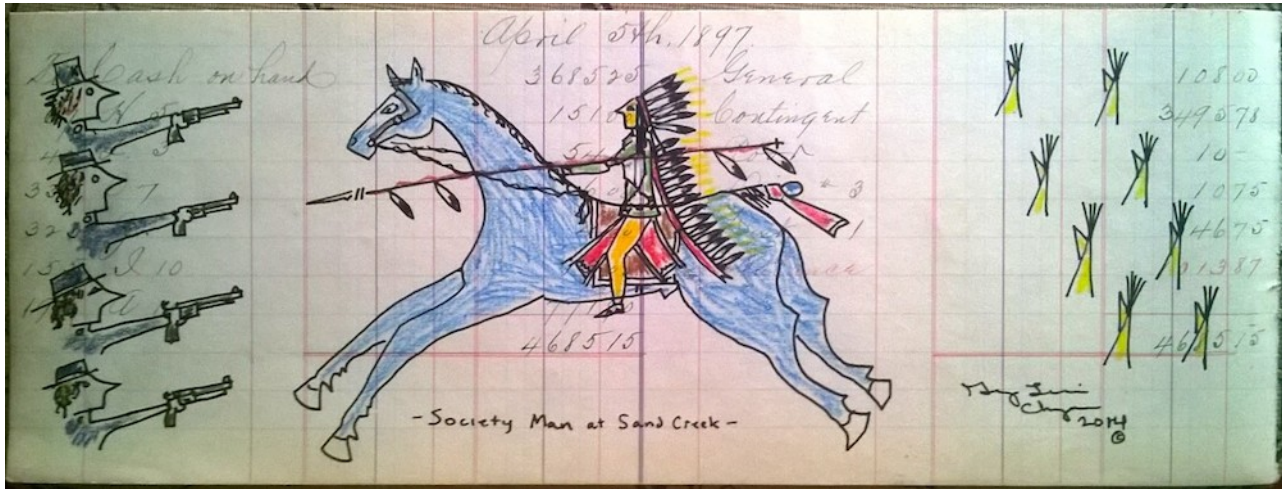


Stories of Native Presence and Survivance in Commemoration of the 151st Anniversary of the Sand Creek Massacre



Statement of Poetic Research

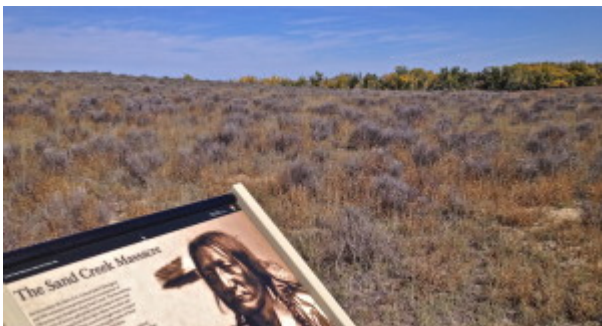


1. Sand Creek "Battle" memorial headstone, circa 1950, Sand Creek Massacre Historic Site, southeastern Colorado (2014). Photo by Billy J. Stratton.

On the cold morning of November 29, 1864, a force of U.S. soldiers under the command of the minister/Colonel John Chivington carried out a brutal and unprovoked attack on a peaceful Cheyenne and Arapaho encampment at Sand Creek in southeast Colorado Territory. In the resulting carnage that spread over forty square miles and into the next day, at least 200 Cheyenne and Arapaho were killed, with many scalped and mutilated, including a large number of women, children, infants, and elderly. Determined by the U.S. military and government in the ensuing months to be a massacre, this event forms one of the most infamous chapters in Colorado history and the annals of the American west. For Cheyenne and Arapaho people, whose legal right to Colorado lands were denominated in treaty covenants with the U.S. government, the massacre served

to drive them from their ancestral homelands and reduce them to the status of exiles.

The far-reaching impacts of this massacre of Cheyenne and Arapaho people, as well as its broader effects on Native peoples of North America, was the concern addressed by Acoma poet Simon J. Ortiz in his seminal poetic work, *From Sand Creek* (1981). "How to deal with history," our collective American past that so often excludes Native people? This question forms the central organizing concern of the work as a whole, and operates as a provocation to see the world from a different perspective. And not just to do so passively, but also to interrogate a largely one-sided conception of the past that has been reinforced in the dominant culture's narrative of Sand Creek, which is *still* referred to by some as a "battle," rendering Native people "invisible." The maintenance of this other posture is what tolerates the perpetuation by so many Americans of "an amnesia that doesn't acknowledge that kind of history." This sort of response, however, is not available to all, for as Ortiz perceptively asks, "but Indians? What choice do we have?"



2. Informational sign with Cheyenne Leader War Bonnet, killed at Sand Creek, Sand Creek Massacre Historic Site, southeastern Colorado (2014). Photo by Billy J. Stratton.

These simple but vital questions are ones that the Native writers and artists included in this issue of *Common-place* also seek to address through their own words and art. The positioning of the poetry, prose and art around the specificity of Sand Creek on its 151st anniversary is not done due to its "uniqueness" within frontier history, for the event itself is not unique, but because of the place that Sand Creek holds within a broader context of systematic oppression and violence, spanning several centuries from Mystic River, Block Island, Fort Neoheroke and Gnadenhutten to Clear Lake, Bear River, Sand Creek, the Marias River and Wounded Knee . . .

It is hoped that the creative insights presented by such a rich diversity of Native voices can serve as a basis for a more comprehensive conception of what such traumatic events mean in their historical relativity, while also demonstrating the capacity of Native people and cultures to resist, persist and survive. The joining of these words as a means of repudiating narratives of victimry and tragedy in favor of an active presence is what Gerald Vizenor

defines as “survivance.”

The legacy of the Sand Creek Massacre has been brought into sharp focus over the last several years at the University of Denver where I teach, which just last year celebrated its 150th anniversary. The intertwining of DU’s anniversary with the horror of Sand Creek is no mere coincidence in time or place within the mythologized history of the American West and its “civilizing” and “winning” that Ortiz deconstructs through his poetry. It is the direct result of the intentional actions and inactions of settlers, soldiers and government officials, including DU’s founder, John Evans who was Governor of Colorado Territory at the time and also Superintendent of Indian Affairs. The massacre that precipitated the wholesale removal of two distinct Native societies from Colorado, whose rightful claims to the land had been validated by the U.S. federal government through the ratification of the Fort Laramie Treaty of 1851, and was of such devastating consequences to the Arapaho and Cheyenne people that they continue to live with the effects of the trauma inflicted upon them. And always to remember. It is a regrettable truth that the legacy of Sand Creek seems to have laid buried for so long within DU’s institutional memory, perhaps reduced to that shadowy absence “within” what Ortiz calls “the socio-cultural-historical schematic of ‘victors and victims’” that naturalize such events while simultaneously erasing them from our collective cultural memory. As we lament and even condemn such a process, we must also cultivate and maintain an awareness of the direct intentionality that leads so many to unknowing, along with the failures of those who led us to this place and continue to work to make people forget.



3. Informational sign with Colorado Territorial Governor John Evans, Sand Creek Massacre Historic Site, southeastern Colorado (2014). Photo by Billy J. Stratton.

While the effort to confront the pervasive nature of the historical amnesia

Ortiz speaks of is one of the goals of the selection of work presented here, we know that it can only have a limited value if operating in isolation and must be part of a broader network of creative labors to be truly successful. Hence, this issue of *Common-place* is joined to previous collaborations including a special feature on Native writing and art in commemoration of the Sand Creek Massacre included in the Fall 2014 issue of [Denver Quarterly](#). As editors of the feature, Eleni Sikelianos and I addressed the tangled interconnections of these events at DU with an awareness that “history is not something of or in the past, but the very field we walk upon.” Indeed, the Native writers who contributed work to this previous project, many of which are also included in *Common-place*, highlighted the myriad ways that the Sand Creek Massacre and related events impact Native people and communities, while continuing to weigh on the contemporary lives of Native people. Together, both selections are intended to offer a means to create a more complete and multivocal understanding of our collective pasts and to confront the distressing truths that lie hidden in a way that eschews the debilitating narratives of tragedy and victimry. In an essay published at [Salon.com](#) on the day of the anniversary, November 29th, I further explored the ways in which memory, trauma and place are inextricably connected through historical events and the process by which particular narratives gain legitimacy by the creation of historical monuments, but also how the creation of respectful and honest memorials can contribute to healing and peace.



4. Cheyenne and Arapaho Healing Runners pay respect and give honor to the memory of Silas Soule, downtown Denver, Colorado, Dec. 3, 2014. Photo by Billy J. Stratton.

During this same time and growing out of some ongoing discussions about the place of Sand Creek in Colorado history and John Evans’ role as territorial governor, I, along with a small group of other concerned faculty, formed a [scholarly research group](#) to formally address these issues. As our work marked the first time that members of DU’s academic community had confronted this question, and the difficult truths to which it is inextricably connected, in a direct and comprehensive way, our task often seemed overwhelming. It was the unanimous belief of our committee members, however, that after so many years such an effort was long past due, regardless of the challenges and internal tensions our research brought to the surface. At Northwestern University, which

was also founded by Evans, the administration formed an official committee to conduct their own examination of Evans' actions as a response to protests from their Native students and concerned community members. The independent efforts of the two groups of scholars promised an unprecedented consideration of our shared institutional heritage, while marking an extraordinary opportunity to engage with Cheyenne and Arapaho communities to promote healing and peace, as well as renewed friendship and collaboration.

From the onset, we at DU recognized the critical importance of engaging with the Cheyenne and Arapaho communities as a fundamental component of our efforts to understand the complexity and multilayered narratives that make up the history of the University of Denver, the state of Colorado and the frontier West. Accordingly, we reached out to representatives of survivor descendants from Cheyenne and Arapaho communities residing in Montana, Wyoming, Colorado, and Oklahoma and invited their participation in the project. Through our meetings and ongoing communications with Native community members including, Gail Ridgely (Northern Arapaho), Otto Braided Hair (Northern Cheyenne), Karen Little Coyote and Joe Big Medicine (Southern Cheyenne), and Henry Littlebird and Chief Willey (Southern Arapaho), among others, as well as consultations with respected scholars and historians who are widely recognized as the leading experts on Sand Creek, such as Gary Roberts, David Halaas, and Tom Meier, our study group generated a scholarly report that we hoped would offer a more inclusive and nuanced conception of this traumatic period of Colorado and Western American history. It was an effort that was guided by a search for truth and shaped by a mindful independence from the artificial partitions imposed largely by arbitrary disciplinary categories endemic to historical methodologies that tend to assign ultimate authority to colonial documents and testimony.

In addition to the literary projects and the sharing of stories with the tribal representatives noted above, the University of Denver also hosted numerous lectures to give members of our community the opportunity to attend readings and exhibits featuring Native scholars, writers and artists who so generously shared stories of Native cultural survivance. Among these we were honored to host the renowned Cheyenne-Arapaho scholar and educator Henrietta Mann, who shared White Buffalo Woman's (her great grandmother) harrowing account of traumatic experience and survival at Sand Creek, as well as Cheyenne artists George Levi and Brent Learned, Merlin Little Thunder, B.J. Stepp and Nathan Hart, whose drawings and paintings on the theme of the massacre function to reclaim the narrative of these events from the inflexible apparatus of colonial historiography that tends to consign Native people and cultures to a static and doomed past.

Through these participants' memories of their ancestors and their enduring active presence in stories passed forth from one generation to the next, such accounts live on and demand to be told, but also listened to. We took it as our obligation and responsibility as scholars and educators, but also as occupiers of a land so violently appropriated from its rightful Native owners, to listen

to the Native peoples who generously shared their stories and memories with us. And it was the insights gained from these encounters that allowed us to offer a fuller accounting of the historical, political and social contexts out of which the Sand Creek Massacre emerged. For reasons that remain unclear, the scholars involved in the production of the Northwestern report decided to take a different approach without the active participation of the Cheyenne and Arapaho tribal communities who were the very people most affected by the truly horrific events that both study groups worked to understand. This crucial distinction, perhaps, best typifies the contrasting methodologies that each group employed in their research and seems to reflect strongly in the apparent divergences in our findings, which again recall Ortiz' questions about the systemic and consistent exclusion of Native voices and perspectives in American history.



5. "Captain Silas S. Soule, A Man with a Good Heart, July 26, 1838-April 23, 1865," George Levi, ledger art (2014). Courtesy of George Levi.

While both reports severely criticize the actions John Evans took as Governor of Colorado Territory, and his failures in his duties as Superintendent of Indian Affairs, the DU report found him to bear culpability for the Sand Creek Massacre due to his position as the highest political authority and his significant role in stoking the violent anti-Indian sentiment and dangerous hostility in the months leading up to the massacre. This finding was echoed and specifically cited in the official apology conveyed to the Arapaho and Cheyenne people by Colorado Governor John Hickenlooper on the steps of the Capitol building in Denver on December 3, 2014. The Northwestern committee came to a different conclusion which was viewed by many, including their own Native students, as ultimately absolving John Evans of responsibility for the massacre using the relativist claim that he was a "representative figure who believed in and lived out the dominant ideas" of his time. But as Ortiz illustrates, there was another way, there was always another way: "pain and death did not have to be propagated as darkness and wrong and coldness; they

could have listened and listened and learned to sing in Arapaho." Despite the differing conclusions of our committees, both universities are moving forward with efforts to acknowledge historic wrongs and repair the damages of the past to create a more welcoming and inclusive environment for Native students on their respective campuses.

It is a regrettable truth that the founder of Northwestern and the University of Denver, John Evans, forever binds our institutions to the Sand Creek Massacre. This past, our past, however, does not have to define our futures, nor the relationships we have forged with Cheyenne and Arapaho communities. As members of the DU community we have chosen to no longer hide from the reality of the past and to underscore the belief that true healing can only take place when the legacy of history is reckoned with in an honest and open way. Not through obfuscation, neglect, equivocation and silences. We owe it to ourselves, and the students we are dedicated to serving, to resist this easier path at every turn. To stand against the implacable attitudes of tradition and nostalgia that all too often renders necessary change inordinately slow or worse yet, ineffective. And we also owe it to the memory of courageous leaders such as Lean Bear, White Antelope, Big Man, Left Hand and Black Kettle who represented their people with honor and dignity in the face of violence and hatred and greed, as well as men like the U.S Cavalry officers Silas Soule and Joseph Cramer, men that refused to be driven by the dominant ideas of the time and *instead* understood the injustice that is driven by hatred and greed, and who stood up against it. Men who give Ortiz reason, perhaps, to turn away from the incapacitating power of hopelessness and despair: "I know/ there is a world/ peopled with love./ I know/ there are people/ who speak/ not in undertones/ but gallantly and joyously,/ who are valorous/ with simple courage." Such are the people who truly deserve to be remembered and honored in history and in monuments over those who perpetuated a shameless legacy of violence and oppression.

Most importantly, we maintain our most hallowed responsibility to the original owners of the land on which the University of Denver stands, the Arapaho and Cheyenne people who were driven from *their* homes, from *their* bountiful landscape, from *their* places of tranquility and *their* holy places and sacred sites . . . We owe it to the land itself. Likewise, for Indigenous peoples of the Americas, this history, and the struggle against greed, hatred, oppression, deracination . . . extermination . . . a seemingly unending series of catastrophic events that continue to hold power and affect their lives and communities, must be remembered. Throughout North America, as the writers and artists included here in *Common-place* bear witness, the wreckage of this history has now been accumulating for over 500 years . . . And Native people continue to respond in their own creative ways to the results of this enormity.



6. "Respect Sacred Ground," Sand Creek Massacre Historic Site, southeastern Colorado (2014). Photo by Billy J. Stratton.

Despite this history and the traumatic events it set into motion, however, the people have persisted. Native peoples of North America have persevered and the people have continued to live, to love, and to flourish—to sing and tell stories, *their stories*. For as Ortiz writes, "I have always loved America; it is something precious in my memory in blood and cells which insists on story, poetry, song, life, life." This selection of creative work in *Common-place* offers simply one small contribution to the ongoing endeavor to open up new spaces for Native writers and artists to share *their own* stories, memories and histories within a context where such perspectives are so often denied a presence, intentionally or not. So while this latest journal selection includes new work by several of the writers from the *Denver Quarterly* feature, such as George Levi, Kimberly Blaeser, Frances Washburn, Toni Jensen, Crisosto Apache, Byron Aspaas, and Sara Ortiz, it also includes the deeply affecting voices of Simon Ortiz, Lance Henson, Margaret Noodin, Michael Wasson, and Brent Learned.

This collective work is offered as a virtual gathering of Native voices and a diverse yet unified testament to the power of memory in giving substance to the ideas I have attempted to convey through these admittedly insufficient words. In spite of its inherent limitations, my hope is that this feature can offer renewed testimony to the resiliency of Native people; that combination of persistence, resistance, and survival that Gerald Vizenor has championed in his work, to create within the ether of these virtual pages a sense of Native presence and actuality over absence, nihilism, and victimry . . . Survivance, in all of its forms, is the renunciation of dominance and oppression in "the continuation of stories."

Billy J. Stratton
University of Denver

Further Reading:

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Crisosto Apache

Of Thunderous Blood Storm

~~The rain fell upon the earth for forty days and forty nights. [Genesis 7:12]~~

dawn bleeds through biosphere, back to a beginning—

clouds gather from onyx and water falls, always—

in a beginning, as (s)he / our hands caress,

in a beginning as (s)he / we are meant to exist,

in a beginning (s)he /our voice heaves

immemorially—

blood shot eyes clamp down around all fingers—

seam of sideways light filters through glass caps—

tireless legs climb up our white mountainside—

wet clay debris mesh between toes and dermal ridges—

water slab backs hinder an exertion to higher ground—

russet liquid skirts channel continuously through embankments—

sheaves slide underfoot, coursing always before and now—

top center veins mend through reformation of red skin—

memories of mankind work in *this* same way,

memory is the skin that *is* all our body,

memory is the milk that *is* our feminine,
memory is the fist that *is* our masculine,
memory is the cradle that *is* our born,
memory is the heap that *is* our stolen,
memory is the council that *is* our dead and massacred,
memory *is* our placental land, *our Americas*—
will our memories eventually reach our mountain top—
baptismal levels rise rapidly, as the always have—
clad bones and flesh pour from the mouth of basalt cliffs—
dense clusters of *by-the-wind sailor* jelly fish engorge with algae—
a hollow tree trunk hastily purges somnolent vessel—
thunderous static charge trade a task of inert limbs—
flouting blood sputters inward, coating whitening eyelids—
lightening surges through a course edge of tangled fingers—
swollen arms grapple alongside a timber raft—
a stutter set afloat a mucus current, rowing slowly away—
whitewash membrane collides into a small piece of island womb—
inflamed curtains suspend inside a buoyant flux of cavity—
reddish tight skin ewers stay bobbing, adjacent to crossing legs—
stagnant waves balance through droplets, as it always has—
this beginning, undulates toward an abyss that is whirling—
a grand empty opulent complex bulges painfully from the navel—
an ubiquitous scar imprints at the base of all abdomen—
umbilical pulls us closer to disintegration—
our sacral bone cleaves us apart, toward a state of decay—
tiny blood bulbs echo from fused linings—

centrifuge plunges us into an umbral slant of shadow—
our pelvic descent carries through a breakage of plasma—
broken shell and stone carry refrains of lanterns and litany—
inside an elongate throw we stretch our grip on each another—
we tether toward the outer ends of a black plastic lining—
an imminent sieve lost in a slog of a murky epithelium—
a gild silence hovers over whispery monuments—
twinkling ghost cut intermittent signals of encumbering monsoon—
a marching sound of water droplets reveal a sulfurous match—
epidural drape shapes a drain that corrode arroyos—
cross currents liquid ages fruit blood casks for infallible lips—
northern hemisphere air is a heavy static—
droplets stains of ancient liquid fall onto face—
fire ants and *pinacate* beetles scurry into burrows—
coves corrode in a bath of matching pelvic flaps—
barn swallows take no flight today—
small hairs on our forearm sway by the unseen—
loose air confines the expansion of deep clouds—
dziř gais'ání / sacred mountain is still visible in our approach—
an infant wails for first breath at Mt Sinai Medical Center—
in the thickest part of the Congo, leaves thrive—
plankton multiplies inside the north Atlantic currents—
magma toils as afterbirth beneath the earth's crust—
tectonic plates ease with lenient fractures—
basalt plummets off a western sea cliff into the colliding waves—
accruing globule course down the right side of nostril—

oceanic spay, dusts the coast line—
placental fluid washes the floor in a prenatal unit—
the last remaining white rhino falls to its knees—
we pull the noose tighter before finally dangling on a closet rack—
a sapphire colored car abruptly stops as an ambulance darts by—
a murder of crows gather outside a window planning their demise—
ceiling fans rotate with the concave of last breath—
the sun unleashes a powerful solar flare on March 11, 2015—
fires extinguish in the arctic circle as the sun rises—
tears of red wine saturates our face as we emerge—
our limbs convulse a blurry apparition in the world—
our pelvic muscles contract and constrict uncontrollably—
losing sounds to letters as fluid rushes from our skull causing syncope—
training wheels detach from a child's bicycle in Florida—
somatic cells begin their splinter—
coccinella magnifica separates her elytra and takes flight—
the same fleet of fire ants dismantles and consumes a mouse carcass—
tumble weeds herd the highways and are shepherd by gale forces—
blood passes from one vacuum to another—
x will always remain as anomalous blood in our identity—
at the collapsing center of a desert universe, dawn arrives—

Byron Aspaas

Candy Land Has A Front Range

To escape, I started to run again. I started to run along the paths of Colorado Springs which was flavored much different than the taste I was used to. I say

flavored because the recipe of the landscape is measured differently and calls for different types of spices and ingredients which created a different delicacy with a different visual flavor. If I could describe Colorado to my family, to my friends, to you. I would say Colorado has a front range frosted with different layers of green: forest green, emerald green, marijuana green. I would say the land is cemented and massacred with decorations of foreign flowers from different lands placed strategically to detour your eyes from the blemishes of its history which is now laced with red white and blue ribbons edged in a signia of calligraphy, *America the Beautiful*.

Kimberly Blaeser

Mochi, Prisoner of War

Remember her in winter. Picture her as she was then in Black Kettle's camp. A young woman of 24. Southern Cheyenne, of the Tse Tse Stus band. In the tipi of her parents.

Remember her at Fort Marion. Imprisoned with her warrior husband Chief Medicine Water. The infamous Captain Richard Pratt her warden.

Try to imagine the slow-motion-minutes that changed her life: Dawn. November 29, 1864. You are Mochi—Buffalo Calf. Your band is camped at Big Sandy Creek. Your leader Black Kettle flies America's stars and stripes above his lodge. Flies the white flag of truce. You are safe here and Black Kettle has sent the warriors to hunt buffalo.

This is United States History 101. Fact: Black Kettle's peaceful camp is not safe. Mochi is not safe. Indians in colonial America cannot be safe. Fact: U.S. Army Colonel John Chivington was a Methodist preacher. He was a freemason and opponent of slavery. Chivington, however, was not an opponent of murdering Indians.

You are Mochi in winter camp with your mother. It is dawn when your life explodes around you. The first explosion is the bullet entering your mother's forehead. The second explosion comes as you fight off the soldier attempting to rape you. You have made that explosion with your grandfather's rifle and the soldier falls. You run then into the chaos and through the cannon fire and the screaming and the slashed and disemboweled bodies.

Imagine your life now as a long series of explosions and escapes. You are Mochi the warrior, the raider. Imagine you are remembering the explosions when you sleep. Imagine you are imaging the soldiers each time you raise your rifle. Killing the memories over and over for eleven long years. Exploding them and running from them, until finally you surrender at Fort Leavenworth.

Remember her in winter. Picture her as she was then in Black Kettle's camp. Remember her at Fort Marion. Imprisoned with her warrior husband Chief Medicine Water.

Text books call it Chivington's massacre; but Sand Creek was also Mochi's spiritual transformation. Let us call her Mochi the witness, the survivor. Prisoner of War.



In taking account of Sand Creek, the Wounded Knee massacre, the Trail of Tears, the Sandy Lake tragedy, the Long Walk, or any of the other long list of atrocities inflicted upon Indigenous Peoples of the Americas, the cold facts still stun. But among the sad litany of military barbarisms—Jewish Holocaust, Pol Pot, My Lai, Abu Ghraib—they remain among the least known. The historic campaign to displace or eliminate Native tribes has been trivialized beyond recognition into some Western fantasy of American frontier justice.

What is survivance in the face of denial? In recent news, the picture of a drowned three-year-old boy, a Syrian refugee, has put a human face on the ongoing refugee crisis. "We are human beings, just like Westerners," said his father. To survive, to resist, as Native nations we too reject the comb-over caricature of simply tragedy. Real people like Mochi saw the brutal slaughter of family and community they loved. They were changed by it. Their lives and the lives of each succeeding generation have been irrevocably altered. With real fingers on this keyboard, I write to recall and to repair.

Chivington's triumphant army of Sand Creek decorated their uniforms, their saddle horns, their bars and barracks with the body parts of Cheyenne and Arapaho men, women, and babies. Such was their celebratory memorial.

The Cheyenne warriors imprisoned at Fort Marion, many of whom saw their band decimated at Sand Creek, chose another path of remembrance. Moving beyond despair, they depicted in Ledger Art images of their old life, of spiritual connection, their memories of battle—each powerful expression drawn over the colonial accounting, symbolically reclaiming a kind of tribal autonomy.

And what of America's memorializing 150 years after the Sand Creek Massacre? In a country that celebrates "Columbus Day" and a cardboard-cut-out pilgrim and Indian "Thanksgiving Day," how do we make space for historic truth? Native lives are not merely mile markers on a tourist highway. This new nation should acknowledge the history and continuing existence of each Native Nation within its bounds. Imagine with me "Indigenous Survivance Day."

"That we may not be mistaken by them for

enemies.”

Motavato (Black Kettle), autumn,

1864

Estate of Chief Black Kettle (1813-1868)

Peace medal from Abraham Lincoln

34-star American flag presented by Colonel Greenwood—flown over his tipi to stave off attack

White flag of truce

Appointment as Chief in the Cheyenne Council of Forty-four

Official papers declaring him a “good friend” of the United States

Treaty at Fort Laramie.

Treaty at Fort Wise.

Peace settlement at Fort Weld.

Livestock: 21 horses and 6 mules—valued by U.S. at \$1,425.00 after their destruction at Sand Creek

Nine bullets removed from his wife Medicine Woman Later after the Sand Creek Massacre

“Perpetual Peace” in the Treaty of Little Arkansas River

Medicine Lodge Treaty.

Title of “Peace Chief”

A rally of bullets to the back while retreating at Washita River

Portrayed as “good Indian” in television’s *Dr. Quinn, Medicine Woman*

Memorial at Black Kettle National Grassland

Lance Henson

Just after midnight in the denver bus station

I ask a shoeshine black man where the indian bars are

We walk outside and he points toward the rounded moon

Soule street he whispers

Three blocks away i find soule street
And a red neon bar sign with the r shot out
Inside merle haggard sings mama tried

I settle in and order a 25 cent beer lighting a toscanello
an old man behind the bar watching
Im sitting next to a midget
His legs dangling beneath him
Wearing little boy tennis shoes
He asks me for a cigar

They call me the prophet he says
I didnt think they called you slim i said
People keep buying him beers and he slides
a few my way

a mexican and an indian start a fight over a toothless
babe with nice legs
guns and knives everywhere

the barman shouts a beer for everyone
the fight stops
i see him staring at the whirling ceiling fan

i have owned this bar for 56 years he says to me

i smile and descend into a dark winged price
already paid
drinking warm beer with these bruised eyes and souls

entering the backside of a song
another beer sliding in front of me

denver
jan10.04

soule street,name for the army capt silas soule who testified against col.
chivington,the officer who ordered the massacre of cheyennes at sand creek,1864
merle haggard..country music singer

At the military cemetery hamm In luxembourg

For jack whiteshield and roy larney

In a slow snow storm last december

I found your graves

The white landscape
Undulating in breaking sunlight

The crunching snow beneath our footsteps
The sloping shadows of headstones weaving a
Breathless pattern of goodbye

In beauty i pray for you
In peace i place this cigarette
my relations

In a circling sage wind

I speak your names....

January05

jack whiteshield,my uncle, and roy larney,arapaho
served and died in general george patton' tank corps,1944

Toni Jensen

Fracture and Song

Of the nearly 200 Arapaho and Cheyenne killed at the Sand Creek Massacre, two-thirds were women and children. I use the preposition "at," not "in" because those women and children were not "in" battle—they were at home; they were invaded at home. I say "at," not "in" because location matters. This location—Sand Creek—has become a contested space. Its history is as contested as it is important. To memorialize correctly, language matters. To remember the place of lineage, both of people and of place, language and image matter. To place Sand Creek in a line of people and space that connects to today's people, today's spaces, language and image together must matter for us to work toward survivance.

The Sand Creek massacre occurred at the edge of the geologic formation now best known as the Niobrara Shale Play. At the time of the massacre, November 29, 1864, the Niobrara Shale was laid down between 82 and 87 million years past. The formation sometimes also is called the Niobrara Chalk.

The image most associated with the Sand Creek Massacre, most familiar is not

chalk but is oil on canvas, Robert Lindneaux's 1936 "History Colorado #46619." The image is displayed in the *Wall Street Journal's* article on Sand Creek and on the National Park Service website, for example, which is the where the *New York Times* article leads readers for more information on the massacre and the 150th anniversary.

Lindneaux's painting offers a landscape that stuns: panoramic, row on row of teepee in taupe and tan against the brown of the ground, with the light blue water of the creek winding through the scene like ribbons, the clouding sky above a mix of both palettes. The details, though, the people. Soldiers in blue ride roans and chestnuts. The soldiers have their guns drawn, long, thin barrels out front—this seems like it might have been. But they're shooting, most often, at men. At Arapaho and Cheyenne men. Some hold guns back to the soldiers, some lay fallen to the ground by the teepees or in the creek, face down. Image and language—they matter.

Two-thirds of the Arapaho and Cheyenne killed that day were women and children. In the painting, the women and children are few, not many, and they are standing or walking. They hold their children's hands or carry them on their backs. It is easy to find them; they wear green and so are bright among the tans and blues.

Green is the color of growth, of spring, of hope. Two-thirds of the Arapaho and Cheyenne killed that day were women and children. Words matter. Images matter.

The women and children that day—wearing green, wearing brown, wearing blue, wearing all the colors—were not left to stand, were not left to play or work or see the beauty of their homes, their panoramic vistas, their land.

A "shale play" is a formation of similar geologic and geographic properties that also contains a notable amount of natural gas. In oil and gas terms, the Niobrara Shale Play is most often called "an emerging play" or "an exciting, new play" or "a young play." It is an active play, producing natural gas through hydraulic fracturing or fracking. Water and sand and chemicals, millions of gallons, are forced down into the shale, the rock, to break it apart, to release the gas, which is then taken.

In October 1865, the Treaty of the Little Arkansas acknowledged the government's blame for the Sand Creek Massacre. But the treaty also took Cheyenne and Arapaho rights to land titles in the state of Colorado. The language matters, and the actions do not speak, they shout.

What has happened since fracking began in June 1998 in the Barnett Shale of Texas, what is happening today across the country is this continued shouting. The degradation and exploitation of Indigenous women and children continue through the force and power of history, through the force and power of this fracking industry.

Indigenous women and children are sold for sex to fracking camp workers; they

are exchanged, they are bartered, they are trafficked; they are supply meeting demand. They are made to be goods on the land their families once inhabited, their own lands.

The taking by force of our land always has been twinned with the taking by force of our bodies, of our most vulnerable bodies—our women, our children.

In the Bakken Shale Play in the Dakotas, there has been a 30 percent increase of sex trafficking cases filed in the last three years. In April 2015, a coalition of Indigenous women filed a formal request for the United Nations to intercede on behalf of Indigenous women who are being sex trafficked near fracking sites across the Great Plains.

The taking by force of our land always has been twinned with the taking by force of our bodies.

In rural, northern Pennsylvania, along the New York State border, sex trafficking around Marcellus Shale sites has grown so great, a local YWCA received a \$500,000 federal grant to provide help to trafficked women and children, many of whom come from nearby reservations in New York. The organization Sing Our Rivers Red has taken its art exhibit to New York and to North Dakota and to most states across the country. They collect single earrings and display them on red backdrops to memorialize the missing and murdered Indigenous women.

The taking by force of our land always has been twinned with the taking by force of our bodies.

History is lived, in our lands and in our bodies. In this country, we bear the repetition of the words—the times “battle” is chosen over “massacre”—and the images, those women in green still whole, still standing. We repeat them whether they are true or false. We spin them until we are dizzy, until we fall to the ground.

But the ground receives us. Always. We practice survivance through language and image and memory. We protest, we draft petitions, we make art, we memorialize.

The taking by force of our land always has been twinned with the taking by force of our bodies. Images matter. Words matter. These lives matter. We understand that alongside every creek, every rock formation, every piece of land that was once and still is ours, there is crying, yes, there is blood on the bright green of the women’s dresses, but there also are our images, our words, ringing out like song.

Brent Learned



Courtesy of Brent Learned



Courtesy of Brent Learned



Courtesy of Brent Learned

George Levi



Courtesy of George Levi



Courtesy of George Levi



Courtesy of George Levi



Courtesy of George Levi



Courtesy of George Levi



Courtesy of George Levi



Courtesy of George Levi

Margaret Ann Noodin

Bingwi-nanaandawi'iwe-nagamon A Sandy Healing Song

1.

Anaambiig, anaamaabik
Under the water, under the rock

mikwendamang giizhgoog
we remember the days

mikwenimangwaa
we remember the ones

gaa mewinzha
who long ago

inosewaad, onosewaad
walked to and from

gichimookomaanakiing
the long-knifed American

zhimaaganishigamigoons
place of war, of distribution

mii baabii'owaad, mii zhigajibii'owaad
then waited, became impatient

bakadewaad miidash gawanaandam
hungry then starving

bedosewaad, niboowisewaad
walking slowly dying

gojigiiwewaad
trying to go home.

2.
Anaambiig, anaamaabik
Under the water, under the rock

mikwendamang giizhgoog
we remember the days

mikwenimangwaa
we remember the ones

gaa mewinzha
who long ago

gabeshiwaad akawaabiwaad besho
made camp in expectation near

gichimookomaanakiing
the long-knifed American

besho zhimaaganishigamig
place of war, of distribution

mii babaamademowaad, mii animademowaad
then crying away from there

animinizhimowaad miinawaa giishkishinowaad
ran terrified and falling in slices

nitamawaawaad, niboowisewaad
murdered, slowly dying

gaawiin wiikaa giiwewaad
never to go home.

3.
Anaambiig, anaamaabik
Under the water, under the rock

mikwendamang giizhgoog
we remember the days

mikwenimangwaa
we remember the ones

gaa mewinzha
who long ago

bagadinmawiyangidwa
made offerings to us

mitaawangaagamaagong, heséovó'eo'hé'ke
Sandy Lake, Sand Creek

ho'honáevo'omēnēstse biinish gichi-ziibi awyaang
we are standing stones and flowing water

gii noondawangidwaa, naadamawangidwaa
we heard them, we helped them

ezhi-inawewaad inawemiyangidwa
they were our relations

ganawenindizoyang endaaazhi-bakaaniziyang
caring across one another's differences

giiwe-gizhibaabizoyang apane.
spinning always home.

4.
Anaambiig, anaamaabik
Under the water, under the rock

mikwendamang giizhgoog
we remember the days

mikwenimangwaa
we remember the ones

gaa megwaa
who right now

gabeshiwaad akawaabiwaad
make camp in expectation

oshki-gichi-akiing
in a new global space

gimoozikaw-zhaabwii-niimi'idiwaad

a sneak up dance of survival

onaakonigewaad ezhi-nagamowaad
they decide how to sing

nanaandawi'ive-nagamon
a healing song

gaawiin wiikaa wanendamosiiwaad
never forgetting

apane bi giiwewaad
always coming home.

This poem connects the memories of the Sandy Lake Tragedy, which occurred between October 1849 and January 1850, when 400 Anishinaabe men died of starvation and freezing; and the Sand Creek Massacre on November 29, 1864, which took the lives of at least 200 Cheyenne and Arapaho families and soldiers. It was written first in Anishinaabemowin with select Arapaho and Cheyenne place names.

Margaret Noodin, 2015

Sara Marie Ortiz

Oil

I began to write at the age of fourteen. But I think I'd always told myself, and others, stories. Stories about the world as I saw it. Stories about the world as I wanted it to be. Stories to shock, and inspire awe, or captivate, stories that told a version of the truth which helped me to feel like my spot of Pueblo child-earth was a little less inconstant, a little safer, a little more mine somehow. A lesser known 'fiction' would be the one I'd ultimately come to know as my adolescence and young adulthood as a working Indigenous woman writer – a 'fiction' that I'd dared to begin writing as only a child.

Of thee I sing
 strange fruit
Colonel Chivington
Evans and all his many ghosts assembled there
 Spring wind rising
Driven from the land
 Not really
The ghosts sing a song of *me*

I lied as a little girl. A lot. I think these earliest fictions, which were sometimes the only truth a child like me knew, were actually early forays into the genre I'd ultimately be rooted in—creative nonfiction. I think my own version of truth-telling, and the ways in which it became food, scepter, and guide wasn't just a survival mechanism, it was my way of orienting myself in time and space and granting myself ownership over my own Indigenous life, selfhood, and vision. I'd soon learn that the people I emerged from, Pueblo people, had all told stories in this way—not just in order to survive, but to sing the world and everything in it into being.

Sing a song of us

But this is not a scary story to tell in the dark, no,

this is our morning song, our staying awake through the night song,

our survival-somehow song

We were not driven from this land

We were not relocated

Not really

The enterprise failed.

Our brown bodies are only half the story.

The great-great half-Pueblo granddaughter of a businessman and mill owner named Van Winkle who owned slaves and built a good deal of the infrastructure of NW Arkansas in the civil war era. Heroin and crack-addled caretakers. A venerated alcoholic Pueblo poet-father. A manic, yet dutiful, actress-turned-lawyer mother. A part-Navajo, part white schizophrenic baby brother. A girl child born to the brown girl at fourteen. Crack deals gone bad. Murders and missing women. The vastly beautiful New Mexican landscape—a rapture unto itself. Constant travel, across Indian Country, and even a little abroad. Stories. So many. And ghosts. So many. How could I *not* write them?

#Blacklivesmatter
Denali or McKinley
Either way
Drilling for oil in the arctic
Every plastic bobble
Every cell phone
Every pen
A legacy
Oil into plastic
Bones into oil
The ghosts of them dance and rise up

I can't say that I have a 'favorite poet'; books, their contained poems and prayers, and the scribes who get them down—they are all nourishing to me, sometimes beautiful and terrifying in just what their little forms mean. I left Santa Fe for Seattle; left most of my beloved books behind, along with my daughter, my mother, my little brother, my land, my rivers, and my sky.

They are one fabric of voice and loss.

I miss them all terribly.

Some of the writers whose names rise, and whose poem-song-prayers continually strike me:

Mei-mei Bersenbrugge

Arthur Sze

Natalie Diaz

dg Nanouk Okpik

Lorca.

I am impelled by, dragged along the seam of, language. Its history and its mysterious interplay, its codices, and vertices of light, that glimmer and wane—I am enrapt within and by it. It haunts. It nourishes. It maddens. It is all we have. Silence, void: they, too, are language. I aspire to that, according to Aristotle, 'highest good', a greater depth and breadth of knowledge. I want to know the seemingly unknowable, even say it a little, if only just that and sometimes. I want to stare into the heart of darkness, cross the river Hades, return with dried orchids placed on the graves of men I dared to love, let love me, and leave. I have known so many broken-hearted children who would be fathers. I have known so many fathers who would be ghosts, and live many years, without knowing that they were. I am driven forward, always, by a wind that says "tell your story, child. It will be enough after all." Film, music (it is proof), driving, dreams, conversations, things heard in passing, flight, bad TV, emails, letters, texts, posts to friends, sounds of birds, and every sort of *light*: it is all food, it is all a bit of balm and song. The Muses – they are mad, and they are many. I have been blessed to meet a few. They don't visit me as often as they once did. But my door is always open.

They never left

We never left

We will never leave
A la Silko – stories, they is all we are.
They is *all we have*.

They is all we were, are, and will be.
Blood and bones into oil; oil, bones, and blood back into light.
Hashtag: we are still here
we are still here
we are still here.

I talk a lot. Most likely too much. I have a really big mouth, so in a way I'm always partially within that architecture of ideation and rendering the world into more suitable reels of omni-sensual experience. If I don't write them, I say them out loud, and that can get me in trouble. I don't always write in earnest and all the time. I'm not what you'd call 'a disciplined writer' and I've never been. I usually write at least a little each day or night, usually on my smartphone, little notes, little word and world ephemera just to remind myself of little things, and to orient myself in time and space.

Pueblo child
Born of Methodist and Baptist kinfolk too.
No turnin' away from the hallelujah sing-you-clean
but never clean enough spirituals of old.
Child come up in the time of MTV blinking awake,
gangster rap, the LA riots, and memories of 1680
too far to cull back and through the gentle clap and clamor
of latch-key child PSAs, late night trips to this locale or that, and school
days on the west-side too near where all those missing and murdered brown women
lay.

These bits *come when they come*, ebbing into more evolved forms as they need to, regardless of the time of day. I think there were periods where I wrote more at night, and then others when I wrote mostly in the day. I seem to write with the same urgency and lucidity regardless of where I am when I most need to write. When I'm overworked, super stressed, taken by a less-than-fruitful ennui, inundated with non-sensual language, underexposed to new or stimulating ideas, or forms, *gone too long away from home*, when I go hours or days, even months, without being allowed the space and time to really engage in the process of writing, not being allowed to enter fully into a deep enough, protected, familiar, cathartic, hyper-acute, and hyper-active sort of reverie, that ends up producing much of my work, I'm a pretty terrible person. I stop dreaming. I want to take a black Sharpie to the walls of the world. Everything goes a matted thatched shade of dark. But when I emerge from that dark? Like a group of survivors of a zombie-attacked world, just emerged from an underground compound; what else do you do? You begin again.

Simon Ortiz

From Sand Creek: A Vision for Peace and Continuance

Violence is even
beautiful.

Mastery

of pain
is crucial
to this work.

A senator
did not need to hawk
Biblical phrases.

It was

all ordained and certain.

They clamored for salvation,
those stalwart victims
sent
as messengers,
already avengers
fore-running justice,

to Colorado.

One should know better. In 1974 when I learned about the November 29, 1864 Sand Creek Massacre, I didn't know anything. In 1941 when I was born, the U.S.A.—my nation I was told and had come to know as fact—was at war. In 1974, the U.S.A.—I'd been told a million times I was a U.S. citizen—was still at war. In 1864, when the Arapaho and Cheyenne were massacred at Sand Creek by a citizens' militia called Colorado Volunteers and U.S. military soldiers from Fort Lyon, my grandfather, Mayai-shaatah, was 9 years old. And also, yes, that was when the U.S. was fighting two wars: the wars against Indigenous Americans—known popularly as “the Indians”—and the war against its own brothers and sisters which it called the American Civil War.

One should know better is not a dictum, as far as I know, but it can serve as one when I think about the United States of America and war. The nation was born in war when it revolted against its British Empire origins and mother homeland, and it continues in war mode today in Afghanistan and perhaps soon in Syria and in almost countless instances of conflicts stemming from invasions, occupations, conflicts, police actions, and so forth over the past years. War has been endless in our nation's history; it's almost as if there's never been a time in my lifetime when there has been no war. War and its trauma, even when it's not happening in our front yard or backyard, is vastly negative. The greater part of our culture and society is experiencing and suffering PTSD—do you know that? Do we know that? Do we want to know that? Should we know that? I think so. We have to in order to address PTSD and its root causes.

Aacqah–Acoma Pueblo in New Mexico–was destroyed in January 1599 AD by Spanish invaders led by Don Juan de Oñate during the initial colonial conquest of the Indigenous Southwest. According to Spanish records, 800 Aacqumeh people were killed, and the Pueblo was utterly destroyed. It's a long time ago in some respect, but it's not really. Remember my grandfather Mahyai-shaatah who I mention above? He was 96 years old when he passed away in 1951. That means he was born a few years before the American Civil War in the 1860s, and in fact he was born 9 years before the Sand Creek Massacre. So in the way of calculating time and noting its passage in the manner of speaking within the oral tradition, my memory of the Civil War and the Sand Creek Massacre is fresh because of Mahyai-shaatah, my grandfather. I can almost literally say I have an intimate sense of recall when I put it into the context of oral tradition and how one is placed within the narrative structure and power of Indigenous oral knowledge. That's a validation that's needed but not provided in scholarship which, as a result, limits Indigenous knowledge to some degree since dissertation and research committees do not fully recognize and accept oral tradition knowledge as equivalent to Western-derived knowledge. If any people have been affected directly by violent and traumatic warfare in the Western hemisphere, it has been Indigenous American people more than other cultures and communities.

Perhaps I shouldn't say this but I will in order to make a point of it: violent and traumatic warfare has been so endemic to Indigenous American people and their lives that it has become virtually normalized. Part of it has to do with the image created by the narrative recitation of "Indians," a term that is defunct even though it is still used presently as an entirely valid construct of fact. Upon initial Spanish European arrival, there were innumerable tribal communities of Indigenous peoples throughout the Americas, living across both continents of the Western hemisphere. Population figures range from 65 million to 140 million people upon the arrival of Europeans i.e., Columbus's landfall in 1492 AD, and these millions were not known as "Indians." Columbus's chronicler records show Columbus recognized and identified the Indigenous people who first greeted him and his men as "*gente en Dios*." People of God. *En Dios* soon became bastardized as *in dios*. And *in dios* became *indios* that as a term was used to identify all Indigenous peoples in the Americas thereafter. "Indians" later became the general derivation that has stuck through the span of more than 500 years. In any case, pliable terminology became an easy and convenient way to construct imagery that served colonialism more than it served to protect the integrity of Indigenous land, culture, and community. "Indians" is inaccurate, very prone to expropriation, easy to undermine since by inference it's more abstract than actual and solid, and the term has very little semantic basis on sound legitimate knowledge. Therefore imagery regarding Indigenous people as "Indians" is suspect and prone to convenient use that is detrimental, dismissive, misleading, and damaging. Such use of imagery affects Indigenous people negatively because horrendous events like the Sand Creek massacre may not be understood and not seen in terms of the horrific,

traumatic, and devastating experience it was but rather something constructed by Hollywood films or exaggeration or even fiction. No, the massacre was not a Hollywood production nor an exaggeration or a literary fiction. The Sand Creek Massacre was real, and we have to deal with it as reality!

Violence and trauma transform and transform, and change takes place. On and on until changes become a force that one doesn't know what to do with. Society and culture are formed in the modern age by past historical experiences that are practically impossible to understand because they happened so long ago that one has no cognizance of them. Yet despite that, one tries to make sense of present day patterns of social behavior and structure, usual and ordinary relationships between people, responsibilities that are guided by local, state, and federal laws. And even when one doesn't truly comprehend society and culture, there is acceptance and going along with public or common practice and belief.

When Indigenous people like Maiyai-shaatah were born in the mid-1800's the American republic was not 80 years old yet. Settlement in the Americas was in full swing. The Spanish had been in the Americas since 1492, almost 300 years already! Northern Europeans like the British and French were coming ashore as immigrants since the early decades of the 1600's, for 200 years along the eastern seaboard from present-day North Carolina to Nova Scotia. With almost no major cognition of violence and trauma, Europeans were becoming Americanized rapidly. Since the goal of Euro-Americanism was acquisition of gold, slaves, and resources useful for Europe, the overriding impulse was determined by the New World's wealth because of the power that would result upon conquest: gold, slaves, resources.

Looking for Billy,
I knew he wasn't anywhere
nearby.

Like his words,
he could be anywhere.

He was the shadow.

Memory was his lost trail.

West, then south, then east,
a swirl of America
in his brain.

Looking for shadow,
he could be anywhere.

In a way, democracy, like religion, could be anything. Or nothing. As Indigenous children, we were sent to school like everyone else in the nation. It was the law. It was U.S. policy with reference to Indigenous people. And the U.S. government was enforcing/enacting the law by requiring Indigenous

children to go to school. Education was the law; it was required. However, since it was the law and the law governed "Indian reservations," as Indigenous children we were doubly required to go to school. It was against the law not to go to school; it was against the law not to become educated. For me to not go to school at six years of age, my parents and I would be defying the nation's law. Our parents-guardians would be law breakers. Our own concept of Indigenous tribal law said the law served the people: it was security, safety, preservation, health, and wholeness. Law made sense; so the people obeyed. It was like living on the reservation: that's where "Indians" were supposed to live. That was the law: reservations were where "Indians" belonged. Not in the cities, not on state lands, not anywhere else but on the "Indian rez". That was the policy. We had to live by it. The rest of America believed that was the way it was. It was inconceivable it could be any other way. We, as Indigenous people, had no choice.

You wouldn't believe it but it made sense to go along with the federal government. They, the officials, i.e., the bureaucrats, had tremendous hope and patience and a special cynical faith—well, they couldn't lose either—that willed them to believe "in the Indians". No matter what. No matter what one Indian agent said, *God will carry us through. That's God's will. We have to have the determination that God's will will carry us through.* And he'd repeat it. *Believe in God, he'd say, and the Indians.* In the 1930s, the government planners built the irrigation system on our Acoma reservation. It's our duty, I'm sure the Bureau of Indian Affairs "Indian agent" said. Ideally, that was the belief in the belief, consistent, persistent. Congress, Senators, bureaucrats, the President, even the missionaries believed in the belief. In the 1860's, it was to clear the prairie of the Sioux, Cheyenne, Arapaho, Comanche, Pawnee, Blackfeet—the "Red Devils", as newspapers would have it—and in the 1930's it was to build an irrigation system to water "Indian land"—land of the same Red Devils—all done in the name of believing the belief. Yes, even the parish priest had in the church sacristy WPA photos of Aacqumeh men and boys working on the irrigation system at home on the reservation.

Billy believed beyond the belief. He was always trying to get away from the VA hospital. Run away. Just leave. He'd be gone for a day. Or two or three days. He'd make it to Pueblo or Colorado Springs or Trinidad or another town not far away, and they'd bring him back. Once he was gone for a week. Made it to Kansas I heard. The police saw him, I'm sure, wandering around downtown in that slow rhythmic lope he had. And he was back at the VA locked up in Lock Ward for a couple of days looking lost, trapped, and empty. And, soon, Billy was back outside wandering around with his handy empty smile. Of all the guys at the VA hospital, Billy was the only one who was always trying to get away. That's what I mean by Billy believing beyond the belief. He knew he could live outside the confines of the reservation the VA joint was. He just knew he could. One day, two days, or a week of living beyond the belief. That was all Billy needed to believe in forever.

It made sense for Indigenous people to believe the land with its animal and

plant life was enough. In fact, it was more than enough. As people, they were related to it as mother, father, sister, brother, grandma and grandpa; they believed, just like Billy, it provided everything. Land, people, animals, plants, everything was sustainable. Creator—*Dzah-yaa-yuutyah*—provided for everything and everyone in all creation. Sky, land, ocean, tree, bush, weed, insect, fish, animal, molecule, atom, all bits and pieces of creation, nothing was left out, everything was sustainable. Connections, relationships, responsibilities, obligations, laws, understandings, common sense, great ideas, little ideas, all were part of the mix. Billy was part of it; he believed in forever. Society was part of him; he was part of society. He wasn't Indigenous like Native people of the Americas but it didn't matter; he was part of the land, culture, and community. That was the main strength he had—his innocent belief in the connections he had to everything. It didn't matter what or who. Repeat: it didn't matter what or who, just as long as he was connected/related to everything contained in the land, culture, and community.

In the Dayroom,
the Oklahoma Boy sits
sunken into the arms
of a wooden and leather couch
that has become his body.
The structure of his life
and the swirl of his mind
have become lead.

There is beauty
in his American face,
but the dread implanted
by the explosive
in Asia denies it.
The life he now matters by
is pushed away without pity
by the janitor's broom
which strikes his shoe.
Only the corners
of his eyes and the edge
of his shoe know the quality
of the couch he has become.

It is the life he has submerged
into, a dream needing a name.
He has become the American,
vengeful and a wasteland
of fortunes for now.

We feel we have wasted nothing as Americans. There is no wasteland. Not a bit. It is a belief. Plenty means plenty. The American Dream is not a dream at all but a principle beyond anything we have ever known. It is patriotism

unneeded of understanding or comprehension. Or acceptance. It just is. That's all. Simple as simple, something we simply don't understand. As Americans, belief is first, then everything follows. Even if failure is fate, it doesn't count. Should fate be failure, then we don't have to win. Victory is American despite fate as failure. We have nothing to prove. Even when we have nothing to lose.

America is not a dream at all. We have arrived. Our schools teach that. There is no choice. In fact, we don't even learn to question. Accept, accept, accept, accept—that's the order of the day. That's the only order. On the "Indian reservation" I went to a day school run and paid for by the federal government. Obey. Obey. Obey. Obey. Sounds like accept, accept, accept, accept doesn't it? In fact, that's what it means. Same thing. "Indians" were to learn to be Americans. Nothing more. Nothing less. We learned the ABC's. That's the way success was spelled. Nothing more. Nothing less. ABC spells success. Learn English: writing, speaking, no more, no less: that's success.

Accept. Obey. Learn ABC. Learn success. Nothing more. Nothing less. Especially learn English. I did. Learn to spell. We did. Learn well. I did. Learn success. We did. ABCs spells accept, obey, learn, success. Our grandmothers tried to shelter us behind their dresses, behind their knees, within their homes. Call them teepees, call them hogans, call them stone and mud, call them huts, call them our homes. We lived in them. They were home. Nothing more, nothing less. Our homes our lives. Our way our own. Our hearts, breaths, names, spirits. Our past, our future. Our heritage, our destiny.

What more could America be. A natural land of plenty. Land with dirt, rivers, valleys, mountains, deserts, canyons, oceans. Forests, prairie grass, cactus, willows, swamp grass, seaweed. Sky so wide, winds that blow for days, hurricanes to bring water to the land, rains and snows and mistiness for days on end. And sun so plentiful, constant, bright, brilliant, shining, forever without end. Land upon land, expansive for miles and miles. What more could America be? From seashore to seashore: east west north south. Galaxy to galaxy, we lived within and without. What more could America be is not a question at all; it is wonderment and awesomeness beyond our short memory and constant forgetfulness. A vision that beholds us, waiting for us to return its gaze so we can both see ourselves in the other.

I wish now I talked with the Oklahoma Boy about the dream that America isn't. The dream he left in his dry homeland back when in Oklahoma when he went to Vietnam. The years ago sand and dust and wind and time gone that are still there. Waiting. Yeah, waiting for him to return. The rivers that ran dry before he was born and grandma and grandpa remembered for him and maybe told him and his sisters about them a time or two or more. Many times I'm sure. The dreams they knew. Dreams poor people have. The ones we hold precious even though we may have thought they were just lies. That's okay though. That dream is real even if it's hard to believe because it's hard to keep track of. That's part of the dream though we must remember. Unfortunately—fortunately

also—the way we learn is by missing the sand, dust, constant dry wind, the rain we feel even when it hasn't fallen for years. Believing is believing facts—and lies too sometimes. Yes, lies too that we come to bet our factual lives upon. No matter what we feel and what we must deal with, the dreams we have do matter, especially the dreams the Oklahoma Boy wanted to tell me but didn't.

Don't fret now.

Songs are useless
to exculpate sorrow.
That's not their intent anyway.

Strive
for significance.
Cull seeds from grass.
Develop another strain of corn.

Whisper for rain.

Don't fret.
Warriors will keep alive in the blood.

Genocide is genocide. It is a fact. There is no other way to look at the death of a people caused by another people who are uncaring, unfeeling, unwielding, unrelenting. Death of Indigenous people of the Americas took place. Death was not caused by the Indigenous people themselves. It was caused by another people who coveted the lands and resources of the land that Indigenous people lived upon. Genocide was caused by a senseless hatred of the love human beings have for human beings. It made no sense to kill people because of love, some said. It makes perfect sense if it keeps people safe, others said. Which way do we choose? No one knows directly. Or say they don't know. But we do know genocide is wrong and evil. And that's all we need to know.

As a human culture and society, we are responsible for each other on this planet Earth. We have no choice but to be responsible for one another. That is called obligation. Human beings taking care—great care—of each other. Food, shelter, clothing, respecting, honoring, protecting. When we have no choice in the matter of relationships with each other, that sense of obligation comes to the forefront. Even enemies know this; they fear and hate and detest as a result. Obligation: caring for others; seeking to feed, clothe, and shelter others is not a foreign concept. A mother gives birth to a child, and everything is obligation from then on. The infant is dependent on the mother for nourishment both physically and emotionally; human nature begins at the very moment an infant child cries for sustenance and the parent has no choice except to reply instantly to her child's cries, pleas, demands for sustenance. And vice versa also, the parent is dependent upon the children's needs and requirements. Responsibility, obligation, interdependency is the sacred nature of human culture and society.

When Black Kettle went to Washington, D.C. in 1863 to meet with the U.S. government and its president, Abraham Lincoln, Black Kettle was presented with a U.S. flag that symbolized the responsibility, obligation, interdependency and the sacred nature of human culture and society. A year later in November 1864, the genocidal attack on the Cheyenne and Arapaho took place in sheer, utter, and absolute violation of the sacred nature of human culture and society. During the attack, that symbolic flag flew from Black Kettle's lodge. The elder had raised it because he believed the U.S. flag would protect him and his people. In fact, one can even say Black Kettle believed in the vow the U.S. government had made to him and Indigenous people across the vast lands they lived upon. I've never read or heard of remarks or comments President Lincoln may have uttered when he was told about the massacre at Sand Creek. Perhaps the U.S. President never said anything since this was the same era in which he ordered the mass execution by hanging of 38 Indigenous warriors who were protecting their land, culture, and community in Minnesota territory. As for us, we must remember this: responsibility, obligation, interdependency is the sacred nature of human culture and society. We must always remember this, no matter what.

In this remembering is the vision for peace and continuance that we must live, no matter what. Repeat: in this remembering is the vision for peace and continuance that we must live, no matter what.

Simon J. Ortiz, Tempe, AZ
September 17, 2014

Frances Washburn

A Dry Thunder

Brown grass burned brittle in the fierce summer heat crunched beneath their feet as Becca followed her father up the steep hill to the little church. Overhead the sun glared from a brassy sky, while the usual thunderheads hovered on the horizon, grumbling in the distance. Sweat beaded on the back of Becca's neck, runneled down her spine to soak the waistband of her jeans.

Lee's faded brown uniform shirt showed dark sweat circles beneath the arms and a dark tee patch across the shoulders and down his spine. The wind picked up, blowing dust from the mass grave outside the church, rattling dry weeds.

Lee sat down on one side of the narrow cement line that formed the rectangular perimeter of the grave patting the ground beside him. His daughter bent her

knees and sat on the hot ground. A grasshopper leaped onto her knee, observed her, and hopped away.

"Dad? Are all those people really buried under here?" Becca asked. "It doesn't look big enough."

"You'd be surprised how many people you can put in the ground if the hole is deep enough. And if you fling them in any old way," he answered, looking not at the grave but at the thunderheads building in the west. "Shhh. Listen."

The wind rising and falling found a voice in a loose shingle on the church roof, whistling and howling. Distant thunder grumbled. Down on Route 27, an old Chevy station wagon with a loose muffler bumped over the pot holes in the broken blacktop, going south. A blue bottle fly licked sweat from Becca's arm before she could twitch it away.

Lee lifted his cap, letting the wind ruffle his thinning gray-streaked hair, reached out and tousled Becca's hair.

"Why are we here?" He asked.

Becca knew he expected her answer to be more than the casual, factual, "because we come up here twice a year." She remembered other visits over the past thirteen years of her life, walking up the hill through snow ankle deep, or slipping in mud, or when the grass was green and a breeze blew softly upon her face, when her sister, Connie was still alive, chattering, running, and jumping alongside her father, and her father, rarely speaking, always sitting on the rim of the grave, and asking that same question.

"Why are we here?"

"Because they were here first," she answered. That was not right answer; she knew that, she felt like she was getting no closer to what her father wanted her to say, to know, to understand about this sacred place. He asked her that question often, not just here on the top of this lonely hill.

He asked that question when she sat beside him, outside the pen of birds as now and then, not often, he wrote a few words with a black ball point pen in the spiral blue notebook he held in his lap. Last time he asked the question outside the pen, as they sat on grass burned as brown and brittle as here, she answered "Observing," and his eyes had widened, his glance had caught hers, but he hadn't answered. She didn't expect an answer. She believed there might not be an answer. The question intended her to think deeper, not to find a conclusion.

She had glanced at the words he had written in the notebook: Martha and George. That was the name the workers at the refuge gave the tamest two of the nineteen

trumpeter swans brought to Lacreek from Red Rocks, Montana six months earlier, the last of the trumpeters that all the specialists believed would be extinct soon. Lacreek would be their last refuge. Endangered species, doomed, unless Lacreek could get them to breed, get the females to sit on their eggs until they hatched, get the chicks to live, grow to adulthood, mate, and continue the cycle.

The creek wound around the base of the hill, dry, lined with brittle brush and squat trees with tired gray-green leaves. More than seventy years ago, they had tried to escape up that creek, gunned down, bludgeoned, old men, women, and children, their red blood spilling out on the white snow, their screams and cries carried on the wind. Distant guns thundered.

Becca stood, stretched, moved back to sit on the cracked cement church steps in a narrow strip of shade. Half a dozen brown beer bottles nestled in the weeds to one side, the labels faded and peeling. She looked to the thunderheads in the west that seemed no nearer.

Lee stood, removed his cap and wiped his hand across his forehead, turned to Becca.

"What do you hear?" he asked.

The wind howled beneath the shingle on the church roof.

"I hear their voices in the wind," she said.

He nodded.

"Looks like we won't get any rain," he said, "those clouds are going south. Let's go."

At the bottom of the hill, he stopped where a sign lay on its face, toppled over in the weeds and the dirt, turned it over. It read only, "Wounded Knee Battle Site," in faded black letters on a white background.

"Not a battle," he said. "A massacre."

Becca slammed the car door three times before the latch caught.

Lee cranked the engine that whined and complained before the motor turned over. He put the car in gear, circled it, and drove slowly away, dust billowing behind them.

"I'll buy you an orange pop at the Trading Post," he offered.

"Okay," she said, her dry mouth already beginning to water.

Distant thunder grumbled, a harbinger of rain somewhere else.

“Dad,” she asked, “are we an endangered species?”

“Not yet.”

Michael Wasson

In Winters, as Ghosts

any lack
of light might do
had we the opening
to the sky
where the snow begins
to fall
on all our daughters
which is to say
I might find anyone of them
among the dead as every bird
is crushed in the throat
of a direction leading south
& my mother said
there's no hell here
her eyes black
a moonless night still scatters enough
moonlight on our skin
*
there is a hole where we are
up through my head some witness
left between that & tonight
come father me
again the body begs

I'm dreaming of you
shredding your
c'ic'ál' into a single
metal jacket that is
your eyelids unblinking
& you're dreaming
of me
aren't you the *shadow of my father*
are you not?

so the winter speaks
a memory
of blood
carried like a heavy rope
in the failing
of hands & look
you're dead still
& bared arms
wait
with nothing of flesh
but a ghost
watching the snow break
apart by gathering.

Lit in the Mouth [Or for the Woman Who Died of Song & Loneliness]

There we are
the boy might say
to the bone
white in the night *méetmet q'o' manáa*
hinú' kem kaa páayno'
& he stares silent as how one might
find a body left at the edge

of a field meeting
a burned tree is what he's been
ashamed to know

i
Open your ears
nothing for you are
without this sound

'ee himc'íyo 'áatwaynim
she will hear you
when you move *'ee 'iim*
even when you are

nothing
like a ghost

i
kál'a c'ic'ál' hiicéem kiyéewkiyew

I confess I'm young
& you take a flame
to my tongue

c'ic'ál is lit in the mouth *c'ic'ál* again

'ipnéetetmipniye was a bluing
vessel tied from the back

of the throat
to the *manáa yox . hice?*

inside my confession

i
manáa yox . hice? asks the naked pine
above me *manáa yox . hice?* asks the star buried

beneath a haze of moonlight *manáa yox . hice?* asks the bird that forgot
to ignite an evening of birdsong *manáa yox . hice?* sing the crickets
with small mouthfuls of night *manáa yox . hice?* ticks the slight burn

of the sunset a mouth pauses
 in awe

i

c'ic'ál hiicíix kiyéewkiyew

 sometimes to remember this living

we let a word
 fire from the opened hole in the face

& tell me how to swallow what light does

 to the tongue at rest

i

kúnk'u hinwíhna because death is what shadow does
to the body climaxing

 & hidden in the dark

t'úmm kál'a 'íske naqsníix & because that sound is just like another
single dusk draining off

 its slow-motion blood

máwa pehíne? máwa pu'úuyiye? because *when* is the best question
I can muster

kál'a sáw is a silence

you'll never forget & *hit'úxnime* because she burst
into a din

 & *sáw sáw sáw sáw*

because *'ipí 'áatway kál'a c'álalal c'álalal* & who can say
they've been so close

 to a loneliness like this before?

i

Who is it that the dead
remember? the moon
finally asks me

i

Say pá'ipciwatx .
hiwe'npíse could be herself singing
& say konó'
'ipnéeteti'nke could be she sang
herself to death & remember wéet'u'
máwa hinéeshewtuk'iyé hinmíitx was that
she never caught up in singing herself
& so there we were again
us alone again after dusk.

** this poem borrows language from kiyéewkiyew (Katydid), a nimíipuu story
told by weyíiletpuu*

Mouthed

But is it not
 for the flesh
nor the prayer
you recite in the house

outside an autumn
rusting the edges
 of the dead leaves?

if not to grieve
history burning
the space between
 our bodies
our long hair
still sewn into
 our stripped scalps
then what?

is it not for
 the suffering?
tell me it is
for the emptiness
like this plea caught
in the air of a town
 with no name
a land ghosted
 with the ashes
plumed by the war

 so are we not
the ash? is it that we're
 the names dissolving
into your throat

pleading for your life
us a sound like a dark
 blued field crowded
with katydids
in their *sáw sáw*
 sáw sáw herding
you to your loneliness?
& is that not you desperate
 for relief & mouthless
seeking for any
 exit of your body?

& is that not you
 I hear drowning
in the living room
hunched down to what
we never called god
 to *kill the clock*
god please the clock
to *pull back the hand*
to unwind your life
 back together again?

is that scope of light
 pointed to your skull
clear-eyed enough
in its hunger? is it
 about to swallow the dark
of our bodies &
 claim *boy it's all in*
your head now
don't be scared my son
O answer me please

 so call it beauty
call it the emptiness
left with a twist
 of smoke unbraiding
from a hot chamber

call it our survival
to carve a clean thread
through the head
 of a silenced deer
& call its full heart
in my hands an ache
 as I'm remembering
how to part

the skin & sing properly
that yes it gave its body
to us in our appetite

remember us
for our nourishment
to reduce the burning
plea into a resin
of blood drying
in my fingernails

remember please this
opened hole
burst from your head
here in the house
crushed by autumn
can only be yes
your closing word.

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Crisosto Apache is an enrolled Mescalero Apache member from New Mexico. He is an alumnus from IAIA (AFA 1992 / MFA 2015) and Metropolitan State University of Denver (BA, 2013) in English and Creative Writing. His work is published in *Future Earth Magazine*, *Black Renaissance Noire*, *Yellow Medicine Review (2013/2015)*, *Tribal College Journal*, *Denver Quarterly* (Pushcart Prize Nominee 2014), *Toe Good Poetry*, *Hawaii Review*, *Cream City Review*, and *Plume* anthology. Crisosto also appeared on MTV's "Free Your Mind" ad campaign for poetry (1993). His work includes Native LGBTQI / "two spirit" advocacy and public awareness.

When **Byron Aspaas** writes, he creates stories using vivid imagery of landscape which is etched with experience upon white space. Byron is Diné. He has earned his BFA and MFA in creative writing from the Institute of American Indian Arts. His ambition is to incorporate his writing toward teaching and becoming a storyteller. His work is strung through journals and anthologies such as *RedInk*, *Yellow Medicine Review*, *200 New Mexico Poems*, *Weber: The Contemporary West*, *As/Us: A Space for Women of the World*, *Semicolon*, and *Denver Quarterly*. Byron wants to influence readers along this literary journey. He is of the Red Running into the Water People and born for the Bitter Water People. He resides with his partner, Seth Browder, his three cats, and four puppies in Colorado Springs. Currently, he is working on a memoir.

Poet, photographer, and scholar **Kimberly Blaeser** is the current Wisconsin

Poet Laureate. A professor at University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee, she teaches creative writing and Native American literature. Blaeser has authored three poetry collections—*Apprenticed to Justice*, *Absentee Indians*, and *Trailing You*. Her poetry and scholarly essays are widely anthologized, and selections of her poetry have been translated into several languages including Spanish, Norwegian, Indonesian, Hungarian, and French. She is at work on a collection of “Picto-Poems.”

Lance David Henson is Cheyenne, Oglala, and French. He was raised on a farm near Calumet, Oklahoma, by his great-aunt and uncle, Bertha and Bob Cook. He grew up living the Southern Cheyenne culture. He served in the U.S. Marine Corps after high school, during the Vietnam War, and is a graduate of Oklahoma College of Liberal Arts (now University of Science and Arts of Oklahoma) in Chickasha. He holds an MFA in creative writing from the University of Tulsa. Lance is a member of the Cheyenne Dog Soldier Society, the Native American Church and the American Indian Movement (AIM). He has participated in Cheyenne Sun Dance on several occasions as both dancer and painter. Lance has published seventeen books of poetry, half in the U.S. and half abroad. His poetry has been translated into twenty-five languages and he has read and lectured in nine countries. His readings include the One World Poetry Festival in Amsterdam, the International Poetry Festival in Tarascon, France, and the Geraldine Dodge Poetry Festival in New Jersey. He has co-written two plays, one of which, *Winter Man*, had a successful run at the La MaMa Experimental Theatre Company. His play *Coyote Road* played to sell-out audiences in Versailles, France, in December 2001. A new remix of a jazz and poetry CD titled *Another Train Ride* (1999) has appeared in collaboration with Brian Eno, titled *The Wolf and the Moon*, from Materiali Sonori, Milan, Italy (2001).

Toni Jensen is a Métis writer whose first story collection, *From the Hilltop*, was published through the Native Storyers Series at the University of Nebraska Press. Her stories have been published in journals such as *Denver Quarterly*, *Ecotone*, and *Fiction International*, and have been anthologized in *New Stories from the South*, *Best of the Southwest*, and *Best of the West: Stories from the Wide Side of the Missouri*. Her short story “At the Powwow Hotel” won *Nimrod International Literary Journal*’s Katherine Anne Porter Prize for Fiction. She teaches in the programs in creative writing and translation at the University of Arkansas.

Brent Learned is an award-winning and collected Native American artist who was born and reared in Oklahoma City. He is an enrolled member of the Cheyenne-Arapaho Tribes of Oklahoma. Brent graduated from the University of Kansas with a bachelor’s degree in Fine Arts. He is an artist who draws, paints, and sculpts the Native American Indian in a rustic, impressionistic style. He has always appreciated the heritage and culture of the American Plains Indian. He tries to create artwork to capture the essence of the American Plains Indian way of life with accuracy and historical authenticity. Although Brent has many different styles, he is typically

known for his use of bold, vibrant colors in his depictions of the American Plains Indian. Brent's work resides in museums such as the Smithsonian Institute-National Museum of the American Indian in Washington D.C., the Cheyenne/Arapaho Museum in Clinton, Oklahoma, the National Cowboy and Western Heritage Museum in Oklahoma City, and the University of Kansas Art Museum in Lawrence. He has work in private collections such as the Governor of Oklahoma Private Collection, the governor's mansion in Oklahoma City, the Haskell Indian University in Lawrence, Kansas, and the Kerr Foundation Private Collection in Oklahoma City. Brent also has the honor of having one of his paintings displayed in the Democratic National Headquarters in Washington, D.C.

George Levi is Cheyenne and Arapaho. Husband, father, Kit Fox Society member. Sand Creek descendent. He is also an artist specializing in ledger art, acrylics, and watercolors. His art has been exhibited at the National Museum of the American Indian at the Smithsonian Institute and the Denver Art Museum, among other places.

Margaret Noodin received an MFA in creative writing and a PhD in English and linguistics from the University of Minnesota. She is currently an assistant professor at the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee, where she also serves as the director of the Electa Quinney Institute for American Indian Education. She is the author of *Bawaajimo: A Dialect of Dreams in Anishinaabe Language and Literature* and *Weweni*, a collection of bilingual poems in Ojibwe and English. She is a member of Miskwaasining Nagamojig (the Swamp Singers) a women's hand drum group whose lyrics are all in Anishinaabemowin (Ojibwe). To see and hear current projects visit www.ojibwe.net, where she and other students and speakers of Ojibwe have created a space for language to be shared by academics and the Native community.

Sara Marie Ortiz is a twenty-eight-year-old Acoma Pueblo memoirist, poet, scholar, aspiring filmmaker, youth trainer, and Indigenous Peoples advocate. Her work has been widely published and garnered numerous awards, among these the Truman Capote Literary Fellowship, the Native American Literature Symposium Morning Star Award, and an American Indian Graduate Center Fellowship. Her book of experimental poetry, *Red Milk*, was released in 2013. She is the proud daughter of Simon Ortiz.

Simon J. Ortiz, Acoma Pueblo, author-writer-editor of more than 25 books of poetry, fiction, non-fiction, and children's literature, Regents Professor of English and American Indian Studies at Arizona State University. Honors: 2 NEA awards (1970 and 1980); Lifetime Achievement Award from Returning the Gift-Native North American Writers (1993); Lifetime Achievement Award, Western States Arts Federation (1999); Lila Wallace Reader's Digest Writers Award (1996-1998); Lannan Foundation, Artist Residency Award (2000); New Mexico Humanities Award (1985), Golden Tibetan Antelope Prize for International Poetry, Qinghai, China (2013). Ortiz is father of three grown children and grandfather of nine beautiful grandkids.

Billy J. Stratton currently teaches contemporary Native American/American literature and film in the Department of English at the University of Denver. His scholarly and creative writings have been included in numerous books and journals. His monograph on the development of the Indian captivity narrative genre, Mary Rowlandson and King Philip's War, titled, *Buried in Shades of Night*, was published in 2014. His latest project is an edited collection that addresses the fiction of Stephen Graham Jones.

Frances Washburn was born and raised on Pine Ridge Reservation in South Dakota. She earned her PhD from the University of New Mexico and was a visiting professor at the University of Nebraska before coming to the University of Arizona, where she is currently an associate professor in the American Indian Studies Program and the Department of English. She is the mother of two children, Lee and Stella. Her first novel, *Elsie's Business*, was published in 2006, and a second novel, *The Sacred White Turkey*, came out in 2010. Her latest novel, *The Red Bird All-Indian Traveling Band*, was published by the University of Arizona Press as part of its renowned Sun Tracks series in 2014. She also recently completed a biography of Louise Erdrich for Praeger Press (2013). In addition to fiction, she has published scholarly articles and poetry in a variety of venues such as *Wíčazo Ša Review*, *Weber*, and *Denver Quarterly*.

Michael Wasson's poems appear in *American Poets*, *Prairie Schooner*, and *DIALOGIST*, among others. He is Nimíipuu from the Nez Perce Reservation and lives in rural Japan.