

# Vine Deloria, Jr. (1933–2005)

**I**N THIS ISSUE I want to take a break from discussing the Penn Museum and note the passing of an individual of great importance to all Native peoples and those who study indigenous peoples. Vine Deloria, Jr., a Native American activist, author, historian, and theologian, died on November 13, 2005.

During the course of his life, Vine Deloria, Jr., had a tremendous impact on Native American communities and the scholarly community in anthropology, archaeology, and Native studies. In many respects, his first book, *Custer Died for Your Sins: An Indian Manifesto* (1969), defined the nature of Native American studies and redefined the relationship of Native peoples to anthropologists and archaeologists. The author of more than 20 books and a large number of articles, Vine Deloria held academic positions at the University of Arizona and the University of Colorado during his career. Early on he served as the Executive Director of the National Congress of American Indians (1964–67) and was also a founding Trustee in 1977 of the National Museum of the American Indian.

Although I did not know Vine well, we met on a number of occasions over the past several years. Vine was fascinated with stories of a race of giants that preceded humans on the earth. He was convinced, in his own way, that archaeologists could find evidence of these giants if we simply looked hard enough. Following a talk in Santa Fe, New Mexico, a few years ago, Vine and I agreed to disagree about giants, but we made a pact whereby I promised to fund and excavate any giant, or site with a giant, that he could find. Last fall I came across an article about giants that I knew would excite Vine. Unfortunately, he died before I could send him a copy.

I recently joined him, along with his family and many friends, in Washington, DC, where he received the second annual American Indian Visionary Award from *Indian Country Today*. At that time he joined a discussion I was having with Suzan Shown Harjo, another Native American



activist, about an exhibit here at the Museum. Vine and Suzan agreed to curate a future exhibit examining the nature of Indian treaties and land use in the eastern Pennsylvania region during the 18th and 19th centuries. Today we continue to move ahead with the exhibit we discussed but without Vine's wisdom and sharp humor. 🏠

*Richard M. Leventhal*

RICHARD M. LEVENTHAL, PH.D.

*The Williams Director*