

What's So Bad about Communism?
A Look at Tribal Environmentalism
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The word “industry” means what people do. There are various kinds – industry to keep people busy, industry that keeps people alive, and industry meant to make a few rich. In the U.S. industry is seen as opportunity for anyone to get rich, though very few do. My study of tribal environmentalism will demonstrate the difference between industry to survive and industry to hoard – or the difference between capitalism and tribal communism. I intend with my research and study to remove the stigma of “communism” as a bad thing, and demonstrate, through research of early pagan cultures and oral mythology, here in the U.S. and elsewhere, that people can be industrious but not greedy, and protect their fragile environment at the same time.

I first started researching this topic while a graduate student of history. I took an independent study on the history of pollution on the Great Lakes, because I wanted more background in historic environmental issues. I found criticism culled against Indian tribes (herein called tribes) in the U.S. as natural environmentalists. In researching to uncover if they justly earned this title, it started to appear that the criticism arose after the 1992 protests of the 500 year anniversary of Columbus Day. As someone who once ran a campaign to re-name Columbus Day, I will include in my book more research on exactly why this criticism has come about, which will help me focus on debunking those criticisms.

Using oral mythology and early contact documents, we will see whether the tribes did indeed consider the earth a ‘mother’ and to what extent they criticized whites – and themselves – for destroying their environment. One historian, Sam Gill points to the absence in literature to the identification of the

earth as a major goddess.¹ Sam, perhaps you ought to read oral mythology, because from what I've seen so far, this reference has occurred more times than can be counted.

Other critics have asserted that tribes were not natural environmentalists because they too caused degradations to their environment. I will demonstrate the concepts I've uncovered to show that it's not whether or not they polluted, but how they recognized and attempted to prevent pollution that makes them natural environmentalists. Their spiritual attitude of living *with* nature, almost as an apology, rather than in antagonism against it, is the very most outward sign of this attitude – but was it enough?

This project was stirred by several factors; that I'm pagan, that I am incensed that the dominant white culture looks for ways to justify its conquest of the native tribes, and that there is a spiritual truth to environmentalism that needs to be uncovered, explored and discussed. If you immediately reject my research as being biased, I cannot stop you. However, research often comes from the need to expose what has been buried in the past. That is what I'm doing here – not to validate my beliefs, because I don't need to, but to demonstrate that the title of Indian (or natural) environmentalism is justified by the very reason of their paganism, and to hopefully encourage tribal leaders to become more active in the global warming debate. No matter how badly we whites here in the U.S. have screwed up, the land being destroyed will affect all of us.

This research also has the potential of demonstrating that the conquest of the pagan tribes in the U.S. had more to do with progress and greed than with racism. Instead racism developed as a rationale to progress, to give what people saw as a 'natural' excuse to reduce competition. Even today we see that religious

¹ Saleem H. Ali, *Mining, the Environment, and Indigenous Development Conflicts* (Tucson: The University of Arizona Press, 2003), 31.

wars, which bear racist features, mask the real purpose, the glut of resources to benefit the few at the expense of many.

For this presentation I'll demonstrate the difference between "capitalist" communism and tribal communism by looking at pre-contact tribal mythology and early contact historical documents to demonstrate how pagan cultures viewed themselves and their environment. Tribal members have few, if any, positive things to say about Marxism, and Marx himself called them "primitive and precapitalist." Marx fought industry that made a few rich. He expected the tribes to join him in this revolution in the real world, and become part of the industrial equality system.² I focus more directly in my book how tribal communism, in attempts to live with nature, differs from the atheist approach that is associated with communism.

In early contact attempts with sixteen different tribes to ask for their dialog on this project, I received two initial responses, and then nothing in follow-up. One Indian contact declares, "many native people will not help anybody as regards their beliefs, because the memory of the actions against us is rather fresh." I hope soon, rather than later, they learn that anger is non-productive, and that a Pagan attitude in this country is available to all, and definitely a necessity if we are ever to learn to treat the Earth as She deserves. I hope as I proceed they will come to understand the importance of this project and the impossibility of it proceeding without reference to their ancestors. Rather than digging up their bones to display, I think of it as alerting the world to ancient wisdom to be understood and absorbed. Without it, as people we – and the descendants of these ancient tribal cultures – are doomed. They share the air, the water, the land with everyone and everything equally. That's true communism.

² *Marxism and Native Americans*, ed. by Ward Churchill (Boston: South End Press, 1984), 26.

THE CONCEPTS

My initial research as a graduate student led to the discovery and/or reincorporation of three concepts — pollution as a natural byproduct of living; that all living creatures seek ease of living; and greed as an integral core of survival of the fittest.

1. Every living thing pollutes.

Pollution is a natural byproduct of life and death and rebirth. Everything living thing lives, defecates and dies. Wildfires were (and sometimes are today) caused by lightning that hits a massive pileup of plant debris — plant growth has natural die-back that dries and does not decay quickly enough. Tribes had attempted to control major fires by burning undergrowth and debris themselves, but once the whites took over, they stopped what they felt was a dangerous practice. Whether wildfires can be considered pollution, I'll leave the scientific community to debate, but in my opinion, it does destroy plant and animal (and human) life and forces the earth to do a bit of recovery. Fortunately, the residue left behind from the fire is fertile and can even be considered good for the planet overall, although the smoke can caused short-term air pollution.

The earth can recover and regenerate from natural pollution such as fire, although perhaps never in the same form. But there are instances when recovery is non-essential. Take the incident of bat guano. I was a park ranger intern for two months at Carlsbad Caverns where we showed visitors a six-foot-high pile of bat dung.



Carlsbad Caverns bat pile, author photo, 2005

Bats had lived in this particular section of the cave for decades, in the same spot, and the guano just kept building up and up. Finally, when the bats swooped down to leave for the night's bug hunt, they began to drown in their own feces because the pile had gotten too high and robbed them of flight clearance. They decided it was time to move.

This is natural migration from a polluted environment, and one that humans emulated. Migration was a last resort for any species. When human populations got too large, and stayed in one place too long, disease and death forced them to move, as well as outstripping their food resources.

I've also research tribal civilizations, such as the chiefdoms of the Aztecs and potentially of the Chacoamericans, and will cover aspects of their cultures in later chapters of the book.

2. Ease of living.

All of nature strives for it, to survive in the easiest way possible. This concept is responsible for evolution, and for all the innovations ever created by

humans. It also is responsible for developing ways of preserving their resources so that they don't have to migrate quite so quickly. Migration, as populations grew, was difficult and often led to warfare. By finding ways to protect the resources around them, they wouldn't have to migrate so quickly.

Animals also demonstrate this ease of living concept. A mallard duck population thrived on Basswood Lake (Minnesota) because the locals fed them grains. The population grew too large — “the mallards soon decimated some of the plant species of the fragile shoreline habitat.” The experience led to accelerated eutrophication of the lake. The bay hadn't recovered after a decade of abandonment. The ducks, on their own, would not have caused such alterations to the landscape. They sought “ease of living,” explaining why they could be seduced by the sudden easy grain supply. They became so used to an easy food supply that they destroyed, by population numbers, edible vegetation in the area when grain supplies just weren't enough.³

Cats demonstrate this principle every day. When domesticated (as opposed to feral) they like knowing they can come back inside to eat, and will often catch and kill their prey but not eat it. My cats during the summer will come in, eat, and go right back out. They still hunt and kill but like the easy food source rather than chewing off the head of some tough critter. Even feral cats can be seduced by human food put outside, and come to expect it.

Overpopulation, such as those ducks, can harm an environment. The Sahara desert was not always a desert — what had happened? When bison overpopulated they helped turned the western woodlands into grassland prairies, aided by postglacial warmth, aridity, and wildfire. The bats at Carlsbad fouled their environment with towers of waste before moving to a new location, because until they lost their young who drowned in their own waste, they were

³ Clifford and Isabel Ahlgren, *Lob Trees in the Wilderness* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1984), 32.

comfortable where they were. Now their dung is one big, unmovable rock. Disease has been considered as cause for the die-out of many extinct species. At the same time, humans were invading all different biospheres and adapting and growing and dying back, all in relation to the environmental stressors.

Most prehistory environments have been affected by human occupation, and my research will help determine whether tribes knew that living caused pollution. They also wanted to live, to survive, in the easiest manner possible. "Traditional ecological knowledge is a "knowledge-practice-belief complex," an attribute of indigenous societies that, historically, have continuity in particular practice of resource use . . . both incremental in accumulation and holistic in outlook." They lived in nature, not outside of it, not attempting to control it but encouraged it and prayed to it to keep sustaining them, and always looking for easier ways to expand resources to gather and hunt. Their worldview is "consistent with the assumption that nature is not in a steady state, but rather it is in a constant change, and that societies must respond by continually adjusting and evolving." Occasionally they made their societies vulnerable to collapse during times of rapid environmental change during which they exceeded nature's threshold. These authors admit that a study of their oral mythology may give us a better, although subjective, glimpse into the past. Hopefully my attempts will be satisfactory in that regard.⁴

3. Greed as a built in tool in the cell structure for survival.

I take the greed concept from the plant and animal world into the human community, where we'll see how tribes developed their spiritual life to counter greed, an attitude that became tribal communism. This greed cell, encoded into

⁴ Paul A. and Hazel R. Delacourt, *Prehistoric Native Americans and Ecological Changes, : Human Ecosystems in Eastern North America since the Pleistocene* (Cambridge University Press, 2004), 156-169.

our DNA as part of our will to survive, has also been referred to as “the selfish gene,” although as a theory this is also called “inadequate.”⁵

You can see greed at work in the plant world, in a stand of white pine, where each tree will shoot up to grab the sun at the expense of everything else around it. You’ll see it in a wolf pack when one struggles to be the dominant one for mating. Humans recognized this greed in themselves as well, and developed their moral code –their spirituality, if you will – to conquer this greed. Think about one of the criticisms against the Paleo-Indian, that they were responsible for overhunting and causing the mammoth elephant to go extinct. Whether they did or not—there were likely mitigating factors – imagine being a hunter and realizing you aren’t going to find them anymore. You might *think* that you killed the last one. And with this recognition, they could have developed the concept of respect and spirit in all of nature, recognizing greed, and began to diversify their diet, leading to cultural changes where we identify them as Archaic.

To establish this potential recognition of greed, I turn to the only two sources available – mythology and early historical documents. The bones of their archaic ancestors tell us little, except that they revered family and their ancestors. But the tales they told each other, like moral lessons, were meant to both entertain and guide them as people, and the reactions they had to Europeans, a culture so vastly different from them, while distorted by interpretation and white writers, is still the best indication of who they were on contact.

In studying this comparison of native to immigrant Europeans I’ve developed a concept called the “Can’t Control Greed” principle of pollution. As Mahatma Ghandi said — *The earth provides enough to satisfy every person’s need but not every person’s greed.* Can’t Control Greed means that today’s moral guidance

⁵Terri McClain, “Survival of the fittest? Anthropologist suggests the nicest prevail, not just the selfish,” Washington University in St. Louis, June 9, 2004, <http://news-info.wustl.edu/tips/page/normal/902.html>

does not include a commandment called “thou shalt not get rich at the expense of others.” Ghandi was right, in that if everyone tries to get rich, the biggest loser is the Earth, because only She provides the materials by which we feel wealthy.

BLENDING HISTORY & MYTH

Why do we hear so much about how pristine the wilderness was when the Europeans arrived? It’s not because native people left their environment unaltered. That’s not humanly possible, as we’ve seen. This pristineness has been used as proof that Indians were natural environmentalists. But the answer is not that simple. The Europeans sent an enemy ahead of them—disease. The populations around the Great Lakes had been devastated by disease because the disease traveled from the east coast and from the Southwest to these tribes faster than the Europeans. So Europeans, in comparing this country to Europe, found a pristine wilderness due to a dramatic reduction in human population, allowing the resources to rebound.⁶

Larry Balber, Chippewa tribe, said that with European contact they could no longer migrate to their seasonal camps, which made them poor in resources, and eventually the DNR even stopped them from their traditional techniques for increasing the wild rice crops, calling it environmental degradation. All they were doing was attempting to increase a food source, a sort of farming technique. The U.S. government wanted them to farm but only on the poor land they were given, and following U.S. methods. Ironic, no?

Much of tribal mythology demonstrated their attempts to control their environment, but the way they went about it differed greatly from capitalist modes. While capitalists would build bigger ships, these tribal members used prayer, pleading with the gods to be merciful, and then used symbolic gestures

⁶ William Cronon, ed., *Uncommon Ground*, 25.

to follow up their prayers. Because all of nature was sacred, both good and evil, all of it could be pacified with prayer. But is prayer enough? When you overhunt, all the praying in the world won't bring the Mammoth back, regardless of why it actually disappeared. Prayer had to be coupled with action. In the Chippewa tribal lifestyle, for example, the single biggest deterrent to indiscriminate slaughter was fear of spiritual reprisal.⁷

So Europeans, when they arrived, saw a great open wilderness, with far fewer people than there was land, because of disease. Surely these natives had no need for all that land. But in the treaties that were signed the tribes reserved for themselves the right to hunt and fish on the land they treated away. They wanted to keep using the land, to share, because sharing was always better than warfare.

"The white man came across the great water – he was feeble and small in stature," said Little Elk of the Great Lakes Winnebagoes in 1829. "He begged for a few acres of land so that he could, by digging in the earth (like a woman), raise some corn, some squashes, and some beans for the support of himself and family. He, who was so small in stature, became so great in size, that his head reached the clouds, and with a large tree for his staff, step by step he drove the red man before him from river to river, from mountain to mountain, until the red man seated himself on a small territory as a final resting place, and now, the white man wants even that small spot."⁸ No sharing here.

Recognition of greed can also be found in the legend of where the Aztecs first got their corn.

"In the beginning the grain was known only to red ants, who kept it hidden deep inside Mount Tonacatepetl . . . (one day) Quetzalcoalt (a major

⁷ Gerald Vizenor, *The People Named the Chippewa: Narrative Histories* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1984), 21.

⁸ Lucy Eldersveld Murphy, *A Gathering of Rivers: Indians, Metis and Mining in the Western Great Lakes, 1737-1832* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska, 2000), 1.

deity) transformed himself into a black ant and made his way unseen to their secret storeroom . . . to release it, Quetzalcoatl slung a rope round the mountain and tried to shift it, but it was too heavy for him.” So he took the task to the oldest of the gods, who decided that “Nanahuatzin, the creator of the Fifth Sun, should...split the mountain open. He did so with the help of the Tlaloques, who snatched up the grain inside and scattered it – and so were responsible for bringing the crop to humankind.”⁹

Hoarding to natives was a sin, and thus as part of their communist attitude all shared all equally, as they did the air, the sun, the moon and the rain. Belief that the natives were not industrious but lazy is also an erroneous one. The Winnebagoes in the lead mining district of the Fox-Wisconsin region had been mining lead for their own use for years. When the whites came, the Winnebagoes (now Ho-Chunk) established a trade network with them for the lead, and continued mining as always.¹⁰ But eventually, with so many whites moving in, the Ho-Chunk and other tribes were forced away. We’ve all heard of Black Hawk’s War? An earlier event, involving the Ho-Chunk, combined alcohol and rape to rile the Indians to war, in order to take the land. The Winnebago uprising of 1827 needs to be corrected in the records and is another of the projects I’ve taken on.

Because life was hard for them, myths were created to help explain why. They had myths that sound much like biblical tales, how Raven created a world that was much too easy (a Northwest coast tale), with rivers that flowed in both directions, where meat was plentiful. But Raven didn’t like how easy the humans had it and so he recreated the world to make it hard (sound like Adam & Eve?). This tale would tell them why humans have been seeking ‘ease of

⁹ C. Scott Littleton, ed., *Mythology: the Illustrated Anthology of World Myth & Storytelling* (London: Duncan Baird Publishers, 2002), 567. The Tlaloques, gods’ attendants, would be similar to what the Pueblo people call Kachinas, which remind people of their obligation to the community.

¹⁰ Murphy, *Gathering of Rivers*, 5-6.

living ever since. The people, rather than hating Raven for this, revered him for his creative and healing power. They prayed to him for good luck in hunting, health and prosperity.¹¹

Prosperity? What did they mean by that? We think of prosperity as having more . . . more than say, perhaps, our neighbors. Prosperity can be another word for greed. Unless it means prosperity for the community, and not just the individual. It could mean being able to put away enough food to last their village through a bad winter, and not lose too many babies, which were the last to be fed off their mother's breast. Judge James Doty, future Wisconsin governor, said in 1820: "Nature has taught them there is one method — show them there is a better and an easier one."¹² Europeans noted that they did not put away enough to last through a hard winter. When asked why not, they replied, "It is all the same to us, we shall stand it well enough; we spend seven and eight days, even ten sometimes, without eating anything, yet we do not starve."¹³

They never faulted the Earth for not caring for them. The Earth they lived on was like a mother to them, impregnated during the winter to give birth to new life in the spring. Remember Sam Gill earlier — the one who said there was nothing in literature referring to the earth as a goddess? Here's one he missed:

Old-one, or Chief, made the earth out of a woman, and said she would be the mother of all the people. Thus the earth was once a human being, and she is alive yet; but she has been transformed, and we cannot see her in the same way we see a person. Nevertheless, she has legs, arms, head, heart, flesh, bones and blood. The soil is her flesh; the trees and vegetation are her hair; the rocks, her bones; and the wind is her flesh. She lies spread out, and we live on her. She

¹¹ C. Scott Littleton, *Mythology*, 490-510.

¹² *Schoolcraft's Narrative Journal of Travels*, Mentor L. Williams, ed., (Lansing: Michigan University State Press, 1953, reprint 1992), Appendix F, 449.

¹³ William Cronon, *Changes in the Land: Indians, Colonists and the Ecology of New England*, (New York: Hill and Wang, a div. of Farrar, Straus & Giroux, 1983), 41.

shivers and contracts when cold, and expands and perspires when hot. When she moves, we have an earthquake. Old-One, after transforming her, took some of her flesh and rolled it into balls, as people do with mud or clay. These he transformed into the beings of the ancient world.¹⁴

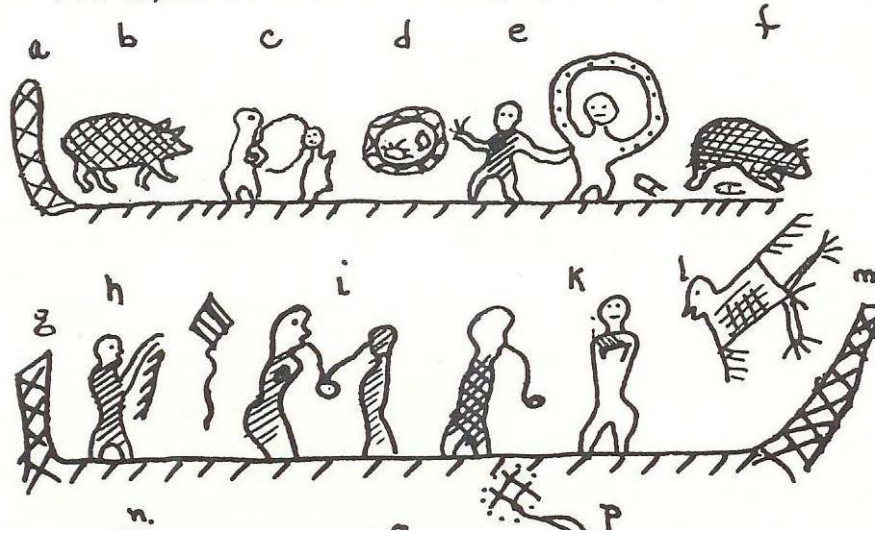
Only those who animate nature to this level can show it the kind of respect they would have been expected to show their own parents. The earth *was* a parent — it fed and sustained us; it also got angry with us, and sometimes killed us.

But mythology is not that easy to decipher, and the tales I've found may have been warped from the original. A tale in *Medicine Water*¹⁵ appears to be the sharing of an attitude of reverence toward the animal that sustains them. It starts with the animal, then an elder talking to a younger, with the next symbol signifying earth (according to text) — notice how each person appears to be dressed differently which must signify something — the one, pointing to the earth, holds the body of another who appears to radiate out some kind of mystical energy which then leads to the tracking of more animals that they need.

¹⁴ An Okanagon tale, *Red Swan Myths & Tales of the American Indians*, edited by John Bierhorst (New York: Indianhead Books, 1976), 55.

¹⁵ Inaqtik Raven Legenbard Atanoqken and Johan G.R. Baner, *Medicine-Water: Mashkiq'Kiu-Ne'Pish, Kitch-Iti-Ki-Pi the Big Spring; Menominee and Chippeway Indian Legends and Myths* (1933 copyright Bellaire and Baner), 36-38.

An Ojibwa-Menomini Pictographic Myth-Legend



Here's their interpretation.

A—That line means: "Hear we're starting this our lay, our myth, our legend; read with care, or hearken closely—not alone to scripts and drum-sounds, but to subtler, inner meaning, hinted at, but seldom given clear delineations—ne'ats i".

B—The Bear, the great Owa'ssee—brawn and brain in one, is slowly, meditatively beginning symbolistic, mythic motions—physical—portraying mental, yes, spiritual, if transcribed by—brain and heart—sustained by fancy.

C—A wise one, yes, a teacher, giving knowledge's information to a youth that needs and wants them, both as arrows for the life bow and as strings that bind to weary feet the moqkasines of life-path.

D—The earth, with trails within it, trails upon it—thorns 'mong thistles; few and fading, withering flowers, plenty weeds, yes, poison ivies. Wisdom's shells, as yet unopened, to distribute—heart glee's pearl wines, Fragrant happiness and beaming—then is earth's, as well as heaven's. Yes, in due time, yes, in soon-time joy's own pearls are found by Redfolks.

E—The former pupil teaching here an other generation's aspirant for crown of learning, wisdom's laurels, knowledge's nimbus, which is here encircling frontlet of the one that sought attainments yesterday, which he acquired. He, the aged one, he, the learned one soon is ready, for transmission, transmigration to Akamia, to Manidiwauk's, 2. perfected world, and tribefolk in the Bluerealm. Some one else must e'er be ready when he lifts his wings for journey toward star-world—must be ready to enshoulder knowledge's mantle: heal the tribal sores, the bodies and the hearts', the brain's, the tribe souls'. Here THIS youth is educated, like the other in his swain days, learns to heal and dry the tear-eyed. And in time he will be able to plant health-herbs where Ne'pua 3., the transformer—"Death" intended to dig graves or hammer scaffolds.

To a logical reader, there seems to be no connection between B & C in the tale at all. To them, this is not about sharing wisdom in the hunt, or having shamanic visions to make the hunt successful, but instead, it appears to be sharing the wisdom and mystery of nature, a passing of the word forth, with emphasis on being of age to hear the truth. A reading of the way they tell it is much more specific and less stereotypic than the way I would have interpreted it with white eyes.

Chippewa-Menominee myths demonstrated recognition of greed in a number of ways. A friendship tale showed what happened when the otter was greedy and his friend the bear wasn't. The bear was rewarded after death but refused to go to the new land without his friend the otter. Another is about two fellows called Stomach and Brain, the one always hungry and the other, able to control his hunger with thought. The tale follows their adventures, showing all the trouble Stomach gets into trying to get more food than he needs.

Here's an excerpt, as written back in 1933:

O'mot was able to see Mima'nita's riches, and comparing them with his own lack thereof, he became jealous, just like some of our time's people, though, of course, not you or I. And hunger, thirst and jealousy together made him inclined to make himself the owner of Mima'nita's property which he thought easy enough, when he noticed the rich ones small size, and he saw his own enlarged by the magnifying waters of Kitch-iti-ki-pi.¹⁶

As we have a hard time understanding their myths even today, Europeans arrived not understanding their communist lifestyle, meant to control greed. The natives understood trade, however, and soon became enriched by European

¹⁶ Inaqtik Raven Legenbard Atanoqken and Johan G.R. Baner, *Medicine-Water: Mashkiq'Kiu-Ne'Pish, Kitch-Iti-Ki-Pi the Big Spring; Menominee and Chippeway Indian Legends and Myths* (1933 copyright Bellaire and Baner), 18-19.

goods such as the rifle, horses and iron kettles. Eventually and inevitably their lifestyles changed. Some tribes converged into multi-tribal settlements, to the detriment of the natural resources, to protect themselves against the marauding tribes who got rifles before they did. In order for tribes to be able to do this, noted historian Richard White, a fundamental altering of their religious structure had to take place.¹⁷

Religion, and I make no apologies for this, is the primary reason tribes were able to conquer greed, and the primary factor through which Europeans conquered them. Tribal religious structure recognized that destruction of their environment was detrimental to their survival. But greed had begun to take hold of half of their people, who were seduced by what the whites had. Even though the tribes in this country had a history of siding with the losers in war – first French, then British, then the South – they recognized that the whites had more ‘ease of living’ than they had.

As early as 1737, a Shawnee/Onondaga seer asked their God how they could suffer in a land that used to be so productive, and reported that their God answered him this way:

You inquire after the cause why game has become scarce, I will tell you. You kill it for the sake of the skins, which you give for strong liquors, and drown your senses, and kill one another, and carry on a dreadful debauchery. Therefore I have driven the wild animals out of the country, for they are mine. If you will do good, and cease from your sins, I will bring them back; if not, I will destroy you from the end of the earth.

¹⁷ Richard White, *The Middle Ground: Indians, empires and republics in the Great Lakes region, 1650-1815* (UK: Cambridge University Press, 8th ed., 1999), 41.

This is a reiteration of the belief related earlier of the Chippewa, that of killing indiscriminately angers the spirits.¹⁸

Frederick Turner put it well when he said, “We know now that there has been no people on earth capable of resisting this seduction, for none has been able to see the hidden and devious byways that lead inevitably from the consumption of the new luxuries (ease of living) to the destruction of the myths that give life its meaning.”¹⁹ Greed – it’s in our cellular tissue, and our spirituality given to us with consciousness should help us to conquer this, and other demons of human imperfection.

South American mythology indicates that their worldview was one of superstition combined with the wonder and devotion to nature. They saw spirit all around them and recognized their own limited place in the natural world. Living so closely to nature’s unpredictable moods of nurture and destruction, they lived every day ready to be humbled to the ground by world spirits who could act in vengeance as the result of a misdeed, or misplaced thought or word.²⁰

Here in the pre-U.S. territories, the French told the natives that their religion was the reason the fish returned or the crops grew. While they denied being manitous, the French took the credit from their manitous and gave it to Christ. A Sauk headman told Father Allouez: “We care very little whether it be the devil or God who gives us food.”²¹ The French, who believed in personal accumulation, saw Indian burial goods and redistribution of wealth in an Indian community as mad. As Richard White put it, “Leaders did not amass wealth but, rather, gave it away; the dead did not leave property to the living; instead, the living bestowed scarce goods on the dead. Algonquians had put European

¹⁸ Richard White, *The Middle Ground*, 281 & 492.

¹⁹ Gerald Vizenor, *People named the Chippewa*, 24.

²⁰ C. Scott Littleton, *Mythology*, 605.

²¹ Richard White, *The Middle Ground*, 26.

goods to the service of an existing social reality.”²² Use, re-use, redistribution, burial of goods, all indicate that things deserve to be shared.

Vine Deloria Jr. believed that the Europeans conquered with Christianity because in order for Christ to make his second coming, he needed the world converted. This meant that tribal spirituality and style of communism had to change, and in fact, all styles of communism, unless Christian, were not acceptable.²³

The capitalist system, coupled with Christianity, leads to the “Can’t Control Greed” principle of pollution, as my book will demonstrate.

Back in the lead mining region between Lake Michigan and the Mississippi, the native peoples did not accommodate well to the European fashion of life. Sauks and Mesquakies argued that the Great Spirit did not want them to be like the whites and the Ho-Chunk believed they would have been created that way, if he did. A typical Ho-Chunk view in the early 1800s:

Look at them, always toiling and striving – always wearing a brow of care – shut up in houses – afraid of the wind and rain – suffering when they are deprived of the comforts of life! We, on the contrary, live a life of freedom and happiness. We hunt and fish, and pass our time pleasantly in the open woods and prairies . . . what should we gain by changing ourselves into white men?

They recognized that “ease of living” was not in hiding from nature but in living with it.

Tribes were, however, torn in half by European contact, and even today can be known as traditionalists and progressives, indicating that things are still

²² Richard White, *The Middle Ground*, 103.

²³ Vine Deloria, Jr., *God is Red* (New York: Putnam Publishing, 2003), 105-106.

not all well on the reservation, which tells us that they have reasons not to be able to bury the anger of the past. (When I worked on a reservation, I was accepted by about half of the population.)

Many of these tribes were remnants of once great societies with enormous trade networks that collapsed for reasons of disease, pollution, migration, and drought. Up around the Great Lakes, the tribes traded with Cahokia (St. Louis) and the Mississippians, who traded with Aztecs and Hohokam – these trade networks collapsed like dominoes even before European contact because of drought and disease, disease brought by Columbus, but also caused within their civilizations by reason of inability to migrate, drowning in their own feces.

But if the whites had not brought new diseases as well as increasing their own presence, these civilizations could have risen again, and even wiser. With the early transmittal of diseases, Europeans inadvertently created the chaotic tribal disarray that worked in their favor when they arrived. Except for perhaps some Aztec tales, we have little knowledge of what the early great eastern tribal civilizations were like. The best we can do is to blend their ancient mythology with some of the speeches made by the natives on contact.

Trade networks of these great civilizations meant that greed was not always well controlled and people began to hoard. They developed great societies, chiefdoms, hierarchies – and yet, they continued to believe in preserving their resources. We can see evidence of this in study of the Aztecs, where, as objectionable as the thought may be to some, sacrifice of humans was one attempt to keep populations reduced. Cannibalism for ritual purposes eased demands on the food supply. War was a population reducer, but never over spiritual beliefs. War was over resources – water, animals – because control of the land meant control of what the land provided. After all, they couldn't just pick up their great temples and migrate. They had to fight to survive. Those tribal wars the Europeans noted when they arrived were likely related to the

mythology of a collapsed civilization. Those myths seem impossible to find today, however.

Remember, all myths contain truth.

When these civilizations collapsed, perhaps those tribes that dispersed realized that control of the land led to the collapse, and so Europeans found them adverse to the idea of owning land. Those who could still farm, did. Those who could still migrate, did. The numerous tribes, suffering with wars and disease, prayed and called themselves poor in their need to appease nature so that it will provide the necessary food and water for life, for ease of living, and to grant their request not to have to migrate again.

When the whites came, that's exactly what they wanted the tribes to do – move somewhere else.²⁴

SUMMARY

I think we can find numerous examples that document tribal environmentalism and I've just begun to put the book together. One piece of written documentation of tribal environmentalism is a statement by the Menominees that demonstrated they recognized the damage to the land caused by greed. The lease below is proof of early tribal environmentalism. Note the underlined statement of environmentalism. As Europeans did go on to waste the timber, as the Menominees are today considered among the best in the world in sustained forestry, this document is a true record of natural tribal environmentalism.

²⁴ Margaret Beattie Bogie, *Fishing the Great Lakes, an Environmental History, 1783-1933* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2000), 9. Henry R. Schoolcraft, *Schoolcraft's Narrative Journal of Travels*, edited by Mentor L. Williams (Lansing: Michigan University State Press, 1953, reprint 1992), 36-37.

LEASE BETWEEN MENOMINEE INDIANS

AND J.P. ARNDT

TO OPERATE A SAWMILL

Whereas our Great Father, the President of the United States, has for the benefit of his red children of the Menominee Nation directed that a Grist and Saw Mill be erected in our neighborhood and has given permission to John P. Arndt to do the same, upon conditions hereinafter mentioned and of which we highly approve, now therefore, know all men by these present that we Oshkosh, alias "The Claw", Ok-ko-me-chun, alias "Great Wave", Sthai-ke-tok, alias "Scare All", Chief of the Menominee Nation of Indians, residing in the vicinity of Green Bay, Territory of Michigan, in order to facilitate the object of erecting a Grist and Saw Mill, as aforesaid, do give permission to the said John P. Arndt, his heirs, and assigns to erect, occupy and improve said Grist and Saw Mills, and to cut and use any timber necessary either for building or sawing into lumber upon and adjacent to a creek or stream of water called Paissacue, situated about twenty miles from Fort Howard and on the west side of Green Bay. To have and to hold the said mills, mill seat and all necessary privileges to carry on and to keep in operation the same, subject to the pleasure of the United States Government, with free access without let or hindrance from the Menominee Nation, so long as it shall be agreeable to our Great Father, President, for the said John P. Arndt, his heirs and assigns to occupy them as such. To all which we do well and truly agree, upon the following conditions, viz:

- I. That the said John P. Arndt, his heirs and assigns shall yield immediate and quiet possession of said mills, with all their

privileges to the United States Government when it may be required; and that he will saw any timber which may be required for the Public Services upon reasonable terms.

- II. That the said John P. Arndt, his heirs and assigns, shall commit no unnecessary waste of timber.
- III. That the said John P. Arndt, his heirs and assigns, shall furnish the Menominee Nation with all the lumber they may want for their own use, and grind any grain they may want at the said mills gratis.
- IV. That the said John P. Arndt, his heirs and assigns, shall pay annually to the Menominee Nation, on the first day of June the sum of fifteen dollars.

In testimony whereof, we have hereunto set out hands and seal this twenty fifth day of August one thousand and eight hundred and twenty six.

Hy B. Brevoort Indian Ag't. Oshkosh his X alias the Claw, Ok-ko-me-ne-chan, his X alias mark Great Wave, Sthai-ke-tok alias mark Scare All.

In the presence of N.G. Bean, A.G. Ellis, witness, to the signature of the Great Wave.

Received for record March 7th and recorded April 19th, 1827. Henry S. Baird, Notary Public."²⁵

I tried to work with David Grignon, historian for the Menominees, on this research but he wanted no part of it, reiterating that Arndt stole the land from them, even though the lease document was signed by their chief Oshkosh. You

²⁵ The Arndt Lease Document of 1826, "Some Wisconsin Indian Conveyances," *WHC, Vol. XV*, Edited by the State Historical Society of Wisconsin (Madison: Democrat Printing Co., 1900), 16-17.

see, Pennsylvania native John Arndt was smart—he knew the Menominees would not be able to hold onto the land, and so he got first dibs on it. That is the theft Grignon refers to. He is understandably angry over all his people have lost, including their spirituality in this capitalistic environment.

As Carl Jung noted, with scientific understanding of our world, nature has become dehumanized. Thunder is no longer the voice of an angry god, no river contains a spirit, no ancient wisdom embodied in a snake, no voices speak to us from ancient stones. “His contact with nature has gone, and with it has gone the profound emotional energy that this symbolic connection supplied.”²⁶



Jung's Holy Ghost symbolism — a rock with a spiral. ²⁷

The native control of nature kept nature on the same plane of importance as the self. The capitalist control of nature denigrated nature to something to be used. Both used nature, but with different attitudes. Even science has shown the

²⁶ *Man and His Symbols*, edited and with an introduction by Carl Jung (New York: Dell Publishing, 1964), 85.

²⁷ *Man and His Symbols*, edited and with an introduction by Carl Jung (New York: Dell Publishing, 1964), 249.

illogic of trying to explain nature. Nuclear physics has made matter mysterious with mass and energy, wave and particle, proven to be interchangeable.²⁸

Even after contact, the U.S. natives did not immediately change tribal economies – the evolution took time. Even with disease, geographic changes and the fur trade, their knowledge and skill toward the environment remained. This is most immediately shown by Menominee forestry in Wisconsin. Great Lakes Indians were ingrained with their memories of nature’s resources as they moved from place to place – not history as we know it, but history of life and survival.²⁹

My research along these lines will continue as part of what I eventually hope will turn communism into a good word, even if (and especially if) the U.S. in its capitalist state turns itself into a third world country. In all of this, keeping the need to protect the environment squarely in the forefront, hopefully a new global society can be envisioned, one where all cultures are encouraged, appreciated and allowed to thrive.

²⁸ *Man and his Symbols*, 303.

²⁹ Charles E. Cleland, “Indians in Changing Environment,” *The Great Lakes Forest: An Environmental and Social History* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota, 1983), 90.