

W&L After Class: The Lifelong Learning Podcast

With Guest Harvey Markowitz

Episode Transcript

Ruth Candler

Welcome to W&L After Class the Lifelong Learning Podcast. I'm your host Ruth Candler. Our guest today is Harvey Markowitz, emeritus professor of anthropology. Before arriving at W&L in 2003, Harvey taught in South Dakota at Sinte Gleska University, a tribal college on the Rosebud Indian Reservation. Later he spent nine years as an associate and acting director of the D'Arcy McNickle Center for American Indian and Indigenous Studies at the Newberry Library in Chicago. His research interests include interrelationships among American Indian religions, landscapes, culture, histories, and identities. He holds a Ph.D. in the history of Christianity from the Divinity School at the University of Chicago. His dissertation converting the Rosebud Catholic mission and the Sicangu Lakotas, 1886 - 1916, was published in book form and 2018. Harvey, it's great to see you back on campus. Thank you for being with us today.

Harvey Markowitz

Thank you very much for inviting me here.

Ruth Candler

Let's begin at the beginning. What lit the spark? Why did you decide to study anthropology?

Harvey Markowitz

It's an interesting question. And with a whole group of new students just having gone through registration. It brought to mind my first year in college and my meeting with my academic advisor. And we were trying to decide whether I should take introduction to astronomy, or I should take introduction to cultural anthropology. And he looked at me and he said, "You know, I think you'd do better in Introduction to cultural anthropology." And having been to Chicago Public High School, where we didn't have any fancy classes named anthropology or anything like that, or AP classes to be sure at that time, at least. I didn't even know what cultural anthropology was. So, I went to the first class. And I found out that it was the study of different people's cultures or societies throughout space and time and I thought, this might be interesting. And so, I decided to stay in the class. Now one of the books that we had to read was this mammoth ethnography by a guy named Bronislaw Malinowski, called Argonauts of the Western Pacific. And I was I remember myself just lying on my bed as a first-year student, you know, eating pizza or whatever and reading through what some interests what Malinowski had to say about the troll greened in October and Islanders who he was working with. And eventually, after the first, to the first bank of pictures, and for the first time I saw photos of the Trobriand Islanders themselves, and they were dressed in women were dressed in their little grass skirts and men in Hawaiian claws in their village. And then we're celebrating Sagali, which is a redistribution feast for the Trobriand Islanders. And it suddenly struck me that these people got up every morning. Just as I do, just as all my friends did, all my relatives did, everybody I know did and takes the world for granted. And it was such a

different world than the world that I took for granted. And that just amazed me how such different worlds could exist among different peoples taken for granted. And the reality of a pluralistic cultural universe struck me hard for the first time. And I was hooked on anthropology.

Ruth Candler

During this time while you were studying anthropology, an advisor encouraged you to visit a Reservation in South Dakota to translate German diaries. And it's surprising to me that one could find German diaries on an Indian Reservation in South Dakota. Would you explain what Germans were doing in South Dakota and tell us more about their diaries and their connection to the missions?

Harvey Markowitz

Yes, it is surprising in a way unless you know something about the history of American Indian policy. At the time when these Germans were on the Rosebud Lakota reservation. In South Dakota, it was Dakota actually at that time it hadn't been divided between North and South Dakota and they had been assigned by the government or by their, their superiors, they were talking about here about German Jesuits, who were missionaries. And they were to missionize, the Lakota of that reservation. And so anyway, you had a group of German missionaries who had just been kicked out of their homeland in Germany by Bismarck and the culture camp, and they were sent to different parts of the world, mostly England and then the United States. And some of these Jesuits ended up being missionaries throughout North America among Indians, and a certain group of them were assigned to the Rosebud Lakota reservation. And a number of them again kept diaries of their experiences, the reservation and the different people they had met, and their successes but mostly their failures and trying to get these groups of people to see the light and change their, what were considered by the missionaries and Americans in general as, savage habits and pagan habits to civilized American ways of being and again, Catholicism for them. And so, they kept copious some of them at least kept copious diaries and notes on again, you know, they're, they're difficult difficulties and their successes.

Ruth Candler

Around What year was this?

Harvey Markowitz

This was when they first arrived on the reservation, and they built St. Francis mission. This was an 1886. They came to the United States a little before that they were working in other places, but they came to Rosebud in 1886, to do their work of us what was called at the time, civilizing and Christianizing. American Indians in today's lingo, we would call this basically social and religious assimilation.

Ruth Candler

During that time, on the reservation, you decided to go to divinity school. And I'm curious to know more about what led you as a Jewish man to a Christian Divinity School and what your experience was like?

Harvey Markowitz

Yes. A lot of people ask that in the Divinity School. But first and foremost, I was trained as an anthropologist, I knew a lot about the Lakotas by that time, their social life, their cultural life. But I did

not know very much about Catholicism at that time. And so that was a real loophole. In my study of the relationship between the Catholic Church, the mission, and the Lakotas. And unless I knew better the theology, the missiology, of the Missionaries -- omit] of the Jesuits, and particularly were in the Franciscan Sisters who came a little bit later, I was not going to be able to write a decent at that time dissertation on what I was interested in finding out and what I was interested in finding out was the conceptions that the missionaries had the Dakotas, and what they thought Indians who they thought Indians were and what they should become, and who the Lakota is made of all this going on. Why were these missionaries here? And why did they want us to give up our valuable cultural and religious heritage? And so, it was emphatic. I mean, it was just necessary that I seek out a divinity school to learn more about Catholicism. And so, one time I was in Chicago, I made a trip to the UChicago, where there were some very good people and I talked to a professor there named Martin Marty and then David Tracy, who was a Catholic theologian, and they encouraged me to come and study at the university there. And so, I took a leave from the Mission St. Francis mission, and I headed off for Chicago. And I had a great time there, I learned an incredible amount from these very gifted teachers, eternally grateful for them.

Ruth Candler

The assignment on the reservation was supposed to be only for two to three months and you ended up living there on and off for 12 years. What led you to stay?

Harvey Markowitz

Well, okay, um, I had not originally come to Rosebud to do a study of the relationship between the Lakotas and the Catholic church, the Catholic mission. As a good anthropologist, what I had come to do was more of an anthropological study of contemporary moral concepts and behavior among the cultures. And we've already talked a little bit about the diaries, what changed my mind in terms of the orientation of my dissertation. And as it turned out, my life was what was in those diaries and I got more and more interested in how the missionaries were understanding the Lakotas understanding their goals as missionaries among this group of people. And again, on the other side, understanding as far as possible from the sources reading between the lines, what the Lakotas were making of this experience on their side, my original assignment, or my original stay. Originally elongated from two to three months after the superior the mission, a wonderful, wonderful guy named Robert Hilbert found out what he was interested in doing. And he encouraged me and he said, Well, you know, you could become what we call this an anthropological consultant for the pastoral staff. And, then you could give talks to the pastoral staff. And you could also work in the museum with an older man named George Tasunkawakita which means George "horse-looking". And George was, had just lost his wife, and he was a little bit lonely. And so, the superior took me over to the museum. And he introduced me to George was about 70 years old at that time, it was I wouldn't say love at first sight, but there was a real attraction. And he decided that he was going to make me in his words a "Lakota hoksila", which means an Indian boy, have a Lakota boy. And part of that was teaching me the language. And part of that was putting his family to work, which, you know, surprised them a little bit, but I think they got to like it, about taking me to various ceremonies, religious ceremonies, Lakota ceremonies, and taking me the powwows. And just having me hang around and learn as much as possible. The subsequent months and two years, I got more and more attached to the horse bookings in Georgia in particular. Eventually, not very much longer than two years, George was diagnosed with inoperable cancer. And instead of

doing what a typical family might do, a non-Indian family, his daughter's oldest daughter, may took him into her house and gave him the back bedroom. And so, he could, instead of staying in a hospital, he could stay with her and have relatives visit him all the time. And so, this went on, and cancer got worse. And the day the night that he was destined to pass away. There must have been about 50 people from that family in this little house just crowding around, and they had notified me to come and I was there and he was George was in and out of consciousness and what he was doing was incredibly important for an of a Lakota elder. He was doing well Coulter's phrase as wowahunkukiya, which means to lecture younger people on the ways that they should live. And he would go again in and out of consciousness. And at one point, he said, I know you all know this already, but I've taken Harvey as my son. And a little time after that he finally you know, passed away. And after the immediate period of grief, or everybody was crying and broken up, of course, what George's oldest son, Collins did was he took me around to everybody in the room, and introduce me using my kinship relationship with the term with a kinship term that I was understood to be vis a vis this person. And that was an amazing gift. That's as closest I think I've mentioned before, to a conversion experience that I'll ever have in my life. And this is because the most important thing a Lakota can give to another human being is a relationship. And he had given me his family. And that is, basically how that initial period of two to three months got larger what I did with my time there and why I wanted to stay there as long as possible because it was a very fulfilling life with people that had taken me in and given me incredibly valuable and loving gifts

Ruth Candler

That does sound very fulfilling. Did they give you an Indian name as family?

Harvey Markowitz

Yeah, this is a big joke. Kind of as a funny joke. But I was studying Lakota with George and we talk, he just talked to one another and then we use dictionary books, everything we've got our hands on to help us, you know, with the lessons and we were using this textbook and one of the students mentioned in the textbook, in a lesson, was named Twila Buyamani. Which means walks with noise. Buya Noisy. Mani Walker. And that just broke him up. You know? I think that's going to be your name.

Ruth Candler

Say it for us again.

Harvey Markowitz

Buyamani, And again Buyamani, couldn't you have named me "crazy horse" or something like that? Or brave, you know, but sounds pretty good.

Ruth Candler

Sounds like a great sense of humor as well. Yes. I love that story. And to think that you'd only be there for a few months, and you ended up years later with an extended family. Probably not what you thought you were signing up for.

Harvey Markowitz

Not in the beginning. Yes, yeah. George was if you don't mind me coming in, George was a great, great teacher in so many different ways. And so, I was working in the museum with him. And there were cases with a lot of Indian materials artifacts, and he would take me around to give me the Lakota names for these artifacts, and he would talk about their uses. And so, one of the artifacts we came across was a lance that had been covered with river otter fur and I said "Well, why did they cover with river otter fur," and he said, "Well, that was to make horses fast, when they were traveling in water when they entered a river." So, I said though, fur[ed-omit] represented speed. And he thought for a second. And he said, "kind of, but no, it was speed." And what he was trying to communicate there was incredibly important. It was not a symbolic reference to speed it was not, you know. metaphoric. Not a reference to speed. The fur itself, the otter skin itself communicated speed. So, it was sacred power. And that is so much of a difference between Jewish and Christian and Islam understandings of the nature of different beings in the world. And the Lakota and most American Indian understandings of the nature of beings in the world, each being has a kind of power. And it can communicate this power if appealed to and pray to in a certain way. And so that is one of the central tenants of Lakota belief and practice religious belief and practice.

Ruth Candler

You spoke of learning the Lakota language with George, and you're fluent in Lakota. But you've also said that fewer and fewer people speak it today, why is preserving the language vital to the Lakota identity?

Harvey Markowitz

Yes, and it has become a hub of importance to the Lakotas and other Indian groups, as well, trying to maintain their languages because they are disappearing at an incredibly rapid speed. And the importance is, and I think many people understand this, maybe not at a conscious, but a pre-conscious level, is that so much of what we understand about the nature of the world, is communicated through our language to us. And it's structured in our language to us. And in a way, different cultures structure the world differently. Again, pluralistic worldviews are differentiated from the differences in their languages, and how they divide the world up into different categories. And they relate these categories in different ways to one another. And as part of Indian policy in the name of assimilation, or once again, Christianization. And civilization, the goal of the federal government was to basically end the language and basically teach all the students how to speak English, in order to integrate them into the mainstream. They did this a lot of times and very heavy-handed and brutal ways. And this is getting to be more and more recognized. If people read about boarding schools, Indian boarding schools, kids were punished pretty, pretty heavily, sometimes for speaking their native languages. And this was a lesson, a psychological lesson that came through to the students. And so, when George was teaching me the language, and speaking to me Lakota, one time one of his grandchildren came up, and the grandchild was really attentive to what we were talking about. And he seemed to want to be part of this. And so, he said something about this. And he said, "No, no, no, you, you shouldn't learn this."

Ruth Candler

Meaning that George was saying that his grandchild should not learn the language.

Harvey Markowitz

You should learn English. And this was before again, they have an emphasis on learning or maintaining Indian language assistance before the big move at set in. And, and so I asked George, I said, "you know, you put all this effort into teaching me, Lakota, you know," and George looked at me said, "Well, you know, what you want, you're an adult. I want my grandchild to have a greater chance of success as possible." And I thought this is really a tragedy.

Ruth Candler

Especially because, you know, you had said upon his deathbed that he was passing along stories and that was so important to him. Yet here is the language that sounds like it's dying out. Yeah. And he wasn't preserving that.

Harvey Markowitz

He did not. And this is you know when you think about it, this is not something that is unique to Indian people. You know how many groups come over from Europe in the early 1900s, pre-WWII, and insisted that their kids learn English and refuse to speak their languages, you know, in front of them and because they would succeed in their new home, if they had a good grasp of their, their new language, you know, language, English. It's a tragedy that extends beyond Indian people, but not too many other languages are facing extinction, like American Indian languages.

Ruth Candler

So, are you? Are you still in touch with a horse-looking family? And is there anyone within that family that you still speak Lakota with?

Harvey Markowitz

Yes, I am in touch. It's mostly through the web, you know, email. They are modern, Lakotas, and Facebook. And so pretty much every day, I got a message from basically the grandkids and great-grandkids of the elders that I worked with, originally, George and his again, and his children and their children and grandchildren. And yeah, I do to the extent possible, try to use Lakota with them. Some of the kids and grandkids have a passive knowledge of the language. So, when they hear the language, they could identify what's being said, but it's harder for them to be active in it and, and use it to construct conversations, you know, which is really a shame because so much of the humor, and so much of the day-to-day life was captured in that language.

Ruth Candler

Well, gender and how we talk about it is a fascinating conversation in society today. Is gender an important component of the Lakota language?

Harvey Markowitz

Yes, it is and it isn't. It's not highlighted as you would see. For example, in English, where pronouns are gender marked, there is no division between he and she pronouns in Lakota. That's not a distinction. But there are different ways for men and women to speak. Traditionally, there were more rules. But there's still some rules, especially in formal talking, when you're giving a speech, for example, how a man and woman will speak. And these are communicated a lot of times in what are called in linguistics,

and that's how you end a sentence or a statement. And so, men, if they were traditionally asking a question would end with the enclitic "hwo". And women would end in "Hey", this kind of has broken down. So, men now use, "hey", quite a bit. And so, it isn't kind of, you don't get the raised eyebrow if you're using "hey", and you're a man, I mean, that doesn't really follow anymore. Another example is when men are ending a statement, though use and this still exists "yelo" and women "ksto", and that still is maintained. And there are a number of other enclitics, which basically are employed, both formally and for the most part, informally, as appropriate gender-constructed language. So, while you don't have pronouns that distinguish male from female, you do have these other ways of speaking.

Ruth Candler

Sounds confusing.

Harvey Markowitz

Well, it can be you know, and it does give rise when you're learning the language. Very interesting mistakes, and I've made some whoppers, and so anyway, but people just take it as good-humored. And it there's a great example I could give you when a friend of mine was getting going to get married. A male I had just learned the word for married. "hignaton", and I'm going to use this as quickly as possible because you know, this is good. I'm going to be learning, building my language, and people will be impressed with. So, I made the statement that I was going to, hignaton and everybody went, epold women go, "hoo hee", which is an expression. And man, they just laughed. And they said "when a men man gets married, which means take a wife, as opposed to taking a husband". And so, you know, like in any language regarding you know, the person is going to make a load of mistakes.

Ruth Candler

Sounds like you've provided entertainment for those around. So, I'd like to talk for a moment about the terminology that we use when referring to indigenous tribes in North America. I've heard some people use the term Native American, while others use the term American Indian, and still, others say First Nations. What is the term scholars use today?

Harvey Markowitz

Yeah, there's a big division in the United States. In Canada, scholars mostly use First Nation, and in the United States, there's a division between using American Indian versus Native American and Native American to make up for Columbus's bad directions. So, what I found out, you know, just experientially, you know, is that if it's a choice between the two terms, most of the people that I talked to preferred American Indian, to Native American, for various reasons, a, they had their own reasons for doing this. But it's important to insist that the term that they preferred was their tribal name. You know, Lakotas would prefer, rather than being referred to as Native American or American Indian would prefer to be referred to as Lakotas. And this underscores a very, very important point. And it's a social and political point that's very important for non-Indians, especially to remember is that both Native American and American Indian are terms that are foreign. And I mean, these were constructions by people outside their traditions, most American Indian groups, tribes, another term applied to American Angler beings think of themselves as independent from other tribes. And they have their own creation stories, they have their own relationship with their spirits and gods and they have their own relationship with their landscapes. And so, it's very important to demarcate that specialness with their tribal name, as

opposed to this generic name. Now they recognize the importance of generic names when it comes to social and political issues that as a bloc as a political bloc, you get more representation if you have this group vying for certain rights, but in terms of their own existence or own day-to-day existence, I believe that most people in different Indian groups would be preferred to be referred to by their tribal names.

Ruth Candler

So, if you can learn someone's tribal name, you should use that. In higher education today, we often hear speakers acknowledge the original people of the land on which they stand. What do Lakotas and other tribal communities think about such acknowledgments?

Harvey Markowitz

They, as I understand it again, and again, I'm not native, I wasn't born Lakota. And so, everything that I think I've learned has been a gift from talking with other people talking with Lakota people and talking with other Indian groups that I've worked with. They have a close bond with their homeland. And it's because they see their connection with their homeland, and everything in their homeland, their landscape, as being bounded on this web of relationships, which is a moral web and so, they understand the relationship and the universe as a large as being constructed of an intricate number and an innumerable number of moral social relationships because in Lakota they have the key phrase "mitakua oyasin" which means all my relations. And what's meant there is not that you're just not just talking about your human relations, but you're talking about everything. And for Lakotas, traditionally, at least, that included what we would refer to as inanimate objects, rocks, rivers, the wind. So, everything, once again, has a spirit, has a sacred power. And again, if you live in a harmonious universe, you can tap using the correct rites and rituals for this power. For ceremonies, for example, those who have chosen to stand outside this relationship and become non-kin, because of their behavior are considered enemies. The landscape, the homeland of the cultures, especially, I'm talking mostly about Lakotas. But I think this applies to most if not all American groups or Indian groups is basically a consequence of this vision of the universe as being based in a set of moral relationships. And this is the way that they, you know, understand, again, their interactions with their homelands. And so, it's important not only that they think about this when they're doing their ceremonies when they're doing their prayers. But you know, to the extent that outsiders have done damage to their landscapes, and alienated them from their landscapes has been to the detriment and the destruction of these relationships. And even though Lakotas were on these little blocks of reservations now, they appreciate the fact that these areas contain segments of their homelands their traditional homelands. And so, they're grateful for that, I think, and this, again, goes through most American Indian groups, except for those who, unfortunately, in the 1830s, were removed to Oklahoma by President Jackson. And they lost that intimate connection with their original landscape. And so, the fact that institutions like W&L and more and more institutions are acknowledging the importance of the relationships that Indian people had with their traditional landscapes is so important. I believe, you know, if it's done authentically, and not just as "yeah we got to do this."

Ruth Candler

Yeah, check the box. Well, we've talked about land acknowledgments, we've talked about learning tribal names, are there any other sensitivities that we should be aware of?

Harvey Markowitz

Well, there's always ..., yes. You know, of course, this isn't a native language. But you know, the big one, up until a year or two ago, was Redskins.

Ruth Candler

Yes, that's been changed.

Harvey Markowitz

That eventually changed. But it took a hell of a long time for that to change. And that was an affront. I mean, that was an incredible affront to Indian people now naming a ball team, hockey team or whatever after a tribe. You know, sometimes the tribes really liked that, for example, Chicago Blackhawks. I was, you know, but Indian Joe. No, you know, these demeaning uses, not only of words, but of actions like the tomahawk chop. The Atlanta Braves, you know, are just incredibly demeaning.

Ruth Candler

And have they done away with that? Have they done?

Harvey Markowitz

They haven't? They haven't. Okay. They should, they should, is really an offensive and offensive thing.

Ruth Candler

You would think with all of the discussion surrounding the changing of the Redskins name, that other other teams would have had those conversations too.

Harvey Markowitz

So, you know, this is not just professional ball. I mean, this goes to colleges, universities, high schools can't tell how many high schools are named, you know, the warriors, you know, like, you know, so it just kind of goes throughout the system. And there's more change going on, I think, at the professional level than there is at lower levels of sports. So, it's just pervasive. Yeah.

Ruth Candler

Well, thank you for helping us better understand that. As you've said, language and its preservation are so important. And I'd like to take a few minutes now and expose our listeners to some Lakota language for our lightning round today. Would you help us here Lakota? I'd like to give you some English words and ask you for the Lakota translations.

Harvey Markowitz

Okay

Ruth Candler

Alright, so “hello”.

Harvey Markowitz

“how”, except for a woman. This is one of the distinctions “how” for man, “huh” for women.

Ruth Candler

Okay. How about my name is Harvey, what is your name?

Harvey Markowitz

Harvey emaciyapi

Ruth Candler

Please, and thank you.

Harvey Markowitz

Pilyamayaye

Ruth Candler

Pilyamayaye

Harvey Markowitz

Pilyamayaye

Harvey Markowitz

Would be you know, “thank you”. And “please” is kind of difficult. It doesn't really have a direct translation. It's not that there are occasions that we would say calls for a “please”. But there are kinds of endings again and critics which communicate, please like in a command a man will use, “yo”, but when he's trying to say please he'll use “yeah” [“ye’]. And so that's a way that you would say please, you'd make a statement and then you add kind of a “please” onto it by this inquisitive “yeah”.

Ruth Candler

How about “I'm sorry”?

Harvey Markowitz

“Cantemasica”

Ruth Candler

“How are you today?”

Harvey Markowitz

“Toske yaun he”

Ruth Candler

“Where did you come from?”

Harvey Markowitz

“Tuktel etahan yahi he”

Ruth Candler

“Farewell”

Harvey Markowitz

“Toksa ake wiciyankinktelo”

Ruth Candler

I was going to try and repeat that to say, but I don't think I'm going to attempt to

Harvey Markowitz

You can say, **Toksa**

Ruth Candler

Harvey, thank you so much for joining us today. We appreciate having you here.

Harvey Markowitz

“Pilamayayelo”, thank you very much.

Ruth Candler

And thank you to our listening audience for tuning in today. We hope you'll visit our website wlu.edu/lifelong where you can find our show notes as well as a truly great selection of other W&L Lifelong Learning opportunities. Take a look and until next time, let's remain together not unmindful of the future.