**Taiaiake Alfred – Peace, Power, Righteousness: an indigenous manifesto (1999)**

**Thesis:**

Survival as Aboriginal nations requires a turning away from the values of mainstream North American society, a reaffirmation of traditional ways, and a renewed assertion of self-sufficiency and independence. The institutions of the Canadian state are inherently colonial and must be entirely eschewed in the Indigenous struggle for freedom. Leadership is required to affect this drive to independence.

**Main Arguments:**

Aboriginal leaders working within 'the system' (band council, etc) are not providing real leadership to First Nations, but are merely tools of the state. Figures such as the Grand Chief of the AFN cannot claim to speak on behalf of Aboriginals. These people are actively participating in their own subordination and the maintenance of Canadian state superiority.

The co-optive intent of the current system prevents even well-meaning individuals to effectively advance the interests of their nations. The fact that Aboriginal governments are totally dependent - chartered and funded by the state illustrates this reality.

The state exercises power in a way that dominates Indigenous people. Resistance is insufficient to escape this domination entirely. Traditionalists should focus not on opposing external power, but instead on actualizing their own power and preserving their intellectual independence. Indigenous tradition provides a true alternative to state power.

'Sovereignty', as it has been constructed, is incompatible with traditional Indigenous notions of power, although it has been a useful vehicle for advancing Indigenous claims. It is an exclusionary concept rooted in an adversarial Western notion of power. In Indigenous tradition, there is no absolute authority or coercive enforcement of decisions, no hierarchy, and no separate ruling authority – all features of power entailed by sovereignty.

There is a fundamental divergence between the pursuit of indigenous nationhood and the pursuit of a right of self-government within the legal and structural confines of the state, which is a form of assimilation.

The modern treaty process in British Columbia amounts to an advanced form of control, manipulation, and assimilation. Land claims arise from the mistaken premise that Canada owns the land that is being claimed. This wrong assumption underlines the treaty process.

**Method/Approach:**

Alfred adopts the Rotinohshonni ritual of condolence as the metaphorical framework for his research and writing. The “unconventional structure” which is intended to make the work accessible to a Native audience outside of academia includes lengthy excerpts from key informant interviews. The book as a whole is an “indigenously oriented dialogue” that Western academics are invited to join.

**Contributions:**

This is typically read as the most significant single articulation of Native nationalism. It is also an important work of Canadian post-colonial theory. Perhaps one of its most important contributions is its “unconventional structure”. It is one of the first, if not the first major work that attempts to structure itself around organizing principles emanating from Indigenous knowledge. Scholars such as John Borrows and Stephanie Irlbacher-Fox have followed suit. This turn towards Indigenous methods is a major movement within the discipline (and has generated heated debate, with the most notable challenge coming from Widdowson and Howard in Disrobing the Aboriginal Industry). Though Alfred is doing political theory rather than empirical research, the style in which his work is presented is important in this methodological shift.

It is a challenge to RCAP, coming unlike the other critiques from a nationalist rather than a liberal perspective. It entails a complete rejection of Western political thought – considerably more vigorous than Tully. It is also an important work of Canadian post-colonial theory. Later, Alfred refines his theoretical grounding which he comes to describe as “anarcho-indigenist” in its rejection of political institutional reform as a path to self-determination. One notable follower of his in this respect is Richard Day (Multiculturalism and the History of Canadian Diversity).

**Summary points: pp 1-63, 121-154.**

* Aboriginal self-gov’t is not enough to allow Native people to decolonize; is a trojan horse for capitalist domination and individualism (a form of ‘open colonialism’)
  + Must do more than fill up the ‘political space’, but fill it with traditional indigenous content
* to emerge from the post-colonial crisis requires a rejection of mainstream N. American values, and in place restoring pride in traditions, achieving economic self-sufficiency, developing an independence of mind
  + rejects the idea that Aboriginals can promote change from within colonially-imposed governance structures
* working within a traditional framework, must acknowledge the fact that cultures change and notions of what constitutes traditions will be contested; but can identify common beliefs, values, principles that form a persistent core
  + must reintroduce the principles embedded in ancient teachings and use them to address contemporary problems
* leadership is crucial for Aboriginal communities to rebuild; leaders must rely on persuasive ability to achieve a consensus
  + a return to traditional gov’t rejects Euro-style representative, coercive gov’t and towards one founded on those principles drawn from own culture
  + but contemporary politicians hunger for power, money and status prevents many from seeing what is best for community in the long-run
  + Aboriginal leaders have wavered on their commitment to a goal of freedom from colonial domination due to delayed benefits of such a fight and allure of power under partial self-gov’t regimes
    - ex. Tsawwassen First Nation in the BC treaty process has ‘fallen prey’ to corporate-gov’t political coercion, surrendering claims to traditional territories for monetary compensation and promises of business relationships with non-Aboriginal companies
    - this active collaboration with colonial power in this way cannot be supported within the framework of traditional culture