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American Indian Culture and Research Journal

Title

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Permalink

<https://escholarship.org/uc/item/3s10w118>

Journal

American Indian Culture and Research Journal , 37(4)

ISSN

0161-6463

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Publication Date

2013-09-01

DOI

10.17953

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Indigenous Perceptions of Time: Decolonizing Theory, World History, and the Fates of Human Societies

Leo KILLSBACK

American Indian history, as conceptualized by non-Indian historians, has remained a field in which researchers are allowed to obsess about isolated incidents that emphasize mainstream America more than Indians. Despite efforts to revise Indian history, the Indian voice generally remains absent as narratives continue to privilege Eurocentric perspectives. The body of literature has overshadowed and devalued American Indian peoples' struggles for sovereignty, indigenous rights, and dignity. Enduring and pervasive Eurocentric paradigms have also expanded into studies of world history, and the residual effects have become problems for both American Indians and other indigenous peoples, especially when ancient indigenous civilizations are unfairly judged using these theories. In response, in this article I identify and develop a historical paradigm that explains how indigenous understandings of time can be applied to studies of human societies and contribute to broader studies of world history.

A review of mainstream studies reveals that world historians often promote Eurocentric assumptions of human behavior and apply them to all human societies, even indigenous peoples. Inevitably, these studies unfairly label all humans as aggressors against nature and humanity and do not examine how

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and why some societies were relentless in their colonizing practices while others were not. Damning all humans seems to be a favorite assumption, but this is especially unfair to populations that remain victims of colonialism and imperialism. I contend that indigenous people perceived the world with a completely different view and used time and history in a very different light than westerners, and that these perceptions promoted spiritual balance and humanity. In order to develop my thesis, I will use examples from two indigenous societies, Maya and Hopi, and then evaluate two Indian societies, Haudenosaunee and Cheyenne, according to this thesis.

THEORIZING THE INDIGENOUS VERSUS INDIGENOUS THEORIZING

For American Indian and indigenous scholars, what does the world of history and theory look like? Indian and indigenous historians do not necessarily conduct research out of personal interest or to rescue helpless indigenes. However, unlike some mainstream historians who may feel free to pursue primarily personal research agendas, Indian historians are also burdened with inherent “sacred responsibilities”: they undertake obligations to affirm the significance of our societies and cultures and, without taking on an exploitative mind-set, bring a sense of “Indianness” or “indigenusness” into the academy.¹ They often achieve this goal by asserting the legitimate historical and spiritual connections to our homelands in land claims, and by promoting justice and sovereignty. Unfortunately the domination of racist paradigms makes these tasks challenging for burgeoning Indian and indigenous scholars, especially those who value history as a tool of decolonization.

Studies informed by colonial paradigms imply, if not assert, indigenous inferiority, and scholars bearing this mind-set often rely on outdated scientific theories to justify assumptions that essentially glorify western superiority.² When the academy promotes such paradigms, the problems of academic imperialism move indigenous people further from their own histories and concepts of humanity and closer to a global colonial narrative. Indian historians are burdened to learn these totalizing foundations and then later reject them when asserting concepts like sovereignty and justice, especially when their research exposes and challenges the status quo.³ These challenges are not easy to undertake. New indigenous scholars must directly confront prevailing discourses that marginalize and ignore American Indian and indigenous rights to land, history, and humanity. By means of decolonizing concepts of time and world history, we can expose how mainstream research agendas continue to contribute to the exploitation and destruction of the last remaining pieces of indigenous identity.

Growing numbers of indigenous scholars have challenged normative mainstream perspectives by reclaiming the authority to tell the stories of their own people, to write back, and to rewrite their histories for purposes greater than challenging orthodox theories.⁴ Indian historians have also used history as a tool to confront assumptions that have been used to disenfranchise and subjugate Indian communities in court judgments, laws, and policies rooted in racism.⁵ However, modern Indian scholars often do so by relying heavily on the theories developed by non-Indian scholars such as Franz Fanon or Albert Memmi.⁶ If armed with an indigenous historical theory, American Indian historians can retain a degree of “indigenoussness” in their decolonizing efforts, which is to conduct research that honors the intellectual and spiritual legacies of indigenous cultures, and move decolonization “closer to home,” that is, further from alien or foreign ideals that are often ineffective when applied to local causes.⁷

Despite the growth of American Indian and indigenous studies, the development of indigenous historical paradigms has not flowered as much as it should. Directly confronting this challenge, Susan Miller and James Riding In’s recent anthology of Indian history, *Native Historians Write Back: Decolonizing American Indian History* (2011), is an example of such needed development. Framed within the paradigms from the authors’ worldviews, yet grounded and unified in fundamental indigenous concepts, the anthology is evidence that the indigenous “call to theory” has been heard and of rising progress in promising fields such as American Indian studies.⁸

Nonetheless, numerous outdated theories still dominate how Indians and indigenous peoples are (re)presented in history, and to decolonize world history these theories must be reevaluated. Historians traditionally have studied Indian societies within a structuralist paradigm, where only parts of a culture are prioritized. This approach limits researchers to identify “the significant events” among isolated phenomenon, while devaluing or ignoring other events or elements of culture. Unfortunately even today researchers still follow this school of thought, and as a result their research commonly shows that Indian and indigenous peoples perceived the world no differently than Europeans. Such conclusions reveal majorly flawed, incomplete understandings of cultures that are not only unfair to Indian and indigenous history, but allow overtly racist views to remain.

A prominent example of this kind of flawed view is the role of Plains Indians in the destruction of bison populations, popularized by Shepard Krech’s *Ecological Indian: Myth and History* (2000) and Andrew Isenberg’s *The Destruction of the Bison: An Environmental History, 1750–1920* (2001). Such historians passively excuse the role of white hunters and the 1800s commercial market for buffalo hides as they assert that Plains Indians “overkilled” their

own resources, on which they exclusively depended. Such historians apply linear conceptions of time and progress to Indian people when they assert that, with a little technology (rifles) and a cultural push from white settlers (achieved through trade), Indians inevitably came to behave in similar fashion. These assumptions passively blame Indian people for their own demise and justify blatant acts of genocide perpetuated and condoned by the United States. This unjust representation damns Plains Indians as irrational “savages” into perpetuity and we are left to believe that colonization was actually good for the Indians.

Similarly, scholars who traditionally studied Indian and indigenous cultures using a positivist paradigm tended to place all human societies on linear paths to a western idea of “civilization.” Such historians assumed that just as Europeans had risen from their simple lives as cavemen, all human societies would eventually ascend from the states of “primitivism” or “savagery” to civilization. According to this outdated theory, all civilizations are assumed to be on a path destined for the gifts of modern technology—even the less glamorous products of modernity such as environmental destruction and nuclear proliferation. Conclusions drawn from such ethnocentric theories assume that all human societies would collectively respond the same way as European states.

Probably the most notable scholar who exhibits this tendency is Pulitzer Prize-winner Jared Diamond, author of *Guns, Germs and Steel: The Fates of Human Societies* (1997) and *Collapse: How Societies Choose to Fail or Succeed* (2005). In both books, Diamond assumes that human societies, regardless of culture and spirituality, embody the characteristics of viruses: preprogrammed to destroy their environments and, inevitably, themselves. Among other studies utilized in *Collapse*, Diamond cites painstaking scientific research that examined petrified mice droppings in order to determine the diet and habits of the Anasazi. In the end Diamond concludes that the Anasazi became no different than the greedy corporations of modern America, apparently a conclusion he would have reached without the help of the absoluteness of scientific evidence found in mice droppings. Numerous similar scientifically based studies by Diamond, such as the infamous Clovis points and the Kennewick man, make for interesting and entertaining reads, but all point to the same cynical conclusion: that all human societies, previous and current, have failed to succeed. Such cynicism of all humanity is unfair to those indigenous cultures that maintained spiritual and physical balance with their environments and survived for thousands of years, and such judgments only affirm the prevalence of a colonial narrative that seeks to rationalize the West’s subjugation of indigenous peoples. Diamond and other scholars who follow similar paradigms have been widely criticized in their approaches and methodologies in world historical studies.⁹ Where is the indigenous voice in this discussion?

Both the structuralist and positivist paradigms led to the same apocalyptic fate of human societies' self-destruction, and although these paradigms are outdated, historians continue to study civilizations under their assumptions. Modern historians continue to cite the collapse of the Easter Island society as the "control" civilization that best illustrates the self-destructive nature of all humans.¹⁰ Untouched by Europeans, the fall of a once-sophisticated Easter Island civilization affirms to mainstream historians that their paradigms are correct. But can we really trust such histories? Where is the voice of the islanders in this discussion? World historians effortlessly and inappropriately apply similar paradigms to the collapse of other "ancient peoples" of the western hemisphere, including the Anasazi, Maya, and Cahokia cultures.

Recently, some historians began to rely heavily on the concept of *agency*, which moves indigenous peoples from mere victims of history to active participants, or agents. In most cases however, agency is used as a facade to provide seemingly fair and objective narratives as the "indigenous voice," but scholars arrive at the same conclusions as before. This is especially troubling if the conclusions assert that Indians and indigenous peoples played an active role in their own demise. Are we to hold Indians accountable for the atrocities that the United States committed against them? Mainstream historians might also use agency to assert that long before the arrival of Europeans, Indians committed acts of genocide against other Indians. Despite the innovation of utilizing agency in scholarship, the Indian voice is still missing, while conclusions remain essentially the same: either humans are damned as parasites of the world, or variously labeled as the victims of biology or accidental colonialists.¹¹

Historians do not realize that they rely on inhumane generalizations of humanity that do not reflect fairly upon any peoples. Is it easier to say that all humans are resolute about killing everyone and everything in sight, than it is to identify the cultural factors behind this behavior? In extreme cases of denial, historians ignore or excuse Christian roots of colonization (for example, the doctrine of discovery) to characterize European invaders as mere products of circumstance, especially when suppressing indigenous peoples. Although student historians learning their field may be at odds with such assumptions, they may come to rely upon them for legitimacy. On the other hand, if historians openly reject these skewed theories, they may turn to paradigms that are sympathetic towards indigenous people. Typically, "sympathetic" approaches stem from non-indigenous perspectives and contain methodological and conceptual flaws. Significantly, they allow studies to be conducted *from* sympathy, but not *with* sympathy. Often sympathy is abandoned, when scholars predictably arrive at the same conclusions.

Regardless of their approach, historians must acknowledge that they may remain, knowingly or not, the handmaidens of colonialism who have the

privilege to passively perpetuate false truths to protect an establishment based on thievery, genocide, and lies. What is the need for American Indian and indigenous studies if colonial paradigms are still privileged when studying Indian peoples? These disciplines have yet to earn the respect they deserve in the academy, with promising scholarship left unacknowledged. Academic gate-keeping and the unspoken, unseen powers of privilege and egotism continue to indirectly suppress the indigenous voice. With few alternatives, today's historians, Indian and non-Indian alike, are left by themselves to determine how to provide the Indian perspective and evaluate events as Indians saw them.

As an approach, decolonization demands much more effort and work from scholars; it is not easy, but yields much more meaningful results. Decolonization has been criticized for idealizing indigenous peoples, holding less favorable views towards settler cultures, and unfairly representing mainstream and colonial histories.¹² Labeled as biased, radical, and propagandist, studies in decolonization are undermined or simply ignored by mainstream audiences. For indigenous scholars, it is unremarkable that decolonization would be a threat to older schools of thought that have benefited from historical injustice. The challenge at hand is not for Indian and indigenous scholars to convince their critics; since colonial histories have moved from simple master narratives to assertive global narratives, the task instead is to apply decolonizing paradigms on an international level. Numerous indigenous peoples continue to face adversity against their settler states, and since the passage of the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples has gained attention, there is hope that their voices will be heard internationally.

For too long non-indigenous scholars have dominated the direction of world historical studies, which has perpetuated unjust and unfair representations. Some indigenous academics have tried valiantly to address them, but most are entrenched in a framework of mainstream schools of thought and do not adequately represent indigenous perspectives.¹³ There is a high demand to develop indigenous-centered theories to assert more accurate and fair representations, especially in world history. If historians from other disciplines could hear these voices with respect and humility, much can be gained as they can learn from indigenous cultures, not just in matters of ecology, but spiritually as well. The time is long overdue for this learning.

Indigenous scholars who seek to reveal the atrocities of history strive to reconnect history to modern challenges and rewrite their ancestors into existence with dignity. They do so with a close cultural and spiritual relationship with their work. This relationship should not be confused with bias, as it is a significant part of most indigenous cultures. For example, indigenous peoples traditionally preserved events in oral traditions, allowing for them to maintain harmony with their history, even when their histories told of

unfavorable events. Western cultures, on the other hand, hold a dysfunctional relationship with their history, especially when their histories are unfavorable, as in the case of African slavery and genocide of American Indians in United States history. Indigenous peoples and their histories are often unfairly forced into this Western perception of history, which can lead scholars to adapt their work to defend their peoples' honor against the threats of shameful histories. Indigenous peoples embrace their histories and need only to defend their survival.

"Indigenous theorizing" has become a means to develop and apply theoretical concepts specific to their studies and culture.¹⁴ New indigenous scholars who construct theories *from* and *for* their culture, people, and land are ideal candidates for decolonizing history. Linda Smith's *Decolonizing Methodologies* (2012) has inspired indigenous historians and has become a defining text that fosters indigenous-centered academic work. Smith asserts that decolonizing research requires scholars to reevaluate (reread, rewrite, and re-right) the purposes, agendas, outcomes, and uses of studies conducted on, within, and in collaboration with indigenous communities. If we further extend this model into the decolonization of world history, then we can begin an intense reevaluation of how concepts of time and history are conceived, perceived, and used to subjugate indigenous peoples of the world.

Instead of relying upon sympathetic theories of tolerance or unjust ones of victimization and racial inferiority, I propose that we turn to a general historical theory in order to enable indigenous historians to approach history in a more fair and just manner. I offer an adaptable theoretical model that both indigenous and non-indigenous historians can apply to a variety of cultures. This model's four major postulates derive from my understanding of indigenous perspectives of time and history: sacred geography, sacred history, sacred practices, and sacred laws. In utilizing indigenous theories we will find that indigenous societies have much to offer mainstream society as its members search for humanity, ecological balance, and peace. Non-indigenous historians may have challenges in understanding my concept of worlds or "indigenous realities" since I will be discussing values and cultural paradigms that do not necessarily fit within non-Indian cultural beliefs.¹⁵ Nonetheless, I hope world historians and related scholars can gain insight on how to critically evaluate indigenous histories and cultures with respect. I have taken much care and respect in discussing the oral traditions and philosophies that are not of my own people. My effort here is merely a starting point. I rely upon previously published works rather than collect oral traditions. Ideally, indigenous historians are the only ones who can speak for their peoples' sacred history and determine how these should be utilized as weapons of decolonization.

THE MAYA OBSESSION WITH TIME

When studying the history of any peoples, especially when examining cultural change, we need to perceive the unfolding of history as a process occurring over expansive periods of time.¹⁶ This approach to human history reveals more about the life of the society, such as how a society reacted to ecological challenges, or moved from areas that were no longer ecologically sustainable. Mainstream concepts of time and history, on the other hand, force us to remain preoccupied with interpreting fairly recent events that may have occurred in mere fractions of time compared with the overall age of a society. We must abandon those mainstream concepts of time and history that limit our studies of societies. Time must be deconstructed, especially when discussing indigenous peoples and their histories.

Among the most underappreciated and misunderstood indigenous societies are the ancient Maya peoples of Central America, who have earned a dubious reputation of being simultaneously civilized and “savage.” Archeologists divide Mesoamerican civilizations into distinct categories: Paleo-Indian (12000–6000 BCE); Archaic (6000–2000 BCE); Pre-classic (2000 BCE–AD 250); Classic (AD 250–900) and Post-classic (AD 900–1500).¹⁷ Most attention is placed on the Classic periods because of scholarly interest in Maya architecture, human sacrifices, and their dramatic collapse. Because they are Native American, mainstream society has a general lack of knowledge and appreciation for the contributions of these peoples and more importantly their reign over a long course of time, especially when compared to civilizations like the Egyptians or Greeks. Each of the categories of time above dwarf the rather short reign of Christian cultures in the western hemisphere, yet the collapse of the Maya is valued over their intellectual and cultural contributions in works like those I described earlier.

For nearly three thousand years the Maya thrived, maintaining several societies, which developed a sophisticated base-20 mathematical system utilizing the concept of zero. With the combined strengths of advantageous geographic location and a highly organized political structure, the people constructed massive pyramids and epicenters without modern aids such as algebra, steel, horsepower, and computers. Further, without telescopes and modern astronomy, they developed an incredible calendar system based on planetary and star movements and the rotation of the earth. As found in the Dresden codex, one of their last writings, the Maya measured time in a unique manner.¹⁸ Years of cosmic observation and a complex mathematical system allowed the Maya to predict, among other phenomenon, the precise movements of the earth, the moon, and Venus.

Herein lies a critical understanding of indigenous time and history. To summarize the system, the Maya calendar was based upon the rotation of the moon around earth (30 days), the rotation of the earth around the sun, *Haab'* (one solar year or 365 days), the rotation of Venus around the earth, *Ahau* (584 days), and the relationships between all of these cycles. Five Venus cycles occurred every eight years, meaning that Venus appeared in the same position in the sky as it did eight years earlier. The Maya also included a "sacred" cycle of 260 days, *Tzolk'in*; which is a measure of time that continues to baffle archeologists.¹⁹ At every 104 years (two calendar rounds) the *Tzolk'in* (260-day cycle), the *Haab'* (365-day cycle), and the *Ahau* (584-day Venus cycle) sync together, meaning that the calendar resets itself. This 104-year event is celebrated as a sacred day highlighting the alignment of the earth, the moon, and Venus.

Some have suggested that the *Tzolk'in* cycle was invented simply to fit within the mathematical parameters of the other cycles, while others believe it to be a "primitive" means of keeping track of childbirth.²⁰ I contend otherwise. Is it a coincidence that the sacred cycle of 260 days is also the expected length of human gestation? Is it possible that the Maya also had a deeper spiritual understanding of human societies in relation to the earth and planetary movements? After menarche, women mature and begin their biologically-determined menstrual cycle of approximately 28 days. Most indigenous cultures had spiritual practices honoring these reproductive cycles through ceremony and oral tradition. Is it a coincidence that the moon renews itself, makes a complete rotation around the earth, on a cycle that also lasts approximately 28 days? The menstrual cycle is not only biological, but also spiritual. The universe determined the moon's 28-day rotation, and the same could be said for menstrual cycles. Likewise, the universe determined human gestation to be 260 days, and the universe, not the Maya, determined the *Tzolk'in*.

The *Tzolk'in*, considered sacred above other cycles, is associated with midwifery and the female deity Ix Chel. Obviously the cycle is more than mere mathematical convenience or coincidence. Just as women have a physical relationship to lunar cycles, so do all humans, since humans develop in their mother's womb for approximately 260 days. Race, class, gender or other status cannot change this relationship: it is part of humanity. Just as indigenous societies honor womanhood and pregnancy at each monthly cycle, so did the Maya honor the birth of all humans. The *Tzolk'in* (260-day cycle) synced with the *Haab'* (365-day cycle) every 52 years, a "calendar round." Assuming that most people would witness the sync at least once regardless of age, this once-in-a-lifetime event was traditionally highlighted with a massive ceremony and celebration shared by every living member of the community. Is the ceremony mere superstition or is this evidence of a deep understanding of the earth? At

approximately age 52, with the physical changes of menopause women can no longer conceive children. Perhaps the universe also determined this change, and thus the Maya came to honor and embrace it. Upon consideration, the Maya calendar has to do as much with human biology and spirituality as with astronomy.

Humans are beings of earth, physical and spiritual, and therefore bound by the laws of the physical world and dependent upon spirituality to maintain purpose and balance. Human societies can also be perceived as organisms of earth bound by laws of the physical world, but to maintain purpose and balance must also rely upon spirituality. If all human societies exist as organisms, then they are no different than similar living beings: they must be conceived, born, mature, reproduce, age and eventually die in a predictable sequence or life cycle. This lifecycle provides the key to decolonizing time, history, and the fate of human societies.

Oswald Spengler, in *The Decline of the West* (1932), and Arnold Toynbee in twelve volumes of *A Study of History* (1934–1961), theorized that *some* elite “civilizations” rose and fell in predictable patterns or life cycles as organisms. I assert that *all* human societies—not just purportedly elite civilizations—indeed follow biological laws shaped by the larger universe; and, furthermore, the lifespan of a society is also predetermined by the universe and can be measured. What are these laws? In this discussion the most significant measurements of time are taken from the long count of the Maya calendar. One *b’ak’tun* is a measure of time approximately 394 years in length.²¹ The Mayan trace their origins to the approximate date of August, 3114 BCE, denoted as *b’ak’tun* 1. A new *b’ak’tun* began on December 21, 2012, closing the 13th *b’ak’tun* of this long count calendar. After 20 cycles of *b’ak’tun* (7885 years) a new *pictun* will begin on July 11, 4378 and the long count calendar will restart at *b’ak’tun* 1 once again. While such large epochs of time have led archeologists to assume that the Maya were obsessed with time, I prefer to theorize that the 394-year *b’ak’tun* time period is a testament to the Mayan sense of their society’s interconnectedness with the earth and universe.

The Maya origins of the long count and the significance of 394-year epochs are a mystery, but the long count reveals components of their reality, in particular their perception of time and their unusual grasp of large epochs. The Maya from the Classic period organized their political system in accordance with “short- and long-term temporal cycles” ranging from 20- to 256-year intervals.²² Leadership would change in accordance with these cycles as regimes ended in predictable breaks. Extended from this thesis, my contention is that the *b’ak’tun* (394 years), much like the month and the *Tzolk’in*, is a measure of time that directly correlates with the physical life of human societies.

The Maya believe that they have already lived through four previous worlds and are currently living in the fifth world. Could the concept of “worlds” have anything to do with the long count? Like the cycles of female monthly renewal, conception, birth, maturity, and death, a cycle exists for human societies to endure change: social, political, spiritual, and cultural. Like the predictable cycles of menstruation and gestation, predictable life cycles exist for human societies as a whole. Although they had no contact with other societies from overseas, numerous Maya societies survived through long periods of time; in 3,000 years nearly 50 known Maya cities rose and fell as grandparents, parents, children, and grandchildren in Mesoamerica. Thus the Maya *bak'tun* reflects a measure understood as the average duration of human societies. And just as humans reproduce, human societies also bear offspring societies evident in their histories as “worlds.” These worlds are dependent upon parent worlds for survival, but also inherit culture and life ways similar to the way children learn from their parents.

The ancient Maya societies developed a spiritual understanding of their relationship to the earth, and this relationship directed their existence. Similarly, American Indian societies to the north also held sophisticated spiritual ways that allowed them to die and become reborn into new worlds or realities. People from previous worlds typically endured major changes upon entering into a new world. These eras of change can reveal significant attributes about the society, including customs, laws, spiritual practices, and beliefs. Thus to better understand a society, historians should focus on what a society retained, practiced, and valued over larger epochs of time, rather than emphasize what a society gained, invented, or accomplished in shorter periods. I assert that this epoch is approximately 394 years, a *bak'tun* cycle, or a similar measure of time found in oral traditions. In short, analysis of a society's history should not be done using mainstream concepts of time.

THE HOPI FOURTH WORLD

If we assume that over a long period of time the members of a society endured challenges, then these challenges should be evident in long-standing cultural, political, and spiritual practices. Societies reinvent themselves through the manifestation of new ceremonial practices, laws and customs, while abandoning outdated ways as they mature. Parent societies may differ significantly from their progeny, but as is evident in the Hopi oral tradition, they are memorialized in stories. Like the Maya the Hopi organize their history into worlds, but do so without a calendar. Their oral tradition tells of three previous worlds and also describes future worlds revealed in prophecies. In the first world, humans

did not age and Tawa gave the Hopi “instructions and a set of laws” to live in peace.²³ He warned the people not to be tempted by things that would disrupt the peaceful way of life. Eventually the people “misused their spiritual powers for selfish purposes” and Tawa destroyed the world with earthquakes.²⁴ Tawa punished the people by allowing them to age and become ill, and by dividing the human soul into the dualities of good and evil.

First-world survivors emerged into a second world and were instructed by Tawa to sustain healthy lifestyles once again. Unfortunately, the evil side of humans began to dominate as social corruption disrupted the peaceful way of living. A destructive lifestyle threatened to destroy all people so Tawa destroyed the world with ice.²⁵ Those who remained peaceful entered into a third world, and were once again instructed to maintain peace and harmony. Here the people lived for a long time, but soon they began to turn away from the laws of Tawa, as told by spiritual leader Thomas Banyaca:

These people invented many machines and conveniences of high technology, some of which have not yet been seen in this age. They even had spiritual powers that they used for good. They gradually turned away from natural laws and pursued only material things and finally only gambled while they ridiculed spiritual principles. No one stopped them from this course and the world was destroyed by the great flood that many nations still recall in their ancient history or in their religions.²⁶

As the righteous emerged into the current fourth world, they were instructed to search for a permanent place to reside. Here Massau’u instructed them to be caretakers of the earth, to plant corn, hold annual ceremonies, and to once again live in peace. Thus the Hopi came into the current world with spiritual teachings built upon a philosophy of peace and balance with nature, since they are burdened to maintain relationships centered on “truth” to sustain a “balance of life.”²⁷ The oral tradition, which told of the mistakes of the people from previous worlds, is a reminder of both the flaws and accomplishments of their ancestors.

Relatively unknown in mainstream concepts of time, the Hopi “cycle of worlds” is a perception of history that reveals how long they have been in existence and how they lived ages ago. The Hopi aligned catastrophic environmental events with oral tradition, but the exact dates of these changes in nature cannot be determined. They are simply identified as worlds, some possibly dating as far back as the last ice age. The Hopi experience also reveals that they changed their worldviews at least three times before the arrival of Europeans, suggesting that their culture was not static, but alive and adapting. This decolonized understanding of history and change is much more complex than mainstream generalizations of human behavior and time. The Hopi

refined their way of living through trial and error over a long period of time to become sophisticated desert corn planters whose lives are governed and maintained by ceremonial practices.

The three previous worlds of the Hopi are the record of their cultural and spiritual changes. Other than natural disasters, the destruction of previous worlds and the abandonment of outdated and flawed ways of life also resulted from social conditions and unrestricted human dysfunction, in particular the loss of humanity. The people forgot the spiritual teachings and laws that were gifted from Tawa, and as humans drew further from the spiritual connection between each other and with nature, they eventually fell into conflict. Upon reaching the fourth world, the Hopi found humanity. Similar to the way parents and grandparents endure pain and suffering for the sake of their children and grandchildren, the parent Hopi societies endured much strife for the sake of progeny worlds. Like individuals, human societies can reach a physical maturity as well as a spiritual one through enduring violence, despair, and depression, including the pain and misery caused by the wrath of Mother Nature.

The realities or worlds of a society will inevitably change and its success depends on how well it adapts or embraces such change. Geography determines and sometimes dictates how a society is reborn, unless the society manages to make dramatic changes to their home lands. Indigenous societies will always maintain a sense of indigeneness since they affirm the importance of land in creating each new world. Even if an indigenous society decided to change location, as did the Hopi in their migrations, they remained dependent upon the land that determined how they were going to live. Though their physical and spiritual worlds changed, the change was not dramatic enough to completely erase the spiritual bond between humans, the earth, and the universe. "Elder societies" bestow wisdom and knowledge to newer societies, thus developing a culture for the next generations of societies and their people. Most, if not all, indigenous societies function under similar principles of change and continuity, thus preserving their indigeneness.

If the goals of human societies are not technological advancement and territorial expansion, as assumed by mainstream world historians, then what are their goals? The Hopi emerged into the fourth world where they lived in peace and balance for hundreds and possibly thousands of years before European contact. Numerous other indigenous societies also emerged into worlds where they maintained lifestyles of peace and balance. This suggests that human societies have a spiritual objective that defines humanity's goals differently: to live in peace with other humans and in balance with nature. People who pursue physical, emotional, spiritual and intellectual balance seek healthy lives, and they also work to ensure that their children will grow up

enjoying the same pursuit. This same philosophy can be extended to human societies as they pursue humanity and balance with nature. All indigenous societies eventually developed delicate ways of living, bound by their own laws and spirituality.²⁸ Not all, however, were on a path to a single indigenous world or a utopia; after all, this would imply linear paradigms of civilization.

If the fates of human societies are not necessarily self-destruction or implosion, as asserted by mainstream historians, then what are their fates? On a grand scale, all human societies eventually reach their peak and eventually die: they cease to exist like the fall of Rome. The physical death of a society is less important than its life because new societies are reborn, and they rely on the lives of their predecessors to survive. If death is accepted and the society was healthy, then the new world will transition with ease. But if the previous society's life was dysfunctional and inhuman, then its death comes with force through ecological cataclysm. Societies will undoubtedly weaken if chaos rules, and since chaotic societies want to survive, the earth inevitably forces necessary change and kills them. Ecological cataclysms are the mechanism that initiates necessary change by killing a society that has outlived its life cycle. This is probably why indigenous oral traditions contain ecological destructive forces as significant points of change. The fates of human societies are the same as the fates of all living organisms: to live in peace, reproduce in health, and die with grace, but some do not follow this pattern and do not accept death. For the Maya it seemed that there was no need for natural disasters to initiate reality shifts, as numerous societies seemed to decline for no apparent reason other than a collective consciousness to abandon outdated ways of life. Perhaps this was done to prevent chaos and to honor the natural end of each society's life cycle.²⁹ They collectively accepted the inevitable death of a way of life. What else can explain why entire Maya societies simply walked away from their grand cities?³⁰

Just as anticipations of menstruation, gestation, the onset of menopause, and death are inexact, my assertion that societies share a common life cycle of nearly 394 years, a Maya *b'ak'tun*, must be so as well. Some tribal groups, like the Lakota, envision their past and future in terms of seven generations: where the present world exists between seven generations in the past and seven into the future; a period of approximately 394 total years if a generation is 25–30 years long. With the aid of the Maya perception of time and the Hopi concept of worlds, I find this approach also to be an appropriate method in estimating a society's life cycle.

When a world dies, or in the aftermath of the destruction of previous worlds, the histories of indigenous cultures often reveal that prophets and/or culture heroes aid survivors into the next world. They help recreate the new world by revealing new laws and spiritual beliefs. Humans eventually

rekindle an indigenous spiritual relationship to mother earth as the mistakes of the predecessors become part of their history and the sometimes shameful acts of old ancestors are told and retold as reminders of human flaws. Future generations thus learn the value of a new lifeway in a new location in their new world. New ceremonies arise to honor the people's place in the physical world and their interconnectedness to living things. A familiar destiny reemerges in this new world—for its members to become and remain human.

At this point these indigenous societies reveal themselves to be very like living organisms in that they have a life span in which they reproduce and give birth to progeny societies. To add a third element to this theoretical framework, I now turn to four postulates which I see as the building blocks or the DNA of a society and thus useful tools for projects in decolonizing world history. A historian should address each to tell a more complete history:

1. Land or "sacred geography" determines the life of a society.³¹ All human societies and all humans are indigenous to the earth and depend on it for survival. The earth allows for a society and its people to live and subsist within a geographic area. Indigenesness is maintained if, and only if, the society remains dependent upon land. All societies and its people have an indigenous homeland, which is where the ancestors originate. The land determines the degree and extent of change in a society's world or reality, not humans. The land determines how the people subsist: if they become hunters, fisherman, or farmers.
2. Oral tradition or "sacred history" is the collective memory of a society.³² On a timeless scale, sacred histories are the memories of events from previous worlds worth remembering. Creation stories and origin stories are not only a people's understanding of their origins, but also the collective memories of events through which people came to understand their existence in their current reality.³³ If a society does not tell of a previous world, then they are living in a world or reality that has already repeated itself and is not much different than the previous world. This is the case for numerous indigenous cultures that did not move to other lands and that maintained balance and harmony with their environments for extraordinarily long periods of time. Their oral traditions of the current world are the same as previous, older worlds because the society achieved stability.
3. Ceremonies, ceremonial cycles, or "sacred practices" are the methods in which human societies embrace, honor, and respect the cycles of life, procreation, birth, maturation, and inevitable death. Sacred practices are the means in which humans acknowledge their interconnectedness to the laws of the universe and inescapable relationships with nature. Some ceremonies renew cycles that occur over short periods of time, like annual ceremonies, while others renew cycles of longer duration.

4. "Sacred laws" are the edicts created by the supernatural that keep humans in balance with one another and the earth. These laws are written in oral traditions and reiterated through custom to prevent imbalance and dysfunction. Humans desire peace with other humans and nature, but the earth alone cannot force a society into balance; its members have to make a conscious effort to maintain balance. Formal structures of governance and justice must exist for humans to maintain peace and humanity. Sacred laws are created by nature but maintained by humans. A human society has reached maturity if these sacred laws can be achieved and maintained in fact.

I must emphasize that although all societies would come to an understanding of humanity, not all societies practiced this humanity the same since their worlds would differ from one group to the next. For example, Plains Indian cultures became highly dependent upon the massive herds of bison, coastal peoples on fishing, and southeastern tribes on farming, but these cultures share respect for nature expressed in ceremonies, oral tradition, and sacred laws. When an indigenous world or reality ended, as it did for so many throughout the tens of thousands of years of life on earth, its DNA allowed for their people to survive. Throughout the existence of humans in Native America, who knows how many societies could have been born, matured, reproduced, and died?

THE HAUDENOSAUNEE GREAT LAW OF PEACE

A challenge that human societies face is acknowledging or denying unfavorable events in their history that reveal that a society was not as righteous as they would like to be remembered. Very few societies desire to hold onto disgraceful practices and shameful acts that their ancestors may have once perpetrated. In acknowledging unfavorable histories, however, human societies have the capacity to draw from these old times and create lifeways that can avert repeating past errors. Human societies, like humans, must also heal from violence and learn from their mistakes, but this can only be done when they are directly acknowledged and confronted. For some indigenous societies, unfavorable traits of humanity are remembered in the form of monsters or evil beings. These beings are eventually defeated and tales of monster slayers and heroes become the foundation of indigenous reality and sacred laws.

The Haudenosaunee (People of the Long House) are an indigenous culture comprised of a confederacy of six unified nations that existed in what is now known as New York state. The society created a collective memory of a previous world in which their citizens acted in unfavorable ways, similar

to the old Hopi who violated the laws of Tawa. The Haudenosaunee people preserved such unfavorable acts in their creation story to sanction and depend upon a sacred law, the *Kayanerenhkowa* (Great Law of Peace). In this first world, as Chief Leon Shenandoah described it, five nations were at constant war. “Everywhere people were abusing one another—ambushing innocent people on the trails in the forest, attacking people in fishing camps, and even in the towns. It was said that women and children bore scars from these endless conflicts. Assassinations were common. Some of the worst of the warrior leaders were even said to commit cannibalism upon their enemies, almost as if they were hunting humans for food. It was a very bad time.”³⁴

While the Maya and Hopi recall as many as four previous worlds, the Haudenosaunee remember one. Nonetheless, the birth of a new world with a new sacred law was in response to the end of the previous reality, as Shenandoah explained: “the Peacemaker came to the Mohawk looking for some of the leaders—war chiefs—who were responsible for continuing this violence. He found some of these leaders—assassins, cannibals, a lot of bad people at first—who were willing to listen to his words and to become sane human beings who possessed healthy minds.”³⁵ The Peacemaker brought peace and stability to the Haudenosaunee nations, united these leaders, and established the Grand Council governing system.

After five nations united, only one evil person remained; Tadodaha was a man who had turned into a monster. “He had long been the worst human being in the world, so terrible that the people had said, ‘the mind in that body is not the mind of a human being.’ And he was the last to reform.”³⁶ Tadodaha was eventually “melted” and restored to humanity with a song. Since then the Haudenosaunee valued words and songs in resolving conflicts in law and justice. Tadodaha was healed and eventually became such a good human that he was named the leader of the confederacy, a position that continues to exist today. The Grand Council eventually allowed for a sixth nation, the Tuscarora, to join its union using the same peacemaking methods, through words, song, and ceremony. This peacemaking process is an omnipresent aspect of the Haudenosaunee reality that has been utilized through the present as a formal and ceremonial means of building and rebuilding relationships both interpersonal and political.

The previous cruel world in the Haudenosaunee creation account is foundational in understanding the cultural practices of those who lived for hundreds of years by the philosophies of the Great Law of Peace; that five warring nations joined to form a confederacy is equally important. The establishment of Great Law and the Grand Council is said to have originated during a lunar eclipse in 1142.³⁷ If this is so, then according to the earlier proposed standard life cycle of a society, the Haudenosaunee should be

renewed or reborn at least two times since. Here historians may find a problem in that the Haudenosaunee did not collapse, implode, or fall as a fragile and unsophisticated society when compared to European monarchs.³⁸ The society survived and was able to reinvent itself as implied in my earlier discussion. The legacies of the Great Law of Peace and the Grand Council persevered from its original inception, through the colonial era as the Haudenosaunee dealt with settling European nations and the United States, to the modern era as they participate in forums of the United Nations.³⁹ The Haudenosaunee society has proven to be an organism that is capable of sustaining its reality into eternity; as each progeny society is born, it persists in the near-exact image of parent societies.

The Haudenosaunee experience is one that indigenous societies of Native America had endured for tens of thousands of years. Societies matured and died, and most left their progeny to carry on an indigenous way of living. From the Haudenosaunee viewpoint, it did not matter whether they attained the Great Law of Peace 1,000 years ago or 10,000 years ago. They, like other indigenous societies, gave birth to offspring societies that were not much different than the parent or grandparent society. Like a good mother who imparts values and beliefs to a child, so can parent societies establish a timeless continuum of culture found in the consistency of the four postulates listed above. The effect of repetition could place a previous or first world much further away in objective calendar time, despite it remaining much closer in peoples' sacred history and collective memory.

SACRED LAWS OF THE TSÉTSĀHÉSTĀHESE

The Tsétséhéstâhese (Cheyenne) sacred history tells of an ancient time when animals were large. In this reality, giant bears roamed the plains, herds of giant buffalo preyed upon humans, and giant red eagles ruled the sky. This world came to an end after a great race of all the animals, after which the winners would eat the losers in perpetuity. Humans won with aid from the birds and thus came to eat buffalo. The supernatural forces decreed four sacred laws of nature: animals could only be killed for food or ceremony; people could not kill more than they needed; people could not kill for entertainment; and every year the people were to hold a Sun Dance to honor nature.

How long ago did the world of giants end? The end of this world marks a major cultural and spiritual shift in the Cheyenne consciousness. The descriptions of large animals could have easily been transferred through generations reaching as far back as the last ice age, when mega fauna became extinct. The Cheyenne, however, seem to place this reality in an immediate memory. As

with Haudenosaunee sacred history, the previous world and the time of change became timeless. The Cheyenne oral tradition reveals that the people had survived through as many as five different realities or worlds, defined by the animals the Cheyenne came to depend on as well as how the people interacted with the earth. While indigenouness was preserved, the people also moved to different geographic areas.

The people emerged from underground into the first world, which was littered with large stones from which the people learned to make houses.⁴⁰ They depended upon archaic rabbits and lived here for some time. After a star fell the people believed it to be a sign and left.⁴¹ They arrived to a second world, an island in a land of water, and thus began to eat fish and fowl. Here they lived in wooden houses until the people were ravaged with disease and chaos.⁴² The people departed and after crossing several large bodies of water and ice, eventually came to a new land and a third world. Here they lived in earth houses and became farmers relying on corn and small game. This is the era known as “the time of the dog” since large wolf-like dogs were used as beasts of burden. Here they lived for a long time until an enemy tribe threatened the people and they once again departed to a new place. They followed a glowing light on the horizon, believing it to be the original fallen star. After crossing one more large body of water, the Cheyenne settled in the fourth world, which was comprised of large animals. This world is known as “the time of the buffalo” since the people began to subsist almost exclusively on the animal, using its skins to make their lodges and other implements.⁴³

According to George Bent, a Southern Cheyenne historian, the Cheyenne people lived as fishermen in the Great Lakes region as early as 1600.⁴⁴ In the early 1900s, some Cheyenne elders recalled stories of a life in which they knew nothing of the Great Plains and survived exclusively on fowl and fish. They described their ancestors as living in stone houses, which were “beautiful inside, with lions and bears watching the entrance” and lands comprised of several islands.⁴⁵ By the time of fifth world, the reservation eras of both the Northern and Southern nations and “the time of the horse,” few traces of the third world’s corn planting tradition remained with the Cheyenne. The time of the horse is probably the most popular era as the new animal revolutionized their entire way of life. Why did the Cheyenne so easily forget nearly everything about their previous worlds of fishing and corn planting? Why are the much older realities less important than the recent world comprised of extinct mythological giant creatures? The answers lie in the society’s “DNA.”

The sacred history of a society may not necessarily replicate ethnographically based histories that depend almost exclusively on scientific method. Historians may find it difficult to accept that indigenous people do not value

histories that do not contribute to their current realities. The best example is the debates on the Bering Strait theory, which Indian historians, both the traditional and formally educated, find of little value in disputing. Even if any consensus is reached, most believe that this theory will in no way improve or contribute to the lives of modern American Indians. Likewise the Cheyenne find debating about previous worlds unimportant to their current reality. Though they may have come from the Great Lakes, this reality's geography, laws, ceremonies, and history had little value once they relocated to the Great Plains. The Cheyenne abandoned nearly every aspect of a corn-planting lifestyle despite the possibility they may have lived this way for centuries. A change in worldview was necessary upon arrival to an unpredictable plains environment populated with millions of bison, and explains why new oral traditions of giant man-eating animals came into being. The fading reality of previous worlds over time should not be perceived as destruction or collapse. Rather, such adaptation is a feature of remaining indigenous.

If the Cheyenne held spiritual practices that honored their relationship with corn in the earlier world, once in the new world, they adopted new sacred practices that honored their relationship with buffalo. Together with the Sun Dance ceremony, a culture hero named Tomôsévéséhe (Straight Horns) brought the Sacred Buffalo Hat covenant. Both directed the Cheyenne on how to maintain a spiritual relationship with nature. The Cheyenne society also developed new sacred laws that honored humanity. Another culture hero, Motsééóeve (Sweet Medicine) brought the Medicine Arrow covenant and the Arrow Renewal ceremony and established a complex governing system comprised of four warrior societies, a council of forty-four chiefs, and four sacred laws that prohibited incest, lying, cheating, and intratribal murder.⁴⁵ Northern Cheyenne historian John Stands In Timber discussed how the world changed: "many centuries ago the prophet and savior Sweet Medicine came to the prairie people. Before his birth the people were bad, living without law and killing one another. But with his life those things changed."⁴⁷ The murder law was so strict that if violated, members were banished, could only return after four years, and lost numerous rights and privileges.

The plains world in which the Cheyenne came to live allowed them to become a sophisticated Indian society, conscious of the delicate spiritual balance they maintain with the earth and universe, especially the bison. Hunts were organized and executed with precision by disciplined warrior societies that did not kill more animals than needed. Contrary to the hypotheses of those world historians who explain the destruction of the bison as the result of Indians' overkilling of the herds, most if not all Plains Indians affirmed a sacred relationship with these animals, as found in sacred practices and

laws that protected them. These ways would be the center of Plains Indian realities until white Americans of the 1800s launched a campaign to destroy all vestiges of indigenusness on the plains, including the building blocks of indigenous societies.

How did indigenous societies prepare for dramatic change? Within an indigenous worldview the threat of destruction of the known reality was always present because of the chance that nature would become unbalanced. Much like the spiritual awareness that may come when a person accepts unavoidable death, societies also may become aware of their eventual decline. This awareness can be found in prophecies. The Sweet Medicine prophecy, for example, foretold the coming of dramatic cultural and environmental changes to the Cheyenne world. Sweet Medicine predicted the arrival of a white race who would have devastating cultural and ecological effects on Cheyenne land, including the destruction of the buffalo, the spread of exotic diseases, the introduction of cattle, and social vices such as alcohol abuse and political corruption. Among other predictions, Sweet Medicine also foretold the fate of the Cheyenne people: “But at last you will not remember. Your ways will change. You will leave your religion for something new. You will lose respect for your leaders and start quarreling with one another. You will lose track of your relations and marry women from your own families. You will take after the Earth Men’s ways and forget good things by which you have lived and in the end become worse than crazy.”⁴⁸

Pre-reservation Cheyenne could not fathom the possibility of such changes. Nonetheless the keepers of these sacred histories had profound understandings of the bond humans have with earth, and that this delicate balance could be disrupted by the mere presence of an aggressive alien culture. Prophecy can be interpreted, then, as a means for understanding future realities, including the challenges of unwanted change, and not necessarily the end of all existence.

The buffalo-dependent reality of the old Cheyenne was colonized and a new society was born that was neither a child of the buffalo culture nor the white settler culture. The result is the current reservation world, the sixth world, known as “the time of the whiteman,” which is but an imitation of a white world where the people long for a much more honorable past. Some Cheyenne believe that colonization forced their society into a dysfunction similar to a previous world when the people were lawless before Sweet Medicine came. Traditionalists assert that another time for change is necessary and near.⁴⁹ Part of the Sweet Medicine prophecy foretells of the reappearance of the culture hero after a cycle of 400 years, approximately one *b’ak’tun* on the Mayan Calendar.⁵⁰

THE ANOMALY: WESTERN SOCIETIES

I have discussed these indigenous societies as revealing characteristics interestingly like those of living organisms: they have a lifespan, building blocks of life or DNA, and they reproduce and give birth to progeny societies. If we apply this theoretical framework to western civilizations, then mainstream historians would have the tools to completely reevaluate world history. Technology, science, and imperialism no longer become the measures of success, self-destruction no longer becomes the fate of all societies, and once we begin to view western societies as living organisms, we will be able to deconstruct and decolonize such problems.

How does western civilization look through the decolonized lens described earlier? Depending on how far back in time a historian traces western civilization, one must first identify possible first worlds to evaluate any significant changes and, most importantly, any consistencies. Several societies rose and fell throughout European history, like the Celtic, Germanic, Hellenic, Jewish, and Latin, and this is evidence that several changes did occur among different societies. Some could be considered indigenous because of their spiritual relationships to mother earth. For example, the Minoan were an extraordinarily complex human society that survived for ages. When they were ultimately destroyed by a massive volcanic eruption, survivors likely adopted a new lifestyle, and in abandoning their old ways, transcended into a new world. Numerous other cultures rose and fell as imperial organisms—Mycenae, Greece, Rome—and these cultures left their ruins as testimony of their old worlds, but no society was as successful as the Christian world.

As an organism, the rise of Christendom in the High Middle Ages (1000–1300) represents the beginning of the anomaly societies. The Christian world, as a whole, is of primary interest because of its ability to proliferate rapidly and destroy other societies in other places through colonization. Following an earlier change to the western philosophical worldview, when Aristotle separated the Greeks from nature and labeled “barbarians” and other non-Greeks to be slaves by nature, the anomaly society furthered new inquiries and new interpretations of sacred laws.⁵¹ Eventually “sacred geography” became irrelevant, “reason” replaced spirituality, and “man” placed himself as the model for all humanity. This inevitably led to Christianity’s fall from mother earth, and cultures that valued the earth were branded pagan and savage, justifying their annihilation. Instead of using sacred laws, given by the supernatural powers, to protect humanity as achieved by other societies, Christian laws were reinterpreted by men and used to subjugate other peoples, especially those that honored women and nature.⁵² These significant changes to religious doctrine extended through the colonization of Native America and other indigenous

lands. Only one societal generation after coming into existence, after nearly 400 years, Christendom's progeny societies arose in the age of exploration as sophisticated but ruthless organisms, perfect for imperialism. As Robert A. Williams states:

Responding to the requirements of a paradoxical age of Renaissance and Inquisition, the West's first modern discourses of conquest articulated a vision of all humankind united under a rule of law discoverable solely by human reason. Unfortunately for the American Indian, the West's first tentative steps towards this noble vision of a Law of Nations contained a mandate for Europe's subjugation of all peoples whose radical divergence from European-derived norms of right conduct signified their need for conquest and remediation.⁵³

The organism subjugated others by not only taking lands, but also by setting up a system that forced entire societies into enslavement. Crimes against humanity were not only justified by this society, but became a foundation for existence, as stories of the triumph of "civilization" over others became the world's sacred history, which is adamantly protected against truth seekers or, in our current discourse, decolonization.

Unlike other societies, this organism had created a mechanism that could suppress or ignore its own spiritual growth, cultural change, and even its own natural death. Its goal was not to seek balance in nature and humanity, but material wealth and land. The organism did not embrace death, but came to fear it. This unique society allowed for its offspring to take on the same destructive life cycle, sever ties to a homeland, and create systems to justify the domination of others. This organism was able to create a historical tradition based on fantasy that dehumanizes entire groups of people and damns whole societies while excusing itself from any past, current, or future acts of inhumanity. Eventually it produced progeny that suffer from a societal bipolar disorder: half-colonizer and half-colonized.

The Christian imperialist world seems to be an organism that defies all of the characteristics of other human societies, even previous European ones. In replacing logic over humanity this society suppressed its own spiritual maturation, which led to a cycle of violence and destruction. This anomaly organism survives under conditions that are dire and lead to dysfunction for itself and nearly all its members, who are also in a state of spiritual adolescence, unable and unwilling to mature. They are egotistical, dissatisfied, greedy, violent, irritable, sexually frustrated, insecure, and in denial. Offspring societies come to perpetuate the same delusional reality or manifest as ghettos, reservations, borderlands, and third-world countries: products of colonization that are exploited to serve the desires of this anomaly organism, the abusive stepfather.

The society became so dependent upon its colonizing ways that if it were to change, it could collapse. The Christian world depends heavily on its dominion over other worlds and on maintaining an unnatural state of inhumanity. However, just as one cannot prevent natural changes in organisms, societies cannot prevent their own maturation and inevitable death. Attempts to accomplish immortality only lead to the most inhumane and unnatural responses to nature.

The survival of this anomaly society depends entirely on its inability to acknowledge fault, seek justice, and abandon its old ways; it fails to reemerge to a new reality. Until then, its members suffer the consequences when seeking the short-term benefits of its fall from humanity. The western world's denial will lead to its suicide: an anomalous ending to an anomaly organism. Its offspring will share the same fate. A new reality cannot be achieved unless the previous hostile worlds, where humans engaged in heinous act of savagery, are acknowledged and remembered. Proponents of the "new age," peace, and green movements should understand that the only way a "new earth" can be attained is when western civilizations abandon their self-righteous history and own up to their crimes against indigenous peoples. The perpetual state of denial persists as westerners manipulate their own historical record despite the theft of indigenous peoples' lands around the world. Avoiding and ignoring the unfavorable history of colonial states merely perpetuates white guilt, which in turn allows for the creation of racist laws and for injustice to persist. Time is long overdue for the western world to abandon their old reality and start anew.

THE UNITED NATIONS DECLARATION ON THE RIGHTS OF INDIGENOUS PEOPLES

Colonial narratives have damaged the image of indigenous peoples, especially how mainstream culture perceives modern American Indians. A fair depiction of Indians has been hidden so effectively from the consciousness of mainstream America that anything related to Indians is dominated by stereotypes, and the North American continent does not seem to exist or matter without the presence of Europeans.⁵⁴ Whether rooted in ignorance or naïveté, the mainstream notion of Indians continues to incarcerate America's indigenous people, holding them to a perception of perpetual savagery.⁵⁵ This is the "reality" of the modern world, and also a crime that will be committed against future generations of Indians and other indigenous cultures that are subjected to the same paradigm.

The adoption and implementation of the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, despite amendments, can be perceived as an

effort to bring western cultures out of their old world of savagery and closer to humanity—a change that should have occurred long ago. Just as prophets brought laws of peace and balance with nature to indigenous societies, so can this document initiate some movement toward change. In doing so, a much-needed cultural transition away from an outdated western consciousness will begin. In 1993 Thomas Banyaca, a Hopi spiritual leader, addressed indigenous issues to “the house of mica” (the United Nations) and spoke of a need for change:

The man-made system now destroying Hopi is deeply involved in similar violations throughout the world. The devastating reversal predicted in the prophecies is part of the natural order. If those who thrive from that system, its money and its laws, can manage to stop it from destroying Hopi, then many may be able to survive the day of purification and enter a new age of peace.⁵⁶

Banyaca may seem idealistic, but modern societies can change. The best example of a society emerging into a new world is the end of the Nazi regime. After the fall of Nazi Germany, its leaders were publicly ostracized, tried, convicted, and executed for war crimes at the Nuremberg trials. This led to the Genocide Convention and the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. Nazi society members affirmed that the Holocaust occurred and some were forced to visit concentration camps only feet from their place of residence. Under truth and reconciliation German society began to rebuild itself, and with the end of their savage world, they and numerous other countries adopted Holocaust-denial laws. This is exactly how a society moves from one reality to another. Similar measures must be taken if western peoples are ever to free themselves from their shackles of blind loyalty and denial. Germany’s past reality is remembered and their paradigm has shifted closer towards humanity.

CONCLUSION

American Indians have rarely favored the mainstream concepts of history, especially “world history” and “pre-history.” Traditional mainstream models condemned indigenous peoples as primitive and barbaric, thus branding them as unstable, fragile groups without legacies, which crumbled under the might of cultured Europeans. When world historians seek the formula for the dramatic collapses of human societies, they assume that previous human societies fell in similar fashion, and apply this standard to societies that may have not fallen at all. As we know, indigenous societies were stable, sophisticated, and well-established cultures, far from primitive. Visualize, for example, the multiple flowerings of Maya cultures in the garden of Mesoamerica, or the

Easter Island society, which maintained balance for hundreds of years after abandoning their statue-carving empire, long before Europeans landed on their shores and wreaked havoc. It is inaccurate and wrong for historians to assume that societies fell when their progeny had maintained vibrant cultures hundreds of years upon abandoning previous lifestyles. It is equally unfair to judge societies based on their parent, grandparent, and great-grandparent societies while simultaneously devaluing and dehumanizing their descendants.

Indigenous societies were able to make accurate and intelligent observations from their spiritual understandings and their timeless place in the universe. Several indigenous populations endured much change long before the landing of immigrants from Europe, but of greater importance, indigenous cultures enjoyed long periods of stability and balance. Their understanding of history and time should be appreciated, especially by settler civilizations that obsess over their own birth, achievements, and demise on indigenous lands. The western understanding of history and time has allowed us arrogantly to value United States history over others, and assume that no other civilization on earth is worthy of attention as our 240-year young civilization. Furthermore, when interpreting apocalypse, mainstream historians equate it to the end of the entire planet and all of humanity. Damning all humans to a single fate of suicide achieves nothing in understanding human realities. Such a view of humans tells us that we truly have not learned much about our existence, despite the time we have lived on this earth.

Western societies have asserted superiority over indigenous peoples for centuries, while simultaneously proving to them that they as colonizers were the most inhuman, destructive, violent, and deceitful civilizations. But change can happen, and indigenous people have wanted change since falling prey to "the anomaly organism." American Indians have been trying to maintain their spirituality and affirm the interconnectedness of humans and mother earth for more than 500 years. The new movements in eco-friendliness and peace seem innovative and impressive to western civilization, but they are echoes of ancient philosophies that have slowly gained respect by those offending nations. Better late than never. All human societies are indigenous to the earth, and the challenge for western societies is that it takes longer for them to come to this realization and respect the indigenous identities that have survived. For example, Germany's reemergence into a new world has driven an obsession with indigenous culture, but in searching for an indigenous identity, they often offensively mimic and appropriate existing indigenous identities.

The challenge for indigenous peoples, on the other hand, is very different. Their goal is not to return to a previous world, but to emerge into a completely new decolonized reality. For Indians this becomes most challenging because most vividly remember their previous worlds. They can recall life before

colonization, when it was good and in balance. These past beautiful societies were unnaturally forced into change by the barbarism of another society, which disrupted the natural life cycles. American Indian societies were forced to assimilate into societies that were incompatible with indigenous ways. Members of these societies continue to suffer from the effects of genocidal warfare and assimilation policies that can only be described as unnatural and unearthly. In the search for balance, it is natural to desire to return to a much happier time and some try to recreate the old world. Colonization cannot be undone, but it can be endured and overcome through decolonization. This is what indigenous societies must do to emerge into a new reality of indigenoussness, and they must do so in accordance with the teachings from their elder societies.

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