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[Introduction to] Red Prophet: The Punishing Intellectualism of Vine Deloria Jr.

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RED PROPHET

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FOREWORD BY BOBBY BRIDGER
AFTERWORD BY SAM SCINTA

Preface

In January 2005, just a few months before he walked on, Vine Deloria Jr. became the second recipient of the American Indian Visionary Award tendered by *Indian Country Today*, the leading Native news organization. He was proud of this recognition, and although he never said as much, I believe he actually preferred being the *second* rather than the first person to receive this honor.

Why? Because Deloria, with his unparalleled activist and scholarly career, always felt he worked somewhat at a distance from the originating source of true sovereignty. Thus, he held the deepest respect for individuals such as the first Visionary Award recipient, his friend, the late Billy Frank Jr. (Nisqually), a man who clearly embodied the natural sovereignty that emanates from living within, depending on, and tirelessly defending sacred lands, waterways, and the species connected to them. Deloria felt that strong, resolute Native people like Billy were most deserving of such recognition.

Most of Deloria's adult life was spent in unrelenting, prodigious, and largely successful efforts to provide grounded Native individuals and their governments with the intellectual, theoretical, philosophical, and substantive arguments necessary to support their inherent personal and national sovereignty. His work with Billy Frank Jr. and brilliant Native strategist Hank Adams (Assiniboine) during the famous "Fish Wars" of the 1970s, which culminated in the treaty-affirming *Boldt* decision, perfectly exemplified the powerful partnerships that should exist between academics and activists. Deloria was keenly aware that this em-

brace of full-throttle sovereignty was the foundation for meaningful nation-to-nation and intergovernmental relationships, both of and between Native nations, and between Native nations and non-Native governments at all levels.

Deloria was undeniably one of the most prolific Indigenous writers in history. He authored, coauthored, edited, and coedited nearly 30 books, more than 200 articles and essays, and delivered an untold number of keynotes, lectures, interviews, and congressional testimonials. Equally as impressive as his scholarly output was the range of intellectual disciplines he traversed with aplomb, including work encompassing law, religion and theology, natural and social sciences, literary criticism, education, anthropology, paleontology, philosophy, and political science.

He also held important positions outside the Academy, heading the National Congress of American Indians (NCAI) in the 1960s, and serving on many boards. He played a leading role in developing and leading critically important organizations such as the Institute for the Development of Indian Law, which he founded, and others that sought to improve the quality of life for Natives and non-Natives. Now, more than ten years after his death, he has become an iconic figure, something that would have both unsettled and amused him.

To me, Deloria was much more than the sum of his public accomplishments. For twenty-five years he was my mentor and my friend, helping to shape me into a scholar and a responsible human being. His personal influence for me began with his recognition of and advocacy for my nation—the Lumbee of North Carolina. He and his aunt, the noted ethnographer and linguist Ella Deloria, studied and supported our people beginning in the 1940s, at a time when other national Native figures and organizations disparaged the Lumbee and our efforts to acquire full federal recognition.

Our paths first crossed in a sustained way in 1980 because of his work with the Lumbee Nation. Deloria had long been friends with the late Helen Maynor Scheirbeck (Lumbee), who was herself a brilliant strategist who worked tirelessly on behalf of Native peoples. At Helen's recommendation, Deloria recruited me to a new MA degree program he had developed at the University

of Arizona, a two-year terminal degree in political science that focused on training Native students in the quirks, contradictions, and nuances of federal Indian policy and law.

I became part of a small cohort of Native students, thrilled at the possibility of studying with a man we affectionately, and with some trepidation, referred to as "the Godfather" of Native politics, policy, and law. We jokingly called ourselves "Vine's Disciples," but there was an element of truth to this moniker because we were aware of our profound privilege and opportunity to study with the most gifted intellectual of our time. Each of us was ready to learn and accept what was required in order to become active and informed defenders of Indigenous nationhood.

Vine had a pedagogical style all his own—a combination of acrid wit, biting commentary, and relentless questioning. Many found his methods domineering, but, if you could get past the curmudgeonly, off-putting exterior and prove your serious intent to learn, he was a generous teacher, giving time and sincere consideration on how to identify and hone each person's unique skills. Those who finished this intellectually rich and rigorous program left feeling prepared to engage our nations on multiple fronts, armed with research and writing skills that would enable us to continue to mature in our chosen fields. He exercised a profound influence on all those he loved, mercilessly critiqued, and chose to strategize with.