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History, Myth, and Identity among Osages and Other Peoples

Something strange appears when we look at certain autobiographies of Indian people: the notion of identity, of how the individual is related to world, people, self, differs from what we see in “Euroamerican” autobiography. In “Western Civilization,” an identity is something shaped between birth and death, largely by tiny molecules called genes, somewhat also by what the child’s nervous system undergoes between birth and the first few years thereafter—and with every year past the first one, events become less and less important in shaping that identity. That is not how Geronimo sees his identity in the autobiography he dictated to S. M. Barrett. Nor does Geronimo begin by focusing on what a Euroamerican audience would likely consider the key to his identity: the clash with American soldiers and invaders of the Apache lands. Geronimo does not even get around to mentioning his own birth until the book’s third chapter. Instead, he begins the story of his life in this way: “In the beginning the world was covered with darkness. There was no sun, no day. The perpetual night had no moon or stars. There were, however, all manner of beasts and birds. . . . All creatures had power of speech and were gifted with reason. There were two tribes of creatures, the birds and . . . the beasts.”4 Geronimo then tells how the birds wanted light brought into the world, but the beasts would not have it, and there was war. The birds won, admitting light and so allowing humans to live and thrive. But the Dragon continually came down and devoured human children, until one year a son of the Rainstorm was born to the woman, and she hid her son away until he grew up to fight and kill the Dragon.5 This boy’s name was Apache, which (Barrett’s book says) literally means Enemy, and he was the first chief of the people, first to wear the eagle’s feathers in sign of justice, wisdom, and power such as the birds had shown in fighting for light. For Apache and his people, Usen created a homeland, placing within it, as in each homeland created for a people, all that was best for them: grain, fruits, game, herbs of healing, a pleasant climate, all that they could use for clothing and shelter. Geronimo concludes this opening part of his autobiography by saying, “Thus it was in the beginning: the Apaches and their homes each created for the other by Usen himself. When they are taken from these homes they sicken and die. How long until it is said, there are no Apaches?”6 It is only after this Genesis-like history of his world’s creation, his people’s creation and deliverance, of their land’s creation, of why they are called Apaches, of what it means to be taken from the land created particularly for his people, that Geronimo
speaks of himself—of his individual birth into the world: “I was born in No-doyohn Canyon, Arizona, June, 1829.”

Whatever the order of importance among such facts might be for a Euroamerican autobiography, Geronimo ranked them from cosmic through geologic to tribal, subtribal, family and then only, last and in full context, the “individual” self that was Geronimo. And every name in his narrative, whenever he speaks it, has its symbolic meaning that resonates in this deeper context, can be rightly understood only in light of that part of the people’s history which he is then telling. Apache does not “mean” only what (in Barrett’s version) it “literally says,” Enemy, but refers to The Enemy of that Dragon who threatens human children, and it is the name of the first great “Culture Hero” (as Euroamericans would call him): that Son of the Rainstorm who killed the Great Destroyer of Humankind.

I doubt that for most Euroamericans our national terms—English, American, German, European—resonate thus, because we lack a system of national and personal names that is openly and plainly linked to our mythic history or religious creeds. There is of course the Catholic custom of naming after saints and biblical figures, and the Jewish naming arrangements that preserve religious and ethnic and family histories, and there are certainly subterranean passages between mainstream American personal names and the older familial and ethnic and national histories hidden within them. Yet particularly among Protestants, it seems, Americans have untied their names and individual histories from place and nation to an astonishing extent in the last five hundred years—precisely since the terms individualism, self, identity and civilize came into the English language in their current meanings.

Now, when Geronimo told his life story, he had been a prisoner of war for twenty years, and a great deal had been done to civilize him. As a recent editor of his autobiography puts it, “He took on all the trappings of the white man’s civilization, becoming a farmer, a member of the Dutch Reformed Church, a Sunday School teacher, and a tireless promoter of himself, hawking photographs, bows and arrows at various fairs and expositions.” Civilized or not, Geronimo at seventy-six years of age (when dictating his life story to Barrett) still had his culture, his hierarchy of values. He knew who he was and where he came from, and he was sure that removal of the Apaches from their homeland meant, for him and for all of them, the loss not just of a “way of life” or a “home,” but a change in, perhaps a loss of, their beings—or, as we might say, their identities. In his story, the notions of cosmos, country, self, and home are inseparable.

The result of losing that homeland can be seen in another Apache autobiography, though at first it seems to offer counter-evidence on the relation of being to land. This is a book narrated by one of the young Apache men who went with Geronimo on one of the last breakaways into the free Sierra Madre of Mexico—a man named Jason Betzine, born in 1860 and
producing his autobiography in 1958 (he died in 1960, aged 100, from a car crash). Betzinez tells us that in 1902, when the Apache heads of families met with military authorities at Fort Sill, Oklahoma (where they were still prisoners of war), to request once more that they be repatriated to their old homeland in New Mexico, as they had been promised when they surrendered in Mexico, Betzinez himself stood up courageously and said that he wanted to stay in Oklahoma:

I was born and raised among these Indians. I lived just like they did—a hard life, homeless and hopeless. But through a Government school I had a chance to better myself. . . . I learned to be a blacksmith. I worked in a steel mill. I learned farming. Now I am being forced to choose between this new, good life and that old, primitive life out west. If I go west to live in a camp as a reservation Indian, all that I have gained, all that I have learned, will be lost. . . . My wish today is that the Government should give me a house and land and permit me to remain. (p. 190)

Betzinez was clearly a fine person, and I would bet my life he was a good neighbor and friend—but the quoted words make him seem a perfect instance of a “wild” Indian who was “tamed” by the Euroamerican schools. Indeed, rebutting an Arizona senator, Betzinez says this himself: “At the time the removal of the Apaches from Fort Sill was . . . under consideration in Washington. One of the Senators from Arizona said, ‘You can no more tame an Apache than you can a rattlesnake.’ I think . . . the recent history of our people flings those words back in the worthy gentleman’s teeth” (p. 199). At the age of twenty-seven, Jason Betzinez had been put into Carlisle Indian School, taught to speak and write English, converted to Christianity, and brought to be ashamed of and hostile to Apache dances and ceremonies, and now he considered his Apache life as “the old pitiful existence to which I was born” (p. 153).

Consider how different Betzinez’s “old” life had been from Geronimo’s. Geronimo had been born in 1829 and could grow up both “wild” and “free”; Betzinez, born in 1860 after the U.S. annexed his homeland, was from his teens onward under deadly and constant harassment. As he tells it, “As far back as I remember we had never had a permanent home or a place we could call our own. Some of us were beginning to prefer quiet and security to the ever-present worry and fear of being hounded. . . . I think we realized dimly, as we jolted along in these wagons, that even as prisoners our worst troubles might be coming to an end” (p. 141). The episode he refers to here is when the Apaches, having been rounded up in Mexico and Arizona, were being railroaded off to Florida as prisoners of war, in direct violation of the agreement made when they surrendered. What Betzinez says, in effect, is that the prisoners have decided they are only safe in prison. It is meant, of course, as compliment to the jailers.

It is a hard question whether Geronimo or one of the older Apaches, if asked to describe Jason Betzinez when he returned from Carlisle to live at Fort Sill in 1900, would have described him as “Apache.” His identity was
not merely changed from "wild" to "tame," from hunter/warrior to blacksmith/farmer. Consider: it was thenceforward impossible for Betzinez to begin his life story with the Apache account of the Creation, for he was now a sincere Christian. It was no longer relevant to his life to name the subtribes of Apaches as Geronimo's autobiography does, for readers of Betzinez's story would be interested only in his being "an Apache." After going to Carlisle, Jason Betzinez had no homeland unless the United States government assigned him one. He had no religion shared with his people, no ceremonies that tied his youth to his age or self to tribe. In short, he had no IDENTITY unless he could reinvent himself in Euroamerican terms.

After 1900, that is, he was cut off completely from his first twenty-six years of life—from cosmos, tribe, homeland, and "values." From that time on, all that made him Indian was his race—and the chief test of that, by Euroamerican values, would be whether he could raise his status to be like a "white" man, for that alone would show whether he was racially inferior or could "make it." His sense of worth now depended on how NON-Apache he could act. Yet, of course, skin color and features would "identify" him as "Indian," no matter what his lifestyle became.

Betzinez had kept some attitudes, and he saw clearly how false was some of what Euroamericans wanted him to believe about his people's history. He could see it because he still had, in oral history, Apache truths that were omitted or distorted by printed Euroamerican accounts; he makes this clear at the very beginning of his autobiography (pp. 1–2). He quickly reveals that even though he had come to praise the non-Apache life to which Carlisle had turned him, even though he deplored the wish of "wild" Apaches to return to an existence and home country which, he insisted, was wretched and harassed, yet his feelings and memories of that homeland and existence were not negative. On the contrary, as he says: "We loved this beautiful land. . . . Between . . . 1858, when the Government granted us this reservation 'forever,' and 1876, when that same Government took it away from us forever so that white men seeking gold might have it, we lived there in peace and contentment. We hunted, gathered and traded. . . . For a short time life was . . . a happy one" (p. 25). But the official views expressed as Betzinez concludes his autobiography are very different from those at his beginning. From his Carlisle days, Betzinez had "thrown away" his Apache identity and accepted the Euroamerican self patterned for him by the soldiers at Carlisle whom he came to admire and trust. It is a remarkable and attractive self, clearly that of an unusually strong, courageous and decent man, whose life is told in this book. But it is clearly an Euroamerican self. We may account for its shaping, perhaps, by the imprisonment, penances, and education at Carlisle. If this were a U.S. citizen in 1994 we would presumably call the process brainwashing.

How, then, do we account for the different sense of self or identity in Geronimo's book? Here we have no clear description from Geronimo: he shows us an Apache self, but does not show how it was shaped. We can
look into particular books for some idea of the ways Apache education shaped people—for instance, Morris Opler’s *Apache Odyssey, Journey Between Two Worlds* tells how a Mescalero Apache “grew to maturity when his people... were experiencing defeat, confinement, and profound cultural readjustment.” But something more than one tribe’s self-shaping is involved here, or so it appears to me from some years of having taught a course in which we read autobiographies of Indians from very different tribal cultures. Not only how Apache but how Indian beings are shaped is what I want to look into, if only a little way, in this chapter. One trail into this great Sierra is the way of naming and using language.

The autobiography that has helped me see how naming and language reflect and shape a sense of identity within the world, both outside and part of an Indian self, is Charles Eastman’s *Indian Boyhood*. Eastman was a Santee Sioux born about 1858 and raised, like Geronimo, “wild,” but Eastman was then “brought in to the mainstream” as Betzinez was, through education, rather than through capture and imprisonment as Geronimo was. Eastman was just four years old in 1862 when the Santee took part in the great Sioux uprising and massacre in what is now called Minnesota. Eastman’s father was captured and sentenced to death, but Eastman’s mother and others in the family fled into Canada where Eastman was raised to age sixteen in the old ways, expecting some day to return to the United States to take revenge for the father who, he thought, had been hanged. But his father’s sentence had been commuted to life in prison, where he was converted to Christianity, decided to take the white man’s road, learned farming, won release on parole, and finally went to Canada looking for his son. One day, wearing white man’s clothes, he walked into the Santee village where his nearly grown son was living, and presently walked out again, taking his son back to the United States. The son, given the name Charles Eastman, was put into mission school, then Beloit College, Knox College, and Dartmouth. Graduating with honors in 1887, he went to medical school at Boston University, where he got his M.D. just in time to be sent out to the Pine Ridge Sioux Agency shortly before the 1890 massacre of Sioux by the Seventh Cavalry at Wounded Knee. Eastman writes of trying to save some of the Indian children wounded there by the Hotchkiss machine guns, or the more prosaic carbines used by the troopers as they followed and shot down the women and children trying to flee the slaughter.

Such are the facts. I want to look, however, not at the Cavalry versus Redskins scenario so familiar from movies, but at one aspect of Eastman’s *education* as a “wild” *Indian*, before being *civilized*. That aspect, briefly examined in the previous chapter, is his learning the Santee system of names for animals and plants, and how this system tied his sense of personal identity to his sense of tribal identity and relationship to the world of other-than-human “natural” beings. In his chapter on “An Indian Boy’s Training” (pp. 49–56), Eastman points out that the education of Indian children was highly systematic and its customs *scrupulously adhered to and transmitted*
from one generation to another." While a male child was being carried in its mother's womb, she would keep in mind for him some celebrated figure from the tribe's history and "would gather from tradition all his noted deeds and daring exploits, rehearsing them to herself when alone." After he was born, her lullabies would "speak of wonderful exploits in hunting and in war," and he would be called "the future defender of his people." As he grew older, he would be hearing the hunting songs, and in these, "the leading animals are introduced; they come to the boy to offer their bodies for the sustenance of his tribe. The animals are regarded as his friends and spoken of almost as tribes of people or as his cousins, grandfathers, and grandmothers." What Eastman's account here barely hints when the animals are said to "offer their bodies" may well be what is made explicit in the ceremonies of a related tribe, the Osage, particularly in the Origin Wi-gi-e of the Buffalo Bull Clan that might be recited as part of the feast of corn given a year after a child was named. In this recitation, a member of the Tho-ze (Buffalo Bull) clan tells of how the Osages came from the mid-heavens, the stars, to become a people on this earth. In this journey they were directed by various powers through three "divisions" of the heavens, where they found no place to become a people, but in the fourth "division" they met "the Man of Mystery, the god of the clouds" (understood to be "Thunder," though all these terms are much more than "literal"). He said to them: "I am a person of whom your little ones may make their bodies. When they make of me their bodies, they shall cause themselves to become deathless" (emphasis added). They then went to the Buffalo Bull, who also said they could make their bodies of him, and proceeded to throw himself upon the ground so that there sprang up for their use as medicine and food certain plants—including four kinds of corn.

What the Osage chants show is that when the "clan" animals came to offer their bodies it was not only (as Eastman's printed account seems to say) as willing sacrifices for food and clothing and ceremonial regalia—it was as part of the sacred agreement made at Origin Time between human and non-human beings of this world, between Osage beings on the one hand, and on the other hand beings from Thunder through Mountain Lion and Red Bird "down" (or "up") to the stones of the earth. I believe Eastman's account should be taken as implying that among the Santee the same was true, that when Eastman heard the "hunting songs" he would hear them as part of the Creation Stories and the Origin Stories and the Naming Stories.

Eastman's account does describe what I take to be the telling of Santee creation stories—the "legends of his ancestors and his race" were told and repeated "almost every evening," and whatever story a boy heard one night from parents or grandparents, he himself was "usually required to repeat" the next evening. In this way "his household became the audience by which he was alternately criticized and applauded." It was a schooling without having home and school separated, without creating a clerical class within the tribe.
But what interests me here is the naming system. Let's consider once more Eastman's description of how his uncle "catechized" him on his observation of animals: "It was his custom to let me name all the new birds that I had seen during the day. I would name them according to the color or the shape of the bill or their song or the appearance and locality of the nest—in fact, anything about the bird that impressed me as characteristic. . . . He then usually informed me of the correct name. Occasionally I made a hit and this he would warmly commend." Part of Eastman's Santee identity-sense came from realizing that his own close observation of the birds, and his naming them based on this, might well be at one with his community's choice of names for them. He was adjusting his own verbal creativity to his tribesmen's traditions in a very direct way. The sense of linguistic "authority" in his "oral" society seems just as strong as it is in our "literate" society, but the whole relation of individual to authority must have had a different "feel" in the oral society, where spoken language came from authorities present and known. English speakers have two sets of names for creatures—"common" and "scientific," and in neither set is it apparent to an ordinary speaker why a given name is used for a given creature. Our word-roots are buried far out of mind in unknown history. But for Eastman, his language was "transparent," not "opaque" as English is to most of us. English is a melting-pot language, with a priestly language of Latinate terms, and a commoners' language of shorter words, but all of them are opaque so far as animals are concerned. Our words no longer put us in touch with the LAND we live on and from, or the ANIMALS we live among and upon.

So far, we have focused on three autobiographies only—those of Geronimo, Betzinez, and Eastman. We have posited a "wild" sense of identity with its hierarchy from cosmic to personal firmly set, and a "tame" sense dependent on white beneficence and cultural power; and we have touched briefly on how the "wild" sense (as in Eastman) may have been shaped by the language as used by its speakers. Let's look now at two other tribes, Pawnee and Osage, to observe in more detail how the land-orientation of a family and individual created an Indian identity among Pawnees, and how the naming ceremony (for persons) helped create Indian identity among Osages. We turn to these two distinctly different tribes because they show it is Indian and not just an Apache or Santee "identity" we are looking at. The sample, admittedly, is limited, but it seems to me cautious inferences can be drawn from it.

For the Pawnees we draw mostly upon Gene Weltfish's beautiful book, *The Lost Universe*. Our point is how powerful a force the Pawnee ceremonies were in shaping each Pawnee's sense of identity. Weltfish says: "The thing that made life most worthwhile to the Pawnees was their elaborate round of ceremonies . . . based on a complex philosophy of the creation of the universe and of man and of their ongoing nature. The ceremonies were considered as the means for keeping the cosmic order in its course and the continuance of the earth and its life processes. . . . The ceremonies were
more than religious observances. They were the whole focus of Pawnee aesthetic life" (p. 8). Nor were these “ceremonial ways” only dances and songs and recitations. The shape of a Pawnee house, and the place in this house of each inhabitant, were part of an ordered patterning that placed this person in a certain clear relation to kinfolk, to household tasks, to the working areas and the sacred areas—and to the cosmos. That is, the circular Pawnee lodge was oriented not just within the village, but within the universe, by the sun and stars:

Everyone in the house knew his appointed place and where he could go and not go. In the sacred area at the west was an earthen platform. Between the fireplace and the buffalo altar, there was a sacred spot that was invisible—the *uw-hari*, “the place where the wise words of those who have gone before us are resting.” Rather than step over this place in order to pass from one side of the house to the other, everyone walked around the entire house by the way of the east. When the heads of the household sat down... it was to the west... and no one would want to pass in front of them. The house was a microcosm of the universe and as one was at home inside, one was also at home in the outside world. For the dome of the sky was the... roof of the universe and the horizon... was the circular wall of the cosmic house. Through the roof... the star gods poured down their strength from their appropriate directions in a constant stream. In the west was the Evening Star... and in her garden the corn and buffalo were constantly being renewed... and in the western part of the house the sacred buffalo skull and the bundle with its ears of corn symbolized this power. In the eastern sky was the Morning Star—god of light, of fire, and of war. As he rose every morning he sent his beam into the long entryway of the house and lit the fire in an act of cosmic procreation, symbolizing his first union with the Evening Star in the times of the great creation when they begot the girl that was the first human being... The house was also the womb of a woman, and the household activities represented her reproductive powers. The beds of the women along the circular walls were... ranged by age to represent the main stages in a woman’s life—the youngest woman near the west where the garden of the Evening Star was located, the mature woman in the middle... and the old women near the exit to the east, for at their age they were “on the way out.” Being at home was spoken of as being “inside”; *ti-ka*, “he-is-inside”; the house, *a-ka-ro*, “the-inside-place”; the universe, *ka-buraru*, “the-inside-land.”... Everyone in the house had a clear consciousness of these things as they moved about within it. Now secure in his bed, the boy was also secure in the world. (pp. 63–64)

Naturally, to be oriented to heaven and the stars meant one was oriented in time as well as space, among the seasons and the ceremonials that “marked” the seasons: except that for a Pawnee, a ceremony did not merely mark, it helped in the moving of time. There was, for instance, the “spring awakening”: “The first ceremonial act of the year was to awaken the whole earth from its winter sleep... The year began about the time of the spring
equinox with the ritual recitation of the creation by the five priests. The position of the stars was an important guide to the time. . . . The earth lodge served as an astronomical observatory and as the priests sat inside at the west, they could observe the stars in certain positions through the smoke-hole and through the long east-oriented entranceway" (p. 12). Each Pawnee therefore knew from the repeated ceremonies how the Creation began, and saw the ordering of that creation symbolized in the shape and orientation of the house and its inhabitants; saw the seasonal occupations and activities closely tied to the stars, observed that the singing and dancing ceremonies were part of the link between self and tribe and universe, part of a Pawnee being.

From these facts I would argue that the “wild” Indian held quite different opinions from “civilized” Americans around 1880, concerning a person’s relation to land, sky, and the creatures therewithin. They differed not only in their notions about property and ownership, or in their political views on voting, taxation, churchgoing, salvation and damnation. Geronimo, in being Apache, was like a Pawnee, or a Santee, or an Omaha, or an Osage; all were Indian, not Euroamerican. I suggest that for all the anthropologists can say about differences of high importance between cultures of Plains, Pueblo, Woodlands, Coastal and other tribes, groups, nations, there WAS such a thing as an “Indian” way beneath the differences. Succinctly put, that way’s ceremonies embodied a unified way of life: what was Indian was the seamlessness of human life, in which it would not make sense to speak of religion on the one hand, and warfare on the other, of hunting here and naming a new chief there, of the Creation of the Universe on this side and the Naming of a Child on that. “History” and “village arrangement,” “Cosmos” and “lodge architecture,” were intimately related through ceremonies as well as stories and art work; the inside of a lodge, as well as placement of houses in the camp, carried historic and cosmic meanings.

The best way to demonstrate this might be a detailed discussion of ways in which, for instance, the Osage ceremonies for naming a child reflect, are linked with, those for naming a new chief, and both ceremonial cycles embody the tribe’s history as well as its Genesis-Exodus version. Having discussed the Osage Naming Ceremony at length elsewhere, I will focus here on a few points from Francis La Flesche’s account. Himself Omaha and speaking Osage well, La Flesche was the right person at the right time to preserve in print Osage ceremonies that would shortly afterwards be “thrown away.” In the Osage Rite of the Chiefs, as he notes, are not only the ceremonies for naming a new chief, but (in what we may call allegorical narrative form) the history of the Osage people’s becoming a nation. We are told in this rite how they came from the stars and chose bodily forms, how they took the tribal organization that simultaneously represented their history and the form of the universe. In the ceremony one finds, also, explanation of the choosing of certain animals as patrons for their clans, certain foods as the right ones, certain names for individuals as appropriate (and as
tied to their mythic and in-time history). In this Rite of the Chiefs, therefore, what Europeans would subdivide into “history, religion, social structure, farming, hunting and ethology” are all subsumed. This rite was supplemented by another which La Flesche titles Hearing of the Sayings of the Ancient Men, in which we also see expressed “in mythical form, the origin of the people,” here envisioned as a begetting of life between “two great fructifying forces—namely the sky and the earth,” with life continuing forever to proceed from this begetting. And this notion of a continuous procreating of the universe is embodied in the tribal organization, divided into moieties of Sky and Earth divisions, with men from one of these required to marry women from the other, so that for each Osage marriage arrangement and ceremony there was a reenactment of the tribe’s origins and of the cosmic reasons and theory behind this. Further, the version of this origin-story recited by a given clan was modified so as to “conform to that part of nature which the [clan] represented in the tribal and the gentile organizations, for the tribe in its entirety symbolized the visible universe in all its known aspects.” Specifically, the Black Bear or Thunder clan would each have its own version, with its particular patron-being giving its special name, powers, and blessing to the clan and the tribe.

Such, then, were the Rite of the Chiefs and the Hearing of the Sayings of the Ancient Men. When we now look at the Osage rite for naming a child—which as La Flesche puts it “installs the child in his proper place in the tribal organization and entitles him to recognition as a person”—we do not see an isolated and unrelated set of stories and histories. We find instead that the names bestowed in the bringing of a child into a clan reflect the tribal and gentile histories. The name Nom-poh-wab-the, for instance, may be literally translated as “Fear-Inspiring,” but that is only the surface part of its meaning. Literally, nom-poh means “to be afraid,” and wab-the means “cause or make to be.” But the fear referred to in this name, it is understood, is that caused by Thunder: the sacred Thunder of the time before the Osages came to earth, when they sent ahead a messenger to discover how they might become a people, and what they could make their bodies from and what names they might take. The name Nom-poh-wab-the therefore embodies and recalls this part of the people’s sacred history, as well as that part of its chronicle-history when certain famous men bore this name in the memory of the elders.

Clearly, then, giving a clan-name involved a ceremony that itself was an epicycle on the great cycle of clan-origin, which was part of the universe’s wheel that had turned to bring the entire tribe and its world into being. The Osages, we may stress, believed that the universe did move in an order given it by a “silent, invisible creative power . . . named Wa-kon-dah, Mysterious Power.” Therefore, when the first ceremony in the child-naming ritual was called Wa-koh-o-ga-the, “the Taking of Bodies,” it was not merely that some incorporeal star-beings decided to come down and incarnate themselves, but that they were moving as part of the universe under Wa-kon-dah’s guidance. When they
adopted their life-symbols through which they became a people and could live on earth, they addressed these as "grandfather" and "grandmother": Sun, Moon, Morning Star, Evening Star, Dipper, Pleiades, Elk, Bear, Puma, Red Cedar, Buffalo Bull. When (at a later stage of the child-naming) the naming wi-gi-e of a clan was recited, the recital was called the Zba-ze Bh-It-ton, "Taking of Names." The names were given according to a set sequence of possibilities determined in part by the order of birth within a family: first male, second male, third male; first, second, third female—each had its possible set of names.25

At the ceremony's end, there would be a special set of instructions for the child's mother. At the later feast (including corn ceremonially planted by the mother) for the Xo-ka who had presided over the naming, there might be the recitation by a member of the Buffalo Bull clan of that clan's wi-gi-e, telling how the Osages descended from the heavens and—most pertinently—how the Buffalo Bull had brought corn to the Osages. And to recur to the name just mentioned, Nom-pib-wab-the, this wi-gi-e tells how, when the Osages were trying to come down from stars to earth, their messenger was sent ahead to find a place where they might become a people. Having passed through three divisions of the heavens, the messenger had found no habitation for them, but in the Fourth Division he saw the "Man of Mystery, the god of the clouds"—and turning to his brothers, he said: "Here stands a fear-inspiring man! His name, I verily believe, is Nom-pib-wab-the ("fear-inspiring")!"

Thereupon this mysterious and terrible man addresses the messenger and other Osages: "I am a person of whom your little ones may make their bodies. When they make of me their, bodies, they shall cause themselves to be deathless."26 He then gives them other personal names that they can use.

The name Nom-pib-wab-the, then, would be given in a context which would bring its new bearer into the tribe in a very complete fashion, at least as complete as a Christian or Jewish naming ceremony—and on its religious and cosmic side it would be comparable to such rites. It also referenced the tribal, family, and clan history into which the newly named child would be precisely placed. An Osage child in those "wild" times would thus have had all these placements brought to his awareness not only at the particular time he was given the name, but each time he attended another name-giving, and also when he attended the Rites of the Chiefs and other ceremonies.

In short, like Geronimo, or Eastman, or La Flesche, or a Pawnee child, an Osage would have had his personal identity carefully, explicitly, unmistakably linked with that of his people, with the symbolic arrangement of his village, with the marriage arrangements and hunting encampments and choosing of chiefs and war and peace ceremonies, with the animals whom he could hunt or whose feathers he could wear, the plants he would eat, the earth and sky he dwelt within. If we wanted to ask about a "wild" Indian's sense of identity, therefore, we ought to ask also about these "other" matters. The "wild" Indian was tied to land, people, origins and way of life, by every kind of human order we can imagine. "History" and "Myth" and "Identity" are not three separate matters, here, but three aspects of one human being.
Notes

1. Erik Erikson has argued for the importance of much later periods in an individual’s life as crucial to shaping and reshaping identity; the long obituary notice in the *New York Times* (Friday, May 13, 1994) gives a very useful and interesting account of his work. It mentions, for instance, that his *Childhood and Society* (1950) was published after he had studied early childhood training of Sioux people and differentiated their children’s identity-sense from that of the Yurok Indians whom he also studied. He proposed that humans undergo successive “identity crises” during their lives, and applied this notion to “psychobiographic” studies of Martin Luther and Mahatma Gandhi (1958, 1969). Erikson’s having himself been an “in-between”—illegitimate child suspended between religions (Lutheran, Jewish), taunted by Nazis as a Jew, rejected at the synagogue as of Nordic appearance—and his studies of non-European identity-formation surely made him sensitive to issues with which one is faced in looking at the “autobiographies” of American Indians with which the present essay is concerned.

2. *Geronimo: His Own Story*, ed. S. M. Barrett, newly ed. by Frederick W. Turner, III (New York: E. P. Dutton, 1970). All kinds of problems are presented to us by this work: to what extent is it an accurate transcription or paraphrase of Geronimo’s account, how far does its organization and sequencing reflect Barrett’s rearranging of bits and pieces, how much was added or subtracted or altered by the intermediary Apache translators used by Barrett. I cut this Gordian knot by assuming the book as printed is authentic and accurate enough for the purposes of this discussion, expressing reservations only here and there.

3. The 1993 movie called *Geronimo*, for instance, though “sympathizing” with Geronimo, presents him primarily as a larger-than-life Indian warrior fighting American soldiers; and the soldiers are presented as, of course, highly respectful of his courage, of the relatively just causes for which he was fighting, and so on. In the end, that movie asks us to understand Geronimo as “Apache” in only two dimensions: the fierce indomitable warrior, and the man unjustly treated by mean and crooked Mexicans and Americans. There is nothing whatever of Apache cosmology, theology, ideology, customs or ways except in relation to the “war with whites,” which is pictured as about a homeland but not about a way of life or world-views.

4. *Geronimo*, p. 61. Barrett’s version of Apache “creation time” is probably much distorted, but my point is that Geronimo began by telling some version of the Apache Creation Story as his introduction to the story of Geronimo. One may argue that the Christian Gospel of John distorts the Judaic account of the beginning of things, since it is a late Hellenized version adapted to provide a biography of a man taken by its author to be the Messiah. The Hellenizer, nevertheless, has reasons for providing that reference to the *Genesis* story.
5. "Dragon" of course carries all kinds of European baggage, but so does "Monster," a term more usual for translators of Apache, Navajo, or Pueblo Creation Stories, in which such episodes of "Monster-slaying" set parameters for the world as humans now know it. See, for instance, Paul Zolbrod's edition of the Navajo Creation Story, Diné Babani (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1984).

6. Geronimo, p. 69. I wonder about the "literal meaning" that in Barrett's account is assigned to Apache, and suspect some confusion on Barrett's part.

7. Geronimo, p. 70. Could No-doyohn be a mistake for Mogollon?

8. See the earlier essay in this collection, "Making a Name," for qualifications of this.

9. Though the history of these words sheds light on the attitudes of Europeans toward "Indians" whom they civilized with such genocidal efficiency, there is not space to summarize that history here. A sketch is given in my "Why Shakespeare, Though Not Unselfish, Never Had Any Fun," in E. Cooley, Mervin R. Barnes, and John A. Dunn, eds., Papers of the Mid-America Linguistics Conference for 1978 (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1979), pp. 478–487.

10. See the entry for civilise in the Oxford English Dictionary. The word was Anglicized in the early 17th century precisely to justify man's ways to men as the British began to turn the globe a shocking Imperial pink: as Captain John Smith wrote of his experiences in Virginia, it was easier to civilize "them" by the sword than by fair means (to paraphrase the OED citation from his 1624 History of Virginia).

11. Geronimo, p. 49. One of the "fairs and expositions" was the St. Louis World's Fair of 1904, where he was exhibited as prisoner of war. He must have been in its headquarters, the newly built Brookings Hall of Washington University. I teach and have an office across the quadrangle from Brookings. Geronimo perhaps walked round the new-built quadrangle, where Commencement ceremonies now are held.

12. Jason Bettinez, I Fought With Geronimo, with W. S. Nye (Harrisburg, Penn.: The Stackpole Company, 1959). (Page references to this book are given parenthetically in the text.)


14. Eastman, Indian Boyhood, hereafter in this chapter cited by page number alone. As with Geronimo's autobiography, I leave aside the difficult question of how non-Indian input—in this case, from Eastman's white wife, herself a teacher whom he met while at Pine Ridge where she was teaching Sioux children—may have shaped and colored Eastman's account of his life as it stands in his printed work. I ignore also (for now) the neo-historicist aspects of the case: the shifting vagues and forms of Indian autobiography; the particular and general social tasks assigned by whites to this genre during the period 1890–1940 as part of dealing with post-Wounded Knee Indian
tribal entities and the "Indian question" as a whole; and the ways Eastman himself fitted his autobiographical writing and speaking into such tasks and his own personal and ethnic agenda. The very useful discussions and bibliographic account of Indian autobiographies by scholars, especially Peter Bidel, Kathleen Sands, H. David Brumble and Arnold Krupat, are essential to the full discussion such questions deserve.

15. The account as here cited from Indian Boyhood misses the sacred dimension of such songs, which tie intricately into the Creation Stories—though certainly Eastman would have known that dimension well, so it is likely the inadequate understanding of Santee ways by his wife Elaine Goodale Eastman that caused this lacuna in Eastman’s account. We can clearly see this sacred dimension in traditional Osage naming ceremonies, as printed in 1928 (with transcription, translation, introduction and detailed commentary) by Francis La Flesche in The Osage Tribe: Two Versions of the Child-Naming Rite, Smithsonian Institution, Bureau of American Ethnology Annual Report, no. 43, 1924–1925 (Washington, D.C.: 1928), pp. 23–264. Other Osage ceremonies, which illustrate how members of this Siouan-language tribe were being educated at the time Eastman was growing up, are transcribed and translated by La Flesche as BAE Annual Reports numbers 36, pp. 35–597 (Rites of the Chiefs, Sayings of the Ancient Men); 39, pp. 51–650 (Rite of Vigil); 45, pp. 529–833 (Rite of the Wa-ko-be); and in the 1939 BAE Bulletin (War Ceremony and Peace Ceremony of the Osage Indians), passim. Some translations of songs and recital-chants from these ceremonies, and many useful glosses and definitions, are found in La Flesche’s 1932 Dictionary of the Osage Language. And see, now, Garrick Bailey’s account, The Osage and the Invisible World (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1995).

16. La Flesche, Osage Tribe, pp. 56–58.

17. Ibid., p. 57. In Euroamerican culture, words like electricity and gravity have "literal," "figurative," and "scientific" sense-clusters. Alert and sensible readers negotiate among these flavors and quirky senses with no particular difficulty, and the same ability to negotiate among ceremonial and everyday, metaphysical and physical word-senses should be recognized among Osages and other Indian peoples. There are actual instances within some of the ceremoni al recitations or narratives where the reciter will say things, in referring to the "journey from the stars to this earth," such as "They came to a valley: verily, it was not a valley"—warning the listeners, I believe, that the language being used is special, figurative, mysterious, not everyday.

18. I happened lately to look at the words chameleon and chamomile in the American Heritage Dictionary and was surprised to find the same Greek word is behind the first half of each. A chameleon is a "ground-lion," and the herb chamomile is a "ground-apple." The AHD editors say that behind the Greek chamele n is a Babylonian word which itself means "ground-lion," so the Greeks must have thought the Babylonians had a good name for that little reptile, and just translated the name into their own language. As for chamomile, it of course is not actually a ground-apple; rather,
as the *AHD* editors say, some varieties *smell* like apples. I have my doubts about this, particularly since *melon* is the Greek word behind the *-mile* part of *chamomile*, and *melon* might refer to some fruit other than what we would call an "apple." Ah well—Sprachgeschmellers differ.

19. Of course, as discussed in "Making a Name," our English is far more transparent where machines and technology are concerned and our speakers are still coining names in spoken as well as literary English: we understand *batchback* or *Fuzzbuster* or *beeper* to be "tribal" words that are figurative, describing what they refer to.

20. Gene Weltfish, *The Lost Universe: Pawnee Life and Culture* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1977); page references are cited in the text. A primary source, given by the Pawnee elder Tahirussawichis through the bilingual Pawnee scholar James Murie, transcribed and translated by Murie and Alice Fletcher, is printed as *The Hako: A Pawnee Ceremony*, Smithsonian Institution, Bureau of American Ethnology Annual Report, no. 22 (Washington, D.C., 1904). Fletcher for years had found no Omaha informants to recite for her the texts and songs of this intertribal ceremony, but at last located a Pawnee elder who knew and would recite it. I assume that since the Hako Ceremony was intertribal, each tribe performed it in its own language and particular format. The ceremony is an "adoption" rite in which two groups become "brothers." That it involves the sacred pipe suggests it may be one of the most important "peace" ceremonies of the pre-Columbian Great Plains tribes. Anglo accounts of Plains Indians seem always to stress their warfare, their hostilities and rivalries—making them sound very like the Europe known to history as a collection of rabidly hostile and murderous peoples always trying to slaughter or conquer or dominate each other. How the Indian nations succeeded in getting along, rather than how they conducted their warring or raiding relationships, is emphasized by Howard Meredith in *Dancing on Common Ground: Tribal Cultures and Alliances on the Southern Plains* (Lawrence: University of Kansas Press, 1995), discussing Southern Plains nations including Wichita, Pawnee, Caddo, Plains Apache, Cheyenne and Arapaho, and Comanche (see, for the annual Pawnee-Wichita Visitation, pp. 20–21, 58–59).

21. The Pawnee images of microcosm/macrocosm ought to be compared to those of the Europeans in about the same time-frame, say 1400–1600 A.D.—there are startling resemblances as well as the expected differences. Work by Chaucer, Spenser, and Shakespeare could be set beside Pawnee texts—though it would outrage Mono-culturists to anthropologize *The Faerie Queene* along with *The Hako Ceremony*.

25. Ibid., p. 31.
26. Ibid., pp. 56–57.

"Works Cited" Entry: