

# Down by the River, or How Susan La Flesche Picotte Can Teach Us about Alliance as a Practice of Survivance

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*Five hundred years ago, a comet hit the continent to be called the Americas. That comet was European trans-Atlantic expansion. And with that expansion [. . .] the peoples of two other continents—Africa and the Americas—were declared lesser peoples, as were the island peoples of two oceans. Five hundred years ago. And the presence of those who were made less than—sharing a term with children—minors, minorities—remains somehow less than, a minor part of our discussions, a minor part of our professional histories, with so few exceptions that the exceptions become a kind of canon of color. [. . .] Who were the Cherokee or Navajo or Hopi or other American Indian rhetoricians speaking to or with white folks? [. . .] Who are they now? What do they say? How do they say it? How can what they say and how they say it inform our practices in rhetoric, in literature, in writing, in teaching?*

—Victor Villanueva

**T**his is a story.<sup>1</sup>

I write this story in the midst of a summer institute on Native American political activism sponsored by the Lannan Foundation, organized by the D'Arcy McNickle Center for American Indian History, and held at the Newberry Library in Chicago. The Newberry is a magnificent edifice built nearly on the shores of Lake Michigan on the land that Miamis once called *checagou*, the place of wild garlic/onions. I have been working to tell this story, in some form or

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another, for at least a dozen years; it's a difficult story to tell. This story comes, as all stories do, from a much larger, more complicated accumulation of stories—a larger personal and scholarly project than the scope of a single scholarly essay can contain. That larger scholarly project listens both to late-nineteenth-century European American reform discourse about American Indians and to the responses to/negotiations of that discourse offered by four prominent Native people who had extended interactions with Eastern reformers—Sarah Winnemucca Hopkins (Northern Paiute), Charles Alexander Eastman (Santee Dakota), Susan La Flesche Picotte (Omaha), and Andrew Blackbird (Harbor Springs Ojibwe/Odawa). The small portion of that story recorded in these pages touches on two intersecting sites of textual production in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries—the Women's National Indian Association and the writings of Dr. Susan La Flesche Picotte.<sup>2</sup> This story is just the beginning of what could/should be said about the alliance and adaptation tactics used by La Flesche; nevertheless, all stories must start somewhere, so I begin.

*Myaamia.* We emerged from a pool of water at *Sakiwayungi*, the coming-out place, near what is now South Bend, Indiana. When we emerged we took hold of one another and used tree branches to pull one another onto the banks of *Sakivasipiwi*, the Coming-Out River (now the St. Joseph). We made a village there and our living drew connections between the People and the land. In 1654, when French explorers Pierre-Esprit Radisson and Médard Chouart, sieur des Groseilliers, came upon our village near what is now the Fox River in Wisconsin, we had moved north to avoid the ugliness of the Iroquois Wars, but we were back home by 1670. Once home, we helped build what Richard White has come to call “the middle ground”—a political, economic, and social system based on equal sharing and borrowing between allies (50). By the late eighteenth century, the pressures of increased white settlement prompted Mishikinakwa (Little Turtle) to create the Miami Confederacy—a powerful alliance of Miamis, Shawnees, Delawares, Wyandots, Ottawas, Ojibwes, Pottawatomis, and others—to resist those pressures. It was these allied tribal nations who defeated General Arthur St. Clair one sunny November morning in 1791, an event that still stands as the largest military defeat ever suffered by an American army at the hands of Native peoples.<sup>3</sup> Our strength was, and is, in alliance and in the ability to adapt to rapidly changing worlds. We borrowed European goods and ideas, and these became part of our cultural traditions. After all, *all* cultures must change if they are to survive.

I offer this beginning, an emergence, in order to properly respond to Victor Villanueva's call—both the one he penned for this special issue of *College English*, and the more persistent one that he has issued time and time again in print, in presentation, in person, and in presence. That is, that as a discipline we must stop our easy and narrow reliance on Greek, Roman, European, even European American

thinkers; that “we must break from the colonial mindset and learn from the thinkers from our own hemisphere” (“On” 659). I don’t want to imply here that Villanueva is the only senior scholar of color in our discipline who has spent a great deal of time wrangling with issues of canon and exclusion in his scholarly work, his administrative tasks, his mentoring, his life. He *did* issue the call, though, and so, in this essay, his presence is meant to invoke the presence of dozens of other folks who’ve spent decades working for a more inclusive disciplinary narrative. But part of my argument here is to say that we must get beyond our efforts toward inclusion, not because inclusion is bad—the inclusion model has been useful in getting some conversations started about the centrality of race/ethnicity/gender/orientation/class to the study of rhetoric and the teaching of writing—but because cultures that do not change cannot survive. So, to properly respond to Villanueva is a daunting task, one that requires *cuentos*, *historias*, the voices of others to help me ward off the dangers embedded in academic discourse, a discourse that evokes “the worst excesses of colonialism [. . .] that still offend the deepest sense of our humanity” (Tuhiwai Smith 1). To gather together the necessary strength with which to respectfully attend to Villanueva’s insistent call, and to keep this story anchored in the practices of alliance and adaptation that have been important to the tribal nations of this continent for thousands of years, I must give credit where credit is due. So I have gathered up some of the voices of my scholarly relations and have included them throughout this essay as something other than logical, rational, context-bound “citations.” These voices reflect a slice of the accumulated cacophony of story, history, community through which my ability to engage in what Craig Womack has called “the nastiness of a profession that is just pitiful mean” is made possible (20). While I won’t smooth the emergence of these voices within the text, I will tell you that they are meant to be deliberately difficult moments for the reader. I want you to stop and puzzle through the various connective possibilities, to stumble and question and work at making meaning with them. I offer these voices to you not as a trick, but as a beginning, a hint toward the difficult intellectual work that lies ahead if we are to begin together the task of envisioning a Rhetoric and Composition alliance; these voices are a pathway to a middle ground teeming with change and possibility.

*Every Indian I meet is writing a story [. . .] doing what our ancestors had done for millennia [. . .] integrating oral traditions, histories, and experiences into narratives and expanding our identity. (Howe 46)*

In his introduction to the second of CCC’s fiftieth anniversary issues, Joe Harris claims that “a key move in forming a critical history of composition” has been a move “towards a focus on the wider social practices, contexts, and discourses that have shaped and driven the teaching of writing” (559). In the past few years, Native scholars in rhetoric and composition have issued some tantalizing calls for American

Indian rhetorics and for the significance of American Indian texts in the future of Rhetoric and Composition as a discipline. We have encouraged the discipline to focus, for a moment, on a wider social practice, context, and discourse than has been considered relevant to both the teaching of writing and the study of rhetoric before. I want us to take American Indians seriously, both contemporary scholars and historical figures, a task at which Rhetoric and Composition has “done a pretty good job of not doing a very good job” (Powell, “Rhetorics” 397; see also Lyons). I used to believe that this was either from a lack of access to accurate knowledge concerning Native peoples, or from the absence of the kind of persistence necessary to seriously engage in the simultaneous demythologizing and context building that working with Native texts requires. And while either explanation could be true enough, these reasons don’t, in the end, explain enough about the persistent absence of Indians from disciplinary conversations that have come to define “us,” the discipline, “our” inquiry, or materials deemed relevant to “our” future. I put these pronouns under quotation because if there is some collective sense of group identity in “our” discipline, it has, as Villanueva’s call for papers accurately points out, exercised a good deal of energy toward a sort of determined neglect of “those who were made less” through the processes and discourses of empire which constituted these United States.

But my point in even briefly engaging this absence is not to launch an exhaustive critique of the discipline; it is, instead, to propose that we imagine, for a moment, a usable past in which Native peoples’ writings (and African American and Chicano/Latino and Asian American, et cetera) aren’t just included but are, instead, critically important. To do this, we’ll need to undo what Jacqueline Jones Royster and Jean C. Williams call “primacy”—the status given to “official” (that is: dominant) viewpoints (580). According to them, “the privilege of primacy [. . .] sets in motion a struggle” between “official” and “unofficial” disciplinary narratives (580). They rightly claim that this struggle “shows itself vibrantly in composition studies” (580). To their analysis I would add that the language in which this struggle is named—dominant/oppressed, center/margins, colonizer/colonized—is itself a trap, an integral part of the rhetoric of empire. We need a new language, one that doesn’t convince us of our unutterable and ongoing differences, one that doesn’t force us to see one another as competitors. We need a language that allows us to imagine respectful and reciprocal relationships that acknowledge the degree to which we need one another (have needed one another) in order to survive and flourish. We need, I would argue, an alliance based on the shared assumption that “surviving genocide and advocating sovereignty and survival” has been a focus for many of the people now on this continent for several centuries and, as such, should also be at the center of our scholarly and pedagogical practices enacted in these United States (Womack 7). I propose this reimagined alliance not out of idealism, but out of my historical understanding of the ways in which such practices were central to the earliest treaty-relationships

between folks who would later be called “American Indians” and the European explorers, traders, and settlers who came to this continent.

This story, then, has a continental history of at least five hundred years, a history that arises from diplomatic discourses that were rooted in indigenous insistence on shared relations and shared responsibilities between partners.<sup>4</sup> As Robert A. Williams Jr. explains it: “[T]here was a time when the West had to listen seriously to these indigenous tribal visions of how different peoples might live together in relationships of trust, solidarity, and respect” (*Linking* 5). These visions converged “in a distinctive language of multicultural diplomacy” (11), a language that helped Native peoples adapt “their long-held traditions to the challenges of survival in their rapidly changing world” by creating “new legal meanings” (28). According to Williams, this language frequently used the tropology of reciprocal relations—phrases such as “linking arms together” or “eating from the same bowl”—and became a way through which Europeans and Natives could imagine a *nomos*—a “normative universe of shared meanings” (47). This *nomos* was necessary for the mutual survival of both parties, be they Iroquois or English, Miami or French. So what I am suggesting here, dear readers, is that, at least for the rest of this story, we become allies, not competing individuals, working toward the survival of our shared community, for if my scholarly survival depends upon you, then, surely, yours must also depend upon me.

*[I]n Western culture we have constructed a philosophy of knowledge that not only devalues the practices of the everyday, but also devalues the knowledge of those who function in that context. [. . .] Users are producers of knowledge, but their modes of production have been rendered invisible by those modern cultural proclivities that subordinate the user to being a mere practitioner. (Jobson 56–57)*

If we are to be allies, we must share some understanding of one another’s beliefs. We don’t have to *believe* one another’s beliefs, but we do have to acknowledge their importance, understand them as real, and respect/honor them in our dealings with one another. So, for example, if I quote Aristotle instead of Joy Harjo, it doesn’t mean that I believe in his words more than hers; it is simply a respectful gesture, an acknowledgement of the beliefs of my allies.<sup>5</sup> Since I have spent much of my life listening to, and learning to understand, European American stories about theory and practice, I want to here offer two stories of my own that concern the same topics. *Story #1*: I am sitting at a long folding table piled with pictures, carbon paper, beads, needles, thread, and wax with four other women, all of us bent fixedly over the small rounds of buckram upon which we are laboring to create beadwork medallions. Our work is slow because we are beginners but our teacher, Evelyn, an Oklahoma Miami elder whose warmth is equaled by her skill and experience as an artist, is kind. She sits by me, on my right, and watches me make a complete circular row in the turtle pattern I’m trying not to ruin. She has been beside me long enough that I

forget she's there as I squint and struggle until she lays her hands on top of mine and rearranges the way that I am holding everything—the beaded thread and needle, the buckram circle, my head and shoulders. She tells me, “Honey, don't work so hard—it should feel just right when you do it, just like this, comfortable but controlled—you don't want your hands to cramp up. Everybody's different, y'know, but you want to be comfortable while you're beading—I can show you what I know, and then you'll learn to feel it and really get it down.” “See?” she says, as she watches and then walks away. *Story #2*: A year later, I'm sitting at yet another table with yet another group of learners. This time we're trying round brick-stitching, a one-bead-at-a-time kind of proposition. We are chatting with our teacher, Robin, an Eastern Cherokee woman who is a well-established local artist. One of the women at our table has been struggling with the piece she's working on, and finally gets so frustrated that she begins to tear out what she's done thus far, saying “It isn't as perfect as I want it.” Robin laughs:

Oh, it can be frustrating, I know, but, you know, no one is perfect, not one thing I make is perfect, but that's not why I make things. My elders always taught me that our ancestors decorated their clothes and their personal things as a way to thank the animals and plants they used to survive. So, when I'm having a hard time I just get up and take a big breath and go outside and remember that it's respect for other living things I celebrate with my art—not my own ego.

Two claims: first, I learned about “rhetoric” from my home communities; second, I learned how to theorize (what my grandma calls “talk fancy”) that knowledge through my interactions and relationships, both textual and personal, with Native scholars, with other scholars of color, and with allies who care enough about us to engage seriously with our ways of knowing and theorizing the world. What all of this adds up to for me is a negotiated set of reading/living tactics. For example, I was academically trained as a scholar of rhetoric, and I have come to understand rhetoric as

- an art, a *techne*—“a reasoned habit of mind in making [. . .] concerned with coming into being and contriving and seeing how something may come to be among things that are capable of being and not being” (Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics* 6.4.1 1140A3–4);
- an art through which meaning is made and action produced across a variety of human situations;
- an art that links theory (how the world might work) to practice (how we make things work in the world);
- an art that sees *use* as a practice that connects the past to the present and the future through bodies situated in particular configurations of history, culture, economics, genders, and geographies;<sup>6</sup> and
- an art that sees *users* as engaged in discursive productions across which human interaction, manipulation, and negotiation are the common threads.

I came to the study of rhetoric and to the teaching of writing, though, with these theoretical understandings *already* firmly in mind; that is, that human beings learn to produce texts through both theory and practice, by listening and by doing; that “successful” texts are collaborative and are meant for the community, not for the self; and that through continued textual production the community (and the knowledge of its members) survives and gives thanks for its survival. If we are to “eat from the same bowl,” then we must find a way to honor a complex notion of texts that encompasses both beadwork and books as artifacts produced by users who have “the ability to act quickly, effectively, and prudently within ever-changing contexts” (Johnson 53), but that doesn’t ignore the particular circumstances of their production and meaning within specific cultural discourses. In order to be allies, we have to listen to one another, and we have to believe.

*If we take a look at the nineteenth century, we might note two facts: lots of whites spoke on behalf of Indians, and when Indians did author their own books, they had to address a white audience, since they were writing in English, and their people, for the most part, couldn't read them. Those days are over. (Womack 21)*

I move now to those intersecting sites of textual production that I referred to in the beginning of this story. My own reimagining of Susan La Flesche Picotte here is mainly a rhetorical sketch that investigates her relationship to the audience of her time, philanthropically minded European American Protestants who were active in Indian reform organizations at the turn of the twentieth century. Frequently referred to as the “friends of the Indian,” these reformers focused their energies on what was called “the Indian problem,” or “the Indian question,” a problem/question that was “intimately related to a vision of America as abundant and bountiful, ripe for the enactment of the desires of those who constituted the new nation” (Powell, “Rhetorics” 401). Of course, the “problem” with this vision was that those “abundant” lands were already inhabited by thousands of people who, literally and figuratively, needed to be “unseen” (see Powell, “Blood”). The discursive mechanisms through which this “unseeing” was enacted can be at least partly explained by what Roy Harvey Pearce calls the colonists’ belief in “a theory of the savage” which creates Indians *as* the past, a formative stage which is the absolute opposite of the European American, who becomes the present and the future.<sup>7</sup> It was this theory/language that made it possible for President Ulysses S. Grant to deploy his “peace policy” against surviving American Indian nations, and it was the deeply paternalistic discourse generated by this policy in reform circles that led to the “intense public interest in the Ponca tour” (Mathes, *Helen* 6).<sup>8</sup> For those not familiar with post-bellum American history, the Ponca “problem” was created by one of those famous Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA) “mistakes” so common in U.S. governmental dealings with Native nations. When the Great Sioux Reservation was created in 1868, the BIA

“mistakenly” included lands previously reserved for the Poncas. The “fix” for this oversight was to remove the Poncas to Indian Territory (Oklahoma), where land and food were quite scarce. One Ponca leader—Standing Bear—after two years in substandard living conditions, and after the death of his own son, decided to return to those previously reserved lands in what is now Nebraska. Because it was illegal for Indians to leave reservation lands without the permission of the agent, Standing Bear and his traveling party were apprehended by federal troops and returned to the territory. This event drew the attention of Thomas Tibbles, a former abolitionist, who then brought the situation to the attention of the Eastern press. In August of 1879, Standing Bear, accompanied by Tibbles, Tibbles’s soon-to-be wife Susette La Flesche (Bright Eyes), and her young brother Francis, began giving lectures in the reform-minded East.

*Native peoples, and their stories and histories are not a social studies unit of an interesting sub-category. [. . .] We are American history. [. . .] Every track and trace of the American experience runs through our communities, our culture. We have been the transformers so much more than we are ever credited to have been. I am so tired of our image as the transformed—the lost, the dead, always those who are acted upon, always those who have been pushed to the edges, where we can be watched compassionately, nostalgically, seen as little more than a decorative fringe. (Susan Power; qtd. in Howe 45)*

The Ponca incident is significant in the way it galvanized reformers, particularly in its effect on Helen Hunt Jackson. An influential writer who had previously been uninterested in Indian affairs, Jackson was outraged over the treatment of the Poncas and became “a veritable one-person reform movement” (Prucha 627). Well-educated and outspoken, Jackson had close ties to the literati and publishers in Boston and New York. She heard Standing Bear speak while he was in Boston and was immediately inspired. She confessed to her good friend Thomas Wentworth Higginson, “I think I feel as you must have felt in the old abolition days. I cannot think of anything else from morning to night” (qtd. in Mathes, *Helen* 21). She “became one of Susette’s closest companions and strongest allies in the fight for recognition of and enhancement of the Indian’s rights” (Street 516). Jackson encouraged her influential friends to hear Standing Bear and to support the Ponca cause. She also began a long-running feud with then Secretary of the Interior Carl Schurz, carried out mostly in newspaper editorials published in the *New York Tribune* and the *Boston Daily Advertiser*. Soon, Jackson’s outrage extended to treatment of the Ute, the Cheyenne, and the Arapaho. She confessed to Charles Dudley Warner, co-proprietor and co-editor of the *Hartford Courant*, that she wanted to write “simply and curtly a Record of our Broken Treaties—& call it ‘A Century of Dishonor’” (qtd. in Mathes 33). She claims that she “never so much as dreamed what we had been guilty of” in dealings with Indian nations and that she wanted “to awaken the conscience of

America to the flagrant wrongs that had been perpetrated upon the Indians” (qtd. in Mathes 33, Prucha 627). She wrote *A Century of Dishonor* in seven months and spent two additional months gathering materials for the appendix. Jackson received a “wet copy” of *Century* in January of 1881 and distributed special copies of it to every member of Congress.

*Century* is a collection of narratives about past injustices, and Jackson herself claims that it is “only a sketch, and not a history” (*Century* 7). It is also a nearly perfect example of the sentimental outrage and persuasive style that characterize this period of reform writings. Native people are throughout portrayed as the “helpless” objects of the “dishonorable conduct” of the U.S. government (27, 18). Jackson introduces her study with a long argument about the “right of occupancy” of Indian peoples to the lands that contain the United States. Marshaling a host of “expert” opinions on these matters from writers such as Vattel, Hobbes, Grotius, and others, and citing copiously from actual treaties and Supreme Court cases, Jackson uses the language of jurisprudence mixed with that of Christian morality to explain, in detail, “the shame of breaking national compacts, and the wickedness of the nations that dare to do it” (23). Her conclusion is, of course, that “[t]he history of the United States Government’s repeated violations of faith with the Indians thus convicts us, as a nation, not only of having outraged the principles of justice, which are the basis of international law; and of having laid ourselves open to the accusation of both cruelty and perfidy; but of having made ourselves liable to all punishments which follow upon such sins” (29). To address these violations, Indians are to be given citizenship, education, and property (340–41)—the triumvirate solution of the reform movement. After the publication of *Century*, Jackson went to work on behalf of the Mission Indians of Southern California, while continuing to use her well-placed friends and associates to publicize her cause. Her early death in 1885 made her a martyr to reform groups like the Women’s National Indian Association.

*We are too habituated to the images of violent and brutal race wars [ . . . ]. We have difficulty conceiving of these two different groups of peoples [Indians and whites] sharing the identity interests necessary to make any sort of intercultural cooperation possible during any period of our history. (Williams, Linking 20)*

The organization that would become the Women’s National Indian Association (WNIA) was formed in 1879 in Philadelphia. The WNIA began as the Indian committee of the Women’s Home Mission Society of the First Baptist Church, organized by Amelia Quinton and Mary Bonney. They, too, were outraged at the Ponca affair and “hoped to stir up the god-fearing people of the United States” (Prucha 612) by “[r]eviving the old abolitionist tactic of presenting petitions to Congress” to demand reforms in the Indian Bureau (Hoxie 11). In June of 1881 they changed their name to the Indian Treaty-keeping and Protective Association and in October

of 1883 to the Women's National Indian Association. By 1883 this women's association had eighty-three national branches and a large contributions pool. Their actions consisted of presenting petitions, circulating educational literature, holding public meetings, and establishing missions with tribal groups across the country. In Amelia Quinton's essay "Care of the Indian" (1891), she writes that the "first impulse" of the WNIA "was an impulse of protection for Indians and their lands from the robberies and horrors of enforced removals" and a plea for "treaty-keeping and the honest observance of all compacts with the Indians" (386). She attributes these desires to "a common humanity" that recognized "the manhood and womanhood of Indians" (386). Quinton cites, again and again, the ways in which Indians are at the mercy of the government and the military, and it is this fact of their utter victimhood that "thunder[s] out appeals to Christian consciences" (386). Quinton neatly joins the already common trope of Christian parenting—the federal government was called the Great White Father—with the seemingly progressive notion that Indians are full human beings and, as such, are candidates for all the rights and privileges of citizenship.

The WNIA's first petition, sent to the President and to Congress in 1880, condemned the invasion of Indian lands by white settlers and contained thirteen thousand signatures. In 1883 a committee of the whole delivered to the President a four-pronged petition, signed by one hundred thousand people, which was also read by Senator Henry Dawes to the Senate. Their demands were straightforward: that the government maintain all treaties "with scrupulous fidelity"; that it make provision for reservation schools "sufficient for the education of every child of every tribe"; that it allot 160 acres of land in severalty (fee simple, inalienable for twenty years) to every Indian who desired it; and that it grant Indians full rights under the laws of the United States, including those that grant religious liberty, while implementing programs that would encourage Indians in industry and trade (Quinton 382n).

The WNIA distributed copies of their annual reports as well as hundreds of leaflets on Indian rights. They pushed for wider circulation of books that agreed with their position on the Indian question (for instance, they bankrolled Andrew Blackbird's turn-of-the-century publication of "The Indian Question from the Indian Point of View") and put together press kits for reporters and newspapers as well as creating a presence in regional religious and secular papers. At public meetings, organized by branch groups and local churches across the East and Midwest, they spoke to interested citizens about their "national duty to the Indians" as missionaries and Christians (Prucha 614). In its own descriptive pamphlet entitled "Our Work—How? What? Why?" (January 1893), the WNIA describes its work as twofold:

It is the work of informing the public regarding the needs, capabilities and progress of our native Indians, and also, by direct appeals, it is the work of moving the Government to render just help to them. It also points out how Indians may wisely be helped

industrially, educationally, morally and religiously, and it seeks to win such help for them.

Second, it is the work of sending helpers to reside among Indians to labor for their instruction and elevation, to assist them in home building, in special and professional education, by hospital work, and in all other practical and practicable ways. (2)

As historian Valerie Mathes writes, the women of the WNIA believed that if they could pressure the government to adopt policies of “equity and justice to Indian affairs,” this would “gradually lead to the abolition of the reservation system and [would] hasten the civilization, Christianization, and enfranchisement” of Native peoples (*Helen* 16–17). This mission is apparent to some degree in the life and writings of one of their most successful enfranchisees, Susan La Flesche Picotte. Born around 1865 in the Omaha Nation (now Nebraska), Susan La Flesche was the daughter of then-principal chief Joseph (Iron Eyes) La Flesche and Mary Gale. Of mixed ancestry—Omaha, Oto, Iowa, Ponca, French Canadian, and European American—Susan La Flesche was enrolled as an Omaha, was a fluent speaker of Umohan, and devoted her life to improving living and health conditions for the people of the Omaha Nation.

*I feel that Native perspectives have to do with allowing Indian people to speak for themselves, that is to say, with prioritizing Native voices. (Womack 4)*

The prominence of the La Flesche family in what is now northeastern Nebraska and southeastern South Dakota, combined with the activities of her well-known East Coast siblings—activist and “Indian Princess” Susette La Flesche Tibbles and ethnologist-in-the-making Francis La Flesche—offered Susan many opportunities. One event that highlights the prominence of the La Flesche family in powerful East Coast reform and philanthropy circles is the 1880 publication of the La Flesche sisters’ letters in *St. Nicholas Magazine*, a well-known juvenile periodical.<sup>9</sup> Susette, the eldest, begins the four-letter series with, “I do not know whether you allow ‘Savages’ in your ‘Letter Box,’ but my two younger sisters seem to have no doubt whatever on the subject,” and continues by saying that her letter is really that of her “little brother Mitchell,” a six-year-old who is “unable to write for himself” (qtd. in Street 517).<sup>10</sup> The rest of Susette’s letter tells a story that illustrates Mitchell’s fear of white men, especially whenever he sees “a good number of them together” (“Letterbox” 918). Marguerite’s letter sharpens the point of her little brother’s fear—she writes: “Sometimes I am sorry that the white people ever came to America. What nice times we used to have” (918). Rosalie’s letter is fairly forthright, beginning with “I am one of four Indian girls who read and like you very much” and then offering a brief recounting of a buffalo hunt she went on as a child, before such hunts were made illegal. Susan’s letter displays the forthright yet tempered approach of her later writings:

I am a little Indian girl twelve years old. I go to school at the Omaha agency. I study geography, history, grammar, arithmetic, and spelling. I read in the Fifth Reader. I have three other sisters and two brothers. Sometimes father, mother and grandmother come to see us. My father was a chief for fifteen years. My brother Frank [Francis] once killed a deer, right by our house. Some Senators and Congressmen came to see the Omahas. They all came to our house and sang "Hold the Fort" with us. My oldest sister played backgammon with one of the Congressmen and beat him. (Qtd. in Street 522)

Though less directly critical than Marguerite, Susan's "report" contains some interesting elements common in Native writings of this time period, including the statement of her "qualifications" (her schooling), the mention of her family's status, and some "innocent" ironies—like her family's singing "Hold the Fort" with policymakers and Susette's abilities to beat white men at their own game.

*History is important, not just in terms of who writes it and what gets included or excluded, but also because history, by the very nature of its inscription as history, has social, political, and cultural consequences. (Royster and Williams 563)*

La Flesche's way of dealing with European Americans and European American culture, displayed at such an early age is, for me, powerfully persuasive evidence of the alliance and adaptation tactics some Native people engaged in as they negotiated themselves as civilized Indians at the end of the nineteenth century. La Flesche isn't struggling here, she isn't "torn" between cultures; at the age of twelve, her letter to *St. Nicholas* shows the degree to which she simply *is*—an "Indian" girl who studies and reads and sings with Senators. While her older sisters are critically aware of the difference between most of the readers of *St. Nicholas* magazine and themselves as "Savages," Susan does not bother with that distinction at all. Her lack of doubt about the appropriateness of an Omaha girl reading, and writing to, the magazine has clear roots in her own experiences of education as an "Indian." She began her formal education at the age of three in a Presbyterian mission boarding school close to home. When Grant's peace policy closed the Presbyterian school, she continued her studies at the Quaker day school opened nearby. In 1879 she enrolled at the Elizabeth Institute for Young Ladies in New Jersey, the same school from which Susette had already graduated. She took her sister Marguerite with her. In 1884 she enrolled at the Hampton Institute, a move much facilitated by Alice Fletcher, an ethnologist and family friend who helped her gain the sponsorship of the Smith College mission society.<sup>11</sup> This time she took not only Marguerite but also her brother Caryl and ten other Omaha children with her. While at Hampton she lived in Winona Lodge, the new thirty-thousand-dollar girls' dormitory built with funds raised by Susette. Hampton is where La Flesche became formally involved in the various reform activities of the day—she was a member of the Lend-a-Hand Club, the Temperance Committee, and the Christian Endeavor Society—and where, I would argue,

she was able to negotiate a more sophisticated and audience-focused version of the rhetorical certainty she displayed in her *St. Nicholas* writings, a certainty that never questions her ability to fully participate in European American culture and continue to think of herself as an Omaha, an Indian. This more complex rhetorical approach, a practice I have elsewhere articulated as “survivance,” can be seen in the published version of the salutatory address she delivered during her graduation from Hampton in 1886. As LeAnne Howe argues,

*Native stories are power. They create people. They author tribes. America is a tribal creation story, a tribalography. As numerous as Indian tribes, creation stories gave birth to our people, and it is with absolute certainty that I tell you now: our stories also created the immigrants who landed on our shores. (Howe 29)*

La Flesche begins her speech with the customary welcome to the audience and the trustees of Hampton. Immediately in these conventional prefaces, she marks herself as “raced,” makes clear the responsibility that she feels her educational privilege has conferred upon her, and constructs that responsibility as one shared by her classmates, the combined community of American Indians and African Americans who attend Hampton. She writes: “[W]e remember the help which you have given our races through us, and our hearts are strengthened anew in our resolve to do our best in working for our people,” noting that the “kindly interest in the welfare and progress of two races” expressed by the presence of those in the audience “means more to us to-day than ever before; for in Congress a short time ago the question was agitated whether the Indian is worth civilizing, whether the work that Hampton and Carlisle are doing for us is worth carrying on?” (“My” 78). In the first few minutes of her address, La Flesche has managed to perform a number of complicated rhetorical tasks in appealing to the philanthropic impulse of the “dear friends” and “honored Trustees” gathered at this graduation ceremony. I am always struck by the picture she must have presented, standing there as salutatorian addressing classmates of “two races” before an audience of mostly white faces, pointing out that even Congress wasn’t certain that she and her classmates were worth educating.

Beyond this simple picture, though, lies a complicated negotiation of that very “civilizing” process. The two thousand words that follow her welcome, titled “My Childhood and Womanhood,” are a careful compilation of childhood memories and school and family experiences, finished with a statement about her future plans. A fairly conventional “graduation speech” format, but one that contains its own surprises nonetheless. For instance, she presents us with two early childhood memories, the first “in the wilds of Nebraska, in the year of 1866” at “a solitary farm-house standing on the banks of a large creek,” a place where Indians were welcomed and “where my childhood began” (78). The second memory, one of her “first distinct remembrances” was being “sent to the mission school” (78). La Flesche describes

the mission as situated on “one of the most picturesque places I have ever seen” (78). Many readers might expect this trajectory from the wilds of Nebraska to the mission school to culminate in some sort of triumphant progressive exclamation, but La Flesche quickly denies those expectations. She informs the audience: “I can’t say that I learned very much, for sometimes the teacher used to put a newspaper over his head, calmly lean back in his seat and repose in placid slumber, while one of the little heathens took up the book and tried to ‘teach the young idea to shoot’” (78). She wryly comments further that “some heathen try to live up to their light” (78). So La Flesche interrupts a familiar nostalgic narrative in order to insert an ironic point—that the Indian children at the mission school were more interested in learning (more “civilized”) than their white teacher was in teaching. This short episode also makes it clear that Native people who wanted an education couldn’t depend on the government to “give” them one—they’d have to aggressively hunt one down for themselves.

*As a Native fiction writer I sometimes think of my work as consisting of little more than pointing out the bloody obvious. (Power; qtd. in Howe 45)*

This necessity gets reinforced in the second move of the story, as La Flesche returns to childhood remembrance in all its nostalgic glory. She informs us, “In the long summer evenings we would watch the young men at their different games. [. . .] The handsome, stalwart young braves looked very fine and picturesque. [. . .] Then as the sun went down behind the hills leaving purple shadows, calls to the evening meal came from every house” (78). This dreamy picture gets immediately interrupted by stories about her family and their efforts to be “civilized”—“My father secured a farm of 160 acres, and built a house. Although we were rather young, still father taught us to work. We planted corn, hoed potatoes, and weeded vegetables” (78)—but even her turn to this “bootstraps” narrative can be heard as an attempt to create a narrative in which almost any person in her audience (Native, European American, or African American) could participate. She spends several paragraphs describing farm life on the Plains in its beauty—“Oh! For the delight of those days, as the reaper cut down the golden grain”—and its hardships—“[carrying water] was a weary, toilsome walk, clear down to the spring and back again under the hot sun, through the stubble, barefooted” (78). Once she has sufficiently established her Omaha family as happily and energetically agrarian, she begins, again, to talk of schooling. She writes: “My father and mother are not educated. They cannot speak English, but they felt the need of education, and did not want us to go through what they had experienced, so father sent us to the Agency school, three miles away” (78).

In this statement, one that successfully addresses her audience’s beliefs about education and its necessity in the lives of the “two races” educated at Hampton, La Flesche also inaugurates a story about the sacrifices Native people are willing to

endure in order to obtain this cultural capital. The entire La Flesche family certainly believed that European American-style education was an essential component of a future for Omahas and other Native peoples. It's this belief that led to the domestic situation out of which the La Flesche sisters' letters to *St. Nicholas* were produced. Those letters, remember, were written in 1877, during a time when the girls shared "a little brown house at the Agency, three miles away, so as to be near the school-house, where one of us [Susette] was to teach" (83). It's important here to note that La Flesche's belief in the importance of European American education doesn't diminish the expression of her sense of responsibility to her people. She makes it clear that the two are linked, that "from the outset the work of an Indian girl is plain before her" (83). She states her responsibility clearly: "When the Pilgrims first came to this country they were pioneers of American civilization. We who are educated have to be pioneers of Indian civilization. We have to prepare our people" (83). The structure through which La Flesche makes "American civilization" parallel to "Indian civilization" is interesting here. Though she admits that Native peoples must learn to "to use the white man's books, and to use his laws," the implication is that "Indian" civilization need not look exactly like "American" civilization. Indeed, as one of the "pioneers" of this Native future, La Flesche can work to better the health of her people, to ensure their survival; "with a good knowledge of medicine" she can literally improve their lives, all the while having "an advantage over a white physician in that [she] know[s] the language, customs, habits and manners" of her people (83). This, she writes, is "what I hope to accomplish in my womanhood," "to labor among my people, to help" ensure their survival (83).

*I am placing myself in the same position as every American Indian person who struggles to find a way toward a self-determined future. (Warrior xxiii)*

In 1886 La Flesche applied to the Woman's Medical College in Philadelphia, again with the help of Fletcher, to whom she had confided that she would like to "instruct [Indians] in the laws of health" and "minister to them in sickness" (qtd. in Tong 57). Though the federal government did not provide for the professional education of Native people, Fletcher had been able to secure a BIA promise for part of La Flesche's tuition; however, suspicious of government promises and bureaucracy, Fletcher also helped La Flesche secure funding from the Connecticut auxiliary of the Women's National Indian Association (CIA) whose president, Sara Thomas Kinney, she'd met at the annual Lake Mohonk Conference. La Flesche wrote to Kinney, "[I]t has always been a desire of mine to study medicine ever since I was a small girl for even then I saw the needs of my people for a good physician" (16 June 1886, qtd. in Mathes, "Susan" 175). The CIA raised money by placing an appeal on behalf of La Flesche in the *Hartford Courant* (edited by Mr. Kinney) and by then publishing a letter from Susan herself. She wrote: "I feel that as a physician I can do

a great deal more than as a mere teacher, for the *home* is the foundation of all things for the Indians, and my work I hope will be chiefly in the homes of my people” (qtd. in Mathes “Susan” 174), and “[I am] glad that through me you will be helping so many people” (qtd. in Tong 65–66). Further, Kinney appealed to then–Commissioner of Indian Affairs, John D. C. Atkins, requesting that some of the moneys held for general Indian education be released to La Flesche for medical school, arguing that she “would minister to the physical needs of the women and children” (qtd. in Tong 67). Kinney’s argument meshed perfectly with another of the assumptions of the WNIA—a belief expressed in one of their pamphlets, “Training Indian Girls” (Etnier): “[W]hatever pertains to the training and development of the future womanhood of any race touches the national life at its heart’s core” (1). However, significant to my story about La Flesche is the way in which she clearly states her goals as similar to the WNIA’s but also clearly articulates herself as an Omaha, an Indian, and as part of her home community.

La Flesche graduated from medical school in March of 1889, the first female American Indian M.D. in the country. She immediately applied for a government position at the Omaha agency and became physician to the government boarding school there. By the end of that year she had been appointed the BIA physician for the entire Agency. I want to stop for a moment here to mark the particular significance of this historical moment for Native peoples. In March of 1889, Congress had amended a regular Indian appropriations bill in such a way that it was possible for President Benjamin Harrison, using lands made available through the “surplus” provisions of the General Allotment Act, to authorize the opening of these now “unoccupied” lands in Indian Territory to white settlement. The Oklahoma land rush began on April 22, 1889; fifty thousand white settlers claimed nearly three million acres during the land rush, and by June of 1890, Congress had established the Territory of Oklahoma, formally eradicating the land provisions of Andrew Jackson’s 1830 Indian Removal Law. This move was justified by Commissioner of Indian Affairs Thomas Morgan with his belief that “tribal relations should be broken up [. . .] and the autonomy of the individual substituted” (qtd. in Nies 297). During this same time period, the Ghost Dance Revival was spreading among many of the tribal nations in the Plains. In November, 1890, the Army banned the Ghost Dance on the reservations at Pine Ridge and Rosebud, in South Dakota—both of which are very near the combined Omaha/Winnebago agency to which La Flesche had been appointed. Though there are various explanations as to exactly what happened to precipitate the violence of December 29, 1890, it is generally agreed that the Miniconjou leader, Big Foot (Si Tanka) was killed around 8:00 a.m., and that within ten minutes, three hundred unarmed men, women, and children were massacred by the U.S. Army’s Seventh Cavalry. A blizzard almost immediately descended upon the area. Charles Eastman, Santee Dakota agency physician at Pine Ridge, had the responsi-

bility of caring for the walking wounded and of searching for survivors after the blizzard. Of that search, undertaken while the bodies of dead Lakotas were piled into wagons and shoveled into mass graves, he wrote: “It took all of my nerve to keep my composure in the face of this spectacle” (112). One of the first men at the scene of the burials was George Trager, a photographer from the city of Omaha, whose eleven photographs are widely distributed and reproduced even today. It must, indeed, have also taken some nerve on La Flesche’s part as she negotiated this complex of events and policy, which informed the rhetorical context of her work at the Omaha/Winnebago Agency. As Eastman reminds us, it was “a severe ordeal for one who had so lately put all his faith in the Christian love and lofty ideals of the white man” (114).

*There is no such thing as a one-way land bridge. People, creatures, other life will naturally travel back and forth. Just as we will naturally intermarry, travel up and down rivers, cross oceans, fly from Los Angeles to Oklahoma for a powwow. (Harjo 38)*

It is not coincidence, then, that La Flesche writes of her work among the Omahas in a particular way in her 1891 WNIA report entitled “Report of Susan La Flesche, M.D., Medical Missionary of the Women’s National Indian Association among the Omaha Indians.” I would, however, argue that La Flesche’s writings from the Omaha/Winnebago Agency aren’t written from the position of a victim of these historical events; instead, she creates a space between the Christian sisterhood of the WNIA and the Omaha community of her birth to argue for and to attend to the continued mental, physical, and spiritual well-being of that community. That La Flesche has always understood white ideas about Indians and that she has, for a long while, understood the irony of her position as an educated Indian amongst whites is clear in an 1886 letter written to her sister Rosalie during her medical-school cadaver studies—she quips, “I am going to wield the knife tonight—not the scalping knife though” (personal letter, 5 Nov. 1886). But she uses that knowledge in order to find a middle ground between “whiteness” and “Indian-ness.” She begins her 1891 WNIA report with “Dear Friends; It has been almost a year since I wrote you officially, and to me it has been one of the shortest and happiest, as it has been so full of work and pleasure [. . .] engaged in medical work among my people,” a beginning which firmly situates her as part of the community of Omahas as well as part of the community of the WNIA (4).

In the same report, later turned into a WNIA pamphlet, La Flesche clearly demonstrates her understanding of the rhetorical context of her writings by directly addressing the interests of WNIA members; she reports back regarding the progress of her own medical work—“I had a good many patients the first year, but this year I have a great deal more,” this followed by details of her patients, their ailments and

outcomes; she also refers to the building of her medical office at the school—“[I]t is exceedingly nice and well furnished” and is “being used just as much by the tribe as by my children here” (6); and reports on the supplies sent by WNIA members—“All scrapbooks and picture papers which were sent me I have used [. . .] and are gratefully received, and used” (7). La Flesche’s recognition of the ways in which her audience’s assumptions about the Omahas might have changed since the 1890 incident at Wounded Knee is hinted at in her mention of the disposition of government annuity payments among the Omahas. She writes: “[T]hey made splendid use of the money. Over fifty houses were built [. . . ;] they bought machinery of all kinds [. . . ;] almost all are having wells dug,” and “The school is vastly improved. There are several nice new buildings [. . .] containing carpenter and blacksmith shops, in which to teach the Indians these trades” (6–7). Clearly La Flesche does not want the Omahas portrayed in the same threatening light as the Lakotas have been. She wants her readers to see her people as willing and able to engage in dominant notions of “civilization” because she knows their lives, literally, depend upon it. She concludes her report with a reconnection that cleverly allows her benefactors to feel responsible for the “progress” made at the Agency—“I am enjoying my work exceedingly, and feel more interest in, and more attached to my people than ever before. [. . .] I thank you so much for all you have done for me and my people” (7–8).

*Do you remember / when you twisted the wax from your ears / and shouted to me,  
‘You finally speak!’ / because now you could finally bear? (Rose 53)*

La Flesche clearly wants her readers to see the Omahas as redeemable. While some may count this as negative and assimilationist from our twenty-first-century vantage point, I think it important to remember that La Flesche used the means available to her in order to keep the Omaha community intact *as a community*. In this same 1891 report, she cites the advantages of an Indian doctor over a white physician: “I have had more medical work among the women than I expected, which pleases me very much, and I have been called in to attend some cases where a white physician was never called before” (7). And in her 1892 report to the Missionary Department of the WNIA, she tells a story that reinforces that advantage and subtly hints at the degree to which even non-Christian Omahas were already “civilized”:

My first case of the ‘grippe’ came in December. I was asked to go and see an old man who had been sick for several days. He was so ill that the family did not expect him to live, and Indian medicine had been of no avail. [. . .] It was a neat little house, to which my sister and I drove up, painted, with curtained windows, and built by the Indian’s money. [. . .] I found I had a very sick patient, whose age was against him, but his confidence in me encouraged me greatly. [. . .] In a few days the poor old man was out of danger, and a few weeks later a woman came to me as a patient, saying that the old man had told her I had good medicine. (Qtd. in WNIA, “Present” 50–51)

The compliment of “good medicine” from an Omaha elder is high praise indeed; it both perpetuates traditional Omaha understandings about healers and includes in that understanding an acceptance of Western medicine practiced in the hands of a Native physician. Though La Flesche’s work is also clearly part of the mission of the WNIA—“It is blessed work that God has given me in His goodness. Pray for us that He may send His spirit upon us to turn all unto Him” (qtd. in WNIA, “Present” 49)—it is also part of La Flesche’s own call, formulated while she was still a student at Hampton, that educated Indians should keep on “living and working for our people” (qtd. in Tong 86). After all, La Flesche’s work as a temperance advocate had been based on her belief that drinking and drunkenness destroyed trust in the community, and in her letters to the BIA concerning allotment problems, deed ownership, and land rights, she had cited the detrimental effects of greedy and dishonest outsiders to the Omahas’ efforts to “care for themselves” and become citizens of the republic. That she sees Omahas as equal to whites is evident in her 1909 letter to the *Walthill Times*, in which she describes Omahas as “independent and self-reliant [. . . and] as competent as the same number of white people” (qtd. in Mathes, “Susan” 181). At nearly every rhetorical turn in her writing and in her life, La Flesche presents us with a complicated intertwining of reform agendas and desires and her own need to heal and build the Native community into which she had been born. Even the peyote church, which she first pronounced a “great evil,” eventually came to be, in her mind, merely an Omaha variant of Protestant Christianity and the method through which Omahas could make a “change for the better” (qtd. in Tong 130).

Ill throughout her adult life, La Flesche died of bone cancer in September of 1916. In the twenty-seven years she spent working among the Omahas, she not only practiced medicine and advocated preventive strategies for maintaining the good health of the tribe but was also an aggressive temperance advocate, the official Presbyterian Church missionary to the Omahas, a land- and deed-rights advocate, a member of the state medical society, the founder of the Thurston County Medical Society, and the chair of the state health committee of the Nebraska Federation of Women’s Clubs; she married Henry Picotte in 1894 and with him raised two sons, cared for her elderly mother, owned her own home and several rental properties, and in 1913 built (again, with the help of her various missionary friends) a hospital on the Omaha reservation that is today the Susan La Flesche Picotte Community Center.

*Who made up these rules? Why should we want to adhere to them? (Womack 7)*

What I’ve tried to do thus far is, as I said before, to make a rhetorical sketch that illustrates the alliance and adaptation tactics La Flesche used. This is, I know, the barest hint at articulating the kinds of complicated textual production necessary for La Flesche to engage in if she was to negotiate and survive as a Native person. It

is, I hope, a story from which we can learn a disciplinary lesson. La Flesche isn't, in the end, the same kind of Omaha she would have been had she been born a hundred, two hundred, five hundred years earlier or later. She is, however, still Omaha, still Indian, still a member of her community, still *responsible to* that community. It's her sense of equal and shared responsibility that offers, I think, the most promise for a new disciplinary story. This doesn't mean that we ignore our history; no, an acknowledgement of that history and respectful efforts to redress its wrongs is an absolute necessity for the survival of any alliance. That's why Villanueva's call for a history of American continental rhetorics is so important, because if Rhetoric and Composition is to grow and survive as a discipline, then *this* continental history of rhetorics must be writ large in our stories about ourselves. But we cannot, we must not, write these as "other" histories, magnanimously included alongside the "real" history. As Craig Womack reminds us, these aren't some "branch waiting to be grafted onto the main trunk . . . [they] are the *tree*, the oldest [and most persistent discourses] in the Americas" (7). As I've tried to indicate throughout this story, we must be willing to adapt to different beliefs, different practices. That means that we must be willing to go beyond the page upon which our scholarly essays are printed, we must be willing to forego the pretense that each story exists all by itself, that each essay provides all the knowledge that any reader would need. As LeAnne Howe says, we must be willing to imagine a disciplinary community in which words like "*story*, *history* and *theory* [are] interchangeable words because the difference in their usage is artificially constructed to privilege writing over speaking" (42). Further, if we are to investigate rhetorical history on this continent, we must accept that "there is no one pure or authoritative act that constitutes" these histories (Womack 5). And we must be prepared for the difficult work of reconciling responsibility for the meaner events within those histories, not with guilt, but with a larger, more honest sense of who and what "we" are. As Robert Warrior says, we must be willing to "see the complexities of our various pasts and have an opportunity to learn how other people have confronted the same problems we face" (123). That is, after all, why we do this scholarly thing we do—isn't it? To change the world? To learn how to solve contemporary problems in productive and generous ways? Not to publish article after article in pursuit of individual acclaim? If we engage in this work, as Susan La Flesche did, in order to work for our people, our community, our discipline, then maybe we should begin our negotiations toward alliance with a wholesale and meaningful questioning of the criteria by which we "judge" one another's contributions to that community as significant, rather than simply assuming the same long-practiced and dominant critical, theoretical, and pedagogical frameworks. Maybe, as allies, we can spur one another on to even more disruptive tactics. Maybe we can learn to take hold of one another and emerge at the beginning of a new story about ourselves, not a "prime" narrative held together by the sameness of our beliefs, but a gathering of narratives

designed to help us adapt and change as is necessary for our survival. We could start down by the river, eating out of the same bowl. Then, maybe later, we could tell some stories.

## NOTES

1. I want to begin this story by thanking my elders for all they have taught me, and by apologizing for any mistakes that I make here. This essay began as a paper given at the American Ethnic Rhetorics conference at Penn State in 2001; as a consequence, portions of this essay appear in radically different form in “Extending the Hand of Empire: American Indians and the Indian Reform Movement, a Beginning” in Keith Gilyard and Vorris Nunley’s *Rhetoric and Ethnicity* (copyright © 2004 by Boynton/Cook Publishers, Inc., a division of Reed Elsevier, Inc., Portsmouth, NH. All rights reserved.). I want to thank Keith Gilyard, who invited me to be a featured speaker at that 2001 conference, and Gwendolyn Pough and Jennifer BearEagle, whose companionship and advice during that conference were invaluable. It would not have been possible to finish this essay without P. Jane Hafen, Brenda Child, and Michael Tsosie and their supportive, generative conversations in Chicago—thank you.

2. In this essay, I refer to La Flesche Picotte as La Flesche since that is how she was most frequently referred to during her lifetime and by contemporary members of the Omaha Nation.

3. Nine hundred of St. Clair’s fourteen hundred troops were killed or wounded by about a thousand alliance fighters at what is now the site of Fort Recovery (between Portland, Indiana, and Celina, Ohio).

4. There is no clear record of the first alliance, but we do know that the Basques arrived in North America (near the Newfoundland/Labrador coast) during the late fourteenth–early fifteenth century and established formal trade and fishing agreements long before John Cabot or Christopher Columbus “discovered” the Americas; see Kurlansky.

5. I am not implying that we can simply forget hundreds of years of unequal treatment or that we can simply ignore contemporary power relations—dealing with those things that must be part of an alliance negotiation. There is simply not room to even begin to do so within the confines of this essay.

6. I take a general understanding of use from Michel de Certeau’s *Practice of Everyday Life*. My particular formulation of *use* is from Powell, “Rhetorics.”

7. My brevity in sketching this important conceptual frame is based on my assumption that most readers already have a working understanding of how this civilization/savagery binary works to create stereotypes and stereotypical beliefs about Native peoples.

8. Also called the Quaker policy, the peace policy is known for two things: (1) the belief that Native peoples should be legally confined to reservations so as not to come into contact with the “rougher” elements of civilization (whisky, gambling, prostitutes); and (2) the formation of a council of Protestant advisors who, for all intents and purposes, took over the local administration of Indian affairs on reservations in an attempt to decrease the corruption of Indian agents.

9. It’s important to note here, in relation to the significance of the Ponca tour mentioned above, that while these letters were written and sent in 1877, they weren’t printed until 1880. According to Douglas Street, it is possible that Susette herself brought the letters with her during the Ponca tour and gave them to Helen Hunt Jackson, who gave them to Mary Mapes Dodge, then managing editor of the magazine. However they arrived at *St. Nicholas*, they were not printed in their entirety because of space issues, but Dodge assures readers that “the parts we print are just what the little Indians themselves wrote” (qtd. in Street 516).

10. The boy Susette refers to as ‘Mitchell’ is probably her brother Carey, born in 1872, since there were only to LaFlesche brothers—Carey and Francis; see Green.

11. Fletcher's ethnographic career was much enabled by her relationship to the La Flesche family and the access that relationship provided to Omahan cultural and linguistic practices. Fletcher and Francis La Flesche authored two important ethnographic studies together—*The Omaha Tribe* (1911) and *The Osage Tribe* (1921)—both of which depended heavily on Francis's knowledge of the Omaha-Ponca language and his ability to circulate freely in Indian country.

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