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CHAPTER 1

Interpreting the Indian Past

The ancestors of the American Indians had lived in the Americas for tens of thousands of years before Columbus and other Europeans arrived in the Western Hemisphere; yet only the barest outlines of their past are known, and much of it is in dispute. Although some Indian tribes recorded important events with pictures—for example, rock paintings (pictographs) and rock carvings (petroglyphs)—they did not have a written language based on an alphabet. Nevertheless, all tribespeople had an interest in their past and recounted the important events of their history in stories that were handed down from generation to generation. These oral accounts do not amount to a complete record of the pre-Columbian past, but they do convey a sense of Indian history before 1492. Indian oral history also confirms that there was not one unified Indian history but many individual tribal histories—a reflection of the Indian social, linguistic, and cultural diversity that survives to the present day.

To Indian oral accounts we may add the archaeological record. Archaeologists disagree over the date of the first human arrival in the Western Hemisphere; some argue that people may have been in North America as early as fifty thousand years ago. Most contemporary archaeologists believe that the ancestors of today’s Indians came to America from Asia, by way of a land bridge that connected the continents from fifteen thousand to thirty-five thousand years ago when glaciers locked up enough of the world’s water to lower the sea level.

The first Indians hunted big game—woolly mammoths, giant bison, camels, and the like—that died out when the climate became drier and warmer about eight thousand years ago. These new conditions obliged Indians to embrace a way of life based on wild plant foods and small game. More than two thousand years ago, Indians in the Southwest—the ancestors of today’s Pueblo Indians—cultivated maize, beans, and squash. These people built impressive stone and adobe towns that still exist. Likewise, Indians along the Mississippi River took up farming and built huge earthen mounds that continue to inspire wonder in the Midwest. Elsewhere many Indians came to rely on agriculture, as well as wild plants, game, and fish. Along with these adaptations to local environmental conditions grew a rich cultural diversity. Hundreds of different languages and tribes, as well as scores of cultures, covered the human landscape of North America when Columbus sailed into view.

Recent estimates of the pre-Columbian Indian population range from 7 million to 18 million people north of Mexico, though some scholars argue for much smaller
numbers. Although much is still in doubt, it is certain that millions of Indians lived in today's United States and Canada in 1492 and that they had an American history stretching back for more than ten thousand years. Truly, the American continent is the native land of the American Indians.

**DOCUMENTS**

The first selection, by writer William MacLeish, is not a primary document but a fanciful flight across the continent at the time of Columbus's arrival. MacLeish briefly surveys several representative Indian tribes and captures the great cultural diversity among the native peoples of North America. In the second selection, the Pueblo Indians express their love of and attachment to the land in their beautiful "Song of the Sky Loom." The third document is a Maidu account of the creation of the world and its inhabitants. These California people believe that Earth-maker created dry land from soil that he scraped from underneath the nails of Turtle, who dived deep beneath the sea to find this vital substance. The fourth document presents the Skagit Indians' version of world creation. Here we see that the earth is a transitory place where periodic changes are to be expected. In the fifth document, animals help Mother-Corn to dig the ancestors of the Arikaras out of the ground. Accordingly, the Arikaras regard themselves as part of the earth. We see in the sixth document that the Cayugas of the great Iroquois Confederacy thought that animals helped to create the world. The Cayugas' sense of cooperation and complementarity between humans and animals is pervasive in Indian thought.

As a group, these documents provide a window through which to view the Indians' world as they conceived of it before the arrival of Europeans. Native peoples did not see with one pair of eyes or come equipped with a single set of ideas about their origins, their history, or their connection with the earth. The tribes of America comprised many nations, each with its own homeland, each with a particular world view that sometimes conflicted with those of its neighbors. How, one wonders, did diversity affect the Indians' ability to contend with European newcomers?

**A Whimsical View of the Indian World in 1492, 1991**

WILLIAM MACLEISH

There they go, three specks of sail far ahead of us, bearing off to the southwest. The Admiral has decided to follow flocks of migrating birds. He has heard that the Portuguese have found new lands for themselves in this manner.

We won't follow him down into the Bahamas. Our landfall lies full on the bow, the eastern edge of a country Christopher Columbus never saw.

It won't do, though, to close on this coast too quickly. We must pause in our flight of fancy to adjust our imaginations. To the west, beyond that vague line of scrub coat, lies an America separated from us by a lot more than the blue roils of the Gulf Stream. The place is five centuries removed. To close that distance, we must mentally clear away our handiwork—5,338 dams, 2.2 million miles of

paved highway, 87,377 square miles of urban development, 1.5 million square miles of farmland.

Subtracting the Loans, Clones and Drones

We must subtract some grasses and all honeybees from the landscape, along with starlings, wheat, rye, brown rats and house mice, and all domesticated animals except dogs and turkeys. (No, there are no horses; the North American native horse went extinct thousands of years ago.) There goes the eucalyptus and the apple tree, the wine grape and the chickpea. And lastly, there go our newly arrived fellow Americans, along with the 20 generations of human beings who will live on this land from this moment in 1492 until the end of the 20th century.

There are scores of places we should visit, but there is time for just five, and a brief flyover of the Great Plains. The resident cultures in all of these places share some traits, but each carries a clear identity. Three are still vibrant and populated, and of these, two, though acculturated and much diminished, will remain so in 1992. The others have peaked and dissolved over the past couple of centuries, but in 1492 we may see in their ruins signs of the sophistication that made them among the most advanced indigenous societies ever to develop in North America.

The people we are about to see in a brief wheeling over of what is now known as the United States of America claim lineages most of which stretch back 500 generations or more. Early on, they lived through and adjusted to climatic and environmental changes whose extremes were possibly far more severe than the ones global warming may produce in our own time. They are still adjusting, substituting one subsistence strategy for another, and moving on if it makes better sense to try to survive somewhere else. They and their fellow inhabitants number at most a few million in all, but their power and propensities in many instances have been sufficient to have changed the face of the land.

The habitats we'll experience aren't all that different from our own. Abundances are more noticeable, particularly among species like the bison and the wapiti [elk], and prairies, forests and wetlands are far more extensive. Oh, you'll recognize the place, all right, though you may feel a little lonely with all those landmarks gone.

Well, if everybody's ready . . .

The beach down there is where Daytona Beach, Florida, will be. Just 21 years from now, an irascible Spaniard named Juan Ponce de León will land somewhere around here, the first European to report being in this country. His expedition will eventually encounter, and be attacked by, the Calusa, the people we're heading for, also known as the "Fierce People."

Across the Wide Okeechobee

Southward, now. That great sheen ahead is Lake Okeechobee, untrammeled by modern drainage works, feeding one of the most productive environments on the continent. We swing west here to follow the Caloosahatchee River to its mouth at what is now Fort Myers, on the west coast of Florida. Have you seen prettier
estuaries? Fresh water from the Caloosahatchee, and two other streams, mixes with the salt over miles of shallow flats—to the contentment of multitudes of shellfish—and brings in enough nutrients to supply carpets of sea grass. Under those shimmies on the surface are schools of pinfish, grunt and silver perch being attacked by bluefish and jack. Look, the commotion is drawing a shark. It and its kind come in from the Gulf, running the passes between the barrier islands to the west that serve, most of the time, to keep the sea in its place.

We have overflown the Calusa’s front yard. Let’s turn now and come back to them, low across the water. There is a canoe, a dugout, fishing close to the mangroves over by that island shaped like a comma. Many canoes, now. Another island, another village, hazed by the smoke of buttonwood and mangrove burning in hearths, and the smudge fires that keep down the mosquitoes. Black mangrove is the best kind of fuel. The more you chop it, the better it grows.

The clatter you hear comes from a dozen hammers at work. Stone is scarce here: the material of choice is shell. The dense and heavy central column of a whelk makes a fine hammer or chisel, and a big clam a serviceable anvil. The Calusa are a populous people—at least 4,000 live around these estuaries—and their fondness for shellfish as food or tool has created quite a trash problem over the centuries. Some of their dumps look to be 20 or 30 feet high, wouldn’t you say? But that big mound of sand is no midden. It’s probably a cemetery. Yes, that’s it. See the moat around it? Everybody knows that the spirits of the dead can’t cross water.

Ditching is a Calusa specialty. You may think we’re coming to a creek mouth in the mangroves, but it’s the beginning of a canal. Thirty feet wide, up to eight feet deep, it runs for more than seven miles to connect with a creek that flows into the Caloosahatchee. A large canoe—and some of these craft, fashioned by fire and adze out of huge pine trees, can carry 40 people or their weight in cargo—could start its run out in the flats and end up in the Okeechobee basin, out of the wind most of the way. There is supposed to be a canal bisecting the island we’re heading for next, down south of the Caloosahatchee, close to the mainland. Even from this distance you can see the mounds and that imposing building on one of them. It must cover a couple of thousand square feet. I gather that the walls inside are covered with wooden masks and effigies carved with art of great power. During ceremonies held there, hundreds of men and women dance and sing.

This may be Calos, the central place of the Calusa people. If so, a regal man lives here. He has at his call a force of men known across the whole Florida peninsula, and down through its chain of keys, for their skill with the bow and the spear-thrower. He receives tributes of food and feathers and items of prestige. His influence pervades scores of communities. His [town] may not be a state, as the Aztec complex in the Valley of Mexico is a state, but it is on the verge. And, unlike the Aztec or most other prehistoric high cultures, it is building its sophistication on an economic base that does not include agriculture. Seafood, yes, and some deer and raccoons and alligators and snakes, and wild plants like seagrape and heart of palm and wild potato. But no significant reliance on crops.

Hunter-gatherers usually don’t go in much for kings and nobles. For much of the first 2,000 years of their occupancy here, the Calusa didn’t either. Their environment was rich enough to give them more than a satisfactory return on their
investment of time and effort. By sticking to their estuaries and spending some time inland taking game and collecting plants, they provided themselves with the means for settling down.

There are few certainties to sustain us on this flight, just the inferences that skilled prehistorians can build out of bits of bone, stone, pottery and charcoal, and the strands of stories about “the time before the whites” that still remain in native memory. It’s a fair surmise, though, that the Calusa eventually increased their numbers enough to cause some competition and stress. It may have become necessary to make sure that when one source of food ran thin, even for a season or two, other sources, often at increasing distances from the center, could be tapped. They may simply have found hierarchy the most efficient way of handling the problem.

Our time is short. And so, on a larger scale, is that of the Calusa. They will know about Columbus, probably soon after his arrival. Some of their canoes roam far out to sea, and they may be in intermittent touch with Cuba and the islands on the far side of the Gulf Stream. They’ll know. And in another generation they’ll have firsthand knowledge of the strangers. After that will come measles and smallpox and the other devastating diseases of Contact. Their culture will collapse before the economic exuberance of another. They will weaken and, eventually, fade before the raids of Europeans and of people from the north, who will come to be called Creek and, later, Seminole.

It’s not the mounds that are startling. We’ve been seeing mounds all the way from Florida across the Southeast. It’s the concentration, and the sheer size of some of them. There must be a hundred down there at the edge of this soggy floodplain on the eastern Illinois shore of the Mississippi. And that one with the terraces, by what looks like a grassed-over plaza: it must be a hundred feet high!

This is supposed to have been the largest center to develop in the country before Contact, and we don’t even know its true name. It is called Cahokia, but that is a word derived from a group that will be living around here when whites start filtering in, somewhere around the middle of the 18th century. All there is below us now in 1492 is nature rejuvenant and a few hunters and farmers. Things have been that way for at least 150 years. If only we could strip away the vegetation and see the place as it was centuries before Contact, in the days of its greatness.

Move back in time those 750 years and you can see the change human occupation has already worked upon the landscape. There are small clearings all over the floodplain. People are growing wild plants they have tamed to one degree or another—goosefoot, knotweed and maygrass for their greens or starchy seeds, and sunflower and marsh elder for their oily ones. Some farmers are experimenting with a new crop, Zea mays. Ultimately it will become famous, grown around the world as “maize” or “corn.” Its origins are in a Mexico of about seven millennia ago. It reached the Southwest centuries before the birth of Christ.

The communities that will become Cahokia are sited, deliberately, along bottoms where the Mississippi jumps its banks almost every year, laying down new sediments on the floodplains, leaving lakes and fish in the low spots. If the flooding is too severe, there are always bulges of higher and drier land on adjoining bluffs to farm. Add acorns and hickory nuts and wild berries and fruits. Add deer
and waterfowl and fish, and you have something similar to what the Calusa have—a solid subsistence base that can produce storable and exchangeable surplus.

Watch the great mound now as we move forward in time. It rises in fits and starts over a period of three centuries. People wait at the borrow pits to fill their baskets with 60 pounds or so of earth, walk up this hill of their own making, dump their loads at designated spots, return. Fifteen million round trips will be required. Prodigious? Not necessarily. Assuming the project is in operation only half the time, 300 loads a day would suffice. A platoon of men—they do look well disciplined—could do the job and still take most of the afternoon off. I don’t know what motivates them. We are all monument builders. Perhaps they wish to place their priests as close as they can to the sun, the great power for so much of humanity.

Getting a Fix on All-Important Maize

Other mounds are in the making, along with a circle of telephone-pole-size posts the elite use to determine equinoxes and solstices, the better to plan the cycles of religious ritual and growing. Maize is a staple now, a necessity as population and prosperity and consumer demand increase. Exchange along the trails and river systems brings chert [a type of rock] from distant quarries, some of it already [shaped] into efficient hoes; from the Great Lakes, copper for ornaments and points; from other Midwestern sites, hematite and lead for paint; whelks from the Gulf shores—perhaps even from a Calusa diver—for the pendants and other ornaments so prized by those in control. Exchange has been a part of life in this country for thousands of years, but the leaders of these people are giving it new dimensions. A man of rank dies and is laid to rest in a mound on a bed of more than 20,000 “imported” shell disks, and a dozen or two of his relatives and retainers are sacrificed to mark his passing. Coming forward through time, we have just passed A.D. 1100, the peak of Cahokian prosperity. Round about the countryside now there are smaller mound-towns, each with its elites. No one knows how far Cahokian ideas and influences extended, where they joined or clashed with other building centers in this pervasive “Mississippian” culture that now thrives in the heartland and the Southeast. For that matter, it is hard even to guess the size of the home population. The figure often used is about 10,000 souls. The place must be crowded on days of ceremony, when the leader, the embodiment of the sun, conducts his rituals on the great mound. What his purpose is remains with him. My guess is that with sacrifice and incantation he tries to attract the sun’s attention, to focus its energy on him and on his people watching below.

In the next centuries before Contact, the moment of Cahokia’s populous prosperity will pass away. Even now, the society itself seems in trouble. Chiefdoms often don’t remain very stable over time. The competition for power can be intense. As in Renaissance Italy, no doubt alliances constantly form and fade. It may be fear of dissension from within that explains the presence of that stockade ringing the very center of Cahokia. It runs right through communities without regard to boundaries. Perhaps a job done in desperate haste.

The environment pretty clearly is becoming less bountiful, less resilient.
Climate change may have something to do with that. More rainfall, possibly. Swollen rivers, in any case, appear to be reshaping the floodplain, eating away at the best farmland. And the nearest bluffs have been worked over so heavily for limbs and logs that they’re starting to gully. Nature’s not to blame there. I’d say for the Cahokians, for many reasons, it is time to travel. Some may head southeast to lands in which the historic Natchez will live. Whatever their destination, they will leave behind stunning accomplishment—and a city that has no people, no name.

**Early Developments in the Sunbelt**

One look below at those dry washes abraded into the plateaus of northwestern New Mexico, and you know we’re dealing with the dry life. That broad one ahead with the sandstone cliffs, on the northeast side, and the talus slopes on the southwest mark our destination—Chaco Canyon. These days, in 1492, it gets perhaps ten inches of precipitation in a good year. That doesn’t make it in the least unusual around here. What does are the ruins. I count at least half a dozen huge edifices on the valley floor, poking through a couple of centuries’ worth of wind drift and scrub, and several more up on the mesas. There must be hundreds of rooms in some of them. And on the south side of the wash, I can see the remains of dozens of small buildings. But no people.

What’s that, you say? You can’t run a community of this size on ten inches a year? That’s right. You can’t—and they didn’t, and so they’re gone.

But follow me along the cliff base, please. Those designs pecked into the rock above us—mountain goats, spirals, dancers, a woman with triplets—are petroglyphs done by the people who built these astounding condos. Across the way, on a rock overhang, are pictographs of a spectacular comet or exploding supernova, a moon, a hand. The Navajo, whose ancestors came down from Canada only centuries ago, call the artists Anasazi, meaning “alien ancient ones.” We will never know their word for themselves. I’ll bet it was something like “People Who Lead Water.” Let’s head out to the flats here. We seem to be walking on the bank of a large ditch, don’t we? Good. Now let’s imagine ourselves back in time again. To early August, four centuries before Spain’s Admiral of the Ocean Sea landed on an island off the other side of the continent.

We’re about to get drenched. Look out for the hail. This is really a ringtailed roarer of a storm! Look at the water sheeting off the cliff top. Those side canyons will be flumes in a minute. And here they come—around 50 men, wouldn’t you say? They’re well drilled, each running for his assigned spot in the system. And now the side canyon nearest us is dumping water into our ditch, which is diverting it up the valley a ways to slow it down and then delivering it to distribution boxes—big cisternlike pits lined with stone slabs. The men are working frantically now, keeping passages clear, lifting gates that divert the water and its rich muds from the boxes into small ditches leading to grids of small garden plots farther out on the flats.

In half an hour, the storm will be muttering off toward the Rio Grande valley a hundred miles to the east. The people in Chaco had enough water from snowmelt this past spring to get good germination for their maize and other crops.
Now, with this intricate catch-as-catchment-can irrigation system, they stand a
good chance of getting enough late-summer storm runoff to their fields to insure
good tasseling and full ears.

These people delight in stonework. They build these large houses with care
and forethought, laying out most of them in D-shaped floor plans, but they are not
above scrapping a whole wing and starting again with another design. They go to
the trouble of facing the houses with exquisite stone veneers and then hide this
beautiful work behind mud plaster.

A Nation of Ingenious Architects

Everywhere, they make architectural statements. They build walls across windy
mesas; roads—more than 400 miles of them—laid out on the land as if with a
ruler; huge round rooms in the earth for storage, social doings. They build shrines
and leave offerings of bowls filled with turquoise. They build or influence others
in the building of outlying settlements, scores of them, over at least 57,000 square
miles of desert. Seeps and shallow wells, small reservoirs carved in cliff rocks,
even the semi-saline Chaco River, give them water for cooking and for their own
daily needs, four liters apiece on average, or to mix the mud for construction.
Nature and the engineers do the rest.

Over time, these Chaco “great houses” have offered safety and storage, shelter and social congress, efficiencies of scale in maintaining systems of exchange
reaching as far as the California coast. They have kept out the unknown, the
enemy, and—in high-country winters, when the temperature sinks far below
zero—some of the cold.

We can see the costs. Quite a few of the children playing in that large central
plaza have the swollen bellies that indicate parasites, unbalanced diets, perhaps
gastroenteritis—a disease that, along with tuberculosis, does well in crowds.
Some of the adults look anemic. Archaeological analysis will indicate that many
suffer from dental cavities caused by the sugars in the maize they eat and by the
shortage of rougher food. Others are bent with arthritis aggravated by heavy
labor. Those young men coming along the road from the south are carrying logs
that will be used as beams for the new great house just down the way. That’s
Ponderosa pine, cut on mountain slopes more than 50 miles away. Each matched
stick weighs more than 600 pounds.

Moving back up through time toward the moment of Contact, we’re getting
on well past A.D. 1100, the pinnacle for the Chaco stoneworkers. They have been
at work for more than two centuries now, and there are visible signs of exhaustion
in the landscape. Piñon and juniper are far less plentiful than before. And as we
climb the thermals over Chaco, see if you can spot a single antelope near the
canyon.

People are leaving the canyon now, calmly, purposefully. Abandonment, it
appears, is ordinary and ongoing. It may be one of the costs of living in much of
the pre-Columbian world, especially where resources are so chancy. Societies
build communities to a certain density, leave them when they no longer function
properly, live more simply for a time, start over. Some will migrate to the Rio
Grande valley, where there is more water, and it takes less ingenuity to get it. Big
pueblos will go up there shortly, and shortly fade. But the people will abide. The blood of those who live in native communities around Santa Fe in our time will be mixed with some that is “ancient and alien.”

I count six canoes down there, seagoing craft with sleeker bows than the Calusa dugouts. Each is around 40 feet long and carries eight men. They’re beautifully built, with high stems and sterns and plenty of freeboard to handle the big Pacific swells. Do you hear the crews chanting, keeping the beat for the stroke? Now they are still. They have been racing one another, but now one craft takes the lead and the others swing in behind. Not a sound. They keep their paddles in the water. Even when one lifts out, the dagger point of the blade keeps the drip small and silent.

See what the Makah are after? There’s the spout. A gray whale, just under the surface. A big one, maybe 50 feet long, lazing along on its way to the Arctic. The lead canoe lunges forward, six paddlers digging water. The steersman guides them in and almost over the black shadow. The hunter in the bow stands, balances 18 feet of heavy harpoon and drives it down with a deep thrust of arms and shoulders. The head and its barbs are well in the animal. The hunter retrieves his shaft. Others make sure the line is paying out well, that the big floats of sealskin are ready to go overboard, that the boat is veering off properly. The whale is deep enough so its tail can’t reach the boats, but the creature will tear up the ocean when it surfaces.

The Gray Is No Match for the Makah

Other canoes dart in, strike, fall back. There must be a dozen floats for the whale to fight against. It’s weakening fast. One of the harpoons must have struck a lung or an artery. Within minutes, it is over. Men are stabbing small harpoons into the head. Their barbs are attached by short tethers to the sealskin floats that will buoy up the catch. One paddler dives overboard and rigs a line to close the whale’s mouth so it won’t take on water.

The whalers have been lucky. They were 20 miles or more from home when they struck the gray. It could have taken them farther out. Still, they’ll be at it for at least a day. We’d better go on ahead, eastward toward the mouth of the strait that will be named Juan de Fuca and separates the state of Washington from the province of British Columbia. A rich sea, this. A northbound branch of the Japan Current, the Gulf Stream of the Pacific, brings warm water to these coasts, gentling the extremes of climate. Winds and Earth’s rotation force surface waters away from the coast, replacing them with cold water, high in nutrients, that wells up from the depths and over the lip of the continental shelf.

We’re coming in about 15 miles down from the high cape at the entrance to the strait. It seems an unforgiving place, rocky and brutal in foul weather. But offshore islands provide some protection, and a headland looms before us. You can see the village now, a couple of rows of houses paralleling the shore for a half-mile or more. This is the whalers’ place. It is one of five main villages settled by those calling themselves “People of the Cape,” an association with place that
you find in groups across the country. The word for this whaling settlement, as it sounds in the mouth, is “Ozette.”

Behind the houses, the land rises steeply and then rolls away in thicket and forest. Wet air from the sea rises to clear mountains to the east, and rain falls in feet—eight a year or more. Vegetation erupts: Sitka spruce on the coast, a few of them already a millennium old and more than 250 feet high. Giant hemlock and western red cedar stand a little inland. Ferns and mosses fight for space. The ground, where you can see it, is shot with clay lenses and tends to break loose on a slope. A couple of hundred years from now, something, quite possibly a big earthquake, will send a mudslide thundering into Ozette, burying houses intact as ash buried Pompeii in A.D. 79.

The Calusa spend some time at sea, as we’ve seen. But theirs is essentially an estuarine life. The people of the cape—and their relatives across the strait on Vancouver Island—are truly marine. If the men mending fishing gear down there on the cobble beach could give us the dimensions of their land, three-quarters of what they were talking about would be open water: the whaling grounds; the sealing grounds; the shoals where they take the halibut in summer; the choice spots where they troll for salmon in summer and early fall, a line tied to the paddle hand so that the stroke will give appealing action to bait or lure.

These mariners are expert woodsmen. They know what each tree will do for them. A hemlock leaning against another tree in the forest will produce a kind of compressed wood that is ideal for wedges. Yew has the strength and resiliency for bows and paddles. Cherry bark is best for wrapping harpoon heads, and red cedar bark makes good woven rain gear. Cedar lends itself to the carving of masks that rival those of the Calusa. It splits beautifully and lasts long in the wet, so houses, multifamily dwellings up to 60 feet long, are built of cedar. They are designed so that planks on roofs and walls can be removed and transferred to another frame in another camp, saving time and labor as the households move through their seasonal rounds of sea and river fishing, hunting, gathering.

South of us, along parts of the California shore, where acorn and marine resources support very high population densities that are possibly higher than anywhere else in the country, the mean size of some favored shellfish has been decreasing, signaling overexploitation. No such signals are evident here. One reason why may be that, at Ozette, control of access to food resources rests with individual households. This is a ranked society—as, by chance, are all those we have visited so far, though many in the country are fairly egalitarian—and that means that the elite get to eat higher on the halibut. But the system, which includes household control of access to many resources, keeps the entire community from descending on the nearest beach and putting more pressure on the local steamer clams than they can handle.

Yew for whaling, and sealing harpoons. Red cedar, adzed and smoothed and oiled, for canoes. Hemlock for the ingeniously steamed and shaped halibut hooks. The forest gives these people the sea. It has been doing so, with only insignificant changes in technology and subsistence strategies, for 2,000 or 3,000 years, perhaps more. Even in our day, these people, who will call themselves Makah, after the name of their language, do what they can to keep the covenant. They will send
their boats after salmon. But, to maintain themselves in the 20th century, they will, with great sadness, open their forests to the clear-cutters.

We move on. No forests below us here. No trees for miles except for the green lines of them marking the watercourses that head to the Missouri River. It seems that human settlements—collections of circular, low dwellings—are mostly concentrated on the terraces above the floodplains of the larger rivers. There is some farming there, some fields of maize and probably other domesticates, like sunflowers. These prairie people also do a lot of plant, seed and nut collecting, fishing and hunting—including bison. They take the big animals with the bow, by ambush or the occasional drive. But notice how that little band there is prepared to hunt. On foot, using their stalking skills and, here and there, an animal skin to aid in deception.

These are plains people, but there are no horses down there. The last horses to live in this misnamed “New World” (which is just as old as any other) died out about 10,000 years ago, probably the victims of climate change and perhaps hunting pressure (horses were prey for humans in the Old World). There was no evidence that an attempt had been made here to domesticate the animals.

These people of the plains will have to await the coming of the Spanish before they can reacquaint themselves with the animal their ancestors saw, an animal that within the next century or two will give them new life and culture as chevaliers of the Big Sky.

We’ve seen enough now to know that people have a penchant for living on the edge. They like estuaries and floodplains, canyon floors and marine shelf breaks. With good reason. Food and other good things often abound where one ecosystem abuts another.

That is so, as well, along this limestone escarpment that heads east-west ahead of us across central New York. To the north lie marshy plains and to the south, highlands traversed longitudinally by valleys broadened by glacial ice. The climate of the flatlands is mild, tempered by winds off the big waters we will call the Great Lakes. The hills have harsher weather. You can see the difference too in the forests, as we drift over the escarpment. Stretching to Lake Ontario 30 miles away is a confusion of oak, hickory, chestnut—even trees you’d expect to find farther south, like dogwood and sassafras. Up on the higher ground, it’s mostly maple and beech and hemlock.

We’re just south of where the city of Syracuse will be, over a ridge higher than the others. The people living around this part of the escarpment take their name from it. They call themselves Onondaga, “People of the Great Hill.” Their fields are down in that magnificent valley a couple of ridges east of the Great Hill. Yes, the cleared land does look strange to our eyes, trees like immense jackstraws. They are lying every whichway on the ground. Stone axes have stretched them out. The larger trees have been girdled, left to die standing, with the bark sliced right around the trunk. But look at the maize planted in hills. And the beans and squashes and sunflowers. The system works.

There is little forest primeval here, except on inaccessible ground. In the year of 1492 people have been using these woods for thousands of years, for firewood,
for construction. They’ve been clearing land ever since agriculture took strong hold five or six centuries ago. Every 15 or 20 years, when the soils get tired and the pests too plentiful and it takes too long to find firewood in decent quantities, they’ve been moving a few miles and starting over. The woods are full of their old fields, and marks of the fires they have set to clear the way for more brushy forage for deer—as well as to open lanes in which to shoot them—and more blueberries and blackberries for themselves. These trees now are second growth, many less than a foot through, and that is the way these people like them—eminently chop-pable, about the right size for posts to support their longhouses.

The term is apt. The Onondaga may hold the record for the longest long-house—400 feet, enough to shelter at least 100 people. The lodges here are a bit longer than 200 feet. But at 20 feet in both height and width, they are imposing. They are sheathed with elm bark, tight enough to keep out the winter, tough enough to last until 10 or 20 years have passed and it’s moving time again.

There appears to be enough of everything for everyone. Population densities are fairly low. Fish are here for the seasonal taking. So are game, nuts and berries and, of course, the crops.

So why is this village palisaded?

That small group of men clustered at the edge of the clearing around this Onondaga village may provide a clue. They have captives with them. The captives are destined for adoption or for torture and death. This sort of violence has been growing for decades, here and in the settlements of other Iroquois enclaves spread across New York and, in Canada, around the Great Lakes and up the St. Lawrence valley.

A Wintry Tale Takes Hold

Climatologists gather, from evidence such as pollen and seed counts and vegetation, that the Little Ice Age, the general cooling that will last into the 19th century, first made its effects felt here in the early 15th century, 80 years before Columbus’ arrival. It’s possible that growing seasons have shortened so that people have started to switch from one principal food resource to another. Even with plenty of open land left, such switching may be sufficient to cause friction.

Gender roles may also play a hand, if they are anything like what they’ll be at Contact. When corn came in, women—always the gardeners—tended it. As a result, they are now the prime producers. Besides, villages are large enough so that the hunting, constructing and general providing that men once did as individuals are now group efforts. How do males do what males seem endlessly condemned to do—prove themselves? Possibly by hunting the most dangerous game, another male.

Whatever the reasons, blood feuds and vendettas have reached a level not often seen in a country where violence is usually intermittent. Men may be spending more time in the summers trying to manipulate other settlements for the best deals in exchange or alliance—and attacking the same settlements when that seems feasible—than they spend in the fishing camps. The stories ethnographers of our time will collect in Iroquois villages tell of times past when dragons of
discord were about, when serpents lay across well-traveled trails, when fear and horror visited the settlements.

Every once in a while, when people have had enough, they reshape their own culture. That large village near the Great Hill is a testament to such a process. It is a recent amalgam of two groups of people who were willing to give up brutal competition for the sake of cooperation. Another small settlement has sprung up close by, and it, too will coalesce with the village. Later the process beginning here will take hold strongly among the Seneca to the west.

Some focal point, some leader, is usually associated with such a drastic social change. Looking back, the Iroquois of the future will talk of the Peacemaker and his lieutenant, Hiawatha; of how they convinced warring groups to come together in consensus and work out ways to obtain and maintain peace. Right around us, right now, a confederacy is in the making, one that will influence American affairs straight through the Revolution. Its symbol is the longhouse. The Mohawk will be at the eastern door, and next to them the Oneida. The Seneca will be at the western door, and next to them the Cayuga. In the center will sit the keepers of the council fires, the keepers of the wampum belts that commemorate the alliance—the Onondaga, People of the Great Hill, pioneers of the peace.

Well, that’s about it. Don’t forget your personal belongings. Say, sometime why don’t we take another spin like this one? We could look at our subsistence strategies, our lifeways, how we live in our landscapes.

No?
Just an idea.

A Pueblo Song of the Sky Loom, n. d.

Oh our Mother the Earth oh our Father the Sky
Your children are we
    with tired backs we bring you the gifts you love

So weave for us a garment of brightness

May the warp be the white light of morning
May the weft be the red light of evening
May the fringes be the falling rain
May the border be the standing rainbow

Weave for us this bright garment
that we may walk where birds sing
    where grass is green

Oh our Mother the Earth oh our Father the Sky

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All the earth was covered with water, and everything was dark in the beginning. There was no sun, no moon, no stars. Then one day a raft appeared, floating on the water. In it was Turtle. Down from the sky a rope of feathers came and dangled near the bow of the raft, and then a being, who shone like the sun, descended. He was Earth Initiate. When he reached the end of the rope he tied it to the bow of the raft, and stepped in. His face was covered, so that Turtle was not able to see it. In fact, no one has ever seen his face uncovered. Earth Initiate sat down and for a long time said nothing.

"Where do you come from?" Turtle asked at last.
"I come from above," Earth Initiate said.
Then Turtle asked: "Brother, can you not make for me some good dry land, so that I may sometimes come up out of the water?"
Earth Initiate did not answer at once, and Turtle asked, "Are there going to be any people in the world?"
After thinking for a while, Earth Initiate said, "Yes."
"How long before you are going to make people?" Turtle asked.
"I don't know," Earth Initiate answered. "You want to have some dry land: well, how am I going to get any earth to make it of?"
"If you will tie a stone about my left arm I will dive for some," Turtle answered.

So Earth Initiate did as Turtle asked. Reaching around he took the end of a rope from somewhere and tied it to Turtle.
"If the rope is not long enough I will jerk it once, and then you must haul me up; if it is long enough I will give two jerks and then you must pull me quickly, as I shall have all the earth that I can carry."

Turtle was gone for six years, and when he came up he was covered with green slime, he had been down so long. He returned with only a very little earth under his nails. The rest had all washed away.

Earth Initiate scraped the earth out from under Turtle's nails, and put it in the palm of his hand and rolled it about until it was round and about the size of a small pebble. This he laid on the stern of the raft, and went away and left it. Three times he returned to look at it, and the third time found that it had grown very large. The fourth time he looked at it it was as big as the world, the raft was on ground, and all around were mountains.

When Turtle knew the raft was on ground, he said: "I cannot stay in the dark all the time. Can't you make a light so that I can see?"
"Let's get out of the raft, and then we will see what we can do," Earth Initiate replied.
As they got out Earth Initiate said: "Look that way, to the east! I am going to tell my sister to come up."
Then it began to grow light, and day began to break, and the sun came up.
"Which way is the sun going to travel?" Turtle asked.
"I will tell her to go this way, and go down there," Earth Initiate answered. After the sun went down it grew very dark. "I will tell my brother to come up," said Earth Initiate.

Then the moon rose.

"How do you like it?" Earth Initiate asked Turtle. "It is very good," Turtle answered. "Is that all you are going to do for us?"

"No, I am going to do more yet."

Then he called the stars each by name and they came out.

Then he made a tree, which had twelve different kinds of acorns growing on it. . . . For two days they sat under this tree, and then both set off to see the world which Earth Initiate had made. Turtle was not able to keep up with Earth Initiate. All he could see of him was a ball of fire flashing about under the ground and the water. When they returned from going around the world Earth Initiate called the birds from the air, and made the trees, and then the animals.

Some time after this he said: "I am going to make people."

So he took dark red earth and mixed it with water, and made two figures, one a man and one a woman. He lay down and placed the man on his right side and the woman on his left. Thus he lay all afternoon and night. Early in the morning the woman began to tickle him in the side. Earth Initiate kept very, very still and did not laugh. Soon after he got up, he put a piece of wood into the ground, and fire burst out.

The two people Earth Initiate made were very white. Their eyes were pink, their hair was black, their teeth shone brightly, and they were very handsome. He named the man Kuksu, and the woman Morning Star Woman. . . .

A Skagit Belief About the Origins of the World, n. d.

In the beginning, Raven and Mink and Coyote helped the Creator plan the world. They were in on all the arguments. They helped the Creator decide to have all the rivers flow only one way; they first thought that the water should flow up one side of the river and down on the other. They decided that there should be bends in the rivers, so that there would be eddies where the fish could stop and rest. They decided that beasts should be placed in the forests. Human beings would have to keep out of their way.

Human beings will not live on this earth forever, agreed Raven and Mink, Coyote, and Old Creator. They will stay only for a short time. Then the body will go back to the earth and the spirit back to the spirit world. All living things, they said, will be male and female—animals and plants, fish and birds. And everything will get its food from the earth, the soil.

The Creator gave four names for the earth. He said that only a few people should know the names; those few should have special preparation for that knowledge, to receive that special spirit power. If many people should know the names, the world would change too soon and too suddenly. One of the names is for the sun, which rises in the east and brings warmth and light. Another is for the
rivers, streams, and salt water. The third is for the soil; our bodies go back to it. The fourth is for the forest; the forest is older than human beings, and is for everyone on the earth.

After the world had been created for a while, everyone learned the four names for the earth. Everyone and everything spoke the Skagit language. When the people began to talk to the trees, then the change came. The change was a flood. Water covered everything but two high mountains—Kobah and Takobah. Those two mountains—Mount Baker and Mount Rainier—did not go under.

When the people saw the flood coming, they made a great big canoe. They loaded it with two of everything living on earth, with the male and female of every animal and plant. When the flood was over, the canoe landed on the prairie in the Skagit country. Five people were in the canoe. After the flood, when the land was dry again, they made their way back here.

A child was born to the man and his wife who had been in the canoe. He became Doquebuth, the new Creator. He created after the flood, after the world changed.

When he was old enough, Doquebuth was told to go to the lake—Lake Campbell it is called now—to swim and fast and get his spirit power. But the boy played around and did not obey orders. Coyote fed him, and the boy did not try to get his spirit power. So his family deserted him. When he came home, no one was there. His family had gone and had taken everything with them except what belonged to the boy. They left his dog behind and the hides of the chipmunks and squirrels the boy had shot when hunting. His grandmother left fire for him in a clamshell. From the skins which he had dried, the boy made a blanket.

When he found that his family had deserted him, he realized that he had done wrong. So he began to swim and to fast. For many, many days he swam and fasted. No one can get spirit power unless he is clean and unless his stomach is empty.

One day the boy dreamed that Old Creator came.

"Take my blanket," said Old Creator. "It is the blanket of the whole earth. Wave it over the waters, and name the four names of the earth. Then there will be food for everyone."

That is how the boy got his spirit power from Old Creator. He waved the blanket over the water and over the forest. Then there was food for everyone. But there were no people yet. The boy swam some more and kept on fasting.

Old Creator came to him again in a dream.

"Gather together all the bones of the people who lived here before the flood. Gather the bones and pile them into a big pile. Then wave my blanket over them, and name the four names of the earth."

The young man did as he was told in his dream, and people were created from the bones. But they could not talk. They moved about but were not quite completed.

The young Creator swam some more. A third time Old Creator came to him in a dream. This time he told the young man that he should make brains for the new people. So he waved the blanket over the earth and named the four names of the earth. That is how brains were made—from the soil of the earth.
Then the people could talk. They spoke many different languages. But where they should live the young Creator did not know. So he swam some more. In his dream, Old Creator told him to step over the big island, from ocean to ocean, and blow the people back where they belonged. So Doquebuth blew the people back to the place where they had lived before the flood. Some he placed in the buffalo country, some by the salt water, some by fresh water, some in the forests. That is why the people in the different places speak different languages.

The people created after the flood prophesied that a new language would be introduced into our country. It will be the only language spoken, when the next change comes. When we can understand animals, we will know that the change is halfway. When we can talk to the forest, we will know that the change has come.

The flood was one change. Another is yet to come. The world will change again. When it will change, we do not know.

The Arikaras Describe Their Origins, n. d.

A long time ago, the Arikara lived under the ground. There were four animals who looked with pity upon the people, and these animals agreed to take the people up on top of the earth. These animals were the long-nosed Mouse, the Mole, the Badger, and the Fox. The Fox was the messenger to the people to tell them of what the animals were doing. The Mole was the first to dig. He ran back, for he was blinded by the brightness of the sun. The animals went out. The people came out of the earth, the Fox being in the lead. As the people were coming out there was an earthquake. The Arikara came out. The other people were again held fast by the earth.

These people who came out from the ground then journeyed west. They came to a place where the earth shook, so that there was a chasm or a steep bank. The people waited and cried. The Badger stepped forward and began digging, so that it made a pathway for the people. . . . After all the people had passed the first obstacles they sat down and gave thanks and made offerings to the gods.

Again they went upon their journey, and it stormed. In front of them was a river. They could not cross it, for it was very deep; but a Loon was sent by the gods. The Loon came to the people, and said: “Your mother is traveling in the heavens to help you. I was sent by the gods to open up this river, so you could cross and go on your journey.” The Loon flew across the river, flew back, then dived and came out on the other side of the river. The river was opened; it banked up on each side; the people crossed over and the waters came together again. Some people were left on the other side.

Again they journeyed, and they came to a place where Mother-Corn stopped and said: “The big Black-Wind is angry, for we did not ask it to come with us, neither did we make it one of the gods to receive smoke. But,” said Mother-Corn, “the Black-Meteoric-Star understands this storm; it will help us.” Mother-Corn went on, and said: “Here we are. We must hurry for the big Black-Wind is coming, taking everything it meets. There is a cedar tree. Get under that cedar tree. Get under that cedar tree,” said Mother-Corn. “The Black-Meteoric-Star placed it
there. The Star stands solid, for its right leg is cedar; its left leg is stone. It can not be blown away. Get under its branches.” So the people crawled under its branches. The Black-Wind came and took many people, notwithstanding.

The people came out, and they went on. They came to another difficulty—a steep mountain bank, and they stopped. The Bear came forth, and said, “I will go through this place first.” So the Bear went to digging steps for the people. Steps were made on both sides and the people went across.

After they had been gone for some time, a Dog came up, and said: “Why did you people leave me behind? I shall be the one that you shall kill, and my meat shall be offered to the gods. I shall also fix it so that all animals shall make great medicine-men of you. My father is the Sun. He has given me all this power. I will give my power to all animals, then I will stay with the people, so they will not forget my promise to them.” The people were thankful to the Dog.

The Iroquois Depict the World on the Turtle’s Back, n. d.

In the beginning there was no world, no land, no creatures of the kind that are around us now, and there were no men. But there was a great ocean which occupied space as far as anyone could see. Above the ocean was a great void of air. And in the air there lived the birds of the sea; in the ocean lived the fish and the creatures of the deep. Far above this unpeopled world, there was a Sky-World. Here lived gods who were like people—like Iroquois.

In the Sky-World there was a man who had a wife, and the wife was expecting a child. The woman became hungry for all kinds of strange delicacies, as women do when they are with child. She kept her husband busy almost to distraction finding delicious things for her to eat.

In the middle of the Sky-World there grew a Great Tree which was not like any of the trees that we know. It was tremendous; it had grown there forever. It had enormous roots that spread out from the floor of the Sky-World. And on its branches there were many different kinds of leaves and different kinds of fruits and flowers. The tree was not supposed to be marked or mutilated by any of the beings who dwelt in the Sky-World. It was a sacred tree that stood at the center of the universe.

The woman decided that she wanted some bark from one of the roots of the Great Tree—perhaps as a food or as a medicine, we don’t know. She told her husband this. He didn’t like the idea. He knew it was wrong. But she insisted, and he gave in. So he dug a hole among the roots of this great sky tree, and he bared some of its roots. But the floor of the Sky-World wasn’t very thick, and he broke a hole through it. He was terrified, for he had never expected to find empty space underneath the world.

But his wife was filled with curiosity. He wouldn’t get any of the roots for her, so she set out to do it herself. She bent over and she looked down, and she

saw the ocean far below. She leaned down and stuck her head through the hole and looked all around. No one knows just what happened next. Some say she slipped. Some say that her husband, fed up with all the demands she had made on him, pushed her.

So she fell through the hole. As she fell, she frantically grabbed at its edges, but her hands slipped. However, between her fingers there clung bits of things that were growing on the floor of the Sky-World and bits of the root tips of the Great Tree. And so she began to fall toward the great ocean far below.

The birds of the sea saw the woman falling, and they immediately consulted with each other as to what they could do to help her. Flying wingtip to wingtip they made a great feathery raft in the sky to support her, and thus they broke her fall. But of course it was not possible for them to carry the woman very long. Some of the other birds of the sky flew down to the surface of the ocean and called up the ocean creatures to see what they could do to help. The great sea turtle came and agreed to receive her on his back. The birds placed her gently on the shell of the turtle, and now the turtle floated about on the huge ocean with the woman safely on his back.

The beings up in the Sky-World paid no attention to this. They knew what was happening, but they chose to ignore it.

When the woman recovered from her shock and terror, she looked around her. All that she could see were the birds and the sea creatures and the sky and the ocean.

And the woman said to herself that she would die. But the creatures of the sea came to her and said that they would try to help her and asked her what they could do. She told them that if they could some soil, she could plant the roots stuck between her fingers, and from them plants would grow. The sea animals said perhaps there was dirt at the bottom of the ocean, but no one had ever been down there so they could not be sure.

If there was dirt at the bottom of the ocean, it was far, far below the surface in the cold deeps. But the animals said they would try to get some. One by one the diving birds and animals tried and failed. They went to the limits of their endurance, but they could not get to the bottom of the ocean. Finally, the muskrat said he would try. He dived and disappeared. All the creatures waited, holding their breath, but he did not return. After a long time, this little body floated up to the surface of the ocean, a tiny crumb of earth clutched in his paw. He seemed to be dead. They pulled him up on the turtle’s back and they sang and prayed over him and breathed air into his mouth, and finally, he stirred. Thus it was the muskrat, the Earth-Diver, who brought from the bottom of the ocean the soil from which the earth was to grow.

The woman took the tiny clod of dirt and placed it on the middle of the great sea turtle’s back. Then the woman began to walk in a circle around it, moving in the direction that the sun goes. The earth began to grow. When the earth was big enough, she planted the roots she had clutched between her fingers when she fell from the Sky-World. Thus the plants grew on the earth.

To keep the earth growing, the woman walked as the sun goes, moving in the direction that the people still move in the dance rituals. She gathered roots and plants to eat and built herself a little hut. After a while, the woman’s time came, and she was delivered of a daughter. The woman and her daughter kept walking
in a circle around the earth, so that the earth and plants would continue to grow. They lived on the plants and roots they gathered. The girl grew up with her mother, cut off forever from the Sky-World above, knowing only the birds and the creatures of the sea, seeing no other beings like herself.

One day, when the girl had grown to womanhood, a man appeared. No one knows for sure who this man was. He had something to do with the gods above. Perhaps he was the West Wind. As the girl looked at him, she was filled with terror, and amazement, and warmth, and she fainted dead away. As she lay on the ground, the man reached into his quiver, and he took out two arrows, one sharp and one blunt, and he laid them across the body of the girl, and quietly went away.

When the girl awoke from her faint, she and her mother continued to walk around the earth. After a while, they knew that the girl was to bear a child. They did not know it, but the girl was to bear twins.

Within the girl’s body, the twins began to argue and quarrel with one another. There could be no peace between them. As the time approached for them to be born, the twins fought about their birth. The right-handed twin wanted to be born in the normal way, as all children are born. But the left-handed twin said no. He said he saw light in another direction, and said he would be born that way. The right-handed twin beseeched him not to, saying that he would kill their mother. But the left-handed twin was stubborn. He went in the direction where he saw light. But he could not be born through his mother’s mouth or her nose. He was born through her left armpit, and killed her. And meanwhile, the right-handed twin was born in the normal way, as all children are born.

The twins met in the world outside, and the right-handed twin accused his brother of murdering their mother. But the grandmother told them to stop their quarreling. They buried their mother. And from her grave grew the plants which the people still use. From her head grew the corn, the beans, and the squash—“our supporters, the three sisters.” And from her heart grew the sacred tobacco, which the people still use in the ceremonies and by whose upward-floating smoke they send thanks. The women call her “our mother,” and they dance and sing in the rituals so that the corn, the beans, and the squash may grow to feed the people.

But the conflict of the twins did not end at the grave of their mother. And, strangely enough, the grandmother favored the left-handed twin.

The right-handed twin was angry, and he grew more angry as he thought how his brother had killed their mother. The right-handed twin was the one who did everything just as he should. He said what he meant, and he meant what he said. He always told the truth, and he always tried to accomplish what seemed to be right and reasonable. The left-handed twin never said what he meant or meant what he said. He always lied, and he always did things backward. You could never tell what he was trying to do because he always made it look as if he were doing the opposite. He was the devious one.

These two brothers, as they grew up, represented two ways of the world which are in all people. The Indians did not call these the right and the wrong. They called them the straight mind and the crooked mind, the upright man and the devious man, the right and the left.

The twins had creative powers. They took clay and modeled it into animals, and they gave these animals life. And in this they contended with one another.
The right-handed twin made the deer, and the left-handed twin made the mountain lion which kills the deer. But the right-handed twin knew there would always be more deer than mountain lions. And he made another animal. He made the ground squirrel. The left-handed twin saw that the mountain lion could not get to the ground squirrel, who digs a hole, so he made the weasel. And although the weasel can go into the ground squirrel's hole and kill him, there are lots of ground squirrels and not so many weasels. Next the right-handed twin decided he would make an animal that the weasel could not kill, so he made the porcupine. But the left-handed twin made the bear, who flips the porcupine over on his back and tears out his belly.

And the right-handed twin made berries and fruits of other kinds for his creatures to live on. The left-handed twin made briars and poison ivy, and the poisonous plants like the baneberry and the dogberry, and the suicide root with which people kill themselves when they go out of their minds. And the left-handed twin made medicines, for good and for evil, for doctoring and for witchcraft.

And finally, the right-handed twin made man. The people do not know just how much the left-handed twin had to do with making man. Man was made of clay, like pottery, and baked in the fire.

The world the twins made was a balanced and orderly world, and this was good. The plant-eating animals created by the right-handed twin would eat up all the vegetation if their number was not kept down by the meat-eating animals which the left-handed twin created. But if these carnivorous animals ate too many other animals, then they would starve, for they would run out of meat. So the right- and the left-handed twins built balance into the world.

As the twins became men full grown, they still contested with one another. No one had won, and no one had lost. And they knew that the conflict was becoming sharper and sharper and one of them would have to vanquish the other.

And so they came to the duel. They started with gambling. They took a wooden bowl, and in it they put wild plum pits. One side of the pits was burned black, and by tossing the pits in the bowl, and betting on how these would fall, they gambled against one another, as the people still do in the New Year's rites. All through the morning they gambled at this game, and all through the afternoon, and the sun went down. And when the sun went down, the game was done, and neither one had won.

So they went on to battle one another at the lacrosse game. And they contended all day, and the sun went down, and the game was done. And neither had won.

And now they battled with clubs, and they fought all day, and the sun went down, and the fight was done. But neither had won.

And they went from one duel to another to see which one would succumb. Each one knew in his deepest mind that there was something, somewhere, that would vanquish the other. But what was it? Where to find it?

Each knew somewhere in his mind what it was that was his own weak point. They talked about this as they contended in these duels, day after day, and somehow the deep mind of each entered into the other. And the deep mind of the right-handed twin lied to his brother, and the deep mind of the left-handed twin told the truth.
On the last day of the duel, as they stood, they at last knew how the right-handed twin was to kill his brother. Each selected his weapon. The left-handed twin chose a mere stick that would do him no good. But the right-handed twin picked out the deer antler, and with one touch he destroyed his brother. And the left-handed twin died, but he died and he didn’t die. The right-handed twin picked up the body and cast it off the edge of the earth. And some place below the world, the left-handed twin still lives and reigns.

When the sun rises from the east and travels in a huge arc along the sky dome, which rests like a great upside-down cup on the saucer of the earth, the people are in the daylight realm of the right-handed twin. But when the sun slips down in the west at nightfall and the dome lifts to let it escape at the western rim, the people are again in the domain of the left-handed twin—the fearful realm of night.

Having killed his brother, the right-handed twin returned home to his grandmother. And she met him in anger. She threw the food out of the cabin onto the ground, and said that he was a murderer, for he had killed his brother. He grew angry and told her she had always helped his brother, who had killed their mother. In his anger, he grabbed her by the throat and cut her head off. Her body he threw into the ocean, and her head, into the sky. There “Our Grandmother, the Moon,” still keeps watch at night over the realm of her favorite grandson.

The right-handed twin has many names. One of them is Sapling. It means smooth, young, green and fresh and innocent, straightforward, straight-growing, soft and pliable, teachable and trainable. These are the old ways of describing him. But since he has gone away, he has other names. He is called “He Holds Up the Skies,” “Master of Life,” and “Great Creator.”

The left-handed twin also has many names. One of them is Flint. He is called the devious one, the one covered with boils, Old Warty. He is stubborn. He is thought of as being dark in color.

These two beings rule the world and keep an eye on the affairs of men. The right-handed twin, the Master of Life, lives in the Sky-World. He is content with the world he helped to create and with his favorite creatures, the humans. The scent of sacred tobacco rising from the earth comes gloriously to his nostrils.

In the world below lives the left-handed twin. He knows the world of men, and he finds contentment in it. He hears the sounds of warfare and torture, and he finds them good.

In the daytime, the people have rituals which honor the right-handed twin. Through the daytime rituals they thank the Master of Life. In the nighttime, the people dance and sing for the left-handed twin.