

OVERCOMING EDUCATIONAL RACISM IN THE COMMUNITY COLLEGE

Creating Pathways to Success for Minority
and Impoverished Student Populations

EDITED BY ANGELA LONG

Foreword by Walter G. Bumphus

HIGHER EDUCATION / RACE & ETHNICITY

"Persistent equity gaps threaten the future of our society. . . . [This volume] draws upon the perspectives of our best researchers and leaders to remind us of the urgency of the problems and to identify promising practices that can make a difference."

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"[This book] shows us the complex challenges and ripe opportunities we face in ensuring that all students, especially underserved, underrepresented, and minority students, across this nation achieve a postsecondary education."

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"A vital resource for all Native American educators entrusted with the crucial task of improving minority retention rates at our community colleges."

—**Governor Bill Anoatubby**, *Chickasaw Nation, Oklahoma*

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VOICE OF THE NATIONAL LEADER

American Indian Voice: A National Perspective

Cynthia Lindquist, Ta'Sunka Wicahpi Win (Star Horse Woman)

Tell me and I'll forget. Show me, and I may not remember. Involve me, and I'll understand.

—Native American saying

Cindy

I am obligated to explain a few things so that the reader might better understand who I am and where I came from before I became a tribal college president in 2003. Star Horse Woman is my second Dakota name, given to me by a medicine man from Canada at a point in time when I was working for the Indian Health Service at the national level and on a traditional medicine initiative for the agency. My elders taught me that when I introduce myself with my Dakota name, I must explain that I speak the truth as I understand it and that I speak from my heart. A Dakota *win* (woman) does not put herself “out front” or tout herself as a leader, let alone as a national leader. Of the seven Dakota values of life, humility is greatly admired and still recognized as an important characteristic one should exemplify.

I am a member of the Spirit Lake Dakota Nation, and I was asked (by elders) to apply to become the president of Cankdeska Cikana (Little Hoop) Community College. I had worked for my tribe off and on over the years and have a public administration background. Cankdeska Cikana Community College (CCCC) had been put on accreditation probation in late 2002, and by the time they hired me in the fall of 2003, the college had 18 months until the comprehensive visit by the Higher Learning Commission to restore its accreditation status. We were successful and granted 10 years' accreditation. Having grown up in the era without plumbing and running water on the reservation and also as the eldest of 13 children, I am very good at cleaning

up messes. However, I do have a master's degree in public administration; a doctorate in education leadership; and extensive development, management, and political work experience.

As a tribal member and now as an elder, I believe I have greater compassion and responsibility to "help my people." In being a tribal college president, my passion is derived from my students as well as from our community. It is a most challenging role, with complex issues and minimal resources, and yet, tribal colleges and universities (TCUs) do phenomenal work. If we (tribal colleges) were not here, our people would not be college students, nor would they have access to opportunities to help themselves, to dream and aspire, and to hope for things to be better. TCU success is not mainstream success. The following chapter is written with these perspectives in mind, as well as insights from my 30-plus years working with Native people and particularly my experiences from the past 12 years as a tribal college president.

Historical Context, Treaties, and Education

First and foremost, it must be understood that American Indians and Alaska Natives (AI/ANs) have a unique relationship with the United States of America. It is a relationship that is embedded in the colonization and settling on the homelands of America's indigenous people. This relationship is neither honestly explained in history books nor taught accurately in the classrooms. It is rooted in treaty law, legal wranglings, and federal policy meant to "deal" with the Indians (or the "Indian problem") but primarily to take ownership of the lands. This relationship is political—not race-based—and it continues today, but it is greatly misunderstood by the American public and compounded by stereotypes like "free" education or health care, Indians are lazy drunks, we get checks every month, or are now millionaires from the casinos. Besides the stereotyped beliefs of the American public, AI/ANs are less than 1% of the population and thus are politically marginalized. There are many documented disparities in Indian country that include health, education, and socioeconomic status. Most of the Indian reservations are located in geographic areas that are isolated, have severe weather extremes, and generally are at double the U.S. poverty rate of 14%.

It must be understood that AI/ANs are members (citizens) of their respective tribes, but we are also state citizens and citizens of the United States (per federal legislation granting that status in 1924). This tri-citizenship can be confusing, and at times it muddles the "who is responsible?" question. States often push off to the federal government anything that deals with Native people within the state. Tribes continue the struggle to have the federal

government honor the treaty provisions that were promised, and, of course, the federal response has been piecemeal at best or nonexistent at worst. Not one treaty has been honored, and the various federal policy eras (currently self-determination) have only provided themes for issues that require a significant infusion of resources, let alone a focused and comprehensive response.

Education was one of the items promised in the treaties by the federal government in exchange for the taking of the land, minerals, and other natural resources, as well as for the confinement of Native people to the reservations. During the era of treaty-making, there were various philosophies as to "what to do with the Indians," which included termination, containment, and assimilation. Education was one of the "tools" toward the latter goal of assimilation. The education of the indigenous people was cruel in that the heart of it was to break up the family. Children were taken away to various boarding schools, and churches were assigned geographic areas to convert the "heathens." There are many writings on this subject, but it is important for educators and education policymakers to understand this history and the context of "Indian" education. Today's cultural perspective on education is a coercive tool to punish or change people; AI/ANs are still suspicious of Western education. It is only recently that my tribe—Spirit Lake Dakota—has begun to embrace education as a "good" thing and the bridge to helping us address the plethora of historical trauma issues and today's devastating poverty. Being an educated Indian does not diminish or negate my being Dakota.

History of Tribal Colleges and Universities

There is a lack of a coordinated focus on AI/AN college students due to the complexity of Indian issues as well as differences among higher education institutions. In the 1960s, within the context of the many social awakenings and unrest occurring in the United States, and because of the failure of Native students at mainstream institutions, many gifted and visionary people conceived the idea to create a tribal higher education system. This is a system that is controlled and managed by Natives and has as its core mission the teaching, learning, and perpetuation of the respective indigenous culture and language.

According to federal law, a "tribal college or university" is an institution that qualifies for funding under the Tribally Controlled College or University Assistance Act of 1978 (25 U.S.C. § 1801 et seq.). To qualify for funding under the TCU Act, an institution of higher education must (a) be chartered by the governing body of a federally recognized Indian tribe or

consortium of tribes; (b) have a governing board composed of a majority of American Indians; (c) demonstrate adherence to stated goals, a philosophy, or a plan of operation that is directed to meeting the needs of American Indians; (d) if in operation for more than one year, have students, a majority of whom are American Indian; and (e) be accredited, or have achieved candidacy status, by a nationally recognized accreditation agency or association.

Of the 37 existing TCUs, 34 are designated as land-grant colleges through the Equity in Educational Land-grant Status Act of 1994 and are commonly known and referred to as the "1994s" within the U.S. Department of Agriculture system and by other land-grant institutions.

TCUs Today

Supporting and strengthening tribal identity is the core of a tribal higher education system that was established in 1968, when Diné College was founded as the first tribal college. There is a very rich, yet frustrating, close to 50-year history for today's 37 TCUs. These institutions vary in size (from 50 students to up to 2,000 students), focus (liberal arts, education, technical, and sciences), and location (rural reservation, urban, desert, frozen tundra, woodlands, or the Great Plains). All TCUs offer associate degrees, 13 offer multiple bachelor's degrees, and 5 offer master's degree programs (American Indian Higher Education Consortium [AIHEC], 2014).

The current tribal college system has 77 campus sites in 16 states and covers approximately 80% of Indian country. TCUs serve about 19,300 degree-seeking students (full- and part-time) plus another 50,000 through community-based education and support programs. Most of our institutions are reservation based and have been chartered by our respective tribal governments, though there are several anomalies, such as Haskell University, Southwest Indian Polytechnic Institute (SIPI), or the Institute of American Indian Arts (IAIA), which are federal institutions. Each tribal college serves its respective tribal community; thus the majority of students are AI/ANs (AIHEC, 2012).

TCUs serve a unique role as rural and urban education providers, and all have open enrollment policies. Nationally, 20% of the students attending TCUs are non-Indian. Tribal institutions are public, nonprofit institutions accredited in the same manner and by the same regional accrediting body as state institutions. The TCUs receive federal funding only for *American Indian students* (defined as students who are enrolled members or the biological children of enrolled members of federally recognized tribes). TCUs are authorized by Congress to receive \$8,000 per Indian student; however,

they actually receive only \$6,355 per Indian student (fiscal year 2015). In comparison, another minority-serving institution (MSI) that receives federal operating funds, Howard University, is funded at nearly \$22,000 per student, not limited by race/ethnicity.

TCU Leadership

One becomes president of a TCU by applying. It is that simple, and yet it is also complicated in that most tribes and tribal organizations have Indian preference hiring policies. While being a tribal member where the TCU is located is a good thing, it can also be very political and stressful. TCU presidents must be adept at managing politics, including the art of communication in keeping the tribal government, respective boards of regents/trustees, and various stakeholder groups informed. A TCU president must also be very good at financial management and networking the very limited resources. TCU presidents must have a strong understanding of the student learning process and the assessment of student learning—within the context of AI/AN students.

Of the 37 TCU presidents in June 2014, 34 were American Indian or Alaska Native. Of these, 27 were presidents at TCUs wherein they were tribal members. There were 14 female presidents. One president had a JD degree, 22 had doctoral degrees, 5 were working on doctorates, and the remaining nine TCU presidents all had master's degrees. Six presidents were tribal college graduates.

TCU Student Profile

A “typical” TCU student is a single mother who works full-time. She is, on average, 28 years old, is Pell (federal financial aid) eligible, and is more likely to be a first-generation college student (59% of all TCU students are first-generation). The demographics for TCU students are changing, however—for example, the percentage of female students in 2004 was 66%, but dropped to 63% in 2011. Besides gender, similar shifts are seen for age and first-generation status. TCUs are experiencing a significant increase—23% in enrollment from 2008 to 2012—as Native people see higher education as the pathway to independence and self-sufficiency (AIHEC, 2012).

Degree Completion

Pertinent issues regarding Indian education include the facts that AI/AN youth face some of the lowest high school graduation rates in the nation, and educational attainment rates for AI/ANs are the lowest of all ethnic and racial groups (see Table 8.1).

TABLE 8.1
**Educational Attainment: 2006–2010 American Community
 Survey Five-Year Estimates**

	<i>Spirit Lake</i>	<i>ND</i>	<i>US</i>
High school graduates, % of persons age 18+	72.3	89.4	85
Bachelor's degree or higher, % of persons age 18+	7.4	26.3	27.9

Source. U.S. Census Bureau, 2010.

Note. ND = North Dakota; US = United States.

There are many factors related to the issue of educational achievement for American Indians and Alaska Natives, and although each is described separately in this chapter, all are interrelated and connected. One affects another, and each is a part of the history of how and why Native people live the way we do.

Economic Status

Severe poverty is a contributing factor for low education attainment for AI/ANs. Median household income for North Dakota is \$35,590, while for Spirit Lake reservation it is \$18,000. Seven of the 10 poorest counties in the United States have a tribal college. A majority of reservations where most TCUs are located have double the U.S. poverty rate of 14% and unemployment rates greater than 50%. For the Spirit Lake Dakota Tribe, unemployment is 57%, as compared to North Dakota's rate of less than 2.4%, or the U.S. rate of 6.1%. The Spirit Lake Tribe is located in Benson County, which is one of the three counties in North Dakota with double the U.S. poverty rate. On the Spirit Lake Reservation, 80% of the *employed* population lives below the poverty guidelines (U.S. Bureau of Indian Affairs 2013).

The national average for all college students receiving Pell Grants was 36% for the academic year 2012–2013. For TCU students, approximately 80% received Pell Grants, and that number is closer to 90% at many TCUs. And though Pell helps fill the gap for our students, it is not nearly sufficient. The maximum Pell award per year is \$5,645, and with the average annual cost of TCU education at \$13,800, that leaves an unmet need of \$8,155 or 60%. Federal student loans are offered at only two TCUs, and therefore TCU students struggle to fill the unmet need. The average annual income of students entering tribal college for the first time is \$15,262, as contrasted with the average cost of a TCU education at \$13,800 (including the average annual tuition cost of \$2,964) (AIHEC, 2012).

Serious Health Disparities

According to the Indian Health Service AI/ANs (IHS, 2004–2006), American Indians and Alaska Natives experience disproportionately high mortality compared to all races in the United States. Age-adjusted mortality rates per 100,000 are discussed in this section (see Table 8.2).

Death rates are significantly higher for AI/ANs than for all other Americans: tuberculosis, 500%; alcohol-related, 514%; diabetes, 177%; unintentional injuries, 140%; homicide, 92%; and suicide, 82%. Nationally, from 2009–2011, substance-use disorders were higher among American Indian youth than all youth (12.9% versus 7.1%) and American Indian adults (16.9% versus 8.5%). Unmet need for substance abuse treatment among American Indian adults was consistently higher than for all adults, ranging from 19.1% to 9.8% versus 8.7% to 7.6% (Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration [SAMHSA] 2012).

According to results of the 2012 North Dakota Behavioral Risk Factor Surveillance System (BRFSS), 36% of American Indians in North Dakota reported that their mental health (including stress, depression, and problems with emotions) was not good at some time in the past 30 days, compared with 32% of non-Indians. It was also noted that 23% of the Native population reported being told they had a depressive disorder, as opposed to 14.7% of non-Indians in North Dakota; between 2006 and 2011, American Indian adults perceived unmet need for mental health services and substance abuse treatment as consistently higher than all North Dakota adults (SAMHSA, 2012).

There is no specific research being conducted regarding Native college students attending tribal colleges and universities and the issues of alcohol,

TABLE 8.2
Comparison of Mortality Rates per 100,000

<i>Health Related Issue</i>	<i>AI/AN (%)</i>	<i>U.S. All Races (%)</i>
Alcohol Use	43.0	7.0
Diabetes	68.1	24.6
Homicide (Assault)	11.7	6.1
Motor Vehicle Crashes	47.9	15.2
Pneumonia/Influenza	27.1	20.3
Suicide	19.1	10.9
Tuberculosis	1.2	0.2
Unintentional Injuries	93.8	39.1

Source: Indian Health Service, 2004–2006.

drug, or mental health problems. In 2012, 27 of the 37 TCUs collaborated with the Center for Indigenous Health Research, Indigenous Wellness Research Institute, National Center of Excellence, University of Washington, to conduct a needs and capacity assessment survey to document what is known about (a) alcohol and other drug use; (b) risk, protective factors, and outcomes; (c) best practices; and (d) organizational capacity and readiness. Students, faculty, and staff at TCUs completed the initial assessment on key perceptions in the four areas.

As one of the 27 participating TCUs, CCCC is an engaged and vested member of the Spirit Lake Dakota community. Over 70% of our employees are Native and primarily Spirit Lake Dakota tribal members, and approximately 97% of our student population is Native. The collaboration with the Indigenous Wellness Research Institute is a long-term partnership that is establishing benchmark data regarding perceptions on alcohol and other drugs and the role the tribal college is playing in response. Preliminary findings from the assessment are that alcohol or drugs are being used for escapist or social reasons and that use does have a negative impact on the success of a college student. The perceptions noted from the assessment are also validating the important role of a tribal college as a safe haven, as a referral source, and as a place to strengthen identity and self-worth.

College Readiness

Many TCU students need remediation help with math (74%) or reading and writing (over 50%); thus, academic readiness is a constant struggle at institutions that do not have the resources for adequate support services (AIHEC, 2012). In a report released in March 2014, 52% of 2013's American Indian high school graduates who took the ACT college readiness assessment met none of the four ACT College Readiness Benchmarks (English, math, reading, and science) that indicate likely success in credit-bearing first-year college courses (ACT, 2013).

Lack of Buildings and Faculty

Many TCU campuses began in buildings that were abandoned or condemned, although improvements were being made prior to the sequestration of federal budgets a few years ago. Unfortunately, there are no primary funding sources for rehabilitation or construction projects for the tribal colleges or for other tribal construction needs. Construction or rehabilitation funding continues to be a priority for AIHEC, but the lack of adequate facilities and appropriate classrooms for the tribal colleges continues to be an issue contributing to poorer student outcomes.

Recruiting qualified faculty and in particular Native faculty is another significant disparity for Indian education outcomes. As of academic year 2011–2012, only 41% of faculty at TCUs were Native; of those, 56% were women (women were 72% of all faculty). Fewer than half (48%) of Native faculty had a master's degree or higher (73% for non-Native faculty). Full-time Native faculty earned an average of 13% less than non-Native faculty (AIHEC, 2012).

Violence in Indian Country

Another relevant educational issue is that AI/ANs are victims of sexual assault at much higher rates than any other race of people in the United States. According to the U.S. Department of Justice (2012), Native women are more than 3.5 times more likely to be raped or sexually assaulted than women of any other race in this country. AI/ANs are less likely to get the services needed after a crime occurs and are more likely to suffer long-term effects of violence. Nationally, one out of four women will be assaulted physically or sexually by the time she is 18, but for Native women that number rises to one out of three. Since many crimes are not reported, the count is probably much higher. For males nationally, one out of six will be assaulted by the time he is 18, but for Native men that figure rises to one out of five.

Student Transportation

The average commute for a tribal college student is 30 to 100 miles one way, and most reservations do not have public transportation options (AIHEC, 2014). When living in poverty, a car (or money for gas) is another "luxury" that makes attending college impossible without adequate financial assistance. Several tribal colleges provide transportation services for their students as part of retention strategies; however, this puts additional strain on limited budgets.

Technology

While most of America is "plugged in," for most Native people, distance education options are not realistic due to a lack of home computers and low bandwidth on the reservations. The Federal Communications Commission (FCC) in 2011 reported that 65% of all Americans use broadband, while less than 10% of AI/AN communities have broadband access and only 68% of the Native population have access to telephones. According to the FCC, the actual percentage, based on anecdotal evidence, may be even lower for AI/ANs.

Strong collaborations have developed excellent technology systems for most of the TCUs. These collaborations are with the National Science

Foundation, NASA, and state programs and are related to STEM (science, technology, engineering, and math) projects. CCCC is completely wired and wireless and provides its students with community Internet access via its library services, but people have been known to sit in the parking lot to access WiFi.

Family-Orientated Education

All tribal colleges and universities have as their core mission the teaching, learning, and perpetuation of Native culture and language. For Native college students, family and the extended family are paramount to the foundation of indigenous identity. For Dakota people, aunts and uncles were the traditional educators for the children, while parents and grandparents were guides within a structured kinship system. This system had formal and informal rules, taboos, and protocols, but, most important, it conveyed the teachings of common sense living in the natural environment as well as the important boundaries of roles and responsibilities.

Colonization and assimilation policies broke down this system, and Native people (families) were forced into alien dynamics (boarding schools, religious dogma, capitalism, and a democratic form of governance versus consensus) that were nearly successful in eradicating the American Indian family. However damaged or fractured our families are today, we are in fact survivors and resilient human beings. Most Native families today are intergenerational and live together due to poverty, unemployment, and a lack of housing. So the typical TCU student has added responsibilities in that, as adult children, they are supposed to help their families—that might be a nephew, an auntie, or a cousin—who live in the home along with children, parents, or grandparents.

Student Retention

With the pervasive stereotypes and misunderstandings about AI/ANs, most TCU students need help with self-confidence; they need people who believe in them and who reinforce their belief in their abilities. As place-based institutions, TCUs provide a family-centered foundation and culturally rich academic program. Our excellent but limited faculty are specialists in creating a nurturing learning environment that is conducive to the education process, but from a cultural context. TCUs understand the important role we play in modeling behaviors, supporting change, and providing an environment that promotes understanding of our students and families, as well as our communities. TCUs have established research-based data that support the premise that a Native college student, who is rooted in his or her identity and has a support network, has more positive outcomes related to academic achievement and college success.

The TCU overall institutional retention rate is 43% and has improved 32% in eight years. The tribal college graduation rate is up 17%. The actual number of graduates has increased by 15%, and the number of students earning degrees has increased by 13%. These numbers alone do not capture the success of TCU students. Those who attend to gain skills and knowledge for employment or for enrichment, but who are not in school for a certificate or degree, are part of our success. For non-degree-seeking students, the overall TCU *course completion rate* (defined as finishing what they wanted to accomplish) was 63% for the academic year 2011–2012 (AIHEC, 2012).

TCUs were created to provide higher education opportunities for Native peoples and communities. We understand the issues described previously because most of us “live it”—we come from the background that our students face each and every day. The environment is still one of day-to-day survival, but slowly, and through our students, change is happening, one student at a time. CCCC had 37 graduates in May 2014, double the number from 12 years ago. All but two achieved an associate degree; those two earned certificates. The graduating class cumulative GPA was 3.5, and almost all had job offers, were employed, or were transferring to other institutions for bachelor’s programs. According to IPEDS, CCCC’s graduation rate hovers between 14% and 16%, which is viewed as “not good.” From our perspective and calculations (according to our definitions) the rate is closer to 25%. What must be understood is that if CCCC was not here, these 37 students would not have become college graduates. There are many exceptional TCU student success stories that speak to what our students have overcome to achieve their college educations.

Education is touted as the way to improve quality of life. Without tribal colleges and universities, our people would not have that opportunity. There are many reports and articles that discuss how TCUs have filled a void for AI/ANs. Through the TCU organization, AIHEC, we have developed our own database system and are collecting trend analysis on the success of our institutions and achievement of our students. The AIHEC American Indian Measures for Success (AIMS) is documenting the human, social, and financial impact of the TCU system, which currently serves over 80,000 students and community members.

Next Steps

There is no single solution to our challenges beyond an infusion of funding and the professional development of Native people. I offer the following suggestions based on my many years of working for Indian health and Indian higher education:

- Higher education is the pathway for AI/ANs, and it has taken hold via the tribal colleges and universities system. Unified support and investment for AI/AN higher education opportunities must be acknowledged and supported by national education leaders and organizations as well as by the federal and state governments.
- There must be a more coordinated focus locally for a pre-K–16 education program for each and every tribal nation. This includes increased services for adult learners (e.g., GED certificate holders), literacy, and early childhood education. Tribal leaders must direct and demand this focus from their education administrators as well as governing boards and then advocate with education policymakers for programs that support the local ideas. There are many models of excellence to be followed, but resources are needed to accomplish the task.
- While TCUs do very well with very limited resources, the inequities of funding for higher education opportunities for AI/ANs must be addressed. Expanded student support services, such as career and skills advising, college readiness and academic preparedness, and financial aid that meets the needs of the student, contribute to positive Native student outcomes in college.
- TCUs must partner better and assist our students in transferring to other TCUs for terminal degrees. A stronger TCU alliance with articulation agreements could be accomplished through distance education initiatives. This means strengthening the existing TCU system's academic, career, and technical education programs for a variety of career paths and skill levels, integrating technology as a resource for student learning and institutional advancement for student success. It also includes cultural integration, apprenticeships, internships, and programs that support Native student outcomes for terminal degrees in disciplines needed by the tribal community. Mentoring and leadership projects, along with professional development for Native faculty, are all components of a more comprehensive and focused response to the unmet need for Native higher education.
- Mainstream institutions should expand their outreach to TCUs, but on our terms. We no longer want (or need) the "Great White Father" mentality when it comes to educating Native students. TCU students who transfer to the state system need more personal support and attention in addition to adequate financial aid. There are working models at most TCUs regarding this type of true collaboration and many in the STEM disciplines, as well as dual credit programs with the high schools.
- Education policy leaders and organizations should help in minimizing stereotypes by promoting literacy and discussions on history from

Native people's point of view, as well as more in-depth education on racism, prejudice, and bias for all college students.

Final Comments

In a 2009 report, *The State of the World's Indigenous Peoples*, the United Nations articulates that education is a fundamental human right:

Education is recognized as both a human right in itself and an indispensable means of realizing other human rights and fundamental freedoms, the primary vehicle by which economically and socially marginalized peoples can lift themselves out of poverty and obtain the means to participate fully in their communities. Education is increasingly recognized as one of the best long-term financial investments that States can make. (p. 130)

As educators, we must practice what we teach, including the joy of learning—academic learning as well as everyday learning, which is the fundamental basis of indigenous education and is science-based. As a Dakota grandmother, educator, and a modern-day “leader,” I must continue to incorporate cultural knowledge with our academic programs of study. We believe, and have a saying, *taku wakan ska ska*—something holy moving. Life is something holy moving. It is a healing and learning journey that we must do a better job of, as our time is so very brief. Having a safe environment to ask the questions and to search for solutions, all the while promoting cooperation, are components of an education process for all. We should do our best to better understand each other and to live together in a good way. This is education.

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