

## Chapter 3: Culture

### Culture



The United Fruit Company in Guatemala in the 1920s.

*They plucked our fruit  
They cut our branches  
They burned our trunk  
But they could not kill our roots*

~ Committee of United  
Campesinos, Guatemala

Culture is as physical as the texture of hair, the hue of skin, and inflection in speaking one's language; it is as historical as your mother's people, their relationship to land and community; it is as traditional as holiday customs or a grandfather's precise use of tools or language; it is as mythic as symbol and folk tales; it is as spiritual as hope or despair. Culture is the teacher which instructs us through the voice and eyes of parents or guardians what it means to be human.

Through folktales, fairytales, or lullabies we learn the ways and values of our people.

In school, official history conveys national culture, which is the story of the dominant culture, the culture of the military, political, and economic dominators—white European culture. When European culture encountered the culture of the “new world,” a profound clash of worldviews occurred. Indian and African cultures were subjugated by European culture. Five hundred years later the suppressed cultures of the Americas have kept alive the cultural vision and values that hold strategic keys to the survival of the earth and the spiritual redemption of the West. The conquest and its continuing legacy exact a cultural price, not for the subjugated but also for the dominant culture.

*When the colonizers exterminated the indigenous inhabitants in many regions of the Americas, they severed connections with a vast network of secret tributaries that led into the mainstream of the memory of mankind [sic]. The total reservoir of memory was seriously impoverished by this loss. The colonizer, reaching into the cultural reserves he*

*believed he had brought with him, discovered that these were soon exhausted, leaving him with psychic voids that could not be filled.*

~ Jan Carew, *Fulcrums of Change*, 103

Psychic void and loss of cultural memory confront the West. How can we recover our identity and cultural meaning without confronting five hundred years of cultural invasion and cultural resistance? The way to new myths is through the path of truth which uncovers the suppressed history and myths of the defeated.

*We live in an age that portends danger and even disaster....the expanding hole in the ozone layer, the "greenhouse effect," the accelerating extinction of plant and animal species, and a dozen more...The roots of these problems are cultural in nature. Humans have been known to inhabit environments for thousands of years with little life-threatening impact. It is a modern Western culture that has created the most alarming of these problems.*

*The West has achieved world domination. Western worldviews and political agendas dominate every political capital in the world...Western ideologies, views toward nature, versions of economics, art, literature, popular culture, products, and prejudices are practically universal...The West assumes that, to the extent that other peoples are legitimate, they have the same wants and desires, the same propensity for deviousness and competition, and the same or nearly the same ambitions as Westerners....*

*The West has long erred in the direction of dangerous speculation and absence of respect for the obvious dependency of our species on the world which has in fact created us. Science and technology could conceivably exist in a cultural environment of respect and reverence with the forces of life designated as nature. Human knowledge about how natural phenomena function does not necessarily lead to irresponsible behaviors, animal and plant extinction, and the destruction of the biosphere....*

*The element of our culture which makes a dangerous distance from the natural world is its anthropocentrism—the belief that we are not only different from others, but inherently superior....To recover a relationship to nature we must adopt an art which not only tolerates but celebrates difference and complexity in all things, including life forms and cultures. The reason whole species of plants and animals are being destroyed is that the West is so anthropocentric that there is simply not enough value placed on other species of life. Our culture suffers from an inadequate tradition of delight found in things different from ourselves, an inadequate body of stories, images, sounds, and experiences which reinforce that celebration of difference.*

~ John Mohawk, "Toward a Reverence for Nature," unpublished paper

## The White Way, The Native Way



Native Americans with Smallpox

*Culture provides a background to the world in which we live. Our eyes are the eyes of the culture to which we were born and which has formed our group and individual identity, including our sense of place in the world.*

~ John C. Mohawk, "Toward a Reverence for Nature," unpublished paper

The invasion of the Americas by Europeans was a war in which steel, crossbow; mastiff attack dogs, swift horses, and cannons were pitted against native people with lances and arrow.

Where weapons failed, an even deadlier contribution of the Europeans was the introduction of bubonic plague, malaria, yellow fever, and smallpox to cultures who had never known such virulent diseases. Another aspect of the invasion, less visible, less an assault on the body of a people than on the spirit, was the cultural war. This was waged against both the Indian and black visions of the world, visions radically dissimilar from the white way. In the process the red and black visions were discredited. The cultural war, however, remains a battle that has never ended.

Conquest seeks not only to subordinate an “inferior” culture but to crush native culture. European nations differed in the form and intensity of their conquests, but for Africans and Indians the results were the same: death and destruction. The cultural resistance of Africans, Indians, and the later evolving Latino peoples took dissimilar cultural forms. One experience was common, however—pain, and a singular unending refusal to be obliterated as peoples, as cultures.

Culture is the expression of people’s creativity—everything they make which is distinctively theirs: language, music, art, religion, healing, agriculture, cooking, style, customs, and institutions governing social life. To suppress culture is to aim a cannonball at the people’s heart and spirit. Such a conquest is more accomplished than a massacre. “We have seen that colonization materially kills the colonized. It must be added that it kills him spiritually. Colonization distorts relationship, destroys and petrified institutions, and corrupts...both colonizers and colonized” (Memi, 151)

*The notion of civilization was sustained by a powerful myth. Christian Caucasians were holy, white, and civilized. Indians were idolatrous, dark and savage. The Greeks had invented the term barbarian to apply to outsiders. By the time it had been translated to apply to the New World, it also meant morally inferior. Thus, America was made to become a virgin wilderness, inhabited by barbaric non-people called savages.*

~ Ted Jojola, “American Indian Stereotypes,” *View from the Shore*, 26

European culture suppressed indigenous and slave culture, but it did not prevail. Where the memory of the ancestors is long and keen, the truth about “discoveries” contends with the official version of the dominators. The “song” of America, for instance, belongs to the vanquished. The blues and gospel of slaves, every boogie, jive, rock n’ rollin’, jazzy, reggae, mariachi, tango, rumba not the white world has sung or danced has been an imitation, if not a theft.

Cultural war is difficult to see. The militarily and economically powerful nation (the colonialist power) imposes its culture, while at the same time it takes on desired aspects of the culture of the natives. The erasure of the Indian contribution to North American culture has been so accomplished that many descendants of indigenous people never knew their ancestors’ contributions to the world. Generations after the conquest of the Americas, the descendants of the colonizers also don’t recognize the contributions of the victims. For instance, who “owns” rock n’ roll, jazz, salsa, the names of cities—Chicago, Sheboygan, Cheyenne, Minocqua? Where have textbooks revealed that Native Americans discovered the cure for malaria, amoebic dysentery, scurvy, tetanus/lockjaw; that Aztec doctors developed obsidian scalpels for brain surgery; that Mayan and Incan Indians revolutionized world agriculture; that the League of the Iroquois was the model of democracy which shaped the construction of the U.S. political system; that runaway African slaves—maroons—created in the uninhabitable swamps, jungles, and mountain-forests new cultures where ingenuity necessitated the invention of herbal and

bark healing systems, agricultural patterns of intercropping, and a whole technology of defense and survival?

## Dangerous Memory as Cultural Resistance



"Studio portrait of Man and Chief (Pi-ta-ne-sha-a-du), a Pawnee chief," albumen print, by the American photographer John H. Fitzgibbon, taken at St. Louis, Missouri, in approximately 1850. 18.8 cm x 13.5 cm. Courtesy of the British Museum, London.

Cultural invasion has been devastating:

*By the time a century or two of exploitation has passed there comes about a veritable emaciation of the stock of national culture...the poverty of the people, national oppression, inhibition of culture are one and the same.*

~ Franz Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth*, 238

*To correct so many generations of bad faith and cruelty...you will meet the most fantastic, the most brutal, and the most determined resistance.*

~ James Baldwin in Rick Simonson and Scott Walker, eds., *Multicultural Literacy*, 3

Can a people's spirit be killed off? Eduardo Galeano says not as long as someone remembers. Remember who they are by knowing who they came from. Remember their people's struggle. This is the danger of cultural memory. It contains spiritual visions and historical lessons which contest the vision of the dominator. Dangerous memory is a weapon of the colonized.

The reason African and Indian culture was dangerous to waves of conquistadors who came to the Americas is because it was the only weapon conquered people could conceal and wield into the future. "They carried in them mankind's [sic] original memories. To have survived the savageries of slavery in the New World, to have retain essential elements of his African culture while at the same time quickly adjusting to and assimilating new ones—Amerindian, European, and in some instances Asian—remains a unique and miraculous achievement" (Carew, 76)

The memories endured. Slave and indigenous poets have scribbled lost words on reservation long-house doors, on the hulls of slaver ships, on prison and garrison walls, in books that were incinerated. The Ghost Dances were forbidden: Mayan art was thrown into bonfires; the bones of Indian ancestors dug from holy soil now lie naked and humiliated in museum display cases which instruct visitors: "These remains are sacred to Indians." Still, memory endured. Each generation that remembered the people's stories remembered who they were. Not slaves, but a people. Cultural memory, says Galeano, is a memory of fire. It is dangerous. Remembering is an act of resistance.

Here is such a story told after five hundred years of resistance—a long enough time to forget. Pedro Hernandez Corbas is one of a few thousand Indians who direct descendants of the Taino Arawaks who greeted Columbus on his first voyage to Cuba. Cobas remembers the ancestors' stories of those times.

*I would say Columbus (Colon) and his people treated us in a bad manner. We suffered fright (susto). The treatment they gave us was pure whip. The conquistador lied about the Indian. They said we were stupid, imbeciles. But I think the old Indians knew a lot. I think that our ancestors were good, quiet people. They didn't like to hurt anyone. But they ended up whole families jumping off cliffs to avoid slavery. Here our Indian people have been like a fish in a cooler, eyes open but not seeing. For many years nobody spoke about anything Indian, for a long, long time.*

~ Quoted in Jose Barreiro, "Toward an Indian Voice in 1992," *View From the Shore*, 5

In order to resist cultural death, slaves and Native Americans remembered the people's communal life before the pale strangers who invaded their world arrived. What was the link to the life of tribes in Africa, in the Mayan or Andean highlands, the plains and plantations of North America? It was story—the people's own version of their lives and culture.

It is a story that begins on the golden sands of the Caribbean, the foothills of the Sierra Madres and the peaks of Macchu Picchu, in the great temples of Teuctepec, on the shores of the Yucatan, above the thunderous falls of Iguazu, along the great rivers and plains of Africa, in the bush or Surinam, within the stinking holds of slave ships. This story has been dragged through fields, swamps, jungles, along a trail of tears, told in backwoods, back roads, back alleys, and back rooms. It is a story of refusal to die—a story painted on canvas, bark, and leather in colors of sky, earth, and sun; a story woven into the wedding and death dress, festooned with feather, palm, pearl, and jade; a story sometimes moaned on the honey saxophone, chimed on a marimba, slammed on a bongo drum, wept on *afluta*, laughed on *aguittara*, danced before the sun; a story whispered, roared, chanted, testified, harmonized, and rapped. In different languages, in different voices, the same chorus: No to the white way; Yes to our beauty, art, and sacred ways.

## Accumulation vs. Sharing



*...The sailor relates that in Utopia neither money nor private property exists. There, scorn for gold and superfluous consumption is encouraged, and no one dresses ostentatiously. Everybody gives the fruits of his works to the public stores and freely collects what he needs. The economy is planned. There is no hoarding, which is the son of fear, nor is hunger known. The people choose their prince and the people can dispose of him; they also elect the priests. The inhabitants of Utopia*

*loathe war and its honors, although they fiercely defend their frontiers. They have religion that does not offend reason and rejects useless mortifications and forcible conversions. The laws permit divorce but severely punish conjugal betrayals and oblige everyone to work six hours a day. Work and rest are shared; the table is shared. The community takes charge of children while their parents are busy. Sick people get privileged treatment; euthanasia avoids long painful agonies. Gardens and orchards occupy most of the space and music is heard wherever one goes.*

~ Eduardo Galeano, *Memory of Fire: Genesis*, 61

How has the European worldview which Columbus brought to his encounter with the natives of the Americas shaped five hundred years of history? According to Columbus's log, the Taino Indians were so generous that "if it be asked of them they never say no; on the contrary they invite you to share it and show you as much love as if their hearts went with it." How then explain the fact that all Taino men, women, and children were ordered to mine a gold tribute of three-quarters of an ounce every three months? Indians who refused had their hands cut off.

How can one account for the brutality of a slave system causing such despair that, as Pedro Hernandez Cobas relates, whole families of Tainos flung themselves off cliffs to end their misery? How so from a navigator on a mission of God?

The European race to acquire gold locates a fundamental clash of values—for the European, accumulation (of treasure, currency, land) wins cultural and individual honor. The practice of accumulation, historically the basis of a capitalist economy, was as foreign to the Indian and African world as were the tall bearded strangers bearing long knives and muskets.

Accumulating abundance for purposes other than to distribute it to the community found no favor with the tribe. The Indian practices of collectivity, sharing, and sexual freedom so captivated the Europeans that they wrote back to the “old world” of encounters with “paradise” and utopia.

While these freedoms attracted the imagination of some Europeans, most found them threatening. The powerful of Europe (Church and State) were undivided in their desire to control the newly “found” lands and peoples. The European worldview is best revealed in the Papal Bull of Alexander VI, which granted by right the lands of the “new world” to Spain and Portugal for the “spread of the Catholic faith.” This document reveals both Church and State’s belief in the legal and ecclesial right of the powerful to take the lands of the less powerful. The one transgression that was punishable by excommunication was not ownership of people and not, obviously, the ownership of land, or for that matter the appropriation of others’ land, because the Papal Bull legitimated the European state’s right to the lands of the Americas. The great sin that merited virtual damnation was for either nation to cross the Pope’s demarcation line and attempt to take the land or inhabitants of the other. The key here is the right (moral and legal) to property (human and nature).



Taino being punished by Conquistador

The native worldview had no such concept as private property. Although there were over two thousand indigenous languages and thousands of diverse cultures amongst the Indians, few, if any, of the indigenous language forms had a word to express possession. The Indians of “paradise” could not comprehend what was in store for them when they brought offerings of



corn, berries, wild turkey, and beads as tribute to the strangers. In a few years their sharing would be seen as childlike naiveté. When they resisted the enforced tribute of gold, their leaders would be hanged or burned; the less radical punishment would order the resister's hand or foot to be severed.

The story of Guaironex, a leader of Indians from the La Vega Valley of Santo Domingo, epitomizes the divergent views of relationship (to land, people and things, i.e., treasure) held by Indians and Europeans:

*In 1494-95, after Columbus imposed a tribute of gold to be paid by every Taino man, woman, and child, Guaironex went to the first colonizer with a counter offer. Guaironex's main chiefs gathered over one thousand men with coas [planting sticks] in hand. They offered, if Columbus would drop the gold tribute, to plant all the food the Spanish would ever want to eat. They said to Columbus, "We will feed you here on the island and also all of your people back in Castille. You don't even need to work." But of course, the colonizers wanted gold or, in lieu of it, slaves and precious woods.*

~ Lyman Tyler, *Two Worlds*, quoted in Jose Barreiro, "A Note on Tainos: Whither Progress?" *View from the Shore*, 7:3, 69

Western moral code demanded an upholding of law which mandated the rights of the emerging nation-states of Europe to acquire property. Accumulation of treasure was the Crown's objective, and church codes gave the enterprise moral justification. Pillage, execution, destruction of entire communities of native peoples, and enslavement were seen as necessary tactics to civilize and "save the souls" of heathens. European society recognized the rights of the powerful (the aristocracy who owned lands) but gave little or no protection to landless serfs and peasants. Nevertheless, poor Europeans were considered Christians and civilized. Indians and Africans were neither. They were "savages" whose refusal to convert to Christianity (and to give up their land and culture) brought upon them whatever "force" was necessary to change their minds. The *requerimiento* is an example.

The *requerimiento* was legally required to be read aloud to the Indians notifying them that God, through his Vicar on earth who was the Pope, had given the Spanish King the power to grant them salvation. This document, read to the Indians in Latin, was legally required before all invasions.

*The old history is finished,  
it can never return.  
Now it's another history...  
Now history is what the people make.*

*History will now change its name.  
Perhaps it shall simply be called people.  
Perhaps it shall simply be called life.*

~ Jose Coronel Utrecho  
In Alejandro Murguia and Barbara Pashke, *Volcán*, 155

## Requerimiento/The Requirement



Spanish fight their way out of headquarters in Tenochtitlán, from El Lienza de Tlaxcala (Tlaxcalan)

In 1514 the lawyer Martin Fernandez de Enciso read the requerimiento in the name of King Ferdinand and Queen Juana to the Indians of Sinu. Enciso read the warning that if the Indians wished to stay on the land they must pay the gold tribute to their highness. If not they must leave.

*...The two [Sinu] Chiefs listen, sitting down and without blinking, to the odd character who announces to them that in case of refusal or delay he will make war on them, turn them into slaves along with their women and children, and sell and dispose of them as such and that the deaths and damages of that just war will not be the Spaniards' responsibility. The chiefs reply, without a glance at Enciso, that the Holy Father has indeed been generous with other people's property but must have been drunk to dispose*

*of what was not his and that the King of Castille is impertinent to come threatening folk he doesn't know.*

*Then the blood flows.*

*Subsequently the long speech will be read at dead of night without an interpreter and half a league away from the village that will be taken by surprise. The natives that sleep won't hear the words that declare them guilty of the crime committed against them.*

~ Eduardo Galeano, *Memory of Fire: Genesis*, 60

Hernan Cortes faithfully read the requerimiento throughout Mexico and the Yucatan. The document he read warned that failure to accept the King's summons would force him to

*powerfully invade and make war upon you in all parts and modes, so that I can subdue you to the yoke and obedience of the Church and of His majesty's command, and I will take your effects and will do all the harm and injury within my power, as vassals who will not obey or receive their sovereign and resist and oppose him. And I protest that the death and disasters which may come about because of this action will be the fault of yourselves and not of his majesty, nor of me....*

~ From Cortes's Letter to King Charles  
In Irwin Black and Henry Rosen, *The Conquest*, xvi

The "deaths and disasters" which soon followed the conquest of Mexico and the Yucatan measured eighteen million. By 1650, only one and a half million full-blooded Indians were alive.

Cortes faithfully upheld the law of requerimiento each time his soldiers pitched battle.

## **Moral Superiority: The White Man's Burden**

The slave trade was also a system governed by the laws of the nation-states. In this case the law dictated the form of punishment to be meted out to runaway slaves of the Caribbean.

Maroons were punished by castration.

Such cruelty was meant to suppress rebellion, but the punishment fell short of execution in order to continue to reap the benefits of slave labor. Within one hundred years a "reform" law, "Le Code Noir," was signed by Louis XIV of France, in 1685. The edict declared that:

1685 Copy of the Code

*A Negro who is absent for a month shall have his ears cut off and shall have a fleur de lys branded on his left shoulder. If he again runs away, his knees shall be lacerated and his other shoulder branded.*

*Finally if he runs away for a third time he shall be sentenced to death.*

~ Jose L. Franco, in Richard Price, ed., *Maroon Societies*, 28



In effect, native people were children if they submitted and savages if they resisted. In either case, Europeans saw themselves as the superior culture bringing civilization to an inferior culture. The colonial worldview split reality into polar parts: good and evil, body and spirit, man and nature, head and heart, European and primitive. Indian spirituality lacks these dualisms:

language expresses the oneness of all things. God is not the transcendent Father but Mother Earth, the Corn Mother, the Great Spirit who nourishes all.

For the European such beliefs were pagan. Thus, the conquest was rationalized as a necessary evil that would bestow upon the heathen Indians a moral consciousness that would redeem their amorality. The impetus which drove the conquistador's invading wars was not exploration, but the desire to expand empire, not discovery of new land, but the drive to accumulate treasure (gold), land, and cheap labor (slaves). The worldview which converted bare economic self interest into noble, even moral, motives was a notion of Christianity as the one redemptive religion which demands fealty from all cultures.

There were some Christians who were converted to the Indians and slaves. Bishop Bartolome de Las Casas refused the land grant afforded him by the Crown, then preached and cried out against the enslavement of Indians by writing to the Council of the Indies and to the Pope documenting "cruelties more atrocious and unnatural than any recorded of untutored and savage barbarians...[because of] the greed and thirst for gold of our countrymen." Although de Las Casas lost the argument in which he challenged the European worldview, his prophetic voice earned him the friendship of the voiceless Indians.

The Bishop's intense written debate with the prestigious jurist Sepulveda, chaplain for Charles V, reveals the supremacist worldview of European colonizers. The Bishop argued for the abolition of the encomienda system of gold tribute which he called tyrannical, inhuman, and an offense to God. Sepulveda said it was a system suited to the nature of Indians who, unlike the

Spaniards, were somewhere between humans and monkeys, and thus it was “natural” and an expression of God’s will that barbarians and the unjust should experience punishment.

Spiritual vision informs values. A fundamental difference between the European value system and Indian and African values is centered on relationship to the community of ancestors which includes the living and dead. For Indian people, right relationship includes relationship with all beings, including the natural world which surrounds the human world. The destruction of the environment was, from the Indian perspective, a destruction of spiritual equals.

*It is more than a coincidence that the modern age of extinction begins in 1680. It is often cited as the foundation of the Enlightenment....During the Enlightenment, there arose notions of a mechanistic universe and that humankind can use science and technology to shape his own ends subject only to the physical laws....The idea of the sacredness of nature is, however, a strong central theme in many non-Western cultures.....Those cultures tend to see a supportive kind of magic in the process of birth, death, and transformation which recognizes that human beings are part of a wonderful process that can be celebrated and revered....*

*Respect is not something that can be readily generated through dissection. Scientists can wonder at the complexity of the biology of a leaf, can achieve something approaching awe, and even spiritual reverence, through the study of the vast system of the stars, and can even grow to achieve profound respect for the complexity of life, but they have been only marginally successful at creating stories and images which transmit those feelings to young and old alike.*

*They have not been successful, in short, in challenging the element of Western culture which views Nature through primarily materialistic lenses because they are viewing reality through such lenses themselves....*

~ John Mohawk, "Toward a Reverence for Nature," unpublished paper

In this short description, John Mohawk delineates the radical opposition with which Western and Native American worldviews regard nature, spirituality, and science. But it is the Western European worldview that dominates and thus appears natural.

*Because [the Eurocentric worldview] is the one we have grown up with, it is sometimes hard to see it as just that—one of several different ways of relating to reality. Eurocentrism is distinguished by a kind of one-dimensional seeing—that of a privileged white Western male. It is a perspective that assumes the thinking “I” as the center of the universe. Descartes: “I think, therefore I am.” How different this is from the African worldview in which the individual is affirmed as being only in relation to the “we” of*

*his/her community—family/clan—including those not born and those who have departed.*

~ Sheila Collins, "Are the Multiculturalists Politically Correct?", 7

## **Symbols of Freedom**

Every memorial or symbol of the white nation's triumph becomes the occasion that sparks the fire of dangerous memory. Statesman Frederick Douglass, a former slave, gave a speech commemorating America's day of freedom and independence on the Fourth of July, 1852.

*What to the American slave is your Fourth of July? I answer, a day that reveals to him more than all other days of the year, the gross injustice and cruelty to which he is the constant victim. To him your celebration is a sham; your boasted liberty and unholy license; your national greatness, swelling vanity; your sounds of rejoicing are empty and heartless; your denunciation of tyrants, brass fronted impudence; your shouts of liberty and equality, hollow mockery; your prayers and hymns, your sermons and thanksgivings, with all your religious parade and solemnity, are to him mere bombast, fraud, deception, empiety, and hypocrisy--a thin veil to cover up crimes which would disgrace a nation of savages. There is not a nation of the earth guilty of practices more shocking and bloody than are the people of these United States at this very hour.*

~ Howard Zinn, *A People's History of the United States*, 178

## **Repentance**

Fray Toribio de Motolinia placed ten crosses in the Mexican earth to atone for sins of European Christians.

*"This cross, my God, is for the diseases that were not known here and that rage so terribly among the natives.*

*This one is for war, and this for hunger, which have killed as many Indians as there are drops in the sea or grains of the sand.*

*This is for the tribute collectors, drones who eat the honey of the Indians; and this one for tribute which the Indians must sell their children and their lands to pay.*

*This is for the gold mines, which stink so of death that one can't go within a league of them.*

*This is for the salves who have been dragged here from all directions like herds of beasts, branded on the face; and this one for those who fall by the wayside carrying the enormous loads to maintain the mines.*

*And this one, Lord, for the perpetual conflicts and skirmishes of us Spaniards, which always end with the torture and murder of Indians."*

~ Eduardo Galeano, *Memory of Fire: Genesis*, 95

In 1524, facing waves of massacres, an Aztec holy man addressed his prayer poem to the Giver of Life:

*Nothing but flowers and songs of sorrow  
are left in Mexico and Tlatelolco,  
where once we saw warriors and wise men.*

*We know it is true  
that we must perish,  
for we are mortal men.  
You, the giver of Life,  
have ordained it.*

*We wandered here and there  
in our desolate poverty.  
We are mortal men,  
We have seen bloodshed and pain  
where once we saw beauty and valor.*

*Have you grown weary of your servants?  
Are you angry with your servants,  
O Giver of Life?*

~ In Robert Venables, "The Cost of Columbus: Was There a Holocaust?" *View from the Shore*, 72

## **A Tradition of Individualism vs. Communalism**

A fundamental value that shapes Western European emphasis on the right to accumulate, and to ownership of property and people, is the right of the individual. Western law, for example, legalizes the individual rights of property owners. The U.S. Constitution gave states the power to determine who was allowed to vote. The states in turn enfranchised property owners and

denied the vote to the nonpropertied, nonwhite, and nonmale -- Indians, blacks, women, and propertyless indentured servants.



Paula Gunn Allen

"The Supreme Court of the United States to this day says that the U.S. government is free to take away Indian land, to confiscate it, to extinguish aboriginal Indian title without due process of law, without any compensation and without any regard whatever for the Fifth Amendment" (Coulter, 62). Communal, not individual rights, formed the moral and public codes and laws which governed tribal life in the Americas and Africa. It is one's obligation to community, not oneself, which is binding. Indians, blacks, and Latinos discover their identity in and through community.

The hero of Western literature, on the other hand, discovers himself by separating from others, striking out for independence, and becoming his own man. In Western culture, independence, and thus maturity, is achieved in separation. Native writer Paula Gunn Allen says Native American literature focuses on themes of modern enslavement and colonization to reveal these ruptures of communal identity and meaning. "A theme that shows up frequently in Native writers' stories [is] about jail, boarding school, war and abduction. In all these stories the underlying theme is about forced separation, signifying the loss of self and the loss of personal meaning" (Gunn Allen, 8)

Slaves and maroons of the Caribbean and Latin and North America preserved the African tradition of *mati*, which emphasizes a ritual of kinship that implies a friendship based on deep bonds of solidarity. This practice, referring to the experience of having shared passage on the same slave ship, extended the sense of community care and responsibility for the people that slave culture embraced. As in Indians' culture, black identity is discovered through solidarity with one's people, not through Western hero's quest.

For Caribbean writer Jan Carew, identity was achieved by recovering his memories in Guyana village life which culturally location his connection to generations of ancestors.

*Leaving Agricola, I soon began to realize that my village in the sun was an important spectrum through which, for the rest of my life, I would view the world. The more widely I travelled, the more forcibly it struck me that Agricola with all its mysteries – its deceptive façade of poverty, squalor, and apparent hopelessness – was, in fact a*



*microcosm of the Third World. Growing up there, I made the acquaintance of secret sorrows and beheld the vision of hidden, stubborn hopes from my soul landscapes within. I needed to have true images of myself and a sense of identity clearer than the one I carried in my mind's eye and ear. All the scattered pieces of my life in Agricola and the complex configuration of my ancestral links had to be shaped into a whole if I was going to live with myself... it is slowly dawned on me that I was the product of a bewildering array of races, colors, creeds, and cultures; that I carried in me the blood of masters and slaves, bondsmen and overseers, renegade's castaways, and convicts.*

~ Jan Carew, *Fulcrums of Change*, 119

Reclaiming culture requires recovery of the people's lost voice and history. To remember is to discover the culture of ancestors and in the process discover oneself. Jamaican writer Michelle Cliff describes the process.

*Jamaica is a place halfway between Africa and England, to put it simply, although one culture (guess which one) has been esteemed and the other denigrated... as a writer, as a human being, I have had to accept that reality and deal with its effect on me, as well as finding what has been lost to me from the darker side, and what may be hidden, to be dredged from memory and dream. And it is there to be dredged.*

*To write as a complete Caribbean woman, or man for that matter, demands of us a retracing of the African part of ourselves, reclaiming as our own, and as our subject, a history sunk under the sea, or scattered as potash in the canfields, or gone to bush, or trapped in a class system notable for its rigidity and absolute dependence on color stratification. On a past bleached from our minds. It means finding the art forms of these of our ancestors and speaking in the patois forbidden us.*

~ Michelle Cliff, "A Journey Into Speech"

In Rick Simonson and Scott Walker, eds., *Multicultural Literacy*, 58-59

## **African Creation Myth**

*The Africans... do not on the whole share the almost universal preoccupation of Amerindians with the creation of the world. [However]... African myths are impregnated with realism and in them gods and humans are never far apart, and the former are eternally responsible to the people they both rule and serve. The genesis myth of the Amerindians around Lake Titicaca portrayed the world as beginning when the Great Serpent stirred under the sea and pushed the earth upwards from murky depths. This makes the whole conceptual framework of creators and creation far more abstract than that of the West African myths which tell of the creation of*

*people and not the world. The maroons of Jamaica, for example, tell of how Damballa, one of the senior West African members of their pantheon of gods, created humans by baking cakes.*

*The burnt cakes were the ancestors of black people, those that were neither well baked nor underdone were the ancestors of brown people, while white people were sired by cakes Damballa neglected to bake at all.*

~ Jan Carew, *Fulcrums of Change*, 75

## **The Legacy of Colonialism Today**

The memory of the colonized is dangerous because it is an account of theft and bravery that would make the colonizer look, at least ignoble. None of us wants to look bad in front of our children, or before the eyes of history. So the colonizer repeats his version of the “facts” about the superiority of Western medical, scientific, military technology, or art and literature—in a word—culture.

The first task of the colonizer, or generations of colonizers after the conquest, is to erase the very notion of colonization. This can be done by possessing control of the culture’s institutions and communication systems. At its simplest, this process begins with the story itself—who tells it, who sings it, who writes it, and whose language is used.

But, it can be argued, haven’t things changed in five hundred years? The quincentennial celebration—in which President Bush honored the brilliant discoverer Christopher Columbus, while at the same time American Indian Movement (AIM) activist Russell Means poured blood on the statue of Columbus in a public protest—makes clear that just as dangerous memory continues amongst the colonized, so too the European worldview has carried its own memory into the future.

The relationship of the United to Puerto Rico is a case study which reveals the continuation of colonialism from Columbus’s encounter with the Taino Indians to relations with their descendants today. Following Columbus’s journey to the “new world,” Spain soon colonized Puerto Rico, Cuba, Jamaica, and Hispaniola. The people of Puerto Rico (then called Borinquen) were Taino Indians. Those Taino who were not killed off by the diseases or slavery brought by the Europeans fled to the mountains. The Tainos intermarried with African slaves imported by the Spanish. Five centuries later, currents of Indian, African, and European blood run in the veins of Puerto Ricans.

In 1868, Puerto Rican nationalist Ramon Emeterio Betances led an uprising in the town of Lares (Grito de Lares) against the Spanish colonizers, declaring Puerto Rico an independent republic. That insurrection, along with the rebellion of Yanco in 1897, failed. But Spain was losing its grip. In an effort to hold down rebellion, the Spanish conceded some freedoms. They awarded

Puerto Rico the power to ratify treaties and set tariffs and to grant citizenship to the Puerto Rican population. In 1898, the United States usurped Spain's control of Puerto Rico, landing Marines on the island and signing the Treaty of Paris with Spain which gave the United States control of Puerto Rico. The rights Spain had granted were then revoked; the Puerto Rican provisional assembly and cabinet were abolished; Puerto Ricans were denied a vote in the U.S. Congress; English was made the official language of the island. Between 1900 and 1947 the dollar became the national currency, U.S. laws replaced Puerto Rican law, the House of Delegates' decisions were subject to U.S. veto, and U.S. citizenship was imposed by an act of Congress, in spite of protest by the House of Delegates. In 1952, Puerto Rico became a Commonwealth of the United States, adopting its "own" constitution which has an amendment that states: "Any revision of this constitution shall be consistent with the resolution enacted by the Congress of the United States approving this constitution...."

In addition to virtual political control of the island, the United States also possesses economic control.

*Puerto Rico is the largest per capita purchaser of U.S. goods in the world...Eighty-five percent of industries in Puerto Rico are owned by U.S. interests. They do not have to pay island taxes for ten to twenty-five years. This, along with the lower wages than those they pay in the United States has allowed U.S. industries to average twenty percent profit per year, far higher than comparative profits in the United States....The ultimate effect of Operation Bootstrap (which opened two thousand factories in the 1940s, converting the economy from an agricultural economy to an industrial economy) has been to assure complete U.S. control of Puerto Rican economy, as well as to increase a social dislocation and economic inequality....It is the distortion of the economy of Puerto Rico for the profit of U.S. capital which has forced one-third of the Puerto Rican nation to move to the United States and accept low-paid menial and service occupations....The incidence of both poverty and unemployment among Puerto Ricans is more severe than that of virtually any other ethnic group in the United States, and the incidence of poverty has been rising since 1970.*

~ The Council of Interracial Books for Children, *Stereotypes, Distortions and Omissions in U.S. History Textbooks*, 96, 98-99

*Glory to these aboriginal hands because they've worked.  
Glory to these black hands because they've worked.  
Glory to these white hands because they've worked.  
Through these hands, Indian, black, white,  
Through these hands the country remains in us.*

~ Juan Antonio Corretjer, national poet of Puerto Rico and former U.S. political prisoner

Currently Puerto Rican *independistas* (Puerto Ricans seeking independence from U.S. colonial control) sit in U.S. prisons with twenty-five and thirty year sentences for seditious conspiracy against the United States. The activists refused to recognize the U.S. court's right to jurisdiction over Puerto Rican patriots, claiming the rights of the colonized under international law to defend themselves against their colonizers. Such arguments were, of course, useless when argued before a U.S. judiciary which denies Puerto Rico's status as a colony of the United States.

Few North Americans know this history; rather, they assume, as they do about African Americans, that Puerto Ricans' poverty and unemployment are due to some lack of ambition, not the result of centuries of colonization. Memories of independence, of Puerto Ricans not having to depend on the United States, are a danger to the powerful.

Not all white Americans fear the memories of the subjugated. There are many white people who, although they are the cultural beneficiaries of colonialism, want to know the truth about history, even the painful truth. To the powerful, however, the memory and voice of the colonized are always a threat because such memory challenges the myth of European white supremacy.

People's history reveals that the "new world" empires were built by the killing labor of Indian and African slaves. That theft of human life and labor becomes almost unrecognizable as the economic process becomes systematized. Year and years of an economy which rewards accumulation of wealth and punishes poverty has made the system appear natural. Yet systems based on human sharing rather than accumulation, and politics based on true democracy, may not be so threatening to most Americans. In fact, those systems are what they've been led to believe the American Revolution achieved.

The economically and politically powerful, work hard at fooling most of the people, most of the time. Their best tactic is instilling fear of those who pose a threat—people of color, women, gay people, the "undeserving poor." What is lost in this suppression is, of course, the truth—not just about the cultures of the colonized, but also the "new world" culture.

## **A Caribbean Notion of Time**

*An Aceways droger (Guyana porter)... who had remained outside the awful grinding inevitability of linear time that the Columbian era had imposed upon his people... told me of the journeys he took in and out of the regions of the mind. The hand across his forehead, and the harness strapped under his armpits distributed the hundred and twenty-five pounds he carried in his wareshi (back-pack with a harness around the forehead and shoulders) so that by thrusting his*

*head forward he could walk at a steady, rhythmic shuffle from dayclean (dawn) to sunset. We were averaging twenty-five miles a day in the mountainous Potaro district.*

*"How do you manage?" I asked, thinking of the thirty pounds I was carrying and the way it seemed to double itself after every ten miles. After a long pause he replied, "It's like this, skipper. Most of the time you see me walking here, carrying this big load, I'm not here at all... is only shadow here, the substance is back home in Aquero, hunting agouti or deer or labba, playing with my children, catching a gaff, listening to the Old Ones speak, talking to the Ancestors or to God. you can ask me how can I be in two places at one time, I will tell you the secret: the pressure of this waresion my brain makes it easy for me to send my mind away... At the stat I feel like a drunken man, there's a singing inside my head, my body feels heavy and the wareshi feels like a mountain on my back. Then all of a sudden everything gets lighter and lighter until I feel like a silk cotton blossom floating on wind. Once I reach this stage, I can walk from here to the Forest of the Long Night without feeling any weariness."*

~ Jan Carew, *Fulcrums of Change*, 108-109

*Puerto Rico has the right to independence because when the Treaty of Paris was signed, by which the United States took possession of the island, Puerto Rico already had its sovereignty and, besides, Spain did not have the right to cede it to the United States.*

~ Pedro Albizu Campos, *Claridad*, San Juan, Puerto Rico, Sept. 12, 1991

*She walks with the stride of her borinquen ancestry as a "Taina Casica"...*  
*She knows where she is headed, for her commitment is to her people.*  
*She is captured by the enemy*  
*But she does not despair...*

~ Dylcia Pagan, Puerto Rican prisoner of war  
In *Que Ondee Sola*, student newspaper, Northeastern Illinois University, March 1981, 9

## The Gifts of the Colonized



Native Americans Smoking Meat

What were the cultural contributions of the colonized that shaped the “new world?” Historian and anthropologist Jack Weatherford provides the following research which documents the contributions fo the Indians of the Americas to the world.

### **Political Contributions: The Gift of Democracy**

The democratic system which the United States fought two world wars to defend, and one war of independence to invent, owes much of its formation to the Iroquois Confederation.

Founding Father Benjamin Franklin, who studies Indian culture and later became the Indian Commissioner of Pennsylvania, implored the Albany Congress of 1754 to construct a model of governance like that of the Iroquois League. The Iroquois League, initially encompassing five nations—the Seneca, Oneida, Mohawk, Onondag, and Cayuga—was composed of five councils of delegates elected as representatives of each tribe. These councils represented their specific nations but were also formed into one Council of the League which represented the entire League of the Iroquois. The League governed the territory from New England to the Mississippi

River. "This model of several sovereign units united into one government presented precisely the solution to the problem confronting the writers of the United States Constitution.

Today we call this a 'federal' system in which each state retains power over internal affairs and the national government regulates affairs common to all" (Weatherford, 137).

Not all aspects of the Iroquois democratic political process were adopted by the Founding Fathers. The council delegates elected from each tribe, called sachems, could be recalled or impeached for misconduct or incompetence through the decision of the women of the tribes, who then elected the replacement sachem. Imagine the development of democracy if women could recall and appoint congressional leaders!

The notion of impeachment was foreign to the Europeans whose monarchs ruled for life. Moreover, the very notion of elections was foreign to colonists whose conception of government was based on the British Parliament and imitation of the Greek city-states which, according to Weatherford, were considerably less egalitarian than the Indians' models of democracy.

So fundamental a political process as the caucus was a contribution of the tribes of North America. The word "caucus," which comes from the Algonquin language, describes a process of discussion which explores ideas without making a formal decision or voting. This process was integral to the Indian decision-making process of making a pow-wow and talking through issues affecting the community or councils.

## **Yaqui Early Democracy**

The documented example of the Yaqui Tribes (who still reside in the Sonora desert of Arizona) demonstrates the Indian's early practice of democracy.

*In July 1739 the Yaquis sent two emissaries named Muni and Bernabe to Mexico City for a rare audience with the Spanish Viceroy to plead for free elections of their own government administrators... Thus in the wilds of Mexico a full generation before the Revolution in the English colonies of North America, we see evidence of the Indians demanding the franchise and free elections in order to maintain their traditional political values. In almost every North American tribe, clan, or nation for which we have detailed political information, the supreme authority rested in the group rather than in an individual.*

~ Jack Weatherford, *Indian Givers*, 139

*Under the old laws, the Iroquois were a mother-centered, mother-right people whose political organization was based on the central authority of matrons, the Mothers of the Longhouses (clans)... The sachems were chosen from certain families by the matrons and set forth in the Great Law of Peace of the Iroquois Confederacy.*

~ Paula Gunn Allen, *The Sacred Hoop*, 33

## **Economic Contribution: The Gift of Silver**



Colonial Potosi

*Nothing from our impossible past has died.*

~ Mirna Martinez, in Zoe Anglesey, ed., *Ixoc Amar\*go*, 249

The communal traditions of the Indians shaped the political structure which the Founding Fathers constructed, but Indians were not responsible for the economic system based on accumulation that the Europeans imported from the “old world.” The Incan Indians of the Andean nations provided the forced labor that impelled a world economic transformation that shaped generations and gave rise to a capitalist world economy.

The silver mined from the Cerro Rico of Bolivia initiated a new currency, which, unlike gold, could be used by the emerging merchant class of bakers, fisherman, candle makers, and cloth weavers. Never before had this common sector of society been major actors in the economy:



*Never before in the history of the world had so much silver money been in the hands of so many people. Kings, emperors, czars, and pharaohs had always accumulated great wealth in their jewels, their hordes of gold, and their coinage, but the total amount of gold and silver was quite limited by the scarcity of precious metals... This changed with the opening of the Americas... Precious metals from America superseded land as the basis for wealth, power, and prestige. For the first time there was enough of some commodity other than land to provide a greater and more consistent standard by which wealth might be measured. This easily transported and easily used means of wealth prepared the way for the new merchant and capitalist class that would soon dominate the whole world.*

*Even though the Indians made possible the greatest economic boom in the history of the world...they still languish in poverty... Potosi, the city which supplied the silver for the rise of capitalism, is now out of silver... The great mint of Potosi that swallowed eight million Indian miners and turned out billions of coins from the sixteenth century into the twentieth century operates now as a museum for visiting children.*

~ Jack Weatherford, *Indian Givers*, 13, 18-19

## **Agricultural Contribution: The Gift of Food**



The Inca feast of tilling

More precious than the silver the Incans were forced to take from the earth is a food root the Incans seeded into the earth. The potato, given to the world by the Incans, saved more lives than silver ever has. Moreover, the lowly potato eventually shifted the power centers of Europe.

Before the conquest, Europeans depended on grain crops which needed warm climates and predictable weather conditions to be harvested. The colder Northern European countries had to import grains and thus remained dependent on the more stable Southern European grain-growing nations. With the arrival of the Incans' potato, which could be grown in cold climates, the Northern European countries were able to feed their masses with a cheap, nutritious crop that needed only four months to harvest.

Five hundred years after the conquest, environmentalists are desperately trying to reconstruct a world where appropriate technology will lead to an atmosphere that is not life-threatening. Our food, water, and atmosphere are so poisoned that scientists predict a possible future of human species extinction unless rapid and radical changes in the use of technology, chemicals, and energy sources are adapted to a simpler and less consumptively driven lifestyle. Clues to such a life are buried in the history of suppressed cultures. The remarkable agricultural system of Caribbean farmers was efficient and abundant.

Mayan and Aztec agriculturalists had developed brilliant methods of irrigation, continuous harvesting, and recycling of waste. In the Aztec city of Tenochtitlan the *chinampa* system of organic farming fed over one hundred thousand inhabitants by adapting the city to its location on a lake. The Aztec farming experts created floating plots of land where food crops or gardens of flowers flourished.

This intricate terraced cultivation had been in use for over fifteen hundred years before Cortes destroyed Tenochtitlan, the ancient city whose wealth, in the eyes of the Europeans, lay in gold and slaves, not an urban geography of beauty, abundance, and unparalleled environmental architecture.

## The Power of a Potato



Incas planting crops

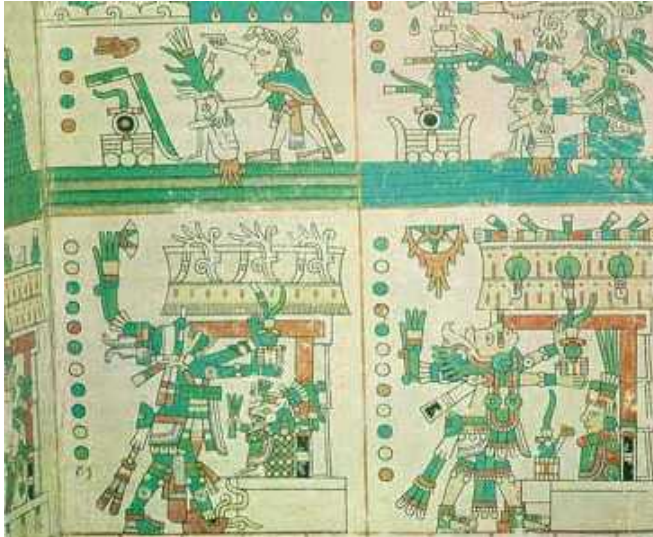
*With the new calorie source and the new source of nutrition, the potato-fed armies of Frederick of Prussia and Catherine of Russia began pushing against their southern neighbors. During the Age of the Enlightenment these northern cultures wrestled free from the economic, cultural and political domination of the South. Power shifted toward Germany and Britain and away from Spain and France, and finally all were eclipsed by Russia...[Russia's] adoption of the potato as their staple food preceded their rise as a world power.*

*American foods (including corn and varieties of beans) brought about the miracle that centuries of prayer, work, and medicine had been unable to do: they cured Europe*

*of the episodic famines that had been one of the major restraints on the population for millennia.*

~ Jack Weatherford, *Indian Givers*, 69-71

## **Aztec Environmental Engineering**



Aztecs farmers

*The chinampa... is anchored by roots of the ahuehuate tree and by posts and vine walls.*

*Mud from the canals is piled up on a bed of wattles and vines, and layers of water weeds which serve as compost form the upper section of the plot. This is covered with a layer of fresh mud, which provides a fertile medium for planting.*

*The chinampa plots are usually surrounded by an intricate network of canals. These canals are stocked with carp and other fish, and a giant salamander called axolotl, which is considered a delicacy. The canals also provide organic fertilizer and mulch in the form of abundant green algae which is skimmed off the water and applied to the plots... Human wastes were collected, treated, and recycled as fertilizer without polluting its indispensable canals. Urine was collected separately, broken down, and two of its by-products were paint and sulphate of ammonia. This was all part of a rhythm or recycling that had become as natural as breathing.*

~ Jan Carew, *Fulcrums of Change*, 151-153

## **Appropriate Technology**

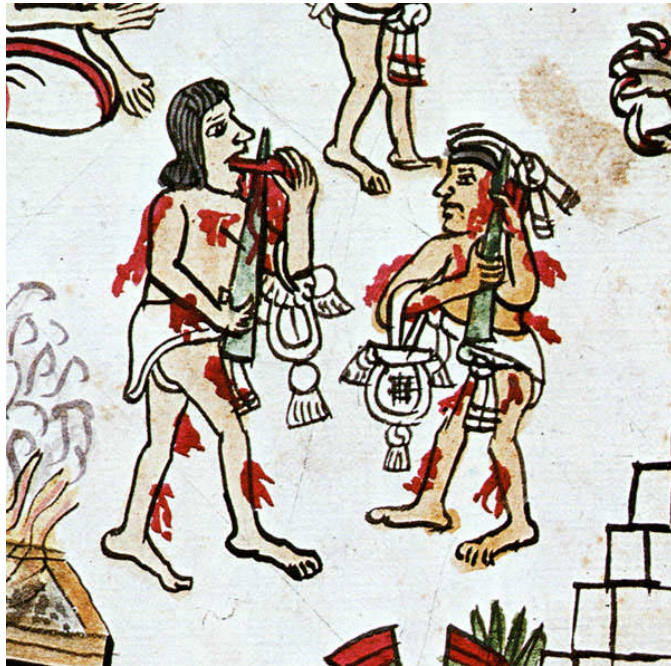
*By using imaginative and well-designed systems of irrigation that were both simple and eminently appropriate, they [the Aztecs] could ensure an adequate supply of water during the seasons when it was most needed.*

*Their cultivation of crops was labor-intensive and highly productive; they used biological control of pests, organic fertilizers, plants that trapped nitrogen in the air and encircled the soil, crop*

rotation and effective methods of storage. They also supplemented their diet with fruit that was both wild and cultivated, roots, fish, grubs, and game.

~ Jan Carew, *Fulcrums of Change*, 148

## Medical Contribution: The Gift of Healing



Mayan tongue piercing

Incan, Mayan, and North American medicine healers have saved the world from major illnesses, too. At the time of the conquest, European medicine was more a practice of witchcraft than science. Native healers discovered the cure for malaria, amoebic dysentery, scurvy, and lockjaw. The Incans used a bark called *quinaquina* to cure malaria, a disease introduced by Europeans to the “new world.” The word “quinine” is derived from the Quechua word *quinaquina*.

The new medicine made extensive European settlement of America possible.

For example, the 167 records of Governor Berkeley of Virginia show that before the introduction of quinine into Virginia one colonist of every five died within the first year from malaria. “After the incorporation of quinine no one died... But until the research of [Sir Ronald Ross], no one knew that the mosquito transmitted it into the human bloodstream. This discovery led to the Nobel Prize in medicine for Ross in 1902, three hundred years after the unknown Quechua Indians had given the cure for the disease to the world, a gift for which they received no recognition” (Weatherford, 178).

The Huron Indians of North America were able to cure French sailors who were dying of scurvy. French Commander Jacques Cartier wrote in his log that the *annedda* bark administered by Indians accomplished in one week what “no amount of drugs from Africa or Europe could have done” (Weatherford, 183). A variety of North American tribes contributed witch hazel, wintergreen, blue cohosh, petroleum jelly, and numerous herbs to the stack of medicinal aids used by the early colonists. Aztec surgeons using obsidian scalpels performed brain surgery almost five hundred years ago.

What the Indian healers received for their healing gifts was an influx of European diseases so virulent that the Indians who lacked immunities for killer diseases such as smallpox, bubonic plague, tuberculosis, yellow fever, influenza, and malaria perished by the millions. Their helpless doctors, who'd been used to the practice of preventive medicine with an essentially healthy population, had to watch their people die off.

## Aztec Surgeons

*Indian surgeons sewed facial lacerations by using bone needles threaded with human hair. They set bones in plasters made of down feathers, gum, resin, and rubber. They gave enemas with rubber hoses, and they invented the bulbed syringe for use in a variety of medical treatments... European doctors quickly adopted both the rubber hose and syringe and continue to use them today.*

*Indian healers lanced boils and removed tumors by surgery. Surgeons amputated limbs, prescribed artificial legs, removed teeth and castrated men and animals... they mastered the application and use of tourniquets and cauterization.*

~ Jack Weatherford, *Indian Givers*, 188



Slaves planting tobacco by Ann O'Hanlon

## The Gifts of Africans

### Culture

The African gift to the world was culture itself. Archaeologists indicate that civilization began in the great river valleys of Africa and Asia.

*For some 600,000 years Africans and Asians led the world... Blacks or people who would be considered black today were among the first people to use tools, paint pictures, plant seeds, and worship gods.*

*In the beginning, then, and for a long time afterwards, black people marched in the front ranks of the emerging human procession. They found empires and states. They made some of the critical discoveries and contributions that led to the modern world.*

~ Lerone Bennett, Jr., *Before the Mayflower*, 5

The founders and creators of civilization were bound into servitude with little compunction on the part of European “civilization” because they were an uncivilized and inferior race by European standards. Even if this mythology was invented to justify the colonizers’ economic needs for a strong laboring class that would facilitate the expansion of empires, the myth would endure and form the racist basis of white superiority.

W.E.B. DuBois confronts the myth of white cultural superiority by listing the cultural gifts Africans brought to America two hundred years before the Mayflower even landed.

*Your country? How came it yours? Before the Pilgrim landed we were here. Here we have brought our three gifts and mingled them with yours: a gift of story and song—soft, stirring melody in an ill-harmonized and unmelodious land; the gift of sweat and brawn to beat back the wilderness, conquer the soil, and lay the foundations of this vast economic empire two hundred years earlier than your weak hands could have done it; the third, a gift of the spirit.*

~ Quoted in Lerone Bennett, Jr., *Before the Mayflower*, 29

These three gifts then, story and song, labor, and the gift of the spirit, came from a people who were branded, ‘buked, flogged, raped; whose children were torn from their mothers; who were castrated and hanged if they resisted; and who, in the twentieth century, were attacked by police dogs, clubbed, hosed, imprisoned, and beaten to death.

## Story and Song

Slaves sang in the hissing fields to lighten the burden to toil from sunup to sundown, sang spirituals that told the burden of their suffering, sang in chain gangs breaking rocks under the guns of Southern prison guards, sang in swamps and backwoods. No sorrow was sufficient to stop their singing.

*Music was everywhere and it was grounded in two techniques which survived in the "new world": polyrhythmic percussive technique and the call-and-response pattern (leader and chorus alternating). The poetry of tom-toms, the symphonies of synchronized bodies: these ebbed and flowed with the rhythm of life. Men and women danced because dancing had a social and religious meaning and because dancing was meaning, was life itself. This attitude came to America too.*

~ Lerone Bennett, Jr., *Before the Mayflower*, 5

Story is the basis of African American aesthetic expression. Oral tradition remembers the beloved culture, the people's suffering and their resistance to their colonizers. Such an aesthetic is grounded in the community and is accountable, not to the art/literary world, but one's people. For the African American, story addresses the concerns of people; the literary character's journey is immersed in the people's struggle. Western aesthetic does not require this accountability, rather the opposite. The hero or anti-hero is distinctive because he or she achieves independence from the family, the community. The character's personhood (usually manhood) is achieved through separation from the crowd or from constraints.

The song and story the Africans gave America was communal and integral to the life of the people. "Art and aesthetic expression were collective experiences in which all the people participated. Art, in short, was not for art's sake, but for life's sake (Bennett, 25).

Story is a crucible which reinvents culture for each generation. Each village in the Caribbean had its storyteller carrying on the African tradition of story and myth-making. In Guyana, children gathered beneath the silk cotton tree where the storyteller "would chant poem hymns to accompaniment of drums, repeating stanzas over and over until his head felt light as air and his body became a house of dreams; then the tales would unravel themselves" (Carew), 121).

It was the storyteller who conveyed the folk archetype myths from East and Central Africa that became part of the slave mythology of the Americas. The stories of Brer Rabbit and B'ra Anancy in the Caribbean islands were tales of resistance and strategic cunning in impossible situations.

## Bree Rabbit and Freedom

*Tar-baby is an archetypal symbol of the oppressed--black and indestructible, endowed with he strength and powers of resistance of both male and female. Its tormentors were themselves worn out raining blows upon its head and in the end the aggressor becomes the victim. Tar is black, plastic, capable of being poured into any mold; the harder it becomes, the more vulnerable it is, the more easily it can be pounded into dust; its strength lies in appearing to be soft and yielding. For the slave the rabbit was a communal creature, swift, fragile, cunning, its habit of procreation legendary. It had survived down the ages when stronger and more ferocious enemies had in their pride rushed into extinction. The rabbit, too, was gentle, loyal, loving. Although each warren was fortress unto itself, it lived and survived in groups.*

*For slaves anxious to conceal their persistent longing for freedom, the animal story was a perfect vehicle. To those unschooled in the subtleties of an oral tradition in which speech inflections, facial expression, gestures and the infinite variety of feelings that weave themselves in and out of the storyteller's narrative, animal stories could easily be dismissed as infantile, but because of this, political, historical and cultural messages could be more safely woven into a seemingly amusing or innocuous story. the storyteller could also implant in every tale the idea of the moral right of the weak to struggle against the mighty by any means necessary.*

~ Jan Carew, *Fulcrums of Change*, 84-85

## Labor

The black gift of labor was the gift of wealth to other nations—a gift all but invisible. While the Incan Indians of Potosi transmuted the world economy, African labor and agricultural skills built Caribbean and North American Empires. There could have been no agricultural economies without slaves to work the lands of the “new world.” And land was the basis of power. When that human labor source was withdrawn, as happened with the slave revolts in the Caribbean, the European world economic order was threatened and altered. Moreover, the slave revolts contributed to the “movement for freedom, equality, and democracy, while they foreshadowed the movement against capitalism itself...the results...formed part of the political opposition to European capitalism” (Genovese, 84).

*And my special geography too;  
the world map made for my own use,  
not tinted with the arbitrary colors of scholars,  
but with the geometry of my spilled blood.*

~ Aimé Césaire, *Collected Poetry*, 77



## To Love the Land

Marko, a Grenadian farmer, describes the human labor from “breast to death” that sustained the land and people as they toiled for colonizers from generation to generation, and how his “heart humped” when the young Grenadian, Maurice Bishop, came to power. The old farmer’s hopes were pinned on the new government, which successfully initiated land reform and an educational and health care system geared to the needs of the Grenadian peasants. Sadly, Marko’s reflections preceded the United States’ invasion of Grenada, resulting in the death of Bishop and his entire government cabinet.

*Ah can't tell you how long we wrestled with these hills and valleys from breast to death... this land makes you old before your time, grey hairs your life while you're still young... and if it's not one thing it's the other—hurricane, landlords, drought, flood—farmers are going to have to make a better living or this country will die. This is a country of youths, and yet the age of the average farmer is fifty-five... part of it is that before you can buy enough land to make a living you're too old to work it well... but all that is changing. The morning after Fairy fell, I heard Brother Bishop say, “This is a revolution for land, for jobs, for liberty,” and I felt my old heart jump... This time, me, and all the farmers around, those with land and those without, are part of the settlement... we will take over the land from those who owned it since long time past days, and who used it so badly... Anyway, only He who created the land got a right to own it, land is for all of we...*

~ Jan Carew, *Fulcrums of Change*, 158

## Spirit

As for the gift of the spirit, never before in the history of the United States did a movement of such spiritual force confront the moral contradictions of the white world than did the Civil Rights movement. Singing through that struggle with its beating and bombings, clapping and dancing to a God who would deliver the people from the “Pharaohs” of this land, the spirit of black people revealed, and some would say redeemed, the diseased soul of a nation.

That eruption of spirit was not the genius of a charismatic minister named Martin Luther King, Jr. He was only one voice that remembered with his people the moral resistance they’d continued from Africa to plantation cabins, from farm shacks to storefront churches.

It would be hard to name popular music forms that remain separate from or unaffected by this spirit. Negro spiritual inspired blues, jazz, rock n’ roll, much of folk music, and currently, rap.

## Civil Rights March

*...l'ouverture / dessalines on horseback /  
you will ride back thru here / invoke those  
same spirits you called on at the citadel /  
there are half-naked women sleeping at  
your feet / children begging under yr  
bridled stallions / what 3 horses would  
balk at / one black man carries on his  
back / his sweat falls into the streams of  
blood....  
where are you now  
Haiti's in need....*

~ Ntozake Shange, *A Daughter's Geography*, 34

## The Gift of Resistance

Maroons contributed not only a fighting spirit, but also a demonstration of the power of resistance. Historian Eugene Genovese argues that the maroon establishments, such as Palmares in Brazil, sought to reconstruct the communal traditions of Africa but failed to overthrow the colonial powers that continued to hold other blacks in slavery. The desire of runaway slave communities to restore traditional ways limited their political and/or economic impact. Even so, "however traditional or backward-looking the world of the Palmarinos, every blow they struck at the Dutch and the Portuguese forced some slight alteration in the course of European capitalism" (Genovese, 84). The San Domingo revolution, led by Touissant l'Ouverture, however, provided the world with a revolution which led to a modern black nation capable of export trade and entrance into the world market.

*The great revolution marked the turning point in the history of slave revolts in the "new world." The people of San Domingo successively humiliated the Spanish, British, and French and inflicted upon them the heaviest losses those supreme imperialists ever suffered...*

*W.E.B. Du Bois argued that the revolution in San Domingo enormously strengthened the anti-slave movement in England and prepared the way for its flowering in America; that it ended Napoleon's dream of American empire and led him to the sale of Louisiana, which doubled the size of the United States; and that it influenced, perhaps decisively, the decision of the Southern states to close the African slave trade...*

*Haiti stirred the slaves and free Negroes to rebellion under a modern ideology that posed a new and more dangerous threat to the old regimes that anything else previously encountered... The revolution in San Domingo propelled a revolution in black consciousness throughout the "new world."*

~ Eugene Genovese, *From Rebellion to Revolution*, 87, 93, 96

That revolution in black consciousness which has sparked slave revolts and uprisings in South Africa, Algeria, the Frontline nations of Africa, and the Civil Rights movement in the United States remains an every-present dangerous memory that could ignite and burn away the economic and political cages that enslave the black world.

### **Killing the Spirit, Keeping the Spirit**



Buffalo Herd

*They took away everything except the spirit, which they were incapable of seeing.*

~ Julia Esquivel, *You Can't Drown the Fire*, 197

A people's spirit can be wounded, dishonored, and diminished. Their land can be stolen, their leaders killed, their people enslaved, their children starved. Remembering the spirit of their people's resistance they will, nevertheless, endure. The most dangerous and insidious tactic of the colonizer is the attempt to destroy the people's spirit. Such a strategy aims a weapon at the

people's culture, attempting to "adapt" that culture to the "civilized" culture by negating the culture of the colonized. This leads to self-hatred on the part of children who grow up in the shadows of the hated (or feared) subjugating culture. This strategy also reinforces in the colonizer's descendants a legacy of moral superiority, which, because it is a lie, is morally corrosive.

Consider, for example, the damage to the Indian spirit, as well as the moral character of Americans, to have U.S. government policies state an objective of cultural destruction of Indian nations. After the buffalo were killed off the Great Plains, after wild horses no longer ran the open range, and after red people of this land were penned into reservations, the white fathers in Washington made policies to win the final war against the Indians. This was the cultural war; the weapon used was law and policy. The objective of U.S. Indian policy was to deny Native American cultural identity. Psychologists insist that the failure to know who you are leads to madness, suicide, or violent rage. It is psychic death. Yet this was Indian policy. Here is an extract from the Annual Report of the Commissioner of Indian Affairs in 1889. "The logic of events demands the absorption of citizens... The Indians must conform to 'the white man's ways,' peaceably if they will, forcibly if they must... They cannot escape it and must conform to it or be crushed by it" (Prucha, ed., 177)

Indian Commissioner Morgan then goes on to identify the essence of U.S. "civilization" and the Indian cultural practices which presented obstacles to their enculturation. "The tribal relations should be broken up, socialism destroyed, and the family and autonomy of the individual substituted. The allotment of lands in severalty, the establishment of local courts and police, the development of person sense of independence, and the universal adoption of the English language are the means to this end" (Prucha, ed., 177).

The excerpt below from the *Annual Report of the Secretary of the Interior* also identifies the Indian cultural values of community and nonownership of sacred land as obstacles to their civilization. "The value of the property as an agent of civilization ought not to be overlooked. When an Indian acquires property... he has made a step forward in the road to civilization" (Prucha, ed., 161).

The clash of cultures centers on the property right and individualism of the white way and the communal and nonacquisitive values of the Indian. Identifying individualism and private property as civilization not only destroys Indian culture but exposes the spiritual bankruptcy of white mainstream culture. The most morally damaging aspect of U.S. Indian policy for the "civilized" citizens of the United States was and is presented as a moral effort much the way modern wars against "communist" or "terrorist" nations are fought in the name of God to save civilizations from the new "savages." The forms of "morality" used to justify the destruction of Indian culture can be overtly racist or sympathetic, as the next two government documents illustrate. Whether the conservatives or the liberals decided on Indian policy, the result was still the same: reservations, broken treaties, the banning of the Indian language and rituals in the reservation schools: in short, cultural destruction. Indian Commissioner Price recommended a policy that would solve the "Indian Problem" in 1881:

*To domesticate and civilize wild Indians is a noble work, the accomplishment of which should be a crown of glory to any nation. But to allow them to drag along year after year, and generation after generation, in their old superstitions, laziness, and filth, when we have the power to elevate them in the scale of humanity, would be a lasting disgrace of our government... savage and civilized life cannot prosper on the same ground. One of the two must die. If the Indians are to be civilized... they must learn our language and adopt our modes of life. We are fifty millions of people, and they are only one fourth of a million. The few must yield to the many.*

~ From the *Annual Report of the Commissioner of Indian Affairs*, October 24, 1881, in Francis Paul Prucha, ed., *Documents of United States Indian Policy*, 156

Is the more sympathetic “liberal” approach of Indian Commissioner Walker, which follows, much different in practice from Commissioner Price’s harsh tone?

*Had the settlements of the United States not been extended beyond the frontier of 1867, all the Indians of the continent would to the end of time have found upon the plains an inexhaustible supply of food and clothing. Were the westward course of population to be stayed at the barriers of today... the Indians would still have hope of life.*

*The freedom of expansion which is working these results is to us of incalculable value. To the Indian it is of incalculable cost. Every year’s advantage of our frontier takes in a territory as large as some of the kingdoms of Europe. We are richer by hundreds of millions; the Indian is poorer by a large part of the little he has. This growth is bringing imperial greatness to the nation; to the Indian it brings wretchedness, destitution, beggary...*

*Can any principle of national morality be clearer than that, when the expansion of development of a civilized race involves the rapid destruction of the only means of subsistence possessed by the members of a less fortunate race, the higher is bound as of simple right to provide for the lower some substitute for the means of subsistence which it has destroyed? That substitute is, of course, best realized, not by systematic gratuities of food and clothing continued beyond a present emergency, but by directing these people to new pursuits which shall be consistent with the progress of civilization upon the continent, helping them over the first rough places on the white man’s road.”*

~ Commissioner Walker, *Annual Report of the Commissioner of Indian Affairs*, in Francis Paul Prucha, ed., *Documents of United States Indian Policy*, 137

Address delivered by chief Seattle to Governor Stevens of the State of Washington in 1853 after his Squamish and Duwamish tribes were removed to reservation lands.

*There was a time when our people covered the land as the waves as a wind-ruffled sea cover its shell-paved floor, but that time long since passed away with the greatness of tribes that are now but a mournful memory. ...*

Your God is not our God! Your God loves your people and hates mine. He folds his strong protective arms lovingly about the pale face and leads him by the hand as a Father leads his infant son--but He has forsaken His red children... Our people are ebbing away like a rapidly receding tide that will never return. The white man's God cannot love our people or He would protect them... We are two distinct races with separate origins and separate destinies... To us our ancestors are sacred and their resting place is hallowed ground. You wander far from the graves of our ancestors... and the visions of our sachems, and it is written in the hearts of our people.

Your dead cease to love you... as they pass the portals of the tomb... Our dead never forget the beautiful world... Even the rocks, which seem to be dumb and dead as they swelter in the sun along the silent shore, thrill with memories... and the very dust upon which you stand responds more lovingly to [our people's] footsteps than to yours... When the last Red Man shall have perished, and the memory of my tribe shall have become a myth among the White Men, these shores will swarm with the invisible dead of my tribe, and when your children's children think themselves alone in the field... or in the silence of the path less woods, they will not be alone.

~ In W.C. Vanderwerth, ed., *Indian Oratory*, 118-119

## **Indian Policy and the Black Hills**

*Our ideas will overcome your ideas. We are going to cut the country's whole value system to shreds. It isn't important that there are only 500,000 of us Indians... What is important is that we have a superior way of life. We Indians have a more human philosophy of life. We Indians will show this country how to act human. Someday this country will revise its constitution, its laws, in terms of human beings, instead of property. If Red Power is to be a power in this country it is because it is ideological... What is the ultimate value of a man's life? That is the question.*

~ Vine Deloria, Jr., In *Touch the Earth*, 159

It's no wonder that the Indian cannot understand the white way or that native people have come to assume that whites are only capable of cultural theft of art, medicine, and ideas, of human labor and of land. Sitting Bull articulated the cultural clash of worldviews and the resulting tragedy for the Sioux nation which defended the Indian way:

*What treaty that the whites have kept has the red man broken? Not one. What treaty that the white man ever made with us has the white man ever kept? Not one. When I was a boy the Sioux owned the world; the sun rose and set on their land, they sent ten thousand men to battle.*

*Where are the warriors today? Who slew them? Where are our lands? Who owns them? What white man can say I ever stole his land or a penny of his money? Yet they say I am a thief. What white woman, however lonely, was ever captive or insulted by me? Yet they say I am a bad Indian. What white man has ever seen me drunk? Who has ever come to me hungry and unfed? Who has ever seen me beat my wives or abuse my children? What law have I broken? Is it wrong for me to love my own? Is it wicked for me because my skin is red? Because I am Lakota, because I was born where my father died, because I would die for my people and country?*

~ Quoted in Peter Matheissen, *In the Spirit of Crazy Horse*, 33

And now, five hundred years later, the colonizers still seek treasure. Today treasure is not gold, but uranium; Indians within the United States are not reduced to slaves, but leaders are criminalized and imprisoned. Law is able to accomplish what the whip and sword accomplished in the time of Columbus. Just as Chief Guaironex and Sitting Bull cherished the land, Lakota leader Russell Means fights for the Black Hills today:

*Right now, today, we who live on the Pine Ridge Reservation are living in what white society has designated a National Sacrifice Area. What this means is that we have a lot of uranium deposits here, and white culture (not us) needs this uranium as energy production material. The cheapest and most efficient way for industry to extract and deal with the processing of this uranium is to dump the waste by-products right here at the digging sites. Right here where we live. This waste is radioactive and will make the entire region uninhabitable forever. This is considered by industry, and the white society that created this industry, to be an "acceptable" price to pay for energy resource development. Along the way they also plan to drain the water table under this part of South Dakota as part of the industrial process, so the region becomes doubly uninhabitable. This same sort of thing is happening down in the land of the Navajo and the Hopi, up in the northern Cheyenne and Crow, and elsewhere....*

*We are resisting being turned into a National Sacrifice Area. We are resisting being turned into a national sacrifice people. The costs of this industrial process are not acceptable to us. It is genocide to dig the uranium here and drain the water table, no more, no less.*

~ Quoted in Peter Matheissen, *In the Spirit of Crazy Horse*, 525

It's sadly ironic that the clash between the red and white vision is symbolized today in the Black Hills, the sacred land of the Great Sioux nation. A legal fight rages over the 1868 Sioux claim to South Dakota lands, including seven and a half million acres of the Black Hills that were "lost" when Congress nullified the 1868 treaty following Custer's defeat. In the 1980s when the Sioux appealed to the Supreme Court, the government's "right" to the land was upheld. But the Sioux nation, faithful to tribal ethics and believing the earth is sacred and not for sale, refused the money.

The Black Hills is the land where the U.S. government chose to symbolize its democratic achievement. Chiseled into the stone hills of South Dakota are the faces of Presidents Washington, Lincoln, Jefferson, and Theodore Roosevelt. The government of the United States seeks to renovate the Mt. Rushmore National Memorial in South Dakota—"a shrine of democracy," according to President Bush. The Sioux nation protests! "Not only did they desecrate our sacred land," said Tim Giago, an Oglala Sioux who is editor of the Lakota Times, "they also memorialized four Presidents who committed acts of atrocity against our people...They want to spend \$40 million to repair Mr. Rushmore and it's 70 miles from the poorest country in American, where our people are destitute (Chu and Shaw, 69-70).

Destitute indeed. The annual income in the area is twenty-four hundred dollars, with an unemployment rate of eighty-five percent (Chu and Shaw, 70). Impoverished and defiant, the Sioux will not accept money for the sacred. Who is spiritually destitute, spiritually alive? If the lands of the Americas are to be saved from destruction, it is the Indians of America, who by their faithful reverence for the living world will save it. This sacred love of all beings is the profound spirituality that has enabled Indian people to continue to resist five hundred years of assault and degradation. Indian spirituality is the hidden cultural weapon that sustains resistance in the face of hardship and death. Penned in reservations, marginalized, made invisible, the red nations refuse to die.

Five hundred years after the conquest of the Americas, an environmental crisis confronts the world. Scientists predict that the destruction of the rainforest, industrial pollution, acid rain, nuclear radiation, and destruction of animal species has so altered the environment that the earth itself is in mortal danger. Some of the Indian medicine people echo the Indian prophecy which foretells apocalyptic destruction as a result of the whites' failure to respect the mother, Earth. Lakota Wallace Black Elk articulates that vision.

*The white people have to surrender their arms to the great Spirit.*

*This purification is coming real soon, and all the guns and gold will melt. The holy spirit, the atom, the power of god, will melt those guns and tanks and poison gasses they create... They will be standing by themselves... When the time comes there won't be no amnesty.*

*We're going back to the beginning of time... I have no fear, I have no slightest fear whatsoever. Even if I have to face death like Chief Big Foot, it's very beautiful.*



*We hold the key to eternity, where it is beautiful and it is everlasting for everyone. That's where we're going. We're going home. And finally we will be back in the Great Spirit's hands again. Grandmother's arms again. She'll cradle us in her arms again.*

~ Quoted in Peter Matthiessen, *In the Spirit of Crazy Horse*, 547

*[Indians] believe that the roots of oppression are to be found in the loss of tradition and memory because that loss is always accompanied by a loss of a positive sense of self. In short, Indians think it is important to remember, while Americans think it is important to forget.*

~ Paula Gunn Allen

In Rick Simonson and Scott Walker, eds., *Multicultural Literacy*, 15

*This is remembering, waki-ksuya. It means to recall, to travel back into the past, to hold communion with the spirits, to receive a message from them, to bring to one's mind the dead friends, to hear their voice once again, even to the point of having a vision.*

~ John Lame Deer

In Alan R. Velie, ed., *American Indian Literature*, 239

Anna Mae Pictou Aquash, a Micmac Indian, faced her own death with the same openness that Black Elk reveals. A mother and activist involved at Wounded Knee, she was mysteriously murdered and found frozen in the snow in a remote area of Pine Ridge reservation. Her hands were cut off and sent in a jar to the FBI in Washington for a fingerprint check. Her sister, Mary Lafford believes someone connected with the FBI killed her. AIM leader Dennis Banks said that her killer was not just the triggerman but the cultural triggerman of centuries. "She wasn't killed by just one person. It was what she represented and what kin of person she was. What happens to people in four hundred years? Maybe that is the answer. Maybe four hundred years killed Anna Mae" (Matthiessen, 268).

Before she died, Anna Mae Pictou Aquash expressed both the spiritual vision and cultural resistance which sustain Native American hope and courage.

*I am part of this creation as you are, no more and no less than each and every one of you within the sound of my voice. I am the generation of generations before me and the generations to*

*come... If I have gone against this creation—no man on this Universe holds the power to punish me other than the Creator himself...*

*You are continuing to control my life with your violent, materialistic needs. I do realize your need to survive and be part of this Creation—but you do not understand mine.*

~ Quoted in Peter Matthiessen, *In the Spirit of Crazy Horse*, 252

## **How Cultural Invasion has Affected North American Culture**

*Down the root of Conquest our bodies receive the insult.*

~ Meridel Le Seur, *Ripening*, 268

Native American philosopher John Mohawk links the birth of racism to the conquest of the fifteenth century and a white European worldview that continues its mission of conquest through today's mission of bringing "progress" to less developed nations.

*It is said that the Conquistadors spilled more blood than any group of people ever spilled up to that time....[Their]mentality also said that they had to dehumanize the victims of the conquest....Even modern scholars identify the period of the conquest as the birth of racism in the modern world. It was the first time that arguments were seriously put forward in courts of Spain, especially at Valladolid, arguing that the Indians were biologically inferior beings, that they were not even human beings at all, that they were really beasts of burden, that they were sub-humans as you would treat a burro or as you would treat a monkey.*

*Some of the same things are still being argued in the Western Hemisphere, whether peoples of different physical characteristics are fully human and have full human rights and have full civil rights. All those arguments still go on right to the 1980s, certainly in places like Guatemala, and Peru, and Mexico where the conquest, I say, is not ended.*

~ John Mohawk, "The Indian Way is a Thinking Tradition," *Northeast Indian Quarterly*, 15

*Let us all return  
It is the people who give birth to us,  
to all culture, who by their labors  
create all material and spiritual values....  
Only they have the future in their hands.  
Only they.*

~ Meridel Le Seur, *Ripening*, 219

## **Crossing the Borders**

*Cursed be  
all your fences  
which encircle you  
from within,  
fat, isolated,  
like man-eating pigs....  
Cursed be all fences!  
Ours is another land....  
The human earth made free, sisters and  
brother!*

~ Pedro Casaldaliga, *In Pursuit of the Kingdom*, 48

*In school I learned of heroic discoveries  
Made by liars and crooks. The courage  
Of millions of sweet and true people  
Was not commemorated.*

*Let us then declare a holiady  
For ourselves, and make a parade that begins  
With Columbus' victims and continues  
Even to our grandchildren who will be Named in their honor.*

*Because isn't it true that even the summer  
Grass here in this land whispers those names,  
And every creek has accepted the responsibility  
Of singing those names? And nothing can stop  
The wind from howling those names around  
The corners of the school.*

*Why else would the birds sing  
So much sweeter here than in other lands?*

~ Jimmie Durham, "Columbus Day"  
In *Sojourners*, October 1991, 12

*1992 could be the beginning of a reflection on the 500 years, the beginning of a discovery of what we have-- the bad things which exist on this continent and the good things which we must plant, or cultivate, or irrigate, so that they can grow in the future.*

*But it is not a question of 1992 being a great happening after which it can be said that the oppression, the discrimination, the racism, the poverty, and all the other evils have ended. It is the moment to begin creating the conditions for an encounter between two worlds, two cultures.*

~ Rigoberta Manchu  
In *Sojourners*, October 1991, 29

Who is America? Where is the America that Langston Hughes says has yet to be? Official history remembers one America. Red, black, brown, and yellow people remember another America, the American whose memory is a danger. That rainbow America continues to create history and to be a sign of blood and hope.

The America of the conquerors identifies with whiteness, manliness, and keeping a correct order. The other America has mixed things up and is full of color; its song and art break the rules. The other American is the real frontier, the place where something new can happen, the place where history is made. It is a place of possibility, but it is also a dangerous place. It is the border.

Borders are made by the powerful, but they can be subverted. Sometimes the border is a nineteen hundred mile wire fence with armed border patrol guards, checkpoints, and helicopter surveillance, like the Mexican/United States border; sometimes the border is a line drawn around the Black Hills. Sometimes border lines divide suburbs from slum neighborhoods where police question anyone from the ghetto for crossing over. Sometimes the border is in the mind. This is what Franz Fanon calls taking on the mind of the colonizer, believing the official America's version of history.

The first step to creating history, according to Fanon, is to decolonize the mind. Brazilian Bishop Pedro Casaldalga, who is considered the new de Las Casas of the Americas, has this to say about decolonization: "Decolonizing, reaching back for Latin America's identity, means allowing

the overall Latin American culture—which is the sum total of many cultures, first of many indigenous peoples, and of the black people, enslaved and brought to Latin America, and then of the resulting mixture in many places—allowing this culture to be expressed...” (Casaldaliga, 2). How is culture to be recovered when it is no longer simply the culture it once was but the “sum total of many cultures... indigenous... black... the resulting mix”? Dangerous memory must take back its own bruised and bold history. But even more than that, it must reckon with the fences that held captive the native, the black, red, brown peoples of the Americas, the fences staking land and the terrain of the heart and mind.

Historically the mixed blood person represented an affront to both the colonizer and the colonized. Mulattoes in the Caribbean were despised by the Europeans because they had black blood; they were rejected by the maroons and slaves because they were upwardly mobile and sought status in the white colonial society.

Even some colonized hold to the myth of pure blood and reject those who sympathize with or marry the colonizer. For the colonized, adherence to one’s race is a necessary part of the decolonization process in which the colonized throw off the dominant culture and recover their own. Yet after five hundred years we have a racial mix that makes the notion of pure blood a myth. Historian Lerone Bennett, Jr., says that seventy to eighty percent of blacks have white and Indian ancestors. Moreover, he cites a study by Professor Robert Stuckert which indicates that one out of five American whites have African ancestors.

*The most authoritative and scientific study in this area was made by Melville J. Herskovits...[whose study of 1551 blacks found] 71.7 percent of the same had white ancestors and 27.2 had some Indian ancestry. Since that time the number of mixed blacks has increased, not only because of additional black-white marriages but also because of the marriage of blacks (mixed) and blacks (unmixed). In the Herskovits sample, only 22 percent of black Americans were of unmixed ancestry. Nantu, Mandingo, Yoruba, Akan, Semite, British, Irish, German, French, Spanish, Dutch, Creek, Choctow, Seminole, Pequot, Marshpee—the American black is an extraordinary amalgam of different amalgamations. The end product of 260 years of amalgamation, he is a genetic metaphor of the impossible possibilities of the people of the world, who are not so much equal as complementary, which is, as Teillard Chardin and Leopold Senghor said, a higher form, perhaps the highest form of superiority.*

~ Lerone Bennett, Jr., *Before the Mayflower*, 325

The mix of races reveals “the impossible possibilities of the peoples of the world.” But the colonizers have not welcomed the crossing of genetic borders. Ironically, the early colonists of North America lacked the taboos that would circumscribe such intermingling. Contrary to most accounts, there were many marriages between blacks and whites in the early U.S. colonial period before slavery was introduced. Bennett argues that a system of racism had not yet

developed which could focus white fears and that marriage between blacks and whites was a commingling of the poor black and white indentured servants who made up the majority of the early colonial population. The state of Virginia was composed largely of mulattoes resulting primarily from the union of black men and white women who, without social prohibition, chose each other across race lines.

When the colonial planters sought more mass agricultural labor in the latter part of the seventeenth century, slavery was introduced and with it systematic separation of the races. This took some orchestrating because, according to Bennett, whites didn't as yet understand the concept of whiteness implying racial superiority.

*To teach them their roles, the colonial ruling class organized a systematic campaign against mixing, which was perceived as a threat not only to Puritan morality but also to Puritan economics. "The increasing number of mulattoes, through intermarriage and illicit relationships," Dr. Lorenzo J. Greene wrote, "soon caused alarm among Puritan advocates of racial purity and white dominance. Sensing a deterioration of slavery, if the barriers between masters and slaves were dissolved... they sought to stop racial crossing by statute."*

~ Lerone Bennett, Jr., *Before the Mayflower*, 309

If the colonists of North America tried to hold color lines fast, the Spanish colonists did not. Sexual relations between the Spaniards and the Indians produced a mixed race, the *mestizos*.

*Mestizas* were represented by la Malinche (*La Chingada*), the Indian woman who "betrayed" her people and slept with Hernan Cortes. The mix of bloods which resulted from mating between the Spanish and the Indian is the Ladino. Even today the most vulgar put-down one can say to a Mexican woman is to refer to her as *la chingada* (whore). Writer Gloria Anzaldua insists that such an interpretation of history fails to analyze Aztec class and gender relations.

The Aztecs' weakness was their apparent strength. The Aztecs were themselves conquerors of other tribes who hated them because of the rape by the Aztec nobility. The conquered Tlaxcalans helped the Spanish defeat the Aztecs. "Thus the Aztec nation fell not because [Malinche] interpreted for and slept with Cortes, but because the ruling elite had subverted the solidarity between men and women and between noble and commoner" (Anzaldua, 34).

The culture of the mestizo and the mulatto is the culture of the wretched of the earth. This is the juncture in history where worlds collide. It is the borderland, the land of nobodies, those cast-offs who "belong" to no one—but themselves. The mestiza is the mixture of races, the flesh in which the blood of oppressor and oppressed flows. The mestiza, sign of contradiction, rejected, shoved to the margins of history, stands at our border, those racial, and often class

lines that separate us from each other. The border is the place of reckoning and hope. There, in the places of “fences,” is another culture which transforms the old but remembers everything.

This is not an “integrated” or assimilated culture which imitates or seeks acceptance from the dominator. It is its own culture, struggling to know its identity, to make sense of the senseless, to make meaning of suffering, of absurdity, of duality. “We question the ‘integration’ of these cultures and people into what is supposedly a greater nation or a better culture. We do say we would be willing to accept an inter-integration, one continent meeting another... Latin America can and must provide Europe with a great deal in the way of ecology, nature, sense of gratuity, joy, color, hospitality, solidarity, hope, utopia...” (Casaldaliga, 2).

Who can see a world without fences, imagine the world beyond walls of captivity? Certainly not the fence-makers whose legacy to their children is a legal system which upholds their right to land, to boundaries that scar the earth with possession, and armies to enforce the “rights” of fences and walls. Those whose children and dreams were broken on the walls know the perniciousness of “ownership.” Theirs is the vision showing that “boundaries are all lies” (Hogan, 68).

Poet Gloria Anzaldua expands the idea of Mexican philosopher Jose Vasconcelos who spoke of the synthesis of races, a *mezcla* (mixture) resulting in a cosmic race. It is the *mestiza* who bridges borders, having been torn apart by them. Anzaldua is not speaking of a kind of universal *mestiza*, that is, an idealized human person without a concrete history mired in the pain of colonialism. The new frontier, peopled with those whose minds are free of fences, is not a “melting pot,” or a place for “individuals without an anchor, without a horizon, colorless, stateless, rootless, a race of angels” (Fanon, 218). On the contrary, those who stand at the borders refuse to forget their people’s history of slavery, of colonization. They embrace the border as a meeting place rather than a place of separation. Whether the border is a state of mind or a fence in the earth, crossing over is an act of defiance, an act of decolonization.

The *mestiza* understands that colonialism’s intention is to obliterate her people’s culture.

*Sisters and brothers, the time is at hand. We cannot continue with business as usual. The threats to life in this nation and around the globe demand from all of us a new way of thinking, acting, and being. It is time for new affirmation and new covenants.*

*A radically new orientation is requested; a movement of unity, solidarity, and resistance is required in all parts of the world if we are to pursue a vision of a just peace for all of creation. I believe that 1992 presents us with a pivotal moment in history. This is a truth-telling time, a world-changing time, that can provide us with new identities, new behavior, and a renewed mission for life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness for all of God's people. This is a time for unity, solidarity, and resistance--not fragmentation and division.*

*The question has come up over and over again with regard to whether 1992 is a time for Native Americans to take the lead, to offer out of their pilgrimages insights and wisdom for the facing of these days. To teach us out of their rootedness to Mother Earth their understanding of peace, harmony, justice, wisdom. And the answer is obviously yes. We all--African Americans as well as Hispanic Americans, Asian, and white Americans--have much to learn from our Native American sisters and brothers. The shameful reality of our histories is how little we know of one another and how the history of divide and conquer has defined and continues to define the relationships among us.*

~ Yvonne V. Delk, "A Moment of Turning"  
*Sojourners*, October 1991, 20

*Colonialism is not satisfied merely with holding people in its grip and emptying the natives' brain of all forms and content... it turns to the past of oppressed people and distorts, disfigures, and destroys it... We have taken everything from the other side; and the other side gives us nothing... unless by a thousand wiles and a hundred tricks they manage to draw us toward them, to seduce us, and to imprison.*

~ Franz Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth*, 210

Decolonization is the process in which the colonized person refuses seduction. The task of the oppressed person is to discover his or her identity free of the definitions of the dominant culture. To be free is to affirm one's own stolen history. But what of the mix, the new breeds created in the clash of cultures: Are they the cast-offs of the world or the harbingers of culture, and signs of a new humanity? People who identify with the dominator die internally, strangled by their own betrayal. The racially mixed person who embraces her subjugated selves recognizes the gifts of mixed blood, having suffered the pain of difference. The *mestiza* incorporates in her flesh our common blood.

For Fran Fanon, "It is not enough to try to get back to the people in the past out of which they have already emerged; rather we must join them in the fluctuating movement which they are just giving shape to, and which, as soon as it has started, will be the signal for everything to be called into question,,,IT is [in] this zone... where... our souls are crystallized and our lives are transfused with light" (Fanon, 227).

It is there at the border, in the shadows of fences that light pours in, dispelling the clouds of forgetting. The struggle of the borderland is a struggle for culture. But this liberation struggle is not without anguish. "The area of culture," says Fanon "is then marked off by fences and signposts....Every effort is made to bring the colonized person to admit the inferiority of his culture" (Fanon, 236).



Gloria Anzaldua expresses the internalized shame and self-hatred produced by colonial domination:

*In the Gringo world, the Chicano suffers from excessive humility and self-effacement, shame of self and self-deprivation. Around Latinos he suffers from a sense of language inadequacy and its accompanying discomfort; with Native Americans he suffers from a racial amnesia which ignores our common blood, and from guilt because the Spanish part of him took their land and oppressed them. He has an excessive compensatory hubris when around Mexicans from the other side. It overlays a deep sense of racial shame....*

*Chicanos and other people of color suffer economically for not acculturating. This voluntary (yet forced) alienation makes for psychological conflict, a kind of dual identity—we don't identify with the Anglo-American cultural values and we don't totally identify with the Mexican cultural values. We are a synergy of two cultures with varying degrees of Mexicanness or Angloness. I have so internalized the borderland conflict that sometimes I feel that one cancels out the other and we are zero, nothing, no one.*

~ Gloria Anzaldua, *The Borderland/La Frontera*, 63, 83

Amoja Three Rivers describes the burden of not knowing the racial mix that constitutes one's peoples as a fate as damaging as trying to straddle the known mix of one's race.

*One of the most effective and insidious aspects of racism is cultural genocide. Not only have African Americans been cut off from our African tribal roots, but because of generations of whites pitting African against Indian, and Indian against African, we have been cut off from our Native American roots as well. Consequently most African Native Americans no long have tribal affiliations, or know for certain what people they are form.*

~ Amoja Three Rivers, "Cultural Etiquette: A Guide," *Ms.*, 42

Guillermo Gomez Pena sees whole generations "as the world's biggest floating population" – the refugees, the war and border displaced the impoverished seeking work only the desperate want. The colonial project set in motion, and continues to drive, vast displacement of peoples. Gomez Pena calls this the *borderization* of the world.

*The borders either expand or are shot full of holes. Cultures and languages mutually invade each other. The South rises and melts, while the North descends dangerously with its economic and military pincers....Europe and North America daily receive*

*uncontainable migrations of human beings, a majority of whom are being displaced involuntarily...*

*The demographic facts are staggering: The Middle East and Black Africa are already in Europe, and Latin America's heart now beats in the United States. New York and Paris increasingly resemble Mexico City and Sao Paulo. Cities like Tijuana and Los Angeles, once socio-urban aberrations, are becoming models of a new hybrid culture, full of uncertainty and vitality. And border youth—the fearsome “cholo-punks,” children of the chasm that is opening before the “first” and the “third” worlds, become the indisputable heirs to a new mestizaje [the fusion of the Amerindian and the European race].*

~ Guillermo Gomez Pens, in Rick Simonson and Scott Walker, eds., *Multicultural Literacy*, 131

What emerges from the *mezcla* of cultures, from five hundred years of fences, is not only cultural damage and psychic scars but a new wisdom, a new path. Creoles, mulattoes, and *mestizas*, the issue of crossed blood, of people who have crossed over the forbidden frontiers, are people who represent a new human enterprise. The new path is made by the despised. It is not an easy road; it is a way that reveals our common journey and common frailty.

The mixed blood person, like all subjugated people, bears the memory of lash, shackles, humiliation, and rape. Here is the testimony of Mary Crow Dog, a Lakota woman who gave birth during the siege of Wounded Knee.

*...After I had a baby during the siege of Wounded Knee they gave me a special name, Okita Win, Brave Woman, and fastened an eagle plume in my hair, singing brave heart songs for me. I am a woman of the Red Nation, a Sioux woman. That is not easy.*

*I had my first baby during a firefight, with bullets cracking through one wall and coming out the other. When my newborn son was only a day old and the marshals really opened up on us, I wrapped him in a blanket and ran for it. We had to hit the dirt a couple of times. I shielded the baby with my body, praying, “It’s all right if I die, please let him live.”*

*When I came out of Wounded Knee I was not even healed up but they put me in a jail at Pine Ridge and took my baby away. I could not nurse. My breasts swelled up and grew hard as rocks, hurting badly. In 1975 the feds put the muzzle of their M16s against my head, threatening to blow me away. It’s hard being an Indian woman.*

*My best friend was Anna Mae Aquash, a young, strong-hearted woman from the Mic Mac Tribe with beautiful children. It is not always wise for an Indian woman to come on too strong. Anna Mae was found dead in the snow at the bottom of a ravine on Pine*

*Ridge Reservation. The police said she died of exposure, but there was a 38 caliber slug in her head. The FBI cut off her hands and sent them to Washington for fingerprint identification; hands that helped my baby come into the world.*

*My sister-in-law Delphine, a good woman who had lived a hard life, was also found dead in the snow, the tears frozen on her face. A drunken man had beaten her, breaking one of her arms and legs, leaving her helpless in a blizzard to die.*

*My sister Barbara went to the government hospital in Rosebud to have her baby and when she came out of anesthesia found that she had been sterilized against her will. The baby lived only two hours and she had wanted so much to have children. No, it isn't easy.*

*When I was a small girl at St. Francis Boarding School, the Catholic Sisters would take a buggy whip to us for what they called "disobedience." At the age of 10 I could drink and hold a pint of whiskey. At age 12 the nuns beat me for "being too free with my body." All I had been doing was holding hands with a boy. At age 15 I was raped. If you plan to be born, make sure you are white and male.*

~ Mary Crow Dog and Richard Erdoes, *Lakota Woman*, 1-3

Born in this suffering is a defiance that offers hope. Indian poet Joy Harjo uses the metaphor of houses to describe Indian shame and defiant hope in response to the white way.

*She had some horses who whispered in the dark,  
who were afraid to speak.  
She had some horses who screamed out of the fear of silence,  
who carried knives to protect themselves from ghosts.  
She had some horses who waited for destruction.  
She had some horses who waited for resurrection....*

*These were the same horses.*

~ Joy Harjo, in Rayna Green, ed., *That's What She Said*, 45

The borderland is woman's "place" because it is no man's land. It is woman who locates in her bodiliness the wounds of centuries. It is woman who envisions a new humanity without borders, without a "place" for women, for the elderly, for those who are outcasts, who are "different" racially, sexually, culturally.

*Part of the blood that is mine has labored endlessly four hundred years under the heel of lustful Europeans.*

*I am still here!*

~ Rodolfo Gonzales, *I am Joaquin*, 82

*The point is hardly to blame Columbus for every atrocity of the West since his first voyage... The real issue is the social paradigm and economic order that the Columbus event set into motions and the fact that it has dominated all of our lives and, in particular, the lives of marginalized peoples for the past 500 years. There is, in fact, no new world order; we are still being governed by an old one whose economic, political, philosophical, environmental, and especially spiritual roots can be traced back to the conquest and colonization of the Americans:*

*What are the values of that social order? What is their relationship to people of color, to security, and to so many other virtual questions that now face us? Most important, can the values and structures of the old social paradigm carry us into the future? If not, what must we do?...*

*The future of the American experiment depends on our remembering the past, transforming the present, and altering the future.*

~ Jim Wallis, "Rediscovering America", *Soujourners*, October 1991, 5

*The prophecy reports that many years ago the indigenous people of the Americas were divided into two groups, the people of the Eagle (those from the North) and the people of the Condor (those from the South). According to the prophecy, when the tears of the Eagle and the Condor are joined, a new era of life and spirit will begin for Native people.*

~ Winona LaDuke, "We Are Still Here", *Sojourners*, October, 1991, 14

*You have sanitized death, put it under a rug, robbers it of its honor. But we Indians think a lot about death. I do. Today would be a perfect day to die--not too hot, not too cool. A day to leave something of yourself behind, to let it linger.*

~ John Lame Deer, in Alan R. Velia, ed., *American Indian Literature*, 232

## Women at the Crossroads



Timucuan women in Florida, working in agriculture side by side with men

Pretty Shield was a medicine woman of the Crow Nation. Medicine Woman of the Crow, Shield's autobiography written with Frank Linderman is the first record of the "women's side" of Native American Life.

*I saw Strikes—Two, a woman sixty years old, riding around the camp on a grey horse. She carried only her root-digger, and she was singing her medicine-song, as though Lakota bullets and arrows were not flying around her....*

*When the men and even the women began to sing as Strikes-Two told them, she rode out straight at the Lakota, waving her root-digger and singing that song. I saw her, I heard her, and my heart swelled because she was a woman.*

~ Pretty Shield in Paul Gunn Allen, ed., *Spider Woman's Granddaughters*, 33

*The dark-skinned woman has been silenced, caged, gagged, bound into servitude with marriage, bludgeoned for 300 years, sterilized and castrated in the twentieth century....she has been a slave, a source of cheap labor, colonized by the Spaniard, the Anglo, and by her own people (in Mesoamerica her lot under Indian patriarchs was not free of wounding). For 300 years she was invisible, she was not heard....Every increment of consciousness, every step forward, is a travesia, a crossing....Every time she makes "sense" of something she has to "cross over," kicking a hole in the old boundaries.*

*In a few centuries, the future will belong to the mestiza. Because the future depends on the breaking down of paradigms, it depends on the straddling of two or more cultures. By creating a new mythos—that is a change in the way we perceive reality, the way we see ourselves and the ways we behave—la mestiza creates a new consciousness. The answer to the problem between the white race and the colored, between males and females, lies in healing the split that originates in the very foundation of our lives, our culture, our language, our thoughts. A massive uprooting of dualistic thinking in the individual and collective consciousness is the beginning of a long struggle, but one that could, in our best hopes, bring us to the end of the rape, of violence, of war....*

*As a mestiza I have no country...yet I am cultured because I am participating in the creating of yet another culture, a new story to explain the world and our participation in it, a new value system with images and symbols that connect us to each other and to the planet. Soy un amasamiento, I am an act of kneading, of uniting and joining that which not only has produced both a creature of darkness and a creature of light, but also a creature that questions the definitions of light and dark and gives them new meaning.*

*We are the people who leap in the dark; we are the people on the knees of gods. In our very flesh (e)volution works out the clash of cultures....Indigenous like corn, the mestiza is a product of crossbreeding, designed for preservation under a variety of conditions. Like an ear of corn a female seed bearing organ, the mestiza is tenacious, tightly wrapped in the husks of her culture. Like kernels she clings to the cob; with thick stalks and strong brace roots, she holds tight to the earth—she will survive the crossroads.*

~ Anzaldua, *The Borderland/La Frontera*, 22-23, 48-49, 80-81

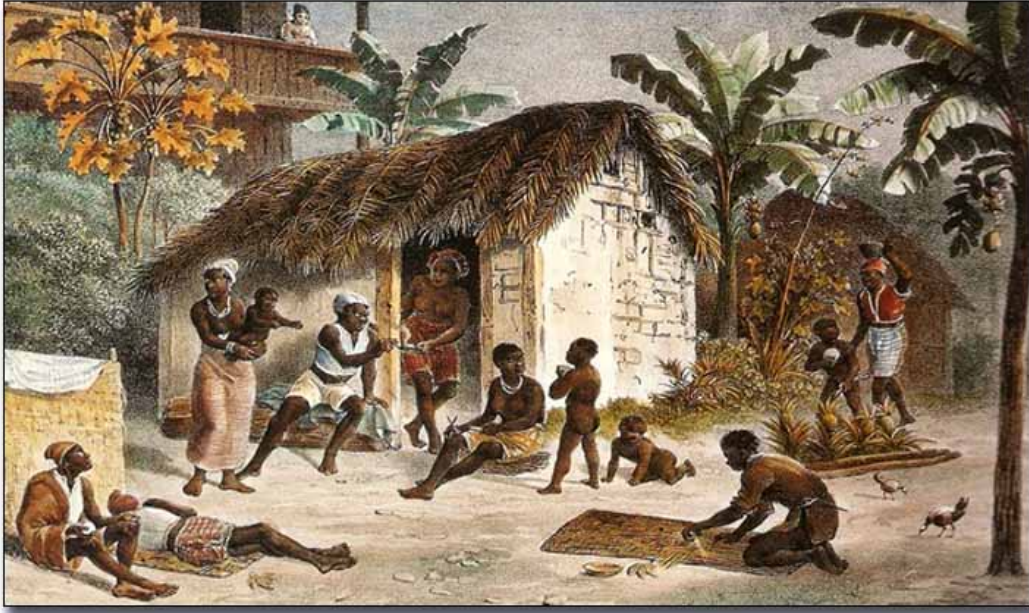
*I hope that I can save  
my grandchildren, but  
times have changed so  
fast that they have left  
me behind...I am  
walking in the dark.*

~ Pretty Shield (1856-1944)

*This weight on her back—which is the baggage from the Indian mother, which is the baggage from the Spanish father, which is the baggage from the Anglo?*

~ Gloria Anzaldúa, *The Borderlands/La Frontera*, 82

## Liberated Zones Within the Borders of Empire



Slaves of Palmares

*Let us summon the petals  
of all the accents sometimes fratricide  
to a single rose called  
Amerindian America, Afroamerica,  
Creole America....*

~ Pedro Casaldaliga

In 1663 in the mountains of northeastern Brazil, black slaves fled to Palmares. The governor general of Brazil sent expeditions to route the dissenters, to no avail. The Portuguese sent twenty-three expeditions against Palmares and failed to crush them. It is in Palmares that the many “petals” of language and custom become a “a single rose.”

Palmares remained dangerous memory, the place of resistance and new culture, black culture, the culture of the Quilombos, those escaped blacks who formed settlements in the mountains

and jungles of Brazil. The culture which they made was mix of many different languages, cultures, and national identities.

As a precursor to the slave revolts of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, Palmares symbolizes the formation of an autonomous “state” within empire. Only one slave revolt, however, became a sovereign national power. The Haitian revolution, led by Touissant l’Ouverture and Dessalines, embodied the struggle for freedom and rights epitomized in the French revolution. But the Haitian revolution added a historical depth lacking in the French revolution. It was led by slaves. Such a fire threatened to spread.

The tragic counterrevolution which followed reduced the island to isolation, savage poverty, and rule by brutal dictators. Yet the spirit of resistance rises from the ashes of history. A new leader, devoted to the impoverished majority, has given the people hope. On his presidential inauguration day Jean Betran Aristide invited the masses into the palace for a banquet.

President Aristide, a Catholic priest who the people called “our Liberator,” moved throughout the courtyard offering the Haitian poor an inaugural meal as a sign of his desire to serve the people.

Aristide’s uncompromising defense of the poor masses so angered the elites and military that he was captured and exiled in October 1991. The generals soon learned that they country might be ungovernable. Resistance remains clandestine, wily, and massive. The people do not forget the revolutionary priest who believed in them, who believed that the poor of Haiti are its future. So they wait as their ancestors waited for the tight moment. They will fill the years with sabotage, defiance, underground organizations, secret cods, and memory. They will remember Aristide as they remember l’Ouverture. Poet Ntosake Shage calls on leaders’ l’Overture, Petion, and Dessalines to observe the suffering of the people:

*can you satand it Dessalines?  
can you stand it Petion\l’Ouverent?  
can you stand these children  
with the red eyes and Dacron brassieres for sale.....*

*will you come again\some of you  
sweep through the alleys and the stink\come here  
with yr visions  
l’liberte l’egalite l’fraternite.  
come visit among us that we might know  
again/some hope.*

~ Ntosake Shange, “A Black Night in Haiti, Palais National, Port au Prince,” *A Daughter’s Geography*, 33-34



L'Ouverture, Petion, Dessalines can never, of course, return. But the spirit of their resistance can. It is the memory of that spirit that Shange calls upon. This book has sought to remember the l'Ouverents' of history. But the book's dedication is to those anonymous masses that make such liberators possible. Those nameless peasant, slaves and workers are the spiritual and material forces that drive history. Shange calls upon the spirit of Haitian revolutionaries to return. But it is, and it was, the peoples' spirit of resistance which will determine the struggle for justice, not an individual leader. L'Ouverture cannot return. Aristide can. The people say he'll come again. They'll see to it.

## **Mass of the Quilombos**

*We are coming from the depths of the earth,  
We are coming from the bosom of night,  
Of the flesh under the lash we are made  
We have come to remember.*

*We are coming from death out at sea,  
We are coming from the packed holds of ships;  
We are heirs of melancholy  
We have come to weep....*

*We are coming from the old slave quarters,  
We are coming from the new favelas;  
We are the outcasts of the world  
We have come to dance.*

*We are coming from the land of the quilombos,  
We are coming to the beating of drums;  
We are the new Palmares*

We have come to struggle.

~ Pedro Casaldaliga, *In Pursuit of the Kingdom*, 67-68

## **So That You May Not Forget**

Dedicated to Miguel, a Baptist minister killed with three others in El Salvador on November 15, 1989.

*You tried to rip out the roots of my life.  
One time, ten times, a thousand times, a million times.*

*To erase me from the earth  
so as not to leave traces of my existence.  
But today I am more alive than when you killed me.*

*I give you back your death  
so that you will always carry it like a shadow  
that does not allow you to forget—  
that the bread you raise to your mouth  
is the bread that was paid for with the sweat of our workers;  
the coffee that delights you  
you took from campesinos blood;  
the latest fashion that you wear  
you robbed from women who worked long hours.*

*Because of your luxury, billions of my brothers and sisters  
were left without food, without sleep,  
without rest, without schools.*

*When you sleep, may you draw in your dreams  
the faces to be disappeared  
the pain of their children  
the bodies you mutilated  
and the tortures you designed.*

*I give you back your death.  
Because today I am more alive than when you killed me.*

~ Salvadorean refugee, Secudino Ramirez

*They plucked our fruit, they cut our branches, they burned our trunk, but they could not kill our  
roots.*

~ Committee of United Campesinos, Guatemala

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## Culture: Post-reading Strategies



Mural section by Diego Rivera

### Reflecting on *Dangerous Memories*

The title of this book is *Dangerous Memories*. What are some of the memories included in the book thus far that you consider being dangerous?

- To whom are they dangerous?
- How did those in power seek to erase or distort those memories?
- What are some “dangerous memories” or “dangerous ideas” that exist today?
- Do you see any similar erasures or distortions happening today?

### Reflecting on Culture: A Preliminary Discussion

Culture provides a background to the world in which we live. This chapter of *Dangerous Memories* presents the evidence, the story of the manipulation and annihilation of that background for millions of people in this hemisphere in the five hundred years since Columbus. The cultural context of some people’s lives have been painted over, and integrated with or subsumed by the more dominant culture. The cultural backgrounds of some people’s lives are visible now only to them.

This chapter looks at the impact of this sometimes subtle and sometimes blatant war against culture. To prepare for reading, reflect on the meaning of the following terms: culture, dominant culture, “minority” culture, subculture, popular culture, and multicultural. These words may often be heard, but seldom do we consider the extent to which our lives are framed by the substance of those words.

Use the following quotes to discuss what culture is (beyond the dress, the food, the customs, and the traditions) and the way that culture deeply affects all of us. Begin to consider the issue of imposition of culture and the whole question of the ethics of a “dominant” culture in a hemisphere such as this one.

As you read this chapter, begin to analyze the way in which people’s cultures and lives can be radically different and whether they can ultimately integrate without doing injustice to some.

- Should cultures be assimilated? Can they be?
- What is it to which they are being assimilated?
- What would Native Americans have to do to “fit” into the dominant society? Should they?

*If we are to achieve a richer culture, rich in contrasting values, we must recognize the whole gamut of human potentialities, and so weave a less arbitrary social fabric, one in which each diverse human gift will find a fitting place. (Margaret Mead)*

*Until he [sic] has become fully human, until he learns to conduct himself as a member of the earth, he will continue to create gods who will destroy him. (Henry Miller)*

North American civilization is one of the ugliest to have emerged in human history, and it has engulfed the world. Asphalt and exhaust fumes clog the villages....This great, though disastrous, culture can only change as we begin to stand off and see...the inveterate materialism which has become the model for cultures around the globe. (Arthur Charles Erickson)

## **Worldview: What is It? What is my Worldview?**

Most people recognize different cultural practices, habits, customs, languages, art forms, food preparations, celebrations, dress styles, and physical appearance. What is more difficult to observe is cultural worldview which contains cultural values, the deeper expressions of culture. Worldview cannot be seen because it is held in mind and heart. Worldview is a framework through which we see the world and the perspective with which we interpret the world.

Our own cultural worldview is often partially hidden from our conscious awareness because our world perspective appears to us as “natural,” as a universal point of view. Thus different worldviews are seen as wrong, aberrant, exotic, cute, unscientific or the like. To be challenged by another worldview requires an ability to see our own worldview and to recognize different cultural perspectives. The key to examining cultural perspectives is history.

As an exercise before you read this chapter, consider your own beliefs and viewpoints regarding some of the concepts listed on the following page. To do this think about how you would define each area and how something you do is connected to that definition. For example, I might think of time as linear and an evidence of that is the calendars, date and appointment books that I keep as well as expressions I use (e.g., “That event is on down the line,” i.e., “in the future). I might also think of process and progress as moving forward in one direction and from one point in time. I might also think that we go forward in time progress is inevitable and that we are more advanced now than we were fifty, five hundred, or five thousand years ago.

After you consider your own beliefs and frameworks and begin to read the chapter, be alter to the voices, stories, poetry of the indigenous and African Americans. Fill in the chart here.

<b>Concept</b>	<b>Beliefs/ Frameworks</b>	<b>Evidence/Behaviors that Indicate this Belief</b>	<b>Implications/Extensions</b>
Time	<b>Linear and lateral</b>	<b>Time logs/calendar</b>	Notions of progress and process
Space			
Human nature			
Animals & Nature			
Dreams			
Land & the Earth			
Identity as Individual vs. Community			
Community Family/Clan			
Property/ Ownership			
Body/Spirit Duality vs. Wholeness			
Power—what constitutes power?			



## Historical Research



Ghost Dance

Research a historical event, movement, or law that is of interest to you. Events that are referred to and/or highlighted in this chapter of the book include the following:

American Indian Movement	Palmares
Bureau of Indian Affairs	<i>Quilombos</i>
Commonwealth of Puerto Rico	The <i>Requerimiento</i>
<i>Encomienda</i> System	Reform Law (Le Code Noir)
Ghost Dances	Sioux Nation
Iroquois League	Wounded Knee

Consult at least two different sources. Once you have some the historical record, write the event as though you were writing fiction. Use present tense and describe the scene as though you and the reader are there. While sticking to the facts, be creative and imaginative. You can include dialogue, description of the scene, etc. Part of your research should include the dress, architecture, mannerisms of the period to give your story an authentic appeal.

### How Could It Have Been Different: A Simulation Scene

Divide into two groups. Group one should be made up of seventy-five percent of the participants. This group represents white Europeans. The other twenty-five percent are indigenous people of the Western Hemisphere.

The year is 1650.

Each group should think about their goals and aspirations and values. The following is a list to consider:

**White European Values and Goals**

Survival  
Gaining more land for agriculture  
Christianizing the Natives  
Freedom to exercise religion  
Gaining wealth and prosperity  
Trading with natives for furs and goods  
Making room for the Europeans still coming

**Indigenous Values and Goals**

Survival  
Keeping lands for hunting  
Accepting all religions  
Living in harmony with nature  
Sharing with community  
Trading with whites for cloth, guns and other machine-made items  
Sharing with others the goods of the land

Both groups are deeply religious. The indigenous believe in the Great Spirit who has given them this land. They do not believe it can sold. The settlers are Puritans who believe that they were sent here by God to Christianize the heathen. They believe that they are to found a “city on a hill” that will be a “beacon to the world.” If they fail in this mission God will eternally punish them.

A disagreement between the two groups has arisen. The indigenous people are complaining that the Europeans are settling on their land. Those settlements are destroying and scaring away the wildlife that they indigenous depend on for their food. The whites, on the other hand, say they have to find new land in order to feed the extra people who have been coming, fleeing the persecution in Europe and looking for a new way of life.

A negotiation session has been arranged. Each group must decide what they want from the negotiations, who will represent them and how the session will be organized. The leader can interject new developments as the negotiations continue such as:

- A boat load of five hundred new settlers has just arrived from England.
- Word has reached the negotiation session that a group of white settlers were killed by another tribe of natives (not included in this particular negotiations).

After the role play, debrief both groups:

- Discuss both feelings and thoughts about what happened.
- Was the solution reached a satisfactory one?
- Would a satisfactory resolution have been possible in reality?
- Did such meetings ever take place?

## **Authors of Dangerous Memories**

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Many individuals participated in the production of this book. The authors want to thank them for their help while acknowledging that any errors are our own.

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