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# Studies in American Indian Literatures

EDITOR

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## CONTENTS

### Special Issue: Tribalography

GUEST EDITOR: JOSEPH BAUERKEMPER

vii From the Editor

#### ARTICLES

- 3 Introduction: Assessing and Advancing Tribalography  
JOSEPH BAUERKEMPER
- 13 Expanding Tribal Identities and Sovereignty through  
LeAnne Howe's "Tribalography"  
CHANNETTE ROMERO
- 26 Talking Tribalography: LeAnne Howe Models Emerging  
Worldliness in "The Story of America" and *Miko Kings*  
CARTER MELAND
- 40 "The Lord and the Center of the Farthest": Ezol's Journal as  
Tribalography in LeAnne Howe's *Miko Kings*:  
*An Indian Baseball Story*  
PATRICE HOLLRAH
- 55 Tribal 2.0: Digital Natives, Political Players, and the Power of Stories  
JODI A. BYRD
- 65 Making It Work: A Model of Tribalography as Methodology  
JILL DOERFLER
- 75 Embodied Tribalography: Mound Building, Ball Games, and  
Native Endurance in the Southeast  
LEANNE HOWE

BOOK REVIEWS

- 94 Alice Te Punga Somerville. *Once Were Pacific: Māori Connections to Oceania*  
BRENDAN HOKOWHITU
- 98 Eric Gansworth. *If I Ever Get Out of Here*  
ANNE JANSEN
- 101 Gerald Vizenor. *Chair of Tears*  
DEBORAH L. MADSEN
- 104 Christopher B. Teuton. *Cherokee Stories of the Turtle Island Liars' Club*  
JACE WEAVER
- 106 Mark Rifkin. *The Erotics of Sovereignty: Queer Native Writing in the Era of Self-Determination*  
MELANIE K. YAZZIE
- 111 Contributor Biographies

## FROM THE EDITOR

The timing for this special issue is especially opportune, given the recent publication of *Choctalking on Other Realities*, a collection of travel adventure stories by Choctaw writer and intellectual LeAnne Howe that continues her exploration of her concept “tribalography.” Early in the collection Howe writes: “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” (13). In the final piece Howe arrives at a well-earned conclusion: these highly personal, self-reflexive, humorous accounts of a contemporary Choctaw woman crossing various and multiple borders “show not only how one thing leads to another, but that movement across space and time, i.e., travel, transforms us into something more than we were” (173). The emphasis on unexpected relationships and significant transformations in these stories of Indigenous travel will surprise no one who is familiar with Howe’s work across genre and media, including not only her celebrated novels, *Shell Shaker* and *Miko Kings*, her poetry collected in *Evidence of Red* and elsewhere, and her dramatic and film work, but also her growing body of nonfiction, memoir, and Indigenous-centered scholarship.

Our guest editor, Joseph Bauerkemper, has brought together a terrific lineup of scholars to explore the unexpected relationships and transformations that are key elements of Howe’s theory of tribalography and to test the applicability of Howe’s theory within and across multiple contexts. The issue concludes with groundbreaking new work by Howe herself. And we are fortunate to have an example of the innovative work of Chickasaw artist Dustin Mater as a special cover for this special issue. Mater’s *Life & Death in the Field of Time* draws on artistic and intellectual traditions from southeastern mound-building cultures, one of the several nodes of intersection and inspiration for Howe’s evolving theory.

Chadwick Allen

# Introduction

Assessing and Advancing Tribalography

JOSEPH BAUERKEMPER

Many *SAIL* readers will already be familiar with the contributions that Choctaw author, filmmaker, mentor, teacher, playwright, world traveler, and performer LeAnne Howe has made to the interdisciplinary field addressed by the journal and fostered by the Association for the Study of American Indian Literatures. A finalist for the Prix Médicis étranger and recipient of the American Book Award, multiple Wordcraft Circle book awards, the Oklahoma Book Award, the Wordcraft Circle Lifetime Achievement Award, and several prestigious residences and fellowships, Howe is the deserving subject of respect and renown within and well beyond academe. The contributions that constitute this special issue suggest that here—within the pages of *SAIL*—and now—the heart of the early twenty-first century—is an opportune spacetime to think creatively and critically about, through, with, and even against one of Howe’s cornerstone critical contributions: tribalography.

In a 1999 article titled “Tribalography: The Power of Native Stories” published in the *Journal of Dramatic Theory and Criticism* Howe writes, “Native people create narratives that [are] histories and stories with the power to transform. I call this rhetorical space ‘tribalography’” (118). Even while understanding tribalography in differing ways and emphasizing various potential trajectories for the concept, contributors to this issue collectively recognize the transformative power of Native story, rhetoric, and performance that tribalography illuminates, describes, and engenders. They also have sought subtly to weave their individual offerings together pursuant to the processual core of tribalography. As Howe explains in her 2002 essay “The Story of America: A Tribalography”: “tribalography comes from the native propensity for bringing things together, for making consensus, and for symbiotically connecting

one thing to another” (42). Tribalography, then, denotes a dynamic process through which the apparent chaos of contradiction and multiplicity is navigated and reconfigured.

Whether emphasized in relation to its textual, pedagogical, theoretical, methodological, or generative contours, tribalography evokes a long-standing and enduring tradition of transformative literary and intellectual practice while also emerging as a new critical lens capable of illuminating a wide array of issues within and across Native American and Indigenous studies. While the term is a recent contribution to critical discourse, the sophisticated and multifaceted characteristics of tribalography have long been prevalent in American Indian literatures. In each of her discussions of tribalography, Howe gestures toward the consistent tendency of Native writers to eschew fealty to any particular form or genre, even while making deliberate rhetorical use of formal structures and generic conventions. She points to the Haudenosaunee Condolence Ceremony, Irvin Morris’s *From the Glittering World*, and Susan Power’s *The Grass Dancer* as archetypal models of tribalography. N. Scott Momaday’s masterwork *The Way to Rainy Mountain* is also a readily apparent example, explicitly presenting itself as a multivocal, auto/biographical, oral, and archival constellation of narrative symbiosis. Leslie Marmon Silko’s *Storyteller* is another tribalographic narration of family, tribe, place, and cosmos by way of interwoven image, verse, and diverse prose. Landmark texts of nineteenth-century American Indian literature also exhibit the markers of tribalography. Black Hawk’s *Autobiography*, John Rollin Ridge’s *The Life and Adventures of Joaquin Murieta*, and S. Alice Callahan’s *Wynema* variously intertwine family and tribal (hi)stories, conventions of sensation and sentiment, and the layering of narrative intimacy and distance in order to represent and comment upon (with partisan interests) their contexts. Because Howe’s concept of tribalography arises from her own observant and descriptive readings of both the canons and fringes of American Indian literary and intellectual traditions, its relevance and resonance stretch widely across time and space. Tribalography thus gifts us with innovative and exceptionally productive ways to encounter and understand Native story, writing, and performance of the entangled past, present, and future. It also calls us forth to contribute to its ongoing development.

The seeds that at long last have grown into this special issue first found good soil during a session on tribalography convened during

the 2009 Native American Literature Symposium (NALS). Participants worked toward accounts of tribalogy as a critical, methodological, pedagogical, and theoretical framework, asking what the concept of tribalogy is, what its limitations are, and what it might become. That discussion left us with a strong sense that a sustained and rigorous collaborative conversation regarding the various dimensions of tribalogy would be worth undertaking in the interests of cultivating, deploying, and assessing dynamic approaches to scholarship and teaching. While the NALS session participants and the additional voices represented in this issue have much to say regarding tribalogy, we are by no means alone in recognizing its contemporary conceptual and critical resonance.<sup>1</sup> Indeed, tribalogy is garnering increased scholarly attention and now routinely appears in publications, interviews, conference programs, and graduate theses. In his foreword to Howe's 2013 collection *Choctalking on Other Realities*, Dean Rader goes so far as to proclaim, "I believe [tribalogy] is the most significant theory of American Indigenous writing to emerge in the last 20 years—maybe ever. This concept [. . .] helps bridge the gaps between the most significant approaches to American Indian studies—nationalism, sovereignty, issues of land and place, history, and culture" (vii). Rader's bold affirmation of tribalogy is both optimistic and speculative. After all, theoretical paradigm shifts are only recognizable as such in their aftermath. It goes without saying but nevertheless bears noting that if Rader is right in his extolment of tribalogy, it will not be due to Howe alone but rather to communities of scholars and writers who take up, expand, advance, and apply tribalogy with both vigor and rigor. Contributors to this issue, of course, join Rader in seeing tribalogy as a major contribution to our field that enhances and clarifies more established scholarly tendencies. As Rader also notes, with its simultaneous emphasis on tribal contexts and the capacity to reveal what he refers to as "connectedness among appearing disconnects" (ii), tribalogy illuminates and cultivates the fertile consonance between the ostensibly opposed cosmopolitan and nationalist critical schools.<sup>2</sup>

In his Beatrice Medicine Award-winning book *Engaged Resistance: American Indian Art, Literature, and Film from Alcatraz to the NMAI*, Rader deploys tribalogy in his own incisive readings of Debra Magpie Earling's *Perma Red*, Charles H. Red Corn's *A Pipe for February*, and Louise Erdrich's *The Plague of Doves*. *SAIL* readers will also be familiar

with Elizabeth Horan and Seonghoon Kim's article "'Then One Day We Create Something Unexpected': Tribalography's Decolonizing Strategies in LeAnne Howe's *Evidence of Red*" from the first issue of volume 25. As their title indicates, Horan and Kim make sustained use of the tribalography framework in order to draw out many of the nuances within Howe's diverse 2005 collection. Other scholars who have found tribalography useful in their work regarding fiction, poetry, drama, history, performance, film, and critical theory include L. Rain Cranford-Gomez, Birgit Däwes, Maria Depriest, Pdraig Kirwan, David L. Moore, Dylan A. T. Miner, Mareike Neuhaus, Jessica Bissett Perea, Geoffrey Stacks, Christy Stanlake, Melanie Benson Taylor, Christopher B. Teuton, and Kathleen Washburn. Marking a moment in which tribalography is perhaps achieving a critical mass that will enable further enhancement and proliferation, this issue provides a forum for the ongoing development of a loose, dynamic scholarly coherence. That is, one space among many others for thinking collaboratively about how and to what extent the multifaceted concept of tribalography can explain and serve Native writing and performance. With the voices just mentioned and the pages of this issue we are already seeing the emergent fruition of Rader's prediction "that as the field of American Indian studies grows, more and more scholars will start to use LeAnne's theory of tribalography as a point of departure for Native fiction, poetry, criticism, drama, and film" (Foreword vii). Of course, in order to endure as a fruitful scholarly point of departure, tribalography must be continually nurtured and assessed. This two-pronged effort is apparent throughout this collection.

Each of the contributions to this issue takes up tribalography as an innovative critical framework that accounts for the workings of Native media, performance, and intellectual traditions while also shedding light on the machinations of settler colonial contexts. Tribalography also serves here as a methodological approach to scholarly research and writing in American Indian studies. Yet important and challenging questions remain. What are the breadth, depth, and scope of tribalography's applicability? Does tribalography make remarkable departures from other theories/methods/practices? If so, what are these departures and how significant are they? What is the likely durability—or lack thereof—of tribalography as theoretical, critical, or methodological framework? In pursuing these inquiries through both evaluating and nourishing tribalography, this issue indicates that the concept can help

illuminate a wide range of (hi)stories and experiences. Perhaps most importantly, tribalogy also helps to reveal the ways in which Native narratives and knowledges fundamentally enable readers and writers to imagine otherwise. That is, to imagine a reconfiguration of authority away from settler orientations toward relations that account for Indigenous claims and acknowledge the enduring tradition of migration shared by human and nonhuman people.

The modes of migration and settlement that mark recent and current centuries have willfully perpetrated and aggressively disavowed violence against Indigenous peoples, their lands, and their seas. The critical analytics of settler colonial studies have made major strides toward theorizing and disclosing the relentless structures of colonizing invasion.<sup>3</sup> Yet unlike prevailing iterations of settler colonial studies, tribalogy critiques settler colonialism without being circumscribed by it. Indeed, tribalogy incisively indicts settler iniquities. This critique, however, is prologue. Tribalogy imagines and remembers otherwise, moving beyond mere critique to underscore and to creatively fuel the ongoing transformations constitutive of the processes of decolonization.<sup>4</sup> Contributors to this issue chronicle and explicate specific textual, archival, pedagogical, and political moments in which these decolonizing transformations take place or conspicuously fail to take place. Their theoretical trajectories, critical frameworks, pedagogical perspectives, and methodological approaches come together in a multivalent symbiosis of collaborative intellectual work that affirms the broad importance of tribalogical discourse for Native studies. Spiraling out from a shared center of Howe's scholarship on tribalogy, these essays learn from and illuminate selected moments within her literary oeuvre and address a perhaps surprisingly broad range of topics and issues. That said, these essays do not constitute (nor do they aspire to constitute) a tribute to Howe or a comprehensive analysis of her dynamic body of work. Even while making sure to account for many of Howe's literary contributions, the essays have been chosen for their collective ability to illuminate and exemplify the critical, pedagogical, theoretical, and methodological dimensions of tribalogy. The explorations and elaborations presented here thus assess and advance tribalogy as a framework for doing the work of American Indian studies and aspire to foster continued dialog, debate, and praxis. Tribalogy is not a ready-made, fully ripened critical elixir. It has not yet been subjected to the sort of

thorough polyvocal consideration necessary for engendering a prominent scholarly paradigm. We hope, however, that with the assessments and applications of tribalography within and well beyond this *SAIL* issue such a consideration is unfolding.

Channette Romero opens the collection with “Expanding Tribal Identities and Sovereignty through LeAnne Howe’s ‘Tribalography,’” an archive-rich textual engagement that deploys, expands, and challenges the limitations of tribalography in order to illuminate the transnational diplomacies and cross-cultural alliances narrated within Howe’s fiction and film. Taking up Romero’s call to continue pushing tribalography toward greater and broader resonance across Native studies, Anishinaabe writer, scholar, and teacher Carter Meland offers “Talking Tribalography: LeAnne Howe Models Emerging Worldliness in ‘The Story of America’ and *Miko Kings*.” Meland explores not only the scholarly utility of tribalography at the fascinating interface of literary aesthetics and theoretical physics, but also the pedagogical power of tribalography vis-à-vis Native, settler, and arrivant students. For Meland, tribalography facilitates the decolonial thinking, teaching, and writing necessary to imagine and pursue collaborative relationships between differing peoples and states of being. In her essay “‘The Lord and the Center of the Farthest’: Ezol’s Journal as Tribalography in LeAnne Howe’s *Miko Kings: An Indian Baseball Story*,” Patrice Hollrah presents a focused engagement with tribalography as literary presence and praxis. Hollrah reveals tribalography’s literary capacity to subvert the efforts of colonizing structures and institutions in order to render them beneficial to tribal peoples and sovereignties. Hollrah’s piece thus dialogues with Romero’s through its use of tribalography to reject the stark distinctions between aesthetic form and political content that tend to constrain literary studies, underscoring instead the inextricable linkages between the aesthetics and politics of Native writing.

In “Tribal 2.0: Digital Natives, Political Players, and the Power of Stories,” Chickasaw scholar Jodi A. Byrd reveals the broad reach of tribalographic theory to illuminate contemporary phenomena from an Indigenous perspective. Her innovative essay explores the proliferation of pseudo-tribal discourses in American political, corporate, media, and social realms. Denouncing the settler strategy of appropriating an invented “Indianness” in order to both obscure and authorize the physical and discursive violence of colonization, Byrd ultimately asserts that

tribalography enables scholars to theorize and articulate Indigenous voices, perspectives, and subjectivities as counters to settler aspiration. Anishinaabe scholar Jill Doerfler joins Byrd in pursuing the wide scholarly relevance of tribalography. In “Making It Work: A Model of Tribalography as Methodology” Doerfler takes up a metaconsideration of tribalography as research and critical methodology. Ruminating on her own work as an archival historian and literary scholar, Doerfler traces both the risks and rewards of deploying tribalography as a scholarly method. Through a self-reflexive consideration of the process by which she developed her 2009 *American Indian Quarterly* article “An Anishinaabe Tribalography”—an essay honored with the Beatrice Medicine Award for Scholarship in American Indian Studies—Doerfler illuminates the potential of tribalographic methodologies to make sense of diverse and divergent resources, while also acknowledging the dangers that inhere in this type of inquiry and interpretive practice.

The issue concludes with a contribution from the ever-gracious LeAnne Howe herself. “Embodied Tribalography: Mound Building, Ball Games, and Native Endurance in the Southeast” offers direct insight into the ongoing development and application of tribalography. Building on her established conceptualizations of tribalography and further elaborating the essay “Embodied Tribalography—First Installment” published in *Choctalking on Native Realities*, Howe’s contribution works via the grammar of Choctaw hymns to explore plausible relationships between baseball and mound sites. Yes, you read that right. The piece expands and repurposes tribalography as an interpretive theory relevant for the radical reconsideration of linguistic, historical, anthropological, and archeological records. Exploring topics ranging from songbooks to Indian ball games to performance to earthworks to dance and beyond, Howe deploys tribalography to evoke storied ground and grounded stories, to illuminate entanglements of the ancient and the new, and to underscore the corporeal agency of Native peoples as they continue living story, cosmology, and place. These stories, entanglements, and core components of Native continuance are reflected, too, in Chickasaw artist Dustin Mater’s *Life & Death in the Field of Time*, which appears on the cover of this special issue. Based on stone-carving iconography found in Mississippian mound sites, Mater’s evocative image underscores the intertwined pasts, presents, and futures to which the concept of tribalography calls our attention.

Taken together, this group of essays suggests that tribalogy has only begun to arrive, and that lying before it is a promising network of paths to be pursued. The contributions embark upon these intertwined paths in order to narrate, assess, and illuminate tribalogy as theory and method, criticism and praxis in American Indian studies. At first blush, tribalogy might appear to attempt a unified theory of Native narrative. Albert Einstein devoted his life to something of the sort but never quite nailed it. Howe and the additional voices represented here know better. The elaboration and evolution of tribalographic practice, theory, and criticism is an ongoing process, one that will, we hope and trust, far outlast this special issue. In her aforementioned essay “The Story of America,” Howe teaches us about a prefix in the Choctaw language: *nuk* or *nok*. The prefix refers to the power of creation, and it appears in the term *nukfokahchi*: to create or bring forth knowledge and inspiration. This is precisely the function of tribalogy: to transform, inspire, inform, and create. As we turn to the substance of this issue, we might listen to the stories the contributors tell as *nukfokahchi*, stories bringing forth knowledge and inspiring us to connect many things together.

#### NOTES

1. In addition to the previously mentioned session at the 2009 Native American Literature Symposium (Bauerkemper et al.), scholarly publications in which contributors have addressed or deployed tribalogy include Bauerkemper, “Video-graphic Sovereignty”; Bauerkemper, “Tensing”; Doerfler; Hollrah; Meland et al.; and Romero.
2. The “nationalist” versus “cosmopolitan” critical debate has received much scholarly attention, including within the pages of *SAIL*. See Appleford as well as Bauerkemper, “Narrating Nationhood.”
3. For exemplary formulations and applications of settler colonial studies see Bateman and Pilkington; Veracini; and Wolfe.
4. For a more sustained consideration of Indigenous transformative and constructive critiques of settler colonialism see Bauerkemper, “Tensing.”

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## Expanding Tribal Identities and Sovereignty through LeAnne Howe's "Tribalography"

CHANNETTE ROMERO

In her nonfiction essay "The Story of America," LeAnne Howe describes her concept of "tribalography" as constructing a reality through storytelling that helps to "create a people" and "author tribes" by making explicit "unending connections to past, present, and future" (29, 47).<sup>1</sup> To create an authorizing literary space that acknowledges the connections among multiple times, Native writers utilize a storytelling tradition that accomplishes two interrelated functions, "integrating oral traditions, histories, and experiences into narratives *and* expanding our identities" (46, my emphasis). Critics who write about tribalography often focus on its first function—"integrating oral traditions, [and] histories"—by exploring the ways that storytelling intersects with and accesses the past.<sup>2</sup> While this usefully broadens our understanding of the way the literary relates to the historical, this critical approach ignores the second interrelated function of tribalography—the way Native stories are used to "create" and "expand" individual and tribal identities. Tribalography asserts that in order to develop, Native identities must create and encounter stories combining oral storytelling and written history, personal experiences and tribal narratives. I hope to draw attention to this critically neglected aspect of tribalography; I believe a greater understanding of the development of Native identities, and the way they are expanded through storytelling, might better serve tribal interests. According to Howe, "expanding our identities" involves not only negotiating the past but also integrating Natives' present and historical experiences with other peoples; she asserts, "tribalography is a story that links Indians and non-Indians" (46). Therefore, a fuller understanding of tribalography has larger implications for interactions not only across time but also across cultures. This essay seeks to demonstrate how Howe's writing, especially her novel

*Miko Kings*, provides a model for thinking through tribalogy's relationship to identity, cultural difference, and contemporary Native political praxis.

LeAnne Howe's writing often explores how historic and contemporary cross-cultural interactions support Choctaw understandings of tribal sovereignty and identity. Her first novel, *Shell Shaker* (2001), recounts how the Choctaw Nation, and other Native nations, were set against each other in the early colonial period by their European allies, leading to the first Choctaw Civil War in 1747. Rather than focusing solely on the negative effects of colonialism, the novel also points out the positive relations the Choctaws had with their European allies, especially the French, and how these relations affect present-day Choctaws. Contemplating the Choctaw Nation's historic relations with France, one of the main characters, Adair, notes, "If the Choctaws got mixed up in a war they could rely on their trading partners for support. Just like England and America do today" (42). Adair and other characters in *Shell Shaker* use the Choctaw tradition of alliance making to understand how their own lives relate to their tribe's ongoing national sovereignty. Adair, a contemporary stockbroker, "tells herself she's following a tradition established by her ancestors" (42). Knowledge of the complex diplomatic and trade networks created by her ancestors is portrayed as essential to Adair's and other present-day Choctaws' ability to create strong identities, and these identities are portrayed as necessarily intertribal and international.

The Choctaw Nation's history of diplomacy and alliance is recounted in Howe's writing to better support contemporary Choctaws' individual and tribal identities. In her 2010 interview with Kirstin Squint, Howe states, "what I think is most important" about *Shell Shaker* is its portrayal of how "very ancient communities had vibrant intertribal relationships" with "hundreds" of different tribal and linguistic communities, including settler communities (Squint 215). Admitting that these historic negotiations and affiliations "[weren't] a paradise; it was fraught with many tensions," Howe nevertheless asserts the necessity of "uniting, not dividing" (216). Howe claims that knowing stories of both historic trauma and affiliation is essential to tribal identity; she declares, "through the chain of stories we are able to grow stronger" and "bring more of the past back into existence" (218). Howe suggests a dynamic notion of tribal identity here, one that refuses a static identification as

solely colonized “victim” and instead “grow[s] stronger” by not only recounting past stories of alliance but potentially bringing them “back into existence” in present-day political negotiations. The story “Chaos of Angels” included in Howe’s collection of poetry and prose, *Evidence of Red* (2005), proposes that historic cross-cultural interactions could form the basis for contemporary anti-imperial affiliations. When the story’s Choctaw narrator grows distressed while dreaming of the Choctaw Removal, a Haitian character resists her singular focus on destruction, reminding her, “Never forget we are all alive! . . . Our ancestors survived wars, the Europeans, diseases, and removal from our homelands” (Howe, *Evidence* 33). Recalling historic Choctaws who were removed by the colonial French to Haiti where they made a new home, the unnamed Haitian woman asserts cross-cultural kinship as an antidote to the destructiveness of imperialism, declaring “we are sisters” and “all must work hand in hand” to resist ongoing oppression (32). In *Evidence of Red* numerous characters actively choose cross-cultural affiliation over and against wallowing in historic grief. The text links past and present Choctaws to each other and other peoples—Haitians, Palestinians, Jews, African Americans, and others—in an effort to promote cross-cultural resistances to ongoing imperialism.

In her interview with Squint, Howe contends that Choctaws’ traditions of alliance and diplomacy “can be helpful in getting our country past the nightmare of binaries that the Bush administration has created” and that she fears Native nations have begun adopting in “the rise of fundamentalism, homophobia” and other forms of separatism in Indian Country (Squint 216, 224). Writing against the shrinking of tribal identity to simplistic binaries (“us” versus “them”), Howe asserts the necessity of expanding tribal identities to include positive relations with other peoples. One of the key topics explored in the PBS documentary that Howe wrote and narrated, *Indian Country Diaries: Spiral of Fire* (2006), is how youth of the Eastern Band of the Cherokee Nation create more empowering identities for themselves by learning about their Cherokee culture while also interacting with other peoples. When eighteen-year-old Corey Blankenship is chosen by his nation to speak to the US Congress about a proposed plan to build new public schools, as narrator Howe contextualizes this act of international diplomacy, she says, it’s “just like [when] the Powhatans chose a young Pocahontas to represent them before the English crown.” When Richard Pombo, chairman

of the House Committee on Natural Resources, questions the teenager on camera about potential environmental degradation resulting from building the schools, Blankenship asserts the Cherokees' claims to the land while also strategically reminding the chairman of previous land agreements between the two nations. He tells the chairman the land "is sacred to us"; "Our people have been there for thousands of years and because of our commitment to the United States we were willing to give up that land for the Blue Ridge Parkway." Blankenship's pairing of tribal culture and history in his international negotiations with the US government embodies Howe's concept of tribalography. Blankenship's focus on alliance ("our commitment to the United States") rather than the historical trauma of how land was lost through Cherokee Removal and the 1887 Dawes Act, is a strategic move that helps to persuade the congressional committee to support the Eastern Band of the Cherokee Nation's proposal. In a narrative voiceover Howe asserts that such international diplomacy is essential for Cherokee youth "to grow up and become business leaders, teachers, good parents, and Cherokees in the twenty-first century."

Howe's interest in understanding how Indigenous identity is created through a dynamic process of tribal traditions and negotiations with other peoples is most saliently expressed in her novel *Miko Kings* (2007). *Miko Kings* examines tensions and connections among Choctaws, African Americans, and European Americans. Set in the beginning of the twentieth century, the novel chronicles the dispossession of already severely limited Choctaw lands as a result of the 1887 Dawes Act.<sup>3</sup> It describes the way federal and local officials actively deceived Choctaws to gain tribal land, and the less official (but no less horrifying) acts of intimidation by organized crime syndicates and the Ku Klux Klan, all of which sought to disempower the Choctaws and their alliances with other peoples. Reflecting the concept of tribalography, *Miko Kings* recounts not only the tensions that existed among these different groups, but also the political and familial alliances that continued despite, or at times because of, these tensions. For example, the novel portrays the growing love affair between Hope Little Leader, a Choctaw baseball pitcher, and Justina Maurepas, a Creole of French, African American, and Native descent who teaches Hope at a historic biracial boarding school, the Hampton Normal School for Blacks and Indians. In addition to describing their growing intimacy after leaving Hampton

and moving in together, the novel also portrays the way this couple is terrorized by the Ku Klux Klan: “The Klan members carried a burning cross and shouted ‘Coloreds s’posed to be living in Colored Town’” (171). The Klan’s reductive view of Justina as “Colored” denies her mixed Creole heritage. Their fear of interracial mixing—a mixing already evident in Justina’s lineage—is juxtaposed in the novel against the more accepting and inclusive behaviors of the Choctaw characters who welcome Justina and her cousin Beauregard Hash into their community. In addition the novel describes the friendship between Ezol Day, a Choctaw, and Mary O’Brien, an Irish Catholic who identifies with Justina. Referring to the Klan’s white hoods, Mary says, “ghosts hate all Catholics whether they are Negro or Irish” (173). The novel’s focus on interracial families and friendships is rooted in tribalography. Howe says, “tribalography comes from the Native propensity for bringing things together, for making consensus, and for symbiotically connecting one thing to another” (“Story” 42). *Miko Kings* suggests that Native peoples’ penchant for connection links not only multiple times but also differing peoples. The text privileges cross-cultural affiliations over the separatism the Klan violently attempts to enforce.

To further reinforce the link between tribalography and cross-cultural relations, the text demonstrates how alliances across peoples and nations can be utilized across time. It recounts the intertribal alliances of the Four Mothers Society, created by Choctaw, Chickasaw, Creek, and Cherokee leaders to oppose the allotment process that privatized tribal land, and describes how this political activism occurred simultaneously with the early Black nationalist movement. The novel connects Native and African American activism through Justina, who becomes labeled a “Black Nationalist” after she dynamites a brothel to protect African American and Native children from sexual slavery (69).<sup>4</sup> While the text exposes the historic sexual abuse of African Americans and Natives as a result of colonialism, its linking of the Four Mothers Society and the Black nationalist movement—Justina says, “All of us in our own way were fighting for equality” (76)—demonstrates the text’s efforts to draw attention to stories of both oppression and resistance across cultures. By describing resistances to social injustice that continues today—sexual abuse, racism, the continuing effects of colonialism—and labeling the Four Mothers Society a “forerunner of our political action committees” (126), *Miko Kings* suggests that historic alliances could be used as con-

temporary political models. The text carefully details the forgotten or little-known activities of the Four Mothers Society, especially its fundraising, lobbying, and diplomatic activities, to provide contemporary Choctaws with an example of how to support tribal sovereignty through alliances with other groups and nations. *Miko Kings* further develops Howe's definition of tribalogy by demonstrating how stories from the past can be used to move beyond the literary into the political realm in ways that amplify current tribal political practices.

Augmenting tribal practices necessitates expanding identities. Such expansion first requires a fuller account of history. Presenting a more comprehensive historical narrative paradoxically requires Howe both to recount the forgotten and unacknowledged past and to imagine a partially untrue or unprovable history. Here, Hope's experiences at the Hampton Normal School offer a salient example of the text's use of tribalogy. Through acts of both historical recovery and imaginative storytelling, the novel constructs a literary past that might expand possible Choctaw identities. *Miko Kings* places Hope, a Choctaw, at a school that never enrolled Choctaws. Further, Hope's experiences there recall and revise American Indian and African American interactions at the school. Native students at Hampton, especially those who attempted to run away, were punished differently than African American students—they were imprisoned in an underground guardhouse. African American students at the school escaped this punishment; as freedmen, they were free to leave school if they liked (Lindsey 159). Tensions at the school escalated when African American students were used to stand guard over the Native students in this underground prison (160).

*Miko Kings* purposefully fails to recount the tensions and inequalities surrounding this underground prison. When Hope is caught trying to run away, he is locked in the underground guardhouse. However, instead of focusing on the historic tensions surrounding this prison, the novel describes Hope's fantasies in the prison about marrying his Creole teacher, Justina (51). The assertion of his desire for a woman who is perceived as "black" is important here. Historian Donal F. Lindsey describes how Hampton's favorable policies toward African Americans, especially African American men, negatively worked to emasculate Native men. Lindsey asserts, "Hampton's emphasis on the greater 'civilization' of blacks lowered the image of Indian men in the eyes of some Indian women, thereby inadvertently making black men seem more desirable" (169). Therefore, the vast majority of interracial

romances at Hampton involved African American males and American Indian females (169). Howe's novel rewrites this history in *Miko Kings* through Hope's assertion of masculinity. When the school principle places him in the underground prison for running away "like some wild animal" (61), Hope resists this dehumanizing description by asserting his masculinity: "I am a man and I am strong" (62). *Miko Kings* recalls the forgotten history of this biracial boarding school, while also revising it. While the text, through Blip Bleen, admits that most students who attended boarding schools "come out not able to think for themselves" (196), through a powerful act of storytelling the novel asserts that some were able to hold onto, and perhaps even expand, their tribal identities under these horrifying conditions by making meaningful cross-cultural connections. Hope's assertion of masculinity and refusal to engage in the boarding school's negative racial politics offers readers a model for resisting inequality by asserting alliance or connection making instead.

*Miko Kings* suggests that alliance making is a Choctaw tradition and recounts how ancient ball games acted as important locations for diplomatic negotiations. Choctaw ball players are described as "the diplomats of our people" and the games as the "diplomatic solution for everything" (90, 94). The novel juxtaposes the tradition of Choctaw diplomacy with mainstream US society. It states:

the first thing whites did during their civil war was exclude blacks from playing in their baseball teams. Later they excluded Jews. But base-and-ball, *our game*, was created so that we could include everyone. We played the game to collaborate with other tribes, the stars, and with the great mystery. (43, original emphasis)

While the Choctaws used ball games as sites of diplomacy and spiritual collaboration, mainstream Americans used them as sites of recreation and exclusion. The novel juxtaposes Choctaw alliance making in ball games with US racism, land theft, and boarding schools. *Miko Kings* describes these early forms of Choctaw diplomacy and alliance to prompt its readers to think about the limitations of national separatism. Howe's prose poem "The Red Wars," included in *Evidence of Red*, critiques Native separatism in the harshest terms possible. The poem portrays Thunderhawk, a Native activist who tries to inspire the poem's speaker to become involved in the creation of "the new Indian nation," "a separate nation" (38). In response, the poem's speaker says:

He reminds me of a black and white movie, I've just seen on the late show. A drama. An American couple adopts a young boy from Germany after WWII. The boy has been brainwashed by the Nazis and rails at everyone in the movie. It's called *Tomorrow the World*. (Howe, *Evidence* 38)

The poem suggests that any notions of national separatism based on race, including those practiced by American Indians, are internalizations of the racial hegemony practiced by Europeans, especially the Nazis. It rejects such ideologies as being too focused on difference, too "black and white," a color contrast that denotes both a denial of the complex relations between peoples *and* the outdatedness of this concept; racial separatism is likened to old black-and-white movies shown late at night.

Howe's concept of tribalogy can be used to complicate current notions of tribal nationalism. In her essay "Blind Bread and the Business of Theory Making," Howe supports Choctaw sovereignty by arguing:

In fact, the oral stories are the legal primacy we used to make our original treaties with foreign nations. In the nineteenth century Andrew Jackson's men believed that Choctaw stories were true. Otherwise how can we explain the treaties they made with us? Why would a foreign government make a contract to trade for land if they didn't believe we [the Choctaws] weren't the original holders of the land? (335, brackets in original)

Here, Howe clearly upholds the primary claim the Choctaw Nation, and other Native nations, have used to support tribal sovereignty, that treaty-making indicates their status as sovereign nations. However, her notion of Choctaw sovereignty requires that individuals be both "international and intertribal, reflecting a larger worldview that would have been as important in the past as it is in the present" ("Blind" 330). Howe justifies this notion of an international identity by suggesting, "my characters are doing some of the same things that Choctaws have done in the past. They link the stories they've heard about their ancestors with the stories they are living," which "breathes meaning into their world" (331). Howe's writing does not deny the importance of sovereign nation status to Native tribes, but it advocates a form of Native nationalism that allows for pluralities of experience, identity, and alliance, pluralities pro-

hibited by groups like the Nazis and Ku Klux Klan. Through its focus on international alliances and identities, tribalography upholds Native sovereignty while resisting national separatism.

*Miko Kings* makes the international component of Choctaw sovereignty and identity explicit when Choctaw spirits use the Islamic ritual prayer, Salaat, to contact the text's narrator, a Choctaw woman living abroad in Jordan. The narrator states:

I heard a strange voice at dusk during the *Salaat* . . . instead of “*Allahu Akbar*” I heard “*The time has come to return home.*” The next morning at sunrise it was the same. *The time has come to return home* . . . Even though I'd put ten thousand miles between me and Oklahoma, the land of my ancestors had tracked me down and was speaking. (20, original emphasis)

The connection the text is making here between Choctaws and Muslims is meaningful. In “Choctalking on Other Realities,” included in *Evidence of Red*, the narrator notes a similarity between the Salaat and early Choctaw prayers: “When I hear a man singing the prayers on a mosque's loud speaker system I am sure he is praying to the Sun, just like Choctaws once prayed to Hashtali” (*Evidence* 55). When the narrator is informed that “The prayers are to Allah, not the Sun,” she responds with an imaginative reading of history: “It looks like you are praying to the Sun, especially with your palms turned up toward the sky. The Egyptians once worshipped the sun God, Ra. Since the Hebrews and the Egyptians once lived together, maybe your religions rubbed off on each other” (55). The narrator attempts to make connections across difference through an imaginative act, an act that acknowledges the effects of colonialism on both the colonizers and colonized. Howe's Choctaw characters use the stories of their ancestors, in this case the practice of praying at sunrise and sunset, to both comprehend their world and to make connections across cultures.

Howe's characters also use knowledge gained from other cultures to better comprehend their own. Living in Jordan where “water is a precious gift” helps the narrator of *Miko Kings* fully understand a Choctaw spirit's insistence that “Water is life” (35–36). While the novel acknowledges the importance of gaining cross-cultural knowledge, it stresses returning to share this knowledge with the Choctaw people: “*The time has come to return home.*” As the main character, Auda, points out in

*Shell Shaker*, “We, the Choctaw people, are the assets of our tribe . . . if all the Indians are off doing their own thing, tribalism will die” (112). Howe’s writing asserts the importance of Choctaws expanding their identities through cross-cultural interactions but acknowledges the necessity of using this knowledge to expand Choctaw sovereignty. In this way tribalogy presents a Native literary praxis, one that uses Native storytelling both to uphold tribal sovereignty and to resist identities, ideologies, and politics based on separatism and exclusion. In fact, as *Miko Kings* and Howe’s other writings demonstrate, ignoring the importance of alliances with other peoples denies significant aspects of Choctaw history and tradition, especially the practice of diplomacy.

Howe’s oeuvre suggests that alliance building and cross-cultural knowledge work to strengthen Choctaw sovereignty. Her writing contends that sovereignty requires an awareness of specific tribal traditions, as well as knowledge of how one’s nation relates to other peoples. In his review of Howe’s *Evidence of Red*, Craig Womack states, “Sovereignty has to be able to see past its own belly button . . . Scrutinizing situations beyond Choctaw country . . . is essential to Choctaw survival in the most literal of senses” (160). Howe’s writing offers readers and critics a valuable lesson: we must expand our understandings of what counts for tribal and intellectual sovereignty, carefully balancing discussions of specific tribal traditions with an understanding of individuals’ and tribes’ past and present political alliances. A more expanded notion of tribal sovereignty, one that includes the history of a tribe’s interactions with others, offers readers and critics an important model for expanding contemporary Native politics and identities.

It is useful to note that while Howe discusses the importance of making alliances with a variety of peoples, she does not advocate a pan-Indian or polyethnic identity that erases historical, religious, and cultural differences among peoples. The differences between Hope and Justina in *Miko Kings* represent different personal and cultural responses to the US government. Justina’s fear of the Klan, created by their longtime terrorizing and lynching of African Americans, including her own family members (75), makes her pressure Hope to deliberately lose the Twin Territories Pennant. This act has devastating consequences for Choctaw sovereignty; by losing the game, the *Miko Kings* lose their baseball team, their ballpark, and the allotment land mortgaged to fund the team. Justina’s focus on gaining money and safety for

her family, at the expense of Choctaw sovereignty, reflects her own post-traumatic stress as a former victim of police torture (203), as well as the different relationships African Americans and Choctaws have to the US government. Historian Donal Lindsey notes that this difference was evident at the Hampton Normal School for Blacks and Indians: “Indians at a school for Negroes saw their claims to nationhood undermined by associating with blacks, whose ambitions for integration were assumed to be true of Indians also” (164). While Lindsey suggests that African American desires for integration and Native assertions of sovereignty often kept black and Native students from interacting with each other, *Miko Kings* employs this cultural tension for political purpose. The text points out the promise of cross-cultural alliances, while also acknowledging the differing histories that might motivate such alliances. Hope plays baseball in an effort to support an autonomous, sovereign Choctaw nation, while Justina participates in Black nationalist activism to reform and revise mainstream America. The text notes these differing motives and histories, but suggests that they do not preclude effective alliance making. Instead, they can be used to create a more nuanced, less “black and white,” representation of history and activism, one that accounts for, and negotiates, difference. *Miko Kings* points out these differing political programs yet exposes the similar desire for connection underlying them. While Native and African American political motivations and histories differ, each contains a tradition of “making consensus” that is at the heart of tribalography. The novel uses tribalography’s “propensity for bringing things together, for making consensus” (Howe, “Story” 42) as the bridge for building alliances that account for cultural differences. The larger political goal the novel asserts is not erasing the cultural differences between Hope and Justina, or between Choctaws and African Americans, but using these differences to provide the possibility (“hope”) of strengthening our own identities and communities.

Thomas King contends that “stories [are] medicine, that a story told one way could cure, that the same story told another way could injure” (92). In order to create authorizing stories that “cure,” tribalography asserts that narratives of the past must not only recount past oppression but also provide useful models for contemporary resistance. Howe’s writing suggests that stories that fail to recover these models of resistance, especially cross-cultural and cross-national alliances, “could injure” by passing on only stories of fear and loss. In her documentary

*Indian Country Diaries: Spiral of Fire*, Howe states that too many Native stories pass on “historic grief”; she wonders aloud, “how are we going to heal ourselves?” Proposing an answer, she declares, “For healing we must forgive. Together we can reconcile our past for peace, for the future.” Howe’s body of work asserts that responding to oppression with separatism and fear continues the cycle of historic grief by keeping individuals and tribes isolated and self-oriented. Instead, Howe’s work promotes moving forward and healing collectively, “together.” Her concept of “tribalography” urges a fuller representation of the past, one that recognizes and honors not only historic grief but also stories of collective resistance. Tribalography advocates that individuals and tribes expand their identities and political practices, adopting early tribal traditions of diplomacy and inclusiveness more actively to resist intergenerational trauma. Howe’s writing suggests expanded identities and political practices present a far more effective means for supporting tribal sovereignty. In “The Integrity of American Indian Claims” Craig Womack urges critics to imagine a “literary nationalism . . . with global implications, thus demonstrating a more profound cosmopolitanism than has been argued for to date, one with strong roots at its base” (169). A fuller examination of tribalography reveals its efforts to prompt readers to rethink how tribal identities and nations can be supported with cross-cultural and international alliances. It is important to note, however, that tribalography is more suggestive than immediately applicable. Though Howe’s writing asserts that stories contain political feasibility, further theorizing and activism is needed to understand and develop the relationships among literary and political praxis, and expanded tribal identities and sovereignty.

#### NOTES

1. Howe repeats this idea in her play “The Unknown Women.” At the play’s conclusion, the characters chant, “Get up and deliver the stories . . . They create people and author tribes” (Howe, *Evidence* 20).

2. See Hollrah 76–78; Driskill 163; and Steeves.

3. After losing their traditional homeland in the Choctaw Removals of 1831, 1832, and 1833, the Dawes Act of 1887 stripped the Choctaw of tribally held land in Indian Territory. The Dawes Act privatized all tribal lands into individual plots, called allotments, the majority of which went to non-Natives. *Miko Kings* states, “With the creation of Oklahoma, with the privatization of tribal lands . . . Indians will be writ-

ten out of Oklahoma's picture. And history" (23). The novel seeks to recover this forgotten history.

4. To make Justina's connection with the Black nationalist movement explicit, the novel describes her political and familial connections with Marcus Garvey and William Shakespeare, the chief of police of the United Negro Improvement Association, a Black nationalist organization founded by Garvey (*Miko Kings* 69, 74, 204).

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# Talking Tribalography

LeAnne Howe Models Emerging Worldliness in  
“The Story of America” and *Miko Kings*

CARTER MELAND

Put it this way, it's better to box your students than not. I mean put them in that box with that cat, that vial of hydrocyanic acid, and that radioactive substance that may or may not decay within the hour that the cat is in there: the cat that physicist Erwin Schrödinger postulated in order to deal with questions of quantum superposition. If the radioactive substance in that box decays, the vial shatters, and the cat dies; if the radioactive substance does not decay, the cat lives. For the hour that the cat is in the box it is alive-dead: a superposed state. The cat's alive-dead state helped Schrödinger address the question of whether light is a particle or a wave. The box contains the *potential* of both, and for that hour it is both—the cat is both potential: living and potential: dead. Potential: wave and potential: particle, but always light, always cat. Opening the box after an hour resolves the superposed state: either the cat jumps out (and ignores you for the rest of your life), or the box becomes its coffin.

Students in Native literature courses such as mine (at a majority culture institution in the United States) live in a superposed state. They live, for the most part, unquestioningly colonialist, but in the course they see decolonization at work: They are colonialist-decolonized. They, Native and non-Native, are the potential in the boxes we teach, the stories of these Native writers.

LeAnne Howe's notion of tribalography is a valuable tool in realizing the decolonizing potential within our students.

This potential raises questions about why we teach Native literature (an easy answer: because we love the work the writers do in the stories we love) and, more critically, why students take Native literature. At one end of the spectrum they take our courses to fulfill requirements, and at the other end they take the courses out of a deep and abiding

interest. Regardless of where they fall on this spectrum, what emerges in conversations with most non-Native students (and the occasional Native student) is that what one should want to learn about Indians in taking a literature course is that *they* have a *culture*. Rather than existing as an imaginative engagement with Native lived, historical, and political experience, some (many? most?) students predict and believe and *hope* that Native literature will document Native culture. That Native people possess cultures—are *cultural*—is a notion deeply embedded in US national culture, and as a result of a lifetime in front of the TV, or seated in classrooms watching educational documentaries, or browsing Wikipedia, or paging through oversized Time-Life books in a desperate attempt to scare up some interesting information for that fourth-grade report on Indians we all had to write, it comes as little surprise to those of us engaged in this field of instruction that “culture” is the focus of our students’ sense of what Native literature should be presenting to them. Apolitical in this American sense of it, culture reassures students with its portrayal of exotic differences, some of which are instructive and hopeful (we are all honor the earth for seven generations related!) while others are safely bizarre to them but unique, and so, though trivialized, the differences are still worth remarking about (they used deer brains for what?!). While we can point to the sources of such misrepresentations, there remains the task of explicating the ways that this lens reflects an American cultural or political imperative to reduce Native lives and histories to “culture” as a means to evade deeper reflection on what America has done to those lives and histories. There remains the task, in other words, of explicating the ways that these stories we love forward implicit and explicit critiques of such notions of “culture” that ease disquieting historical and political questions out of the picture of what Native literature means.

Most (some? many?) of us teach this literature to ease these disquieting ideas back into the picture of what life—political, historical, cultural, experiential—is in North America, because we know that humans, like ourselves, have given voice over countless generations to images and ideas embodied in stories about how to live, and not live, in places that have evolved to human presences and to the sometimes inhumane activities that accompany those presences; we teach this literature because we know that disquieting experiences are as instructive as contemplative consideration of the mysteries of differing cultures, and

likely more critical to the task of cultural, social, and political transformation in which many (some? most?) of us see ourselves engaged. We discuss colonialism both as form of thought and as deed to explore and explain that it too often and too deeply condones and rationalizes the basest kinds of cruelty and inhumanity as it unfolds over these places we now stand within. We initiate such explorations not to bring anybody down, but rather as a means of raising questions about what kinds of dialogue we must generate to reimagine and restory what life in North America should become. Tribalography digs deep into this question of how to generate such transformative dialogues between the human, the other-than-human, and the inhumane as we strive to figure out how best to live here and to undo the inhumanity of colonialist thought and deed so we can address its costs and consequences to the earth and to the peoples it too often marginalizes. The transformative dialogues of tribalography seek to challenge but not dehumanize those that colonialism privileges even as it simultaneously strives to elaborate ways to bring peoples together in place and across time on the back of this turtle that some call America, but others call mother.

All this fine talk about the transformative potential of tribalography in reimagining America demands a bit more discussion of just how it intervenes in colonialism and how, in that intervention, it becomes a decolonizing activity. In her 2002 essay, “The Story of America: A Tribalography,” Howe tells us that tribalographies “pull all the elements together of the storyteller’s tribe, meaning the people, the land, and multiple characters and all their manifestations and revelations, and connect these in past, present, and future milieus (present and future milieus mean non-Indians)” (42). The bringing together of the human and the other-than-human—the tribe, the people, and the land—as well as all the epiphanies arising from those experiences across all manifestations of time in that place strikes me as the best summation of the philosophical thrust of Indigenous literature that we might hope for. While explicating the implications of this statement would no doubt be rewarding, I’m going to ignore it and instead push that last parenthetical phrase about “present and future milieus mean non-Indians” forward because it concerns the students that I advocated boxing in my opening paragraph. That phrase points to a pair of critical ideas that invite further reflection: (1) non-Indians are part of the tribalographies we may read, imagine, or live, and (2) as non-Indians are only a part

of “present and future milieus,” it means that the past milieu—that of Indian peoples—must be regarded as originary, and we need to recognize that those originary voices story America before America was America. Such a thought little surprises those of us in Native studies, but it is often terra incognita for majority culture students. Nine students out of ten express amazement when they read in Howe’s essay that the Haudenosaunee story of their confederacy inspired the American Founding Fathers as they worked to articulate the US Constitution (Howe, “Story” 37–40). Given the dismissive binarism of the colonialist paradigm in which they’ve grown up, most students have never considered that “America,” as Howe declares in the opening paragraph of the essay, “is a tribal creation story, a tribalography” (29). Colonialist binarism relegates tribal creation stories to a before-America prehistory, and to consider it as an America-constituting shared history is, dare I say it, a small though still revolutionary step outside the bounds of received knowledge. The essay pulls together the Haudenosaunee, the Founding Fathers, and our students connecting them in place (America) and across time—linking past, present, and future milieus. Connecting ourselves to others in place and across time is what tribalographies strive for, stemming as they do “from the Native propensity for bringing things together, for making consensus, and for symbiotically connecting one thing to another” (“Story” 42).

Though such statements defining tribalography have their uses, they ultimately miss the true beauty of the idea. Tribalography is a process, not a theory; it is something you do more than something you name; it’s an action, not an ideology: you kill a story’s beauty and power when you make it a protocol to be followed rather than an activity to be engaged. Tribalography is no-ism, and we find its beauty in its motion to story peoples together. The trick when talking tribalography is to help students who, generally, have been schooled in reductionist modes of thought to avoid those traps when thinking with (or in) tribalographies. (By “schooled in reductionist modes of thought” I am referring to the scientistic modes of thinking encouraged in colonialist modernity. Notice that I use the word *scientistic* here rather than *scientific* in order to emphasize that sort of dogmatic belief in science that percolates within modern societies. Scientistic modes of thinking propose a series of basic laws that can be applied universally. Newtonian physics is such a mode, but others such as phrenology, blood quantum, and neoliberal

economics, though often outmoded, can still often be found. While such beliefs may offer comfort with their simplicity, they are too often inhumane in their application.)

Howe's essay articulates this notion in the way it moves. Rather than reductive and disciplined, the essay is accretive and interdisciplinary. In it Howe draws on personal observations, her grandmother's stories, and Choctaw traditional stories, as well as discussions of the work of biologists, historians, and artists, some Indian and some non-Indian, and rather than exploring whether some of these citations are superior or inferior to the others, she points out the ways in which they are in dialogue with one another, suggesting that together they are the story of America. She points out as well, in that "past milieu" phrasing, that we must never lose sight of the fact that it is Native voices that first articulated this dialogue in the Americas—though, arguably, and as evidenced in Native sacred histories, this dialogue was just as likely initiated by the birds, turtles, bears, beaver, muskrats, trees, lakes, rivers, stones, and swamps long before the human voice joined in. In bringing all manner of expression into dialogue in the essay, Howe models the ways that tribalogy both questions colonialist authority (those stories—sciences, pardon me—that would exclude Native knowledge as superstition or mere allegory) and, more crucially, seeks to share authority between the various genres of writing that appear in the essay: let us not forget "the Native propensity for bringing things together" ("Story" 42).

By means of these collaborative dialogues and the sharing of authority they encourage, and by giving primacy to Native voices in articulating the original relations in America, Howe effectively inverts the assumptions of colonialist Eurocentrism. Eurocentrism assumes that all discourse between whites and Indians was (largely or mostly) unidirectional. Depending on whether we are looking at triumphal or revisionist majority culture narratives of American conquest, this Eurocentrism imagines Native peoples as being affected, changed, or injured by Europeans and European American colonists and settlers, spending precious little wonder on the ways in which Indians created America through the articulation of their traditional literatures. By showing the ongoing relevance of the teachings in these stories and forwarding how the teachings in the Haudenosaunee's story of their confederacy inspired the Founding Fathers, Howe turns the arrow of influence around—probably counterclockwise as the Choctaw would tend to do—and unmans those

Eurocentrist narratives, proposing instead that the seminal act of Congress that creates America comes (yes, I said it) when white Americans engage with Native stories—when, more critically, Native peoples decide to share their stories to help these visitors become something new.

My students and I explore the ways that tribalography liberates these Native and American and scientific and sacred stories from imaginary hierarchies to open new forms of dialogue.<sup>1</sup> In turning away from hierarchy and toward dialogue, students turn away from their colonialist assumptions and the racialized dispossessions and accruals of privilege on which colonialist thought depends; I encourage them to turn toward the creative task of figuring out how to generate the kinds of decolonizing thinking that tribalography advances.

One means by which I forward student engagement in this process is to focus on the science that Howe uses in both the essay and in her 2007 novel *Miko Kings*. The liberationist storying Howe undertakes in the essay moves over a variety of scientific domains, ranging from symbiosis in evolution to the many worlds interpretation in contemporary quantum mechanics, which Howe explores either directly or through powerful, layered images like the Eye Tree in *Miko Kings*. As an effect of colonialist hierarchical thought, nothing seems more at odds with Native thought and expression to majority culture students than modern biology and physics. In colonialist stories, science is what liberated Modern Man from the dark shackles of superstition, and these students, having inherited this story, believe it. In the box of my classroom, the students and I explore the ways in which Howe, through her tribalographies, unwinds modern science from its implications in the colonialist dispossession of Indigenous peoples, so that we can see—in that shared authority—bringing things together kind of way that Howe favors—that science is not more capable than or superior to Native thinking, but is rather cousin, brother and sister, daughter and son to Indigenous knowledge. Tribalography moves us away from colonialist habits of thought and toward a recalibration of our minds and hearts to see the sciences in a Choctawan way—if we follow the path of Howe's national pride (as forwarded in the essay and novel)—though perhaps, for the purposes of my essay, it is best to be more general and just say that tribalographies offer a Native way of seeing science, rather than expecting and accepting that the lens focuses only ever in one direction: from science to the Natives.

Howe's tribalography exploits the shift from a Newtonian view of the

universe to an Einsteinian one to advance this crucial reversal. Newtonian physics rested on the certainty of seemingly immutable laws and so encouraged a faith that profound scientific questions had answers that were either right or wrong. Like biology since Darwin, physics since Einstein seems more and more interested in mapping relations, recognizing flux, and accepting the possibility that key questions may have multiple answers: light may be *both* a wave *and* a particle. The world science recognizes has become a both/and world, not an either/or one. Classical sciences and, it seems, prevailing perceptions of science in contemporary lived culture follow those reductionist ways, and so every day we hear news about how scientists have found the gene that causes diabetes, cancer, or eczema, and yet these scourges persist because, as we really know, it is not a particular thing that causes the other thing, but rather it is a range of relations that set conditions in which the undesired thing may transpire. Such popular notions of science as reductionist allow us, as a culture, to indulge the fantasy that knowledge is certainty, rather than potential. Turning toward potential returns us to that box in which I, following Schrödinger, placed my students.

In “The Story of America,” Howe reminds us that knowledge is potential, rooted in dialogical relationships driven to inspire, create, or recognize connections across a range of subjects—even if the social norms of colonialist culture remain blind to these ideas. She discusses how the Haudenosaunee history of their confederacy, known to some of the US Founding Fathers, planted a seed-image in their minds that grew into a plant that fed a sheep whose hide was tanned (with sheep brains?) into the parchment upon which Jacob Shallus inscribed the US Constitution and for which he was paid thirty dollars (Bloom). Just as she points out the Native roots of the United States as a modern nation, Howe also asserts that modern biologists like Lynn Margulis have “adopted a Choctawan way of looking at the world” (“Story” 34) when they talk about symbiosis. “Symbiosis refers,” Margulis tells us, “to an ecological and physical relationship between two kinds of organisms that is far more intimate than most organism associations” (qtd. in “Story” 34), and she illustrates the concept with reference to the birds that eat the leeches inside crocodile mouths. The plover dines in the croc’s mouth without being eaten itself, resulting in both healthy crocodiles and well-fed plovers. Even if it is rooted in a need for nutrition and dental health rather than language, this scientific fact focuses on a

dialogical relationship that demonstrates, in Howe's words, that evolution is "the result of cooperation, not simply competition" ("Story" 34). In this symbiotic relationship, one that has evolved over time, the plover and the crocodile evade, if not transcend, popular notions of Darwinian competition and show that the natural world is not necessarily red in tooth and claw. We see this biological lesson when we shift our focus from the individual in a place to the relations of the living community that is the place. As Jack Forbes puts it, "That which the tree exhales, I inhale. That which I exhale, the trees inhale. Together we form a circle. When I breathe I am breathing the breath of billions of now-departed trees and plants. When trees and plants breathe they are breathing the breath of billions of now-departed humans, animals, and other peoples" (146). Tribalography brings Haudenosaunee and American revolutionaries together, as well as the breath of trees and plants and people, and everyone grows in the exchange—or should.

This shift in focus cuts at colonialist-capitalist notions of aggression and competition as being "nature's way" and puts us in that Native place that seeks to recognize generative relations. Howe reminds us in the essay that these are the kind of relations explored in Native sacred histories where animal people, plant people, and people-people sometimes conflict, but the world is almost always made in acts of collaboration. For instance, in the Ojibwe story of the creation of this world after the flood, Wenebojo, the first man/culture hero, calls upon animals to assist him in making the world from the mud under the water. He needs them to bring it up so he can fashion a world on the turtle's back.<sup>2</sup> Native sacred histories show that the evolution of life in a place develops through imaginative dialogue and the negotiation of crucial differences, just as biologists have learned to recognize since Darwin. These imaginative dialogues that aim to generate productive relations are what students in the box of my class engage in.

Howe liberates the Choctawan way of seeing contained in evolutionary theory, but this does not necessarily liberate Choctaw people or their nation. The scientific insights explored in the "The Story of America" are not large enough for that task, but in *Miko Kings* Howe moves towards the liberation of science to a Choctawan vision that also liberates Choctaw people and their nation from colonialist constructs of history.

To speak knowledgably about the vast range of theory in contemporary physics far exceeds my abilities as a thinker, but if I look at those

theories as stories rather than esoteric formulae, I think I might bring Howe's work into a bit more focus. The importance of these theory-stories in *Miko Kings* should not be undervalued; they are what Howe unleashes in the novel's explorations of superposed quantum states and the many-worlds interpretation of quantum mechanics.<sup>3</sup> The relevant story here concerns Schrödinger's cat and the Eye Tree that Ezol Day, the time-traveling theorist of Choctaw space, draws in her journal, the one with all the eyes in its branches and at its roots (see *Miko Kings* 135). Ezol sees the universe in all its angles and in all its possible iterations through the medium of the Eye Tree; for her, the eyes on the branches of the tree allow her to track potential resolutions to superposed states across space. She sees the alive-cat in the alive-world and the dead-cat in the dead-world.

So let's remind ourselves about the difficulties of superposition before we attempt to unravel the complex realities that Ezol sees and experiences. Recall that Schrödinger placed the cat in that box with the perilous vial of cyanide in order to raise the question of whether it was alive or dead when we couldn't see it. Since its true state is unknown to us until the box is opened, the cat lives in that superposed state of alive-dead discussed earlier. When you open the box you find the cat is either alive or dead, and the question is resolved.

Only it isn't really. This answer fails to satisfy for many complicated reasons in quantum thinking. As near as I can muster, it is unsatisfactory because opening the box does not really resolve the question of when a quantum system—or a cat—stops existing as a mixture of states. The cat is both alive and dead for an hour, and that we know is a physical impossibility. Opening the box only highlights the uncertainty of the both/and state—for an hour you did not know. Hugh Everett III proposed a solution to the problem in 1957 when he pointed out that the cat knows if it is alive before we open the box. As Price explains, "As the cyanide/no cyanide interacts with the cat the cat is split into two states (dead or alive). From the surviving cat's point of view it occupies a different world from its deceased copy." Likewise, when you open the box you also split, and one of you finds a living cat in your world and the other you finds a dead cat in your world. In the stories of this science, truths are complex and have a multiplicity of phases, some of which contradict others, but still all prevail. Price explains, "The histories [generated in these splits] form a branching tree which encompasses all

the possible outcomes of each interaction” of cat and box and you. Each history follows a distinct world line, and the branches of the tree are the lines where every possible quantum event is realized: everything that could happen in our world does happen in some other world, and the truth is, we know only the one manifestation, but our inability to see the other manifestations does not mean we foreclose upon their inherent right to be true. Instead, it means that we must exercise our imaginations to recognize their potential, even if we cannot physically realize it.

Physicists think these split world lines are decoherent, meaning that communication between discrete world lines is thought unlikely, if not impossible, but Ezol, the young woman possessed of “genius symptoms” in Howe’s novel (*Miko* 142), seems to know otherwise. With the Eye Tree Ezol sees decoherence; she sees all the world lines that branch out of each quantum event, and she can trace them from each root event through all the branches that grow from them.<sup>4</sup> She travels down these other world lines, much like Native medicine people and their “journeys to other dimensions” (*Miko* 36), and like those medicine people, she intervenes in the lives of those that live there. Ezol sees and interacts with a diversity of world lines, bringing them into critical relationships that transform those people who realize the potential she offers.

Ezol tracks one world line to Lena’s home in Ada, Oklahoma, one hundred years after her own death in a fire and reveals that she, not her cousin Cora, should have been Lena’s grandmother. This is just one story in the novel. Others concern attempts to save Choctaw land from allotment, the establishment of an Indian baseball league in Indian Territory, and whether or not the Miko Kings ball club won the Twin Territories championship game in 1907. Lena’s initial research into the championship shows that the team’s pitcher Hope Little Leader threw the game as the result of a payoff.

Ezol reveals that Cora’s illicit affair with Ezol’s boyfriend was the spark that leads to Lena’s mother’s birth, when by rights—and in other world lines—it is Ezol who gave birth to Lena’s mother. Instead of an aged cousin and an ancestor to be honored, Ezol reveals that she is Lena’s grandmother: she is both cousin and grandmother, depending upon the world line. Like the cat, she is both alive and dead, and hers is not the only superposed state in the book. For instance, by the end of the novel Ezol shows Lena that Hope Little Leader won the championship game (that he elsewhere threw) and so, from what Lena knows,

he is both the hero and the goat. These superposed states need to be resolved, though; the box needs to be opened so that a world line can be seen resolutely—so that the anchor line of superposition and uncertainty can be cut—and Ezol resolves these states for us in her final words in the novel. “My girl,” she calls Lena. “My dearest girl” (*Miko* 221).

In claiming Lena as “her girl” she places us squarely in that world line where she became the mother of Lena’s mother, where her lover did not “spark” with her cousin, where Hope won the championship game, and where the Four Mothers Society found a way to protect Choctaw land from allotment. Given these developments (all of which contradict the world we live in today), I think we can predict that the house Lena is refurbishing no longer sits on land in Oklahoma. Instead it has moved through Choctaw space, by means of Ezol’s spark, and has become the (refurbished) history of this other place: this Choctaw, non-allotted world line. After Ezol leaves her, I think Lena steps out into a fully intact Choctaw nation, not one whittled away by Oklahoma Sooners and Boomers and federal allotment. Stepping outside her home, into the homeground of this other world line, this other history, Lena is transformed from a woman detached from the Choctaw nation into one who now sees the power in the stories of the Indigenous world line.

Lena may not see by means of the Eye Tree, but her grandmother’s story leads her to unlock the potential in a mostly unknown and unacknowledged history that brims with Native vitality—she discovers Native baseball, sees Choctaw resistance to colonialism, learns of her real ancestry, and absorbs the stories about all these things. Ezol’s uncle, Henri Day, the Indian Territory baseball entrepreneur, sees this same world line of Choctaw vitality a hundred years before Lena does, but only briefly, in what he thinks is an anxiety dream induced by the threat of allotment. In his dream he sees “a modern baseball field unlike any other. He decided it must be from the future. The sign on the stadium read *Chahta Hapia Hoke. We are Choctaw*” (*Miko* 116). As she walks down the street in this other world line Ezol has shown her, I believe Lena passes this stadium, reads the sign, and remembers all the worlds her grandmother Ezol shared with her. Through Ezol’s memories of the “past, present, and future milieus” of the Choctaw people (“Story” 42), Lena steps into the world that Henri glimpsed in a moment of undecoherece from that other world line, from the one where we live now. Lena now lives in a revitalized and resistant Choctaw nation where

allotment failed, Hope threw the championship-winning pitch, and someone built a beautiful big Choctaw baseball stadium. If Yankee stadium was at one time “The House that Ruth Built,” perhaps we should think of this stadium as “The House that Hope Built.”

*Miko Kings* speaks to us across world lines, asking us not to be fooled by what appears to be real here. The Choctaw loss of land in the allotment process is a matter of our misperceptions, because even if it is true, in this instance, that allotment went forward and the Choctaw lost land, we are transformed from one world line to another when we realize that the Four Mothers Society strenuously resisted that injustice. The Choctaw did not merely die in the box of federal policy; they fought for what was right, even if they lost. Like them we have a choice: see the dead cat of allotment or the living cat of resistance. In choosing one over the other we may not actually be moving between world lines as Ezol does, but we are choosing to see the world in a different way—and the choice should change us.

All this cat-in-box, alive-dead, Eye Tree talk should not be mistaken as science fiction. It is tribalography, a looking back along the world lines of the past and seeing worlds other than the one trumpeted by a triumphal American exceptionalism and the Native victimage it imagines. Tribalography is a way of finding, as Ezol does, a way to bring the strengths and beauties and losses of Choctaw history into stories rooted in the primacy of Native experience and the vitality of Native thinking. Tribalography looks to the past as a source of potential, not as over and done with as is propagated in colonialist models of history; tribalography looks to the past as a seed, an image of some new way to look at our shared world, one open to the multiple truths that contemporary physics predicts are part of our physical reality, and one that also promotes the kinds of collaborative exchanges that drive the many constituents of this world to evolve symbiotically, to come together in mutual benefit rather than colonialist dispossession.

Science in our world line too often claims Native lives, experience, and knowledge. It patents Native medicines, catalogs ancestral bodies, and archives Native stories, but Howe’s tribalography asks us and our students to recognize that, like Native land, science needs to be decolonized, that it needs to recognize the theory-stories that tribalographies articulate. Tribalographies—engaged with past, present, and future milieus—embrace the notion that multiple truths and unseen dimen-

sions shape the world and our experience of the world, just as contemporary physics does, and they—tribalographies—put these modern sciences into a symbiotic relationship to Native thinking, rather than a domineering one. Decolonized by the kind of thinking Howe proposes in her essay and novel, science can be indigenized and help us generate new relations among the many stories we all live. Science is, potentially, a tribalogy, but only if it discards its culturally conditioned colonialist blinders.

In that “We are Choctaw” world line into which Lena walks at the end of *Miko Kings* all the best theorists of time, space, and place, all the best storytellers and historians, speak Choctaw, Lakota, Ojibwe, and so on, as well as English—just as they do here—only there everyone, Native and non-Native, listens. Tribalogy, as a way of seeing, reading, and writing, helps us guide our students out of the convenient boxes of colonialist thought into vital, tribal world lines where Native stories breathe America into life in a generative act of sharing and exchange that, while rarely acknowledged, nevertheless remains true. Tribalographies put us into boxes where the potential of Native story and knowledge carry us toward a new coherence.

#### NOTES

1. Just so no one thinks that there is some sort of righteous revival taking place in my classroom, with students rolling on the floor, rapt and semi-rabid in transports of Indigenous literature-induced ecstasy, let me say that many unfortunates—as I can’t help but see them—reject out of hand any challenge to that scientific reductionism that will be, generally speaking, their bread and butter when they move into their professional careers; let me say too that most students are eager to rise to the challenges tribalogy poses.

2. Scholars, writers, and ceremonial leaders have recorded/told various versions of the story of Wenebojo’s making the earth. See Barnouw, Benton-Banai, and Vizenor for differing examples.

3. My discussion of this quantum material benefited from my reading of Greene’s *The Fabric of the Cosmos* as well as Price’s “The Everett FAQ.” Any mistakes are a result of my reading, not their work.

4. Price emphasizes that “thermodynamically irreversible” events are the root events that initiate world line splits. Thus it is the radioactive isotope that does or does not break down (a thermodynamically irreversible event) in the box with the cat that initiates the split, not the cat itself. This thermodynamic theme plays out again and again in *Miko Kings*. The word *miko* refers to fire, Ezol dies in a fire, and, most critically for my reading, Ezol describes her sexual activity as “sparking,” linking it to fire and thermodynamic, transformative events.

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## “The Lord and the Center of the Farthest”

Ezol's Journal as Tribalography in LeAnne Howe's  
*Miko Kings: An Indian Baseball Story*

PATRICE HOLLRAH

In the documentary *Playing Pastime*, Choctaw author LeAnne Howe says, “For two centuries American Indians fought genocide, negotiated Indian identity, and struggled against cultural assimilation, all the while playing ball in the fields of their ancestors. How did American Indians become the mascots for a sport they may have invented? This is the story of playing pastime” (Fortier and Howe). Comparable themes run through Howe's novel *Miko Kings*, a story of Indian Territory baseball set in Ada, Oklahoma, covering a nonlinear period from 1888 through 2007.

### INTRODUCTION TO MIKO KINGS

Multiple narrators from the past and present relate the story of the all-Indian baseball team, the Miko Kings, their triumphs, losses, loves, deaths, and survival. A spirit from the past, a postal clerk, Choctaw Ezol Day, visits a modern-day freelance journalist, Choctaw Lena Coulter, in 2006 to tell her about the history of Ada and its citizens. Ezol, a theorist of relativity according to Choctaw time, explains to Lena how life in the past, present, and future has already happened: “Ada is an event in which I isolate myself now and again,” she says. “The circus that came to town, the moving picture producer, the fire, the ballgames—they all happened here. But then, everything, even the farthest universe, has already happened. They're stories that travel now as captured light in someone else's telescope. No?” (*Miko Kings* 35). Some of those stories are in Ezol's journal, which Lena discovers while remodeling her Choctaw grandmother Mourning Tree Bolin's house. The journal and Ezol's visits become the catalysts for uncovering the history of the Miko Kings baseball team as well as that of Lena's own family.

Among the numerous characters in *Miko Kings* are several who directly affect Ezol's life, appear in her journal, and have prominent roles in the novel. In 1907 Choctaw Hope Little Leader is the twenty-five-year-old pitcher for the Miko Kings who falls in love with his teacher, Justina Maurepas (Dusky Long-Gone Girl/Black Juice), at the Hampton Normal School for Blacks and Indians. Justina's cousin, Beauregard "Bo" Hash, convinces Hope to throw the last game of the Twin Territories Series against the Seventh Cavalry Baseball Team for \$5,000, so Hope will have enough money to take care of Justina. Ezol's love interest is the Miko Kings' manager-player, Chickasaw-Choctaw George "Blip" Bleen, who carries out justice by chopping off Hope's hands in retribution for throwing the game. Ezol's Choctaw Uncle Henri Day owns the Miko Kings, and his daughter, Ezol's cousin, Cora Day (Mourning Tree Bolin), colludes with Bo Hash and seduces Blip to persuade him to take the bribe and throw the baseball game. Cora becomes pregnant by Blip and gives birth to Lena's mother, Kit Bolin. Ezol's spirit appears to Lena because she should have been her grandmother: "Lena, I may not be your blood grandmother—but I should have been. And I have always been with you in spirit. That is the true story I came to tell" (221).

The front matter of *Miko Kings* opens with several pages of visual images; first, an 1891 map of Indian Territory, signifying the importance of the land, place, time, and space, all key aspects of Ezol Day's Choctaw philosophy of time. Next follows an image of Ezol's journal, discovered in the walls of Lena Coulter's house, which chronicles the story of Ezol's life, Ada's citizens, and the Twin Territories Series between the Miko Kings and the Fort Sill's Seventh Cavalry Baseball Teams. The third image is a photo from the film *His Last Game*, in which Ezol plays the role of a male gravedigger, a fitting representation as she is the one who guides Lena to unearth the history of the Miko Kings. In fact, Lena's narration, which frames the novel, claims, "the voice of this story is [Ezol's]" (24). As part of the motivation for Lena's researching the Miko Kings, Ezol's journal warrants a closer look for what else it reveals about the characters and their survival. The different genres that open the novel—map, photo of journal, photo of film, story—also represent a visual tribalography and echo the different genres found in the journal.

## EZOL

Ezol is a strange mixture of characteristics, herself somewhat of a micro version of a personal tribalogy, perhaps representing a larger Native population that suffers from the historical and intergenerational trauma of colonization; yet she has survived with numerous and varied strengths. Howe begins her essay on tribalogy, “Native stories are power. They create people. They author tribes. America is a tribal creation story, a tribalogy” (“Story” 29). This critical definition of Native stories creates the powerful character of Ezol and contributes to the authoring of the Choctaws and their interactions with non-Natives in America. The novel’s earliest description of Ezol characterizes her as an “oddball” (*Miko Kings* 10), and Lena thinks, “As a young girl, Ezol must have been afflicted somehow” (186). Lena wonders about Ezol’s eyesight: “Did she see multiple images? Or could she have had an eye disease as a child?” (185). Her teacher at the Good Land Indian Orphanage, Mrs. Sara Anderson LeFlore, orders science books for Ezol because she believes that Ezol “suffer[s] from genius symptoms,” having gone from “barely utter[ing] words in her own tongue” to a command of the English language (142). Lena observes the contrast of entries in Ezol’s journal: “In some entries she seems utterly nonsensical, then on other pages she imagines time and space in the language of philosophers and physicists” (186). In an interview Howe has said, “[Ezol’s] a little quirky because she lacks social skills” (Howe, interview, McKosato). Despite Ezol’s inability to interact with people in socially appropriate ways, she performs her job well in the post office, “her peculiar habits meshing with the routines of postal clerks” (*Miko Kings* 110). Clearly, Ezol manifests strange personality traits.

Ezol’s strange personality traits exhibit Asperger Syndrome (AS), which the National Institutes of Health describes as “an autism spectrum disorder (ASD), one of a distinct group of neurological conditions characterized by a greater or lesser degree of impairment in language and communication skills, as well as repetitive or restrictive patterns of thought and behavior.” Although Ezol displays all of the symptoms of AS, she expertly instructs Lena on the history of Indian Territory, allotment, fraudulent land deals and corruption, identity, her ancestors, and baseball. Ezol underscores a different way of seeing the world, which in turn supports the view of seeing the origins of baseball in

a different way, not as an original American game but as developing from an Indian game. As Ezol explains to Lena her Choctaw theorem of time built around verbs, Lena asks, "What does all this have to do with the Miko Kings and baseball?" (39). Ezol's answer sums up tribalogy: "Everything, Lena! After I understood that there might be other spacetime terms embedded in our language, I looked for them in plants that contain sacred geometric expressions. I studied the patterns in our stomp dances and baseball games. Words make equations the same way that numbers connect us to other dimensions and to *okchamali*" (39). Ezol explains the etymology of *okchamali*, a word that can signify "life." Hence, Ezol sees everything as having connections; nothing is truly isolated.

To illustrate a different way of seeing the world, a Choctawan way of looking at the world, Howe quotes from a painting by artist and author Roxy Gordon: "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" ("Story" 33). Howe goes on to note how this quotation represents basic principles in scientist Lynn Margulis's theory on symbiogenesis: "the merger of previously independent organisms is of great importance to evolutionary change" (33). In her essay, Howe enacts her methodology by merging stories, art, and science as evidence in support of her theory. Hence, the creation of the game of baseball might best be described as the merger of previously independent Native games and non-Native players. People are "different," as Ezol represents, but "everything is everything, and everything is very, very strange" (33). Ezol could easily repeat Howe's words to Lena: "The story I am telling you now is *nukfokechi*. It brings forth knowledge and inspires us to make the eventful leap that one thing leads to another" (32), that is, an Indian game led to American baseball.

#### EZOL'S JOURNAL

##### *Tribalogy*

Ezol's journal, reproduced within the chapter "The Lord and the Center of the Farthest," illustrates Howe's literary critical theory of tribalogy:

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, and multiple characters and all their manifestations and revelations, and connect these in past, present, and future milieus (present and future milieus mean non-Indians). [. . .] tribalogy comes from the Native propensity for bringing things together, for making consensus, and for symbiotically connecting one thing to another. ("Story" 42)

Ezol's journal is a concrete example of tribalogy in its compilation of diary entries, letters, drawings, biblical scriptures, and clippings from the *Ada Weekly News*. The intertextual assemblage of these various items helps create the world in which Ezol lives, a "native transnationalist" world, as Osage scholar Robert Warrior might describe it: "In effect our nationalism is born out of native transnationalism, the flow and exchange of ideas and politics across our respective nations' borders" (125). *Miko Kings* has a mix of characters from southeastern nations—Cherokee, Chickasaw, Choctaw, Creek, Seminole—along with other white and African American characters among whom there are certainly cross-cultural/racial relations. Still, Howe's definition of tribalogy accounts for the diverse cast of characters in *Miko Kings* when she uses the language "multiple characters" and "non-Indians."

Scholar Lisa Tatonetti's review essay "The Both/And of American Indian Literary Studies" gives a useful overview of "the imagined divide between proponents and detractors of contemporary literary nationalism" (specifically discussing the works of David Brumble, Penelope Myrtle Kelsey, Arnold Krupat, Kenneth Lincoln, and Gerald Vizenor). Tatonetti places Elizabeth Cook-Lynn (Dakota), Robert Warrior (Osage), Jace Weaver (Cherokee), and Craig Womack (Oklahoma Creek/Cherokee) among those who argue for tribally centered readings of Indigenous literatures; and Arnold Krupat, Elvira Pulitano, and David Treuer (Ojibwe) among those who privilege combinations of theoretical approaches that include either nontribal and tribally centered readings or a sole focus on textual aesthetics. Howe's definition of tribalogy places it within the discourses of contemporary literary nationalism by focusing on a Choctaw reading, but the definition also makes room for connections with nontribal readings and textual aesthetics.

An oversimplified comparison of the nationalist, cosmopolitan, and tribalographic critical approaches might present as the following. If a critic were to read *Miko Kings* with only a cosmopolitan approach, perhaps there would not be enough attention paid to issues of sovereignty, history, land, and language, some of the literary concerns of nationalist approaches; the critic might pay attention only to the analysis of the formal properties of a fictional text: language, style, narrative, and genre, as well as poetic and aesthetic facets (complexity, subtlety, and irony). Scholar Craig S. Womack argues, "The heart of the critique against tribal literary nationalism hinges on denying the validity of Indian experience" ("Single" 377), and the cosmopolitan approach would be guilty of such an oversight. On the other hand, if a critic were to read *Miko Kings* with only a nationalist approach, other important elements, such as transnational cultural/racial relations, might be overlooked because of a more narrow focus, essentialism. In other words, the critic misses an opportunity to engage the Choctaws with the larger world in which they mediate on a daily basis.

However, if a critic reads *Miko Kings* with a tribalographic approach, she makes connections, the kind that allow Lena to recover the histories of the *Miko Kings* baseball players. Womack echoes Howe's tribalography: "A resistance literature is building that argues that sovereignty is not an isolationist position, since tribal governments exist in complex relationships with municipal, state, and federal powers that demand constant movement between and across borders" ("Single" 37). In fact, Womack has reviewed Howe's *Evidence of Red: Poetry and Prose* with a similar critique:

Like "An American in New York," "Choctalking" is a story about intersecting and competing jurisdictions, the tensions going in and out of borders, in short, disputes over who constitutes the indigenes of a given geography. What better city to illustrate this point than Jerusalem? The significance of Howe's imaginative act is an insistence that Indians have something to say about the world beyond Indian country, that Native studies is not inherently parochial, that tribally specific approaches have global implications. (Review 158)

Again, tribalography means "everything is everything" (Howe, "Story" 33). In Howe's *Choctalking on Other Realities*, scholar and poet Dean

Rader writes in the foreword that he believes tribalogy will be the future critical methodology of choice in American Indian studies:

It is a theory of how everything comes to be, though localized through Indigenous points of origin, and even more specifically within tribes and communities themselves. I predict that as the field of American Indian studies grows, more and more scholars will start to use LeAnne's theory of tribalogy as a point of departure for Native fiction, poetry, criticism, drama and film. (Rader vii)

Rader's prediction rings true because tribalogy offers a valid alternative to the polarization between nationalism and cosmopolitanism, and it accounts for those issues that are often discussed in transnationalism. Moreover, tribalogy begins from the Indigenous perspective.

By making tribalographic connections among all the things in Ezol's journal, Howe offers a microcosm of Choctaw life. *Miko Kings* considers Choctaw history and culture, past, present, and future, and the relationships among the Choctaws and non-Natives, which support the argument in *Miko Kings* that today's game of baseball is historically derived from an Indian game. In an interview, Howe says,

Because there's no past, present, or future tense per se in Choctaw or other tribal languages, there are only animate and inanimate ways to differentiate both gender and that things tend to be ever present, ever alive; and the same thing for spirits that are alive in the house, usually our relatives that come back. And how do we think about that gauze of past, present, and future with the future being spirits? And so those questions actually drive the narrative, and of course baseball is a game without time, and that notion about the way we want to live in the universe, I think, is wholly Native. (Howe, interview, Inge).

Howe's comments about time and spirits directly relate to the second outcome of the Twin Territories Championship when Hope returns to the past to replay the final pitch: "[He] throws his famous 'in-down' to Fort Sill's batter, Hugh Scott, who smacks it straight across the plate into Hope's glove. The *Miko Kings* win the 1907 Twin Territories championship in a 1–0 victory" (*Miko Kings* 220).

*Boarding School Education*

Another consideration of the past in Choctaw history is the boarding school education that characters in *Miko Kings* receive. One of the most noticeable features about Ezol's journal is the progression of her education at the Good Land Indian Orphanage, beginning with the first page that shows her initial attempts at cursive to later pages that reveal more mature handwriting, typing, and vocabulary. The journal's narrative depicts Ezol's growth in an educational system of colonization, which converts Native students to Christianity, teaches them how to read and write in English, and attempts to erase all aspects of their Native culture. Ezol has learned the importance of reading, writing, and speaking in English and writes, "I long to speak in complicated thoughts to Blip. To write and speak well is a sign of a clear mind" (163). Her rhetoric parrots what her teachers have taught her.

Despite Ezol's mastery of reading and writing in English, she never loses her sense of Choctaw sovereignty, language, identity, and connection to place. Howe maintains, "Not everyone's experience was awful at boarding school":

There are a multitude of experiences, and [. . .] because [Ezol] had some trouble socializing, they kept her at school for a long time. And you know my grandfather went and my uncles went, and they didn't have really horrible things to say. It was a lonely experience, but [. . .] it wasn't the same everywhere for everybody. So I was trying to let [Ezol] talk about that boarding school experience. (Howe, interview, McKosato)

Ezol holds on to her first language, sprinkling her journal entries with Choctaw words; she opens most entries with "Aichna, Alas" and usually closes with "Si apela. Help me." When her love interest, Blip Bleen, speaks to her in Choctaw, she records the event in her journal: "You are the one I love. Blip looked surprised as if he thought I would not understand because I had been so long in boarding school" (*Miko Kings* 168). Ezol always wants to return to her Aunt Fancy's home, and on March 1, 1888, writes, "I count the days until I go back home to Doaksville" (136). Without a doubt, Ezol retains a sense of who she is and where her home is. Regardless of Asperger Syndrome or eye conditions, Ezol represents something larger than the incentive for Lena to begin her research on

the Miko Kings. Ezol underscores the theme of survival in the novel, just as baseball represents survival for the Choctaws and other southeastern tribes. Ezol blossoms in boarding school with its routine and structure, an environment that nourishes her sense of curiosity about the world around her. Boarding school allows her to develop her Choctaw theory of time, space, and language, which keeps her connected to her people and culture.

### *Literature*

Boarding school gives Ezol the opportunity to read well-known literature. Lena wants to understand Ezol, so she lays out the pages of the journal in what she considers chronological order, an interesting irony because Ezol's theory of time is so different from linear time. The opening page of the journal with Ezol's name is followed by pages torn from well-known literature (129). Two pages are from "The Prince and the Birds" from *The Arabian Nights' Entertainment*, a wonderful reference to Scheherazade and the importance of storytelling for survival (130–31). The image of the birds fighting alludes to the birds flying over the dead body of the squatter on Uncle Henri Day's land, the man who has hanged himself in shame at being discovered having relations with a chicken. The adventures of Prince Camaralzaman and the Princess Badoura echo the separation between other couples in the novel: Ezol and Blip, and Hope and Justina, couples who never marry or find happiness together. Ezol dies in a fire; Justina runs away; and Hope wanders without hands, his "tramp days" (215), spending his last years in the Elms Nursing Home in Ada in 1969.

Pages four and five of the journal are pages from Henry Wadsworth Longfellow's 1847 poem *Evangeline: A Tale of Acadie* (132–33). The poem is noteworthy because it resonates on several levels with themes in *Miko Kings*. The name of the poem is meaningful to Ezol because her deceased twin sister is named Evangeline (141), and in the novel Justina's daughter and great-granddaughter are both named Evangeline (70, 78, 81). The poem follows an Acadian girl named Evangeline and her search for her lost love Gabriel, set during the time of the Great Upheaval (also known as the *Great Expulsion*, the *Deportation*, the *Acadian Expulsion*, or, to the deportees, *Le Grand Dérangement*), the forced population transfer of the Acadian population from Nova Scotia between 1755

and 1763, ordered by British governor Charles Lawrence and the Nova Scotia Council. The poem echoes the ideas of lost love, again as seen between Hope and Justina and between Blip and Ezol, and the idea of lost land, as seen in the Removal Act of 1830, allotment, and Indian Territory becoming the state of Oklahoma in 1907. Justina feels compelled to leave Ada for New Orleans on September 25, 1907, because of racial tensions as Bo Hash explains to Hope: "Justina's done went home. After the Klan showed up at your house she was scared out of her mind. Said if you had any gumption you'd take the money we're offering so the two of you can make a fresh start" (194). The reader does not know if Justina knows she is pregnant with Hope's baby when she leaves Ada, but perhaps her condition contributes to her reasons for leaving posthaste. Her daughter, Evangeline, is born in 1908 in Houmas. Ezol writes in her journal on September 6, 1907, that the Klan carried a burning cross and shouted, "Coloreds s'posed to be living in Colored Town" (171). Ezol stays all night with the terrified Justina and reads to her: "I read aloud from my constant companion, *Evangeline: A Tale of Acadie*" (171). The name Evangeline represents more than the literature for Ezol and Justina. The name is wrapped up in lost love, friendship, and family. The intertextuality of these classics in literature and *Miko Kings* portrays the layered complexities and connections in the Ada community of Natives, blacks, and whites.

Ezol has written her own notes on both literary excerpts. Howe has related how both her grandfather and grandmother "wrote in the margins of books because they didn't have paper" (interview, Inge). After Aunt Fancy dies, appears in Ezol's room, and says that she will be back in seven days, Ezol "marked the days on a stick because there was no paper" (*Miko Kings* 144). Howe's inclusion of these well-known literary excerpts in Ezol's journal creatively combines historical, political, and personal information, reinforcing the same themes in the novel and illustrating how the ideas of tribalography reveal connections between Choctaw history and non-Native history and between spirits of lovers in the past and spirits of lovers in the future.

### *Eye Tree*

The drawing of the eye tree soon follows in the journal and is a visual example of tribalography's ability to make connections among dif-

ferent points in space and time (*Miko Kings* 135). In different entries throughout the journal, Ezol makes references to how she sees “patterns [she] cannot explain” (141) or how “Thanks to the eye tree, [she is] able to spot mistakes in addition and subtraction” (179). Lena tries to make sense of Ezol’s drawing but cannot deduce any solid conclusions. In old age Justina has cataracts and says she knows “just how [Ezol] felt” (80), and Lena agrees that cataracts would have blurred Ezol’s vision, not enhanced it (184); however, a blurring of vision might be a blurring of how Ezol sees time, past, present, and future. The eye tree contains eyes in different positions, which seems to be a metaphor for how Ezol explains her concept of time, that “[t]here must be many locations in time and languages” (144). She argues that her Choctaw theorem of time is built around verbs (38). “To see” is a verb, and the eye tree allows for seeing different perspectives simultaneously. Hence, Ezol can live in 1907 and visit Lena in 2006, an example of tribalography’s connections among the past, present, and future. Howe answers an interviewer’s question about how she manipulates time with language: “Choctaw doesn’t distinguish between past, present, and future tenses, not in the same way English does. So I theorized that was another reason we viewed time differently from English speakers” (interview, *Superstition*).

### *Newspaper*

In *Miko Kings* there are eleven newspaper clippings from the *Ada Weekly News*, most dated in the year 1904, one in 1906, and one in 1907, with eight of them pasted in Ezol’s journal. The clippings offer a glimpse of what interests Ezol and what happens in Indian Territory. Tribalography “symbiotically connect[s] one thing to another,” and the news clippings demonstrate how Natives and non-Natives benefit one another or are dependent upon one another (“Story” 42). Howe says, “Hey, Indian territory was really with it. There were four daily newspapers in this little town. And a lot of the businesses were run by Indian people. We had a very vibrant community. And you know it’s always thought of as down-trodden or broken. But that wasn’t the case” (interview, McKosato).

The news articles report a variety of events that represent Ada as a growing community, making progress, working to improve the lives of its citizens, enduring its losses, and staying connected to events beyond its borders. The first three articles are pasted on one page. On Janu-

ary 4, 1904, two articles report fires, foreshadowing how Ezol will die. One article is about the State House “now on fire” in Des Moines, Iowa, and the second one is about how “Fire destroyed the Choctaw depot at Erick” (*Miko Kings* 149). Ada suffers from the dangers of disasters, the same as any other community. The third news article, dated January 10, 1904, is about enrollment in the Ada Business College, showing that people want to improve their business skills and employment opportunities: “Advance his or herself for requirements of the business world. One would do better to enroll now” (149).

Three more news articles immediately follow on the next pages. On January 10, 1904, an article titled “The Pawnee Indians” details how an anthropologist received a grant of \$2,500 to “study the religious ceremonies of the Pawnee with reference to the mythological origin of each ceremony” (150). Howe’s inclusion of this article critiques anthropologists’ continual interest in Indians, noting how academics still want to study them, know where they came from, and learn how they lived in the past. On January 21, 1904, datelined Muskogee, an article titled “Creek Indian Objects to Burial on His Land” exposes the racism that Indians suffer: “A peculiar instance, which shows the ignorance and prejudice which exists in the minds of the Fullblood Creek Indians, happened here recently” (150). The article goes on to explain that the Indian owner of land leased to a white farmer refused to allow the burial of the white man on his land. To accuse the Indian owner of “ignorance and prejudice” reveals how Indians have continually had to fight for their sovereignty, self-determination, and land rights. The next article, dated February 4, 1904, Washington, also deals with racism: “The Negress Who Served as Postmistress Succeeded by White Man.” The racial tensions are obvious in the description of events that led to the closing of the post office: “[T]he white inhabitants refused to accept their mail from her. Threats were made against her life and she was led to believe her life was in danger” (151). The discrimination makes believable the Ku Klux Klan activities that so frightened Justina.

The seventh news article in Ezol’s journal, dated July 1, 1904, is about the arrival of an ice company in Ada: “Ice Comes to Ada in Hot July.” The picture shows the name of the company on the building, “Crystal Ice & Cold Storage,” and underneath another sign, “Ada Ice Cream Company” (154). With the temperatures that Ada experiences in the summer, the new company must have been exciting for the community.

There are horse-pulled wagons with citizens in front of the building to celebrate the occasion, and Ezol writes on the clipping, “Uncle Henri and Lonnie Johns made the newspaper today. They are pictured standing on the fourth ice wagon from the right” (154). The citizens are interested in business development.

The last article in Ezol’s journal is a sensational one, the front page of the *Ada Weekly News*, dated April 19, 1906, with the bold headline, “An Earthquake,” and the second line in a smaller bold font, “Early Wednesday Morning Wrecks the City of the Golden Gate” (159). However, what draws Ezol’s attention is a smaller front-page headline, “Fatal Shooting among Fullbloods at Ahloso,” and she writes under the clipping, “Our cousins made the newspaper in a fusillade of bullets. Uncle was thoroughly disgusted” (159). The murder foreshadows events when Hope throws the ballgame, an event not recorded in the journal but something that Lena knows when she finishes reading it (186).

The news of Ada and its Choctaw citizens delivers a factual view of life in this town around the beginning of the twentieth century. Howe says, “All of the newspaper clippings with the exception of the one that I wrote about one of the games are real. I took them out of the *Ada Weekly News*” (interview, McKosato). The news tableau of Choctaw life corresponds to tribalography’s ability to “pull all the elements together of the storyteller’s tribe” (Howe, “Story” 42).

#### REWRITING HISTORY

Tribalography offers the decolonizing act of rewriting history in *Miko Kings*. Warrior states, “At its best, Native writing . . . gives voice to that ungovernability and succeeds in unsettling a history that in the minds of many is already complete” (127). Howe sets out to show how the game of baseball is not just an American game but a Native American game. She also succeeds in offering the reader another way to view the world, time, and space. The title of the chapter in which Lena reads the journal is “The Lord and Center of the Farthest.” One explanation of this title conflates the game of baseball and Ezol’s theory of Choctaw time. The Lord is omnipresent and can be in more than one place at the same time, the center and the farthest, the pitcher’s mound and the outfield of the baseball diamond, the Choctaw nation and the universe. The Lord could be the pitcher, Hope, the center of Ezol’s world, another spirit who

can return to the past and replay the winning game for the Miko Kings. The Lord could be Indian baseball because the game is spiritual for the Choctaws: "Hope winds up, looking straight up into the Sun as if in prayer to *Hashtali*, the Choctaw's source of power. He disappears inside it. When he pulls out of the light he throws everything he's got at the Cavalry" (*Miko Kings* 218). To continue the sacredness of the story, the narrator Lena, the implied author, and the story itself conclude with an explanation of time, space, past, present, future:

Now it's my turn to become the movable object in space, a relative whose clock is set at my own distant future. Within an instant, the sheathing that has held us in place will expand, and although we are intimately linked by the motion of story, we are also distinct equations. I turn away and close my eyes knowing that I am a moving body in Choctaw space, as she is, and that miraculously we must both disappear . . . for a time.

Such is the mission of celestial knowledge.

Such is the sacred made manifest in the flesh of the page. (221)

Womack suggests that Native critics seem to "root literary practice in social activism" . . . and produce "materialist criticism that allows for the presence of both spirits and history" ("Single" 101). I would argue that LeAnne Howe's critical and creative works are examples of this social activism, working to reclaim rightful ownership of the origins of American baseball through the spirit of Ezol and the history of the Miko Kings.

Howe's conclusion to the documentary *Playing Pastime* is a fitting commentary on Indian baseball and *Miko Kings*:

I think this story is about survival in the 21st century. How do we do that? How do we manage that? We've managed to outlive all the bad stuff and incorporate the good things that work for us, like the games, like sports, and pride. So how did we manage to outlive all the diseases, all the wars, and keep the games alive? Let's play ball, and let's be really good at it. That's what this is about. (Fortier and Howe)

Hope does just that; he returns to the Twin Territories Series and pitches a winning game. Howe's theory of tribalography, particularly as revealed in Ezol's journal, allows the reader to see these connections among time, history, and spirits, to change the past in the present and obtain survival

for the future. Howe rewrites Choctaw history, offers a different way of seeing the world, and gives people hope for the future.

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## Tribal 2.0

Digital Natives, Political Players,  
and the Power of Stories

JODI A. BYRD

“Native stories are power. They create people. They author tribes. America is a tribal creation story, a tribalogy,” writes LeAnne Howe as the beginning call-out to her methodology that forms the intellectual center of this special issue for *SAIL* (Howe, “Story” 29). While Howe seeks to draw new lines within old traditions and along the way remind us that Native peoples are nothing without the families and communities, the stories and the histories, and the jokes and shared grief that hold us together, she also binds America in its totality to that process of creation. “Our stories,” Howe reminds us, “created the immigrants who landed on our shores” (29). And whether it was corn to sustain them, structures to govern them, or kin to remind them how they are all connected, America was, finally and in the beginning, “created from a story” (29). Settlers and arrivants themselves have also told stories in order to create these lands in their image, and their politics continually return to the scene of the narrative in order to recast themselves as part of the story. And not just in a supporting role, but rather as the central first-person narrator in the story of America that depends upon vanishing the Indian as part of its denouement.

Within the context of such well-honed processes of replacing Indians by becoming Indian that Jean M. O’Brien has described as “firsting and lasting” and Philip J. Deloria has critiqued as “playing Indian,” the notion of tribalogy becomes not just a method, but a powerful theoretical tool in reading counter against the stories the United States likes to tell about itself and others. It raises deep implications about how, when, and for whom stories are told. If we take Howe at her word that tribalogy might best be understood as a “basis for critique, interpretation, a moment in time” that is tied to “the greater community of

*chafachúka* ('family') and *iksa* (adopted group or 'clan')," then tribalogy is first and foremost a way of thinking through and with Indigenous presences and knowledges in order to "inform ourselves, and the non-Indian world, about who we are" (Howe, *Choctalking* 3). But it might also be a way of thinking against and contrary to accepted modes of knowledge production within the context of an ongoing occupation of Indigenous lands.

As with anything that involves Indians, however, tribalogy does not come to us uninflected; even its Latinate construction is marked by a primordial struggle for ontological control over origins, power, and meaning: *tribal* as ancient precursor, *-graphy* as a means to write or to delineate. Its haunted portmanteau bears Grecian antagonisms to Latin prefixing appropriations, and in such enjambed tensions, tribalogy provokes a discursive pause and signals a turn away from the self (auto) to locate life (bios) in relation to a form that refuses states and nations as its *raison d'être*. In a contest of stories, tribalogy teaches us that referents matter as much as the author. LeAnne Howe's contribution to the field of American Indian literary study is methodological, certainly, but it is also philosophical and theoretical. Tribalogy locates itself initially within the particularities of Chickasaw and Choctaw structures of relationality and governance, and from there it looks out toward a region, a hemisphere, to a world. It serves an individual, or it might just tell the story of the Anishinaabeg as they struggled with identity, blood quantum, and allotment. As Jill Doerfler explains, tribalogy is "not completely fiction or history but a story that draws on the past, present and future; documents and imagination; the spaces between reality and rumors of memory" (295).

Given such trajectories, from the spaces between reality to the rumors of memory of the past, present, and future, tribalogy is an additive and expansive concept within the critical toolbox that scholars can now use to engage in and produce indigenized critical scholarship. It is an invitation to improvise and connect. Toward that end, I would like to take up tribalogy as a gesture of critique to see how it might play within the heart of what Jodi Dean has labeled "communicative capitalism" and Matt Cohen might call a "networked wilderness," especially where social media networks intersect with contemporary politics. What happens when tribalogy is operationalized as a mode of critique within the colonial appropriations of subject formation

where everything Indian and tribal has become new again? How might the interpretative connections and intuitive gestures that tribalography deploys help us make sensible and visible what hegemony, capitalism, and technology have sought to obscure?

“Drowning in plurality,” Jodi Dean observes about the current state of participatory media, “we lose the capacity to grasp anything like a system” (3). And yet, one of the consistent refrains linking political theory with critiques of communicative technologies is the need to make order out of a lawless frontier of incivility, harassment, and perpetual hook-ups. Forwarding, linking, quizzing, sharing, and (un)friending have contributed to a speedup in how we process information across multiple sites and networks. With the rise of digital communication technologies, message boards, blog pundits, and armchair trolls, something of a system, however, *has* emerged, even if individual users have lost the capacity to grasp it or locate it within the historical, human, and colonial dimensions that have enabled the rise of the technology in the first place. With the motif of the frontier to describe the innovative, capacious, and lawless terrains of digital interconnectivities comes the inevitable “Native” and “tribe” as signifiers of a nostalgic longing toward luddite refusals on the one hand and a romantic irony that recovers the primitive at the bleeding edge of technology on the other. In either case, the Internet and concomitant metaphors and languages that have emerged to address its function have reiterated the colonial violences captured within the capitalistic terrains that have provided the infrastructure, machines, and labor to bring the systems to life.

From Marc Prensky’s discovery of Columbian proportions that those born after 1980 were “digital natives” to Cory Doctorow’s *Eastern Standard Tribe*, the notion of tribal has time-shifted through its settler colonial modalities of preempting the Indigenous. From its anthropologically and sometimes derogatively used signifier of primitive organizations of hunter-gatherer societies to the rise of the communicatively social and technologically adept, *tribal* across these reformulations bears the trace of US settler federalism that relegated sovereign Indigenous nations into warring ethnic factions hindering the destiny of the United States. Social media has become the new network through which communities are built and commonality is experienced, and in the process tribes, we are told, have proliferated beyond those trapped in antiquity. From websites such as [tribe.net](http://tribe.net), which offers to help you

find your community, to *Grindr*, which lets you identify a tribe to best capture your personality, tribes have become endemic to the Internet as users of services as diverse as Twitter to the World of Warcraft game imagine their communities as tribal entities emboldened by their shared love of an object, hobby, fetish, or self. “The Internet has become the site not only for the composition and recomposition of new, intriguing, Internet-specific identities,” Jim Parker observes; “it has also given vent to the recrudescence of hitherto premodern social formations such as the tribe and all the consequences that come with this” (1).

Though communication and Internet studies have recently expanded the use of tribe as a diagnostic for an accounting of how, on the Internet, users build communities outside family relationships, the notion that America was full of tribes is a much older interdisciplinary concept. Indeed, in 1971, Paul Cowan, a self-described political radical and columnist for the *Village Voice*, published a book that has in recent years captured a lot of the commonsense thinking for progressive voices in the United States. *The Tribes of America: Journalistic Discoveries of Our People and Their Culture* set out to chart the divergent regionalism that continues to factionalize the US population. Using tribes as a metaphor, Cowan wrote, “to an unrecognized extent, we’re a nation of professional, religious, ethnic and racial tribes—the Tribes of America—who maintain a fragile truce, easily and often broken” (15). This idea of tribe within US political and marketing discourses has become more and more prominent—it rejects the archaic notion that the United States is a melting pot and acknowledges in business-speak shorthand that class, region, and ethnicity all create local communities of shared interests that span hobbies, fandoms, political ideologies, and marketing subsets. Self-described “bestselling author, entrepreneur, and agent of change,” Seth Godin penned *Tribes: We Need You to Lead Us* as a business manifesto to help anyone with an identified community realize that they can and should become its leader.<sup>1</sup> As Jim Parker further notes, “Electronic tribes give people a chance to be chiefs or shamans when in real life they are much lower on the organizational chart” (5).

As Wall Street companies and stock market brokers transform themselves into tribal communities and leaders just as Howe’s story “An American in New York” predicted, Paul Cowan’s book, which helped contribute to the current state of liberal discourse about how the Internet functions by tracking the tribes of America through the early 1970s,

includes not one mention of any American Indian community. Rather, he writes, “we had to conquer this continent—and its original tribes—in order to exploit its resources. But we were never able to conquer our atavistic hatreds, to accept our widely diverse pasts, to transcend them, to live together as a single people” (P. Cowan 15). It was this sense of tribe that President Obama evoked in his first inaugural address when he stated: “And because we have tasted the bitter swill of civil war and segregation and emerged from that dark chapter stronger and more united, we cannot help but believe that the old hatreds shall someday pass; that the lines of tribes shall soon dissolve, that as the world grows smaller, our common humanity shall reveal itself, and that America must play its role in ushering in a new era of peace” (Obama). And indeed, for Seth Godin, only people who want to bring about change, to constitute a *movement* to make things better, should be able to constitute tribes. “Some tribes are stuck,” he writes. “They embrace the status quo and drown out any tribe member who dares to question authority and the accepted order. Big charities, tiny clubs, struggling corporations—they’re tribes and they’re stuck. I’m not so interested in those tribes. They create little of value and they’re sort of boring” (Godin 5).

It is nothing new within American Indian studies now to point to the ways in which the US colonial culture continually underwrites its mastery by subsuming and assuming Indigenous markers to define itself. As the United States progresses toward an imperial “new era of peace,” the story it seeks to create about itself is an appropriative version—a playing Indian narratology—of a tribalography, with that first-person obsession that inserts its own interests to maintain the illusion that new and improved American tribal interests have superseded if not entirely replaced Indigenous peoples. Tribal 2.0 if you will. As if abjecting colonialism, genocide, and tribalism onto social networking communities that depend on bottom-up brand affinities and political allegiances to create tribes out of like-minded individuals does not continually produce Indians so that the United States and the banks can then play cowboys. In a political culture where both the Democratic and Republican parties, progressives and conservatives, can conceptualize their constituencies as “tribes” and describe those political actors who diverge from the talking points as having gone “off the reservation” (and what a historically amnesiac phrase that is), it should surprise no one that someone like Sarah Palin might have elicited such strong—one might even

be tempted to say tribal—feelings within the national frontier imaginaries that pitted the outposts of US statehood, in the form of Hawai'i and Alaska, against each other during the 2008 presidential election cycle.<sup>2</sup> As a political player, Palin embodied the Teddy Roosevelt, Frederick Jackson Turner mythos of “going native” to become truly American, and because of her proximity to the frontier colonialist ideal, she was both celebrated and reviled, deemed frighteningly stupid and cunningly, insidiously anti-intellectual and the antithesis to progressive values.

These interdependent liberal characterizations of Palin as simultaneously beauty queen dim—with crib notes scrawled on the palm of her hand—and menacingly evangelical in her colonialist machinations speak to the indeterminacies that arose from her position in empire. On the night she was announced as John McCain's vice presidential running mate, Keith Olbermann and Rachel Maddow did a countdown analysis to answer the question “Just who is Sarah Palin?” We learned that she was nicknamed Sarah Barracuda, that she had dreams of working for ESPN, that she was the mother of five children—Track, Bristol, Willow, Piper, and Trig Paxon Van Palin—and that she was “the most popular governor in the country according to the polls with approval ratings over 90%.” When Olbermann asked Rachel Maddow if there was anything he missed, she responded: “You did a pretty comprehensive job, given that she's received all of five seconds of national reporters' attention in her political life thus far. The only things I could add are that we know that she enjoys moose as her favorite meat product. We know that her husband is part Alaskan native. He's part Eskimo which is neat” (Maddow). According to Seth Godin's book *Tribes*, “What leaders do: they give people stories they can tell themselves. Stories about the future and about change” (Godin 138). Keith Olbermann was already functioning as a tribal leader for Daily Kos, a leftist blog that allows users to create their own entries, and Rachel Maddow was in that moment one week away from taking the helm of her own show and becoming another leading tribal voice for the progressive blogosphere.

The dismissal of Todd Palin's Yup'ik identity as Eskimo-neat unspooled in the blogosphere in fascinating ways. The progressives followed their leaders, and Stormfront, the web forum for the White Aryan Nation, debated for thirty-four pages what Palin's Yup'ik connection meant. While there was no consensus among the white supremacists on whether Sarah was a race traitor, they all agreed that, through white

intermarriage, the Yup'ik could and would disappear from her family tree.<sup>3</sup> This moment of dismissal in the Tribal 2.0 discourses also served to absent Sarah Palin's—and, more importantly, her children's and her husband's—connection to Native community and family. It also served to cloud her corporatized appropriations of Indigenous sovereignty discourses for the state of Alaska in the name of oil that transforms Alaska Native villages into either natural resources or into obstacles to the progress represented by “Drill, Baby, Drill” and Pebble Mine.<sup>4</sup> As liberals framed themselves as Tribal 2.0 communities and identified Obama, Olbermann, and Maddow as their leaders, the national media continued to ignore the ongoing struggles of Indigenous peoples threatened by Palin's policies and glossed by her husband's and children's unparseable Native identity.<sup>5</sup> What also occurred in the absence of Native contextualizations was the transformation of Bristol Palin into an (anti)abstinence poster child in the national debates concerning the revelation of her pregnancy. Within those Tribal 2.0 talking points on liberal political blogs, in which Bristol was rendered white and lower class, were also embedded anti-Indian, misogynistic, and genocidal discourses that called for the sterilization of stupid people, starting with the Palins and the rest of the inhabitants of Alaska.<sup>6</sup>

As Indian country struggled with what John McCain, Sarah Palin, Barack Obama, and Joe Biden might mean for Indigenous peoples' continued struggles for sovereignty—and to quote Sherman Alexie, “they all look like treaty-makers to me”—the lived presences of Tribal 1.0 peoples continued to be pushed aside so that the United States could maintain its neoliberal narrative of multicultural inclusion.<sup>7</sup> For one brief moment, and save a dismissive Tribal 2.0 “neat” in reference to Todd Palin's heritage, there *might* have been a national conversation that considered indigeneity alongside race at the same time that the US nation paused in 2008 to reorient power and representation within those stories of progress it holds so dear to its heart. Of course, such a conversation could not and did not happen within a cacophonous social media dominated by mob mentalities, troll democracies, and a willful Tribal 2.0 refusal to reckon with the quotidian consequences of their own colonial complicities with the dispossession of Indigenous peoples' lands, histories, languages, and identities. Such elisions and refusals challenge us to remember otherwise and against the repetitive memes that obscure the continued persistence of Indigenous presences within the realms of the sensible, the political, and the digital.

In the end, LeAnne Howe's tribalogy, with its emphasis on the power of Indigenous stories to create, to mnemonically connect past, present, and future, and to affectively and intuitively read through and beyond the colonial rumors that have been layered onto Indigenous lands, is a powerful analytic tool through which to confront, challenge, and reconfigure the stories colonizers like to tell about themselves and their place in the world. As method, it is robustly analogic as it draws from the rhizomatic genealogies of thought, family, and kinship that have sustained Indigenous worlds for thousands of years. As theory, it recenters Indigenous agency and authority and adroitly rewires the circuits of meaning to help us apprehend how the tribal moves and transforms within the transits of Indianness that enable US imperial investments in inclusion and incorporation. If LeAnne Howe is right that America was, at heart, created through stories told by Indians, then the critical reading practices that arise from Indigenous tribalographies represent one of the best ways to keep resisting and to keep on telling the stories that convey the truth, to ourselves and to those who would try to capture, erase, and replace us in the social networks and communicative technologies that appropriate the notion of an American Indian "tribal" to simulate connection to others.

#### NOTES

1. See the Seth Godin website (<http://sethgodin.typepad.com/about.html>, accessed 23 Feb. 2009).

2. According to *Safire's Political Dictionary*, "the phrase ["off the reservation"] first surfaced in *The Atlanta Constitution* in 1909. The metaphor is rooted in traders' lingo, referring to Indian reservations in the days when unscrupulous whites would trade 'firewater' for goods, and *off the reservation* was a lonely and dangerous place for an aboriginal American to be" (489). In political commentary, the term means something akin to drifting from one's party's talking points, and signaling support for the opposing party's policies and candidates. Safire's definition here plays on drunken Indian stereotypes and enacts yet another historical amnesia that disaggregates the phrase from its genocidal consequences. "Off the reservation" was dangerous because of the murderous US military intent as evidenced by the Wounded Knee Massacre on 29 Dec. 1890.

3. A Google search will readily bring up the Stormfront forum and message board thread that begins on 28 Aug. 2008.

4. Pebble Mine refers to an ongoing proposal to develop one of the largest open pit mines in Alaska, and Sarah Palin's support of mining interests there threatens Bristol Bay, subsistence salmon fishing, and the very land she says she and her family are connected to through Todd Palin's Yup'ik relatives.

5. This unparsable connection to Indigenous identity, community, and history is nowhere more evident than in the online storm that ridiculed Sarah Palin, her ghost writer, and the editors at HarperCollins responsible for her memoir *Going Rogue: An American Life* and its many gaffes, errors, and distortions. Chief among them, and relevant to this discussion, is Geoffrey Dunn's "Palin's Latest *Rogue* Gaffe," a blog that appeared on the *Huffington Post* website on 30 Nov. 2009 ([http://www.huffingtonpost.com/geoffrey-dunn/palins-latest-emroqueem-g\\_b\\_373453.html](http://www.huffingtonpost.com/geoffrey-dunn/palins-latest-emroqueem-g_b_373453.html), accessed 1 Mar. 2010). "But perhaps the most embarrassing gaffe so far," Dunn writes, "is her mis-attributed quote to UCLA basketball legend John Wooden." That quote is an epigraph to the "Drill, Baby, Drill" chapter and reads, "Our land is everything to us . . . I will tell you one of the things we remember on our land. We remember that our grandfathers paid for it—with their lives" (Palin 105). *Going Rogue* does attribute the quote to John Wooden, but the text does not identify who John Wooden is. Geoffrey Dunn's article fills in the ellipses, first by asserting she meant the UCLA basketball coach despite the lack of an evident referent, and then identifies the true author of the quote as Cheyenne activist John Wooden Leg. The quote, in its full context, refers to Cheyenne land rights, language, culture, and the victory of Cheyenne and Lakota warriors over General Custer at Little Big Horn. "Oops!" Geoffrey Dunn exclaims, "That's not quite the sentiment that Sister Sarah was trying to convey as she guzzled down sugar-free Red Bull and cranked up Toby Keith's 'How Do You Like Me Now?' while jumping on her patriotic high horse at the opening of the third chapter." His point that Palin could never and would never cite an Indigenous activist in her book spawned twenty-seven pages of comments, the majority in agreement, but the irony is that her book actually, and rather disturbingly, does cite at least some Indigenous family members despite the progressive Web's jokes that Indigenous peoples are too other, alien, and obviously mistakenly present in the Wooden supplement arising from Palin's blank interpretable text. For instance, scattered throughout the captions to family photos included in the book are descriptions such as, "Three of five generations of beautiful Yupik women, all dressed in traditional bright Native clothes. Gathered around Lena, the matriarch, are Willow, Blanche, Piper, and Bristol. Todd and I are blessed knowing that our kids have Lena and other esteemed elders to look up to" (*Rogue* unpaginated color plates). A more interesting analysis would be to interrogate how emerging conservative nativism pairs itself to Indigenous identity.

6. For examples of the popularization of this comment meme, see threads on Perez Hilton's "Bristol Palin Makes a Fool of Herself on Oprah!" (<http://perezhilton.com/?p=84285>, accessed 1 Mar. 2010); letters to the editor on Salon.com in response to Joan Walsh's "Bristol Palin Has a Boy" ([http://letters.mobile.salon.com/mwt/broadsheet/2008/12/30/palin\\_baby/view/index15.html](http://letters.mobile.salon.com/mwt/broadsheet/2008/12/30/palin_baby/view/index15.html), accessed 1 Mar. 2010); and "A Timely Question: Should Sarah Palin and Her Daughters Be Sterilized?" at Subversify.com (<http://subversify.com/2009/06/15/a-timely-question-should-sarah-palin-and-her-daughters-be-sterilized/>, accessed 1 Mar. 2010).

7. See Timothy Egan, "Return of the Natives," *New York Times*, Opinionator, 14 Jan. 2009. Quoting Alexie: "He's still a politician and I'm still an Indian. . . . They all look like treaty-makers to me. . . . I guess that's the puzzling and I suppose lovely

thing about Indians' love of Obama. Many have suspended their natural suspicion of politicians for him" (<http://opinionator.blogs.nytimes.com/2009/01/14/return-of-the-natives/>, accessed 2 Mar. 2010).

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# Making It Work

A Model of Tribalography as Methodology

JILL DOERFLER

## SETTING THE STAGE

Choctaw scholar LeAnne Howe introduced the concept of tribalography because she did not believe that Native writers “tell strictly autobiographical stories, nor memoir, nor history, nor fiction but rather they tell a kind of story that includes collaboration with the past and present and future” (“Story” 42). She has explained that tribalography arose out of “the native propensity for bringing things together, for making consensus, and for symbiotically connecting one thing to another” (42). I argue that in addition to serving as a critical lens for literary study and as a theoretical framework for cultural analysis, tribalography can also serve as an abundantly fruitful methodological approach relevant across the interdisciplinary field of American Indian studies. I discuss my own application of tribalography as a methodology for my article “An Anishinaabe Tribalography: Interweaving and Investigating Concepts of Identity during the 1910s on the White Earth Reservation” and address the following questions: How might scholars intentionally seek to employ the principles of tribalography in their own work? What are the advantages and challenges posed by this methodology?

There is a growing call for an ethical Native literary criticism.<sup>1</sup> Tribalography provides one answer to this imperative by balancing rights and responsibilities via a system of relationships. Tribalographic stories consist of connections drawn between autobiography, fiction, history, and time (past, present, future)—relationships that, Howe suggests, all necessitate reciprocity. Understanding the relationship between scholarship and the real life experiences of Natives is an important aspect of American Indian studies (AIS). By acknowledging the work that can and is done by writing, tribalography contains a component of activism as

a part of methodology. Scholarship is not limited to the “ivory tower” but has an important purpose to communities because it has the power to create. As Howe has argued, “A Native writer remains in conversation with the past and the present to create the future” (“Blind” 338) and “Native Stories are power. They create people. They author tribes’ (‘Story’ 29).” There was a time when many Americans believed that American Indians were destined to “disappear.” By employing racialization and blood quantum, both scholars and the US government have been working to create a future of absence for Natives. We must write our own futures, and tribalography opens up a space for us to do so.

#### METHODOLOGY

##### *The Big Picture*

“Isn’t there a danger in using tribalography as a methodology? Doesn’t it allow scholars to ignore evidence that doesn’t fit their argument? Doesn’t it allow too much creative license?” This is a paraphrased version of a set of questions posed to me after I presented a paper at the American Studies Association’s annual conference in the fall of 2008, which employed tribalography and would later be published as “An Anishinaabe Tribalography” in *American Indian Quarterly*. In both the presentation and the article, I created scenes in which characters “said” quotes from historical interviews and combined this story with a more traditional historical overview. The questions were not unexpected and were posed in a friendly manner. In fact, I had thought about these questions when I was working on the presentation. There are pitfalls in any methodology; tribalography is not an exception. When I first learned how to bead, I was taught that nothing is ever perfect and that mistakes remind us of this. That lesson transfers to scholarship: nothing is ever perfect, but that does not mean that it is not a work of beauty or something of use and importance. So, my answer was both yes and no. As scholars we have a variety of methodological tools available to us. Tribalography is one of those tools. Are there potential dangers in using tribalography as a methodology? Yes, but these “dangers” are not unlike the dangers inherent in any methodology. Scholars can take (and have taken) creative license without acknowledging it. Consider the idea that the US was destined to expand across the continent and did so in a justifiable manner. This national narrative has been repeated in numer-

ous elementary and high school textbooks. Undoubtedly, it took a high degree of creative license to create that story.

Does tribalography allow scholars to overlook or ignore sources or evidence? Consciously or not we evaluate sources all the time and, at times, overlook something of importance. I have gone through my own files for a second or third time only to “discover” something and think: how did I miss this? Scholars can use the same sources, notice different actions and events, and come to different conclusions. We must understand and acknowledge that all scholarship, all stories, are constructed from a particular viewpoint, with a specific purpose and agenda. Ultimately, this realization is a liberation that provides both the freedom and the responsibility to consider the political and cultural impacts of our work. Like it or not, we are participating in the construction of the past, present, and future. If we explicitly acknowledge our motivations, there may be less room for skewed interpretations. What story do we want to tell? What work do we want that story to do? What kind of future does the story construct? As scholars we have the responsibility to keep these questions present in our minds as we write.

As a practice, tribalography provides inherent critiques of the conventional dichotomy between both history and fiction and the past and present. One-dimensional constructions of fact and fiction do not allow for the diversity or the complexity of Native experiences or the multidimensional ways in which Natives often construct narratives.<sup>2</sup> Tribalography opens up a space for scholars to engage with multiple truths and address questions regarding the role(s) of scholarly work in academia and community. As Caddo historian Carol Hampton has asserted: “Native American historians have a unique opportunity to contribute and offer new perspectives in comprehending American history in general and American Indian history in particular” (91). Howe has argued: “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” (“Story” 42). Indeed, tribalography offers an important perspective on history, which does not limit our understanding of history to the past but acknowledges a dynamic interaction between the past, present, and future. In addition, tribalography rises above disciplinary barriers and acknowledges the power that stories carry. Stories create us as individuals, families, communi-

ties, and nations; they help us formulate understandings of who we were, are, and will become. Tribalography is a method that scholars can use to tell stories that are not isolated, objective accounts of the past but weave together a variety of sources and perspectives to create useful stories that engage with AIS and “traditional” disciplines, Native and non-Native scholars, and academia and tribal communities. This is precisely the type of project I undertook in “An Anishinaabe Tribalography.”

One important aspect of tribalography is its emphasis on connections. As an “interdisciplinary” scholarly field AIS brings together a wide variety of methodologies, theories, and perspectives. Consequently, the ways in which tribalography employs diverse sets of source materials and constructs interdisciplinary narratives serves AIS very well. In addition, because of the ways in which tribalography arises out of connections, it also works to connect AIS with other disciplines, allowing scholars in a wide range of disciplines to consider the importance of including the theories, methodologies, and perspectives of AIS in both research and teaching.

With its inherent commitment to pursuing intersections and developing relationships, tribalography as methodology connects American Indian studies to multiple realms of knowledge and to multiple constituencies both within and beyond the academy. One of the major charges in AIS is to create knowledge that is relevant to and engages with American Indian peoples and nations outside of the academy. Indeed, scholar Elizabeth Cook-Lynn has argued that Native scholars have not done enough, noting: “Indians may now ask of their writers . . . ‘Where were you when we defended ourselves and sought clarification in the modern world as sovereigns?’” (83). Likewise, Creek scholar Craig S. Womack has argued the literary criticism of American Indian authors should first and foremost concern itself with “the ethics of the relationship between a text and the community it claims to represent” (149). These calls for community engagement speak to the strong desire for scholarship to be transformative. Scholarship has real consequences for Native peoples, communities, and nations. Tribalography frees scholars from the notion that they are sifting through sources to uncover and (re)construct narratives based on immutable “facts.” Instead, tribalography is a methodology that encourages scholars to make connections and form relationships, which, in turn, encourages a culture of ethical standards and reciprocal obligations. Scholars employing tribalography are pushed to

consider the possible impacts of their work and, therefore, consciously work towards the creation of a positive and decolonized future.

Using the methodology of tribalography no source is isolated or objective; everything is related and influenced by perspective. Regardless of what he or she might claim, no scholar is simply mining the archives for a set of facts, putting them into a coherent narrative, and presenting that narrative. As demonstrated by the now classic work of historian Angie Debo in *And Still the Waters Run*, the perspective of the scholar plays a critical role in the way in which they read the documents and what sources they are willing to consider utilizing. While Debo famously detailed the ways in which other scholars had overlooked and possibly intentionally ignored important sources, the strong assimilationist tone within her own work suggests that she was not immune to such tendencies.

The call to create ethical scholarship is inherent within tribalography as methodology. Indeed, Howe asserts that tribalography “is an ethical Native literary praxis” (“Blind Bread” 338). When applying tribalography, scholars are compelled to consider the “work” that their writing will do. While it is impossible to anticipate all possibilities—tribalography allows authors to acknowledge their desired outcome(s). Maybe they want their text to encourage Native youth to become politically engaged. Maybe they hope a narrative that creates pride in the past will result in contemporary actions that will, in turn, facilitate the creation of a future filled with promise. Maybe they want non-Natives to appreciate the possibilities for collaboration in the construction of a multi-national society. I wrote “An Anishinaabe Tribalography” with hope that knowledge about how Anishinaabeg spoke about and understood identity in the early 20th century would encourage Anishinaabe today to transform their understandings of identity, to motivate a change away from the one-quarter blood quantum requirement for tribal citizenship. In other words, I wanted my construction of the past to inform the present and to participate in a transformation of tribal citizenship requirements in the future. Of course, my construction of the past is informed and transformed by the present and by my vision of the future. As Howe has suggested, there is “collaboration with the past, present, and future” (“Blind Bread” 333). The past, present, and future are not distinct and discrete entities; despite our best efforts they cannot be separated from each other. Their relationship is unbreakable and calls to mind the ways

in which familial relationships intertwine generations across time and space in enduring ways.

The relationships created and nourished by tribalogy can be both within a single tribe and with other nations (both Native and non-Native). In “Blind Bread” Howe articulates the need for individuals from different tribes to be kind and accepting as demonstrated when her Diné character, Debbie, instructs Howe: “Have a little compassion. We’re all Indians” (328). These instructions bring individuals from different tribal nations together, not to unite in some kind of pan-Indian utopia but to respect individuals from tribes and to acknowledge that, on some level, all tribes are connected. Tribal specificity is important but there are connections that reach across tribal lines. Likewise, employing tribalogy as a methodology creates an opportunity for both tribal specificity and building inter-tribal relationships. Thus, tribalogy relates to Flannery O’Connor’s much cited argument that the deeper a writer delves into his or her own community, the more universal and effective the writing becomes.

Another goal of my use of tribalogy was to connect the story of identity and dispossession at White Earth with other Natives and non-Natives. Each tribe has their own conceptions of identity and those may or may not include concepts of blood, biology, and/or race. I want my tribalogy of Anishinaabe identity to raise questions for other tribes and for non-Indians as well. In addition, I want readers to understand the devastating consequences that racialization has had for Anishinaabeg.<sup>3</sup>

### *The Specifics*

As part of my dissertation research, I discussed the varied ways in which White Earth Anishinaabeg understood identity prior to the mid twentieth century. Mining Melissa Meyer’s bibliography in *The White Earth Tragedy*, I came across transcripts for hundreds of interviews with Anishinaabeg during the 1910s regarding their conceptions of identity, which emphasized kinship and culture and defied US conceptions of biological race and blood quantum. The interviews leaped off the page; I was struck by the emotion and passion of the interviewees and wanted to make the statements of the interviewees as meaningful as possible. Little information about the interviewees short of their name, place of

residence, and age was given; there was so much more to tell. I aspired to convey a story that went beyond the “facts” given in the archive, to write an article detailing the contents of the interviews and placing them within the larger story of racialization and dispossession. Ultimately, I decided to employ the principles of tribalography as a methodology to enable me to achieve my goal.

There are a myriad of ways in which a scholar might utilize tribalography as a methodology. I wrote and rewrote several paragraphs detailing my conception of tribalography and validating my use of this methodology but found that it wasn’t working. I deleted the paragraphs and rewrote them as a poem, which I then used to begin the article:

Tribalography  
 quantum leap  
 revolution and evolution  
 weaving and writing  
 new worlds and old  
 keyboard drumming  
 indelible marks on the page  
 take shape  
 come together  
 like a sweetgrass basket  
 blade words  
 twirl together  
 circle around  
 form something whole  
 transform life (Doerfler 2)

I used poetry to introduce my methodology because I knew it would get the reader’s attention, to upset their expectations and to shift the perspective. The poem was a way for me to present my metaphor of the sweetgrass basket and my goal of transformation. The poem draws in the reader and makes them part of the story because it requires engagement.

Next I organized the article into several sections. The first section relied heavily on the interviews and included a cast of characters. The second section provided the broader context for the first and was written in a more traditional historical style but drew upon some of the same source material as the first. In addition, I added several historical photographs because I felt that they conveyed important information

about what life was like at White Earth in the 1910s. I wove these elements together and used the metaphor of a sweetgrass basket throughout the piece as a means to bring an Anishinaabe perspective and highlight my efforts to create a single piece using multiple distinct elements.

It was my goal to create a narrative that connected multiple elements together, highlighting the importance of collaboration. I wanted to follow in the Anishinaabe style of narrative set forth by Gerald Vizenor and Gordon Henry, who as Kimberly Blaeser asserts, “shift and reshift their stories’ perspectives, turn the tables of historical events, unmask the stereotypes and racial poses, challenge the status of history’s heroes and emerge somewhere between the probable and the possible, in some border area of narrative” (39). This “border area of narrative” is American Indian studies, not bounded by disciplinary borders but open and collaborative. Like the work of some Anishinaabe writers, my Anishinaabe perspective of tribalography serves to “incite the reader to an imaginative reevaluation of both the accounts and processes of history” (Blaeser 43). I reimagined the history of Anishinaabe identity, going beyond the rigid and simplistic idea of blood quantum that many mistakenly assume has had a long-standing usage among our people, and, instead, demonstrating the diversity, complexity, and adaptability of Anishinaabeg identity that existed in the early 1900s.

This “history” of Anishinaabe identity can be used to construct a future that unites us through relationships. The words and assertions of our ancestors can be used to transform the current reliance on one-quarter blood for tribal citizenship to reflect Anishinaabe conceptions of identity. It can be used to erase race and create a new way of understanding identity that both contains echoes from the past and continuance of Anishinaabe traditions in the future. Like Howe, I drew upon a variety of sources and “reimagine[d] our history from many point of views: mine, my relatives, and our ancestors” (“Blind Bread” 338). For example, my character Gekek emerged as a male representation of my mother. As the character developed, I decided he should be tall like my mother’s brothers and not petite like she is. I thought the character should command attention and introduced him as the last witness in the scene. Other characters were inspired by the historical record in combination with other White Earth Anishinaabeg that I have a personal connection to. These relationships reminded me that I had a responsibility to tell a story that would work towards decolonization. I hoped

that Anishinaabe readers and other readers would reflect upon how the story I was telling linked with stories they have heard about their ancestors and how it ties into their lives today. My goal was for these stories to be in dialogue with each other because the story of identity is connected with current debates about tribal citizenship both in the academy and around the family dinner table.

Howe notes that she wrote *Shell Shaker* to remind her community that long ago there was a high degree of diversity among the Choctaw and it is important to recall and recover this array of traditional practices. In drawing attention to these histories, Howe hoped to open the door for other stories that few people know about to gain more attention. “I hoped the others would begin to rise up out of the land where they’ve been kept—waiting on us to call them out” (“Blind Bread” 336). Indeed, my Anishinaabe tribalography told a story of Anishinaabe resistance to racialization and I hope that it provides motivation for new resistance. I hope that it will lead to other stories rising up. I ended my Anishinaabe tribalography with a story about a new generation of Anishinaabe women weaving sweetgrass baskets while building relationships. They were constructing a future that incorporated tradition but was not fixed or stagnant. Tribalography enabled the article to open the door for collaboration between the past, present, and future, and I hope that other scholars will find tribalography a useful tool for doing the same.

#### NOTES

1. Indeed the contributors to *Reasoning Together* were asked to “describe an ethical Native literary criticism.” This collection provides a variety of useful approaches. Womack, Justice, and Teuton, *Reasoning Together*.

2. For example, Kimberly Blaeser argues, “The most compelling and ultimately most rewarding literary representations of history by Native American writers are those, which by their humor work to unmask and disarm history, to expose the hidden agendas of historiography and thereby remove it from the grasp of the political panderers and return it to the realm of story.” Blaeser, *Gerald Vizenor* 85.

3. In the early 1900s blood quantum was interconnected with intelligence and one’s ability to own and sell land. Flexible and familial Anishinaabe-based conceptions of identity were ignored, and rigid, pseudo-scientific, racial US conceptions were valid. Consequently thousands of suspect land transactions were ruled legal and the land base at White Earth was devastated. Later the idea of blood quantum as a means to determine identity was further pushed by the US government and, eventually, became the sole criteria for tribal citizenship.

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# Embodied Tribalography

Mound Building, Ball Games, and  
Native Endurance in the Southeast

LEANNE HOWE

A decade ago, I became obsessed with Native ball games. As a result I wrote the novel *Miko Kings: An Indian Baseball Story* set in Indian Territory in 1907 and present-day Ada, Oklahoma. The year before I co-produced a short film with Native filmmaker James Fortier, *Playing Pastime: American Indians, Softball, and Survival*.<sup>1</sup> Since then I have published several essays about how Native lifeways are the roots of American baseball (Howe, “Embodied”; Howe, “Story of Movement”; Howe and Wilson).

Recently though, I’ve become obsessed with Choctaw hymns and call and response songs. My mother, uncles, and aunts sang from the *Choctaw Hymn Book* at their families’ home church of Zion, outside of McAlester, Oklahoma. But I paid little attention and was seldom in attendance. Mostly I remember the “Lord’s Prayer” and “Amazing Grace” being sung in Choctaw. Now as I study the *Choctaw Hymn Book*, the chapter “Times and Seasons” grabs my interest with its morning hymns and songs and evening hymns and songs. For me, “Evening Hymn 93” has a particularly quirky second stanza: “*Issa halali haatoko iksa illok isha shkii, because you are holding onto me, I am not dead yet.*”<sup>2</sup> It is second and first person parts of speech roped together by a comma. Not necessarily so uncommon. In the oral tradition second person has a visual appeal in order to appreciate the nature of what is being shown. Yet in “Evening Hymn 93,” who is the unknown caller, who is the “I” that responds, and what is being seen? Taking the phrase out of context will likely get me slapped around in either academic or Choctaw first language circles—metaphorically speaking, of course—yet I’ve long wondered what kinds of call and response songs were sung at Southeastern mound sites, either in the morning, evening, or both. We can attend stomp dances, Green Corn ceremonies, and all-night sings to

hear shared Southeastern morning and evening songs, but what of specific tribal songs sung at specific sacred sites? With this in mind, the phrase “*Issa halali haatoko iksa illok isha shkii, because you are holding onto me, I am not dead yet*” seems an expressive artifact lying dormant where it was buried inside a Christian hymn.

Presbyterian missionaries Alfred Wright and Cyrus Byington translated most hymns in the *Choctaw Hymn Book*. Byington didn’t begin to learn Choctaw until after his arrival in Mississippi in 1820. With the help of Choctaw consultants he began preaching in Choctaw in 1825. The *Choctaw Hymn Book* contains 168 hymns and 10 doxologies broken into multiple chapters, one simply titled “miscellaneous.” Originally the hymnal was published in 1829 under the auspices of the American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions. Perhaps embodied in some of the songs are fossilized expressions of Choctaw spirituality before Christianity. Could “*Issa halali haatoko iksa illok isha shkii, because you are holding onto me, I am not dead yet*” be a mnemonic that ancient Choctawans chanted while looking at the mounds they built? Certainly they could have sung songs that embodied the spirituality of a mound. Therefore in this essay I build on my earlier essay “The Story of America: A Tribalography” by discussing Choctaws and earthworks in the Southeast, Choctaw language, both spoken and expressed through physical actions, to show the often ignored reciprocal embodiment between people and land. I am interested in continuances rather than disappearances. By linking Southeastern Native architects who emplotted the land with meaning (e.g., earthworks, ball fields, recreational and ceremonial dance grounds) with the actions of ball-playing families that came back seasonally to these sites (for generations), I show how “returning” is an embodied lifeway expressed in myriad actions, including songs. Further I suggest ball games were integral to the growth of the Choctaw Confederacy of the eighteenth century, the Choctaw Nation of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, and *voilà* (we Choctaws still like to use French whenever possible), the Choctaws of the twenty-first century. As anthropologist Brenda Farnell has said, “Once persons are conceived as embodied agents empowered to perform signifying acts with both speech and action signs, the way is clear to see the medium of movement as an equally available resource for meaning-making that can also be imaginative and metaphorical” (330). In other words, cultural actions embody cultural continuance.

My approach is interdisciplinary, and I consider many sources and places: the earthworks where the ancient games took place, the stylized iconography of the Southeastern Ceremonial Complex found at Mississippian sites, historical documents, oral traditions, song chants, and the way contemporary Southeastern Native communities return to play ball in tribal tournaments at tribal headquarters and complexes throughout Oklahoma. I also reflect on the motion of water and wind in the Northern Hemisphere. This may explain why Natives of the Southeast dance counterclockwise and would create a ball game played counterclockwise, mimicking or expressing water flow and tornado and hurricane winds.

Further, Native ball game is without time limits and evokes the four cardinal directions.<sup>3</sup> Most importantly, it was an egalitarian game that anyone could play with a ball and a stick. That Southeastern Native life-ways are at the roots of modern baseball (e.g., running the four directions counterclockwise, imposing no time limits on game play expressing cosmic duration, and having a pitcher in the center of play, much like the Choctaw ceremonial center pole, *iti fabassa*) is the height of irony. Yet, I do not suggest the Americans “stole” baseball from Indians. Rather, I’m saying that if the land taught Natives how to play ball, it just might have taught non-Natives as well.

#### HOME ADVANTAGE

Fox, Deer, Rabbit, Turtle, Bear, Eagle, and Bat, all my relations, play ball. While some baseball historians track the origins of baseball to everywhere but Native North America, Natives can point to ancient ball fields situated next to earthworks sites throughout the Western Hemisphere. The fields of geometric shapes in the Americas suggest Indigenous peoples were playing a variety of ball games adjacent to mound sites at a time that was simultaneous to their construction.

Stories are a great source for showing continuance. The following is a story of how the animals and birds taught Natives how to play ball. It’s a compilation of stories I’ve heard and taken from the written sources I’ve read, and it is greatly abbreviated.<sup>4</sup>

A long time ago, the animals challenged the birds to a great ball game, and the birds accepted. The captain of the animal team was Bear, and he was very strong. He could play all day and never get

tired. All the way to the ball game Bear was throwing logs and boasting how the animals would win the game.

The birds had Eagle for a captain, and the co-captain was Hawk. They were so fast they could carry the ball and fly it home to score a point. Everyone knew the birds were fast and powerful ball players. Before the big game the animals and the birds had an all-night dance. At that dance a few of the little ones came along and said they wanted to participate on the teams. Because they were so small, no one wanted them on the teams. Finally, Eagle took pity on the little ones and decided to make wings for the little ones so they could play the game too. Eagle took a small piece of leather from a drum and put it on Bat to make him wings. Next he stretched the fur of Squirrel to make him wings. Each of the little ones had a different way of fitting into the ball game.

On the day of the big game, the little ones would prove the effort to give them wings was worth it. The two teams, animals and birds, played all day and all night. The game continued. Finally after many days and nights—when Bear and Eagle were exhausted—it was Bat who carried the ball and threw it in to score the winning point. For his hard work and humbleness, Bat was thought to be so important to both animals and birds that today he can play on both teams.<sup>5</sup>

This story of the animals and the birds has always been thought to be about Southeastern stickball, *toli*. But I respectfully argue that American Indians could play more than one kind of ball game. Besides, within this story there may be deeper meanings intended for listeners. Here goes. The animals and birds agree to play a ball game, but they do not carry sticks to use in the game (nor is a bat mentioned). Just before the big game they host a party and an all-night dance. Outsiders show up, but they're small and puny. Eagle, the most gifted leader of the birds, offers them a spot on the bird's team, but they must first be outfitted appropriately. For Bat, special wings are made from a drum's leather. Squirrel's fur is reshaped to make wings. After the changeup ceremony, Bat and Flying Squirrel's new regalia make them proper for play on the birds' team. A long and tiring game follows. When the animals and birds are exhausted, it's the adopted-in-kin, either Bat or Flying Squirrel (depending on the storyteller), who flies the ball across the goal to win the game.

Here I'm interested in the story elements that deal with the body and with physical movement. The story tells of transformation from one form into another and from movement in two worlds, upper (flight) and middle (on the ground), and about an adoption of form very different from one's own. The transformations of both Bat and Squirrel are a result of their desire to play in a ball game. The evolution of their bodies occurs quickly; they suddenly embody new physical attributes, but they must also remember how to move in their nontransformed selves, occupying both worlds, in order to play in the game. Even more profound, Indigenous Southeastern storytellers have always mapped Squirrel and Bat together in Ballgame's story, often substituting one animal for the other. So it should come as no surprise that scientists now suggest that 55 million years ago, the bat and the squirrel shared an arboreal, squirrel-like gliding ancestor (Simmons), underscoring a core Southeastern belief that "everything is related to everything."<sup>6</sup>

Other aspects of the story point to lessons Natives must embody such as generosity and hospitality. Eagle seems to have the home advantage as he's the leader that offers "the little ones" a place on his team. The subtext: never underestimate those you think are less fortunate, for they may play harder for your team (read tribe) than your own kind. The story teaches us that dance is ceremonial and an integral part of momentous events, a cultural lifeway that Southeastern Natives continue today.

While the animals and birds' story teaches Natives to play a ball game, we must remember that the game is unspecified and could mean any number of Indigenous ball games that require a team ethic. Finally, through a story Natives learn that we're capable of embodying the knowledge of animals and birds.

What else can we infer from the story? It's not a story of warfare. No one is killed during play. No horrendous fights take place after the game, at least none we're told about. The birds and animals also show us how to make fictive kin with people and things (read systems) different from ourselves. This is also something that the Iroquois Condolence Ceremony teaches.

In the historic Southeast there are many examples of Choctaw fictive kin traveling on diplomatic missions on behalf of our tribe. *Fictive kin* is a term used by scholars to describe kinship that is from neither blood ties nor marriage. The Choctaws have a very old and prominent Fani Mingo/Miko (squirrel chief) institution that serves as a kind of cultural

template for diplomacy.<sup>7</sup> Fani Mingo/Miko, often an adopted outsider, must “play” as hard for the opposing team as he does for his “home” team, just as Bat and Squirrel played for their adopted team. In other words, he (or she) must advocate for the tribe or town he is not a member of. As Patricia Galloway points out:

These first explorers found native institutions in place for dealing with formal intertribal communication. In the early eighteenth century the *fani mingo* institution served this purpose among the Chickasaw and Choctaws; tribes would adopt an advocate within a neighboring tribe, and his duty would be to argue in favor of what became in a sense his adopted tribe whenever war threatened to break out. Under other names such an institution may have been widespread as a means of dealing with intertribal relations throughout the Southeast, connected with the fictive kinship mechanisms of the calumet ceremony. (322)

The story of the animals and birds shows us how to make diplomatic relations with other tribes and foreigners, those different from ourselves, which aids in our survival.

#### MOUNDS EMBODY STORIES

Over the past three years I’ve been working with Monique Mojica, Jill Carter, Brenda Farnell, Ric Knowles, Erika A. Isherhoff, and Michael Greyeyes on a research project, “Indigenous Knowledge, Contemporary Performance.” The project involves developing new Indigenous performance models based dramaturgically on Indigenous cultural texts: earthworks. The Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada (SSHRC) awarded the project grant housed at Guelph University in Canada. Mounds were built by layering different kinds of soils one upon the other. As Indigenous playwrights, Monique and I hope to employ the deep structure of earthworks as dramaturgical models. Our soil layering will be represented in the stories we layer in the play. We began our research at mound sites by asking a simple question: How do Natives embody the lands of their origin? To aid in our research we’ve talked with tribal elders and residents in Native communities in close proximity to mounds, and we visited mound sites from Canada to Louisiana.

The Western Hemisphere is populated with mounds and earthworks

in various ages from the Archaic, Early Woodland, Middle Woodland, and Late Woodland/Mississippian periods. In the Southeast some of the great mound cities are Poverty Point (Louisiana), Moundville (Alabama), Nanih Waiya (Mississippi), and Okmulgee (Georgia). Other earthworks known as Hopewell era sites are located across Ohio and the Ohio Valley. At one time hundreds of thousands of mounds, including embankments, conical mounds, platform mounds, and effigy mounds, dotted Indigenous North America, beginning as early as 4000 BCE. The very name “Turtle Island” connotes a vast effigy mound rising out of the water.

In studying the mounds as Indigenous literatures, we asked other questions. Are the earthworks embodied mnemonics aligned with moon and sun rotations to show future generations of Natives when and where to converge at specific sites? Another indication of the return motif. Consider the Newark Earthworks site in Ohio, which is the largest surviving Hopewell complex: One of its mounds, the Octagon Earthworks, comprises a type of lunar observatory for tracking “the motions of the moon, including the northernmost point of the 18.6-year cycle of the lunar orbit. The moon then rises within one-half of a degree of the octagon’s exact center.”<sup>8</sup> Today an 18.6-year lunar cycle of return continues to be marked in ceremony by Natives and non-Natives wishing to witness the moonrise. But most often they must stand outside the Octagon Earthworks, which lies within a privately held golf course. In ancient times what kinds of community activities would Indigenous people have developed to complement the lunar return? One answer: ball games.

The Bird Mound at Poverty Point, Louisiana, is one of the first major earthworks that Monique and I visited. Located near West Carroll Parish, Louisiana, and fifteen miles from the Mississippi River on the Macon Bayou, Poverty Point is the Western Hemisphere’s largest earthworks and is relatively close to the Choctaw’s mother mound, Nanih Waiya, only 197 miles away.

The mound was built during the late Archaic period, and archaeologists tell us the site was inhabited only on a seasonal basis (much like a modern recreational park). Poverty Point is home to the 3,600-year-old Bird Mound. While archaeologists say they do not know why Mound A, or Bird Mound, came into being, the following is one possible explanation as to why the mound was built in a short period of time and what this may signify.

Indigenous architects and their families came to Poverty Point and used all means available to them from the sacred to the scientific. Astronomers, mathematicians, geologists, engineers (for soil analysis and design), storytellers, the young, and the old all came together to create the mound in approximately three months (Kidder, Ortmann, and Arco 9–12). Natives in the Southeast literally moved a mountain of soil, some 238,000 cubic meters in approximately ninety days, to create the story of the Bird Mound.

Let's pause for a moment: Natives built Bird Mound in three months. What would have been the significance of ninety days to these people that they would demand such labor of themselves? The Bird Mound faces west, and her wings seem tilted downward, as if landing. Her head may have tilted to one side, but it's impossible to know as her head has been dug away by nineteenth-century looters looking for gold. However, the angle of the wings could signify that she's either moving to perch in order to be mounted by a mate or to roost for the evening.

The giant Bird Mound earthwork has a wingspan of 640 feet and stands seven stories high. Considering the size of the effigy, I suspect she, the mound, is a bird of prey, and even more specific, the representation of a red-tailed hawk.

Red-tailed hawks embody special meanings for Southeastern Natives, especially Choctaws. The red-tailed hawk is a solar bird, one of power and strength, and the tail feathers are bright red in sunlight. Red signifies lifeblood and is sometimes a powerful metaphor for war. These predator birds mate over a period of a few days in late winter or early spring. By March, the female lays her eggs, one every other day (two eggs in the nest can take up to four days to be laid). The incubation period for hawk eggs is typically thirty-five days. It generally takes another four days for the small nestlings to hatch out of their shells. Once out of their shells, the nestlings will spend another forty-six days or so in the nest before the baby birds begin to leave on short flights. The total time needed to create a red-tailed hawk, from mating to a fledgling leaving the nest, is approximately ninety days. Three months. Therefore, it would seem that Bird Mound at Poverty Point is possibly a performance mound that embodies the story of the red-tailed hawk from conception to first flight—the story of its creation. I suspect that the people who came together, from many directions, to write the story

of Bird Mound into the land must have considered her an important symbol for their communities.

Yet, there's more to the story. Bird Mound signals two major ceremonial events: March 21, the vernal equinox, and June 21, the summer solstice, and it may also be read as a mnemonic expression of a return to home base—the subtext of Native ball game. If a red-tailed hawk's eggs were laid in March, the fledglings would be ready to leave the nest sometime in late June, close to the time of the summer solstice. Traditionally Choctaws (and other Southeastern tribes) extinguished all “fires” on summer solstice, known as Luak Mosholi. Fires are a multi-purpose metaphor for settling all scores, ending the old six-month cycle and beginning a new cycle that will end on winter solstice.

The ceremonial cycles are not the only functions of Bird Mound, but again, if we connect the gestation of an actual bird, a red-tailed hawk, with the building of a bird's mound, a performance of natural and cosmic events begins to unfold at the site. We can see the ceremonial event; the mound rises above the horizon and spreads its wings, a story to be read over and over again for all who visit. As Bird Mound faces west, perhaps a deeper metaphor is present—that of roosting time. Each evening red-tail hawks and other birds come to roost at their favorite places. The Native architects and builders who created the mound may have also created songs to mark the seasonal return of the people to the site. “*Issa halali haatoko iksa illok isha shkii, because you are holding onto me, I am not dead yet,*” or something like it, could suggest a call and response song of return.

Other features at Poverty Point are the dance grounds, ball fields, a small flat-topped ball court, six elliptical half-rings that if laid end to end would span seven and one-half miles, and a series of circular holes for oak posts that archaeologists believe were a calendar. Again, the calendar marks ceremonial times for ever-returning events at that site, which may have instructed Native visitors when the annual gatherings and ball game tournaments would occur.

Poverty Point also contains many icons: jasper owls, a large bird of prey, panther, Fox Man, and Long Tails, all of which could represent ancient clans or even ball teams that came to the site seasonally. Much more research will be needed to form a better picture of the past, but at Native fast-pitch tournaments in Oklahoma today, panther and hawk, even tornado and hurricane (again symbolizing the wind currents in the

Northern Hemisphere), are but a few of the Native team symbols worn by modern ball players. Just as copper and shell icons once worn or carried by Southeastern Natives symbolized clan and tribe (or team affiliation), I suggest the Native ball game expresses the continuity of culture and is embodied by Native ball players. As players run the bases counterclockwise they express wind patterns in the Northern Hemisphere and the notion of returning home. The pitcher, or center pole man, winds up (underhanded), engaging upper and lower worlds with his body movements. Through game play, ball players express through body movements east to west and north to south dimensionality creating a kind of three-dimensional space: a spinning orb, a world ever-returning.

Ancient replications of ball fields figure largely in the shell gorgets uncovered in various mound sites. One style, the Cox Mound gorget, found in both Tennessee and Alabama, has four engraved woodpecker heads facing counterclockwise around a square ground, with a crossed point within a circle. (Again east–west, north–south.) As discussed earlier, even our dances are also performed counterclockwise.

Therefore, the cross within a circle found in ancient icons may encompass both ball game motifs and ceremonial dances, and more importantly the engravings replicate the wind and water systems moving counterclockwise in the Northern Hemisphere.

According to anthropologist F. Kent Reilly III in “People of Earth, People of Sky: Visualizing the Sacred in Native American Art of the Mississippian Period,” the Native universe of the Mississippian period had stories of three important mythic zones.

One may conceive of the relationship among these overlapping mythic cycles much as an environmental scientist perceives overlapping environmental zones. The transitional area where zones overlap—what ecologists call an ecotone—possesses the most wide-ranging biodiversity. Analogously, the area where these mythic cycles overlap, in effect, constitutes a religiously charged ecotone in which various Mississippian cosmogonic beliefs thrive. Aspects of these three mythic zones unquestionably survive today in the traditional beliefs and religious rituals of certain contemporary Native American groups. (126–27)

Following Reilly’s logic, I suggest that these ecotones can still be found on the ball diamonds located on tribal grounds such as the

Choctaw's Red Warrior Park at Tuskahoma, Oklahoma. Native ball game has morphed over time into fast-pitch softball. In fact, the ball games are a major reason so many Native families return to Tuskahoma each Labor Day.

Another Choctaw story tells of the center pole (that unites upper, middle, and lower worlds) and explains how the Choctaws and Chickasaws became two tribes. Each night the pole was placed in the ground to determine which way the tribe should travel; but eventually they argued about which way it was leaning, and split into two groups. In Choctaw, the ceremonial center pole is sometimes commonly referred to as *iti fabassa*. The "Pole Man" is called Tikba heka, the one who gives the cry preceding ball game's dance.

An important aspect of Poverty Point was trade. According to archaeologist Jon Gibson, "long-distance trade was a hallmark of Poverty Point culture. Stones were carried over long distances up to 1,400 miles. Many kinds of materials were traded, including flint, sandstone, slate, shale, granite, and other coarse igneous rocks, soapstone, crystal quartz, copper, and galena" (22). While corn is not in the archaeological record, other foods such as persimmons, wild grapes, wild beans, hackberries, doveweed, fish, and birds such as sandhill cranes, turkeys, geese, herons, and crows were found in the ashes at the dig sites. Also found there was the medicinal herb snakeroot, an important trade good in the Southeast, especially among Native ball players.

#### THE TRIPLE: MOUNDS, BALL GAMES, AND SNAKEROOT

Choctaw elder and ball player Sim Noah from Battiest, Oklahoma, tells how he played baseball in the fields around Battiest that his father cleared in the mid-1930s. He says his father and his uncles played ball, as did his grandfather and grandmother. Noah adds that he and his family played ball on the first cleared baseball fields at Tuskahoma in the Choctaw Nation's Red Warrior Park over fifty years ago. Today the Choctaw Nation continues to host a yearly Labor Day fast-pitch tournament at Tuskahoma and invites tribal teams from all over the country to enter the tournament. The Capitol Building at Tuskahoma, the former headquarters of the Choctaw Nation, was built in 1898.

If buildings are modern mounds, then Tuskahoma represents a gathering place for Choctaws much like the earthworks sites once did. Each

Labor Day, Tuskahoma is the site of a three-day yearly festival in which a hundred thousand people from around Oklahoma and elsewhere gather to sell a wide range of goods including handmade quilts, beadwork, leather goods, T-shirts, and books and to watch the tribal ball games.

Noah explains how in the early 1960s he and his friends gathered snakeroot in exchange for the entrance fees to a nearby baseball tournament. “Once,” he says, “we were on strike from our jobs and a bunch of us went out and dug snakeroot to get enough money to play in a ball tournament. We sold snakeroot to the general store. They said they’d pay us \$25.00 per pound. Snakeroot is light, so it took some doing to get enough money, but we did it. We wanted to play ball. And we did,” he says smiling. “I have the trophy that’s three feet high in the garage, still.”

Sim Noah’s story shows how he and his friends harvested a plant they could exchange for enough money to enter their team in a tournament. The local general store owner then sold the snakeroot to local Choctaws to use for medicinal purposes and for making turpentine. All this snake-root economy in 1960 was going on in an area of mostly Choctaw towns. Yet the practice of gathering snakeroot by Southeastern Natives dates back hundreds of years, as evidenced by the writings of an eighteenth-century Frenchman. In his memoir on the history of Louisiana, Antoine Simon Le Page du Pratz wrote on the uses of the “rattle-snake-herb” (251). Le Page du Pratz says that the plant was used to cure victims of snakebites: “it is the specific remedy against the bite of that dangerous reptile” (251). He reports that Natives would chew a piece of the root for a while, apply it to the wound, and wait for the ill effects to subside. During his sixteen years in the Lower Mississippi Valley (1718–1734) Le Page du Pratz lived near two waterways, Bayou St. John and St. Catherine’s Creek, a small southwesterly stream that joined the Mississippi.

It seems likely that Le Page du Pratz and his Indian friends were gathering snakeroot to aid in the treatment of rattlesnake bites. We can extrapolate that snakeroot would likely have been a medicinal trade good for large gatherings and ceremonies that Le Page du Pratz witnessed. Gathering and trading snakeroot is a practice at least three hundred years old among Southeastern Indians, and Noah and his teammates were continuing this tradition.

Another action of continuance is show and tell. When elder ball players like Sim Noah retell a ball game story, they often hold an imaginary ball while explaining specific physical movements of a ball player they

remember. Sometimes they show in slow motion how a player used his or her body in making certain plays work to their advantage. Anthropologist Brenda Farnell suggests that practiced movements evoke body memory and teach more than just perfected actions. "When body movements are viewed as action signs . . . they become one kind of semiotic practice among others, all of which provide persons with a variety of cultural resources for the creation of meaning. Dances and rituals are replete with these kinds of metaphorical gestures and, as we shall see, frequently extend to include whole body action signs and metaphorical usages of the ritual or other performance spaces" (323). Farnell suggests that the visual movements serve the tellers' memory of the story that's being passed along. The show and tell of the moves by an elder ball player may seem rather informal or even happenstance to outsiders, but it nevertheless energizes younger Native ball players to join in and express their moves. In this way past and present merge in shared physical moves. More important, younger players learn the stories embodied by the elders. This may explain why Native ball game tournaments remain a powerful force among tribal members. In these multigenerational gatherings, younger generations are encouraged to be the future of the tribe's cultural practices, whether dancing, singing, or pitching a ball for a team.

#### KINSHIP VINES AND NATIVE BALL GAME CULTURE

Kinship among the Choctaw and Chickasaw peoples is deeply intertwined, connecting towns and communities throughout southeastern Oklahoma. Here's how. Ashley Hart (Choctaw Chickasaw) from Ada, Oklahoma, was a shortstop for Native All-Stars, a Choctaw-Chickasaw Ada team. The Native All-Stars played in the women's division at the Choctaw Nation's fast-pitch tournament in 2005 and were interviewed for the short film *James Fortier and I* co-produced, as mentioned earlier.

Ashley's father and mother both coach Native fast-pitch teams. At the time of the interview, Ashley was the president of the Native American Student Association at East Central University in Ada, Oklahoma. Her sister married Jason Wallace (Chickasaw), a player for the ball team Red Storm. A year or so after we finished the short documentary *Playing Pastime*, Ashley married ball player Jeremy Wallace (Chickasaw), brother of Jason, also from Ada. So two Choctaw-Chickasaw sisters

married two Chickasaw brothers, and both families are well-known ball players supporting a number of teams at the Choctaw Nation's fast-pitch tournament, the Chickasaw Nation's fast-pitch tournament, and other local tournaments.

In the documentary we also interviewed Pauline Walker, Jeremy and Jason's ninety-three-year-old grandmother. She told us that she began playing stickball as a girl and later baseball. Mrs. Walker's first language is Chickasaw, and at the time we filmed her, she was frequently traveling to Washington DC as a Chickasaw ambassador, accompanying Chickasaw Nation governor Bill Anoatubby. So, these families are participants in all cultural lifeways, even beyond playing ball. At the time Jeremy Wallace worked for the Chickasaw Nation's Head Start program in Ada and was active in tribal cultural activities. He was one of the performers in the Chickasaw Nation's theatrical play *Hina Falaa*, the story of how the Choctaws and the Chickasaws (in ancient times) became two tribes. The play was written and performed by Chickasaw actors, dancers, and singers; Chickasaw composer Jerod Tate wrote the original musical score. The Chickasaw Nation produced the play in 2009 for a standing-room-only crowd at the 1,089-seat Hallie Brown Ford Fine Arts Center at East Central University in Ada. Dozens of Chickasaws and Choctaws performed in the cast and crew, and the Chickasaw Nation produced a DVD and a CD of *Hina Falaa*.

The play's subtext is that the population was large enough to split, and like a single cell dividing to reproduce, one group became two tribes. The story tells us that the split happened peacefully. Just as in the story of the animals and birds there is no warfare. It would seem good ethics are embodied by tribal peoples from a ball game story.

Native ball playing families like the Harts and the Wallaces remain active in cultural ceremonies through intertwined tribal networks, further suggesting that historic Chickasaw and Choctaw towns and populations also grew as a result of ball games. Today the Wallace family is large enough to divide into several fast-pitch teams: Twister, Red Storm, and Mulihoma.<sup>9</sup>

Native ball game tournaments play a continued role in growing Native populations in the twenty-first century. As evidenced in their report to the Oklahoma Indian Affairs Commission in 2011, the Chickasaw Nation now boasts a population of 49,000 Chickasaws. They also report that their operations include seventeen casinos, eighteen smoke

shops, a chocolate factory, several museums, a publishing house, and a host of other businesses with a combined annual tribal economic impact of thirteen billion dollars.<sup>10</sup>

The Choctaw Nation's website reports that the tribe employs 7,600 tribal and nontribal Oklahomans. The tribe's overall population has grown to 223,279 Choctaws worldwide; 84,670 in-state.<sup>11</sup> Compare this to the paltry population of 18,981, the number of Choctaws reported in the final Dawes Rolls of 1894. Obviously the Trail of Tears removal era, disease, boarding schools, and often malnutrition had taken its toll on the Choctaw population. Yet today tribal ball game tournaments held by the Choctaw Nation, Muskogee Creek Nation, Seminole Nation, and Chickasaw Nation are played on tribal lands during the tribes' national holidays, with hundreds of Native fans and families coming to watch the games.<sup>12</sup> I've witnessed the chiefs at the Muskogee Creek Nation and Chickasaw Nation (in the case of the Chickasaw Nation, the leader is titled "governor") give their State of the Nation address while the ball games are being played on the field. This may seem disrespectful to the office of the leader, but let's consider what the ball game expresses. Ball-playing Indians running the bases counterclockwise, adjacent to the site where a leader speaks as the metaphorical "center pole" of the tribe, may signal our ever-returning presence on the land, just as cosmic solar and lunar events are ever-returning at earthworks sites such as Newark, Poverty Point, and hundreds of mound complexes in the North Hemisphere. Indigenous games and literatures written on the land are embodied stories that Natives carry expressing our duration here as ever-alive and ever-returning.

Le Page du Pratz does make a brief note about Native games in his historical account. He says that one game was played with a pole eight feet long, another with three sticks eight or nine inches long, and that another ball game was played by the youth: "The young people, especially the girls, have hardly any kind of diversion but that of the ball: this consists in tossing a ball from one to the other with the palm of the hand, which they perform with a tolerable address" (366).

Again Native ball game tournaments are a centuries-old story of continuity, emplotted in the land, embodied by the players. And as Le Page du Pratz's observations indicate, even if Europeans did witness ball activity, they didn't understand its importance to Native life and culture. While we don't yet have documented evidence of Native ball

games being played next to mounds or around Choctaw towns in the eighteenth century, I hope for lost letters from the early French colonial period. Perhaps they're in the archives, or in private collections waiting to be discovered. Historical recovery is also without time limits.

#### PLAY-OFF ROUNDS

Though very little is known at this time about Indigenous ball game organizing systems, or the epistemological benefits to a people who played team sports, anthropologist Greg Urban argues that moieties may have been a model for ball game team organization since moieties also assigned burial roles and regulated marriages (172–93). Perhaps. But it's just as likely the other way around. Ball-playing teams could have, over time, helped develop the moieties. In team games one side plays the other side. Eventually one person from one side (read team) marries someone from the other side; same with burial practices. Play-off systems may have leached into all aspects of cultural life. After all, historians and scholars have pointed out that Choctaws always exhibited a kind of “play-off system” when dealing with foreign powers. Historian Richard White makes the argument that Choctaws played the French against the English for much of the eighteenth century in order to benefit from trading for goods and guns. And according to Patricia Kay Galloway and Clara Sue Kidwell, the Choctaws were trying to reestablish their play-off system between the Spanish and English as late as 1771 (499–514). All this playing “one side against the other” for the advantages of the home team suggests the possibility that play-off systems had deep cultural roots embodied in Choctaws through the continued performance of ball games. It may be time to consider the role of game-play as a progenitor of Choctaw political culture. A play-off game performed on a ball field between two teams could easily have been a primer for Choctaw leaders dealing with French, English, or Spanish opponents. Political strategies learned through the praxis of ball games, I suggest, aided in our survival over millennia.

One only has to look at another famous team player of the nineteenth century, Choctaw stickball ballplayer Tullock-chish-ko, “He Who Drinks the Juice of the Stone,” to see that even the mantle of his game-name reflects a powerful survival story (Catlin 400). Could this talented athlete be able to play only one kind of ball game, I wonder.

Today the land continues to call Choctaws home. Practically every Choctaw I know from Oklahoma has returned to visit Nanih Waiya, the Mother Mound of the Choctaws in Winston County, Mississippi. In 2008 the state of Mississippi returned control of the 120-acre site of Nanih Waiya to the Mississippi Band of Choctaw Indians. I would be remiss if I didn't mention the fact that the Chickasaws built a new mound at the Chickasaw Cultural Center in Sulphur, Oklahoma. Mound building continues.

Throughout the essay I've offered diverse readings of stories, games, songs, and even phrases in hymns to show how the motion of water and winds in the Northern Hemisphere taught Choctaws how to dance, sing, and, of course, play ball. The land, solar and lunar events, and the birds and animals also taught us to return home to visit our mounds. "*Issa halali haatoko iksa illok isha shkii, because you are holding onto me, I am not dead yet.*" I agree. Because we are holding onto her, we live.

#### NOTES

1. For information on how to order a copy of *Playing Pastime*, contact Turtle Island Productions (<http://www.turtle-island.com/>).
2. I use George Aaron Boardwell's spelling and translation of the line in *A Choctaw Reference Grammar* (320). For an older spelling see *Choctaw Hymns* (93).
3. I use "Native ball game" to mean an ancient Indigenous Southeastern game played on the grounds around mound complexes. I suggest the game served as a unifier connecting the upper, middle, and lower worlds of the Southeastern cosmology.
4. In 2004, I was privileged to hear Cherokee storyteller Jerry Wolfe tell the ball game story several times while living on the Qualla Boundary. For a written account of the ball game story see Mooney (286–87). Further readings include Lankford; Swanton.
5. A similar version of the story appears in Meland et al. (391–416).
6. The quote by the late Choctaw writer Roxy Gordon appears in my essay "The Story of America" (29–48).
7. Oklahoma Choctaws use Miko, rather than Mingo.
8. "Newark Earthworks," *Wikipedia*, [wikipedia.org/wiki/Newark\\_Earthworks](http://wikipedia.org/wiki/Newark_Earthworks).
9. Lara Mann and I conducted research for a creative nonfiction book on Native ball game and its history in 2008. We interviewed contemporary ball players, learned about tournament play, and include a collection of historical newspaper accounts about nineteenth-century Indians and baseball and about fast-pitch softball culture.
10. <http://www.ok.gov/oiaac/documents/2011.FINAL.Web.pdf> (no longer accessible).
11. The employment figures are taken from the Choctaw Nation's website (<http://www.choctawnation.com/>).

12. In 2005, I attended three summer fast-pitch softball tournaments: the Muskege Creek Nation, the Choctaw Nation, and the Chickasaw Nation. The games were held during the national holidays of the tribes, and the chief's speeches were given as the ball games continued. In the case of the Chickasaw Nation's Governor Anotubby's speech, the games were rained out. That year lightning also forced Governor Anotubby to postpone his speech.

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## BOOK REVIEWS

Alice Te Punga Somerville. *Once Were Pacific: Māori Connections to Oceania*. Minneapolis: U of Minnesota P, 2012. ISBN: 978-0-8166-7756-6. 265 pp.

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*Once Were Pacific* sets out to make disingenuous the epistemic constructions surrounding Māori and other Pacific peoples, particularly as they ascertain to the settler colonial nation-state of New Zealand and its simultaneous location within and disconnection to the Pacific. As a literary studies scholar, Te Punga Somerville reveals her project primarily through texts of Māori writers and their connections to Pacific paradigms incomprehensible to the New Zealand nation-state. Of note, however, is the author's use of nonliterary sources such as music tracks, historical figures, DVDs, performance centers, theatrical groups, paintings, TV series, and tapa cloth, all of which help illustrate a powerful methodology for Indigenous scholarship that moves beyond Western disciplinary confinement. In part 1 of 2, tapa cloth is used metaphorically as that which binds Pacific people across distances. Here the author examines Pacific ontological proximity through three chapters that interrogate Māori within Pacific spaces, explore Māori writers who write beyond New Zealand's nation-state, and begin to comprehend how Māori writers beyond Aotearoa's shores position themselves as writers of the Pacific. Framed by largely historical accounts drawn from archival research, chapter 1 if nothing else demonstrates the complex nature of Māori postcolonial diasporic culture, academia, and people. From the fraught nature of the racial taxonomies of Te Rangihiroa (Sir Peter Buck) while domiciled on O'ahu to the intricate relationship between Māori

performative labor and the Polynesian Cultural Center (PCC, [also on O'ahu]), the author demonstrates the paradoxical nature of Indigenous peoples leaving home to return home. PCC, for example, is ultimately framed by the imperial desires of the Mormon Church throughout the Pacific, yet in many ways the church enables Pacific communities to move outside the state. Chapter 2 thematically examines the works of Māori writers who began writing in Aotearoa but who later find themselves writing from the Pacific. Here, Te Punga Somerville concentrates on the poets Vernice Wineera, Evelyn Patuawa-Nathan, and Robert Sullivan, outlining how their writing from the Pacific asserts a non-nation “re-remembering” derived via a “returning” ontology: “the Māori person venturing to the Pacific is retracing migration routes, seeking genealogical and cultural sources and tributaries. In this way, the Māori person *returns to* an originary home” (58). “Aotearoa-Based Māori Writers,” the title of chapter 3, looks at the fragmented efforts of Māori to write in relation to the Pacific from New Zealand, particularly focusing on Witi Ihimaera’s 1987 Novella *The Whale Rider* and Hinewirangi’s collection *Kanohi ki te Kanohi*. Te Punga Somerville discusses the texts in terms of their demonstration of increased ontological depth; of a sense of being Māori with a profundity of genealogical and cultural mobility. What would have further helped the reader in this regard was a chapter devoted to explaining why Māori, in many ways, were complicit with the formation of the settler colonial nation-state in that we readily divorced ourselves from “being Pacific,” imagining *waka* as one-way tickets “home” from Hawaiki, as opposed to vessels vacillating between the sea of islands.

Grounded in the concepts of *tangata whenua* and *manuhiri* (in this case Māori as “Pacific hosts” and “Pacific guests,” respectively), part 2 examines the intersections between Pacific (i.e., both Māori and Pasifika) communities within the borders of New Zealand as a nation-state, looking at collaborations and particular texts that effuse such relationships. In the first chapter of part 2, “Māori-Pasifika Collaborations,” Te Punga Somerville gives an account of various alliances fostered by common genealogical and social parameters. Chapter 4 resembles more a historical genealogy of seemingly heterogeneous historical and contemporary enunciations, such as the program notes to a 1943 performance fund-raiser aptly named “South Sea Festival,” a 1970s political magazine, *Rongo*, invested in disclosing Māori and Pasifika social prob-

lems and activist unrest, a contemporary music track from the Māori/Pasifika hip hop group Nesian Mystik entitled “Lost Visionz,” and the 2008 DVD *Polynation*. Centering her examples on the city of Auckland, Te Punga Somerville signals the importance of urban spaces to neocultural formations and connections and their simultaneous entanglement in national codes. Similarly, chapter 5 looks to Māori writers (Apirana Taylor, Patricia Grace, and Briar Grace-Smith) who are making conscious decisions to navigate connections back through the Pacific. Not to be out done, in chapter 6 the author looks to how Pasifika writers based in New Zealand make connections to their new homelands in old Pacific. Through the works of Alistair Te Ariki Campbell and Karlo Mila the author evokes the not uncomplicated nature of being cousins to Māori within a national framework fundamentally underpinned by a discourse of bicultural tokenism and an Indigenous politics heavily articulated through the language of “being first.” The final chapter of part 2 and the book, “When Romeo Met Tusi: Disconnections,” follows accord with discord by examining three texts that more broadly speak to postcolonial cultural formations in the production of an unnatural disunion between Māori and their Pasifika kinfolk. Specifically, this chapter delves into the disgruntled underbelly of Pacific-based New Zealanders. Through the 1997 plays *Romeo and Tusi*, developed by Oscar Kightley and Erolia Ifopo, and *Once Were Samoans* (2006), produced by the theater company “Kila Kokonut Krew,” and the hit television series *The Market* (2005), Te Punga Somerville demonstrates competing and ethnically stratified jacqueries produced via proximity within urban spaces such as Ōtara and Porirua. Here, the author helps reveal a seldom analyzed aspect of every urban space in New Zealand; the mutual prejudice that exists between (some) Māori and Pasifika communities and families.

The central aim of *Once Were Pacific* is to reassert the importance of Pacific connections to Māori ontological formations and political consciousness. Te Punga Somerville achieves this in a delightful way via the overarching metaphor of Tupaia’s 1769 painting *A Maori Bartering a Crayfish*. While there is no space here to describe the painting nor the significance of the Raiatean, Tupaia, to New Zealand colonial history, the author employs the metaphor throughout the book to triangulate Māori, Pacific and the not so dormant (but often silent) spectral effects of colonialism upon the relationship between Māori and Pacific-

based New Zealanders. More importantly to this book at least, the metaphor helps animate how Māori might imagine themselves in relation to the sea of islands of their forebearers. It should be said, however, that the overarching metaphor also gives rise to an overromanticization of Māori in the Pacific. For instance, the section on Te Rangihiroa reveals the reproduction by a Māori scholar of racist academic methodologies. Although Te Punga Somerville suggests at the end of chapter 1 that Te Rangihiroa was able to overcome his racist assessments of Hawaiians due to spending two decades in Hawai'i, the chapter fails to explain how this is borne out, oddly concentrating on Te Rangihiroa's quest for US citizenry, while ignoring the ample evidence of Buck's complicity with New Zealand's colonial endeavors throughout the Pacific, and in particular Sāmoa, in thinking about anthropology as a method of "Government of Native Races,"<sup>1</sup> while at the same time propagating eugenics as a force for corporeal assimilation.

That being said, it is toward the colonial order of things that Te Punga Somerville levels her harpoon. The author assists Māori at least in unlocking those encumbering notions that articulate a "once were warriors" culture locked within a South Seas Britain. Moreover, the author succeeds in circumventing colonial taxonomies of place (i.e., "the logic of New Zealand") in "re-remembering" that we, Māori, were "once Pacific." Although *waka* (in this case, ocean-voyaging vessels) are transitory in nature, nonetheless they have become key ontological symbols for Māori, highlighting the importance of both "origin" and a spiritual homeland. Although it is not explicitly spelled out, the author implicitly questions ontological tithing to place framed by the nation-state and, hence, exclusion of Pasifika from Māori Indigenous political formations, while simultaneously examining Māori ontology through a Pacific lens. Te Punga Somerville's successful intention in this book is fundamentally anticolonial at the epistemic level—that is, to illuminate the possibilities for Māori, especially to think ourselves into the Pacific.

#### NOTE

1. See M. P. K. Sorrenson, "Polynesian Corpuscles and Pacific Anthropology: The Home-Made Anthropology of Sir Apirana Ngata and Sir Peter Buck," *Journal of the Polynesian Society* 91.1 (1982): 7–28.

Eric Gansworth. *If I Ever Get Out of Here*. New York: Arthur A. Levine Books, 2013. ISBN: 978-0-545-41730-3. 359 pp.  
 Anne Jansen, *University of North Carolina at Asheville*

“Paul McCartney had sung just a few Beatles songs during the show. One of them had been ‘Yesterday,’ about longing for an easier, earlier life. On its surface, it was a breakup song. But its perfection at capturing impossible losses made it one of the world’s best-known songs. You didn’t need to have someone dump you to long for a time when your life was easier. You could fill in your own sadness” (158–59). So narrates the protagonist of Onondaga author and artist Eric Gansworth’s young adult novel *If I Ever Get out of Here*. One could make a similar argument about this book: its perfection at capturing adolescent struggles makes it an incredibly rich work. You don’t need to be American Indian to understand it. You can fill in your own experiences. In fact, the universal themes on which the novel focuses—such as friendship, belonging, and adolescence—are part of what make the book so accessible. That being said, Gansworth’s novel is undeniably just as much about what it means to be American Indian as it is about what it means to be a teenager, especially given the careful attention he dedicates to various facets of American Indian history and culture.

*If I Ever Get out of Here* takes readers back in time to 1975 (the year before the United States’ bicentennial) on the Tuscarora Nation’s reservation in New York, where unpopular seventh-grader Lewis Blake is about to start his second year at the nearby “white school.” At the novel’s onset, Lewis has one goal: to put an end to his tenure as “the Invisible Boy” (his self-appointed nickname) and make at least one friend. In a scene that calls to mind both the history of Indian boarding schools and US military procedures, the book opens with Lewis having his braid cut off and his remaining hair buzzed short. This sets the tone for the rest of the novel: through Lewis’s quest to figure out who he is, who he wants his friends to be, and how he wants his Indianness to factor into his sense of self, the reader is exposed to the complex history of American Indians alongside the story of Lewis’s coming-of-age. Gansworth uses three boys (Carson, George, and the Wedgie King) at Lewis’s school to illustrate three of the most significant aspects of his quest for belonging. Carson is Lewis’s oldest friend and also lives on the reservation, but at the same time, Carson alternates between friend and antagonist. Lewis’s relation-

ship with Carson is fraught, and his attempts to figure out how Carson fits into his life parallel his internal efforts to decide what roles his culture and the Tuscarora community occupy in his understanding of himself. Conversely, George is the child of military parents who just moved to town. George, who is white, commits the social taboo of befriending Lewis; their mutual love of the Beatles and their different experiences as cultural outsiders prove to be the perfect ingredients for a deep connection. More representative of the other white students at the school, the Wedgie King hates American Indians and makes Lewis the focus of his intense bullying as the school year progresses. Lewis struggles to avoid the Wedgie King's targeted violence while his friendship with George grows stronger and his relationship with Carson becomes increasingly strained, and his navigation of these complicated social dynamics takes readers on an emotional voyage as Lewis develops his identity.

The novel's structure reflects this internal journey toward a cohesive sense of self: each chapter "is named, in alternating order, for a Beatles song and a Paul McCartney post-Beatles song" (353), as Gansworth explains in the "Playlist & Discography" that follows the novel. This alternation between Beatles songs and Paul McCartney songs—between the group and the individual—echoes Lewis's attempts to belong to a community while also existing as an individual with his own unique qualities and perspective. Similarly, the novel's three parts (named, respectively, after two Paul McCartney songs and one Beatles song) parallel Lewis's movement from the Invisible Boy with no sense of belonging to an individual who is comfortable in his own skin and feels connected to his family, his culture, and his community. Ultimately, the novel is a coming-of-age story in which a teenage boy learns that some experiences (like music and isolation) are universal while others (like culture and family) are not, and in the process of this understanding comes Lewis's growing appreciation of all the people and other factors that have shaped him. Even though Lewis is arguably just as alone at the end of the novel as he was in the beginning, his solitude has changed from the isolation of insecurity and exclusion to one of certainty and self-confidence. Like Paul McCartney, Lewis is an individual person with his own talents, but he is also a member of a group of people. In this way Gansworth's novel provides a valuable model for young adult readers—and an especially relatable one for young American Indian readers—about a person's individual worth and the potential to con-

struct an identity that encompasses community and family values while simultaneously respecting one's unique characteristics.

*If I Ever Get out of Here* includes sporadic artwork by the author, which lends the text a special quality. Moreover, it is a beautifully written and thoroughly engaging text from start to finish. Gansworth's wry humor complements the tumultuous ups and downs of adolescence, providing comic relief and subtle commentary on everything from history to dating. The characters are complex and interesting, giving readers a wide range of perspectives to try on. One of the strongest aspects of the novel is the way Gansworth presents readers with universal experiences, such as making friends and navigating the social minefields of middle school, alongside larger cultural and political issues, such as institutionalized racism and tribal sovereignty. The broader themes of friendship, family, and belonging give all readers a point of entry into the characters' lives while more focused themes and histories offer familiar or curious readers a slew of potential directions for further exploration. In this way Gansworth delivers a novel that allows American Indian readers—especially young adults—to see a reflection of their culture represented in literature, and that will also invite non-Native readers to glimpse a culture that may be unfamiliar to them. The novel's candor invites young readers to think critically about popularly held beliefs and stereotypes, to question the accuracy of dominant narratives of history, and to ask tough questions about race and class in the United States today. The novel is extremely ambitious in this regard (a quality that I find is often subdued in books written for young adult audiences), taking on a variety of issues ranging from bullying and violence to tribal sovereignty and reservation poverty to histories of Allotment and American Indian service in the US armed forces. I admire Gansworth's ability to interweave history, politics, and adolescent concerns. In essence, he seamlessly integrates larger social and political issues into a coming-of-age novel that is funny and compelling, thereby opening the door for curious readers to explore any number of these issues on their own.

This is a smart book. It doesn't present young adult audiences with a diluted version of history, nor does it force a value system upon its readers. Instead, it offers readers characters to which they can relate, and it lays the foundations for a deeper understanding of American Indian (especially Tuscarora) history and culture. This book will appeal to

young adult and adult readers alike. It will have added appeal for readers interested in classic rock and roll music. It is a rich, engaging read that tells a good story and conveys several valuable messages about culture and identity. Gansworth depicts the pain and awkwardness of adolescence with sensitive honesty, but within the pages of this novel, adolescence becomes a poignant and hopeful experience.

Gerald Vizenor. *Chair of Tears*. Lincoln: U of Nebraska P, 2012.

ISBN 978-0-8032-3840-4. 152 pp.

Deborah L. Madsen, *University of Geneva*

In *Chair of Tears* Vizenor returns to the genre of the campus novel. The most obvious comparison is with *Chancers* (2001), but in this latest return to the world of academia Vizenor offers many more laugh-out-loud moments and a general tone that is much less bleak in a narrative that is no less serious just because it is seriously funny. His irony is as sharp as ever in this rollicking trickster tale that is framed by the auctioning of the failing Department of American Indian Studies at the University of Minnesota. Indeed, the serious question posed by the novel asks us to imagine how an academic department of American Indian studies would function if its structures and practices were determined by Anishinaabe tribal values. Of course, Vizenor's satire does not work to propose a utopian alternative to present realities; as elsewhere in his writing, his effort is directed into creative processes of disruption and dismantling through a militant style of satire. The entire rhetorical arsenal of satire is deployed in this narrative: parody, burlesque, outrageous exaggeration, irony, of course, and a sustained analogy between the academic "reservation" known as the campus and the lexicon of historical tribal experience.

The introduction of the opening frame is delayed, preceded by family stories told by the unnamed first-person narrator. While the slender dimensions of the novel suggest at first that this may form the third in a trilogy with *Father Meme* (2008) and *Shrouds of White Earth* (2010), the distinctive second-person narrative mode of the earlier novels is supplanted here by a complex narrative voice that is articulated in the style of direct spoken discourse yet lacks a defined "you" that is being addressed. The effect is a narrative that seems to speak in the second

person and yet does not. The issue of speaking is evoked in the long series of epigrams that preface the novel: Emerson on the emancipatory power of nature infused with spirit; William Warren on the crane clan, origin stories, and the fate of such stories when heard as “*bona fide* belief” by “white hearers.” These epigrams work to situate the narrative voice within the oral tradition while signaling the liberating power of play that will characterize the entire narrative. The opening story, “Captain Eighty,” situates the narrator as the grandson of the eponymous trickster ancestor and his wife Quiver, a poker-playing genius, establishing, as the narrator describes, the “family traces and the natural currents of our presence [that] were turned to cold blood and racial fractions by federal separatists” (2). The gap between nature and spirit that can only be filled with stories, to which the epigram from Emerson alludes, provides the epistemological space within which the novel does its satirical work. The separation that Emerson identifies is politicized in terms of the racial policies, such as blood quantum, that Vizenor addresses.

In a novel that is preoccupied with deception, imitation, and simulation, the distinctive narrative voice is perhaps the most fundamental level on which the text plays with appearances and expectations. And yet inevitably we are invited to bring a set of expectations to our reading of a latest addition to the Vizenor canon. There are many motifs that will be familiar to Vizenor’s regular readers: the location of Captain Eighty’s houseboat on the headwaters of the Mississippi River; characters like Father Mother Browne, Coke de Fountain, and Almost Browne; Dogroy Beaulieu appears as the cousin of the narrator, and further links with *Shrouds of White Earth* are represented by the Women of the Creature Arts, allusions to Camus and Chagall, and a prominent return of the “Irony Dogs”: these highly skilled animals, which are trained to sniff out the absence of irony, are let loose to hilarious effect in the seminar rooms of Vizenor’s fictionalized university. Familiar concepts are also deployed in this narrative: chance and gaming, Native survival, memory, “natural reason,” victimry, the postindian—Captain Eighty creates and sells to tourists “postindian traditional [birch bark] scrolls” (6)—and, of course, the idea of presence located in nature and the seasons. The *Manabosho Curiosa*, the arcane manuscript concerning Benedictine monks and their erotic predilection for animals, reappears as one of many kinds of textuality—books, scrolls, pictomyths—that highlight the dynamics of Vizenor’s “storying.” The opening chapter expounds on a

recurring Vizenorian theme, the Native use of names: ironic nicknames, trade names, mis-recorded names, professional names. Captain Eighty is named for the atomic number for mercury—an appropriate moniker for a tricky communicator—and his children with Quiver are named for poker hands (Two Pairs, Straight, Full House, Flush, and High Card). It is seemingly significant, then, that the narrator remains unnamed, identified by his family and tribal relations.

The very title of the novel evokes expectations, echoing as it does the short story that appeared in *Earthdivers: Tribal Narratives on Mixed Descent* in 1981. “The Chair of Tears” is the opening story of that collection and the only entry in the section titled “Earthdivers in Higher Education”; it represents a symbolic narrative performance of the earthdiver origin story, as the remnants of a ruined Department of American Indian Studies are re-created in Anishinaabe tribal form. In the multi-layered narration, the anonymous third-person narrator reports the presentation by Clement Beaulieu to an academic conference on “Mythic Satire and Secular Reversals”: a presentation that rejects the orthodox form of the academic paper in favor of “an imaginative satirical narrative about mythic resurrection and tribal studies departments” (4). This description neatly encapsulates the novel, which, together with a revised ending, represents a substantial expansion and complexification of the story. The most obvious element of this narrative complication is Vizenor’s allegorization of tribal history and Anishinaabe values through the plot device of auctioning the Department of American Indian Studies. As the newly appointed “Chair of Tears” in this failing department and initiator of the sale, Captain Shammer, the narrator’s cousin, introduces a number of scandalous changes to academic life. He “removes” the faculty from the private offices granted to them by the state government to a “communal native space” (39) by issuing a “treaty termination notice” (38); his memos, “edicts and decrees” are incised on birch bark scrolls designed by Dogroy Beaulieu; those who have emptied the departmental library by never returning the material they borrowed are “book and movie rustlers” motivated by “some obscure sense of entitlement and right of discovery” (36). The vacated library and faculty offices then become “the exclusive centers of native communal activities, clearly a natural native conversion and radical transformation of separatism, conspiracies, fantasies of privacy, and nostalgia” (41) and, narratively, the scene of subsequent chapters, each of which opens the door to the

communal activities housed in one of the rooms. The former library becomes the Full House Casino where Quiver presides; the Panic Hole Chancery houses Panic Radio and the students who form the Chant Shouters to “shout their rage over . . . derogatory doctrines and documents of dominance” (61); another office accommodates the training of the irony dogs; another, the “skin dunks” administered by Darkhorse, a “prominent shaman of . . . identity brews” (71); “last lectures” are delivered in another transformed office by “native fakers” (75) immediately before collecting their new postindian identities; Almost Browne creates, and teaches seminars on the art of, postindian holograms in yet another. These are motifs familiar from novels like *The Trickster of Liberty* (1988) and *The Heirs of Columbus* (1991), but they are subject to transformation in the genre of the campus novel and under the satirical pressure of generations of the fictional Beaulieu trickster storiers.

*Chair of Tears* is challengingly innovative and comfortingly familiar, satirically biting and laugh-out-loud funny. A postindian “as-told-to narrative,” the novel entertains us with a rambunctious allegorization of contemporary academic life through the lens of Native survivance.

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Christopher B. Teuton. *Cherokee Stories of the Turtle Island Liars' Club*. Chapel Hill: U of North Carolina P, 2012. ISBN 978-0807835845. 272 pp.

Jace Weaver, *University of Georgia*

Christopher B. Teuton is a leading scholar of Native American literature. Now he has produced the first major collection of Cherokee storytelling from west of the Mississippi since the work of Jack and Anna Kilpatrick in the 1960s. The work is particularly valuable for recording little-known traditions preserved by the traditionalist Keetoowah Soci-

ety. As Teuton himself describes the book's purpose, it "documents and perpetuates contemporary Cherokee oral traditional stories and practices, presents Cherokee oral traditional knowledge within a historical and contemporary context, supports Cherokee literary arts, and perpetuates the Cherokee language" (8–9). It is an ambitious agenda that the author/ethnographer sets for himself. He succeeds admirably.

The "club" of the title refers to Cherokee storytellers who get together to swap stories. In particular, it refers to Teuton's four collaborators: Hastings Shade, Sammy Still, Sequoyah Guess, and Woody Hansen. These four master storytellers have traveled all over the fourteen-county area of the Cherokee Nation in Oklahoma. They have also shared their knowledge with Eastern Band Cherokees in North Carolina and with members of the wider Cherokee diaspora in places as far-flung as Tennessee, Texas, New Mexico, and California.

After an introduction by Teuton, the book begins, appropriately enough, with a chapter on origins entitled *Alenihv* ("Beginnings"). Anyone familiar with the orature of the Cherokee knows their earth-diver creation myth, in which the little water beetle ("Beaver's Grandchild") dives deep to the bottom of the primordial sea to fetch land to the ancient ocean's surface. James Mooney recorded a version of it in the late nineteenth century. The people also preserve a migration myth in their grand "Vision of Elo" of traveling from "beyond the great waters" to their traditional homelands in what is today the American Southeast. In the process five of the twelve Cherokee clans were lost. The story is commonly assumed to be an ancestral memory of when the tribe split off from its more northern-dwelling Iroquoian kin. Here, however, Hastings Shade offers two much less known creation accounts, one an emergence myth associated with Kituwah, the mother mound of Cherokee in North Carolina, and the other a migration story in which the people flee a volcanic island "surrounded by water that was undrinkable," suggesting a Cherokee belief in origins in the Caribbean or the Gulf of Mexico (56).

There is a wealth of knowledge here. While none of it is previously totally unknown (and thus not open to the misguided accusation of being "made up"), like Shade's emergence story, much of it will surprise and delight—and no doubt anger some—persons who think they know the Cherokee and their traditions. There is the story of when Cherokee warriors drove away dark-skinned invaders long before the com-

ing of whites. And there is Woody Hansen's lament about Cherokees who are today "Wal-Mart warriors" who no longer know their culture and supply all their needs at the Tahlequah big box (104). Earlier I mentioned the loss of five Cherokee clans during migration. Here you hear the members of the Liars' Club discuss those lost, like the Dragon Clan (*Aniugatena*), the Rattlesnake Clan, and the Nape of the Neck Clan. There are etiological myths here, offered by Shade, including "Why the Mole Lives Underground," "Why the Crow is Black," and "How the Raccoon Got His Mask and Ringed Tail."

*Cherokee Stories of Turtle Island Liars' Club* is, however, more than a simple anthology of oral tales. Much of the book is Teuton's gentle, freewheeling—even affectionate—conversations with his four collaborators. These provide a texture and a richness. The effect is enhanced by the beautiful and abundant illustrations by master Cherokee artist America Meredith.

At the outset of this review, I suggested that this book is both valuable and important. Such adjectives, however, are inadequate to do it full justice. Though Teuton is still a relatively young scholar, he has in this book produced a masterwork. *Cherokee Stories of the Turtle Island Liars' Club* is a book that will be read, studied, and quoted fifty years from now like the Kilpatricks' *Friends of Thunder*, or even more than a century hence like Mooney's *Myths of the Cherokee*. It is that significant. And I'm not lying.

The book is dedicated to Hastings Shade, who passed from this realm in 2010. In addition to being a superlative storyteller, he was also a skilled artist in crafting frog gigs. As I write this review, on a wall in my office less than twenty feet away is one of his creations, the shaft done in persimmon wood. For those of us who knew him, his absence is still keenly felt. Teuton has given him a fitting monument.

Mark Rifkin. *The Erotics of Sovereignty: Queer Native Writing in the Era of Self-Determination*. Minneapolis: U of Minnesota P, 2012.

ISBN 978-0-8166-7783-2.337p p.

Melanie K. Yazzie, University of New Mexico

Published in 1977, *Marxism and Literature* advanced one of Raymond Williams's most influential ideas, what he coined "structures of feeling."

(the real) by determining how well settler narratives or US imposition reflect the verities of Native life. While Rifkin acknowledges the importance of this intellectual exercise, he argues that it fails to attend to what he calls “ongoing and potentially competing processes of realization” (22). Following Eric Cheyfitz, he likens these processes of realization to “figuration” and “literalization” (14), terms that mark the ways in which forms like authenticity become real, or self-evident, in and through the codification of legal truths, especially truths that are assumed to cohere US superintendence of Indigenous life. These competing processes of realization, figuration, and literalization comprise the field of possibility for hegemonic social forms to gain meaning and value. Rifkin theorizes their complex interrelation as metaphorical, for the metaphor indexes structures of feeling that are erased in dominant social forms like self-determination (the metaphor as image instead of material) while also pinpointing that which is literalized by these same forms (the metaphor as a critical method for analyzing hegemony).

At the core of these interventions into extant approaches to analyzing American Indian literature is a refreshing, stubborn insistence on foregrounding the “ongoing conditions and legacies of settler occupation” (36) in Native life. Indeed, Rifkin goes to great lengths throughout the book to demonstrate that settler colonialism is an “intimate part of Indigenous experience” (36), an assertion that leads him to focus on the embodied and emotional dimensions of institutional power as these dimensions are evidenced in queer Native writings articulated from within their confines. Moreover, his application of the concept of structures of feeling seems to be influenced by a deep investment in the framework of settler colonialism, for he essentially argues that settler colonialism is a contested process of power brokerage that is experienced by Native peoples as hegemonic. This is an immensely helpful approach for understanding *how* colonial occupation conditions the very fabric of Native peoples’ lived social processes, especially in a settler society like the United States. With its careful effort to position settlement within the framework of hegemony, *The Erotics of Sovereignty* thus marks an important contribution to scholars of American Indian literature specifically, and to scholars more broadly interested in developing the theoretical relationship between Marxism, critiques of colonialism, and Indigenous studies in the United States and elsewhere.

Rifkin’s focus on the hegemony of settlement also frames his thesis

about the function and potential of erotics for articulating lived and felt experiences that are foreclosed, de-realized, or silenced by settler narratives. For Rifkin, erotics incorporates the framework of sexuality by attending to forms of lived experience that are not conventionally considered political. However, the concept also exceeds sexuality by including new networks of affiliation, collectivity, and inspiration that harbor special potential for imagining and forging different processes of realization, as well as a broad range of embodied and emotional experiences that are uniquely positioned to critically assess the complex, ongoing effects of settlement on Native social life. He builds diversely on affect studies, and specifically on the work of Sara Ahmed, to articulate the multiple dimensions of these networks and experiences. He uses terms like *sensation*, *interdependency*, *wounding*, *vulnerability*, *everyday*, *healing*, and *memory* to mark the matrix of depoliticized and de-realized affects that comprise and activate the political potential of erotics. Harkening the book's title, he calls this potential an "ethics of sovereignty" (33). An ethics of sovereignty imagines alternative kinds of Indigenous being, collectivity, and placemaking to those literalized through Indian policy and self-determination, while also acknowledging the very real ways that Indigenous peoplehood takes shape within and through hegemonic forms like tribal sovereignty (39).

He delves into these nuances throughout the book's chapters, excavating in turn each writer's conceptualization of erotics and ethics. He begins in the first chapter with Qwo-Li Driskill's 2005 collection of poetry, *Walking with Ghosts*. In this chapter he examines Driskill's use of haunting and desire to capture how Native bodies register continuing legacies of colonization and efforts to reclaim belonging. He moves on in the second chapter to Deborah Miranda's 2005 collection of poetry, *The Zen of La Llorona*. In this chapter he explores Miranda's concept of melancholia as a method for forging peoplehood and placemaking in the present tense out of legacies of colonial loss and erasure. He turns to Greg Sarris's 1999 novel, *Watermelon Nights*, in the book's third chapter. Here he highlights Sarris's critique of authenticity as a bureaucratic criterion for determining tribal belonging, one that is challenged by so-called impure intimacies like cross-racial sex and prostitution that otherwise generate important social communities and relations between and among Native people. The fourth and final chapter hones in on Chrystos's poetry from the period of 1988 to 1995. In this chapter Rifkin

argues that Chrystos connects urban Indian life to the labor of imagining Indigenous belonging and homeland in a way that shatters and mocks Indian stereotypes of primitivity and fetishization.

As a whole these writers reveal for Rifkin the central importance of everyday intimacies for Indigenous collective histories, politics, and connections to place. The crux of this assertion is that settlement is an everyday process that exists in the present tense. It is a reality that possesses *material* force in the lived relations of Native life, and one that, according to the emphasis on erasure and exclusion at the heart of *The Erotics of Sovereignty*, is experienced by Native people as routinely violent. It is therefore puzzling why Rifkin continues to leave his readers with a question mark regarding his stake in this violence.

In reading much of his work, I have noted Rifkin's tendency to offer provisional statements and prose that are as difficult to decipher as they are thought provoking and interesting. While this may be an issue of style, I sense an important absence in the flourish of his pen. Is the absence one of clarity about his vision of alliance politics? Is it one of outward queer suspicion regarding Native nationalisms and their politics of Indigeneity? Or, is it one of equating radical Indigeneity with queerness (and vice versa)? Who has the authority to ask these questions, and what is our responsibility in doing so? The absence I sense may touch on all or none of these questions, but it is one that begs explanation instead of the ambiguity that haunts his work.

## CONTRIBUTOR BIOGRAPHIES

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DEBORAH L. MADSEN is professor of American literature and culture at the University of Geneva. Her publications on the work of Gerald Vizenor include *Understanding Gerald Vizenor* (U of South Carolina P, 2009), the coedited (with A. Robert Lee) book *Gerald Vizenor: Texts and Contexts* (U of New Mexico P, 2010), and, most recently, the edited collection *The Poetry and Poetics of Gerald Vizenor* (U of New Mexico P, 2012).

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MELANIE K. YAZZIE (Diné) is a doctoral candidate (ABD) in American studies at the University of New Mexico. She specializes in Indigenous critiques of liberalism and colonialism, feminism, violence studies, the politics of life, and Diné studies. Her dissertation explores how Navajo life is moralized in social practices of tradition and violence conditioned by liberal recognition of Navajo self-determination. She holds an MA in American studies from Yale University and a BA in political science from Grinnell College.