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COMMENTARY

Indien Personhood

JAY MILLER

In pulling together these pithy citations from respected Americanist works, sometimes now called Indienology, this commentary attempts a comprehensive overview of notions relating to the person, in both cosmic and personal senses, of Native North America. It uses the European solution for distinguishing those indigenous to India from those of America by the expedient of a single vowel: *a* or *e*. Moreover, to clinch the argument, comparable Inuit data are included. This treatment is intended to be balanced, indicating features that both helped and harmed individuals and communities, using citations from scholars who convey statements in a Native voice upholding the interconnectedness of customs, taboos, demeanors, and their likely outcomes.

Though reported as asides or seemingly obscure details for only a single tribe or instance, all these observations can be understood to have continent-wide distribution, providing a coherent worldview that was accepted, rejected, modified, or ignored depending on local conditions of terrain, history, customs, contacts, and inter-group hostilities. Local factors of population densities, social systems, and tending (foraging) or tilling (farming) lifeways are largely ignored here in the interest of tracing more generic patterns. Spatial orientations in worlds and homes are as significant as cultural rules since they provided the basic “staging area” for the active deployment of people and materials for larger tasks and activities.

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WORLD

Every community seemingly had its own beliefs about their world. Not all were created in the same way or at the same time since fires, floods, and famines called for successive recreations before the emergence of the present world. For the North American continent, eight different creation epics have been located, though all agree that these universes are pervaded with a mindful flow of power-energy-force that is both diffused everywhere and channeled along rings and rays, like that of a web, with divinity at its center.¹ Over eons, articulations of space, time, and life took form through the applications of this deified power.² Earth often emerged from the primordial sea where it was held in suspension until realized by an "earth grasper" intent on global reform.³

Best described by the Southern Californian Luiseño, this *ayelkwi*, or knowledge and power, provided the systematic means of relating all parts and events of existence through four means of access. Either it was commonly available to all, innate by birth within a particular family, residual as thrown around the landscape by their culture hero Wiyot, or formulated by prayers and rituals which enacted their history and laws conveyed in song. As elsewhere, it was engendered as diffuse for women, but particular and specific for men.⁴ For the Navajo, the world was transformed from knowledge, organized in manly thought, patterned in language, and realized in womanly speech and other symbolic activities.⁵

After initial thought and speech came lasting memory, since language itself consists of images projected and shared with others who pile up their own details and pictures as conversation goes on.⁶

The inevitable separation of land and water, earth and sky, moon and sun had long range consequences. For the Omaha, night and day became symbols of precision, while the bow came from the moon and the first arrow from a sun ray.⁷

"Primacy is universally revered,"⁸ giving precedent to the first born, first kill, first picking, first fruits, first menstruation, and all founders because "all have special merit and powers of freshness" that come from the beginnings of a sequence. Land and sea remain inherently unsteady, except when anchored by mounds, giant snakes, or other heavy landmarks.⁹ Periodically, shamans, priests, and concerned members must renew, fix, and reinvigorate the universe, often using sexual metaphors and engendered ritual acts. General categories of center, inside, and outside were observed, but each community treated them in its own way. For example, Navajo sand paintings start at the center, but those of Pueblos begin at the edge.¹⁰

All species are mutable. In season, beavers transform into geese, "Sturgeon change into bears when the berries ripen, whence the large number of bears at that season," and moose become whales.¹¹ These changes derive from a belief that all beings are infra-human: they have human hands, faces, and bodies on the inside and an outer covering that can be put on and removed when going or coming home. Though shape-shifting, these immortals at base are shimmering, iridescent humans, sometimes described as rainbow-hued.

Among Inuit, an animal assuming its infra-human form raised its forelimb or wing to push its outer muzzle or beak up and back to reveal its inner

humanity.¹² Ojibwa shamans wore bone and wood amulets carved into human faces to protect their souls.¹³

Everywhere powerful local shamans met in caves or other holy homes with the giant immortal boss of a species in order to negotiate the exchange of human and animal souls to sustain the human community. Most often the souls of enemies were given up first, followed by those closer to home, with children and women going before strong hunters.

Overall, this universe is finite. Nothing can exist in or from a void. Everything came from something else. The Achumawi cosmos was made by World Heart, acting through his grandson, Annikadel, "whose underparts are blue and white so no one could see him moving through the sky." At the location of each town, he stuck in feathers that became the first humans, often a separate feather for the chief, for the woman chief, and for the poor.¹⁴

SETTLEMENTS

Wherever people build their homes from local materials, the shape and layout of a house is usually the same as that of the cosmos, round with domed housing or square with apartments.

Inside, however, spatial arrangements vary by culture. For example, inside a tipi, Lakota men sat on the right half, and women on the left with their legs modestly drawn up alongside their bodies.¹⁵ Throughout the Great Lakes region, encampments were ethnically obvious since Shawnee suspended a kettle from X-crossed beams, Ottawa from a straight stick, Wyandot between two trees, and Ojibwa from two sticks.¹⁶

Cleanliness was a concern of both hygienic and religious proportions. When a Mistassini Cree family left its hunting camp, everything was left clean with large bones from its kills decorating a single tree whose trunk was shorn of all but the top branches. This way, when the local spirit-partner of the hunt-leader flew over to make its inspection, it would approve and continue to send good luck.¹⁷ Similarly, other foods were physically encouraged to re-propagate. The Ojibwa, for example, threw back into water a few grains of wild rice wrapped in clay.¹⁸

Habitat also played a role, with rivers providing the cohesive lifeline for communities linked by its flow. Such "natural" unity has been sadly overlooked by scholars who fail to see that those living upriver have an automatic obligation to those downstream. Dense population and aridity seem to affect this pattern, however, since Henry Dobyns found that rivers were borders among the Florida Timucua, while the Arizona Pai visualize a midstream-dividing backbone along the Colorado River.¹⁹

WOMB

Engendering began in the womb, if not before, with parents making different contributions or infusions to the materials that "cooked" to become a fetus. Actual gender was determined by which parent reached orgasm first or had the stronger will. Oregon Tillamook believed a body template was sent from

a land where such beings lived awaiting birth. Patrilineal Kickapoo men reported that women were only a tray to hold the gestating new clansmember.²⁰ For Quechan (Yuma), successful conception required the conjoining of a father's dreams with a mother's desires. After this birth, a mother did not distinguish between the sex of her children, who all called her "mother," while a father did since his sons and daughters called him by separate terms.²¹

During pregnancy a Delaware father determined the coming gender by hanging a toy bow or wooden mortar off his leggings to keep its spirit nearby. If a bow did not work, then a mortar would.²² Similarly, when depositing the cord stump in hopes of an abundant future for the infant, Yuchi put a tiny bow and arrow with a son's umbilical, or a mortar and spoons with that of a daughter. Yuchi believed that twins and deformed children were sent to earth as special moral guides.²³ Throughout the Northwest, twins were equated with salmon, since both had double aspects seeming to go away and come back. Lakota make two effigies of a lizard or turtle, since these are difficult to kill and long-lived; one keeps the umbilical cord and the other serves as a decoy.²⁴

In a well-described example, a proper Cheyenne was conceived from three sources.²⁵ Two were the mother and father, who contributed blood and substance, but most critical was the Creator, Ma'heo'o, who provided two blessings. The first was a life soul, enabling a fetus to grow and move when it became bound into its body, diffused throughout, and indicated by the heart beat, pulse, breath, growth, blinking eyelids, and food digestion. Any loss of body parts, particularly amputations, diminished the effectiveness of this life soul. The second blessing came just after birth when the baby first inhaled *omotome*, or breath, air, speech, articulation, understanding, and power. For these people, a person was conscious of self, the moral order, kinship obligations, careful speech, understanding, virtues of immortal spirits, and a profound sense of being existentially alone, regardless of external appearance or species. Each human had body, breath, memory, and heart, allowing differing degrees of individuality, provided that everyone supported communal tribal identity and purpose.

Regardless of personal genitals, every Cheyenne balanced the genders because the inside of each body is female and the outside is male, with ribs as the divide. Yet because man was the generic, only boys could use sleds made with rib runners.²⁶ Among Navajos, body substance was considered an outer form (symbolic of woman) and spirit was an inner form (of man).²⁷

BIRTH

Quebec Inuit held that an annoyed or stressed fetus could crack open to change sex at the moment of birth, a process called a *sipiniit*.²⁸ Biology is not destiny since in everything-is-possible epics men did give birth. Tohono O'Odham (Papago) tell of Handsomeman, who made all women pregnant in one night, then gave birth himself the next day. His baby cried so uncontrollably that the world flooded.

After a child is born, Ojibwa say it was "empty" of any characteristics and identity, so spirits and parents had to fill him or her.²⁹ Delaware parents

bound a newborn to the earth by tying on wristlets and placing the afterbirth someplace where it would beneficially affect the child's career. For example, the afterbirth might be buried in a forest to produce a hunter. The Delaware also dressed newborns in adult clothes and moccasins with holes in them to discourage ghosts from luring them away. As a safeguard against illness, a pet was given to the child to attract any harm to itself.³⁰ Sauk made a cradle-board from a living tree to transfer its vitality to the child.³¹

Nicknames and formal names further assured a child's growth. Every Kickapoo baby was given two names, one used during life and the other after death.³² Among closely related Sauk, the first-born joined the moiety opposite that of the father, while the second-born shared the father's.³³ If the father was a light-color moiety, the oldest was dark, and the second was light. Sometimes, for her comfort and protection, a daughter was taken into the side of her elder brother.

Men occupied public offices, but Potawatomi women consciously filled in when men defaulted on their duties.³⁴ Women in the lower Great Lakes had their own strong leaders (see subsection entitled "Leaders" below).

COUVADE

Unlike South America, where a new father commonly shared his wife's and baby's postpartum seclusion and taboos, this custom of couvade is rare to the north.

ENGENDERING CHILDHOOD

The maturation of a child coincides with marked stages in his or her life. Various communities observed different milestones, such as the Cree "walking out" to celebrate a baby's first steps, indicating special regard for feet among hunters.³⁵ After a Navajo infant's first laugh, salt and bread are given away;³⁶ an Oto's first haircut followed clan patterns to indicate larger memberships;³⁷ a Cheyenne mother's brother fed her child meadowlark meat and eggs to encourage fluency;³⁸ a Kootenai couple could resume coitus when their most recent child began to whistle; and Delaware, among many others, offered lost baby teeth with prayers for stronger new ones.

At six, Menominee boys were subjected to icy baths, long runs, and endurance tests.³⁹ Time was spent in mediation and labor, building trenches, stone walls, or rock cairns. Ojibwa boys out on a quest remained in "nests" built as platforms in trees to be closer to hovering spirits,⁴⁰ though very young Potawatomi fasters slept at home for their parents' peace of mind.⁴¹ In Ojibwa idiom, to "pity" another is to adopt him and care for him like a parent or grandparent. Thus the pitying immortal is bound to the protegee by the firmest loyalties in Ojibwa worldview. Discipline and attitude were hallmarks of those high born, though "Abstinence is considered a negative attitude of insulting indifference; whereas chastity is a positive attitude of desire held in leash."⁴²

Being human for Cheyenne was a process of defining conscience on the basis of two antitheses—good or crazy, action or wisdom.⁴³ Good was anything orderly, controlled, careful, thoughtful, and proper, as taught by Sweet Medicine, the man

who learned Cheyenne culture from the spirits inside Bear Butte in South Dakota, and instituted the Council of Forty-Four Chiefs and the worship of the Four Sacred Arrows. Crazy was anything disordered, impulsive, or brutishly animal-like. Humans have both potentials, but should learn self-control to embrace the good and avoid the crazy. Both good and crazy were, in turn, bisected by the axis of action and wisdom. For example, men could choose between two role models, that of the active warrior or that of the sage chief or priest. In the circle of life, associations of these four principals are good and spirituality, white, and east; crazy and sexuality, yellow, and west; action and youth, red, and south; and wisdom and elderly, black, and north.

Ideally the young should be active but willing to listen, while the old should be wise and ready to instruct, so that these roles can easily succeed from one to the other. Greater latitude is tolerated in men more than in women, so young men might be crazy and active, but women should always remain good and wise to remain stable, tempered, quiet, and soothing. Some biological males, known as woman-hearted, became transgendered and strictly subscribed to the good of the female role, spending all their time among women (see "Transgenderers" below).

The core of every person was the heart, which is why the Cheyenne call themselves "those like-hearted." Over a lifetime, the heart of a person filled with life history, spiritual growth, physical identity, and names; each tribal member did not develop as a distinct individual but as a part of the larger whole.

Associates of any person influence character. If these are crazy—liars, drunks, or thieves—he or she will turn out the same. For this reason, the Keeper of the Sacred Arrows for the Southern Oklahoma Cheyenne or of the Sutaio Sacred Hat for the Northern Cheyenne in Montana must be a superior person so that all Cheyenne will benefit. In ancient times, the Arrow Keeper indicated his willingness to suffer for his people by having four strips of flesh removed from his arms, shoulders, back, and legs, along with a circle and crescent cut from his chest.

Though underreported, young men often lived by themselves, either roaming around the village to keep it safe by their unpredictable actions or in separate quarters, as was the case with the Gwich'in (Kutchin) boys dorms, which housed those males between the ages of fourteen and twenty-five.⁴⁴

More rare still were Iroquois virgin dorms, *ieouinnon*, where girls were kept busy at minor tasks, helped by very young boys as servants.⁴⁵ More commonly, some Ioway and other women took up an amazon-like warrior role when they received a vision from Thunderers.⁴⁶

GIRLS

The onset of menstruation was marked and celebrated throughout the Americas, largely because of the arrival of a woman's ability to confer life set her apart from male activities concerned with killing, defending, and boasting.⁴⁷ For Kansas Potawatomi, menstrual blood endangered all medicine, youth, "tender" growths of any life form, and masculine life and appurtenances.⁴⁸ In one of the few accounts of its origin, Chehalis said that the first

menstruation was a punishment upon young girls who mocked an old man with bleeding eyes. "If the girls had not made fun of the old man, men would menstruate [through the eyes] instead of women and would have to sleep outside alone for a certain length of time."⁴⁹

For Dakota, "femaleness, as menstrual and lochial [birthing] bloods, was inimical to men, weapons, and horses. Despite this dogma, a few individual women in each village did drive buffalo on horseback, and did stalk, scalp, and mutilate enemy; often they were young women, of child-bearing age."⁵⁰ Formalized Dakota feasts were held as elaborate tests for chastity and provided outlets for honor and malice as a consequence of accepted or failed accusations of undue familiarity.

Among Ioway, fathers with high aspirations had to have their daughters formally tattooed before puberty, "or blood will flow from the wound in the forehead and spoil the mark," while Ioway boys were tattooed all life long in recognition of brave deeds.⁵¹ Among related Siouian Oto, girls of high family were sometimes laced up into a buffalo hide at night,⁵² similar to Lakota's use of string chastity belts.⁵³

Among Tlingit and other Northwest nations, girls entered puberty with a feast to celebrate the insertion of a labret beneath the lower lip, reminding her to watch her mouth in terms of what she said, ate, and did.⁵⁴

MARRIAGE

All adults should wed. In considering partners, the Kickapoo looked for a wife who was good-humored, honest, clean, fine-cooking, and hardworking, and a husband to be a sober hunter with integrity.⁵⁵ New Yurok spouses exchanged the names of their hometowns to strengthen their co-identification.⁵⁶ Anyone unwed among Tohono O'Odham was presumed to have a snake for a spouse whose potency left them uninterested in humans.⁵⁷

Among tribes from the Great Lakes, a Manabus robe, named for their Great Hare culture hero, was made of deerskin and adorned with tiny metal cones and a strategic hole. The robe was loaned or hired out from its owner to newlyweds to assure strong and healthy births.⁵⁸

Ojibwa and Plains nations might hold a divorce dance to display the fortitude and bravery of "discarding something that is dear."⁵⁹ Plains husbands ritually transferred spiritual power through access to younger wives,⁶⁰ though shameless wives could and did arrange fatal "accidents" for demanding husbands.⁶¹

CAREERS

Men and women had distinct, separate but equal,⁶² lives that mutually supported the good of the community and nation. For Delaware, man was container and woman contained. For Mescalero Apache, man is shield and protector; woman is center and protected.⁶³ For Cheyenne, man is spiritual, woman is material.⁶⁴ Since the fishing Sta:lo Salish regard their community as a salmon, men are its nose and women its backbone.⁶⁵

Some activities were biologically determined, as when Coyote decreed for the Karuk that only women would pound acorns because a man's baby maker would get in the way; instead, a man hunted and fished for meat to eat with acorn soup.⁶⁶ Pottery was a job for women working in seclusion since it involved a war between Thunderbirds and Watersnakes, as noted by the cracks that could appear to ruin a vessel. Like all else, this skill among Hidatsa derived from the proper ownership of sacred medicine bundles, with potters specifically owning this right through Big Bird, River, or Snake bundles belonging to matrilineal kin.⁶⁷

Parry Island Ojibwa urge hunters not to concentrate entirely on their prey,⁶⁸ while Tsimshian⁶⁹ insist on total dedication to the game being sought. When planting, Jicarilla "men made holes with digging sticks. The women and children followed, dropping in the seeds and covering them up. It was believed that the crops would grow faster if the children, who were still growing, put the seeds in the ground." Children also kept birds and rodent pests off these fields, each bounded by a turkey feather set in its four corners.⁷⁰ Pawnee planted an even number of maize hills in their gardens since corn was a woman and breasts are paired.⁷¹ Delaware kept the sanctity of their corn fields by preventing any misuse by humans or pollution by animals.

A proper Delaware adult displayed responsibility, respect, courtesy, self-discipline, generosity, and social graces. Their lives were a blend of "personal autonomy, respect for others, clan membership, selfless motivations, pleasant attitude, proper upbringing, and diligent training towards a productive adulthood as a man or woman" to produce children who were "empty" until becoming fulfilled by a "gifted" partnership with an immortal, or *manitu*. Delaware men worked constantly while women labored in spurts, exchanging the products of their separate labors. In old age, elders gained respect and attention for their wise advice, while extremely old women, after a life of dedication, finally had total freedom of expression.⁷²

Men would fast, pray, and abstain from sexual relations before a hunt. Plateau women engage in ritual chastity before root digging.⁷³ These females were strictly forbidden to come within a half-mile of a salmon weir, yet one woman with Salmon power frequently swam around an Okanogan River trap without causing harm.⁷⁴

Women generally had an especially constrained life, since they were under greater public scrutiny and pressure to conform to the roles of wife and mother. Exceptional visions allowed women to break from this mold, but only at the cost of great hardship. Flagrantly promiscuous, lewd, foreign, or adulterous women, particularly if without male protectors, were subject to gang rape,⁷⁵ euphemistically called "running through the meadow."⁷⁶ During heated arguments, women occasionally damaged or killed men by yanking out their organ.⁷⁷

As a whole, the Plains culture area recognized at least six gender roles. Aside from "natural, normal" men and women, there were the *berdache*, contrary, or a super warrior who did everything backwards, amazon, and virgin. Among these famous women warriors were Apache Lozen (sister of Victorio), Kootenai Water Sitting Grizzly, Blackfeet Running Eagle, Ojibwa Chief Earth Woman, and Cheyenne Buffalo Calf Road Woman and Yellow-Haired Woman.⁷⁸

Lakota male virtues are bravery, fortitude, generosity, and wisdom; those of a female are bravery, generosity, truthfulness, and fecundity,⁷⁹ with patience and wisdom also mentioned.⁸⁰ Affinities with nature made elk the “Dakota symbol of masculine beauty, virility, virtue, and charm.”⁸¹ Overall for Lakota, “Man is a subset of woman, not only in the empiricity of childbirth but in linguistic terminology which identifies the stages of life.”⁸²

An Oto man was courageous, gentle, truthful, and generous; an Oto woman was ideally faithful, hardworking, and motherly.⁸³

According to the Tohono O’Odham moral code, an adult should be industrious, enduring, skilled, and prepared for battle. In addition, a woman should seclude herself during menstruation, since this blood caused deer to avoid hunters, shaman’s crystals to rot, and tobacco plants to shrivel.⁸⁴ Successful visionaries were called *meeters*, such as Hawk meeter, Coyote meeter, and so forth. Full time professional deer hunters remained in the mountains all year, except for two months, with male kin tending fields for him in return for venison.⁸⁵ “To many ... a good field, enough cattle to provide occasional meat and money, a few horses for prestige, and plenty of rain would make an ideal combination.”⁸⁶

Ultimately, however, final judgements about a person’s life were and are made on the issues of their overall character, contributions, and determination to aid the greater good, along with occasional reports of their fate in the afterworld.

TRANSGENDERS

Because Natives lived within a totally engendered universe, special intermediaries functioned to keep it from halving or fragmenting. Often these were shamans, mediating among lonely mortals, sympathetic immortals, interspecies needs, and personal motivations. Certain animals, such as bears or frogs, also played this role across life-forms.⁸⁷

Yet recent attention has focused only on transgendered humans,⁸⁸ often called *berdaches* as this term has been redefined and laundered by usage. At base, many may have had biologically androgynous bodies that encouraged them to take a special course in life. Others may have had psychological or societal pressures to assume this role, which was not always as honored and esteemed as some recent authors have projected, though drunk whites were almost killed once by Creeks for undressing a woman suspected to be a hermaphrodite.⁸⁹

Hidatsa *berdaches* had strong religious sanction and hereditary ties to certain mystic bundles. S/He took up this career after a vision of Holy Woman Above, dressed as women but worked much harder, and was the brother or son of a man holding tribal rites in the bundles of Woman Above or Holy Woman. Though hemmed in by especially intricate taboos, they were very nurturing, often rearing orphans, taking center stage in ceremonies, and elaborating craftworks in skins and beads.⁹⁰

But Lakota *berdache*, whose “heart of a woman” was often held in high derision, lived at the edge of a camp with widows, orphans, and social misfits.⁹¹ Yet they also were regarded as *wakan*, or sacred, and gave special names

to children. In addition, it seems that warriors visited these Lakota for sexual release before battles and expeditions. In the Southwest, Quechan parents of transvestites were said to be ashamed.⁹²

Ruth Landes provided sensitive characterizations that above all indicate that a *berdache* was regarded as extraordinary, among both Potawatomi and Mystic Lake Sioux.⁹³ Such a Dakota *berdache* was gently exiled from "his" natal village, as his interests became evident, "by adopting female forms of speech, female fears of water and of bodily exposure ... as always the lurer, the coquette, acting like cousin or sister-in-law of all the village men," commending "himself to women by his industry and helpfulness, and to men by his complete hospitality... He was accepted by the strange group in a spirit of gingerly tolerance comparable to that covering a truce with enemy visitors; he was treated to the teasing, bitter, flirting conduct of cross-cousins and siblings-in-law."⁹⁴

LEADERS

As a general rule, officials on earth took their powers, positions, and authority from identical immortals in the heavens.⁹⁵ Differences between leader and led were often imperceptible, yet very real, to the community. In an obvious example, every Ioway chief had two bodyguards who lived with him.⁹⁶

More typically, only the Chemehuevi "high chief" could wear turquoise.⁹⁷ In northwest California, only Karuk rich families had and have a wide, bare, and cleanly kept plot in front of the house where the wife and children live, apart from the abode of husband and sons in the sweathouse.⁹⁸ Nearby, ancient houses of the Yurok rich were guarded by rattlesnakes while members achieved luck and wealth through self-denial, prayer, fasting.⁹⁹

Among Western Apache, a woman chief was noted for her "industry, even temper, avoidance of gossip and trouble making or other quarrels, wise head, and strong body." The children of such leaders stood out as self confident, wise, unafraid, and unembarrassed. In contrast, other women were associated with a butterfly decoration because "women's minds are as flighty as butterflies and must be attracted by something beautiful, just as a butterfly is." At a Victory Dance, men were lewd, while a few loose women exposed themselves for pay.¹⁰⁰

In addition to the common joint authority of civil and military leaders for clans, towns, and nations, Ohio Valley tribes, including Shawnee and Miami, recognized similarly paired woman, whose duties of ritual, warfare, and community organization included the disposition of prisoners and the right to force an end to warfare and to community feuds.¹⁰¹ As mothers, sisters, and daughters of leading families, they cared for women's matters of planting, cooking, and feasting, when the peace woman cooked white corn and vegetables as the war woman did meats and coarser articles.¹⁰²

HEALING

Health and well-being were topics of private and public concern. As a general rule, specific diseases were caused by an animal species in revenge for

human malfeasance, and cured using a particular plant intended to remedy it.¹⁰³ Allowance was always made for individual expression, provided it was sanctioned by a proper vision and continued success. At its most elaborate, Lushootseed shamans cooperated to retrieve lost or stolen souls.¹⁰⁴

Though bundles must always be handled with care and respect, one Sauk warrior always smashed his bundle down onto the ground before a battle to make it so enraged that it would take the life of the bravest enemy warrior.¹⁰⁵ Menominee who dreamed of Thunderers began to worship together, but soon their drum was struck by lightning so they quickly disbanded.¹⁰⁶

Among Mvskogi (Creeks), informal "brush schools" taught special cures so that a few youngsters would hire a fasting doctor to spend four days with them, teaching at noon and early sunset.¹⁰⁷ They could return for advanced training over eight- then twelve-day sessions. Such a novice might be buried in a trench with only a cane mouth tube for breathing as a brushfire of leaves swept over his "grave," teaching the curer to cure by being cured.

More public expressions, in the Great Lakes region, ranged from the shaking tent occupied by a shaman with a host of spirits, to the Midewiwin, also known as Grand Lodge or Shaman's Academy, which was revitalized around 1700 by Ojibwa survivors of epidemics and dislocations. Both rites reversed "normal" time and space to make healing that much more sacred. Shaking tent polarities put the spiritual inside and the physical outside.¹⁰⁸ Inside, these spirits look like sparks or tiny people sitting upon its tier of hoops with Turtle on the bottom rung.¹⁰⁹

Mide reversals are traced to its bear patron, who is left-handed.¹¹⁰ Divided into earth and sky halves, each half included about four degrees represented by the pelt of an appropriate animal for earth or bird for sky. Wooden pegs with rounded tops were moved over a sand drawing of the lodge to show new members what to do.¹¹¹

An initiate was sponsored by wealthy family members and "shot" by a cowry shell called a *megis* to "die" and be revived by senior adepts. Ioway shot an initiate four times in the right shoulder, left shoulder, right leg, and left leg.¹¹² Each Omaha member had two *megis*, believed to be a man and woman pair, to breed progeny of tiny shells that grew larger over time to increase their abilities and wealth.¹¹³

All Native doctors were expected to be wealthy, haughty, and demanding, both for themselves and their spirit partners. Indeed, "Because Jesus healed the sick without payment, he lost his power and perished."¹¹⁴

MASKING

Throughout the Americas, people could enhance or expand their personae by adopting a mask. Matrilineal societies have a greater propensity to use masks, largely because the face is believed to come from the father.¹¹⁵ The most complex expressions of masking are the Kachinas of the Pueblo Southwest, where Edmund Ladd, a Zuni and an anthropologist, reported that when Kokko, or Zuni Kachinas, first danced for humans, women became completely allured and followed them back to the lake of the underworld. Since

they were not dead, women could not enter the underworld, languishing there until humans were given the right to bring these masks to life as its actual spirit stood in front of the wearer, its movements distinct but visible in the masker. Every detail of dress and dance had significance, intent, and meaning such that, for example, painting was regarded as a "chromatic prayer."¹¹⁶

SORCERY

Greed, selfishness, envy, and revenge were causes for sorcery.¹¹⁷ Most people were wise and cautious enough to take precautions, especially with body waste. All cut hair was burnt, for example, because there "is no way of countering sorcery that used human hairs."¹¹⁸ In all, about one-tenth of the universe had hostile intent and needed to be restrained or avoided.

DEATH

Death was not the inevitable end of every short life. Shawnees were promised to live for "200 years," so deaths before that were someone's fault. Those dead who had been especially bad during life were reduced to ashes.¹¹⁹ Just before and after death, stock was taken of a person's life. Often the heir to an office or position only received the final linchpin of vital knowledge as a last gasp to safeguard it for the holder as long as possible.¹²⁰ Effective transitions, therefore, required stable societies, adding another dimension to the destruction of Native lifeways that came from the epidemics rampant in the Americas before Europeans actually settled.

A Menominee soul on the way to the underworld was judged by a dog at a log bridge, either continuing on or plunging into the abyss if it had mistreated pets. The underworld chief had the arriving soul washed in a large wooden bowl, cured of all ailments, and purged of past memories so as to be endowed with heavenly lore to make them less intelligent but more supernatural than humans.¹²¹

Quileute components include an inner and an outer shade, along with a soul. A week before death, the outer shade went directly to the afterworld, joined a few days later by the inner shade after it had visited favorite places. The recombining of the shades forced the soul to become a ghost, causing death. Each ghost had an elongated human shape, moss covering, long nose, round yellow eyes, crooked gait, and shrill whistle. A spouse could not lie down to sleep for five days, so he or she slept huddled in a large basket. The whole family had to move very slowly and deliberately while mourning, carrying small black stones in their mouths and armpits to limit their speech and movements.¹²²

FUNERAL

A Sauk grave was dug by women using "wooden bowls as spades," with the placement sometimes determined by clan. For example, people of the Turkey Clan were buried sitting up, "in some isolated knoll under a tree suitable for a turkey roost."¹²³ Females often dug graves because, "a woman has always

taken care of a man, all his life."¹²⁴

Navajo gravediggers prepared themselves by removing all clothes, shutting the mouth, closing off the foreskin with a yucca thread tied in a special knot, preparing fire and hot water for a bath afterward, using only sign language, and, later, brushing away all tracks to and from the grave.¹²⁵

Delawares had a friend speak to the deceased at the graveside to release its soul. Mourners are expected to linger around the grave, as it was considered disrespectful to rush away. For this reason, many of the grieving lamenters feasted there. Later, at home, all washed in cedar smoke to cleanse any harmful effect. For the next four nights a fire burned at the head of the grave to light the way for the soul along the Milky Way where a dog blocked the way of animal abusers. Unami Delawares hold a feast after these four days, while Munsie waited twelve days. Many families held and still hold annual memorials, where the steam coming off the fresh cooked food provides its essence to their deceased loved ones before the living consumed the rest.¹²⁶

Most families took care to keep very powerful objects out of coffins or graves since these might be used, without deliberate malice, to harm the living. Throughout the Great Lakes region, Midewiwin members were buried with substitute emblems, particularly their cowry shell, or *megis*. Thus, instead of the actual gastropod, a stone or button was placed with the body out of concern that a *megis* could restore or revive the corpse or make it emerge with harmful intent.¹²⁷

Remains were variously treated—some buried intact, while others dismembered tribespeople to dispose of the parts separately, with all or some of the parts cremated, as when the heart of an Achumawi chief or shaman was released into the sky to become a star.¹²⁸

Among the Subarctic Athapaskan, the Carrier, or porteur of French Canadians, were so named because a wife carried the cremated bones of her husband back to the summer salmon-fishing town if he died during the winter. This enabled his death to be noted and his title and consequent ownership rights to be passed on to his heir at a witnessed public feast.¹²⁹

DEADING

The fate of the soul was largely the result of the life of the body and its treatment before final disposition. Often the body disassembled into its various components. Consciousness or life-essence was represented variously by breath, clear body fluids—like spit, tears, and sweat, blood, and flesh, in addition to bones, hair, or several intangible souls, shades, shadows, ghosts, or spirits. Cherokee recognized that each of these substances decomposes at different times and they accordingly treated each span as a further release of the life essence.¹³⁰

The loss of breath often began the countdown, followed by clear effluvia. Pawnee regarded a pipestem as "symbolic of the human windpipe and the breath was considered the essence of life itself."¹³¹ The power of a Tohono O'Odham (Papago) shaman resided in quartz crystals primordially formed from the solidified spit of one of their creators.¹³² Throughout the Americas, quartz crystals were the most usual insignia of a shaman, suggesting that, regard-

less of locale or language affiliations, this association of shamans, crystals, and clear fluids was an ancient one. A Kootenai hunter spit on his arrow to make it fly true, implying that his goodwill and respect for the game animal was given in return for its life.¹³³

After death, among Jicarilla, if the dead had participated in sexual relations with outsiders their ghosts transmogrified into the animal form of that group, such as a Navajo Cougar, Ute Owl, Pueblo Prairie Dog, Mescalero Wolf, Mexican Burro, or American Mule.¹³⁴

In the Northwest, a Makah ghost repeatedly returned to its corpse so as to remove all its flesh in order to reconstitute that body in the afterlife.¹³⁵

After fleeing British depredations in the Carolinas for haven among Iroquois now in Canada, Tutelos, though long sociopolitically extinct, still hold a spiritual adoption within a year of death "to bring back the soul" for one night before it travels over the sun's rays on the next dawn to its "permanent celestial abode."¹³⁶

Mexican Kickapoo held a memorial adoption ceremony within four years of a death or "the spirit turns into a moth and dies of hunger," blaming close relatives.¹³⁷ If a Shawnee was buried without rites, he or she was reborn a dwarf.¹³⁸

CONCLUSIONS

These ethnographic bits, how-some-ever derived from memory, have the virtues of clear fact stated in proper context in Native voice. Strung together, they speak of integrity and coherence across the continent for notions of personhood as mixings, infusions, and layerings to combine spark, bone, flesh, soul, shadow, immortal partner, and ghost into a living whole that reverses the same series at death. They also speak of flux and flow in ways that many Americans would take for ambiguity and confusion, but this is the incomprehension of outsiders.

Throughout Native North America, an engendered person was and is the predominant outcome of genetics; anatomy; moods and attitudes; outside pressures from parents, peers, self, and role models; community or family needs; training; inheritances; namings; and outcome of vision quest, all accordingly expressed by appearance, gesture, ornament, clothing, and lifestyle.

Gender, for example, is open and fluid, shifting at the moment of birth, over a lifetime, or across generations if there is reincarnation.¹³⁹ One bewilderingly complex framework for modern sociological gender separates sex as biological, sexuality as erotic practice, sexual identity as type designations, gender identity as personal feelings of patterned subjectivity, gender role as prescriptive and culture-specific expectations of appropriateness, and gender-role identity as personal lived commitment to expected ideals.¹⁴⁰

Yet "Chromosomes, hormones, sperm production, and egg production, all fail to differentiate all men from all women or to provide a common core within each sex." Instead, genitals and then body type provide primary and secondary attributes for assigning gender, though tertiary ones are usually more significant as culturally defined by posture, movement, dress, adornment, image, sexuality, intonation, speech, and job skills.

Additional influences are gender symbolism of perceived dichotomies,

gender structure dividing necessary social activities, and individual gender of socially construed personal identity, which is always “mediated by race, class, ethnicity, and sexual orientation” in lieu of “the numerous privileges of white, heterosexual, middle-class feminists who have the luxury of experiencing only one mode of oppression.”

Even more extreme is one attempt to derive transgendered males, subcategorized as military, diplomatic, domestic, and religious *berdaches* with specialized functions, from rape and brutalization because “warfare was the incubator of civil institutions,”¹⁴¹ in blatant disregard of the compelling Native motivations from personal psychology and sacred vision.

For Indians, everything is connected in a web of energy and thought, uniting each and all together, via sharing across species and beings to hopefully benefit all. Indeed, denying charity can have unpleasant or fatal consequences.¹⁴² The living tree used for a cradle-board has as much to do with raising a healthy child as parents and kin, food, clothing, and shelter.

Danger and harm came from “the devil’s tenth,” that part of participatory existence that was selfish, hurtful, and damaging. While theft, torture, and murder were practiced on enemies, they were sternly repressed at home. Thus, most intra-hostility had to be covert, producing criminals involved in sadism, sorcery, ill will, and abuse. Harm thereby worked by insinuation, though sometimes it became outright and deliberate. In vivid image, it was parasitic like a stylops, a blob that enters through a bee’s skin, propagates through a vague brood canal, and, by absorption, transforms its host so that colors brighten, behavior changes, and gender switches.¹⁴³

In this heightening, a parasite is a perversion of the keen regard that should be given to the boundaries and passages making life possible, particularly the inter-species requirement to make up for whatever another “lacks.” Thus Yup’ik turn driftwood to alleviate its boredom, give fresh water to slain seals, and provide sea oil to land mammals.¹⁴⁴ Thus, a good person constantly fills gaps to keep his, her, and their community whole.

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