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# Stitching Osage Governance into the Future

*Jean Dennison*

Walking into the Osage Nation congressional chamber six years after its transition from the Osage Tribal Council chamber in 2006, I was surprised to find that the room remained mostly unchanged. The two murals—one depicting an Osage origin story and the other depicting Osage in the late twentieth century—still lined the walls, and the globe lights and microphone system were still strung from the ceiling. A raised platform had been added to the front of the room, framing a large copy of the preamble to the 2006 constitution, which ends by stating, “We, the Osage People, based on centuries of being a People, now strengthen our government in order to preserve and perpetuate a full and abundant Osage way of life that benefits all Osage, living and as yet unborn.” The tables had been removed for the day and chairs tightly packed into the small space. Despite the fact that it was the Fourth of July holiday, finding a seat for the Third Osage Nation Congressional Inauguration proved tricky, with more than seventy-five Osage arriving early to view the biannual ceremony.

After the congress members had filed into the seats at the front of the room, a color guard made up of Osage veterans of the US military, dressed in their combat uniforms and adorned with medals, processed into the room. They carried with great dignity not only the Osage flag, but also the American stars and stripes as well as the flag of Oklahoma containing an Osage battle shield, an olive branch, and a peace pipe. Following the placement of the flags, the color guard led a silent salute as the melody of “The Star-Spangled Banner” played softly in the background. Once this

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was complete, a prayer was said in Osage that placed the governance of the Osage people in the hands of God and asked for guidance in ensuring the strongest future for the Osage people. Next came several speeches honoring the past administration, and finally the new congress members were sworn in, promising to “uphold and defend the constitution of the Osage Nation,” which among other things states: “The Osage People have the exclusive right of governing themselves as a free, sovereign, and independent nation as done from time immemorial.”

It is in moments such as these that the entanglements of settler colonialism are undeniable. While ubiquitous among current Indigenous peoples, such moments are rarely acknowledged for their full complexity. In this particular twenty-first-century moment, no Osage is only an Osage; we might also be citizens of the State of Oklahoma or veterans of US wars. In this one inauguration ceremony we simultaneously saluted the founding of America and denied the United States authority over our territory. We stood to honor three flags and the affiliations they represent, knowing all the while that these tangled relationships are anything but straightforward. For many people, this moment would be seen as full of contradictions. As Paul Chaat Smith has argued, “only when we recognize that our own individual, crazy personal histories, like those of every other Indian person of this century, are a tumble of extraordinary contradictions, can we begin making sense of life.”<sup>1</sup> Asserting Osage sovereignty to the tune of the “Star-Spangled Banner” certainly demands some sort of further explanation, but the picture is made more even complex by the fact that the anthem’s lyrics celebrating an American victory over the British Royal Navy were set to the tune of a bawdy British drinking song about Greek gods.<sup>2</sup>

Labeling such moments as contradictory, however, reaffirms particular colonial categories and limits future possibilities for Indigenous peoples. Contradictions only manifest when expectations have been breached. Following Philip J. Deloria, it is important to read such expectations as “shorthand for the dense economies of meaning, representation, and act[s] that have inflected both American culture writ large and individuals . . . [and thus as representing] the colonial and imperial relations of power and domination existing between American Indian people and the United States.”<sup>3</sup> Expectations, in other words, serve as a fundamental tool of settlement, limiting the kinds of spaces American Indians are comfortably able to inhabit. To view the Third Osage Nation Congressional Inauguration as a “tumble of extraordinary contradictions” thus does more to reinforce settler-colonial categories than it does to open up possibilities for an Osage future.

This assortment of preambles, flags, anthems, prayers, and oaths, as well as the complex relationships they represent, are better understood as a colonial “entanglement.” In using the concept of entanglement, my goal is to avoid either ignoring or empowering the colonial forces with which colonized peoples must contend. Instead, entanglement serves to mark the shifts created through the ongoing settler-colonial process, with a particular focus on the agency that is possible within this space. Other authors have variously used the concept of entanglement to compare colonization to a hunter’s strategy of entrapment;<sup>4</sup> to move away from us/them binaries;<sup>5</sup> and to follow the ways that “identities, spaces, and histories . . . find points of intersection

in unexpected ways.”<sup>6</sup> Pushing this focus on interconnection, rather than authenticity and difference, this article uses the notion of entanglement to seek a means by which colonized people can pick up the pieces of the current moment and create their own original patterns for the future.

For their part, the Osage have long understood the colonial process as at once devastating and full of potential. Osage ribbon work, born out of eighteenth-century trade with Europeans, presents an ideal metaphor of colonial entanglement. Using the raw material and tools obtained through the colonial process, Osage artists began by tearing silk into strips and then cutting, folding, and sewing them back together to form something both beautiful and uniquely Osage.<sup>7</sup> American Indians originally obtained silk ribbon through both trade and gift-giving exchanges with Europeans. Rivalries between the French and British greatly escalated the preponderance of ribbon among American Indian nations. The earliest account of ribbon appearing on dress occurs among the Iroquois in 1735, but the innovation of ribbon work likely came later.<sup>8</sup> Ribbon work is most commonly defined as “ribbon strips of contrasting colors that are layered on a textile or leather foundation and which form designs based on the cutting, folding under, and sewing of the ribbon layers.”<sup>9</sup> While it is hard to trace precisely, it is thought that ribbon work first dates to the late eighteenth century. It likely began among the southern Great Lakes tribes, and then spread to Prairie Indians such as the Osage during the removal period.<sup>10</sup> In this way, ribbon work is deeply intertwined with the settlement process, not just in terms of its material changes, but the vast networks of exchange among American Indians that were also drastically altered.

Much of the existing literature on ribbon work is devoted to the way in which it went through a multi-stage adaption process to become something unique to American Indian communities. Different processes of “selection,” “incorporation,” and “transformation” are described whereby American Indians chose ribbon over other European goods, incorporated it into their existing material culture patterns, and transformed ribbon into a distinctive art form. About this process Rachel Rannabecker writes, “ribbon-bordered dress signified a creative response to culture change, one that simultaneously established cultural boundaries while binding cultures together.”<sup>11</sup> While exchange with Europeans certainly changed American Indian life dramatically, ribbon work also serves as a visual marker of belonging, strengthening community ties. Since community belonging has been a fundamental part of what the settler-colonial process has attempted to erase, it must be understood as an essential part of any process of decolonization.<sup>12</sup>

In picking up the pieces of fabric, both those torn apart by the colonial process and those created by it, and stitching them into their own original patterns, Osage people have artfully formed the tangled ribbons of colonialism into their own statements of Osage sovereignty.<sup>13</sup> Osage ribbon work thus reminds us that it is possible to create new and powerful forms out of an ongoing colonial process. Likewise, the twenty-first-century Osage Nation, with its six-year-old tripartite constitutional government, provides a rich example of how Indigenous people are taking the entangled threads of settler colonialism and beginning to weave them into new forms. Like the ribbon work that reshapes the colonizer’s materials into new forms of Osage life, Osage government

has been charged with implementing a constitution that borrowed much from the colonial process. This new government must similarly create a current link with older Osage structures, while at the same time giving a new shape, meaning, and future to the Osage people. In creating a tripartite government, the writers of the 2006 constitution were not seeking to emulate the United States government, but instead hoped to use the colonizer's tools to strengthen Osage governance.

Looking at the history that has led to the current moment and the current tensions that exist over the separation of powers within the Osage Nation, this article will use the metaphor of Osage ribbon work to envision what the future of Osage governance might look like. In doing so, it will move away from the binaries that underwrite colonialism, including past/present, sovereign/dependent, and primitive/modern, and instead explore what it might be possible to create out of the threads of this colonial moment. In this way a resilient future for the Osage people is possible, not as some pure alternative to modernity, but as something truly viable in this moment of colonial entanglement. This article, then, like the ribbon work and Osage governance it describes, also attempts to remake the tangled and shorn legacies of colonialism into new patterns for envisioning a strong Osage future.

## HISTORICAL ENTANGLEMENTS

Envisioning a future for the Osage government is greatly complicated by the ongoing colonial process, both as it relates directly to the history of Osage governance and as it pertains to more widespread attempts to erase Indigenous peoples from the land.<sup>14</sup> By 2004, the Osage were the only federally recognized American Indian nation in the continental United States not able to determine their own citizenship or governance structure. In 1900 the Office of Indian Affairs had illegally abolished the 1881 Osage Nation Constitution, appointing their own Osage officials to serve on a small governing council.<sup>15</sup> The primary motivation for this move, though unstated, was to ensure that the Osage allotted their reservation land, something the Osage Nation's three-part government was adamantly against.<sup>16</sup>

Allotment was a creative tactic of settlement, aimed at destroying Indian nations and expanding US authority.<sup>17</sup> As David E. Wilkins relates, "As late as 1887 tribes controlled nearly two billion acres of land. By 1924 because of laws like the General Allotment Act . . . the total amount of Indian-owned land had been reduced to 150 million acres."<sup>18</sup> In addition to the massive settlement of land, allotment was also about the transfer of Indigenous people into the body politic of the United States. Settlers justified the breakup of tribal lands as an essential part of forcing Indians to move beyond the problems supposedly created by tribal structure in order to adopt "civilization."<sup>19</sup> If Indian nations were written out of existence, then the treaty promises would no longer have to be honored, there would be no title to the territory outside the federal government's control, and the colonial process could be considered complete.<sup>20</sup> Such attempts are a fundamental part of the settler-colonial process, which labors, perhaps above all else, to deny Indigenous peoples a political future.

In the case of the Osage, the United States government appointed allotment-friendly Osage to a body it termed the Osage Tribal Council (OTC), with which it conducted all of its business after 1900.<sup>21</sup> The OTC was ultimately able to negotiate a unique allotment whereby the entire Osage reservation was split among those people listed on the 1906 roll, rather than the usual practice of opening up a majority of the land for White settlement. Furthermore, the mineral estate under the reservations lands, which included the rights to all oil and gas, remained in collective ownership. The 1906 Osage Allotment Act was a failed attempt to reduce the sovereign Osage Nation into a group of individual landowners who held a property interest in a mineral estate. According to the act, the OTC was to administer the natural resources held in common by all Osage on the 1906 roll for twenty-five years, after which time it assumed the Osage people would be acculturated into mainstream US society, eliminating any need for an Osage government.

Through various creative tactics, the OTC was able to extend the mineral estate until 1958 and then to 1983. In 1978 the council convinced the US government to change the wording about the duration of the mineral estate from “until otherwise provided by an Act of Congress” to “in perpetuity.”<sup>22</sup> Additionally, in 1953 the Osage, along with several other tribes, faced termination through House Concurrent Resolution 108 because we were perceived to be successfully “assimilated” into the White world. Rendering Indigenous peoples as “too different” and then later as “not different enough” is a fundamental component of colonial settlement.<sup>23</sup> Here the federal government again labored to erase American Indian nations through a specific definition of the Indian. The Osage, understanding the importance of federal recognition, sent representatives to Washington, where they were able to negotiate successfully for continued recognition by promising to pay Osage operation costs through Osage mineral estate proceeds.

Fear that the United States government will one day deny the status of Osage nationhood continues to haunt the Osage Nation in many obvious and subtle ways, from desires to implement a blood quantum to fears of change itself. Whatever the real motivation, many visions of the Osage future are justified by arguing that they are necessary in order to maintain the recognition of the United States government.<sup>24</sup> Such consequences of settlement have caused a wide spectrum of tensions throughout Indian country about what constitutes a “real” American Indian, where cultural practice, geographic location, blood quantum, phenotype, and political affiliation are all deployed to discredit a person’s status as Indian.<sup>25</sup> This component of settler colonialism is so powerful that many recognized American Indians today refuse to acknowledge non-recognized Indigenous peoples as Indigenous. These layered processes place a high value on recognition itself, endowing the United States government with ultimate authority.

Even as the OTC was fighting the US government on multiple fronts in order to maintain its recognition, an increasing number of Osage were alienated from their government. When the land was allotted in 1906, the Osage roll had four qualifications for admission: Osage blood in any quantum, local residence or continued affiliation, enrollment prior to December 31, 1881, and proof of birth prior to July 1, 1907.<sup>26</sup>

Those born after July 1, 1907 were not added to the Osage roll. This system created two different classes of people within a single Osage family. A common example of this occurred in my family, where my grandfather was an original allottee, meaning he was listed on the 1906 roll, while his younger siblings, who were born after the July 1, 1907 cut-off date, were outside the Osage structure recognized by the United States.

The money afforded to the allottees divided the Osage Nation, as a larger percentage of Osage descendants were disenfranchised and began fighting for equal voting rights through the US legal system and various Osage political organizations. My grandfather, and more frequently my grandmother, were well known in my family for their diatribes against non-annuitant Osage wanting enfranchisement, who they claimed were "just trying to get our money." The project of settlement was furthered here, not just by creating a cut-off point for who was considered Osage, but also by reframing Osage mentalities around personal property interests rather than the political interests of the Osage people. Many Osage annuitants today continue to focus on the importance of the Osage Mineral Estate over the well-being of the Osage Nation.<sup>27</sup>

Many of the shares in the Osage Mineral Estate trust also left the tribe in the twenty-year period when mineral estate shares were considered like any other piece of property and thus could be willed to anyone or any organization. As a result, many churches, lawyers, and even some famous actors ended up with shares in the mineral estate. This did not give them a vote in Osage elections, but it did keep many Osage descendants from participating in tribal politics. By 2004 this system had limited the number of Osage voters to approximately four thousand of a possible sixteen thousand Osage descendants of the 1906 roll.

In addition to alienating thousands of Osage descendants from tribal politics, the OTC also encountered problems when it acted as a more general governing body. Because all authority was concentrated in the ten-person tribal council, there was no system to prevent misuse of authority, misappropriation of funds, or outright corruption. The Osage voters responded to these problems (both real and perceived) by electing new officials in almost every election, but the lack of continuity created its own challenges. Projects funded under one administration would be scrapped by the next, leading to a great deal of uncertainty for those wanting to do business with the nation. Additionally, since there was no larger structure of law, a resolution was often passed one week and overturned the next. These problems ultimately alienated valuable people, resources, and funds from the reservation area. In responding to these problems, various reforms were attempted, eventually leading to the passage of P.L. 108-431, which allowed the Osage to rebuild the nation and define their own citizenship and governance once again.

In forcing the Osage Nation to function through a ten-person tribal council structure focused on the extraction of minerals with a system of voting roughly equivalent to that of a corporation, the United States was able to strengthen its own claims to full sovereign authority over the territory. In the case of the Osage, the processes of settlement worked to limit the Osage who could participate in the political life of the polity, limit the infrastructure of the government, and, perhaps most dangerously, redefine the Osage as annuitants in a minerals estate rather than as citizens in a nation. With the



passage of the 2006 Osage Nation Constitution all of this was interrupted, opening a different path forward for the Osage people.

The 2006 constitution gave all descendants of the 1906 allotment roll an equal vote in Osage elections; it created a tripartite governing structure with a system of checks and balances; and it refocused Osage governance around building a strong Osage community politically, economically, and socially. Built using models created by the colonial process, including those of the Iroquois Confederacy, the United States Federalist system, and the 1881 Osage Constitution, which was adapted from the 1839 Cherokee Constitution, this twenty-first-century Osage governing document provided the tools, if not the end product, for building a strong Osage Nation. Since 2006 Osage officials and employees have worked hard to weave these colonial entanglements into something that truly works for the Osage people, but there is still much work to be done.

## PATTERNS FOR THE FUTURE

When I arrived at the first special session of the Third Osage Nation Congress on the afternoon of July 20, 2012, I found the chamber doors closed with a printed sign reading “executive session,” which instantly reminded me of the many executive sessions held by the OTC. Unlike the often-unexplained executive sessions of the OTC, the employees waiting in the foyer explained that the sign had to do with a confidential land purchase agreement that was under consideration. Around the short but wide waiting area sat several Osage program directors who had various legislation in front of Congress, primarily related to urgent issues with their budgets that had to be addressed prior to the next budget period. During the wait, there were several individual conversations, and a few conversations that were interesting enough to capture the attention of the whole room.

One of these conversations had to do with the governing structure created by the 2006 Osage Constitution. One program director, raising her voice for the entire room to hear, stated that “this was a system that might make sense for the United States government, but it could not work for the Osage people. The Osage are too prone to fighting to do well with such a structure.”<sup>28</sup> In the last six years there had indeed been a great deal of fighting among the Osage Congress and the Osage executive branches, as the two clashed over how authority was to be divided in the nation. Under the old structure, a single council made the laws, oversaw the programs, ran the finances, and acted as the supreme court of the land. Now the Osage Congress had to share its authority with a strong executive branch, which was in charge of all programs. Too often in the last six years the congress and executive branches had worked against each other in an effort to bolster their own authority.

This program director was not the only one concerned about the separation of powers among the three Osage branches. Online forums such as the Facebook page entitled “Osage Community for Responsible Citizenry” also discussed the conundrum. One thread begun on August 21, 2012 discussed whether the Osage Nation Supreme Court should be used to help settle some of these debates. Several online



contributors—including the former chief of the Osage Nation, Jim Gray, and Congressman R. J. Walker—agreed with Congressman Raymond Red Corn that “until we have the [Osage] Supreme Court review separation of powers issues, we will continue to have arguments about who is out of bounds.”<sup>29</sup> Responding to these posts, Red Thunder Rolling stated in part,

Did we truly intend to structure Osage society by laws to the extent we encourage lawsuits against each other? Counterproductive? Yes. Time, energy and resources don't come cheap. While we are busy tying each others [sic] hands, economic development suffers, our leadership is limited in ability, and our people lose faith. Forgive my criticism, but like you, I expect a better future for our generations to come. I'm not sure we are doing ourselves “justice” today by building government based on traditional state and federal systems as opposed to a realistic Osage Way that is based on the values and principals [sic] of who we are traditionally and historically. I believe in checks and balances and understand we need order, but when control trumps our ability to be creative, so too is our ability to refrain from conflict.<sup>30</sup>

The question remains, however, what such a “realistic Osage Way,” might look like. Clearly the state and federal system does provide some useful tools, but could more be gained by finding a way to include the values and principles “of who we are traditionally and historically,” as Rolling suggests?

Too often such searches for “Indigenous alternatives” to the problems created by settler colonialism work to limit what gets to count as authentically Indigenous. At the heart of this conundrum is the persistent bifurcation of modernity and indigeneity. Many authors have argued that current discussions surrounding American Indians continue to create ideal types, defining who is and who is not a “real” Indian.<sup>31</sup> One of the earliest and most direct critiques of academic discourse surrounding Indians came from Vine Deloria Jr., who wrote: “Not even Indians can relate themselves to this type of creature who, to the anthropologists, is the ‘real’ Indian. Indian people begin to feel that they are merely shadows of a mythical super-Indian.”<sup>32</sup> This “mythical super-Indian” works to limit the activities that are a recognizable part of American Indian society, labeling them as modern and thus inauthentic. By focusing primarily on Indians who participate in particular kinds of practice, some early anthropologists and other academics contributed to the myth of Indian extinction by denying that all peoples have divergent and changing modes of interacting in the world.<sup>33</sup> Indigenous populations are too often positioned as the precursor to the modern era, either as an important lesson for how far modernity has come or as a romantic view of what has been lost.

The challenges inherent in such static notions of American Indians cannot be separated from the colonial process. Defining American Indians against the modern era is a colonial construct, a way of viewing the world that was formed during the colonial period to justify conquest and rationalize continuing occupation.<sup>34</sup> While the conquerors had “science” to understand the world around them, they positioned Indigenous populations in relation to “tradition” and “culture.” As discussed above in

relation to allotment, settlers thought that Indigenous populations needed White civilization in order to become fully realized humans. It was then their “culture” that marked individuals as “still” Indian. Within this settler formulation, American Indian culture could only be preserved rather than practiced and adapted. Such static notions served to limit who was counted as a real Indian, especially in moments such as termination, and served to further erase Indians from the land.

Through notions of authenticity, many of the discourses surrounding culture work to freeze Indigenous practices in the precolonial moment and deny Indigenous authority today. In the words of Kevin Bruyneel, “The imposition of colonial rule denotes the effort by the United States to narrowly bound Indigenous political status in space and time, seeking to limit the ability of Indigenous people to define their own identity and develop economically and politically on their own terms.”<sup>35</sup> In this way, binaries have been used to erase an Indigenous political presence today by relegating authentic American Indian peoples to a mythic past.<sup>36</sup> Such notions have had devastating effects on the solidification of Indian identity and have limited the possibilities for what Gerald Vizenor terms “survivance,” which he describes as “more than survival, more than endurance or mere response; the stories of survivance are an active presence.”<sup>37</sup>

As contemporary Indians attempt to chart a path around these easy binaries, American Indian ribbon work provides a helpful example and metaphor. While many American Indian peoples continue to create ribbon work today, it is particularly popular among both male and female Osage, who frequently wear it in regional social dances and in the yearly Osage-specific In-lon-shka dances. According to Daniel Swan, “the Osage earned a position of great stature [among American Indian ribbon work artists] based on their distinctive patterns, high standards of quality, and the sheer volume of ribbon work they have produced.”<sup>38</sup> Using rayon taffeta instead of silk ribbon, Osage artists today most frequently use a style known as “reverse appliqué,” wherein geometric patterns are created by the space between up to fifteen combined ribbons. As with many other American Indian ribbon work styles, Osage ribbon work draws on both designs established prior to the colonial process and more recent developments, including the horse and the Native American church.<sup>39</sup> These representational and geometric ribbon work patterns have come to stand as a symbol for Osage community and can be found in several places, including T-shirts promoting the Osage language, cell-phone pouches, and the Osage Nation website. There are also classes at the Osage cultural center, where Osage of all ages gather to learn and perfect the craft.

While ribbon-work clothing is often inherited or made within the family, it is becoming more common to purchase this material through specialty stores, such as the Cedar Chest, a small downtown store in Pawhuska, Oklahoma, owned and operated by two Osage women. Hiring different artisans to craft various elements of the dress necessary for In-lon-schka and other occasions, the Cedar Chest then compiles the pieces and teaches their clients how all the pieces are to be worn. Such clothing then serves as a marker of heightened Osage belonging, particularly during In-lon-schka, where one of the districts has gone so far as to mandate full dress for participation.

Osage ribbon work provides a helpful pattern for envisioning a future for the Osage Nation that bypasses many of the pitfalls endemic to the ongoing settler-colonial process. It teaches us that tools, materials, and even forms can be redeployed. It helps to move the focus away from notions of authenticity and the binaries that so often work to erase Indigenous populations. Perhaps most importantly, it focuses our attention on the future, without creating a stark divide with the past. Old forms are given new shape, allowing them to thrive not just in the past but also in the future. It is the future potential of ribbon work that is most devastating to the ongoing colonial process, for an Indigenous future is what the process of settlement attempts to deny most.

## STITCHING IT TOGETHER

Separation of powers was a topic that permeated Osage discussions in the summer of 2012. In addition to the program director already mentioned, five additional program directors complained to me personally about how the fighting between the congressional and executive branches was having a devastating impact on their ability to run their programs. Like the Facebook post, Vann Bighorse, the director of the Osage Cultural Center, expressed the opinion that we needed to stop modeling our government solely on the United States and find ways of making the government more reflective of Osage culture. To illustrate this, he told a story about how he was going to take several Osage culture workshops on the road to California, but was having a hard time making the northern and southern California groups get along well enough to co-host the event. He had explained to them that they needed to learn from the Osage In-lon-shka dances, when everything (especially political fighting) was put aside for those three weeks in June and everyone from the drum keeper to the cooks focused on making the whole thing run smoothly. Each person had a set role and one didn't interfere with the roles of others. His anecdote reminded me of various conversations that had taken place during the 2004–2006 Osage reform process, particularly one discussion of how the history of Osage government might be used as a model for the future.

Early in the reform process, Tulsa University's Indian Law program sponsored a training session for the group of Osage volunteers who had been put in charge of the reform process. During his session entitled "Tribal Constitutions: Skeletons, Beads, and Feathers," William Rice asked about the older governing structures of the Osage: "How important are these things to who the Osage are? Should they have a place in this constitution?"<sup>40</sup> In an attempt to address these questions, Mary Joe Webb, one of the Osage reform commissioners, went to the blackboard at the front of the room, saying that she had studied the traditional government through the writings of anthropologist Garrick Bailey as well as through conversations with members of her own family for twenty-five years. She drew two half circles on the board with the sky people on top and the earth people on bottom. She explained that they each had their own high chief and lesser chiefs, saying that part of the governance structure involved a large gathering in the fall: "So they gather; they begin to fast and pray. And they come out of this lodge here [pointing to the blackboard] and they begin to dance on

this side like this [Sky]; and on this side [Earth] they dance like this. They meet in the middle. They do that for four days from sun up to sun down. They never sing the same song twice. They've got four days of memorized songs and each clan would have their own."<sup>41</sup>

The commissioner went on to explain that it was only possible for this event to take place if all the clans were there and they each sang their own songs, which only they knew. If there was any disharmony in the tribe, they had to work it out. She concluded by saying, "You had to forgive and have restitution all the time."<sup>42</sup> While this history was given shape in the 2005 referendum vote in the form of a bicameral congress, it was narrowly defeated and thus not incorporated into the 2006 Osage Nation Constitution. Here again a pattern emerges of each entity understanding its role within a larger structure and the Osage as a whole meeting annually to work out any disharmony. Such a model provides an essential pattern for stitching Osage governance into the future.

When I discussed the program directors' concerns with Debra Atterberry, the senior executive adviser to the chief of the Osage Nation, she proposed holding a yearly summit during which the three branches could each meet prior to establishing their budgets and planning for the next year, and all would work together on a reasonable list of needs and goals for the nation. By facilitating constructive communication, the three branches could focus on the good of the Osage people and move forward together. Atterberry's solution draws upon historical and modern Osage values to reshape the colonial materials currently at the nation's disposal.

Osage ribbon work, too, relies on collaboration for its production, distribution, and exhibition. Roles are well understood and performed with tireless diligence, especially in preparation for the yearly June dances. The current roles of Osage officials must be similarly delineated to meet the needs of the Osage people. The Osage Nation must look to all of its resources, including those threads left from and created out of the ongoing colonial processes, to try to shape something that will not just serve the current needs of the Osage people, but enable a stronger future.

The Osage cannot move forward by either blindly adopting non-Osage forms or by seeking some pure Osage alternative to modern governance structures. Today, Osage governance must be able to work with federal and state governments, bring the Osage people together, serve existing Osage needs, and realize the full potential of Osage sovereign authority. By building the strongest possible Osage Nation, we can unsettle the forces that have worked so hard to deny us a political future.

### *Acknowledgments*

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## NOTES

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7. For more information on Osage ribbon work, see Garrick Bailey, Daniel C. Swan, John W. Nunley, and E. Sean StandingBear, *Art of the Osage* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2004); all subsequent references to *Art of the Osage* will be cited parenthetically in the text; Alice Callahan, *The Osage Ceremonial Dance In-Lon-Schka* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1990); all subsequent references to *The Osage Ceremonial Dance In-Lon-Schka* will be cited parenthetically in the text.
8. R. K. Pannabecker, "'Tastily Bound with Ribands': Ribbon-bordered Dress of the Great Lakes Indians, 1735–1839," *Clothing and Textiles Research Journal* 14, no. 4 (January 1, 1996): 267–75.
9. *Ibid.*, 270.
10. C. Oberholtzer, "Silk Ribbonwork: Unraveling the Connections," *Algonquian Conference* 31 (2000): 272–89; R. K. Pannabecker, "The Cultural Authentication of Ribbon: Use and Test of a Concept," *Clothing and Textiles Research Journal* 7, no. 1 (September 1, 1988): 55–56; Brenda Ackerman, "The Tradition of Meskwaki Ribbonwork: Cultural Meanings, Continuity, and Change" (PhD dissertation, Iowa State University, 2008).
11. Pannabecker, "'Tastily Bound with Ribands,'" 274.
12. Jolene Rickard, "Uncovering/Recovering: Indigenous Artists in California," in *Art/Women/California 1950–2000*, ed. Diana Burgess Fuller and Daniela Salvioni (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002), 143–60.
13. For discussion of artwork as a statement of Indigenous sovereignty, see Rickard, "Uncovering/Recovering: Indigenous Artists in California"; all subsequent references to "Uncovering/Recovering" will be cited parenthetically in the text.
14. Patrick Wolfe describes the process of settler colonialism as "an inclusive, land-centered project that coordinates a comprehensive range of agencies, from the metropolitan centre to the frontier encampment, with a view to eliminating Indigenous societies." Patrick Wolfe, "Settler Colonialism and the Elimination of the Native," *Journal of Genocide Research* 8, no. 4 (2006): 393.
15. Federal courts held in the 1978 case of *Logan v. Andrus* (457 F.Supp. 1318, 1324) that "The Secretary of the Interior was attempting to exercise legislative power when he purportedly abolished the government of the Osage Nation in 1900, and thus such action was beyond the scope of his authority and of no legal effect."
16. Terry P. Wilson, *The Underground Reservation: Osage Oil* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1985).
17. The United States policy of allotment officially began in 1887 with the Dawes General Allotment Act, which called for a widespread survey of native tribal lands and peoples. Once the surveys had been completed, these lands were parceled out, usually in 160-acre tracts, to individual Indians. The remaining lands were then opened up for White settlement.
18. David Wilkins, *Uneven Ground: American Indian Sovereignty and Federal Law* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2001), 161.

19. Francis Paul Prucha, *The Great Father: The United States Government and the American Indians*, Abridged (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1986).
20. This large-scale policy of allotment was justified at the time by the federal government and an array of humanitarian organizations, including the Indian Rights Association, Indian Protection Committee, and the Friends of the Indians, as a solution to the problem of the Indian. Since colonial contact, Indian resources such as the buffalo and other game had been depleted, leading to wide-scale hunger and drastic changes in lifestyle.
21. Wilson, *The Underground Reservation*.
22. Louis F. Burns, *A History of the Osage People*, 2nd rev. ed. (Tuscaloosa: University Alabama Press, 2004).
23. Nicholas Dirks, *Colonialism and Culture* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1992).
24. Jean Dennison, *Colonial Entanglement: Constituting a Twenty-First-Century Osage Nation* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2012).
25. Circe Dawn Sturm, *Blood Politics: Race, Culture, and Identity in the Cherokee Nation of Oklahoma* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002); Eva Garroutte, *Real Indians: Identity and the Survival of Native America* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003).
26. Burns, *A History of the Osage People*.
27. Dennison, *Colonial Entanglement*.
28. Personal Communication, July 20, 2012.
29. Raymond Red Corn, August 23, 2012.
30. Red Thunder Rolling, "Osage Community for Responsible Citizenry," accessed August 23, 2012, <http://www.facebook.com/groups/yanman/>.
31. Rennard Strickland, "The Absurd Ballet of American Indian Policy or American Indian Struggling with Ape on Tropical Landscape: An Afterword," *Maine Law Review* 31 (1979): 213; Kirk Dombrowski, *Against Culture: Development, Politics, and Religion in Indian Alaska* (Nebraska: University of Nebraska Press, 2001); Beatrice Medicine, *Learning to Be an Anthropologist and Remaining Native: Selected Writings* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2001); Sturm, *Blood Politics*; Garroutte, *Real Indians: Identity and the Survival of Native America*; Smith, *Everything You Know About Indians Is Wrong*; Joanne Barker, *Native Acts: Law, Recognition, and Cultural Authenticity* (Duke University Press, 2011).
32. Vine Deloria, *Custer Died for Your Sins: An Indian Manifesto* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1988), 81–82.
33. For further discussion of the role of anthropology in creating a static notion of American Indians, see Strickland, "Absurd Ballet of American Indian Policy"; Dombrowski, *Against Culture*; Medicine, *Learning to Be an Anthropologist and Remaining Native*; and Baker, *Anthropology and the Racial Politics of Culture*.
34. Dirks, *Colonialism and Culture*, 3–4.
35. Kevin Bruyneel, *The Third Space of Sovereignty: The Postcolonial Politics of U.S.-Indigenous Relations* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2007), xvii.
36. To see how this played out in US American Indian policy, particularly the Indian Reorganization Act, see Paul Spruhan, "Indian as Race and Indian as Political Status: Implementation of the Half-Blood Requirement Under the Indian Reorganization Act, 1934–1945," *Rutgers Race & The Law Review* 8 (2006): 27; and Mark Rifkin, *When Did Indians Become Straight? Kinship, the History of Sexuality, and Native Sovereignty* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011).
37. This is part of his larger argument that the "Indian" is an invention of the White man and that only upon moving past such a construction can Indians escape domination. Vizenor, *Fugitive Poses*, 15.
38. Bailey, et al., *Art of the Osage*, 166.
39. Callahan, *The Osage Ceremonial Dance In-Lon-Schka*.
40. Tulsa University Training Session, May 19, 2005.
41. Ibid.
42. Ibid.

