

# A POETICS OF PROPERTY | TAPAHONSO'S POETRY

Navajo Poetics & Contemporary Native Literary Studies | KCL 2018 | Seminar No. 1 Handout



## Key Discussion Points:

1. A Pluralistic Model of American Literary Consciousness
2. The LanguageS of Reading (Western & Indigenous)
3. The Diversity within Indigenous Studies (567+ Nations)
4. Current Model of Curriculum & Academic Specialty
5. Contemporary (Colonized) Politics of Recognition
6. Historical Systems of Redistribution | Abstract Property
7. Brief History of Rhetorical Imperialism
8. Literary Stereotypes ('Indian' Image in Mainstream Lit.)
9. Poetics as Property of Transformative Antagonisms
10. Navajo Poetic Style (Dual Literary Consciousness)

## Luci Tapahonso Biography:

1. Born in 1953 (Shiprock, New Mexico, on the Navajo Nation Reservation)
2. Born of the Saltwater Clan and born for the Bitterwater Clan of the Navajo (Diné) Nation
3. Tapahonso is a middle child among eleven siblings
4. First learned Navajo at home, then English at school (Navajo Methodist School).
5. After graduating from Shiprock High School in 1971, she became a journalist.
6. She enrolled in the English program at the University of New Mexico in 1976.
7. During her studies, Leslie Marmon Silko became her mentor.
8. Silko encouraged Tapahonso to pursue creative writing, embracing her Navajo identity.
9. She received both her BA (1980) and her MA (1983) from the University of New Mexico.
10. She taught creative writing at UNM, University of Kansas, and the University of Arizona.
11. Tapahonso's first short story was published in 1978 ("The Snake Man").
12. Tapahonso's first collection of poetry was published in 1981 (*One More Shiprock Night*).
13. Her more universally recognized works are *Saánii Dahataal The Women Are Singing* (1993), *Blue Horses Rush In* (1997), and *A Radiant Curve* (2008).
14. She became the first Navajo Nation poet laureate (succeeded by Laura Tohe).
15. She received the Lifetime Achievement Award in 2006.

# Lecture Preface to Contemporary Politics of Recognition:

1. **This section explores the [un-emphasized] concept of settler colonialism as well as its connection to contemporary Native studies.**
2. **Indigenous/Settler Binary:** The Indigenous/settler binary is used to analyze the power relationship between settlers (predominantly white Europeans) and Indigenous peoples (the Native nation-peoples) in the United States. In this relationship, land rights are the basis of power as well as later racialized and canonized legal and literary forms of abstracted property.
3. **Contemporary Model of American Literary Consciousness:** American literary consciousness refers to the collective set of conventions and rules, patterns and styles that comprise mainstream literary study and creation. However, the set of conventions and patterns is inherently colonized, white-coded, patriarchal, heteronormative, etc., etc., a.k.a. “Western.” The current teachings of literary study rest on an assumed homogenous model of American literary consciousness. However, due to the unique position of the United States as a settler colony searching for a metropole of the empire (an expansive site of land/property), the U.S. and its literary culture maintain a pluralistic compendium of diverse writers, each carving their distinctive national consciousnesses into an overarching realm of Western literary consciousness. While the umbrella term ‘Native American’ or ‘American Indian’ is typically employed to represent one of these national consciousnesses, there are at least 567 distinctive (those are only the federally recognized\* nations) Indigenous nation-peoples in the United States. Within this seminar, we will explore one realm of Indigenous literary consciousness – a Navajo literary consciousness -- through “That American Flag,” written by Luci Tapahonso and published in 2008.
4. **Dual/Double Consciousness:** W.E.B. DuBois explained “double consciousness” in *The Souls of Black Folk* (1903), stating, “The Negro is a sort of seventh son, born with a veil and gifted with second sight in this American world- a world which yields him no true self-consciousness, but only lets him see himself through the revelation of the other world... This double consciousness, this sense of always looking at one’s self through the eyes of others, of measuring one’s soul by the tape of a world that looks on in amused contempt or pity. One even feels his two-ness- an American and a Negro- two souls, two thoughts, two unreconciled strivings; two warring ideals in one dark body, whose dogged strength alone keeps it from being torn asunder” (9). In this line of thought, there is a connection between the historically constructed positioning of Blackness and Indigeneity in the American racial hegemony. However, Native Americans possess a “true” Indigenous self-consciousness (an original identity tied to initial land stewardship) AND an American self-consciousness (the product of acculturation and a symptom of settler colonialism). This dual/double consciousness is comprised of “two [different] souls, two [different] thoughts, two unreconciled strivings; two warring ideals in one body” (DuBois 9). Within this inherent antagonism between literary modes of Indigeneity and literary modes of colonial Americanism, Navajo poetics maintain a characteristic property – a property with the potential to jam the theoretical machinery perpetuating only the racialized conceptualizations of Indigeneity.
5. **Significance of Acculturation:** Acculturation (the adoption of some mainstream cultural habits, while still maintaining traditional ways) and assimilation (complete adoption of mainstream cultural habits and abandonment of traditional ways) are two pertinent concepts when discussing contemporary Native poetics. It is through a dual consciousness and through acculturation practices (manifested in poetry) that the process of ‘jamming the theoretical machinery’ (Irigarayan notion), inserting transformative antagonisms into mainstream literary circulation (Coulthardian notion), and rejecting the discourses of rhetorical imperialism (Lyonsian notion) becomes possible. (See ‘Pertinent terminology/References’ section for elaboration)

## The Hook Activity: A Mini-Investigation of the Ivory Tower

- Directions:** Take the next five to ten minutes investigating the literary specialties of English faculty at the Ivy league institutions in the United States. I'll even make this super easy for you. Here are the web links:  
Yale University: <https://english.yale.edu/faculty-staff>  
Harvard University: <https://english.fas.harvard.edu/people/faculty/>  
Princeton University: <https://english.princeton.edu/people/faculty>  
Columbia University: <http://english.columbia.edu/people/faculty>  
Cornell University: <http://english.columbia.edu/people/faculty> \*  
Brown University: <https://www.brown.edu/academics/english/areas-of-study>  
Dartmouth College: <https://english.dartmouth.edu/people/faculty>  
University of Pennsylvania: <https://www.english.upenn.edu/people/faculty/interests>

What do you notice? Which fields of study/interest/specialty are recurrent? If there isn't a 'Native American' category, where do you think that interest is placed? What are the implications (explicit and implicit) in its placement there? Why might there be an 'African American' category and not a 'Native American' category? And, why should we care? Or do we?

## The Quick-Glance Reading: 'Decolonize' the Curriculum

- Directions:** Read the 2016 article, "Yale English students call for end of focus on white male writers," by Alison Flood (of *The Guardian*), regarding the English student protest and petition to 'decolonize' the required curriculum and 'dead, white guy' canon of Western-coded English-major program requirements at Yale University.

**Let's have a think:** Thinking back on your own education in literature, which books/authors did you read/study in your secondary and post-secondary academic endeavors? Take two to five minutes and jot down as many as you can remember.

**Time for the cliché: Pair & Share:** Make awkward eye contact with someone in the group. Then, go talk to that person and compare your personal lists. Which texts did you both read? Which texts are different? How 'multicultural' was your secondary and post-secondary literary experiences? Do the texts you read align with a homogenous model of literary consciousness or a heterogenous model of literary consciousness? Explain.

# Refocus: Navajo Literary Culture: A Consciousness of One's Own

*Disclaimer: This is not all-encompassing or all-applicable, but it is a baseline for understanding some of the influences, forms, and styles that work and exist within the context of Navajo poetic spaces. So, here we go:*

## Lesson No. 1: It's Not 'Us vs. Them.' It's 'Us and Them.'

### Board Notes:

Assimilation: Deals with "Us versus Them"

Acculturation: Deals with "Us and Them"

**Hook Activity:** I'm going to say a word and then you are going to write down it's opposite (or foil or something it is not). Alright, ready? (1) White; (2) Rich; (3) Male; (4) English; (5) Speaking; (6) Patriarchy; (7) America; (8) Right; (9) Good; (10) Protagonist [Refer to PPT. slides.]

Now, share your responses with others. How many of your responses are the same? How many are different? Which ones are consistently similar with those sitting around you? Which categories have 'universally' recognized foils and oppositions? What does that teach us about the way we categorize words, concepts, ideas?

In Western literary studies, it is common to quickly apply a good versus evil binary when analyzing a text. Just think about all the groundwork and perpetual reinforcement that went into teaching you the differences between a protagonist and an antagonist in a story. A large portion of Western thought and Western literary consciousness is based on understanding through oppositions. This is how colonial politics of recognition work as well. Hegel talked about this in his theorizations of the master/slave dialectic. He said that the master's position exists only because the slave recognizes his/her/their existence. Therefore, the self-consciousness of the master is dependent on the self-consciousness of the slave. It is not the politics of difference that constitute these identities, it is the politics of recognition (accepting the label) that constitutes these identities. Of course, this paradigm can be applied to contemporary racialized and socio-economic spheres through ideological models like *white/non-white*, *rich/poor*, *mainstream-culture/counter-culture*, or more broadly in abstracted categories: *superior/inferior*. However, for binary systems of power to exist, there has to be recognition of an 'us versus them' mindset in place. There has to be a protagonist as defined against an antagonist. At least, that is what we have implicitly been taught. But, what if there isn't? What if there is a system of recognition that does not require a foil or is not understood in negation (or reference to what it is not)? This is where an Indigenous identity becomes a loophole.

The recognition of Indigeneity in contemporary (neo-colonial, neo-liberal) society can be expressed through (1) a racialized category and colonial prism of identity understood in relation to the superiority of white privilege and 'whiteness as property' in all realms (a.k.a. the 'Savage Stereotype') or (2) a Native category of original citizenship and original stewardship of property, transcending the binary prescriptions of colonial politics of recognition.

Then, can we take this a step further? If a position of identity exists that does not prescribe to the Hegelian notion of identity in Western, colonized society, can a position of property exist that does not prescribe to the Marxist paradigm of capitalism? Fanon is famous for his socio-diagnostic critique of Marxist conceptions of economic superstructures. Lukacs' (a respected Marxist theorist) mantra was that everything tied back to the economic structure. Fanon wrote "hold up" (or to be technical *Black Skin White Masks*) and exposed a loophole. He showed

that social relations in a capitalist system were in a dialectic relation to both the economic superstructure and a racist doctrine (or ideological state apparatus). He showed that racism could function relatively autonomously from the economic superstructure (even though it often aligned with it). So, if we have two loopholes (if you think about it: a loophole within a loophole), who is to say there aren't more loopholes we haven't discovered, realized, or brought to the forefront in educational and literary studies?

When I say 'property,' it usually carries with it the connotative meaning of possession. 'That's my property.' 'That's not yours; that's his property.' Now, this 'property' could be a pencil, a yard, a section of forest, the library of a school, a 'personal bubble,' etc. In all of these realms of 'property,' there are three means through which 'property' is attained: (1) It's bought (economic ownership); (2) it is inherited (an inherent ownership); or (3) it is stolen, commandeered, and claimed as one's own. In Western society, there is a predilection for individualization and consolidation of systems with multiple constituents. This includes the reign of privatization efforts and the growing low-context, highly individualized undercurrents controlling media and economic practices. Even though "MySpace" seems to be a thing of the past, it is just redistributed to "my Twitter feed." This boils down to differences in the ideological realms of a nation-state (epitomized by the United States government) and a nation-people (epitomized by many Native practices of governance and stewardship) as discussed by Scott Richards Lyons. A nation-state is predominantly fixated on [usually individualized, but not always] property ownership, while a nation-people is predominantly fixated on [usually collective, but not always] property stewardship. This distinction is insightful. Why?

If one can identify with an Indigenous heritage that does not conform to contemporary racialized and colonial forms of recognition, then within Indigenous politics of recognition, 'property' in all its forms, both physical and abstract, also holds a two-fold position. One that can conform to the colonial model of neoliberal capitalism and one that can refuse to recognize property as wholly economic or capital-based. Within a system of a nation-people, 'property,' just like race (in Fanon's loophole), is in a dialectic relation alongside the economic superstructure when discussing, conceptualizing, and analyzing social relations (present in society and in literature). And, this is all well and good, but what does it mean in the larger scope of American literary consciousness and culture and society? It means that one piece of literature, for example, Luci Tapahonso's "That American Flag" (2008), can proffer a space that houses two literary consciousnesses: one 'American' and one 'Native American' (which overlap and divide from one another in unique ways). (See full poem later in the packet)

## Guided Close Reading: Discussion Points & Quotations

1. "I wouldn't buy anything with the flag on it,' my friend said / as I showed her a cute straw handbag at Mervyn's one summer night. / It had a small beaded flag in the corner. / 'There's just something about me and the flag,' she said. I didn't respond" (Tapahonso ln. 1-4). (*Discussion Points: The Symbolism of the American Flag (literary symbols and contextual symbols); The One-Sided Dialogue – Significance of Tapahonso's non-response; Capitalism Context (Significance of Shopping); Gendered Realm and Implications.*)
2. "Yes, the American flag is ubiquitous these days, / and we had done our share of marches, protests, and sit-ins in the 1970s" (Tapahonso ln. 5-6). (*Discussion Points: Historical Placement/Reference – the Activism of the Seventies; Characterization Techniques.*)
3. "But later that night, I wanted to call her and explain / about the American flag and us Navajos. / Let me tell you, I wanted to say, that in the mid-1800s / that flag meant fear and untold turmoil. / Let me tell you, there was little we understood about those / who followed the American flag onto our land That thin rectangle of fabric / rippled in the

- dry gusts of wind as the troops approached Dinéyah” (Tapahonso ln. 7-13). (*Discussion Points: Use of Conjunction ‘And;’ Changing Abstractions; Use of Navajo Language in a Predominantly English Poem.*)
4. “Though the men were five-fingered like us, their words / seemed loud and careless, and their mannerisms, dramatic. / Still, we watched for signs of compassion, / as these soldiers had been born of a mother somewhere. / Their mothers had been delighted to hear their first words, / just as some of these men must have talked to their firstborn soothingly. / Perhaps as they walked on Diné Bikéyah, they longed for their families. / These men walked upright, feet moving upon the earth’s surface, as we do. / From childhood they had grown upward toward the sun as the Diné do. / They breathed the air granted all of us by the Holy Ones. / They were like us in these ways, but their hearts were unyielding” (Tapahonso ln. 14-24). (*Discussion Points: A Different Type of Comparison (not the ‘us-versus-them’ approach, but an ‘us-and-them’ approach); Understanding Relations Through Unity First as Opposed to Division/Difference First; Inherent Maternal Culture; Navajo Terms; Allusions to Earth’s Surface [Land] and Holy Ones; Navajo Creationism.*)
  5. “They were like us in these ways, but their hearts were unyielding. / They were faithful to orders from afar. / They were faithful to voices they had not heard themselves. / They were bound by written orders and armed with deadly gear. / They were loyal to their flag of freedom” (Tapahonso ln. 25-28). (*Discussion Points: Word-Specific Analysis [Connotative Meanings- ‘Hearts’ ‘Unyielding’ ‘Faithful’ ‘Orders’ ‘Heard’ ‘Bound’ ‘Written Orders’ ‘Armed’ ‘Deadly Gear’ ‘Loyal’ ‘Flag’ ‘Freedom’]; Abstraction of ‘Freedom’ and Other Ideals; Violence of Abstraction and Other ‘Deadly Gear’ [look at treaties and notion of paper being cheaper than bullets- Treuer].)*
  6. “The government had decreed that the Diné be moved to Fort Sumner / so that we could become Americans. We traveled hundreds of miles / to the south. The winters were cold; / our blankets became worn and frayed. / Though we were given jackets, wraps, and clothing, / the sick worsened, the elderly passed on, and often babies died at birth” (Tapahonso ln. 29-34). (*Discussion Points: ‘Becoming American;’ Historical Contexts [Indian Removal Act of 1830; Navajo Long Walk (Forced Exile 1864-1868); Smallpox; Overview of Attempted\* Indigenous Elimination (Iyko Day’s Research)].)*
  7. “The women set up looms, though they were immersed in grief. / ‘We have to weave as we always have,’ they said. / ‘By weaving, we can make it through these waves of sorrow.’ / ‘Someday we’ll go home,’ they said. / ‘We have to weave through this hunger, through the pain, / through the deaths that surround us. We have to keep up / our strength,’ they said. ‘We have to weave / to remember our land, our relatives, and our animals’” (Tapahonso ln. 40-47). (*Discussion Points: Diné Tradition of Weaving; Strength of Women to ‘Hold Everything Together;’ Holistic Processing as a Means of Survival; The Weaving of Direct Quotations to Stylistic Imitate Weaving.*)
  8. “They unraveled the blue military jackets and red undergarments / and wound them into balls of crinkled wool. / They found bits of wool and cotton and sometimes sheep wool. / The military clothes became thin red and blue stripes in the rugs. / The stripes were laced, line by line – each weft tapped into place / by the weaving comb – its venerable echo a comfort in itself. / Sometimes they wove in strands of hair, feathers, bits of plants, / and knots of corn pollen to ensure strength and abundance. / These were offerings to the desolate land around them. / The rugs were prayers, with red, blue, black, and white stripes” (Tapahonso ln. 48-57). (*Discussion Points: Significance of Unraveling Western-Provided Clothing & Presumably a Form of ‘Deadly Gear;’ Color Symbolism (in both Diné and Western traditions); The Weaving Comb Symbol & Significance; The Spiritual Inter-Textuality and Inner-Textuality in the Weaving of Prayer Rugs and Poetics.*)
  9. “The rugs’ white horizontal bands were for the early morning sky / and signaled new beginnings. / The background of the American flag is white, / as is our sacred mountain in the east. / Thus, the women knew we would survive” (Tapahonso ln. 58-62). (*Discussion Point: Dual Consciousness in Nationalistic ‘White’ Symbolism.*)
  10. “The red stripes were for the dirt at home, the sandstone cliffs, / and for the sumac that turns brilliant red each fall. / The red stripes in the flag are for our blood and for our ancestors, / who tried to search for the good in everyone and everything” (Tapahonso ln. 63-66). (*Discussion Point: Dual Consciousness in Nationalistic ‘Red’ Symbolism.*)
  11. “By weaving blue into rugs, the women recalled the hooghans / they built when the men were gone. They recalled the graceful ease / with which their teenage sons chopped wood, built corrals, / and rode horses. In doing so, the



women were reminded / of their own strength. The blue in the flag is for the promise / of each new spring granted us since Fort Sumner. The blue stripes / honor the men and their strength, tenderness, and intellect” (Tapahonso ln. 67-73). (*Discussion Point: Dual Consciousness in Nationalistic ‘Blue’ Symbolism.*)

12. “Often, the women wove stars in the rug – its center is for our home, / Nihimá, the land that was given to us. We are told that / a specific star watches over us, this star knows everything. / The stars were prayers for the children who held the future – / the ones who became our parents and grandparents. / The flag’s stars signaled our eventual return to Diné Bikéyah” (Tapahonso ln. 74-79). (*Discussion Points: Dual Consciousness in Nationalistic Star Symbolism; Navajo Creation Stories; Historic Generational Strength (in relation to Trauma); Navajo Codeswitching.*)
13. “Sometimes when women wove crosses: a point / for each direction and each of the sacred mountains. / The four points signal the hope that the changing light of each new day brings” (Tapahonso ln. 84-86). (*Discussion Points: Unique Position of Navajo Nation’s Relation to Original Homeland; Four Sacred Mountains; Holistic Thinking; Counter-Western Architecture & Geographical Design; East as Holy Direction.*)
14. “Late that summer night, I wanted to tell my friend that / we Navajos have many reasons not to honor the American flag, / but often it reminds us of our grandparents’ enduring courage. / In the face of terrible odds, the stars and the stripes came to mean / that we would return to our homeland. It taught us that our mother, / Nahasdzáán, cares for us as we care for ourselves and our children. / Let me tell you about the American flag and us Diné, my friend. / Let my grandparents: Shímásání dóó Schicheíí dóó Shináliké, / let them tell you about the American flag” (Tapahonso ln. 87-95). (*Discussion Points: Rejecting Colonial and Homogenous Interpretation/Recognition of the United States Flag; Dual/Double Consciousness; Language(S) of Reading Navajo and English/Western Poetics; Acculturation as the Loophole to Contemporary Colonial Politics of Recognition.*)

## Critical Questions for “That American Flag” (2008)

### 1. TBA

## Written Interlude: The Subversive Potential of Poetics: Why Poetry?

1. **Directions:** Take the next twenty minutes to write two expressions of the same nature. Here are the rules: (1) Pick a fairytale or a myth or a Biblical story or a Shakespearean riff or a well-known story or a tv show plotline or something that a lot of people in this class can probably (maybe almost definitely) relate to and understand. Jot down the premise right now. Go. (2) Use that template to create your own mimicked story (with a twist – there has to be a twist). (3) Record your hijacked story (English majors call this hijacking technique detournement (if they want to be fancy) or culture-jamming). Your record should be two-fold: (A) one expressed in linear prose (you know sentence-by-sentence) and (B) one expressed in poetry (you know verse-by-verse).

Then, after you have two expressive examples (one prose-based and one poetry-based) of the same story, I want you to compare and contrast the qualities of each expression. Which one is better in your opinion? Why? Which one is more ambiguous? Which one breaks the rules of standard English grammar more frequently? If you had to pick, which one is closest to a more accurate record of the ‘true’ story or the ‘real’ basis of the plotline? What types of literary or rhetorical devices do you use in each expression? Are those style-specific? In other words, are there devices that you can use in prose but can’t use in poetry (or vice versa)? Consider the following: indications of silence; manipulation of blank spaces on the page; enjambment; subject-verb agreement; standard linguistic typology (Subject-Object-Verb); fragments and clauses; etc.

## Historical Context of Contemporary Navajo Poetics:

Title of Poetry Collection	Diné/Navajo Poet	Year of Publication
<i>Saánii Dahataal The Women Are Singing</i>	Luci Tapahonso	1993
<i>Blue Horses Rush In</i>	Luci Tapahonso	1997
<i>Cedar Smoke on Abalone Mountain</i>	Norla Chee	2001
<i>Shapeshift</i>	Sherman Bitsui	2003
<i>Tyséyi' / Deep in the Rock: Reflections on Canyon de Chelly</i>	Laura Tohe	2005
<i>I Swallow Turquoise for Courage</i>	Hersham John	2007
<i>A Radiant Curve</i>	Luci Tapahonso	2008
<i>Flood Song; Bone Light</i>	Sherman Bitsui; Orlando White	2009
<i>LETTERS</i>	Orlando White	2015
<i>Of Cartography: Poems</i>	Esther G. Belin	2017
<i>Poetry (Excerpts)</i>	Crisosto Apache	2018

### Indian Removal Act of 1830:

This act renounced the equal sovereignty of the Cherokee, Chickasaw, Choctaw, Muskogee, and Seminole Nations and enforced movement of tribal nations from Georgia and Florida to reservations out west. For the Cherokee Nation, this reservation was in Oklahoma. Despite a Supreme Court case ruling that only the Court had the authority to over-ride Native nations and their power, President Andrew Jackson and Congress passed the act and used military enforcements to remove the Cherokee and other nations from the land. This is known as the Trail of Tears. This act also allowed the movement of other nations (Dunbar-Ortiz 110). For example, as Angela Palm recognizes in her recent memoir, *Riverine: A Memoir From Anywhere But Here* (2016), 800 Potawatomi were forced to march (held at gunpoint) from the Kankekee marsh in northern Indiana to Kansas in 1839 (16). Although the Indian Removal Act and the Cherokee Nation are often used as the predominant example of violent relocation and the elimination of Indigenous peoples, the Cherokee Nation maintains its own history of racist government. During the Trail of Tears, the Cherokee Nation 'brought' their Black slaves to the reservation. The descendants of Cherokee and Black slaves are known today as the Cherokee Freedmen. In 2015, the Cherokee Nation attempted to deny tribal rights to the Cherokee Freedmen. In the 2017 decision of *Cherokee Nation v. Nash* (U.S. District Court case) the Cherokee Freedmen were announced to maintain their tribal rights as members of the Cherokee Nation (Chow). I highlight this information to emphasize the complex systems of governments and societal hierarchies within the 567 distinct Native nations in the United States.

### The Navajo Long Walk of 1864 (*Hwéeldi*):

The Navajo Long Walk, the forced exile of 8,354 Navajos from their homeland from 1864-1868, was the result of two overlapping agendas. Firstly, there were pre-existing tensions between the Navajo Nation and the United States government.



Three treaties were made (and broken) in the years preceding the Long Walk. The Mexicans, Utes, and Apaches also had tensions and disputes with the Navajo Nation. The Long Walk was an attempt to assimilate or eliminate Navajos into mainstream society by marching them to an internment camp (Fort Sumner, Bosque Redondo). Secondly, all of this coincided with the American Civil War. The Confederates were pushed west to the Rio Grande. The U.S. Union government declared that anyone (any Navajo) remaining on the land would be considered a public enemy. Therefore, their removal was deemed essential (to distinguish the Navajos from public enemies). However, the enforcement of the removal was tainted with corruption. Kit Carson and other violent leaders starved many Navajos, slaughtered their sheep, burned their hogans, and destroyed their fields to assert dominance and enforce the exile. During the Long Walk, over 2,000 Navajos died (Tapanonso; Denetdale; Dunbar-Ortiz 138-139).

#### **Dawes Act of 1887 (General Allotment Act):**

This act served two purposes: (1) It was an attempt to make Native members individualized land-owners of specific land plots. This clearly exemplifies the point Scott Richard Lyons makes when he states, "In the context of the colonized scene of writing, the distinction between a nation-state and a nation-people might get at the root of why Indians and non-Indians tend to view things like treaties so differently even today" (456). The United States government functioned as a 'nation-state' in which an individualized "human capital" model was inherently at work. Many of the Native Nations and their 'governance' functioned as a 'nation-people' in which a collective and high-context model was inherently at work. The US nation-state attempted to prescribe nation-state thinking and land ownership to traditionally nation-people forms of Native governance. (2) It allowed the U.S. the 'right' to survey and break apart the land on reservations into land parcels, allowing spaces for predominantly white settlement on former Indian land. This fragmentation of the land and imposed Western views of land ownership were detrimental to the sacred view of land for many Native Nations (Harvard Project).

#### **Indian Citizenship Act of 1924:**

This act confirmed that all Native Americans born within the territorial limits of the United States were considered US citizens. This provided formerly restricted Native American voters a voice in the political landscape of the U.S. However, in some states, Native American voting rights were denied up until 1957. Before this act, blood quantum rules and limits barred Native Americans from voting (Dunbar-Ortiz 168-169).

#### **Indian Reorganization Act of 1934 (Wheeler-Howard Act):**

This act was known as the 'Indian New Deal,' as it offered a new structure for economic and governmental structures on reservations. It also overturned the Dawes Act of 1887 and alleviated the land loss that tribal nations were suffering during the time (The Harvard Project 19). However, as Roxane Dunbar-Ortiz points out, many tribes were against the IRA because it tried to enforce a system of governance and economic production model that was based on Western logic and did not uphold sacred aspects of Native logic and stewardship (169-170).

#### **Public Law 280 of 1953:**

Transferred police power/authority and criminal proceedings on reservations from federal jurisdiction to state jurisdiction (Dunbar-Ortiz 174).

#### **Indian Relocation Act of 1956 (Public Law 949):**

This act is probably the largest factor contributing to the contemporary existence of urban indigeneity in contemporary society today. The act allowed Indigenous individuals to move to cities and receive affordable housing and job placement through funds provided by the Bureau of Indian Affairs (Dunbar-Ortiz 174). Though this was a conscious gesture to provide the potential for economic prosperity, it also led to the growing disconnect between Native land and cultural heritage. With that being said, there are urban Indians that still practice and maintain traditionally Native values and lifestyle practices. Nevertheless, as of 2010, 78% of 5.2 million Indigenous peoples in America live off-reservation (2010 US Census Report).

## Indian Self-Determination & Education Assistance Act of 1975:

This act (largely spurred by the unethical management of the Fairchild's electronic assembly plant in New Mexico in regard to employment practices of Navajo workers) asserted "Indigenous control over their own social and economic development with continuation of federal financial obligations under treaties and agreements" (Dunbar-Ortiz 209).

## Cultural/Spiritual Context for Navajo Poetics: Navajo Creation Stories

**THE GLITTERING WORLD** is the world we live in today. When the First Man and the First Woman and Holy People left the First World (black), they ventured to the Blue world (where Coyote angered a monster), and then to the Yellow world (where the Holy People were introduced to corn). But, it is the glittering world (white) in which they settled and lived in the land and created the Four Sacred Mountains from the soil of the previous worlds. They created the mountains to mark and balance their homeland. These mountains include: the black, northern mountain, Dibé Ntsaa (Mt. Hesperus), the white, eastern mountain, the Holy direction, Sisnaajiní (Mt. Blanca), the blue, southern mountain, Tsoodzil (Mt. Taylor), and the yellow, western mountain, Dook'o'oolíid (the San Francisco Peaks).

While First Man was exploring the land, he heard the cries of a baby girl. In his search for her, he sang songs that are now used in the Blessingway Ceremony. He took her home to First Woman. When First Woman held the girl, the girl transformed into human form and was known as White Shell Girl (Tapahonso 16). They called for Old Salt Woman and celebrated the First Laugh Ceremony. In Navajo culture, a baby's first conscious laugh reveals that they are joining the world (in conscious thought and reason). Before the first laugh, a baby is still considered to be living among the Holy Ones. They adopted White Shell Girl as their own and she ate the food of the Holy Ones- corn pollen - and matured quickly. When she became a woman, they gave her the Blessingway Ceremony filled with song and celebration. It is the Blessingway that sets the foundation for the Navajo concept of Hozho, which means to walk in peace, harmony, and beauty. In four years (or four days according to some accounts), she became Asdzáá Nádleehé (Changing Woman). Her rite of passage into womanhood was celebrated by the ceremony of Kinaalda. The Holy People came to Changing Woman, who was dressed in the traditional clothes, wearing turquoise and shell jewelry. They brought twelve hogan songs, praying that she would be a good mother and grandmother. They prayed that she would respect and live from the natural elements- the land, wind, water, and fire. (Paraphrased from Denetdale 11-14).

In this creation story, First Man represents thought and First Woman represents speech. Therefore, as Witherspoon asserts, they constitute the linguistic structure from which Navajo philosophy evolves (18). Changing Woman's presence serves as a synthesis of both thought (inner form) and speech (outer form) in Dinetah.

\*Some disagreement exists over the number of worlds preceding the current world.

\*Some sources claim that White Shell Woman and Changing Woman (turquoise) are sisters. In this account, Changing Woman procreates Monster Slayer with the Sun and White Shell Woman procreates Born for Water with Water (Zolbrod 170-185).

**CHANGING WOMAN.** As Witherspoon states, "The Navajo World is stringently gendered, with male objects (and subjects) characterized by a 'static reality,' and females characterized by an 'active reality'" (141). Therefore, we might better understand the story of Changing Woman and her two sons in this way. Changing Woman ('active reality') and the Sun ('static reality'- static in the sense that the Sun is always there) had two sons, twins: Born for Water and Monster Slayer. When the twins grew into young manhood, they sought out their father, who gave them a series of tests. It was Spider Woman that protected the twins as they faced monsters (binaayee') released from the transgressions from the former worlds. The Sun (their father) provided the twins with magical tools to conquer these monsters (Tapahonso 17-18).

After the twins leave the home, Changing Woman grows lonely and creates the first five Navajo clans of people. She then moves into a house in the western mountain to be close to the sun. He is in charge of male rain and she controls female rain (Reichard 407). The first clan, both a male and female, she creates by rubbing skin from her feet -- He Walks Around One Clan. Then, she created the Bitterwater Clan, the Within His Cover People Clan, and the Mud People Clan from the skin around her breasts. Lastly, from the skin between her shoulders, she created the Close to Her Body Clan (Witherspoon 45). Other accounts vary in regard to the clans and number of clans created during that time. From this point forward, the Holy People were distinguished from the Earth Surface People. By means of a rainbow, the Holy People went to live within the four sacred mountains. In the early mornings, they return to offer blessings to those who wake up and remember the Holy Ones at the start of each day.

## **Pertinent Terminology/References:**

- 1. American Literary Consciousness:**
- 2. Foster's 'Languages' of Reading:**
- 3. The Body Politic:**
- 4. Settler Colonialism (Indigenous/Settler Binary):**
- 5. Contemporary Colonial Politics of Recognition:**
- 6. Politics of Difference:**
- 7. Cultural Assimilation:**
- 8. Cultural Acculturation:**
- 9. DuBois' Dual/Double Consciousness:**
- 10. Hegel's Master/Slave Dialectic:**
- 11. Fanon's Socio-Diagnostic Critique of Marxist Capitalism Paradigm:**
- 12. Lukacs' Mantra:**
- 13. Marxist Capitalism Paradigm:**
- 14. Neoliberal Economics:**
- 15. Indigeneity & Indigenous Identity:**
- 16. Navajo Nation/ Diné Identity:**
- 17. Literary Consciousness:**
- 18. English Linguistic Typology:**
- 19. Coulthard's Transformative Antagonisms:**
- 20. Détournement (Culture Jamming):**
- 21. Althusserian Ideology & Interpellation:**
- 22. Ideological State Apparatus:**
- 23. Low-Context Cultural Nation-State:**
- 24. High-Context Cultural Nation-Peoples:**
- 25. Lyon's View of Rhetorical Imperialism:**
- 26. Lyon's View of Rhetorical Sovereignty:**
- 27. Barthes' 'Plaisir' of the Text:**
- 28. Barthes' 'Jouissance' of the Text:**
- 29. Literary Symbol:**
- 30. Conventional Symbol:**
- 31. Navajo Concept of Four:**
- 32. Enjambment:**

- 33. Metonymy:
- 34. Synecdoche:
- 35. Frame Narrative Device:
- 36. Modes of Juxtaposition:
- 37. Harris & Bhandar's Notion of 'Whiteness as Property:'
- 38. Modes of Abstracted Property:
- 39. Silence Indicators in Poetry:

## "That American Flag" (Tapahonso 2008)

"I wouldn't buy anything with the flag on it," my friend said  
 as I showed her a cute straw handbag at Mervyn's one summer night.  
 It had a small beaded flag in the corner.  
 "There's just something about me and the flag," she said. I didn't respond.  
 Yes, the American flag is ubiquitous these days,  
 and we had done our share of marches, protests, and sit-ins in the 1970s.

But later that night, I wanted to call her and explain  
 about the American flag and us Navajos.  
 Let me tell you, I wanted to say, that in the mid-1800s  
 that flag meant fear and untold turmoil.  
 Let me tell you, there was little we understood about those  
 who followed the American flag onto our land That thin rectangle of fabric  
 rippled in the dry gusts of wind as the troops approached Dinétah.  
 Though the men were five-fingered like us, their words  
 seemed loud and careless, and their mannerisms, dramatic.  
 Still, we watched for signs of compassion,  
 as these soldiers had been born of a mother somewhere.  
 Their mothers had been delighted to hear their first words,  
 just as some of these men must have talked to their firstborn soothingly.  
 Perhaps as they walked on Diné Bikéyah, they longed for their families.  
 These men walked upright, feet moving upon the earth's surface, as we do.  
 From childhood they had grown upward toward the sun as the Diné do.  
 They breathed the air granted all of us by the Holy Ones.  
 They were like us in these ways, but their hearts were unyielding.  
 They were faithful to orders from afar.  
 They were faithful to voices they had not heard themselves.  
 They were bound by written orders and armed with deadly gear.  
 They were loyal to their flag of freedom.

The government had decreed that the Diné be moved to Fort Sumner  
 so that we could become Americans. We traveled hundreds of miles  
 to the south. The winters were cold;  
 our blankets became worn and frayed.  
 Though we were given jackets, wraps, and clothing,

the sick worsened, the elderly passed on, and often babies died at birth.  
At times the children played as children do anywhere;  
other times they were listless from hunger and fear.  
The men remained resilient: they talked late into the night  
and sang quietly so as not to disturb the soldiers. They prayed  
for the strength and insight to lead our people home.

The women set up looms, though they were immersed in grief.  
“We have to weave as we always have,” they said.  
“By weaving, we can make it through these waves of sorrow.”  
“Someday we’ll go home,” they said.  
“We have to weave through this hunger, through the pain,  
through the deaths that surround us. We have to keep up  
our strength,” they said. “We have to weave  
to remember our land, our relatives, and our animals.”

They unraveled the blue military jackets and red undergarments  
and wound them into balls of crinkled wool.  
They found bits of wool and cotton and sometimes sheep wool.  
The military clothes became thin red and blue stripes in the rugs.  
The stripes were laced, line by line – each weft tapped into place  
by the weaving comb – its venerable echo a comfort in itself.  
Sometimes they wove in strands of hair, feathers, bits of plants,  
and knots of corn pollen to ensure strength and abundance.  
These were offerings to the desolate land around them.  
The rugs were prayers, with red, blue, black, and white stripes.

The rugs’ white horizontal bands were for the early morning sky  
and signaled new beginnings.  
The background of the American flag is white,  
as is our sacred mountain in the east.  
Thus, the women knew we would survive.

The red stripes were for the dirt at home, the sandstone cliffs,  
and for the sumac that turns brilliant red each fall.  
The red stripes in the flag are for our blood and for our ancestors,  
who tried to search for the good in everyone and everything.

By weaving blue into rugs, the women recalled the hooghans  
they built when the men were gone. They recalled the graceful ease  
with which their teenage sons chopped wood, built corrals,  
and rode horses. In doing so, the women were reminded  
of their own strength. The blue in the flag is for the promise  
of each new spring granted us since Fort Sumner. The blue stripes  
honor the men and their strength, tenderness, and intellect.

Often, the women wove stars in the rug – its center is for our home,

Nihimá, the land that was given to us. We are told that  
a specific star watches over us, this star knows everything.  
The stars were prayers for the children who held the future –  
the ones who became our parents and grandparents.  
The flag's stars signaled our eventual return to Diné Bikéyah.

When the clouds gather and darken over Dinétah,  
The air becomes sweet with wet dirt, glistening sage, and creosote.  
The black bands are like a woman's hair pulled back in a tsiiyéél,  
which ensures clear thinking, guidance, and a wealth of songs and stories.

Sometimes when women wove crosses: a point  
for each direction and each of the sacred mountains.  
The four points signal the hope that the changing light of each new day brings.

Late that summer night, I wanted to tell my friend that  
we Navajos have many reasons not to honor the American flag,  
but often it reminds us of our grandparents' enduring courage.  
In the face of terrible odds, the stars and the stripes came to mean  
that we would return to our homeland. It taught us that our mother,  
Nahasdzáán, cares for us as we care for ourselves and our children.

Let me tell you about the American flag and us Diné, my friend.  
Let my grandparents: Shímásání dóó Schicheíí dóó Shináliké,  
let them tell you about the American flag.