachers' meeting. I was a teacher, and this was in Idaho, and I was so dumb about Indians that when I walked into the room with all these teachers sitting
there, and I thought, "My, who's that big Italian in the back row?"
So I always tease him about that.

SM: So you met him there when you were both teachers?

MW: Yes. He was principal of one of the grade schools in the district
where I taught.

SM: And your boss?

MW: No. We were in the same district, but not in the same school.

SM: Well, I'm glad you met, because otherwise I wouldn't be here either,
you see, talking to you, him, and the kids. So then, you have your
children and they are a very interesting family to talk to. How's
your job coming over at the state capital? Do you like that?

MW: It's quite interesting. I travel through the state quite a bit,
work with different groups and do research, write up histories of
different sites. There's a variety to it, and it's very enjoyable.
We do a lot of environmental impact statements too. It's quite
demanding work.

SM: Now since that day when you saw Gene, that "good-looking Italian"
in the back of the room, and he turned out to be a Nez Perce Indian,
have you learned a little more about Indians?

MW: Yes, I learned quite a bit more. I was surprised at all the Indians
there were in the world. I hadn't even realized.

SM: And that's interesting too, because your father had this interest,
and yet you hadn't picked it up yet.

MW: We hadn't lived on the reservation, and I hadn't really gotten
acquainted with Indians. He had in his research, but I hadn't.

SM: Times have changed a little since then, and there is more interest in things Indian and people now. I know there is back in St. Louis and in other parts of the country. But you have been learning almost constantly ever since, and then Gene's mother, she was a great personality.

MW: Very remarkable.

SM: And even though she wasn't 100% Nez Perce, she was in her mind, wasn't she?

MW: Yes. I think being Indian is a state of mind.

SM: You told me that once, and I have quoted you a hundred times, I think. Now, you have a unique slant on the whole situation that I don't have, that an Indian doesn't have, because you have children that are part Indian and a husband who is Indian, and anything that you can think of in that connection I would appreciate.

MW: Well, I think there's a feeling we have at present in trying to correct what has been done in the past. We have a tendency now to go a little bit overboard, to exaggerate, and we're always trying to simplify things so they'll be manageable, and in this way we put white hats on some people and black hats on others. Well, it used to be all the white hats were on the Anglos, and now we're trying suddenly to reverse it and put all the black hats on the Anglos and all the white hats on the Indians. Well, this is just as absurd as the other arrangement, and I think we have to some day get to the point where we can be a little more rational about this and have a clearer perspective, that the Indian is going to have to come to regard himself as an individual rather than primarily as a type.
SM: Because he, too, has been conditioned by these attitudes, so that often-times he has a mental image of himself that isn't really quite realistic or accurate.

MW: Right. One of the problems is that a great many Indians today know nothing about their past, or very little, except what they get out of the media, and a lot of this is pretty ridiculous.

SM: A concrete case. I was talking to a Chippewa man about the traditional enmity between the Chippewa and the Sioux, and he said that wasn't true, they were always great friends.

MW: We know they weren't. They were always killing each other off.

SM: The Chippewa ran the Sioux out of northern Minnesota.

MW: And the same way so many people talk about all Indians are brothers just because they are Indians. Well, just like other people, they were always killing each other off, and it seems to be the nature of people throughout history to take whatever they can and to get away with anything they can.

SM: Whether they be Indians or Anglos or Chicanos or whatever.

MW: Right.

SM: People are more similar than they are different?

MW: I suppose so. I don't know whether that's good or bad. That's what makes history.

SM: Well, now, that's a good observation.

MW: We're dealing with a basic difference in concept here, between the
emphasis on the individual and the emphasis on the group. Any society that's based upon a group, for instance, a tribal society—this is true not only of Indians but of tribal societies anywhere, or of any other subgroups that we have, the Mennonites or whatever it might be which is very cohesive. In one type of society, with your predominantly modern western European ideas, you have the emphasis on the individual. And in that the individual stresses his rights and his responsibilities. He has privileges and he also has to take the blame for what he does. He can't shove that off on to somebody else. In your group type of arrangement, in a tribal society or in your extended family or what have you, you are born into a relationship with everyone else in your little world, and that lasts as long as you live. You are not really responsible as an individual for the bad things that you do, and you don't really get any praise—you can't take credit or blame—you are simply a part of a group, and you kind of disappear into that. Unfortunately that doesn't appear to be a very practical way of living the way the world is arranged now. It makes you rather helpless for some reason, because the dominant view is the strong individualism, and this trying to disappear into the group, and to lose your identity as an individual, and not to take responsibility for consequences, deprives you of the opportunity to develop your life in your own way. You simply let life happen to you, and you will notice this very often on the reservation. It's kind of a fatalism. That is, whatever bad happens is not your fault, it's not anybody's fault, it just happened. Well, very often outsiders will look at that and kind of idealize that nobody's worrying; all these natives are happy, and they're just living from day to day, and they're not worrying the way we are, but on the other hand, they suffer a great deal from that. I remember particularly one reservation where we lived, and a group of young men were out drinking, as young men in any society will do, and in the course of the evening they had a car and one of the fellows was outside of the car and the car ran over him and he was killed, but it was no one's fault, you see, it was his time to die.
SM: They didn't blame the driver?

MW: No, it just happened, it was no one's fault. You see, this deprives you of any control over your life. It makes you a helpless victim of fate, and to me, that would be a terribly confining way to live. It would be like a jail. I don't know, perhaps it's a cocoon, a comforting way for some people to live. I wouldn't like it. I would feel imprisoned.

SM: Well, it probably would work if you were segregated completely—geographically, physically and every way, so that you lived over here in a community like the Hopi people used to do. But when you do live in a larger society where you are in contact with a variety of people, then it becomes somewhat impractical.

MW: Yes it does, and to me, that type of highly-structured primitive life would not be satisfying, because I like to have choices. I like to be able to have options of how I'm going to arrange my life. If you're in that type of society, your life is laid out for you from the time that you were born. That's what you're going to be, and that's the relationship you're going to have with your world, and you don't have any other choices. I wouldn't like that.

SM: Yes. And this is something that our idealists who are romanticizing the Indian way of life are overlooking now.

MW: They want the Indian to be a human zoo, but they would never accept that for themselves. If you tried to get them, if you would say to the average muddleheaded liberal at his cocktail party, "O.K., you once had a perfect culture back in your grandmother's time, and you've lost that. Now you've got to recapture that, and go back to that, because that's the real you. Well, how far back do you have to go? And how do you know that was the perfect culture?"
SM: At which point is it?

MW: And how realistic is it, given the world which you live in today? The world keeps changing, circumstances keep changing. In order to defend yourself you have to adjust to them.

SM: The Hopi culture as it used to be, and still is to some extent, was a very kind and gentle, friendly, almost a loving, communal society; but it was also authoritarian, dictatorial, and, like you said, people were almost programmed from birth to death, what they had to even think, because if they thought bad thoughts they were Ka Hopi or unHopi or bad people.

MW: Right. And for the time, you cannot say that there's anything inherently bad about that because they had developed a system that worked in their circumstances. It worked very well.

SM: But now many of the Hopi people are accepting change, and hope to use it to preserve as much as they can of their good old culture. Still it simply isn't possible any more to live isolated on top of Third Mesa, for example.

MW: Well, I think it's very misleading to always be talking about Indian culture, and, "Oh, we've lost our culture," and that sort of thing, that, "We have to go back to it and recapture it," when in the first place, the only way they can find out about it is to read what Anglos wrote about it years back, because most of them, except for unusual cases like the Hopi, have lost it; and in the second place, it's a mistake to assume that that culture was ever crystallized, because life is just not like that. We always do borrow from each other. How can a Navajo go back to his culture? How far back is he going to go? Is he going to go back before he learned how to do silverwork? Is he going to go back before he learned how to wear velvet
blouses and the woman wore satin skirts? Is he going to go back before they came into Arizona, which was not so very long ago?

SM: Before he learned weaving from the Pueblos?

MW: And before he had horses? What about the Plains Indians? They talk about their culture, but did they have horses very long? Not very long.

SM: As actually your father points out very effectively in one of his books, the one on buffalo, I think, the advent of the horse brought on a golden age for the Plains Indians.

MW: Right. It was by borrowing that they created the very splashy culture which they look upon as a perfect point in their history. This is like trying to tell the Greeks to go back to the age of Pericles. You might be able to do that if you were rich and protected enough so that you could live in that kind of an isolation, but you have to stay in the real world in order to defend yourself.

SM: This carries over into some of the protests against the evils in our society, and let's face it, there are some. Many maybe. We have some idealistic, communal group that wants to separate itself out so they can live "the good life, the perfect life." Even they must then submit to stringent control, give up their personal freedom of choice, so their group can function.

MW: And if you stress too much going back and recapturing the culture, trying to teach it in the schools, and trying to have all the schools conducted in the Indian language, and so forth, this is simply not practical. Every language borrows. It has to, because there's always something new that you have to name that you didn't have a word for, and if you went back and were speaking only Indian, there would be so many things you simply could not talk about, because the concepts
did not exist when the language was invented.

SM: Papago people don't have a word for hello and good-bye. Now that's interesting, but, O.K., they don't have those words because they say they never say "good-bye," because once they have met you, they will always retain you, at least in their thoughts. Now that's a nice way of putting it. On the other hand, if they wanted to talk about electricity, they don't have that word, so they must borrow that in order to use it.

MW: This is like the French trying again this last year to purify their language by rejecting all of the non-French terms, and inventing--they have to have these words, so they invent--new French words for scientific terms. Well, this is just an exercise in futility. One of the beauties of English is that it's such a hodge-podge. It's really a smorgasbord from every language. Whenever something new comes on, we borrow that word for it.

SM: Including from Indians.

MW: Including from Indians and from every culture that we ever come in contact with, and so it is more of an international language than any other language, and this is what makes it alive. It's flexible. You can't crystallize it.

SM: Then there's another whole aspect of this relationship between non-Indians and Indians. The Indian people were here. Have you any idea about how many were on the continent, the area we call the United States of America?

MW: No. There's a lot of dispute about that, and some researchers insist that there was really an extravagant number of millions of them, but I think you can stop and analyze the terrain and the type of life,
why you will discover that that many people couldn't have been supported in the kinds of economic situations that they had developed. I really don't know what the number was. Nobody really knows.

SM: I read figures from pretty responsible people who tried really quite honestly to get at it, 500,000 to 1,000,000 in the area that the United States now covers. Then one Indian person said there were 30,000,000 people here, another said 10,000,000 people here, but this 500,000 to 1,000,000, more authorities seem to use those figures, so a happy medium might be 600,000 to 700,000. Would that be fair?

MW: Well, as far as I know. I've read some very extravagant figures, but I would not agree with them, because I don't think that their simple economics that they had could have supported that size population. I don't have any archaeological evidence of huge populations.

SM: The biggest towns would be probably like Cahokia, with maybe 40,000 people. But it would take an awful lot of towns like that to make up 600,000, and most of them didn't have towns larger than a small village.

MW: Just an aside here. In talking about some of these difficulties of trying to retain or recapture or reinvent Indian culture, I didn't mean to imply that I approved of Anglo destruction, wilful destruction of that culture.

SM: Which was quite deliberate for a long time.

MW: Yes it was.

SM: That's one of the mistakes that we regret. The Europeans came in the 1490's and so on, that was the major impact, and they, being somewhat more technological and aggressive and with this individualistic concept,
they pushed and gradually over the years took over the continent pretty much. Now is that unique in the world's history, that kind of thing?

MW: No, it's one of the oldest stories in history. It's a dynamic, aggressive, expanding people conquering and destroying another culture. It isn't necessarily the technologically advanced either, because one of the dramatic recurrent stories of history is the effect of the nomad on the settled populations, and this is a very destructive influence.

SM: It's the reverse of the advanced people taking over the non-advanced.

MW: Yes. Of course, we talk about Ghengis Khan and that sort of thing, and the destruction of the Roman empire, but even here in Arizona the havoc that the Apache wrought on the peaceful agricultural peoples, the destruction that they caused here. They were not technologically advanced, but it was the old tale of the raiders and the farmers again, which is a very ancient story in history.

SM: The Aztecs moving down from the northwest of Mexico into the more civilized, in fact sophisticated civilizations, and eventually taking them over because they were more rugged, aggressive. So this is an old story.

MW: An interesting story, but kind of sad and depressing.

SM: Oh yes, and gruesome in many cases. Many of our young people in our colleges seem to think that the only time in history that it ever happened was when the "evil" Europeans took over the "gentle, peace-loving" Indians.

MW: Right. And it wasn't exactly that way. The Iroquois, for example, destroyed everybody around them. The Blackfeet, a very destructive
expansive tribe. We have records of them, of Blackfeet travelling clear down into Texas. An amazing people. But smallpox stopped them.

SM: The Iroquois branched out as far south as Tennessee and as far west as Illinois?

MW: Their influence reached a thousand miles, they say.

SM: And they even exacted tribute from these people.

MW: And then the domino effect—you push on one tribe and it pushes on the next one—so their influence was felt clear to the Mississippi.

SM: So this sort of thing was going on between the tribes, one stronger one taking over a weaker one.

MW: Well, even today. The Navajo determination to wipe out the Hopi is just a part of their ancient relationship. The Hopi are all that are left that the Navajo haven't destroyed in that area. The little island of Hopi in the middle, but the Navajo are a big tribe, and they behave like any other strong group. They will go as far as they can. Unless there are restraints placed on them, well, they won't restrain themselves.

SM: They, in fact, are still involved in that land dispute up there on the Hopi and the Navajo Reservation, aren't they? It seems strange that the government would set this up in the first place.

MW: Well, it isn't the first or the last stupid thing they did in Indian history. It comes from not understanding the situation. You sit back there in Washington, and you have no idea, you draw a line on the map, and you don't have any idea what it's going to do to the
real people who live there on that line.

SM: As a result of that 19th century decision that this will be Hopi land, but available for the use of other people, that turned out to be mostly Navajos, it is now entirely Navajo, and so you are just asking for trouble. The way it looks like it might be settled, the Hopis are going to lose half of that, aren't they?

MW: It looks like that.

SM: And the original thing, the way I read it was, it was Hopi land but can be used by other people, but now it's going to become half Hopi land and half Navajo land, roughly something like that. So they will lose.

MW: They'll be lucky to keep that because the Navajos have quite a bit of political clout now. Which brings up another interesting question. You talk about blunders! This is something that we just stumbled into historically, and we kept adding band-aids to try to cure the gangrene, I guess, and it gets worse and worse, that is that the reservation is a political anomaly. It does not fit into our constitutional structure, but there it is. We have it and we're stuck with it, and we keep doing these kinds of little patchwork things to it that simply complicate the whole problem. What is a reservation, politically speaking? Is it part of the state, or is it directly under the federal government? Does it have the rights and responsibilities of a county? Where does it fit in the constitutional structure? And the answer is, it really doesn't fit. It's there, and we just keep working around it, without ever actually solving this problem. Now you have come to the point in Arizona, and it's exaggerated in Arizona more than in any other state, I think, you have this huge area occupied by reservations and the people have now been given the vote, and how do they fit into the structure of the state? And we have this big mess up at Chinle, we have a mess in Apache
County, county supervisors, and we are not solving the problem, and we are still trying to deal with it by putting band-aids on it. But the whole thing is a basic constitutional issue, and I don't see how we can put off forever solving it in some basic way, instead of just tinkering with it.

SM: The Menominees have been struggling to get their reservation back after they were terminated in 1961, as a result of all the talk in this direction in the '50's, and as a small group they seem to be able to do better in the reservation situation than in the non-reservation situation. But if you look at the whole picture of the country, the separating themselves out to be on a reservation is, it seems to me, the opposite of what the Supreme Court is trying to do in Boston with the bussing requirement.

MW: We're not consistent. We're not.

SM: They're opposites. It is deliberately segregating some groups, deliberately trying to desegregate other groups, and it doesn't make much sense that way. It's complex.

MW: But we really do need to find some way to fit the reservation into the Constitution. Is it a political entity at all, or is it ideally just an economic and social entity? It might be much more manageable if it were not a political entity.

SM: Now the Navajos are talking about a Navajo Nation, and they're thinking in terms of politics, aren't they?

MW: I think this is political talk, without any particular. . . .

SM: Several other people, other tribes, have said, "We are, after all, a sovereign nation."
MW: Yeah, well, what's a sovereign nation? You can't seriously say things like that unless you're going to be Alice in Wonderland, you know, and the words mean what you choose them to mean. "Sovereign Nation" has a meaning, and that meaning does not apply to an Indian tribe, and never did, not to our Indian tribes here.

SM: How would you compare, for example, the experience of Europeans moving in onto this continent with other similar movings in around the world?

MW: Alexander and the Greeks did, and the Mongols did.

SM: They moved all over their globe. Compared to those sometimes, it almost seems to me that this was a comparatively gentle take-over, bad as it was, in many individual cases horribly bad, both ways, but the people were not exterminated. There are no more Assyrians, are there?

MW: No, I guess not. Well, you can be very detached and historical about it, but as you point out, we mustn't forget that some really dreadful things were done, and that most of what it proves is that human nature doesn't change very much, and that most of us don't live up to our ideals, and I think you have to keep some kind of perspective. It's very fashionable because it's easy, because it's lazy, and requires no thought; it's very fashionable for people to assume that anybody who doesn't live up to all his ideals is necessarily all bad, and so it's common for people to say America is such a horrible place because we do not live up to what we said in the Preamble to the Constitution, and all of this kind of thing, and Christians are all bad because they don't live up to the tenets of Christianity. Well, of course they don't, but the important thing to remember is that a lot of them try, and that they have got to the point where they have developed those ideals and where they keep them as ideals, and
the ideals do act as restraints and guidance.

SM: And the critics don't live up to their so-called ideals either, do they?

MW: And to say that this country is totally bad because we have failed in so many ways, and therefore other countries must necessarily be lots better, is ridiculous. Look at the treatment of the Soviet Union of its minorities. And while on paper it looks like all the minorities are coddled and protected and have special places and so forth, if you look at the reality, what you find is that the various minorities, the Cossacks and so forth, have all been allowed to keep everything that doesn't matter, like the songs, and some of the language, and the stories and the dances and the costumes, and they can parade those on festive occasions and sing all the little songs, and dance all their little dances, but this sort of thing has no substance; it keeps the people happy, and it gives them the illusion of retaining something, but it's not substantial.

SM: They still must conform to the edicts from the Politburo on all the economic and basic governmental things that are handed down from that dictatorship. And so it is through most of the world, when you look around. Our experiment in democracy here in this country still involves a minority group.

MW: It's an imperfect attempt, but it's still the best attempt so far.

SM: I'm glad you are commenting on some of these things, because it helps to have someone else put these things in their words.

MW: Well, I think each of us has a concept of what the ideal society is, and to some people, if you're more fanatical, well, there is only one perfect society and everybody must conform to that. Now there are
political fanatics, religious fanatics, there are all kinds and small
groups and big groups and whole countries that follow this kind of
thing, but my own personal feeling is that the very best society is
the one which allows the most options to the most people.

SM: This one does, so far, but there have been groups that have been suf­
fering in spite of that, as we know—the Indians and the blacks and
other groups, and, so far as that goes, the Irish at one time, and
so on.

MW: I think one of our greatest virtues is the fact that we are so self­
critical.

SM: Like Gunnar Murdal said,"No country in the world would be crazy
enough to hire an outsider to come in and criticize them, and these
crazy Americans did and even paid me for it."

MW: Although one of my big disappointments at Bicentennial time is this
is such an ideal time for us to really examine where we have been and
where we are going and what's wrong with us, and we're not doing it.
All we're doing, as far as the Bicentennial is concerned, is we're
having little festivals and we're doing all kinds of ridiculous,
meaningless little projects, when we really ought to be soul
searching.

SM: And then thinking how we can make it better somehow. For instance, we
know that we are running out of many of the resources of the world.
Take iron for one. More pertinently, petroleum. It's on everybody's
mind.

MW: But we're not looking beyond the next tankful.

SM: And weirdly enough, sales of big automobiles are increasing rapidly
right now, when nobody knows whether they're going to have the fuel
to propel that vehicle a year from now or not.

MW: And we should be developing solar energy, which is a free source of energy, but--this may be very cynical, it's my personal feeling--we will not do that until somebody has figured out a way for various companies to get a monopoly on it.

SM: There is some effort right here in Arizona to do it, isn't there?

MW: Yeah.

SM: Is it the university that's doing it?

MW: It's a combined effort, I think. We're getting away from Indians.

SM: Yes, we are. Except that this fits the Indian thing, because we have this attitude in mind that when the Indians were here alone everything was fine, and there was no damage to the environment, and so on.

MW: That's another one of my pet peeves. I'm tired of hearing Indians talked about as the great conservationists, which they weren't. Really, they were like the rest of us. When the environment forced them to do certain things to accommodate to the environment, why then they did. But they were very profligate in their use of different resources. All you have to do is look at any buffalo jump to realize how they wasted.

SM: Hundreds killed to harvest a few.

MW: Right. And even now, when they really should know better, just because they have the treaty right to hunt anything at any time in certain places, that doesn't mean they have a moral right to do it,
because the game is no longer there as it was before, and I think they're being very short-sighted to abuse that old treaty privilege.

SM: Like the grazing rights up on the Navajo Reservation. They're still protesting the Bureau of Indian Affairs requiring a reduction in over-grazing, aren't they?

MW: Well, that's a typical stockman anywhere, not just an Indian stockman. You can't talk to a sheepherder or a cattleman any place without listening to a tale of woe, and how he hates the soil conservation service and the forest service and everybody else who tries to restrain him.

SM: How can we solve these problems so we can live together as comfortably as possible, conserving, finding substitutes where we can't conserve, using solar energy, for example, instead of petroleum? We've got to do it.

MW: If we want to survive, I guess we do.

SM: Can we do it with our kind of government?

MW: We're not doing it.

SM: Are we going to have to wait for some dictatorship to take over and hand down edicts to get it done?

MW: Well, the type of government we have is pretty notorious for its inefficiency, but then, dictatorships are even more notorious for inefficiency.

SM: Dictator efficiency is only a myth that some people still cling to. Maybe we've raised more questions and problems than we have answers.
MW: I don't have any answers. The first time that you ever go on to a reservation you just go into shock, and you think, "This is horrible, this is disgusting. Why isn't somebody doing anything? Why is that BIA sitting there all these years and they haven't solved these problems yet?" And then after you've been there a few years, you think, "Well, I don't think there is any answer." And you just kind of give up. I really don't know what the answers are.

SM: I hate to end on that pessimistic note, Marge. Have you got a more optimistic one for the last minute here?

MW: Well, about all I can say is we all lasted this long, maybe we'll make it another day.

SM: And in fact, history has been helpful to show we have survived catastrophies before. They seem more threatening now, but maybe they seemed pretty terribly threatening when the Black Plague swept Europe.

MW: I guess so.

SM: Marge, I thank you very much.