

Sacred Objects and Sacred Places

Preserving Tribal Traditions

Andrew Gulliford

Living Tribal Cultures

It was our custom for the old people to instruct the children. That was not like the learning of today, but it was what we needed for living in this world. I paid attention to what the old people said.

—YELLOW WOLF, Nez Perce

Closing these ceremonial dances is a tough situation because our philosophy says we welcome everyone because that is the Hopi way. We have been an open community and an open society for a long time, but we've become such a focus of attention and curiosity that we're being exploited. The hard message of these closures is to let the public know that the Hopis plea for some level of sensitivity.

—LEIGH J. KUWANWISIWMA, Hopi Cultural Preservation Office

Native Americans continue to gain pride in their tribal roots. Cultural goals include protecting sacred objects and sacred places, but there are other pressing needs, as well—health care, full employment, adequate housing, and educational opportunities on and off reservations. Although over half of all American Indians today live in urban settings or away from reservation lands, Indian culture thrives and evolves within the framework of fixed traditions and the revival of ancient ceremonies. A younger generation now recognizes elders as tradition bearers, and maintaining culture has become essential to the health of tribal peoples.

Demographically, native peoples enjoy high birthrates and a very young population compared to the rest of the United States. At Zuni, New Mexico, over half the tribal population is now under the age of thirty, making the transfer of cultural traditions and values a critical issue. What does it mean to be an Indian at the turn of the twenty-first century? And more important, what does it mean to be a Shoshone, Arapaho, Hochunk, Miwok, Zuni, or member of any other tribe with federal recognition? And what about the tribal peoples who do not have federal recognition, such as the Lumbee of North Carolina and other eastern groups?

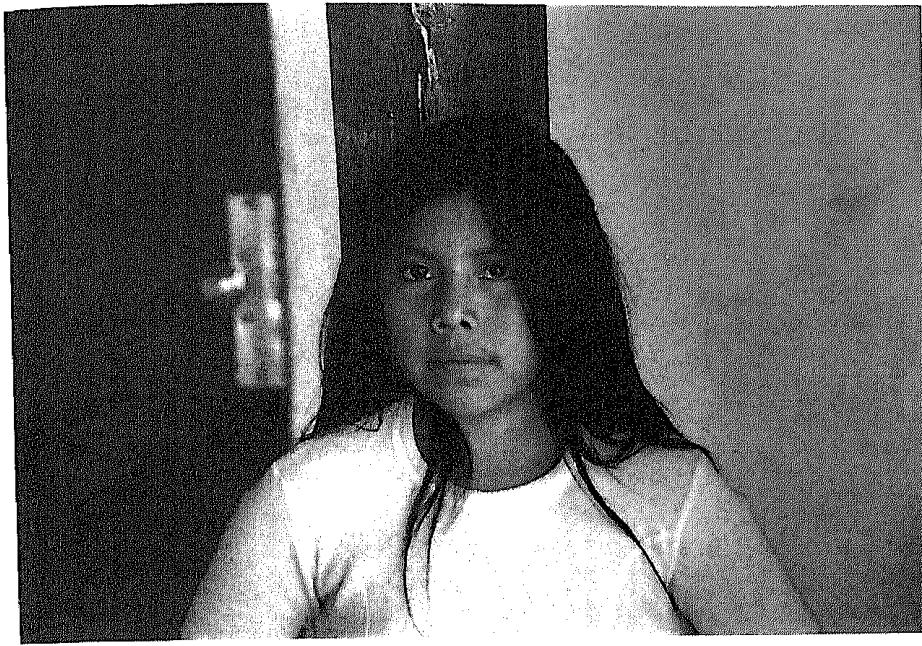
East of the Mississippi River, for those Indians who survived the waves of pandemic diseases and the historic onslaught of colonists and later settlers, their blood became mixed with that of other peoples, and farmers took native lands long ago. Yet Indian ties and traditions remain strong. Despite hardships, culture and traditional values have been passed down among the eastern Indians who hid from President Andrew Jackson's armies in the 1830s and did not travel on the Trail of Tears.

In the East, a large number of the Indians who stayed are displaced Choctaw, Chickasaw, and the ever-present Cherokee. Many of these people are not well integrated into the American economic system, and at times, they live a marginal existence, yet they feel bound to the land of their ancestors and determined to prevent the desecration of Indian graves. They hope to rekindle ceremonies and traditions. Alienated from the larger society but needing to find work in the nonnative world, urban Indians re-create their own traditional communities and seek to become culturally self-sustaining. When asked about their presence in public meetings over issues concerning prehistoric Indian villages or sacred sites, they quietly respond, "We are here. We have always been here, and we will always be here."

In their struggle for legitimacy, landless eastern Indians seek to learn and transmit the old ways as part of their personal identity. In Tennessee, for instance, there may be 10,000 enrolled tribal members living in the state, but another 25,000 individuals consider themselves culturally affiliated with Native Americans and claim, but cannot prove, Indian heritage. Displaced themselves, contemporary Native Americans vow to prevent further displacement of Indian graves and removal of their dead. Protecting the ancestors constitutes a very real part of being Indian today.

Issues of Indian Identity

At the beginning of the twenty-first century, the issue of American Indian identity remains hotly contested. Accurate genealogical records can be very important for tribal membership. Some tribes require that their members have at least one-fourth Indian blood; others, such as the Cherokee and Chippewa, consider one-eighth Indian blood acceptable. Recently, the Osage Nation of Oklahoma decided by a 60 percent vote to broaden its membership and include anyone with ancestors on the 1906 enrollment rolls. Ironically, these are the same membership rolls that were originally used to assimilate and Americanize Indians during the land allotment process following passage of the Dawes Act of 1887. But as Jacob John Folstrom, an enrolled member of the White Earth Reservation at White Earth, Minnesota, wrote about blood quantum, or the percentage of Indian blood in people who claim Indian descent, "Is it not the emphasis on strong family ties that distinguishes the Indian Nation from other more materialistic nations? Has this not always been



Preserving tribal traditions sustains native identities, which enables Indian children to better cope with the larger, nonnative world. This young Tohono O'odham girl attended school at San Xavier, Arizona. Photo by author, March 1981.

a source of Indian pride?" He stated, "I believe it is the traditional honoring of all family members through the generations that has helped play a significant role" in Indian survival. "Lesser nations would have collapsed and disappeared."¹

As Devon A. Mihesuah suggested, "How Indianness is defined by American Indians and non-Indians, who claim to be Indian and why, and the anxieties among multiheritage Indians are complex historical and present day issues." "Because of assimilation, acculturation, and intermarriage with non-Indians," she said, "American Indians have a variety of references to describe themselves: full-blood, traditional, mixed blood, cross-blood, half-breed, progressive, enrolled, unenrolled, re-Indianized, multiheritage, bicultural, post Indian," or they can use their tribal name.²

Some Native Americans drift across the country from one urban area to another in search of opportunity and jobs they cannot find at home. Thousands of Indians reside in Denver, Dallas, St. Louis, Chicago, and Nashville. Though they live far from sacred sites on tribal lands, they nevertheless feel a deep need to connect with tribal traditions, which they do at powwows, feasts, ceremonies, and giveaways. Young Indians today learn eagle dancing, girls' fancy dancing, hoop dancing, and the Grass Dance. Native attendance continues to increase at the Navajo Nation Fair at Window Rock, Arizona, the Indian Market in Santa Fe, New Mexico, the White Mountain Apache Fair and Rodeo at Ruidoso, New Mexico, the Treaty Days Pow-Wow at Fort Washakie, Wyoming, and the All-Iroquois Indian Festival at Cobleskill, New York, to name just a few Indian ceremonials. Powwows appear to unify roles in Indian life, but scholar Mark Mattern argued that they also represent "a public arena for negotiation of differences and disagreements," which "contributes to the resiliency and flexibility of Indian communities by

Native Americans who travel the powwow circuit performing traditional dances frequently go to Nashville, Tennessee, and other cities where non-Indian visitors appreciate their dances. Photos by author, October 1992.



helping manage the tension between unity and diversity.”³ Unfortunately, however, attending large, public Native American gatherings such as powwows does not end troubles at home.

Compared to a national average of 6 percent unemployment, the rate of unemployed Indians averages 38 percent, and at some reservations, the rate can be as high as 65 percent.⁴ The suicide rate for fifteen- to twenty-four-year-old Native Americans is double that of any other American group, and 45 percent of Indian mothers have their first child before the age of twenty. Indians die younger than any other segment of the American population, and the alcoholism rate for Native Americans between fifteen and twenty-four years of age is seventeen times the rate for other Americans. Homicide is the second leading cause of death among Indians fourteen years and younger, and chronic unemployment combines with a high violent crime rate.⁵ On the vast Navajo Reservation, which sprawls across four states, the average annual per capita income is only \$6,600.

White Shamans and “Wanna-be” Indians

Clearly, tribal peoples remain in turmoil. The return to “tradition not addiction” and the need for psychic balance represent powerful incentives to seek a spiritual path via the old ways. Nonnatives’ fascination with native religious ways and whites who “wanna be” Indians complicate the issue for Indians trying to learn ancient ceremonies and pass on traditions. Native peoples laughingly call these people the “wanna-be” tribe, but such spiritual seekers have a tremendous impact on sacred sites, on the work and role of shamans, and on the ability of tribes to keep and maintain their privacy.

Tribes deeply resent the use of their ancient traditions by white shamans and authors who claim to have inside knowledge of tribal traditions. “What the New Age seekers view as borrowing, some American



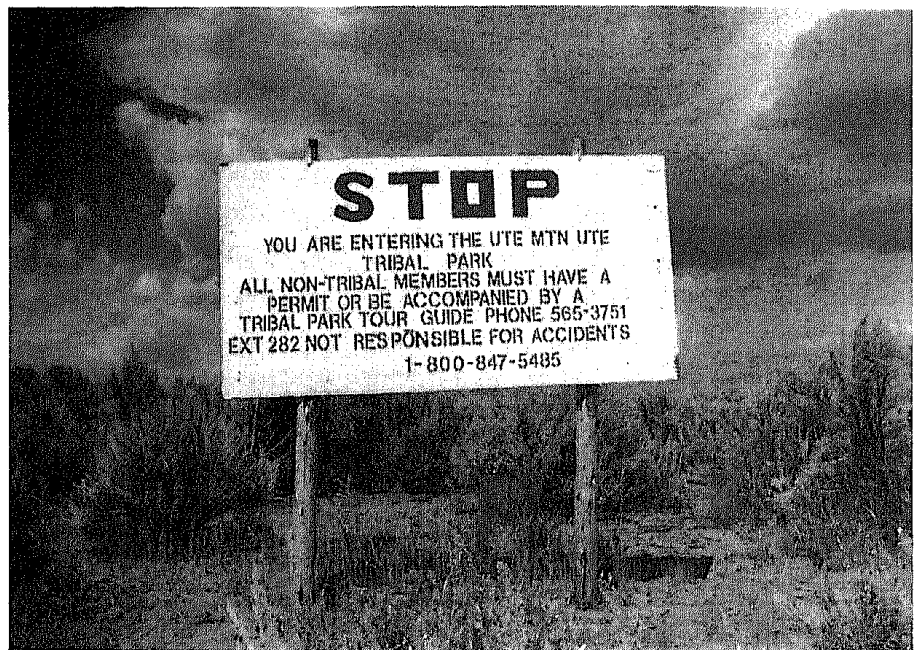
Indian leaders view as appropriation or downright thievery,” wrote Bonnie Coffin-Glass. “The National Congress of American Indians adopted a ‘declaration of war’ against ‘non-Indian wannabes, hucksters, cultists, commercial profiteers and self-styled New Age shamans’ who exploit, abuse or misrepresent American Indians’ sacred traditions and spiritual practices,” she noted.⁶ But misuse of religious traditions is not limited to whites. Because of a growing interest and potential cash market among middle-class seekers of spirituality, Native Americans have also misrepresented themselves.

Indian Country Today headlined lengthy articles on “The Selling of the Sun Dance” in South Dakota, where thirty whites participated in the sacred Sioux dance after each paid a hefty \$5,000 fee.⁷ On the Navajo Reservation, fake healers or chanters have induced families to spend excessive money on ceremonies and food preparation for a family healing event, only to find that the chanter lied. An elderly woman complained she had given \$200 to a fake chanter for a Blessingway Ceremony to heal an ill family member, but the so-called medicine man’s closing chant rang false, and he did not know the entire ritual. The woman sought help. “What she wanted,” explained Daniel Deschinny, secretary of the Diné Spiritual and Cultural Association, “was for us to do something for her—get her money back or take action against the man who had taken her money,” but no certification system exists for traditional healers for the Navajo or other tribes who have no way to police fraudulent healers. Young chanters must learn and memorize all elements of each ceremony, and they must do so without notebooks or tape recorders. Charlatans never complete the process because of the long and arduous apprenticeships. There is no legal recourse against fraudulent shamans.⁸

To prevent the theft of cultural information, the Hopi have closed their Katsina dances on First Mesa in Arizona to all visitors except for

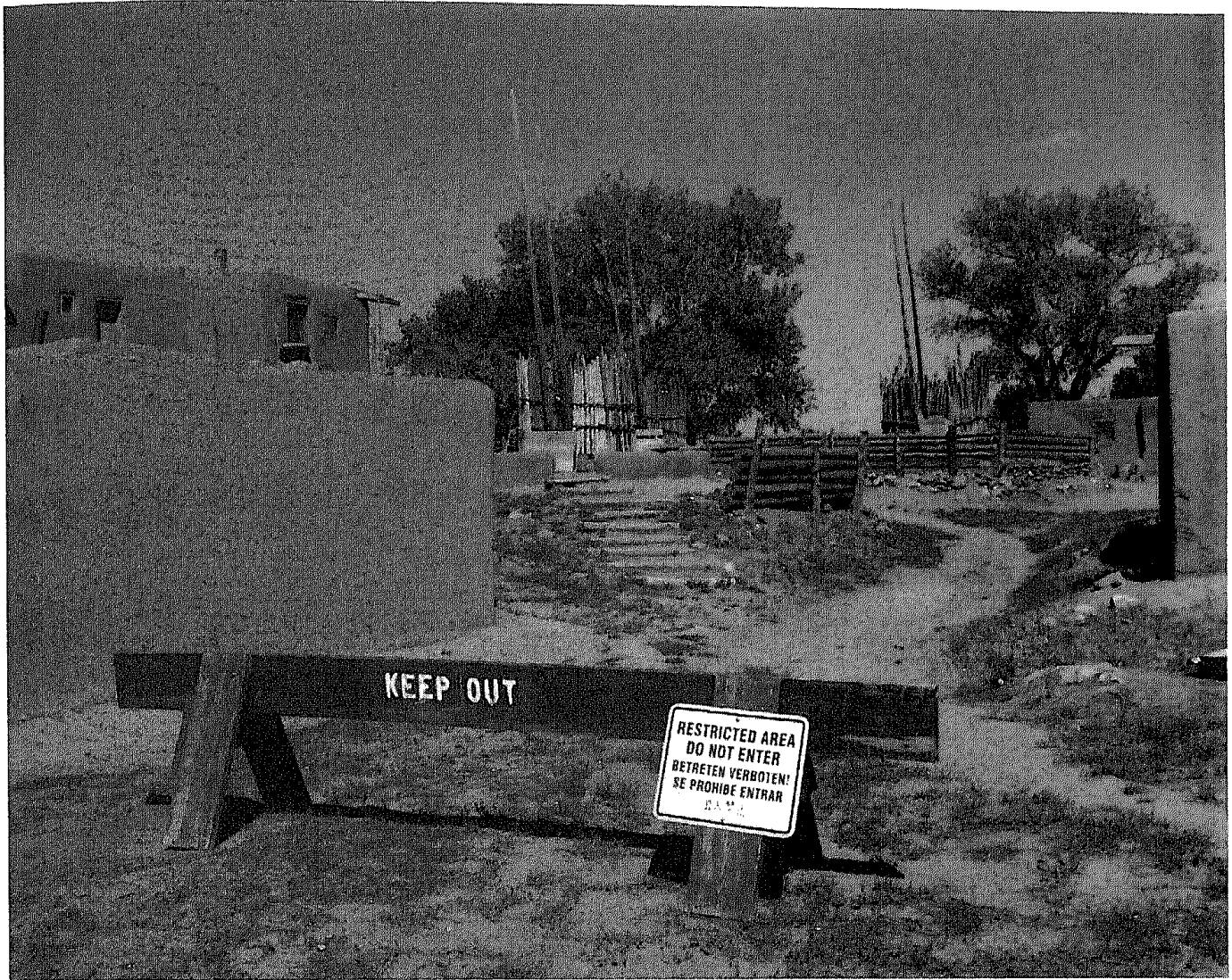


To protect sacred places at Taos Pueblo, tourists are denied access to ancient kivas still in use for religious ceremonies and initiations. Warning signs can also be found in other areas of Taos Pueblo and at Ute Mountain Tribal Park. Photos by author, September 1997.



nonnative in-laws. The Zuni have closed their winter Shalako house blessing ceremonies to non-Indians, who previously came in tour buses, rushed to the front of host houses so that local family members could not see the Shalako dancers, and behaved as pushy, inquisitive tourists instead of gracious guests.

New Age religious believers who have rejected mainstream churches and seek Indian spirituality do so without proper initiation and without tribal permission, and they sometimes steal authentic offerings left by tribal peoples. Indian religion is private and closely held. Knowledge of sacred objects and access to sacred sites is confidential information not to be shared with outsiders or even with tribal members from different clans or medicine societies.



A legal researcher in the Hopi Cultural Preservation Office, Yvonne Hoosava, remarked that people often telephone her because they want to give their businesses or their boats a Hopi name. They want phone numbers for traditional Hopi healers, and they want to know all about the Hopi religion in a few short minutes over the telephone. She sighed and explained, "To know our culture one must grow up in it. You have to live it on a daily basis. We continue to learn every day."⁹ On the Hopi Reservation, New Agers have left offerings and granules of salt, and they have strung materials up in trees. On the Coconino National Forest near Sedona, Arizona, New Agers rearrange rocks, cut boughs from trees, and make their own miniature medicine wheels, all to the chagrin of the local Forest Service employees who must repair the woods and take down the pseudoshrines.¹⁰

In Colorado, New Agers have damaged Ute Indian sacred sites by moving stones aligned centuries ago at high elevations in Rocky Mountain National Park.¹¹ An intruder on the White River National Forest near Aspen, Colorado, created a fake medicine wheel to stop expansion of a ski area. Tribal sacred sites are beset by vandals as well as misguided

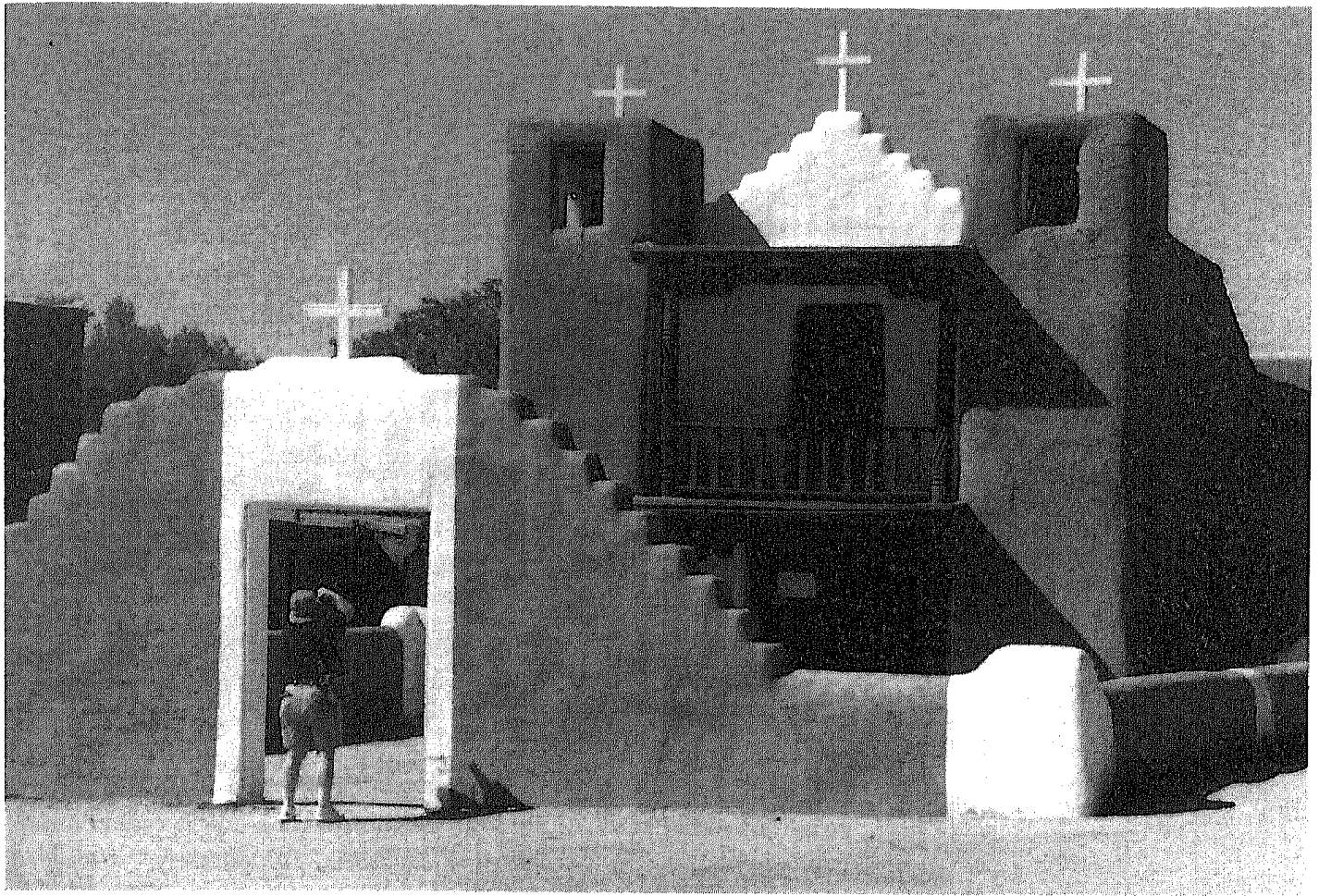
religious enthusiasts who seek to participate in medicine wheel ceremonies, sweat lodges, and vision quests. At Chaco Culture National Historic Park in New Mexico, a World Heritage Site, New Agers scattered the ashes of one of their friends in the main kiva at Pueblo Bonito during a "harmonic convergence." Navajo workers refused to go near the site to do any maintenance, and the National Park Service finally had to remove two inches of topsoil from the kiva before stabilization and preservation of the ruin could continue.

Some white Americans remain fascinated with Indians and Indian ways, and they co-opt Indian spirituality at every opportunity. At Grand Canyon National Park, the Hopi House Gift Shop of the Fred Harvey Company sells thumb-sized "medicine bags for luck." Each pouch contains seven medicine charms and a tag that reads, "The Native Americans believed that all things have a spirit or life force and that all these forces are interconnected. Each animal, stone, plant, has a special spiritual meaning. To use a medicine bag is to use the influences of nature to guide your earth walk." The eager tourist can purchase a small pouch for \$16.99, providing instant spirituality and communion with the earth. The public remains infatuated with Indian ways but does not always respect them.

At the Hopi Cultural Preservation Office in Kykotsmovi, Arizona, Hoosava explained, "We have been taught that if you see something that you leave it alone. You do not pick it up. The term is *kyaptsi*. It means respect for all mankind, insects and animals. One of our main teachings is respect." Whereas Indians understand these implicit and explicit cultural boundaries and do not cross kiva lines or ask about the affairs of other medicine societies, nonnatives, Hoosava said, "want to know because it is secret. The more secretive it is the more they want to

Tribes have problems with white wanna-be Indians and with New Age believers who create false spiritual sites, such as this fake medicine wheel on Burnt Mountain, above Snowmass Village in Colorado. The vandal created the wheel to help stop the expansion of a ski resort, but Ute Indian Kenny Frost explained that the modern alignment of the stones in a medicine wheel shape may have been built on an ancient site, thereby destroying it. Photo copyrighted by Nan Johnson.





know. Outsiders do not understand." She has tried to explain to them on the telephone: "I tell them that your people had spirituality years ago. Go back to them. You will never learn our culture in a day or two or a week. It takes a lifetime and even then you do not know it all."¹² But frequently, the nonnatives do not listen. And meanwhile, a tour company out of Sedona, Arizona, offers "The Ways of the Ancients: Tours to Sacred Lands" by Indian guides who are "Warriors of the Sacred Path."

Consequently, the Hopi, like other tribes, express concern over their intellectual property, names, songs, dances, sacred teachings, and shrines. They insist that research protocols be followed by legitimate students and scholars.¹³ Each village can decide which of the many dances to open or close, but the Snake Dances are now closed, and First Mesa is entirely off-limits for photography, audio recording, or sketching of any kind, though villagers permit walking tours. There is no fee, only a donation box. At the community center on First Mesa where the tours originate, signs proclaim "No Cameras" in six different languages.

Hopi Cultural Officer Leigh Kuwanwisiwma explained, "There are over 300 books on the Hopi and none of them have been written by a Hopi member. Much of the material is false or has been misinterpreted."¹⁴ A prominent nonnative author on Indian topics held a Phoenix, Arizona, workshop at which he charged \$150 to \$250 to teach students

Most Indian people today welcome tourists—but only in certain areas of their villages and reservations. At Taos and other pueblos in northern New Mexico, tourists pay an extra fee to use their cameras and videotape recorders, and strict rules apply. Cameras may be confiscated if tourists violate sacred ceremonies or intrude on the privacy of Indian people. Photo by author, September 1997.

how to make Hopi prayer feathers. Kuwanwisiwma became incensed with the workshop, following as it did on the heels of another debacle in which Marvel comic books depicted sacred Katsina dancers as violent marauders.

Copyrighting Culture

Like the Hopi, Apache tribes seek exclusive control over their cultural property, which means "all images, texts, ceremonies, music, songs, stories, symbols, beliefs, customs, ideas, and other physical and spiritual objects and concepts" related to Apache life, including representations of Apache culture by non-Apache. In an article titled "Can Culture be Copyrighted?" Michael Brown explained that native peoples seek their fair share of any profits from "the acquisition of native crop varieties for the genetic improvement of seeds, the transformation of traditional herbal medicines into marketable drugs by pharmaceutical firms [and] the incorporation of indigenous graphic designs into commercial products." Brown called for "urgently needed public discussion about mutual respect and the fragility of Native cultures in mass societies."¹⁵

At Zuni, the tribe has initiated its own publishing department, and, as former publications director Anne Beckett observed, "the square peg of Zuni tradition and philosophy is trying to place itself in the round hole of Western intellectual property. Zuni tradition is predicated upon collective rights, and intellectual property is based on individual rights never conceived of by Zunis." "Conversely," she added, "Zuni traditions are collectively owned in ways never conceived of by law." The issue of trademarks and copyrights creates conflicts. Beckett, a non-Indian, said, "We are forcing them to have concepts of ownership and we are breeding dissent. This is splitting families and tribes." She cautioned, "In forcing people to adapt to Western ways we are in the process of destroying something ancient and irreplaceable." Bemoaning white infatuation with Indian ideas and perspectives, she stated, "We must temper our fascination with the need to know. We really don't need to know everything about everybody. Somewhere along the line our curiosity got lethal."¹⁶

Tribal intellectual property issues include the right to plant, harvest, and distribute Indian corn. Over the millennia, Pueblo peoples have grown corn, just as tribes in the Northwest have caught salmon or harvested huckleberries, but now the rare Hopi and Zuni species of drought-resistant corn in colorful colors, including blue, are coveted and used by others. One company boldly received a "certificate of plant variety protection" for "Hopi Blue Popcorn" without Hopi tribal authorization or consent. As a result, the rights of farmers, especially Hopi farmers, to sell the seed are limited.¹⁷

A Phoenix factory manufactures Hopi Blue Corn pancake mix, and in San Francisco, Hopi Blue Corn Flakes contain a boxtop history of the Hopi agricultural way of life and the statement "Made from the blue corn



Issues of Native American cultural property include rights to songs, ceremonies, sacred sites, and ancient gardening practices. Hopi Blue Popcorn is a U.S.-protected variety of popcorn seed that was certified or patented without permission of the Hopi Tribe. Courtesy, Leigh Kuwanwisiwma, Hopi cultural officer, Kykotsmovi, Arizona.

that the Hopi ate for strength.” As Kuwanwisiwma pointed out, “Hopi society has always been an open society based on our philosophy of promoting brotherhood, sisterhood and universal community,” but those shared values may not withstand the surge of interest from outsiders.¹⁸

Nonnatives constitute one particular set of problems, but tribes also quarrel among themselves over who can and cannot make certain kinds of art for the \$.5 billion art market. Federal law specifically requires that objects sold as Indian art be made by Indians, but the legislation does not say which Indians should be the artists, so rival tribal members copy and reproduce designs or types of materials such as Katsina dolls, which represent Hopi “intellectual property.”

Even more disturbing, workers in Asian countries replicate American Indian jewelry and sell fake Navajo turquoise or Zuni pincushion silver work as authentic. An island in the Philippines has even been renamed Zuni so the jewelry can be stamped “Made in Zuni,” and imitation overlay on silver bracelets replicating Hopi designs comes from Taiwan and Korea. Laborers produce “American Indian” jewelry in Mexico, Taiwan, China, Pakistan, and Thailand.¹⁹

Despite these imitations, part of the modern Indian cultural revival includes a return to traditional arts and crafts, including basket making, ceramic pottery making, weaving, carving, mask making, and all kinds of beadwork and quillwork. Studying old designs and ancient patterns

enthalls contemporary Indian artists. Though sacred objects cannot be reproduced for sale, Indian artists reproduce old traditional crafts, making new designs for an eager buying public. Some of the best of these native artists have received National Heritage Fellowships from the Folk Arts Program of the National Endowment for the Arts. In time, their art will become cultural patrimony for their own tribes. These individuals represent living treasures for all Americans.

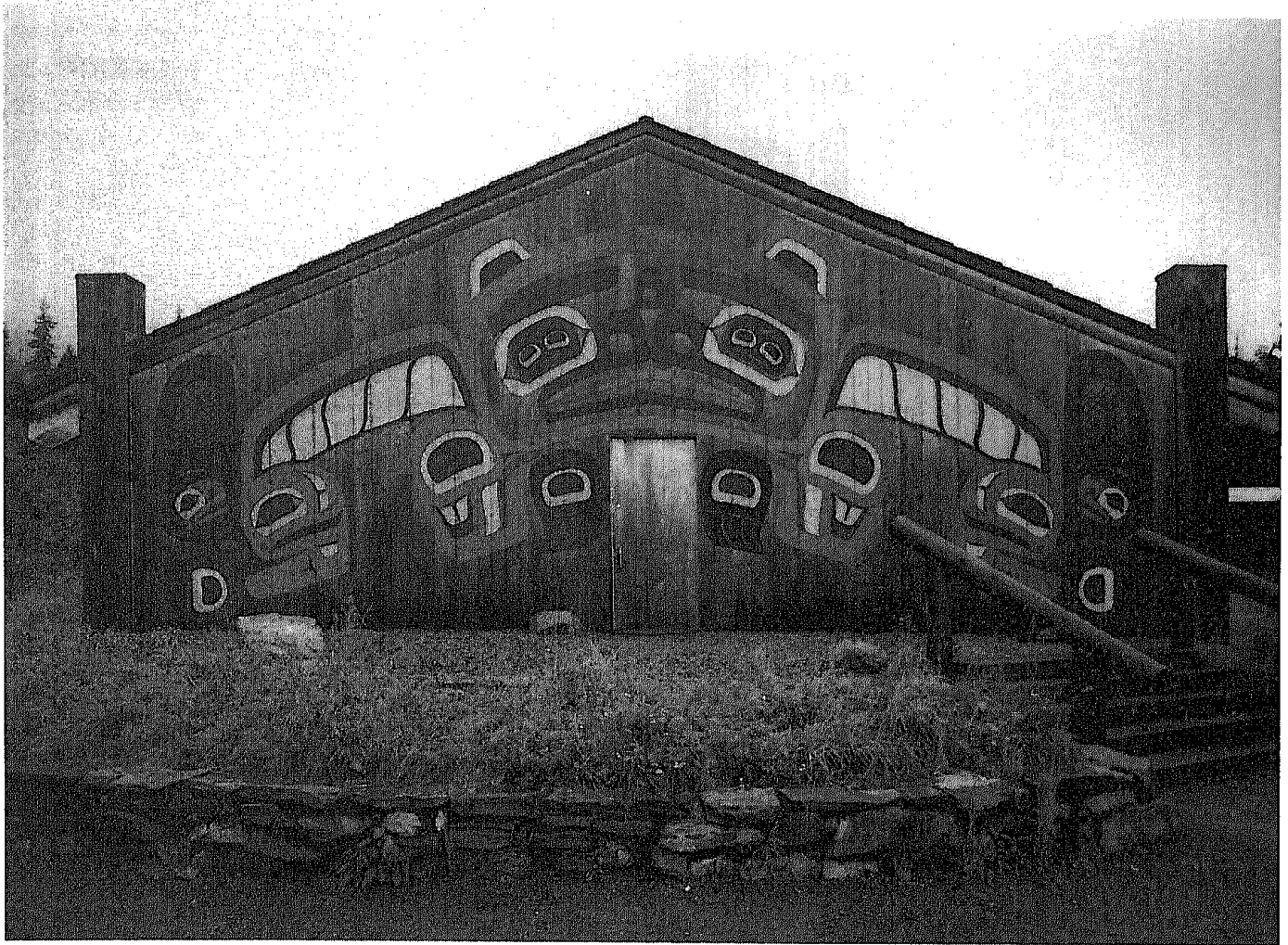
Elder Artists as Living Treasures

Award winners include Margaret Tafoya, a Santa Clara potter renowned for her unusually large pots with a dark mirrorlike finish and a bear paw design on the neck of the vessel. "It is a good luck symbol," she said; "the bear always knows where the water is."²⁰ She made only hand-coiled vessels and dug her clay from deposits on Santa Clara land. Like other Indian artists, she taught her descendants to fire their wares in open fires with natural fuels and to finish their vessels with special smoothing stones.

Clyde "Kindy" Sproat has been recognized as a master of traditional Hawaiian cowboy, or *paniolo*, music, and Chesley Goseyun Wilson is an acknowledged master of the Western Apache violin made from the dried flower stalk of the agave cactus. A member of the Eagle Clan raised on the San Carlos Reservation in the White Mountains of southeastern Arizona, Wilson practices his crafts and instructs younger Apache students in the discipline of Apache Gaan dancing and singing. He said, "My fiddle only plays Apache songs."²¹

Helen Cordero explained, "For a long time pottery was silent in the pueblo [of Cochiti]," where she comes from in New Mexico. But in the late 1950s, she and her cousin began making pottery that heralded back to ancient traditions of seated female figurines. She began to make storyteller figures of her grandfather, with small clay children attached. Just as Maria Martinez of San Ildefonso Pueblo revolutionized ceramics in her village half a century earlier, Helen Cordero took an older form and created a new art style.²²

At Haines, Alaska, Jennie Thlunaut, the last living Chilkat weaving master, told the small class of fifteen Native Alaskan weavers who apprenticed with her, "I don't want to be stingy with this. I am giving it to you, and you will carry it on." Single-handedly, she had kept the weaving tradition alive, from its Tsimshian origins to the Tlingit Chilkat blanket designs of the nineteenth century with stylized animal motifs so important for traditional potlatches and other ceremonies. Woven from mountain goat hair and the fibers of red cedar, these highly prized blankets are made for movement. As Tlingit elder Austin Hammond remarked, "The Tlingit were not writers of books. They wove their history into their garments and they wear their history on their backs." In the traditional manner, Jennie Thlunaut gave all her blankets away despite their high dollar value.²³

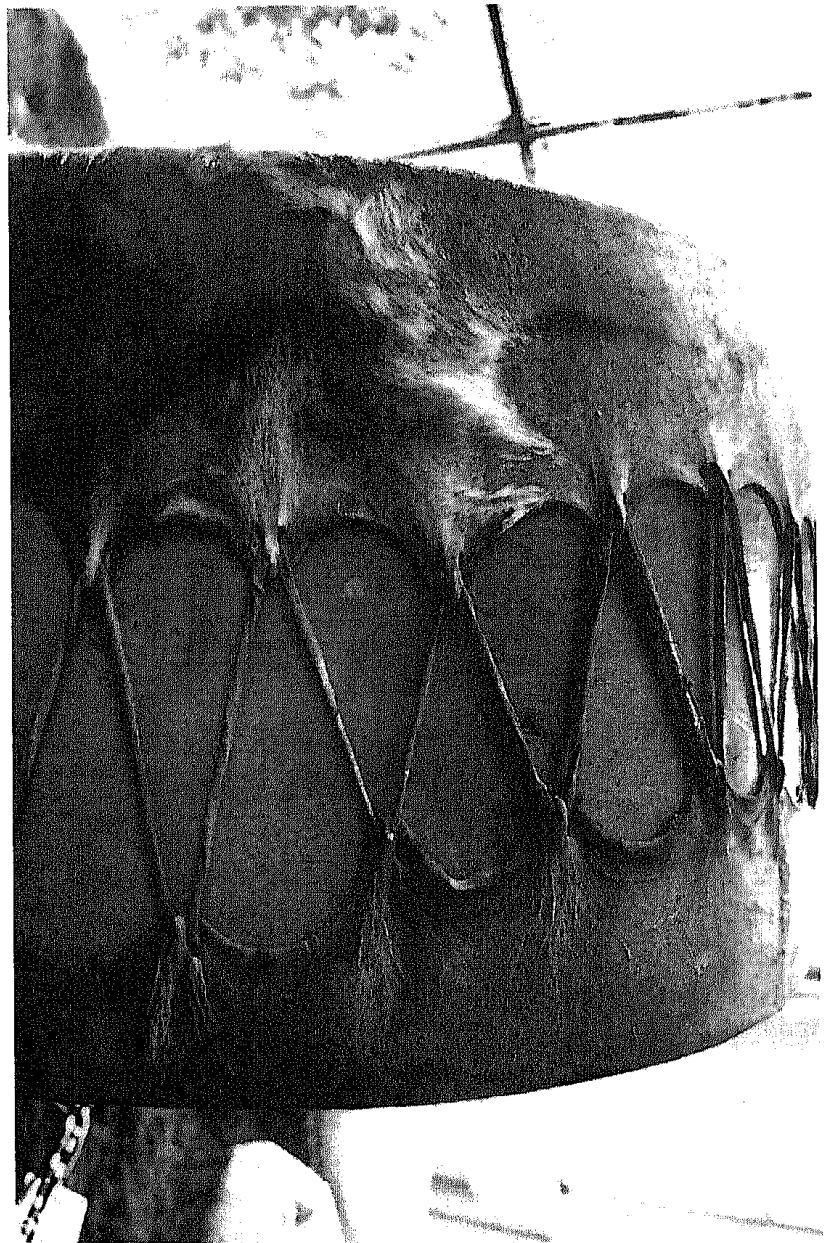
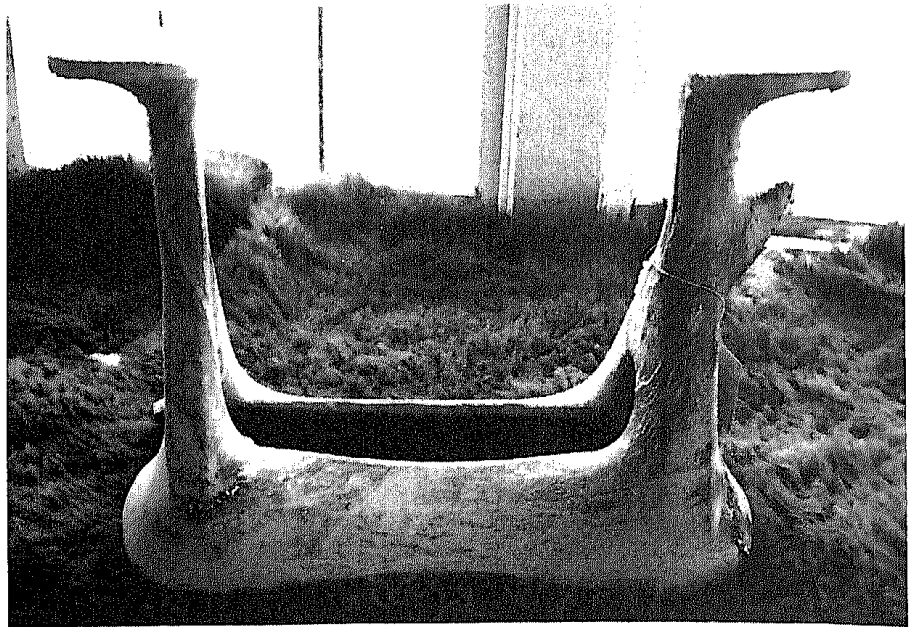


From Onamie, Minnesota, Ojibwe storyteller, craftswoman, and tradition bearer Maude Kegg has written three books on the Ojibwe or Chippewa people from her store of Ojibwe legends. Born in a bark-and-cattail mat wigwam in northern Minnesota and raised by her grandmother, she produced fully beaded traditional bandolier bags, a symbol of prestige and leadership once worn by tribal leaders. Kegg also helped to construct the large diorama of Ojibwe life through the seasons at the Mille Lacs Indian Museum.

Kevin Locke, a Hunkpapa Sioux of the Standing Rock Reservation, has preserved the Plains and Woodland Indians courting flute and the courting songs, which were almost lost. He learned from an elderly uncle who only spoke Lakota, as well as from Noah Has Horns, Ben Black Bear, and William Horncloud. Also a hoop dancer, Kevin Locke has a long-standing commitment to Plains Indian art and philosophy, and he will be part of the current generation that passes on traditions to younger apprentices.

A Yurok-Hupa from the Hoopa Indian Reservation in Hoopa Valley, California, George Blake makes the regalia worn and carried in ceremonial religious dances, including elk antler purses, white deerskin dance headdresses, and otter skin Brush Dance quivers. Formerly cura-

The ongoing indigenous cultural revival is well illustrated in this modern plank community house, which measures forty-six by seventy-five feet and was built by natives in Saxman, Alaska, in 1990. The new community house includes a carving workshop in which ancient traditions can be continued. Photo by Jet Lowe, Historic American Building Survey, National Park Service, 1991.



As part of the Indian revival, native peoples learn craft skills from elderly artisans. At the Shoshone Tribal Cultural Center at Fort Washakie, Wyoming, students in heritage classes were taught how to make cottonwood saddles and drums. Forthcoming classes will cover the ancient art of Shoshone basketry. Photos by author, May 1995.

tor of the Hupa Tribal Museum, he taught featherwork and the carving of antlers into Hupa purses and spoons. He said, "I wanted to do what the old people did . . . I can make elk antler purses and make them as different as I want . . . I mean, I could put elk on them, and all these other things and try to show skills an artist would, but I don't. I just like the way they were done a long time ago. And I just keep making them."²⁴ He has also produced the Yurok sinew-backed bow and the Hupa dugout canoe, learning skills from the last two tribal elders who knew the craft. Those men are now gone, but Blake's canoes have proven seaworthy.

The National Endowment for the Arts wrote of George Blake's contributions, "It is almost impossible now to visualize a time when, if you needed to carry something, you had to make something to carry it in; if you wanted to cook something, you had to make a pot to cook it in; or if you wanted to travel on water, you had to build a boat. That human beings can learn to solve so many problems working only with the materials of nature and the resources of the human spirit is magnificent; that they can also infuse these necessary articles with grace, elegance, and beauty is awe-inspiring." Blake learned both from elders and from meticulous library research. The NEA concluded, "George Blake has taught many lessons to his young tribal relatives in California; his example can teach the entire nation."²⁵

Nick and Elena Charles are traditional Yup'ik Eskimos from the Koskokwim Delta area of southwestern Alaska. Nick is a master carver of ceremonial masks, wooden dance fans, and utilitarian items, and Elena creates women's fancy parkas and boots, birchbark and grass baskets, and traditional dolls. As a Yup'ik mask maker, Nick Charles creates masks as the embodiment of spiritual visions essential for passing on cultural knowledge. His wife has also helped to revive Yup'ik culture, and she has reintroduced Yup'ik dance and the use of carved wooden fans in deliberate dance movements. Like so many other native artisans who are local and national masters, the couple eschews personal recognition in favor of teaching others.

They are tradition bearers similar to the Kanaka'ole sisters Nalani and Pualani from Hawai'i, who are *kumu hula*, or hula masters. The sisters practice *mele*, an inseparable combination of poetry, music, and dance that reveals the deepest of Hawaiian traditional values. Daughters of the chanter and *kumu hula* Edith Kanaka'ole, they inherited Halau 'O Kekkuhi, the hula school their mother founded in 1953, which taught not only dance movements but also Hawaiian culture. Native Hawaiians consider the sisters respected elders, or *kupuna*, in their own right.²⁶

Other traditional artisans include basket makers in Maine and California, but for those tribal peoples, personal hazards exist in perpetuating their art because highway workers frequently spray roadside grasses, and processing the stems, usually by pulling them through one's teeth, can be harmful. In the northern woods of Maine, brown ash trees needed for wood splints to weave baskets have declined both in quantity and

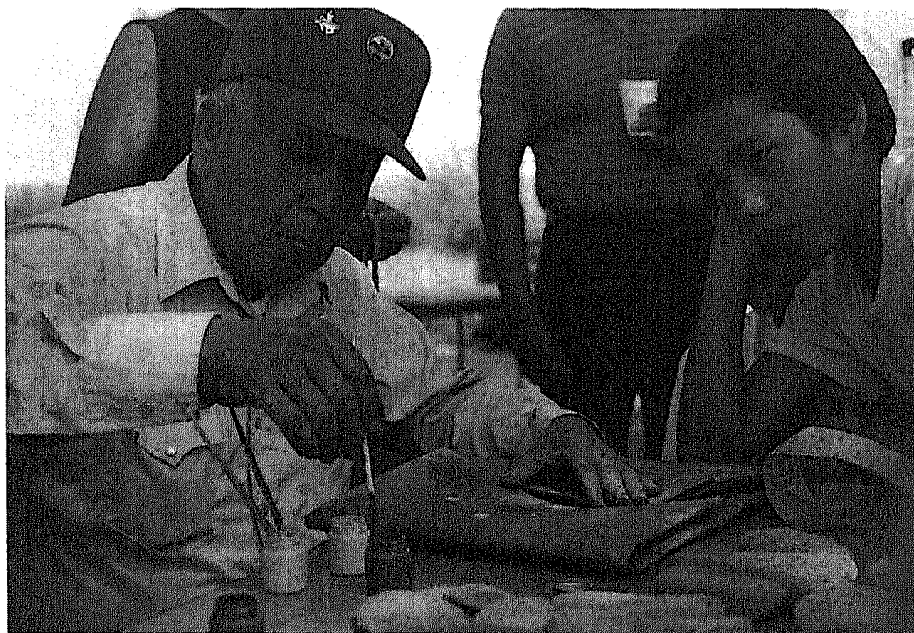
quality because of acid rain. Donald Sanipass, a Micmac basket maker, stated, "Something's killing the trees. I don't know if it's acid rain or fertilizer runoff from the farms, but the tops of trees look dead and the wood quality isn't what it used to be."²⁷ Indian access represents another problem. "It's supposed to be a tradition that any place where there is a Brown Ash tree growing, why it's yours. You don't have to ask permission," said James Tonmah, a Maliseet basket maker. "The Indians have that right."²⁸ Among basket makers, the bounty of the meadows and woods is never "owned." In Maine, Native Americans consider brown ash a resource for all to use, and men who harvest the tree for bark splints must ensure a supply for the next generation. Their gathering places are sacred.

Culture Camps for Native Children

The Indian cultural revival involves not just the craftsmanship of individual artists but also culture camps for children. A few of the Pueblo tribes scoff and say, "Our traditions are alive. We don't need to send children to culture camps. They learn in the kivas." But for other tribes, culture camps mix the old and the young in intergenerational summer settings. Children and teenagers study their native language and learn how to gather berries, shoot bows and arrows, build sweat lodges, ride horses, and process wild game. The Northern Arapaho in Wyoming have culture camps, and there have been successful camps among the Salish-Kootenai near Pablo, Montana.

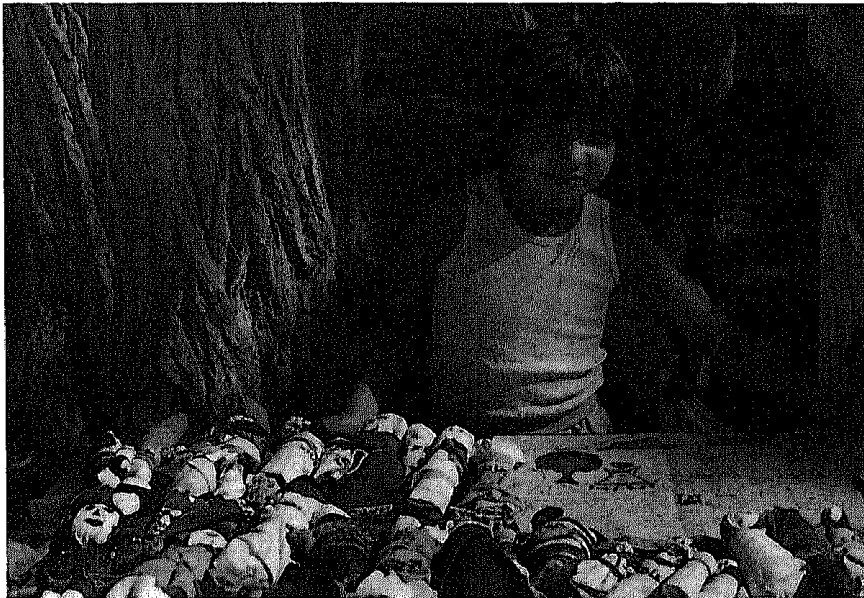
At Healthy Nations, or *Wolakota Yukini Wicoti*, a spiritual boot camp near Eagle Butte, South Dakota, troubled Lakota teens from broken families or with a history of drug or alcohol abuse begin each morning with prayers at dawn, and each week, they move tepees across the prairie to new sites. Greg Bourland, chairman of the Cheyenne River Sioux Tribe, said, "This camp is more than a camp. In a way it is the rebirth of

At the Northern Arapaho Language and Culture Camp on the Wind River Reservation in Wyoming, Richard Moss demonstrates painting on parfleche (rawhide that has been soaked to remove flesh and hair and then dried). Photo by Sara Wiles, Lander, Wyoming.





Students watch as drummers (left to right) Pat Iron Cloud, William C'Hair, and Steven Sun Rhodes play and sing traditional Arapaho songs. Singing "behind the drum" are the codirectors of the Arapaho Language and Culture Camp, Merle Haaas and Sandra Iron Cloud. Photo by Sara Wiles, Lander, Wyoming.



Jola Wallowme Bull displays "dollrags" that she and other students made. Photo by Sara Wiles, Lander, Wyoming.



Young culture camp participants practice their archery. Photo by Sara Wiles, Lander, Wyoming.

the Great Sioux Nation.”²⁹ With close to 85 percent of the Cheyenne River population between the ages of twelve and thirty-five regularly bingeing on alcohol and drugs, returning to the past may be the key to the future. Similar camps include an Inupiat kayak expedition camp near Nome, Alaska, above the Arctic Circle.

Across the country, Indian nations promote temperance and spiritual revitalization. “We call it seventh-generational thinking,” Bourland explained. “Seven generations ago, our ancestors loved us so much that we are still here as a people. We have to create a world not only for today, but for seven generations to come. The young people from this camp are going to be the messengers for the future,” and tribal leaders are trying to revive traditions.³⁰ For many American Indians, that means bringing back the sacred buffalo.

Bringing Back the Buffalo

Thirty-three tribes have joined the Inter-Tribal Bison Cooperative of Rapid City, South Dakota. Former director Mark Heckert spoke of “a deep, innate abiding respect between Indian people and buffalo. It’s a cultural relationship that goes into pre-history.” Put simply, “if there was buffalo, they lived; if there wasn’t any buffalo, they died.”³¹

After the Civil War, market hunters and, later, hide hunters killed millions of buffalo, on the southern plains and then on the northern plains, which helped to spark the Plains Indian Wars. So many buffalo disappeared so fast, the Blackfeet could not believe it. By 1883, the northern herd was virtually extinct, and baffled Blackfeet thought the earth must have opened up and swallowed all the buffalo. Eleven years later, fewer than 500 wild buffalo remained in the United States, the only descendants of herds that once numbered 50 million. The 1890s were also the apogee of life for thousands of American Indians. From a population of perhaps 4–7 million in 1492, their number had dwindled to 200,000 by 1900. In fact, Native Americans living at the turn of the twentieth century knew more people who were dead than people who were alive. But just as the buffalo have come back in strength in more recent years, so have Native Americans.

Today, the Inter-Tribal Bison Cooperative represents seven tribes in Montana and other tribes from Washington, Oregon, New Mexico, Oklahoma, Colorado, Wisconsin, Nebraska, and the Dakotas. The cooperative’s mission is “to restore bison to Indian tribes in a manner which is compatible with their spiritual and cultural beliefs and practices” without domesticating the animal. In the words of Fred DuBray, “Our refusal to join the overwhelming effort to domesticate buffalo and turn them into a mere commodity for exploitation sends a powerful message to the rest of the world. Our thousands-of-years-old relationship with buffalo must be recognized and understood as a critical part of the return of the *Pte Oyate* (Buffalo Nation).”³² Buffalo are annually harvested for ceremonies and powwows and to provide meat for the

elderly who need it. At Ethete, Wyoming, Northern Arapaho have hosted a "Bison Cultural Day" to study the relationship between the bison and the tribe, complete with language teachers and classes on how to make parfleche, or painted rawhide pouches used for carrying the meat. The highlight of one event featured seventy-one-year-old elder Lloyd Dewey, who demonstrated the use of obsidian and rose quartz knives and an old soft-steel blade knife with a pipestone handle, passed down from his wife's family. He butchered a one-ton animal within an hour using traditional methods.³³

The Cheyenne River Sioux Tribe's herd of 85 animals has grown to 800, providing a harvest of sixteen two-year-old bulls per year, with 100 percent of the meat going to the tribe. Culture camp teenagers learn the old ways of butchering and how to use all the animal's parts, even the tail. Skilled elders reshape many parts of the buffalo into sacred



Richard Powauke of Lapwai, Idaho, poses at Fort Vancouver, Washington, with an Appaloosa resplendent in traditional beadwork. For centuries, the Nee-Me'-Poo (or Nez Perce) bred these horses, but the Indian wars of the nineteenth century caused them to lose control of the breed. The Nez Perce Horse Registry has been established to create a new breed for the twenty-first century that will combine the strength, agility, and colors of the spotted Appaloosas with Akhal-Teke horses from Turkmenistan. These sturdy animals are excellent desert horses that can survive with very little water. From 12 purebred Akhal-Teke mares, colts, and stallions, Nez Perce horse breeders have created 130 horses of this new breed. The tribe will also be starting its own buffalo herd. Photo by author, May 1999.

objects, especially the skull, an essential element of the Sun Dance. The Sacred Buffalo Hat, made from the skin of a buffalo cow's head, represents female spiritual power. When the Lakota kill a buffalo, they know the animal has given them the gift of life, so they sing to release the bison's soul to the spirit world so the animal can be reborn and the life cycle continued. As Ron Goodman, a professor at Sinte Gleska University in Mission, South Dakota, explained, "We are in the process of healing spiritual wounds. The return of buffalo is a crucial part of that process."³⁴

Because consumers consider free-roaming bison a healthy alternative to grain-fed beef, the bison's market value has risen dramatically. The cost of purchasing bison can be prohibitive, so tribes receive surplus bison from national parks such as Wind Cave National Park, Chickasaw National Park, and Theodore Roosevelt National Park, as well as from national wildlife refuges such as Sully's Hill National Game Preserve and Wichita Wildlife Refuge. Members of the Crow Tribe in Montana raise 1,100 head of bison, and the Arapaho on the Wind River Reservation in Wyoming have cared for a few head, but Indian cattle ranchers, fearful of brucellosis (a contagious disease that causes domestic cattle to abort), have opposed introducing more buffalo to traditional ranges along the Wind River and Owl Creek Mountains. Other tribes, such as the Devils Lake Sioux Tribe of North Dakota, know *Tatanka*, the Sioux word for buffalo, as the great provider, and they hope to replace cattle with bison on tribal lands. Among the Winnebago Tribe of Nebraska, students at local schools have developed an Adopt-a-Bison Program to learn respect for buffalo at an early age and to perceive the herd as part of the tribal family.

Saving Tribal Languages

Though bison reintroduction programs can only occur where tribes own sufficient acreage, every native group in the United States is concerned about passing culture on through language, which holds the key to tribal identities and worldviews. But most native children now grow up speaking English. The older generation, raised to think and speak in native tongues, declines in numbers yearly. At La Push, Washington, on the western edge of the Olympic Peninsula, for example, only three women still speak Quileute because when the government forced Indians onto reservations a century ago, many left home to find work and English was the language of survival off the reservation.

For several tribes, only a handful of native speakers remain, and tribal officials race to record and transcribe their elders' words in order to introduce young children to the language of their grandparents. Among the Ojibwe in northern Minnesota, only 200 of the 3,000 tribal members are native speakers, all of whom are over the age of forty-five. Marie Smith is the only remaining native speaker of Eyak, a traditional language of Indians in southern Alaska. When she passes on, the language

of an entire people will pass with her. Among the Mashpee Wampanoag Tribe from Massachusetts, the native language has been lost, and the Wikchamni language from northern California will die out in the current generation.

"Less than half of the 500 languages present when Columbus stepped ashore have survived the reservation and boarding school periods. Of these less than 50 could be considered linguistically healthy today," according to Tom Webster, writing in defense of Indian bilingual education. He explained, "A human language is a window into the soul and is a deep pool of knowledge about a given culture."³⁵ Highly descriptive, with precise nuances for naming places, textures, weather, and events, most Indian languages utilize long, multisyllabic words, which are hard to learn if one's first language is English. Indian words can be as long as English sentences and Indian sentences can be as long as paragraphs in English because tribal speech builds on word stems to include suffixes that determine action, time, gender, location, and information about the speaker. Children easily learn languages, but many young Indian parents do not know their native tongue and cannot pass it on to their children. So what was once informally learned at home and in the natural world must now be structured into programs and community center classrooms like those of the Osage Tribe, which has only ten members left who speak fluent Osage.

Tribal sovereignty includes linguistic self-determination, yet only about 200 indigenous languages precariously survive in the United States. As Jared Diamond noted, "Linguists face a race against time similar to that faced by biologists, now aware that many of the world's plant and animal species are in danger of extinction." He said, "Each language is indissolubly tied up with a unique culture, literature (whether written or not), and worldview, all of which represents the end point of thousands of years of human inventiveness. Lose the language and you lose most of that as well."³⁶

Indian culture has traditionally been passed down orally, with language serving as a storehouse of craft, culture, and religion. Elders muse that what is written is forgotten, but what is spoken is remembered, often for generations. "We need our land and we need our language," stated Dick Littlebear, a Northern Cheyenne educator. "The two are inseparable. . . . There are references to the land that can be articulated only in the Cheyenne language. I believe that once those sacred references can no longer be expressed, the Northern Cheyennes will start viewing the land much as the dominant culture views it. These vital links will no longer exist in the tribal consciousness."³⁷

In trying to stop erosion of their languages, tribes have initiated language-retention programs. Language committees certify tribal members qualified to speak and teach effectively. The Pascua Yaqui, Tohono O'odham, Arapaho, Shoshone, Northern Ute, Southern Ute, the Red Lake Band of Chippewa, Zuni, and Navajo have all begun extensive

language training for their young children, complete with workbooks, textbooks, and even interactive computer programs. The language policy and education code of the Red Lake Schools states, "The Chippewa language is a gift from the Creator to our people and, therefore, shall be treated with respect. Our ancient language is the foundation of our cultural and spiritual heritage without which we could not exist in the manner that our Creator intended."³⁸ Congress passed the Native American Language Act of 1992, agreeing in principle to support and preserve tribal tongues, but few federal funds have been made available for such efforts.

Isolated tribes have preserved native speech more easily than other tribes, but factionalism often exists over what, when, where, and by whom things should be taught. Albert Alvarez explained that for the Tohono O'odham, "I felt that was the most important thing we have, the language. As long as it's alive, it's a part of us, it's our life. [It expresses] that respect when we see mountains, when we see trees, when we see anything that grows—we don't just go and start chopping it down for our own satisfaction. When we lose that, we're just walking in the dark, trying to search our way around."³⁹ To lose a native tongue is to think only in English and thus miss the cultural and place connections embedded within the web of generations of experience.

At the far northwest corner of Washington State, the Makah Tribe, with 1,000 residents, instills its language and cultural stories into the lives of children, but only about twelve tribal members truly know Makah. The youngest of those speakers, Helma Ward, was seventy-four years old in 1992. The Makah actively practice tribal historic preservation. For the National Register of Historic Places, they nominate campgrounds, fishing banks, rock outcroppings, petroglyphs, and other sites, but "none of these facets of their culture can be fully understood and appreciated outside of the context of language," in the opinion of journalist Kim Keister. "Our language teaches us how to think like Makahs. To feel like Makahs. To live in Makah ways," Helma Ward said. "When we are out in a boat, we see the same things our grandparents saw if we know the language."⁴⁰

From Tall Trees to Coastal Canoes

Just as Plains tribes bring back the buffalo, coastal Indians remake war canoes from tall cedar trees found deep in forest groves. Centuries ago, Makah traveled the Pacific coast in eight-man, thirty-two-foot dugout canoes, searching for gray and killer whales. All the coastal tribes—the Quinault and Quileute, the Chinook and Clatsop, the Klallam, Skagit, Lummi, Duwamish, and Chehali—used dugout canoes to harvest bounty from the sea, dozens of estuaries, and the Columbia River. The art of dugout canoe making was almost lost, but under the guidance of Emmett Oliver of the Quinault Nation, the tribes carefully crafted new canoes from 600-year-old cedars cut from national forests. Because

of the canoe's spiritual and religious significance, Indians cut the ancient trees under provisions of the 1978 American Indian Religious Freedom Act.

Most coastal canoes had become museum artifacts, but spurred by the desire to have a special Indian event for the Washington State centennial, coastal tribes and religious leaders united to revive an ancient art and to teach young men the necessary teamwork needed to craft and then handle the great canoes. Because of antipathy toward celebrating Washington statehood, some tribes expressed opposition to the idea, but, Oliver said, "The appeal I made was restoration: 'If you believe what you had was good, why shouldn't you want to perpetuate it? As important as the canoe is to the native lore and way of life, can you tolerate that it may be lost forever?' And they saw the value of restoring something tangible of the past."⁴¹

The Swinomish, Upper Skagit, Nooksack, and Lummi Tribes each received two trees. Women sang and blessed the trees and explained to the cedars that they would be reborn as canoes. Just as the Plains tribes use all parts of the buffalo, for coastal peoples, the huge cedar trees provided rope, boxes, baskets, and other materials. Skilled carvers roughed out each huge tree and shaped the inside using hot rocks and steam to soften the tree. Other artists did exterior carving and special painting of animal symbols on the prows of the seaworthy vessels.

Among the Tulalip Tribe, elder Marya Moses waited in the forest for the trees to be cut. Writer Ben Smith described the scene: "As the giant tree was wedged off its balance point, it swayed slightly, stalled, and then thundered to the ground. Her arms over her head, shaking her hands, her eyes on the ground, Marya said [thanks] and then planted cedar seedlings in holes dug in the soft earth, saying, 'When we take from the earth, we must always give something back.'⁴²

The tree harvesting and canoe carving resulted in a surge of ceremonial activities, dances, feasts, and potlatches, as well as a revitalization of tribal customs, including canoe racing and the main event, the "Paddle to Seattle" across Puget Sound to make landfall and camp in a city park among supporters, friends, and relatives. Twenty tribes and forty canoes participated in the centennial race. Other associated events included salmon bakes, dances, and the singing of tribal songs.

The hand-carved, painted canoes revive old traditions, clan stories, and activities. One of the participants, Frank Brown of the Bella Bella Heiltsuk from Vancouver, British Columbia, explained, "To lose a ceremony is to lose the past; to create a ceremony is to create the future." After all the work to cut the trees, shape the canoes, practice paddling, and finally race to Seattle across Puget Sound, writer Ben Smith concluded as the day ended that "amid those canoes on the beach, there was a new spirit, but as old as the ages. The carvers, the paddlers, the elders, and the tribal members stood taller than they had for many years."⁴³

Opposition to Makah Whaling

The last Makah whaling party returned in a large war canoe in 1913, but recently, the Makah received permission from the International Whaling Commission to resume whale hunts.⁴⁴ After seven decades of not killing whales, in May 1999, from a thirty-two-foot-long cedar canoe named "Hummingbird," Makah whalers on a community hunt harpooned a thirty-foot-long, three-year-old migrating female gray whale. Intense environmental protest marred their successful hunt as the whalers faced bitter opposition from organized groups such as the Sea Shepherd Conservation Society, the Sea Defense Alliance, and the Washington Peninsula Citizens for the Protection of Whales.

This opposition to Makah whaling has an ironic twist because most nonnatives link Native Americans with environmental harmony and the balance of nature. As David Waller correctly assessed, "Environmentalists are right to reach out to American Indians, and indeed original peoples throughout the world, for help in discovering less destructive ecological ideas and practices. However, we must not accept their aid and then cause their issues and their cultures to become the first casualties in our fight against environmental irresponsibility."⁴⁵ For the Makah, a return to tradition meant virulent antagonism and personal attacks.

After having been harassed by environmental groups, who had their boats confiscated by the U.S. Coast Guard, the Makah harpooned the whale as it dived under their cedar canoe. Crew member Dan Greene explained, "The energy was so strong we could almost touch it. We were along with the whale and our creator."⁴⁶ Because the International Whaling Commission requires whale kills to be as quick and merciful as possible, after harpooning, the whale hunters fired two shots at the mammal with a .50-caliber rifle and killed it in eight minutes. As the carcass filled with water, it sank and tightened up the harpoon ropes. Then the work began, for it took eight hours to tow the thirty-ton whale back to Neah Bay for a huge potlatch and historic whale feast. For an 800-person capacity crowd in the Neah Bay High School gym, the tribe served big pots of whale meat, blubber, salmon, and other fish. Clearly, the Makah lived up to the meaning of their tribal name, which translates as "generous with food." Tribal members later deposited the skeleton in the bay to be cleaned by waves and other fish before being taken out and displayed at the Makah Cultural and Research Center.

Makah elder Ruth Claplanhoo exclaimed, "These boys have been in danger to catch the whale, and I am very proud of them."⁴⁷ Tribal chairman Ben Johnson said that the right to hunt whale, guaranteed by an 1855 treaty, had been "a long hard fight" because "anytime natives do anything, they put you under a microscope. What happened [affects] all Indians in the country. It goes beyond just Makah."⁴⁸

For Makah language teacher Maria Pascua, the successful hunt meant that theirs is "a living culture." For her students, whaling will not be

"just reading about it in books."⁴⁹ Janine Bowechop, executive director of the Makah Cultural and Research Center, observed that "it's more than a hunt for food. It gives us traditional responsibilities to carry out. It binds the community in ways missing for decades."⁵⁰

Taken off the endangered species list in 1994, gray whales now number 22,500 and regularly migrate down the Pacific coast. Moreover, returning to tradition made perfect sense to the Makah, who by law could not sell any part of the whale and whose whalers had trained physically and spiritually for months prior to the hunt. But protesters refused to understand subsistence whaling and the revival of ancient cultural traditions. Ugly letters, hate mail, bomb threats, phone calls, and vicious computer E-mail deluged the Makah Tribe, with protest letters to local papers running ten to one against the tribe's right to hunt whales. Letters to the *Seattle Post-Intelligencer* featured racist comments directed to the Makahs: "Maybe you can try just as hard at getting an education as you did training for the kill. Why don't you start a new tradition: take pride in yourselves . . . and work for a living instead of finding your courage in the death of a defenseless mammal or at the bottom of a bottle." Another letter to the editor stated, "I have a very real hatred for Native Americans now. It's embarrassing, but I would be lying if I said it wasn't the truth. What do you think will be my private thoughts deep inside my brain when a Native American drops off an application for a job with me?"⁵¹



Val Medicine Pipe, an interpreter at the Blackfeet Cultural Encampment near the Museum of the Plains Indian in Browning, Montana, proudly explains his cultural traditions. Photo by author, July 1992.

Other letters complained of the Makah as “a modernized welfare race,” and one racist Californian wrote, “I am anxious to know where I may apply for a license to kill Indians. My forefathers helped settle the west and it was their tradition to kill every Redskin they saw. ‘The only good Indian is a dead Indian’ they believed. I also want to keep faith with my ancestors.”⁵² Despite such vitriolic attacks, Makah tribal chairman Ben Johnson stated at the victory feast, “We are here, and we are here to stay, and we are going to do what the treaty says we can do, and what we have been doing for thousands of years.”⁵³ An elder member of the Bowechop family explained, “Today the Makah have brought the whale home. From this day forward we need to stand behind our leaders . . . to be a living culture.”⁵⁴ Opposition will continue against Makah whaling, but the whaling will go on. The International Whaling Commission has agreed that the Makah may harvest five whales annually. As other native peoples seek to revive traditions, even at the cost of dissension within their own communities, opposition may grow from some nonnatives who seek to stop the ongoing cultural revival.

Preserving Tribal Traditions

As Native American populations grow, as elders pass on, as tribes continue to defend their treaty rights and sovereignty, protecting sacred objects and sacred places will become even more important. For five centuries now, Indians have fought to survive and maintain their identity amidst nonnative encroachment, theft, and misguided assimilation policies. Now, Native Americans, Native Hawaiians, and Native Alaskans can help to determine their own futures, in part by knowing their ancient cultural traditions and by preserving that which is centuries old. As tribes reassess their past, even tribal names are changing. The Winnebago have become the Hochunk, and the Papago are now the Tohono O’odham. The Flathead call themselves the Salish, the Crow are the Apsaalooka, the Northern Shoshone have become the Aquí Dika, the Blackfeet are the Pikuni, the Navajo are now the Diné, and the Nez Perce are the Nimipu.

Across the northern prairies, wind ripples the shaggy hair on the backs of buffaloes, and along the Northwest Coast, waves splash against newly carved cedar canoes. Children struggle to learn words and stories in their native tongues. Snow covers the top of Mount Shasta, and elk and moose graze the Sweetgrass Hills. The War Chief’s Office in Taos guards sacred Blue Lake, and finally, after decades spent in boxes, Indian human remains have returned home. The bones are going back to the earth. For the dead, the spirit journey continues, and for the living, there is new hope.



On the Wind River Reservation in Wyoming, a recently built roadside memorial near Crowheart Butte keeps alive the ancient Indian tradition of marking special places with piles of stones. After years of frustration and forced assimilation, native peoples now seek a return to traditional ways as part of a wide-spread cultural revival. Photo by author, August 1999.