

they made a fire bed on the prairie that
blew across the people like a storm;
melded our souls with iron.
And in the month of *Hashi Mali*, the Sun of Wind,
we listen for the voices
that still urge us on
at sunrise⁵

Notes

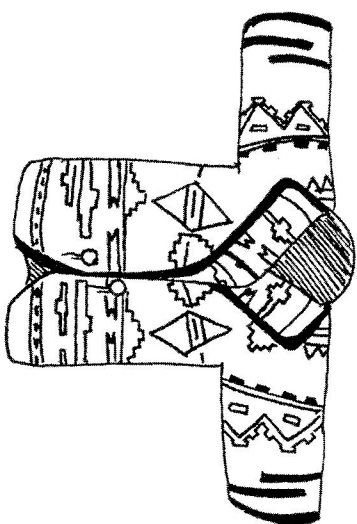
1 "Indians Never Say Good-bye." *Reinventing the Enemy's Language*, 1997.

2 This is a paraphrase of something Rayna Green, director of the American Indian Program at National Museum of American History at the Smithsonian Institution, says in her article "Native American Women." (*Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society*, 1980, vol. 6, no. 2. The University of Chicago).

3 Jean-Bernard Bossu's *Travels in the Interior of North America*, 1751-1762, Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1962, p. 163.

4 *Mississippi Provincial Archives: French Dominion, 1729-1748*, Vol. IV, Rowland, Sanders, and Galloway, Louisiana State University Press, 1984, p. 260.

5 *Gatherings: The Enowkin Journal of First North American Peoples*, Vol. IV—1993.



The Story of America A *Tribalography*

It doesn't end.

In all growing
from all earths
to all skies,

in all touching
all things,

in all soothing
the aches of all years,
it doesn't end.

(Simon Ortiz, "It Doesn't End, Of Course," 1976: 147)

Native stories are power. They create people. They author tribes. America is a tribal creation story, a tribalography.

As numerous as Indian tribes, creation stories gave birth to our people, and it is with absolute certainty that I tell you now—our stories also created the immigrants who landed on

our shores. I don't mean that native people imagined them as their God did, nor "formed man of the dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life" (Genesis 2: 8). But our stories made the immigrants Americans nevertheless.

When the foreigners arrived and attempted to settle in the upper Northeast, they had nothing to eat, nothing to sustain them but their faith in biblical stories. Indigenous people told them new stories of how to live in our world. One example of this is the native story of the Three Sisters (Beauchamp 1897: 177). Natives told stories of how to plant their crops, corn, beans, and pumpkins (squash), which sustained the newcomers and taught them how to experiment with their daily diet by adding variety. As a result, native foods were traded internationally and changed the food cultures of the entire world. According to the National Corn Growers Association's January 2000 statistics, corn is grown in more countries in the world than any other crop, and the United States produces and exports more corn than any other country in the world. In 2011, according to the National Corn Growers Association website, <http://www.ncga.com/>, corn represents 76.62 billion dollars in crop value compared with wheat at 35.76 billion. Worldwide corn production still leads all other grains. Currently products made from corn include everything from sweeteners, distillers, ethanol, corn oil, crayons, and fabrics made from cornstarch. Maize was developed from Teosinte, a wild grass that was growing in Central Mexico as early as 7,000 years ago and propagated by Native plant scientists some 4,000 years ago in the Western Hemisphere, although there is disagreement on how corn spread into North America. Thanksgiving is the holiday in which Americans give thanks to indigenous people for such extraordinary and versatile foods. But the most important story the immigrants would hear from Natives was how to make a united nation by combining people from various tribes. It is this eloquent act of unification that explains how America was created from a story, hence my title: "The Story of America: A Tribalography."

Before I continue with the scholarly account of tribalography, I want to tell you a Choctaw story. My tribe's language has a mysterious prefix that, when combined with other words, represents a form of creation. It is *nuk* or *nok*, and it has to do with the power of speech, breath, and mind. Things with *nok* or *nuk* attached to them are so powerful they create. For instance, *nukfokechi* brings forth knowledge and inspiration. A teacher is a *nukfoki*, the beginning of action. *Nukhibisha* is to be in a state of passion, and *nukfcholi* means to hiccup, or breath that comes out accidentally.

My story begins in September. I was standing on the front porch of my house in Iowa City, Iowa. The sky was bright blue; there was no wind. Rabbits and ghosts of rabbits hopped in the front yard, playing tag with a couple of gray squirrels. After a time I looked at the southern sky and saw what appeared to be black specks of pepper floating in the upper atmosphere. As they glided closer to the earth, I realized they were red-tailed hawks. There were so many I couldn't believe they really were hawks, so I ran into the house and found my binoculars. One, four, seven, twenty-two. Eventually, there were forty-four hawks kettling together, heading for the Iowa River valley. As the first group disappeared, another group of hawks flew into view, their red tail feathers reflecting the mid-morning sunlight. Over the next thirty minutes, dozens more appeared.

Red-tailed hawks are very special to Choctaw people. They can weigh up to ten pounds and their body feathers are variegated browns and whites, but their tail feathers are a bright reddish-orange, the color of fire. As I stood in the middle of my yard, their numbers began to dwindle until there were only fours, sevens; then it happened. One red-tailed hawk flew right over my head and landed in a tree about thirty yards from my porch. He perched on a broken branch and appeared to be looking in my direction. We regarded one another for a while and it was then that I realized my Grandmother was trying to tell me something: the hawks have returned.

Grandmother was a storyteller and she taught me the power of story. When I was growing up she was the one who told stories late into the night. Sometimes she'd say, "Do you hear what I hear? Listen! *Ygeea-e-e*." Then she would begin a story.

"I don't know if you remember old Lum Jones," she'd say, cocking her head in my direction. "One night, I was looking out my picture window when the Angel of Death walked down the sidewalk in front of my house. He went up on Lum Jones' front porch next door. Before I knew what had happened, he was carrying Lum Jones up through the tree tops," she said. "I'm telling the truth."

From her story, I could see what had happened. A large man-bird first showed himself to her by gliding past her house. Then he slipped soundlessly inside the walls of Lum Jones' house and carried the old man in his beak up, up, up, through the loving arms of the gigantic elm in the front yard. Together, the old man and the bird-man winged their way toward the heavens. Of course, everyone in my family agreed that right after Grandmother saw Lum Jones being carried up through the tree, he was as dead as Andrew Jackson. It was a fact. Grandmother could see life and death, and she told me not to be afraid of either one. That was the first lesson I learned from her.

Then one night while I was in the hospital with rheumatic fever, I overheard someone saying that I was going to die. I had had a lot of heart problems, so in a way I was not surprised, but I was afraid of leaving my family. Later my Grandmother appeared to me, first, as a huge brown hawk about the size of a person hovering over my bed. I knew it was my grandmother because the bird had a beak shaped like her nose. In the next moment, Grandmother was standing next to me with her hand on my forehead. She had transformed herself from a winged person back into a human person. She said a few words I couldn't understand, then she left. After a long while, I gradually got well. Much later, Grandmother explained that she was the one who visited me as a bird. She said she would always watch over me.

When Grandmother ended a story, she'd squeal in her high-pitched old-lady voice: "Whee-e-e that's enough, I can tell you no more today." Then she'd whistle at the canaries and parakeets she kept on her back porch. Then she'd have a smoke.

There were always many varieties of birds around my Grandmother's house and she worried constantly that their numbers were becoming thin. She told me that when she was growing up at the turn of the century dozens of hawks and eagles visited her house. She said that back in the old days it wasn't unusual to see them everywhere, but that wasn't the case in the early 1960s. Hunters had killed a lot of game birds, hawks, and eagles, during the first half of the century. Then, farmers had sprayed pesticides that ended up killing all her favorite songbirds.

Right before my Grandmother died, she said the birds never stopped talking to her, telling her stories. She said that they kept her up all night, making her ears ring, and it was their music that she died listening to, not our voices.

To some who read this story, it may seem like a family memoir. I loved my Grandmother and she loved me. And birds. But American and British behavioral scientists have shown that birds have been found to have the same kind of memory that enables people to recall where they left their house keys. A study published in *Nature* (September 17, 1998) marks what researchers say is the first demonstration of episodic, or event-based memory in animals other than humans. Two researchers, Nicola S. Clayton and Anthony Dickinson, (1998: 272) have shown that birds have memories much the same as humans.

The recollection of past experiences allows us to recall what a particular event was, and where and when it occurred, a form of memory that is thought to be unique to humans. It is known, however, that food-storing birds remember the spatial location and contents of their caches. Furthermore, food-storing animals adapt their caching and recovery strategies to the perish-ability of food stores, which suggest that they are sensitive to temporal factors. (Clayton and Dickinson 1998: 272)

So birds, like people (who bring their favorite snacks to eat while watching a Saturday afternoon football game on television) can remember not only when and where but also what kind of food they've stored for the future.

This is big news to white people, or people educated in mainstream institutions, but not to American Indians who have been telling stories of birds as creators, birds as tricksters, birds as healers, and birds with long memories. At last it seems another group of storytellers, the scientists, have now "proven" that birds demonstrate they too, have episodic, or event-based, memories.

I tell the story about my grandmother because it is a good example of what I am trying to address: the power of Native stories. First, there was the event, the birds, then Grandmother's story and her transformation into a bird, her life and death, and the re-appearance of red-tailed hawks. The story I am telling you now is *nukfokkechi*. It brings forth knowledge and inspires us to make the eventful leap that one thing leads to another.

Choctaws have many stories about birds. One story says that a long time ago there came to the Choctaws an Unknown Woman. While it is the story about how the Unknown Woman brought corn to the people, it also incorporates birds and their relationship to people. The woman is a stranger who appears in the moonlight atop a great hill. Two hunters see her as if in a vision:

Happening to look behind them in the direction opposite the moon they (two hunters) saw a woman of wonderful beauty standing upon a mound a few rods distant. Like an illuminating shadow, she had suddenly appeared out of the moon-lighted forest. She was loosely clad in a snow-white raiment, and bore in the folds of her drapery a wreath of fragrant flowers. She beckoned them to approach, while she seemed surrounded by a halo of light that gave to her a supernatural appearance. Their imagination now influenced them to believe her to be the Great Spirit of their nation, and that the flowers she bore were representatives of loved ones who had passed from

Earth to bloom in the Spirit-Land. (Cushman 1899: 277)

The Unknown Woman tells the two men that she's hungry, and they offer her roasted hawk meat. This special meat of the hawk is all they have, so they give it willingly. The woman eats only a small bite, then tells them to return the following mid-summer at the same place atop the mound. She promises she'll be there. The next year, at exactly the same time, the two hunters return and find corn growing atop the mound. From the hunters' initial gift of sacred food to the Unknown Woman, Choctaws and other southeastern tribes received the gift of corn. Today we celebrate Green Corn Ceremony in mid-summer to mark the coming of the future: corn, our ancient food cache. Another version of this story explains how a black bird brought corn, *tanchi*, to a Choctaw boy.

Everything is Everything

"Everything exists and everything will happen and everything is alive and everything is planned and everything is a mystery, and everything is dangerous, and everything is a mirage, and everything touches everything, and everything is everything, and everything is very, very strange." This quote is from a painting by the late Roxy Gordon, painted in 1988. An author and artist, Gordon evokes, in a very Choctaw way, the basic principles of Lynn Margulis' scientific theory on symbiogenesis which says that the merger of previously independent organisms is of great importance to evolutionary change. Margulis is renown internationally as a biologist for her research on the evolution of eukaryotic cells—cells with a nucleus. As professor in the department of geosciences at the University of Massachusetts at Amherst she was awarded in March 2000, along with eleven others, the National Medal of Science by President Clinton. She has chaired the National Academy of Science's Space Science Board Committee on Planetary Biology and Chemical Evolution that aided in the development of research

strategies for NASA, and in 1981, she received a NASA Public Service award. She has written many books on scientific topics, both for children and adults, including *What is Life? Essays in Gaia, Symbiosis, and Evolution*, and *Microcosmos: Four Billion Years of Evolution from Our Microbial Ancestors* (co-authored with science collaborator and son, Dorian Sagan).

The story of how a human—a being made of nucleated cells—evolves from an amoeboid being—a nucleated cell—is bizarre. But even this story has a preamble: the evolution of a cell with a nucleus. How did such a cell evolve?

The quick answer is by the merging of different kinds of bacteria. Protocists evolved through symbiosis; twigs and limbs on the tree of life not only branched out but grew together and fused. Symbiosis refers to an ecological and physical relationship between two kinds of organisms that is far more intimate than most associations. In Africa, for example, plovers pluck and eat leeches from the open mouths of crocodiles without fear. Bird and beast in this instance are behavioral symbionts; crocodiles enjoy clean teeth in the company of well-fed plovers. Bacteria live in the spaces between our teeth and in our intestines, mites inhabit our eyelashes; all these tiny beings draw nutriment from our cells or our uneaten food, as cells are shed or as they excrete organic excess. Symbiosis, like marriage, means living together for better or worse; but whereas marriage is between two different people, symbiosis is between two or more different types of live beings. (Margulis and Sagan, 1995: 96)

In other words, biologists like Margulis have adopted a Choctawan way of looking at the world. "Everything touches everything, and everything is everything," as Gordon phrased it. The theory of symbiosis advanced by Margulis and her colleagues also suggests that evolution is the result of cooperation, not simply competition:

Next the view of evolution as chronic bloody competition among individuals and species, a popular distortion of Darwin's notion of "survival of the fittest," dissolves before a new view of continual cooperation, strong interaction, and mutual dependence among life forms. Life did not take over the globe by combat, but by networking. Life forms multiplied and complexified by co-opting others, not just by killing them. (Margulis and Sagan, 1986:14)

Much like the Choctaw prefix *nuk* that when combined with other words it represents a form of creation, Lynn Margulis' scientific theory is also *nukfokechi*.

Consider another storyteller, Pisatuntema, a Choctaw woman who in 1909 told the story of the hunter who became a deer. Her story shows what Margulis and Sagan say that life does. One thing *combines* with another thing to form "life" the verb, a process that is always in flux:

One night, a hunter killed a doe and soon afterward fell asleep near the carcass. The next morning, just at sunrise, the hunter was surprised and startled to see the doe raise her head and to hear her speak, asking him to go with her to her home. At first he was so surprised that he did not know what to reply, so the doe again asked him whether he would go. Then the hunter said that he would go with her, although he had no idea where she would lead him...[Ed]. Now all around the cave were piles of deer's feet, antlers, and skins. While the hunter was asleep the deer endeavored to fit to his hands and feet deer's feet which they selected for the purpose. After several unsuccessful attempts the fourth set proved to be just the right size and were fastened firmly on the hunter's hands and feet. Then a skin was found that covered him properly, and finally antlers were fitted to his head. And then the hunter became a deer and walked on four feet after the manner of deer. (Bushnell 1909: 32)

There are Choctaw laws, including myself, who consider Pisatuntema's story a biology lesson about creating kin with people and things who are different from ourselves. But there are many possibilities in this story. When all the tribes in the Southeast began to hunt deer to near extinction in the eighteenth century, a relationship evolved between Indian hunter, deer, and foreigner. This event is what historians have called "the deerskin trade." As scholar Kathryn E. Holland Braund has noted, "Trade is a mutual affair" (Braund 1993: xiii). This does not mean that all sides are equal, but rather all sides have agency and are networking. "Between 1699 and 1705, Carolina shipped an average of over forty-five thousand deerskins annually to London. And between 1705 and 1715, the trade in deerskins was the most valuable business endeavor in the colony" (Braund 1993: 29). She goes on to explain that Indian trading companies forged links to Creek Chickasaw and Choctaw towns, "about one hundred thousand Weight of Skins were shipped from Augusta in 1741" (Braund 1993: 97). Another event, however, occurs among the Choctaw. In the town of Chickasawhay, a large Choctaw community of the eighteenth century, hunters forgo the hunting season of 1764. Historian Richard White suggests that the reason they did this was because deer were becoming scarce. "That the town suffered from a depletion of deer is also suggested by its reputation as a collection of stock thieves and later, more positively, as a center of stock raising in the nation" (White 1983: 86). But stories make connections. Choctaws would have been sensitive to the fact that they were the cause of the scarcity of deer, a source of food. A story of what may happen if the cycle continues seems to hold creative solutions.

Pisatuntema's story explains that the deer are fighting back. Not only does the doe talk, but she lures the hunter into the underground and transforms him. Only through the intervention of the hunter's mother is the hunter's blood returned to the earth and a ceremonial dance is held. In the early Choctaw worldview, not being returned to the earth by a bone picking

ceremony would be a kind of heresy. I wrote "Dansc d'Amour, Dansc De Mort" (Howe 1993: 447-472) about Choctaw bone picking, and what it meant to the people in my story of the eighteenth century who saw their bodies as food for the animals and earth once they were dead. "Tchatak, the consumer. The animal, the consumed. Tchatak, the consumer. The animal the consumer" (Howe 1993: 469). Things are made right when we are returned to the earth as food for the planet. Life continues.

Choctaws have another story to explain a relationship between hunters and deer that also speaks to Margulis' theory of symbiosis. *Kashelotep*, half man, half deer, is a character who will harass hunters if they come too close to his camp where many other animals live. I suggest that people tell this story to explain what we have learned about the onslaught of ecological disasters caused by the deerskin trade of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.

For early scholars who studied American Indian stories, and specifically Choctaw stories, the hunter and the doe narrative has been relegated to folklore or myth, a fiction. This troubles many American Indians. Miwok author Greg Sarris, in an interview for the 1994 film series, *The Native Americans*, produced by TBS Productions, Inc., explains the prejudice inherent in the belief that Native stories are fictions:

A team of geologists happened to be working in the creek over here and they unearthed whale fossils from the period of the last Pliocene. And we said, according to the stories that during the time of the flood that there was a whale in that creek. This was told from generation to generation for 10,000 years. They got very interested, these geologists, they said, 'these Indians have this myth that there's this whale in the creek and we found the fossils.' The Indians also say that during the time of the flood that people went on top of that mountain and went into a cave. Well, they went up to the cave and carbon-dated charcoal on the walls from fire that dated to the same period. If that's a myth, you give me some evidence of Noah's

Ark. Do you have any splinters or wood from that?
(Sarris 1994)

In the case of the whale story, bones were found to support the Indians' story. Sarris is not arguing about the Biblical flood or whether Noah's ark existed, rather he and other Natives in the film point out that no matter what physical evidence Indians have, our stories are thought to be myth.

By this time, you may be asking yourself how my boastful opening remark that America is a tribal creation story relates to Margulis' theory of symbiosis. She suggests that the merger of previously independent organisms, or systems (for the purposes of my article) is of great importance to evolutionary change. I am suggesting that when the European Founding Fathers heard the stories of how the Haudenosaunee unified six individual tribes into an Indian confederacy, they created a document, the US Constitution that united immigrant Europeans into a symbiotic union called America.

From An Indigenous Story the Europeans and Indians Unite

...It is that, therefore, that in ancient times it thus came to pass that the hodiyaanehshon, *the Federal Chiefs*, our grandsires, made a formal rule saying, "Let us unite our affairs; let us formulate regulations."
(Bierhorst 1974: 145)

The above is an excerpted quote from Iroquoian into English of an archaic translation of the "Ritual of Condolence," a portion of what is also called the Condolence ceremony. This Iroquois version of the oral drama is spoken by elders and is designed to heal the community and make it a peaceful whole. As John Bierhorst notes in *Four Masterworks*, the ritual drama was the Iroquois attempt to achieve peace between differing tribes and thwart the cult of death and warfare by forming a confederacy (Bierhorst 1974: 109-111). The Iroquois Confederacy at the time of contact with the immigrants was scattered over eastern North

America and across the contemporary US-Canadian border. They occupied most of what is now New York State, parts of neighboring Pennsylvania, and sections of Ontario and Quebec. When the immigrants settled among them and wanted to create trading networks, the Iroquois told them stories of how their ancestors had learned to live peacefully together—their story would serve as a kind of cultural template for the New World. There are many versions of the story and what follows is not a direct quote but paraphrased from a variety of sources including Onondaga elder Oren Lyons' speech at the 1987 conference at Cornell University's American Indian Program and from his interview in the 1994 six-part film series *The Native Americans*.

A long time ago there was a blood lust among the people. A great war engulfed the land and the people were full of merciless killing and fighting one another for supreme rule. Nations, towns, families were destroyed and scattered to the four winds. It was proof of the tyranny which people at that time were capable of. Then along came a great visionary leader, Degenawidah, who realized the killing must stop. He began a journey to establish peace, but he knew he had a serious handicap. He stuttered. Since storytelling is an oral art, Degenawidah knew he had to find someone who could speak for him. Along his journey he met the powerful warrior, named Ayonwatha, or Hiawatha as his name is pronounced in English. Ayonwatha, Onondaga by birth and Mohawk by adoption, was mourning the murder of his wife and children. He had vowed to wipe out his enemies, including the man he saw standing before him. But he knew Degenawidah had combed the snakes out of a powerful wizard's hair, taking away the wizard's anger, so Ayonwatha decided to go with him. Together the two men traveled throughout the land to establish peace. Through Ayonwatha's mighty gift of oratory, Degenawidah proposed that the warring tribes of the upper northeast form a confederacy.

Degenawidah became known as the Peacemaker. He set up the families into clans, and then he set up the leaders of the clans.

He established a confederacy wherein each clan would have a clanmother, and political roles for men and women would be in balance. He made two houses within each nation. One he called the Long House and the other, the Mud House. These two houses would work together in ceremony and council, establishing the inner source of vitality of their nations. The Peacemaker also made two houses in the Grand Council, one called the Younger Brothers, consisting of the Oneida, and the Cayuga Nations, and later (1715) enlarging to include the Tuscarora. The other was the Elder Brothers consisting of the Mohawks, keepers of the Eastern Door; the Onondaga, the Firekeepers; and the Senecas, keepers of the Western Door. Then Degenawidah named the united nations Haudenosaunee: The People of the Long House.

The Haudenosaunee's story remains consistent. The confederacy was founded on the core values the Peacemaker proposed: freedom, respect, tolerance, consensus, and brotherhood. Under the terms and spirit of the *NeGayane-shogowa* or the Great Law of Peace, all parties pledged themselves to the confederacy's body of laws. United we thrive, divided we fall.

After hearing the Haudenosaunee spokesmen extol the values of unification for over a hundred years, the colonists finally transformed themselves into thirteen united states and eventually wrote a document to celebrate the event, the US Constitution. As historian Robert W. Venables says, "the Haudenosaunee influenced both directly and indirectly the generation of the Founding Fathers and their various efforts to achieve unity" (Venables 1992: 68). The power and persistence of a native story convinced the separate peoples of the Old World to merge in their new homeland for their mutual benefit.

Modern scholarly stories place the formation of the Haudenosaunee, the original event, sometime around AD 1500 (Ruoff 1990: 23). Under these terms a Haudenosaunee governance known as the Council of Fifty was created and this system gave all Five Nations equal status, and was later called the Six Nations

when the Tuscaroras were included in 1715. Ever since, the Six Nations have gathered to resolve their differences through common consent.

Historian Donald A. Grinde, Jr., says that numerous colonial documents exist to support the Iroquois story and its effect on the immigrants: "There is ample scholarly opinion and factual data to conclude that the Founding Fathers respected and used American Indian ideas as the American government evolved" (Grinde 1992: 47). Grinde points out that Indian confederacies were so appealing to William Penn that he described the whole of Eastern America as political societies with sachemships inherited through the female side. "Penn was also familiar with the Condolence Ceremony of the Iroquois which was crucial for an understanding of their confederacy" (Grinde 1992: 49). Again, the ceremony was an oral drama, a story, that the colonists observed. The story was about the unification of the Iroquois, and their aim was to achieve peace and unity.

It's important to remember that the influence the Haudenosaunee had on men like William Penn was derived from Penn's firsthand knowledge of their discourse. In the case of the Haudenosaunee, they made wampum belts to record events, but never made written accounts. Rather, their spokesmen were trained to speak and tell stories. Anthropologist Stephen A. Tyler says that "discourse is the maker of the world, not its mirror...The world is what we say it is and what we speak of is the world" (Tyler 1987: 171). Tribal spokesmen used allegory, metaphor, imagination, and inventiveness, all the techniques of storytelling to make their demands come true.

In the case of the Haudenosaunee, their story was about unity. Although the struggle for immigrant dominance was tumultuous, the Haudenosaunee's call for unity in the Northeast remained steady, and it is little wonder why. In the seventeenth century the Haudenosaunee had to negotiate with seven white colonial governments on the Hudson. "The inter-colonial

context was equally stormy. The Haudenosaunee had to deal with New England colonies to their east and the English colonies to the south, which were rivals of the Dutch. After an English government replaced the Dutch in 1664, all the Haudenosaunee white neighbors, except the French in Canada, were now under English rule from London" (Venables 1992: 72).

In the summer of 1677, Haudenosaunee spokesmen such as Carachkondie and Connonobegoo joined with English officials from New York, Maryland, and Virginia to speak for a unified colonial policy. The Indians wanted to create a foreign policy with the English in order to cement their trade relationship with them (Venables 1992: 72). The Haudenosaunee were major political and economic partners of the English in what is now known as the Covenant Chain. Because the Indians were a counterbalance to French interest in Canada (and key to the English colonists' survival) they often used the councils to retell their origin stories and renew the Covenant Chain. This oratory benefited the Haudenosaunee in two ways. First, it presented a unified Indian image to the colonists. Second, the act of storytelling inculcates what historian Raymond D. Fogelson (1989:143) calls an epitomizing event for both speaker and listener. Whether the event in question ever happened matters very little to the people who believe it. Therefore, story creates culture and beliefs, the very glue which binds a society together.

In the western intellectual tradition, the act of writing stories (creating "documents") has been given hegemony over the act of telling stories. This phenomenon led to a privileged view of text, so much so that written stories of the past became labeled as "history," and their storytellers "historians." Currently, debate persists among anthropologists, ethno-historians, and the literary critics on what distinguishes story from history or ethnography. Anthropologist James Clifford has said in his introduction of *Writing Culture* that much of what is being written about a particular cultures is "true fiction:"

Ethnographic writings can properly be called fictions in the sense of "something made or fashioned," the principal burden of the word's Latin root, *figere*. But it is important to preserve the meaning not merely of making, but also of making up, of inventing things not actually real. (*Figere*, in some of its uses, implied a degree of falsehood.) Interpretative social scientists have recently come to view good ethnographies as "true fictions," but usually at the cost of weakening the oxymoron, reducing it to the banal claim that all truths are constructed. (Clifford 1986: 6)

What Clifford and others are saying is that a particular text within a discipline is not false, but always interpretive, and most importantly, the storyteller can never undertake to tell the whole story. The histories of Indian and white relations are replete with documents of how Indians influenced Europeans to unite, but the story remains only partially told. For example, on June 24, 1744, in Lancaster, Pennsylvania, Canasatego, a Haudenosaunee spokesman, gave his first speech on the history of the Covenant Chain and its success in creating symbiotic trade relationships. His manipulation of the image of Indian hegemony in the region was considerable. Canasatego's speech was translated by interpreter Conrad Weiser. In his concluding remarks given on July 4, 1744, Canasatego repeated the origin story of the Haudenosaunee (Venables 1992: 76-81). "Benjamin Franklin printed Canasatego's speech as part of the full record of the 1744 Lancaster negotiations. Franklin sent three hundred copies to London to sell" (Venables 1992: 81). Canasatego's story was read by Londoners as well as colonists.

In 1754, Franklin made a proposal called the Albany Plan to unite the colonies. On June 11, 1776, twenty-two years later, Franklin's revised Albany Plan was given to the committee of the Continental Congress. That group later drafted the Articles of Confederation. James Wilson, a delegate from Pennsylvania and future author of the first draft of the US Constitution, argued vigorously for a confederation that was *similar* to the Haude-

nosaunee. He declared "Indians know the striking benefits of confederation... [and we] have an example of it in the Union of the Six Nations" (Ford 1904-5: 1078).

In reading the papers, memoirs, and diaries of influential colonists such as historian Cadwallader Colden, Acting Governor of New York James DeLancey, Founding Fathers Benjamin Franklin, James Madison, Thomas Jefferson, and James Wilson, as well as philosopher John Locke, it is clear that they noted the social and political effects the Indians had on them. However, what is most important to Onondaga elder Oren Lyons is that his community's story remains constant. Haudenosaunee existence predates contact with Europeans. "This is no small achievement," he says. "We have faced off with the white man for three hundred years and right from the beginning he has learned much from us. He just doesn't want to admit it" (Lyons 1994).

I include this long discussion of the Haudenosaunee story, and the early colonial writings, not because I want to enter the debate on whether the US Constitution exactly replicates Haudenosaunee governance. The Constitution, although a kind of nationalist creation story, does not in intent or function imitate Indian governance. Rather, it is my intention to argue that the Haudenosaunee's *story of their union* created an image so powerful in the minds of colonists that they believed if "savages" could unite, they ought to be able to do the same thing. That united image remained indelible in the minds of immigrants, so much so that Indians will forever be spoken of as *one group*. Today, it comes as a surprise to college students that there are still over five hundred federally-recognized tribes, each with distinct cultural practices.

What I suggest is that a native creation story was one of America's authors. If not acknowledged in the "historical credits," American Indians are certainly the ghost writers for the event, the story of America. So far, I have consciously used "story," "history," "theory" as interchangeable words because the difference in their usage is artificially constructed to privilege

writing over speaking. All histories are stories that are written down. The story you get depends on the point of view of the writer. At some point histories are contextualized as "fact," a theoretically loaded word. Facts change, but stories continually bring us into being.

What is Tribalography?

I add my breath to your breath
That our days may be long on the Earth
That the days of our people may be long
That we may be one person
That we may finish our roads together
May our mother bless you with life
May our Life Paths be fulfilled.

(Allen 1986: 56)

Now I have come to the place where I must tell you what my term "tribalography" means, and how it achieves a new understanding in theorizing on Native and indigenous studies. This is a tall order for a storyteller, but here goes. Native stories, no matter what form they take (novel, poem, drama, memoir, film, history) seem to pull all the elements together of the storyteller's tribe, meaning the people, the land, multiple characters and all their manifestations and revelations, and connect these in past, present, and future milieu. (Present, and future milieu means a world that includes non-Indians). I have tried to show that tribalography comes from the native propensity for bringing things together, for making consensus, and for symbiotically connecting one thing to another. It is a cultural bias, if you will.

Choctaw/Cherokee author Louis Owens writes that the precedent for this wholeness is the oral tradition of American Indians:

Just as significant is the fact that the concept of a single author for any given text, or of an individual who might conceive of herself or himself as the creative center and originating source of a story, or

of the individual autobiography, would have made as little sense to pre-Columbian Native Americans as the notion of selling real estate. For the traditional storyteller, each story originates and serves to define the people as a whole, the community. (Owens 1992: 9)

From the *Glittering World* by Navajo author Irvin Morris is one example of what I am calling tribalography. It is a collection of short stories that connect the Diné with their tribal history and contemporary lives. Throughout his book Morris makes no claims that the stories he tells belong to him alone. The book's subtitle, *A Navajo Story*, shows that he is not only telling stories that have been collected by his people, but the stories are about his journey through his people's experience. In essence, he is saying identity is determined by his history and the future.

The stories in the first section are the creation stories of the Diné that create dichotomies between man and woman, light and dark. Morris tells of a cosmic struggle for survival through flood and drought as well as the lineages of the original four clans of the Navajo. Following the introduction of Diné cosmology, Morris provides the reader with accounts of his family members. For example, Morris' great-grandmother witnesses the atrocities her people experienced when they were forced off their lands and marched into captivity. Therefore, Morris' stories transcend his own memories, but include those of his relatives and tribal community.

The modern stories in the final section are how Morris connects himself to the shiny and glittering world of the highways of the *bilagaanaa*, or white people. He juxtaposes this against the other world, the traditional *hooghan* life of his grandmother and great-grandmother. Often the telling is dismal. The average annual Diné per capita income for 1980 was only \$2,400. Alcoholism takes young men from their homes on weeklong binges. But in the last story, titled "Meat and the Man," Morris offers a comedic version of Navajo life in the 90s.

An older white man and his dog called "Grabs-the-Meat" come to visit a Navajo family; they are uninvited guests. The *bilagaanaa*, a self-proclaimed tourist, speaks a little Navajo, badly. His car is broken down and he's hungry, so the family feeds him. Eventually he wants to hear stories so Grandma tells the man about Skinwalkers. The story is so powerful that he actually sees a Skinwalker outside the *hooghan* and faints with fright.

"I told you not to tell those," said Jill, as they watched the man drive away the next morning. "I think you just about scared that man to death. What if he'd had a heart attack?"

"He was awfully nosy," said Grandma.

"But he talked Navajo," Jill's mother said.

"Barely," corrected Grandma.

"I'll bet he never forgets last night," said Jill.

"Yup," said Jim. "He nearly shit his pants. You should have seen him."

"*Yáadtila*," said Jill.

"I thought he was nice—and rather good-looking if you ask me," said Grandma. "What did you say his name was again?"

(Morris 1997: 256-257)

The story ends with Grandma thinking she might take the old white man as a husband. By the end of Morris's tribalography, another possible future connection is made.

What is most significant about Morris' work is that while he is telling specific Navajo tribal history, culture, and his own revelatory stories, he also regards this textual space as a contemplative reflection of identity. What does it mean to be Navajo, but to connect with people who are not? The story continues.

Yanktonai author Susan Power's novel *The Grass Dancer* is another example of tribalography. Like Morris, Power has written a series of stories that are connected in a novel structure.

The story is set in North Dakota on the Standing Rock Sioux Reservation. Power steeps her readers in the connections between Dakota ancestors and the present-day culture. She tells Dakota stories through six central characters. Time travels counter-clockwise and there are multiple narrators giving their versions of events. This creates a multi-generational story that touches all the characters in the book. As each chapter unfolds, the reader is taken backwards in time until the final scenes of the book complete the beginning.

One of the central characters, Evie, a Dakota Sioux believes her father is a Blood Indian from Calgary. Her mother, Margaret Many Wounds, has told the story that she married Sonny Porter, and gave birth to twins, Evie and her sister Lydia. Evie has believed all her life that she inherited her father's looks, mannerisms, and temperament. Her creation story is that of the Dakota people. What we discover in Chapter Four, called "Moon Walk," is that Evie's father is Dr. Sei-ichi Sakuma, a Japanese surgeon from San Francisco. While it is important for Evie to know the identity of her father, she is not destroyed by the fact that he is Japanese because she has been raised with the Dakota, a people with powerful creation stories.

In a lecture at Grinnell College in 1999, Power talked about the stimulus that helped her create *The Grass Dancer* and her second novel, *War Bundles*. She said that she believes she is reclaiming American history in her novels of fiction.

As a Native fiction writer I sometimes think of my work as consisting of little more than pointing out the bloody obvious. Ideas that Native peoples have been turning in their minds since the age of five can—once released into the mainstream discourse—find themselves plumped to the status of profundity. For this reason, I don't for a second claim to be covering new ground with my new novel, *War Bundles*, rather following trails familiar to a Native audience which sadly have proven to be revelatory to non-Natives exposed to early versions of the novel.

The message of *War Bundles* is incredibly simple. Native peoples, and their stories and histories are not a social studies unit of an interesting sub-category of American Literature to be haphazardly included in courses such as "Literatures of the Outsider in America," if at all. We are American history, we are American literature. Every track and trace of the American experience runs through our communities, our culture. We have been the transformers so much more than we are ever credited to have been. I am so tired of our image as the transformed—the lost, the dead, always those who are acted upon, always those who have been pushed to the edges, where we can be watched compassionately, nostalgically, seen as little more than a decorative fringe. I don't just want to learn how the writing of Louise Erdrich was influenced by William Faulkner, although that is a fascinating and necessary study, but additionally how so much of the material produced by white Southern writers and African-American writers reflects Native oral traditions. *War Bundles*, then, is not the development of a specifically "Native" history, but a reclamation of moments thought of as exclusively-peculiarly American. We (Natives) have participated in World Fairs and World Wars, witnessed the destruction of cities we also helped to raise; we were gangsters and outlaws, performers and writers. We were there. Always there. Still here. (Power 1999)

While these two books are models of what I call a tribalogy, there are many others. Currently there are over two million American Indians in the United States, and most of these people, give or take a thousand, are writing stories. The first thing you may think is: LeAnne, you maniac, not every Indian in America is writing a book. I know it; some are making movies, or music videos for MTV.

Every Indian I meet is writing a story. A couple of summers ago while I was in Oklahoma conducting research and visiting family, I was invited to lecture at OK Choctaws, a non-polit-

ical organization in the Oklahoma City area. Many of the elder members of OK Choctaws gathered every day for lunch at the Salvation Army's Native American Center in downtown Oklahoma City to share stories. After lecturing on some of the historical documents I had found concerning Choctaws in the early eighteenth century, I was asked to come back to help some of the elders who wanted to tell their histories. What I found was that all of the elders were writing stories that had been passed down to them, stories of how their ancestors had survived the 1831 removal from Mississippi to Oklahoma. Our removal began what is known as the Trail of Tears. The Choctaws I met were incorporating the oral stories of their families with the written documents of our removal. They were writing how their ancestors had created new lives in nineteenth-century Indian Territory, now called Oklahoma.

As we talked about their projects, their World War II experiences, of growing up Choctaw, I realized that they were doing what our ancestors had done for millennia: they were pondering the mysteries of their experiences, telling their stories, and creating a new discourse at the end of the twentieth century. Whether they were speaking them into audio tapes, writing them by hand, typing them into computers, or recounting them to future generations of storytellers, Choctaws were doing what Ojibwe author Gerald Vizenor describes as, "...creat[ing] discourse with imagination" (Vizenor 1993: 187). They were integrating oral traditions, histories, and experiences into narratives and expanding our identity. Choctaws and other American Indians are not only creating a future "literary past" for American Indians, but a textual and literal past for non-Indians, as well. If indeed our world "is what we say it is" (Tyler 1987: 171), as Tyler suggests, then a tribalography is a story that links Indians and non-Indians in an expanding global covenant chain. Uneasy tensions ensue. Of course. Not always happy, most certainly, but inevitable for a good story.

In *Choctalking*, a collection of travel stories, I treat with animals, plants, peoples, spirits, ancestors, the mysteries of experiences residing in earthworks, and what little I know about matter in the universe. In "The Chaos of Angels," set in Louisiana with spirit turtles, a Haitian flight attendant, chickens and cats, the wily French colonizer of New Orleans, Jean-Baptiste Le Moyne de Bienville, (pronounced Zhan-Bap-teest Lay Moin day Bee-anh Vee, see Wikipedia) travels across time to make an appearance as a tree frog and later a bullfrog. In "Moccasins I Don't Have High Heels," after a screaming match with a Houston bond trader and a client, I leave my job at a securities firm and go West just like the white settlers in the 1962 film *How the West Was Won* (but I don't kill anyone). Then at the Medicine Wheel near Lovell, Wyoming I receive some free advice from a red-tailed hawk that calls my name. (I know, it reads like one of those cheesy commercials for New Age shamans). Nevertheless, I return home and start working on my first novel, *Shell Shaker*.

Native stories have always been enormous in scope and in the telling of all creation, yet in a little over a century our stories have been pressed into the minuscule size of a grain of sand. A stereotype in feathers. So I hope to (re)complicate matters with international stories. "IFuck Up in Japan" is the story of traveling to Okayama City during the 1993 United Nations International Year of the World's Indigenous People. I meet the Ainu, the indigenous people of Japan, and Burakumin people, the untouchables of Japan. It's no exaggeration to say that I made many cross-cultural mistakes and often made my hosts cry, along with myself and others I came into contact with. In "Carlos Castaneda lives in Romania" I become Humphrey Bogart and recite lines from the 1942 film *Casablanca* to Romanian border guards in order to cross into the city of Timișoara. Why I embody males, or on occasion multiple genders is because I believe that all matter, including human beings, can occupy multiple spaces at once. As Roxy Gordon suggests "everything touches everything, and everything is everything, and everything is very, very strange."

In the final story, "Embodied Tribalography" set in Oklahoma and Louisiana, I show how the animals and birds, and the land taught ancient Southeastern Natives how to play ball, live in the universe, and tell stories so powerful they create tribes.

I leave you with what my friend Craig Howe told me when I was a guest lecturer for a program called "Tribal Landscapes" at the Newberry Library in Chicago. I want you to repeat these words after me, because like my ancestors before me, I believe in the power of breath and mind. I am a *nukfoki*, teacher.

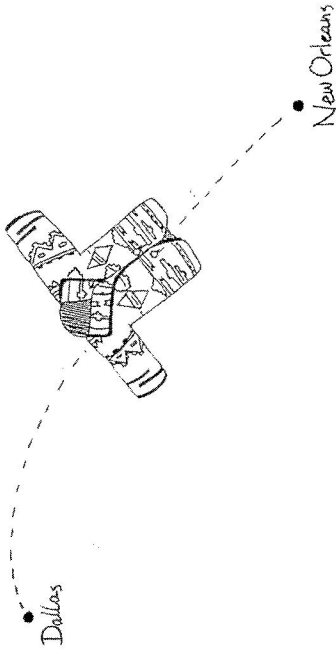
"Tribalism will not die, even if all the Indians do."

What I think Craig Howe is alluding to is that our stories are unending connections to past, present, and future. And, even if worse comes to the worst and our people forget where we left our stories, the birds will remember and bring them back to us. *Whe-ee, that's enough. I can tell you no more today!*

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When the Upper and Lower Worlds collide in the Between Worlds, there is a reaction in this World. Our ancestors called it Huksuba. Today we say chaos. Huksuba, or chaos, occurs when Indians and Non-Indians bang their heads together in search of cross-cultural understanding. The sound is often a dull thud, and the lesson leaves us all with a bad headache.

The Chaos of Angels

First there is the 2 A.M. heartbeat. The sound of my own breathing keeps me from sleep. I leave my bed for the comfort of the heated outdoor swimming pool and the relentless motion of water.

In New Orleans during the month of February delicate lukewarm rain falls. Fog exists. The night sky, neon and purple fire, compete for the senses.

In the central courtyard of the old world hotel, green french shutters hang on eighteenth-century windows. A gilded black woman peers down at me floating alone in the pool. I think I recognize her; we've crossed paths before and I know what comes next. I kick the water with my feet to begin a backstroke. Just then she opens the shuttered window and throws a red swatch of cloth tied with chicken feathers out the open window. The cloth flies away.

So this is how it's going to be. Another competition for the greatest suffering? Another contest on the pain of injustice? I continue floating in silence, pretending to ignore the tease. I'm