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Increasing Consciousness Outgrowing Our US Exceptionalism Myth

The U.S. origin story is based on an unconscious acceptance of and belief in the inevitability of Manifest Destiny, the idea that Europeans and later Anglo settlers were destined by God to take the land from sea to shining sea. Inherent in the origin story was the implication that the land had previously been *terra nullius*, a land without people. In this way, “the frontier” was ready for God’s chosen people to first “tame” it and then found a nation of dominion and freedom for all. This is the source of U.S. Americans’ belief in their unique exceptionalism. In fact, the historical reality is how the theft of lands that are today called the United States came to be claimed and owned by white men, revealing the processes and characteristics of settler colonialism. This specific brand of colonial usurpation is founded upon institutionalizing extravagant violence through unlimited war and irregular war. Extreme violence was carried out by Anglo settlers against civilians in an attempt to cause the utter annihilation of the Indigenous nations and communities of people existent across the continent for thousands of years before it was “discovered” by Europeans. The goal of this extermination was to enable the settlers’ total freedom to acquire land and wealth. Increasing consciousness of this historical reality is, as historian Roxanne Dunbar-Ortiz writes, “both a necessity and a responsibility to the ancestors and descendants of all parties.”

Last September a profound and incisive book was published by Beacon Press: [An Indigenous Peoples’ History of the United States](#). Its author, feminist revolutionary historian [Roxanne Dunbar-Ortiz](#) was a friend of Howard Zinn. As she tells it, speaking in San Francisco on December 4,

He was a friend of mine and all these years I criticized him for terminating the Indigenous narrative, the Native American narrative [in [A People’s History of the United States](#)], at the end of the frontier, so-called; basically 1890 with the massacre at Wounded Knee and the end of armed resistance by Native Nations.

And then suddenly, Native Americans appear again in 1969 with the seizure of Alcatraz. I would tease Howard and say, What happened? Were they hibernating, all those years, 70, 80 years? And he said, Well you need to write that book.

So before he passed away he suggested to Beacon Press that they do different versions of Peoples’ histories that his book couldn’t cover, to go in more depth like African America or Black People’s History of the United States, Women’s History of the United States. And he said, But especially an Indigenous People’s History of the United States and you should ask Roxanne Dunbar-Ortiz to do it.

I now think this was a curse (laughing) because of my criticisms. Not really, but it was a very hard book to write because it was to be a concise book, very readable for the general educated reader, not an academic book, but a book that could be used in university courses or high school courses. Sort of like Howard's book. So I'm very proud that this book is a part of Beacon's [ReVisioning American History](#) Series. [Roxanne Dunbar-Ortiz, speaking at [Green Apple Books](#) in San Francisco on December 4, 2014; [Part One](#) (02:54-03:55), from [Time of Useful Consciousness Radio](#) broadcast.]

The field of view encapsulated in Dunbar-Ortiz's account encompasses the factual core of the history of the United States. A summary with excerpts is linked to on the "Front Door" of rathaus reality. Go to [ratical.org](#) and at the top (or near it, depending on how much time has passed since 07-04-15) is a box with the title:

[The Historical Arc, Past and Present, of United States Settler Colonialism](#)

[Colonization, Dispossession, Genocide Forms the Core of US History, the Very Source of the Country's Existence](#)

Will It Be The Future As Well? The Choice Is Ours

One of the elements that initially focused my attention was listening to Dunbar-Ortiz relate the following in the December 4 recording:

The next chapter is called "Bloody Footprints" and it's about how the US Army was formed in the wars against native people east of the Mississippi. This is a quote from a military historian, John Grenier, in a book called *The First Way of War*:

For the first 200 years of our military heritage, then, Americans depended on arts of war that contemporary professional soldiers supposedly abhorred: razing and destroying enemy villages and fields; killing enemy women and children; raiding settlements for captives; intimidating and brutalizing enemy non-combatants; and assassinating enemy leaders.... In the frontier wars between 1607 and 1814, Americans forged two elements—unlimited war and irregular war—into their first way of war. [[The First Way of War, American War Making on the Frontier, 1607-1814](#), John Grenier, Cambridge University Press, 2008, pp. 5, 10]

I make throughout the book, connections between the US military today and its foundation in these unrelenting wars that actually went up through 1890 and then moved overseas to the Philippines and the Caribbean with the same generals in the Philippines who had been fighting the Sioux and the Cheyenne in the Northern Plains. And interestingly enough, also, who were called in (one division of them) to fight striking workers in Chicago. So I think there [are] very interesting interconnections with the use of the military in the United States that we don't always put together.

The Second Amendment and the irregular warfare, these were mostly settler militias who could organize themselves. Andrew Jackson started that way as the head of the Tennessee Militia. [For] his militia's war against the Muskogee Creeks, driving them out of Georgia,

he was made a Major General in the US Army. So it was a career builder as well to start a militia. But these were also used, especially after US independence, as slave patrols, these militias, self-appointed militias. These militias would form to police—free—they weren't paid to do it—and we still see the ghosts of this performing, actually today. [from [Part One](#), 13:56-16:48]

Author of [a number of books](#), Dunbar-Ortiz was an expert witness and also “on the legal team with Vine Deloria and a bunch of other lawyers” at the Wounded Knee Trials in December 1974. Afterwards she was asked by some of the Elders involved to write an historical account of the proceedings. Published in 1977 as *The Great Sioux Nation – Sitting in Judgment on America. An Oral History of the Sioux Nation & Its Struggle for Sovereignty*, she described the trial in December 2014:

[The Great Sioux Nation](#) was my first book in 1977. It came out of the Wounded Knee trials. All of the people who came out of Wounded Knee were arrested and charged with various felonies and misdemeanors so it just tied the movement up. Each one, one after another, were dismissed or the people found Not Guilty. A few people served some jail time. It was kind of purposely putting the American Indian Movement (AIM) through great expense, raising money for court cases and not being able to organize in the communities.

So we decided to have these remaining cases, I think there were about 90 of them left, that they all be dismissed on the basis of this [\[1868 Fort Laramie\]](#) Treaty that said that any crimes committed in the Great Sioux Nation, the people were subject to punishment by Sioux authorities. This [1868] was when the Great Sioux Nation was a contiguous land base that covered all of North and South Dakota, some of Wyoming and Montana and much of Nebraska. That has been broken down into 7 separate little reservations within that. The largest amount of that land, taken away when the Black Hills were the sacred area of the Sioux, were taken illegally.

And that was actually, because of [AIM and Wounded Knee](#) and the Sioux Treaty hearing, in 1980 the Supreme Court accepted a case and found that the Black Hills were taken illegally [\[United States v. Sioux Nation of Indians, 448 U.S. 371\]](#). But the Federal Government only pays money compensation, not restoration of land. So the Sioux refused to take the money and now it's up to something like almost 2 billion dollars in a trust fund that the poorest people in the Western Hemisphere refuse to take because they want the land back. [from [Part Two](#), 17:24-19:48]

“Because they want the land back.” Project this: Your ancestors dwelled on a land base for millennia that included soil rich from the bones of many, many, many generations of your progenitors. The land was imbued with sacred spirit and your purpose, instilled within you from birth, was to honor, respect and be responsible for the land and its numinous essence. Wouldn't you want the land back too if it had been taken violently from you?

The essential history of the United States is never truly confronted by the mainstream culture. How could it be? Any explication of the Unspeakable in this context must integrate and acknowledge “the fact that the very existence of the country is a result of the looting of an

entire continent and its resources” (p. 5) as well as “that the great civilizations of the Western Hemisphere, the very *evidence* of the Western Hemisphere, were wantonly destroyed, the gradual progress of humanity interrupted and set upon a path of greed and destruction.” (p. 1) Understanding the factual history of the theft of land from sea to shining sea encapsulates the creation and existence of the United States.

The particular mode of U.S. colonization, or expansion of its capitalist system, required the taking of Indian lands, which were flooded with European and Anglo-American settlers. From that base, states and institutions were formed. The [Land Ordinance of 1785](#) propagated a national land system and was the basis for its implementation. The [Northwest Ordinance of 1787](#), albeit guaranteeing Indian occupancy and title, set forth a plan for colonization establishing an evolutionary procedure for the creation of states in the order of military occupation, territorial status, and finally statehood. Statehood would be achieved when the count of settlers outnumbered the Indigenous population, which in most cases required forced removal of the Indigenous inhabitants.

The United States created a unique land system among colonial powers. In this system, land became the most important exchange commodity for the primitive accumulation of capital and building of the national treasury. In order to understand the apparently irrational policy of the U.S. government toward the Indians, the centrality of land sales in building the economic base of the U.S. capitalist system must be the frame of reference.

From the [Introduction, *Roots of Resistance: A History of Land Tenure in New Mexico*](#), by Roxanne Dunbar-Ortiz (2007)
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[Thomas Norman DeWolf](#) is another author whose books have been published by Beacon Press. Last October he [wrote on his Blog](#) about *An Indigenous Peoples’s History of the United States*:

I am a lucky guy to have my books published by Beacon Press. I’m proud to be in the company of such distinguished authors as Octavia Butler, James Baldwin, Cornel West, Mary Oliver and Anita Hill. I recently learned of another author with whom I’m excited to be connected through Beacon: [Roxanne Dunbar-Ortiz](#). I highly recommend her recently published [An Indigenous Peoples’ History of the United States](#).

As an author and public speaker who works to dispel the myths of the founding of this nation in the hope that we might someday actually live up to the ideals espoused in our founding documents, I appreciate all efforts to shine a light on truth.

Dunbar-Ortiz does precisely that, page after page, from the perspective of the Indigenous people who lived on this continent for thousands of years before it was “discovered”—and then colonized—by Europeans. It is not pleasant to learn details of the centuries-long program of terror, genocide, displacement, and theft of the land that became what is now the United States. This is not a pleasant book to read. But it is an essential book—and eminently readable—for anyone committed to understanding truth from the perspective of those outside the systems of power.

“I also wanted to set aside the rhetoric of race, not because race and racism

are unimportant but to emphasize that Native peoples were colonized and deposed of their territories as distinct peoples—hundreds of nations—not as a racial or ethnic group. ‘Colonization,’ ‘dispossession,’ ‘settler colonialism,’ ‘genocide’—these are the terms that drill to the core of US history, to the very source of the country’s existence.”

“My hope is that this book will be a springboard to dialogue about history, the present reality of Indigenous peoples’ experience, and the meaning and future of the United States itself.”

Readers will learn much from *An Indigenous Peoples’ History of the United States* that has been long-buried. Books like this should be studied in American classrooms, rather than the flimflam pabulum endorsed by the [Texas State Board of Education](#) that impacts the thinking and perspectives of far too many students throughout our nation; pabulum that perpetuate [ignorance](#) and [distortions of history](#).

Beginning in the early seventeenth century, a way of life developed based on colonization, dispossession, killing, and irregular warfare practiced by colonial settlers and militias (and in time by commissioned rangers and the Army) against the hundreds of nations and thousands of communities of people living on this land long, long, long before the arrival of Europeans. Nightmarishly, the seamless continuity—first conquest and subjugation of the Indigenous peoples of this continent and then the same methods applied beyond the sea-to-shinning-sea land—is starkly clear once it is delineated and laid bare. Hitler was fascinated and inspired by the comprehensive and supremely effective methods and scope of U.S genocide directed against the Indigenous Nations of peoples of what came to be called America. Dunbar-Ortiz quotes Otto von Bismarck, founder and first chancellor (1871-90) of the German empire, in observing that, “The colonization of North America has been the decisive fact of the modern world.” (p. 96)

John Grenier’s *First Way of War* is one of more than 250 works cited in *An Indigenous Peoples’ History of the United States*. At the end of Chapter Ten, “Ghost Dance Prophecy,” Dunbar-Ortiz cites a passage from Grenier’s book in the context of the five major U.S. wars conducted since WWII, those of Korea, Vietnam, Iraq in 1991 and 2003, and Afghanistan, within the historical continuity of the massacres in Jamestown, the Ohio Valley, and Wounded Knee, and how “a red thread of blood connects the first white settlement in North America with today and the future”:

U.S. people are taught that their military culture does not approve of or encourage targeting and killing civilians and know little or nothing about the nearly three centuries of warfare—before and after the founding of the U.S.—that reduced the Indigenous peoples of the continent to a few reservations by burning their towns and fields and killing civilians, driving the refugees out—step by step—across the continent... [V]iolence directed systematically against non-combatants through irregular means, from the start, has been a central part of Americans’ way of war. (*The First Way of War*, pp. 223-24)

The First Way of War is referenced to a significant extent. Many U.S. Americans today

believe the purpose of the Second Amendment was to ensure people have the right to bear arms. In fact, “Male settlers had been required in the colonies to serve in militias during their lifetimes for the purpose of raiding and razing Indigenous communities, the southern colonies included, and later states’ militias were used as ‘slave patrols.’ The Second Amendment, ratified in 1791, enshrined these irregular forces into law: ‘A well-regulated Militia, being necessary to the security of a free State, the right of the people to keep and bear Arms, shall not be infringed.’” (p.80) As Dunbar-Ortiz relates [in a radio interview](#) on *The Real News*, October 28, 2014:

DUNBAR-ORTIZ: [John Grenier is] a military historian. He’s actually a professor of military history at the Air Force College. I couldn’t believe they allow their people to write these things. But that book came out just in time for me. I knew all this stuff, but it’s very small and dense and well-researched. And it has that perspective. And it was the first time I had those arguments where it’s also connected up with the present. His whole point is that what we see in Afghanistan and Iraq, what we saw in Vietnam, what we saw in all of these U.S. interventions is a playing out again of this American way of war that was forged before the United States was even a state, with the colonial settlers. Being a settler state, it was the colonial militias. That’s why they were so adamant about putting the Second Amendment in. Those colonial militias were to kill Indians.

STEINER: Let me stop you for a minute, because this is a really important piece. And we’ve talked about it on my program a number of times, the Second Amendment, because we look at the Second Amendment often as coming from the slaveholder South. They could have state militias to ensure [crosstalk] But what you’re adding here to this is an element that affected native people and why they had militias, which I think is critical to the Second Amendment.

DUNBAR-ORTIZ: You know, of course, they were used in the whole colonial era and the early republic and invented for Native Americans. But it wasn’t until the really closed plantation, the cotton kingdom, that they started patrolling. They had—all white men were basically police over all African-Americans. So they didn’t necessarily have to have, until the cotton kingdom, when freedom was in the air, the abolitionist movement and people were leaving and marooning in the peripheries of the plantations, that they really started developing formal militias to guard the peripheries of the plantations. But that practice was already practiced for two centuries with native communities. And by that time they had removed all the native people from the southeast, to Oklahoma, to Indian territory, brutal forced removal, to develop the plantation, expand the plantation system into Mississippi and Alabama.

An ancestor on my father’s mother’s side was a colleague of Abraham Lincoln in the Illinois Legislature. My Grandmother’s family’s name was Thompson and I am named after them in my middle name. This man Thompson fought alongside Lincoln in what the history texts call the “Black Hawk War.” I am personally that close—at least—to the genocide. As Dunbar-Ortiz describes it,

When Sauk Leader Black Hawk led his people back from a winter stay in Iowa to their homeland in Illinois in 1832 to plant corn, the squatter settlers there claimed they were being invaded, bringing in both Illinois militia and federal troops. The “Black Hawk War” that is narrated in history texts was no more than a slaughter of Sauk farmers. The

Sauks tried to defend themselves but were starving when Black Hawk surrendered under a white flag. Still the soldiers fired resulting in a blood bath.

From p. 111 of [An Indigenous Peoples' History of the United States](#).
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In 2008 Beacon Press published Tom DeWolf's book, [Inheriting the Trade: A Northern Family Confronts Its Legacy as the Largest Slave-Trading Dynasty in U.S. History](#), "a memoir about one family's quest to face its slave-trading past and an urgent call for reconciliation." This man's willingness to uncover and make conscious within himself his ancestors past lives is of supreme importance and offers an example of how transformation of perceptual reality can change the world by increasing consciousness of what actually preceded the present. As he writes concerning this exploration:

On the surface, *Inheriting the Trade* is a story about the legacy of slavery and how it continues to impact relationships among people of different races today. By digging deeper, readers will see connections between racism, sexism, religious intolerance, and oppression along class, age, and other lines.

We live in fearful times in a troubled world. I believe we are called to wake up, to open our eyes wide and recognize our kinship with each other, with all others, as equals. We can meet the challenges we face in our world by truly developing compassion for each other, by our intentions, and our actions, to understand those who differ from us.

My friend was right. *Inheriting the Trade* is an invitation. As you read about the journey that our Family of Ten took, I invite you to examine your own life, how you walk in the world, how you perceive yourself and how others perceive you, and the impact it has on you and those around you.

All of this learning is an invitation to each of us to increase consciousness. Carl Jung was born into a family of Swiss peasants. In his journey he explored the landscape of the human psyche across multiple dimensions and to extensive depth. *The Collected Works* comprise nearly 20 volumes of his research and ideas. ([Volumes 1-18](#) form the core and Volumes 19 & 20 contain the [General Bibliography](#) and [General Index](#) respectively.) The only book he recounted his personal experiences in was his autobiography, [Memories, Dreams, Reflections](#), published in 1961, the year of his death. Of all his tentative postulations, the one assertion he did make regarding the purpose of human existence was: "As far as we can discern, the sole purpose of human existence is to kindle a light in the darkness of mere being. It may even be assumed that just as the unconscious affects us, so the increase in our consciousness affects the unconscious." (p.326)

Going back ten thousand years, all of us are descended from ancestors that explored what the nature of being human means before there was any form of so-called civilization we currently exist within. Jung's curiosity drew him into lively communing and exchanges of meaning and understanding with fellow humans he crossed paths with. The following is a recounting of such an engagement in exploring and seeking understanding of human consciousness and a sense of place and belonging in the universe. And, as told from the perspective of a Swiss

white man in the 1920s, blind spots appear to be expressed such as, “The desire then grew in me to carry the historical comparison [beyond the cultural consciousness of the white man] to a still lower cultural level [of the Pueblo Indians in New Mexico].” From what I have read of Jung, it may be that “lower cultural level” here means removed from so-called modern expressions of art and other manifestations of human intellectual achievement. I would appreciate [hearing from others](#) alternative explanations for what was meant by “lower cultural level”.

ii. AMERICA: THE PUEBLO INDIANS
(*Extract from an unpublished MS.*)

We always require an outside point to stand on, in order to apply the lever of criticism. This is especially so in psychology, where by the nature of the material we are much more subjectively involved than in any other science. How, for example, can we become conscious of national peculiarities if we have never had the opportunity to regard our own nation from outside? Regarding it from outside means regarding it from the standpoint of another nation. To do so, we must acquire sufficient knowledge of the foreign collective psyche, and in the course of this process of assimilation we encounter all those incompatibilities which constitute the national bias and the national peculiarity. Everything that irritates us about others can lead us to an understanding of ourselves. I understand England only when I see where I, as a Swiss, do not fit in. I understand Europe, our greatest problem, only when I see where I as a European do not fit into the world. Through my acquaintance with many Americans, and my trips to and in America, I have obtained an enormous amount of insight into the European character; it has always seemed to me that there can be nothing more useful for a European than some time or another to look out at Europe from the top of a skyscraper. When I contemplated for the first time the European spectacle from the Sahara, surrounded by a civilization which has more or less the same relationship to ours as Roman antiquity has to modern times, I became aware of how completely, even in America, I was still caught up and imprisoned in the cultural consciousness of the white man. The desire then grew in me to carry the historical comparisons still farther by descending to a still lower cultural level.

On my next trip to the United States I went with a group of American friends to visit the Indians of New Mexico, the city-building Pueblos. “City,” however, is too strong a word. What they build are in reality only villages; but their crowded houses piled one atop the other suggest the word “city,” as do their language and their whole manner. There for the first time I had the good fortune to talk with a non-European, that is, to a non-white. He was a chief of the Taos pueblos, an intelligent man between the ages of forty and fifty. His name was Ochwiay Bianco (Mountain Lake). I was able to talk with him as I have rarely been able to talk with a European. To be sure, he was caught up in his world just as much as a European is in his, but what a world it was! In talk with a European, one is constantly running up on the sand bars of things long known but never understood; with this Indian, the vessel floated freely on deep, alien seas. At the same time, one never knows which is more enjoyable: catching sight of new shores, or discovering new approaches to age-old knowledge that has been almost forgotten.

“See,” Ochwiay Bianco said, “how cruel the whites look. Their lips are thin, their noses sharp, their faces furrowed and distorted by folds. Their eyes have a staring expression;

they are always seeking something. What are they seeking? The whites always want something; they are always uneasy and restless. We do not know what they want. We do not understand them. We think that they are mad.”

I asked him why he thought the whites were all mad.

“They say that they think with their heads,” he replied.

“Why of course. What do you think with?” I asked him in surprise.

“We think here,” he said, indicating his heart.

I fell into a long meditation. For the first time in my life, so it seemed to me, someone had drawn for me a picture of the real white man. It was as though until now I had seen nothing but sentimental, prettified color prints. This Indian had struck our vulnerable spot, unveiled a truth to which we are blind. I felt rising within me like a shapeless mist something unknown and yet deeply familiar. And out of this mist, image upon image detached itself: first Roman legions smashing into the cities of Gaul, and the keenly incised features of Julius Caesar, Scipio Africanus, and Pompey. I saw the Roman eagle on the North Sea and on the banks of the White Nile. Then I saw St. Augustine transmitting the Christian creed to the Britons on the tips of Roman lances, and Charlemagne’s most glorious forced conversions of the heathen; then the pillaging and murdering bands of the Crusading armies. With a secret stab I realized the hollowness of that old romanticism about the Crusades. Then followed Columbus, Cortes, and the other conquistadors who with fire, sword, torture, and Christianity came down upon even these remote pueblos dreaming peacefully in the Sun, their Father. I saw, too, the peoples of the Pacific islands decimated by firewater, syphilis, and scarlet fever carried in the clothes the missionaries forced on them.

It was enough. What we from our point of view call colonization, missions to the heathen, spread of civilization, etc., has another face—the face of a bird of prey seeking with cruel intentness for distant quarry—a face worthy of a race of pirates and highwaymen. All the eagles and other predatory creatures that adorn our coats of arms seem to me apt psychological representatives of our true nature.

Something else that Ochwiay Biano said to me stuck in my mind. It seems to me so intimately connected with the peculiar atmosphere of our interview that my account would be incomplete if I failed to mention it. Our conversation took place on the roof of the fifth story of the main building. At frequent intervals figures of other Indians could be seen on the roofs, wrapped in their woolen blankets, sunk in contemplation of the wandering sun that daily rose into a clear sky. Around us were grouped the low-built square buildings of air-dried brick (adobe), with the characteristic ladders that reach from the ground to the roof, or from roof to roof of the higher stories. (In earlier, dangerous times the entrance used to be through the roof.) Before us the rolling plateau of Taos (about seven thousand feet above sea level) stretched to the horizon, where several conical peaks (ancient volcanoes) rose to over twelve thousand feet. Behind us a clear stream purred past the houses, and on its opposite bank stood a second pueblo of reddish adobe houses, built one atop the other toward the center of the settlement, thus strangely anticipating the perspective of an American metropolis with its skyscrapers in the center.

Perhaps half an hour's journey upriver rose a mighty isolated mountain, the mountain, which has no name. The story goes that on days when the mountain is wrapped in clouds the men vanish in that direction to perform mysterious rites.

The Pueblo Indians are unusually closemouthed, and in matters of their religion absolutely inaccessible. They make it a policy to keep their religious practices a secret, and this secret is so strictly guarded that I abandoned as hopeless any attempt at direct questioning. Never before had I run into such an atmosphere of secrecy; the religions of civilized nations today are all accessible; their sacraments have long ago ceased to be mysteries. Here, however, the air was filled with a secret known to all the communicants, but to which whites could gain no access. This strange situation gave me an inkling of Eleusis, whose secret was known to one nation and yet never betrayed. I understood what Pausanias or Herodotus felt when he wrote: "I am not permitted to name the name of that god." This was not, I felt, mystification, but a vital mystery whose betrayal might bring about the downfall of the community as well as of the individual. Preservation of the secret gives the Pueblo Indian pride and the power to resist the dominant whites. It gives him cohesion and unity; and I feel sure that the Pueblos as an individual community will continue to exist as long as their mysteries are not desecrated.

It was astonishing to me to see how the Indian's emotions change when he speaks of his religious ideas. In ordinary life he shows a degree of self-control and dignity that borders on fatalistic equanimity. But when he speaks of things that pertain to his mysteries, he is in the grip of a surprising emotion which he cannot conceal—a fact which greatly helped to satisfy my curiosity. As I have said, direct questioning led to nothing. When, therefore, I wanted to know about essential matters, I made tentative remarks and observed my interlocutor's expression for those affective movements which are so very familiar to me. If I had hit on something essential, he remained silent or gave an evasive reply, but with all the signs of profound emotion; frequently tears would fill his eyes. Their religious conceptions are not theories to them (which, indeed, would have to be very curious theories to evoke tears from a man), but facts, as important and moving as the corresponding external realities.

As I sat with Ochwiay Bianco on the roof, the blazing sun rising higher and higher, he said, pointing to the sun, "Is not he who moves there our father? How can anyone say differently? How can there be another god? Nothing can be without the sun." His excitement, which was already perceptible, mounted still higher; he struggled for words, and exclaimed at last, "What would a man do alone in the mountains? He cannot even build his fire without him."

I asked him whether he did not think the sun might be a fiery ball shaped by an invisible god. My question did not even arouse astonishment, let alone anger. Obviously it touched nothing within him; he did not even think my question stupid. It merely left him cold, I had the feeling that I had come upon an insurmountable wall. His only reply was, "The sun is God. Everyone can see that."

Although no one can help feeling the tremendous impress of the sun, it was a novel and deeply affecting experience for me to see these mature, dignified men in the grip of an overmastering emotion when they spoke of it.

Another time I stood by the river and looked up at the mountains, which rise almost another six thousand feet above the plateau. I was just thinking that this was the roof of the American continent, and that people lived here in the face of the sun like the Indians who stood wrapped in blankets on the highest roofs of the pueblo, mute and absorbed in the sight of the sun. Suddenly a deep voice, vibrant with suppressed emotion, spoke from behind me into my left ear: "Do you not think that all life comes from the mountain?" An elderly Indian had come up to me, inaudible in his moccasins, and had asked me this heaven knows how far-reaching question. A glance at the river pouring down from the mountain showed me the outward image that had engendered this conclusion. Obviously all life came from the mountain, for where there is water, there is life. Nothing could be more obvious. In his question I felt a swelling emotion connected with the word "mountain," and thought of the tale of secret rites celebrated on the mountain. I replied, "Everyone can see that you speak the truth."

Unfortunately, the conversation was soon interrupted, and so I did not succeed in attaining any deeper insight into the symbolism of water and mountain.

I observed that the Pueblo Indians, reluctant as they were to speak about anything concerning their religion, talked with great readiness and intensity about their relations with the Americans. "Why," Mountain Lake said, "do the Americans not let us alone? Why do they want to forbid our dances? Why do they make difficulties when we want to take our young people from school in order to lead them to the *kiva* (site of the rituals) , and instruct them in our religion? We do nothing to harm the Americans!" After a prolonged silence he continued, "The Americans want to stamp out our religion. Why can they not let us alone? What we do, we do not only for ourselves but for the Americans also. Yes, we do it for the whole world. Everyone benefits by it."

I could observe from his excitement that he was alluding to some extremely important element of his religion. I therefore asked him: "You think, then, that what you do in your religion benefits the whole world?" He replied with great animation, "Of course. If we did not do it, what would become of the world?" And with a significant gesture he pointed to the sun.

I felt that we were approaching extremely delicate ground here, verging on the mysteries of the tribe. "After all," he said, "we are a people who live on the roof of the world; we are the sons of Father Sun, and with our religion we daily help our father to go across the sky. We do this not only for ourselves, but for the whole world. If we were to cease practicing our religion, in ten years the sun would no longer rise. Then it would be night forever."

I then realized on what the "dignity," the tranquil composure of the individual Indian, was founded. It springs from his being a son of the sun; his life is cosmologically meaningful, for he helps the father and preserver of all life in his daily rise and descent. If we set against this our own self-justifications, the meaning of our own lives as it is formulated by our reason, we cannot help but see our poverty. Out of sheer envy we are obliged to smile at the Indians' naïveté and to plume ourselves on our cleverness; for otherwise we would discover how impoverished and down at the heels we are. Knowledge does not enrich us; it removes us more and more from the mythic world in which we were once at home by right of birth.

If for a moment we put away all European rationalism and transport ourselves into the clear mountain air of that solitary plateau, which drops off on one side into the broad continental prairies and on the other into the Pacific Ocean; if we also set aside our intimate knowledge of the world and exchange it for a horizon that seems immeasurable, and an ignorance of what lies beyond it, we will begin to achieve an inner comprehension of the Pueblo Indian's point of view. "All life comes from the mountain" is immediately convincing to him, and he is equally certain that he lives upon the roof of an immeasurable world, closest to God. He above all others has the Divinity's ear, and his ritual act will reach the distant sun soonest of all. The holiness of mountains, the revelation of Yahweh upon Sinai, the inspiration that Nietzsche was vouchsafed in the Engadine—all speak the same language. The idea, absurd to us, that a ritual act can magically affect the sun is, upon closer examination, no less irrational but far more familiar to us than might at first be assumed. Our Christian religion—like every other, incidentally—is permeated by the idea that special acts or a special kind of action can influence God—for example, through certain rites or by prayer, or by a morality pleasing to the Divinity.

The ritual acts of man are an answer and reaction to the action of God upon man; and perhaps they are not only that, but are also intended to be "activating," a form of magic coercion. That man feels capable of formulating valid replies to the overpowering influence of God, and that he can render back something which is essential even to God, induces pride, for it raises the human individual to the dignity of a metaphysical factor. "God and us"—even if it is only an unconscious *sous-entendu*—this equation no doubt underlies that enviable serenity of the Pueblo Indian. Such a man is in the fullest sense of the word in his proper place. (pp. 246-253)

As Tom DeWolf emphasizes, *An Indigenous Peoples' History of the United States* "is an essential book—and eminently readable—for anyone committed to understanding truth from the perspective of those outside the systems of power." There is a great need, on July 4 as well as every day of every year, to acknowledge that, "'Colonization,' 'dispossession,' 'settler colonialism,' 'genocide'—these are the terms that drill to the core of US history, to the very source of the country's existence." (p. xiii) In the book's Introduction is an acknowledgement that, "To learn and know this history is both a necessity and a responsibility to the ancestors and descendants of all parties." (p. 1) Further along in the Introduction is the summing up of the deep disconnect in the consciousness of US Americans:

US history, as well as inherited indigenous trauma, cannot be understood without dealing with the genocide that the United States committed against indigenous peoples. From the colonial period through the founding of the United States and continuing in the twenty-first century, this has entailed torture, terror, sexual abuse, massacres, systematic military occupations, removals of indigenous peoples from their ancestral territories, and [removals of indigenous children to military-like boarding schools](#). The absence of even the slightest note of regret or tragedy in the annual celebration of the US independence betrays a deep disconnect in the consciousness of US Americans.

From the [Introduction](#), p. 9 of [An Indigenous Peoples' History of the United States](#).
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Detailing the ways in which the conquest of lands that are today called the United States came to be claimed and owned by European men, reveal the processes and characteristics of settler colonialism. This specific brand of colonial usurpation is founded upon institutionalizing extravagant violence through unlimited war and irregular war. Extreme violence was carried out by Anglo settlers against civilians to cause the utter annihilation of the indigenous population. The goal of this extermination was to enable the settlers's total freedom to acquire land and wealth.

Many historians who acknowledge the exceptional one-sided colonial violence attribute it to racism. Grenier argues that rather than racism leading to violence, the reverse occurred: the out-of-control momentum of extreme violence of unlimited warfare fueled race hatred. "Successive generations of Americans, both soldiers and civilians, made the killing of Indian men, women, and children a defining element of their first military tradition and thereby part of a shared American identity. Indeed, only after seventeenth- and early eighteenth-century Americans made the first way of war a key to being a white American could later generations of 'Indian haters,' men like Andrew Jackson, turn the Indian wars into race wars." By then, the indigenous peoples' villages, farmlands, towns, and entire nations formed the only barrier to the settlers' total freedom to acquire land and wealth. Settler colonialists again chose their own means of conquest. Such fighters are often viewed as courageous heroes, but killing the unarmed women, children, and old people and burning homes and fields involved neither courage nor sacrifice.

From the [Chapter 4, Bloody Footprints](#), pp. 58-9, of [An Indigenous Peoples' History of the United States](#).
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The Okanagan teach that each person is born into a family and a community. You belong. You are them. Not to have family or community is to be scattered or falling apart. The bond of community and family includes the history of the many who came before us and the many ahead of us who share our flesh. Our most serious teaching is that community comes first in our choices, then family, and then ourselves as individuals.... We also refer to the land and our bodies with the same root syllable. This means that the flesh that is our body is pieces of the land come to us. The soil, the water, the air, and all the other life forms contributed parts to be our flesh. We are our land. (p. 34)

For Indigenous people there is still the conscious understanding and awareness of the indivisible coupling between life and land. There is much to learn and increase consciousness

concerning the way of life of Indigenous Peoples who have survived more than 500 years of genocide and the theft of their land they lived in sacred relationship with and responsibility toward for millennia. The myth of U.S. American exceptionalism was codified in the term, ‘Manifest Destiny’ In Chapter 6, “The Last of the Mohicans and Andrew Jackson’s White Republic,” Dunbar-Ortiz quotes historian Wai-chee Dimock:

The *United States Magazine* and *Democratic Review* summed it up by arguing that whereas European powers “conquer only to enslave,” America, being “a free nation,” “conquers only to bestow freedom,”... Far from being antagonistic, “empire” and “liberty” are instrumentally conjoined. If the former stands to safeguard the latter, the latter, in turn, serves to justify the former. Indeed, the conjunction of the two, of freedom and dominion, gives America its sovereign place in history—its Manifest Destiny, as its advocates so aptly call it. (p. 105-6) [Dimock, Wai-chee, [Empire For Liberty: Melville and the Poetics of Individualism](#). Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1989, p. 9]

The necessity to outgrow the unique brand of exceptionalism that can be seen as the state religion of the U.S. is more pressing with each passing year. And yet, while “even ‘genocide’ seems an inadequate description for what happened, ... rather than viewing it with horror, most Americans have conceived of it as their country’s manifest destiny.” (p. 79) *An Indigenous Peoples’s History of the United States* is a liberating vehicle to facility dispelling the myths of the founding of this Settler Colonial state.

Our nation was born in genocide ... We are perhaps the only nation which tried as a matter of national policy to wipe out its indigenous population. Moreover, we elevated that tragic experience into a noble crusade. Indeed, even today we have not permitted ourselves to reject or to feel remorse for this shameful episode.

—Martin Luther King, Jr.
[Why We Can’t Wait](#), pp. 41-42

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