

(Untitled)

By, Joseph R. Orozco

When one asks a Native Radio station manager what the major problem Native Radio faces, they often say it is financial stability. To those embroiled in day to day operations, technical training, quality staff retention, buying quality equipment, and the lack of administrative support may also come to mind.

However, I think, such issues are only symptoms of a larger ongoing problem. The major problem facing Native Radio, is the same that faces Native Newspapers. The major problem is inherited oppression. Our own tribal governments, our own tribal people are the major barriers to the free exercise of the First Amendment by Native media.

Over the generations Native people have learned to not trust each another. We have learned that it is possible to bully others to go along with us. One of the great fallacies we continue to commit, usually at the tribal council level, is that if we keep control of the amount and types of information that goes out, we maintain control and protection of our destiny. Whether we are ready or not, we are in the informational age. The world is now based on the free flow of information. Those who harbor this resource to themselves, will find themselves alone or in very sparse company. The people deserve and demand to know all truths and they will find means by which to gain such knowledge.

Looking at what has happened to our people historically shows that what happened was not our ancestors' first choice. However, it is our people's responsibility to stop oppressing each other today. Many of our tribes have gone through lengthy court battles for land, resources, subsistence rights, legislative actions and a myriad of other important issues. Tribal councils took measures to silence journalistic news media coverage, as a way to feel secure. In the 1970s we experienced a need for secrecy as tribal departments competed for federal funds against their counterparts from other tribes. These actions were expressed as important as the CIA's classification of "National Security." Such actions emphasized the need to maintain control over all tribal entities. When radio came to the "rez," it was scooped into the same net. If it is a tribal entity, then tribal people must maintain control. Did this mean all tribal people? Or, does this mean just those tribal people who convinced others to allow them to take control?

Another look at our historical past shows that every tribe honored the right for every person to have a say. This may have meant that people have the right to speak their minds, without interruptions. This did not mean that those who spoke the loudest or the harshest got their way, as much is the case today.

This meant that everyone had the right to tell their version of reality. After all had spoken, a decision was made based upon what was heard. More details were regarded than this simple example. In relation to the purpose of radio on the Rez, one can liken it's function to that of the Talking Stick, the Talking Circle, or even the Mediator, or the go-between.

People need radio and newspapers to learn as many versions of reality as they can. People need access to radio and newspapers to tell their stories and share their insights. Some tribal governments and some tribal people bar some people from access to radio or newspapers for fear of what they could say or might say. There are healthy tribal governments that do support the media and the exchange of ideas. Perhaps more councils will follow their example. As the American statesman, Adli Stevenson once said, "The greatness of a government can be measured by the extent in which it invites and encourages public scrutiny."