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Laura Adams Weaver
"Native American Creation Stories"

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"The Journey of the Human Spirit," shown on page 84.

NATIVE AMERICAN CREATION STORIES

Laura Adams Weaver

COMING FROM MORE than 600 tribal groups, divided into at least eight major language families, and living in nine distinct culture areas, the creation stories of indigenous peoples in what are now the United States and Canada represent an incredibly diverse and richly textured body of thought. Although many of these tribes' stories are similar to some degree, any generalizations must acknowledge the tremendous variety that results from differences in language, geography, and social structure. In addition to the number of stories from different tribes, within a given tribe there are also variations. Each individual tribe or nation has its creation stories, in the plural, both in the sense that there can be multiple versions of their creation and that each single reiteration is another event and thus another story.

Despite the tremendous variety in these tribal accounts, two basic models predominate—earthdiver stories and emergence stories. Earthdiver stories begin in a world covered with water. To help make a place for non-aquatic beings, an animal dives down to the bottom to secure a small dab of mud and returns with it to the surface, where it expands to form the lands of this world. In emergence stories, the people enter this world from one or more lower worlds. With the great diversity of people and places, however, there are certainly stories that follow different narrative patterns. Earthmaker, the creator in one version of the Maidu stories, sings the world into being. Whatever the type, creation stories are etiological, explaining how we came to be here, now, in this place. In *God Is Red*, Vine Deloria, Jr., notes that Native stories, less concerned with establishing the event as a beginning in time than as a beginning in place, are narratives that explain the origin of "an ecosystem present in a definable place." In simpler terms, he distinguishes between stories that depict an experience of reality "as 'what happened here' or 'what happened then'" (78). Grand cosmogonic stories (such as the biblical Genesis) describe the ordering of the universe at the beginning of time, stressing "then" rather than "here." By contrast, Native American creation stories are geomythological, intricately bound up with a given people and their particular land base.

As one might expect, earthdiver narratives are common among tribes where water is a central feature of the landscape, such as the Anishnaabe (Ojibwe) in the Western Great Lakes region or the Innu of the Quebec-Labrador peninsula in the North Atlantic. The earthdiver narratives of the Iroquois Confederacy are good examples. At its inception in 1452, it consisted of five nations—Mohawk, Oneida, Onondaga, Cayuga, and

Seneca—with the Tuscarora admitted later to form the present-day Six Nations. The Confederacy was headed by fifty sachems, or clan leaders, who were in turn nominated by clan mothers. Iroquois are traditionally matrilineal, with all property inherited through the mother. The strong female presence in Iroquoian social life is reflected in the power manifested by Sky Woman and her daughter Earth Woman in the formation of their world. Although each tribe has one or more versions, the different tellings of "The Woman Who Fell from the Sky" remain remarkably similar in many respects. The Seneca version collected in the mid-1880s by ethnographers Jeremiah Curtin and J. N. B. Hewitt, a Tuscarora, provides a starting point.

As it is told, in the time before this world, people lived in another world above what we know as the sky. It was a beautiful world, resting on a thin layer of earth that floated like a cloud, and the sky people who lived there did not know what was underneath. In the center of their world, there was a great tree that provided corn for the people. The sky world had a powerful leader, called Earth Holder or the Ancient One. He had a daughter who became terribly ill, and no one knew how to heal her. A friend of the Ancient One was given a dream, and he instructed the father to lay his daughter beside the great tree, which must be uprooted. She was taken there, and the people started to dig into the thin layer of earth holding the tree in place. It was not long before it fell, leaving a hole in the earth through which they could see the sky below. A young man came along, and he was angry at what he saw. He shouted at the people that it was not right to destroy the source of their food, and he pushed the Ancient One's daughter through the gaping hole.

She fell down through the sky toward this world, which at that time was entirely covered with water. Its only inhabitants were fish and birds and animals that could swim. Ducks looked up and saw the woman falling in the sky. Many of them laced their wings together to break her fall, and she was placed on Turtle's back to rest. The creatures of this world determined to make a place where a human woman could live, so they decided to dive down deep and find some earth at the bottom of the water. After much debate, Toad was chosen to go. He swam down a long way, and just when he reached the point of exhaustion, his nose touched the mud that lay beneath the water. He brought a tiny bit back to the surface and smeared it on Turtle's back. The bit of earth grew until it formed all the lands of this world.

Sky Woman recovered from her illness and made herself a home in her new world. Not long after, she gave birth to a daughter, who grew tall and learned things quickly. Some time after she became a young woman, she conceived twins by the breath of the West



Part of a larger painting by Michael Kabotie and his assistant Delbridge Honanie titled "Journey of Human Spirit." In Kabotie's view all cultures and spiritual institutions have a place of beginning or birthing. The Grand Canyon represents this place for the Hopi. The ladder extending from the Hopi kiva, the underground religious chamber, symbolizes the *sipapuni*, the passage that was for their emergence into this world. Copyright © 2001 Michael Kabotie and Delbridge Honanie. Used by permission of the artists.

Wind. Several days before they were born, she heard the two arguing about who should be firstborn and from what place they would leave their mother. Djuskaha (Little Sprout) left her body the usual way. Othagwenda (Flint) pierced an opening under his mother's arm and emerged from there, killing her. After the death of her daughter, Sky Woman returned to the above world. Earth Woman's two sons vie for the control of the lower world. Djuskaha's contributions to the world are beneficial and imaginative, useful plants and animals, whereas Othagwenda's additions are malicious and ultimately destructive. Djuskaha eventually bests his brother and wins control of the world.

In Native American creation stories, the universe is rarely formed *ex nihilo*, out of nothing. The basic elements are already there, and the creators simply give them a new shape, forming mud and water into lands and seas. Frequently, as is the case in the Sky Woman stories, another world precedes this one. Except for its location, the newly formed world in Iroquoian stories is not markedly different from its celestial counterpart, where human like people coexist in recognizable family and community groups. Creation for Native American peoples is local, explaining not so much how we came

to be but rather how we came to be *here*. Also, the stories stress the collective aspect of creation. Rarely do they describe a lone creator. Creation in Native thought is a continuing process, so while the story might begin with a single figure, others soon come along to help. The cycle of creation is typically a collaborative affair, with many beings of all kinds combining their efforts to produce this world. Male and female, human and animal—a variety of forces are needed to bring the world and its peoples into being.

In most cases, multiple accounts of one tribe's creation have been collected and published, which underscores the difficulties of accurate translation and the problem of resolving discrepancies between the voices of informants and collectors. *Seneca Myths and Folk Tales* by Arthur C. Parker, an archeologist of Seneca ancestry, includes two versions that differ in key ways from Curtin and Hewitt's. For the most part, it is the narration rather than the structure that is affected. Parker's language is much more sophisticated and nuanced. Seneca language names are used throughout, so that the figures described seem more personal rather than emblematic. He offers considerably more detail, and key actions in the narrative are repeated for emphasis. In

the Curtin-Hewitt account, Toad is the only animal that tries and succeeds the first time. As Parker tells it, many creatures try to reach the bottom before Muskrat finally makes it. That Duck dies in the attempt underscores both the difficulty of the task and the extent of the sacrifice the creatures make to shape a world for Sky Woman.

Most of the differences are aesthetic, but at least two key changes influence the narrative structure, a distinction that ultimately diminishes or strengthens the power granted to female beings. As with the animals' efforts to find earth, Parker's account of Sky Woman and Earth Woman goes into much more detail. In this case, the telling reinforces the integral role of Sky Woman and Earth Woman in shaping the world. The Curtin-Hewitt account focuses more on the conflict between the Twins, and Sky Woman and her daughter appear to be passive participants in the action. Sky Woman's expulsion from the sky world provides the occasion for earth's creation by the animals, but she herself contributes nothing. Earth Woman gives birth to twin sons, but it is they who create the plants, animals, and human beings that populate this world. Parker's version relates several key actions that are omitted in the previous account. As Sky Woman is forced out of the hole, she grabs at the base of the tree and falls to earth with handfuls of seeds. These mix with the mud that she spreads on Turtle's back, and a rich plant life springs up from the newly formed lands. After she is killed by Flint, Earth Woman is buried, and from the ground above her body, plants of all kinds—corn, beans, squash, and potatoes—start to grow. The two women are responsible for creating plant life, so that their story accounts for the origin of agriculture.

Another variable is the initial conflict that sets things in motion. As noted previously, creation stories are etiological, exploring causal relationships in the ordering of the world and explaining not only the way things are but also how they should be. Each of the three versions begins with a different situation that significantly changes how the narrative ascribes culpability for a crucial act of destruction—uprooting the great tree. In Parker's primary version, recounted in the main text, the Ancient One grew dissatisfied with his aging wife, and he replaced her with a young woman he found more appealing. After his taking a wife, he discovered that she was already pregnant by the potent breath of another man. (Traditional stories often tell of women who were impregnated by Wind.) The man is given a dream that instructs him to uproot the tree to punish Sky Woman. After that, she becomes obsessed with staring down the hole into the world below. Although the aging husband's actions ostensibly precipitate the event, his young wife's

intense curiosity is blamed for both the tree's demise and her expulsion from the sky world:

Again his anger returned against her, for she said nothing to indicate that she had been satisfied. Long she sat looking into the hole until the chief in rage drew her blanket over her head and pushed her with his foot, seeking to thrust her into the hole, and be rid of her. . . . Again the chief pushed the woman, whose curiosity had caused the destruction of the greatest blessing of the up-above-world. (Parker, 61)

Pandora-like, this female thirst for knowledge threatens the existing world.

In a footnote, Parker briefly alludes to another version that significantly changes Sky Woman's situation. As in the Curtin-Hewitt variant, she was not the second wife of the Ancient One but rather his daughter. The old man who desired her is one of her father's rivals, who murdered her father and hid the body in the trunk of the great tree. Parker states that the old man "took her in the manner here related" (59), which implies that the Sky Woman's pregnancy is what sparks the man's anger. She is given a dream telling her where to find her father's body, and the tree is uprooted during her search. In this variant, the narrative arc describes the consequences that follow upon the murder of a leader rather than the cost of female desire for knowledge. In the Curtin-Hewitt version, disease precipitates the loss of the tree and Sky Woman's descent. Not entirely, however. The narrative reinforces the primacy of the collective. While solving a father's murder or curing a daughter's mysterious illness both explain the desire to uproot the great tree, Sky Woman and the Ancient One act on personal motives and put their community at risk.

In the Southwest, where water is a precious commodity, creation stories tend to be emergence narratives, such as those of the Diné (Navajo) or the Acoma Pueblo. The Hopi tell how the people migrated up through several lower worlds and entered this, the fourth world, through an opening in the ground. Understandably in a matrilineal society, the world is in large part shaped by a powerful female—or females, in some versions—either Hurúing Wuhti (Hard Beings Woman) or often Kóhkang Wuhti (Spider Woman). As it was told to Harold Courlander, in the beginning was only Tokpella (endless space), and only Tawa the Sun and other powerful beings lived then. To alleviate the sense of emptiness, Tawa infused elements of endless space with part of his own substance to shape the First World. The first inhabitants were insect beings, and Tawa found himself disappointed by their limited comprehension and by the dis-

sension among them. He sent Spider Woman to guide them into the Second World. When they arrived, they saw that Tawa had changed their shapes along the way, so now they were different kinds of animals. At first, they were pleased with the new world and their new forms, but after a time, they began to fight among themselves again. Once again Tawa sent Spider Woman to guide them, and as they traveled, he created the Third World. When they arrived, they found their shapes had changed yet again; this time, they had become people.

Spider Woman told them that Tawa had made this place for them to live together without discord. The people learned to grow corn, and Spider Woman taught them to weave blankets for warmth and to shape clay into pots to store food. They were thankful for what they had been given, but there was very little light or warmth in their new world, so they were cold, and their crops grew poorly. Without heat to bake the clay, the pots they fashioned stayed soft and fragile. One day, a Hummingbird came to them, sent by Maasaw, the caretaker of the Fourth World. He had seen how difficult it was for the people to live without warmth, so he sent Hummingbird to teach them to use fire. They learned to make fires to warm their fields, to cook their food, and to harden clay to strengthen their pots. Those who had been given the knowledge of fire counted Maasaw as their relative. The gift of fire improved life for the people in the Third World, but once more there was discord. *Pokawas*, or witches, began to work among them, making medicines to harm others. Under their influence, the people started to neglect their responsibilities to each other and the land, causing disharmony and corruption through their world.

Tawa was dismayed by the people's actions, and once again he sent Spider Woman to advise them. She told them of Tawa's displeasure and instructed them to leave the wicked ones behind and find a new place where they could honor their obligations. The people had heard someone walking above them, and they fashioned four birds out of clay to fly up and discover if there was another world above the sky. First they sent Swallow, then White Dove, then Hawk, but each one grew tired before the task was done. The fourth time, Catbird flew up through a hole in the sky and found Maasaw there. When told what was happening in the Third World, Maasaw said that his world had no light and no warmth except for fire, but there was land and water, and the people could come if they wished. Spider Woman and her two grandsons devised a way for the people to reach the *sipapuni*, the opening in the sky to the next world. They called on Chipmunk to plant seeds: First a sunflower stalk, then a spruce tree, then a pine tree grew into the sky, but none were tall enough. Chipmunk planted a fourth seed, bamboo, and the people sang as

the stalk grew. Whenever they stopped to breathe, the growth halted, but it started again whenever they sang. Finally it grew tall enough to pass through the *sipapuni*. Their way was long and hard, but the people climbed up through the sky of the Third World and pushed up through the ground and entered the Fourth World.

As they emerged, Spider Woman watched as Yawpa the Mockingbird gave each a name and a language. One would be called Hopi and speak that language. Another would be called Diné and speak that language. Another would be called Apache and speak that language. Ute, Paiute, Lakota, Pima, Zuni, Comanche, Shoshone, White Men. Yawpa named them all and gave them a language. When all the people of good heart had emerged, the bamboo was dislodged so that the wicked could not follow. Then Spider Woman's grandsons helped give shape to the Fourth World. Flat, muddy ground was formed into mountains and mesas. Spider Woman helped the people to fashion Sun and Moon to bring light and heat. Yawpa gave varieties of corn to the people, and the Hopi chose the short blue corn, which meant their life would be hard, but they could survive it. They stayed near the *sipapuni* for four days, and when one of their number became ill and died, they discovered that a *pokawa* had entered the Fourth World with them. The dead child's father wanted to throw her into the *sipapuni*, but she pointed to where his child, no longer dead, played below them in the lower world. The people debated what to do with her but decided to let her stay. Good and bad are present in all places, and returning the *pokawa* to the lower world would not change that. None wanted her to come with them except the Bahanas, White Men, who respected her knowledge and were not afraid of her. Finally, the time came for the different peoples to separate and travel to their respective homelands. As the Hopi prepared for their migration, Spider Woman counseled them never to forget the *sipapuni*, and she covered it with water. They were to remember this was Maasaw's land, so they would always be in the presence of death. She told them to make songs and sing them to remember, because the ones who forgot why they came into the Fourth World would become lost and would themselves be forgotten.

Like all such stories, this version of the Hopi emergence narrative explains origins and causes of various things in the world. It tells why bamboo grows in segments or how the sun and moon were made so that there was light and heat in this world. It also establishes relationships between different clans or explains why different tribes speak different languages. Unlike the universal accounts provided by cosmogonic narratives, however, the geomythical explanation focuses more on local concerns. The Eden described in the biblical Genesis has no particular location. This brief summary of

the Hopi account omits many details, but the original telling as recorded by Courlander describes and names the creation of specific mountains visible in the present-day Hopi landscape, providing an explanation not only for the Fourth World in general but especially for their immediate environment.

Another consideration in the study of tribal creation stories is the problem of context. In tribal settings, creation stories are often told or enacted as part of a larger ritual. Any single creation story functions performatively, in a complex of stories that provide a sense of individual and collective identity. Outside that complex, a story's meaning is altered. Most people will encounter creation stories out of context, translated from their original language and relocated to an extratribal setting. Any change in context effects a change in meaning, either subtly or dramatically, depending on the degree to which the frame intrudes into the story. Tribal sources may have had very little control over the ultimate disposition of the text. Some collectors make every attempt to respect both the people and the story, whereas others misuse the texts for personal gain or profit. Even the most careful translation, however, significantly changes the narrative utterance, so that the story of "who we are" becomes one of "what they believe."

The primacy of orality foregrounds the speech act, whereby the teller and moment of telling are integral parts of the story. On some level, collected stories require readers to attend to at least two narrative voices, the informant and the collector. Any translation from one language to another, from one context to another, requires a shift of perspective. It may be simply a matter of word choice. In Courlander's text, Maasaw (Masauwu) is called as "Ruler of the Upper World, Caretaker of the Place of the Dead, and Owner of Fire" (19). Words like *ruler* and *owner* appear to be foreign to a Hopi perspective, where power and property are shared. While the Hopi acknowledge his great power, in English they often refer to him simply as "The Caretaker of this World."

Courlander's version differs strikingly from another version published by missionary Heinrich (Henry) Voth in 1905. This telling is not simply a variant on the same emergence narrative but rather a different account of creation altogether. In the story told to Voth, the world in the beginning was covered with water. Hard Beings Woman in the East together with a second Hard Beings Woman in the West created a stretch of dry land between them. After Tawa the Sun commented that nothing lived there, the two formed creatures out of clay and sang them to life, birds and animals of all kinds. They also created First Man and First Woman, giving them writing and language. Spider Woman decided to create other pairs of beings and gave each a different language,

explaining the origin of various tribes as well as the Spanish and the English.

Different clans, societies, or families often tell different versions of a particular story, and sometimes accounts told by men and women are likewise distinctive. In *The Fourth World of the Hopis*, Courlander suggests that Hopi traditions are an amalgam of stories and songs from different clans and groups that eventually came together to form the Hopi people. His explanatory note acknowledges that the contradictory accounts exist and have long been debated among Hopi people, although more Hopi than not accept the emergence narrative.

The Hopi's story of Voth, however, may prove more instructive than Voth's story of the Hopi. In the 1890s, Voth spent nine years working as a Mennonite missionary. His obsession with documenting the intricacies of Hopi culture and religion was decidedly at odds with his ostensible mission to convert his informants. Voth gained access to Hopi ritual, which suggests that his relations with the tribe initially earned him some degree of trust. Increasingly, though, he relied on his studies to provide financial support for his family, using what he learned to produce cultural displays and replicas of Hopi altars in museums and tourist sites. Once they learned that Voth was publishing detailed information about their rituals, the Hopi community grew to distrust the missionary's motives. In the mid-1960s, one informant from Oraibi told Courlander that Voth's actions were not right: "Instead of doing what he was supposed to, being a church man, he got into all the secrets, stole them and some of the altar things too, and revealed all the sacred things in his books." Similarly, another informant from New Oraibi describes Voth as someone who "did not stay in the back. He always pushed to the front, anywhere he wanted to be, even in the kivas. Nobody could stop him. . . . Most of the stories they told Voth is because they didn't want to tell him the true story" (Courlander, 230). Among the documents produced during this period were over 2,000 photographs. At the time of this writing, Hopi tribal leaders are seeking to extend the logic of the Native American Graves Protection and Repatriation Act (NAGPRA) to litigate the return of photographs and other artifacts taken by the man who would not stay in the back.

Cosmogonic narratives focus on the formation of the universe and its inhabitants over a relatively limited span of time. Once cosmos, earth, and people are in place, the act of creation is complete. By contrast, creation as recounted among Native American peoples is a series of acts extended over time and space. The cycle of Navajo creation stories does not end after the formation of the universe and the people's emergence into this, the Fifth World. Their cycle continues to describe the birth of Changing Woman and her twin sons, the

slaying of the monsters, ending with the gathering of the clans that form the Navajo nation. In tribal thought, creation narratives are trifold, recounting the formation of the world, the people in it, but most especially their way of life.

Corn was a staple in the diet of many Native American peoples, so the story of its origins is one of their most sacred etiological narratives. Diverse tribes, from the Muscogee, Cherokee, and Natchez in the Southeast to Penobscot in the Northeast, tell the story of Corn Mother to explain the source of the grain. It is a story rooted in violence and sacrifice but just as deeply rooted in female power. Among agricultural people, food and economy are one, so Corn Mother is not simply the source of food. She is the wellspring of the culture. Although there are numerous local variations from tribe to tribe, the Cherokee version, recorded by James Mooney among the Eastern Band in the mid-1880s, may be considered representative.

As it is told, Kanati (Lucky Hunter) and his wife Selu (Corn Mother) lived with their two sons when the world was new. During a time when food was scarce, Kanati was away for long stretches of time in search of game. Although they had no meat, the woman and her children always had enough to eat. At length, the boys grew curious as to the source of this bounty of corn and beans. The next time Selu went out to the storehouse where she got the food, the boys contrived to spy on her. They removed a bit of mud from a chink in the wall of the building and waited. They watched their mother place a basket in the middle of the floor and stand over it. She rubbed her stomach, and corn sloughed off into the basket. She rubbed her armpits, and beans tumbled off her. Upon seeing this remarkable sight, the young boys concluded that their mother was a witch.

When the youths returned to the house, Selu could tell that they had discovered her secret. Confronting them, she said, "So you are going to kill me?" The boys replied, "Yes. You are a witch" (Mooney, 244). Knowing she was to die, the mother then instructed her children about what to do with her body after death. They were to clear a piece of ground by the house and drag her body around the perimeter seven times. Then they were to drag it over the ground inside the circle seven more times. If they did as she said, she promised that they would always have plenty of corn.

The pair killed Selu. Instead of clearing a large plot for their cornfield, however, they grew lazy and cleared only seven tiny spots. For this reason, corn now grows only in a few places rather than over the whole earth. The boys dragged their mother's corpse around the circle, and wherever her blood flowed out, corn sprang up. But they grew tired and lazy again, and rather than dragging it across the field seven times, they only did so

twice. This is why corn grows only in its seasons and not year-round.

In a variant recorded in Oklahoma in 1961 by Cherokee ethnographers Jack and Anna Kilpatrick, there is no matricide. Rather, once her power is discovered by the boys, the woman immediately loses vitality, becomes ill, and takes to her bed to die. Before her death, however, she explains what her sons were to do with her body. Similarly, in a Penobscot version, set down by Penobscot Joseph Nicolar in 1893, First Mother begs her husband to kill her, since it was the only way to provide food for her family during a famine. In all cases, Corn Mother gives to her sons both the crops and the rituals necessary to organize their planting, thereby preserving her people's way of life. For the societies that tell this narrative, Corn Mother also explains women as the primary agriculturalists.

Inuit creation myths tend to be local, but one story that is common among various Inuit peoples across the circumpolar region is that of Sedna (She Down There). Like Corn Mother, her story is one of violence and sacrifice, but it explores the darker side of female power. One important version was recorded by Franz Boas on Baffin Island in 1884, and Knud Rasmussen, himself Inuit, collected a second telling in Greenland during the early 1920s.

As it was told, an old widower lived with his beautiful daughter Sedna. Although the young woman had many Inuit suitors, she refused to marry any of them because she had been beguiled by the sweet song of a seagull. Despite her father's protests, she agreed to marry the bird-man and return with him to the land of his people. Contrary to her new husband's promises of luxury and beauty, Sedna found his domain repugnant. Their home was a crude tent made of fish-skins that did little to keep the elements out. Her sleeping mat was uncomfortable walrus hide. Instead of delicious meat, she was forced to eat raw fish that the birds brought her. In desperation, she cried out for her father to come get her.

When spring came, the old man went to visit his daughter. Seeing the miserable state of her existence, he determined to rescue her and have revenge upon her husband. When the seagull returned home, the father killed him and fled in his kayak with Sedna. The other gulls, however, pursued the pair and, once they spotted the boat, caused a violent storm to break out on the ocean. Panicking, the old man threw his own daughter overboard in order to save himself, but Sedna clung to the edge of the craft.

The crazed man then took his *ulu* and sliced off Sedna's fingertips. These fell into the water and became whales. Still the woman hung on to the boat. Still the storm raged. Terror-stricken, the father tried again to

dislodge his now dreadful cargo, cutting her fingers off down to the first joint and then to the second. They fell into the sea and became seals and walruses. According to the story recorded by Knud Rasmussen among his own Greenlander Inuit people in the early 1920s, Sedna was at last forced to relinquish her grip, and she sank beneath the waves.

In Boas's account, however, the gulls departed, thinking she had drowned, and the storm subsided. Her father then pulled her back into the boat. Father and daughter arrive home without further incident. Sedna, however, still deeply resented her father's actions. At the first opportunity, she set her dogs on the sleeping man, and the dogs gnawed off his hands and feet. The old man cursed his daughter, the dogs, and himself. At that moment, the ground opened beneath them, swallowing their hut and all inside it.

Sedna became Mistress of the Sea and the ruler of the underworld. From there she controls the sea creatures formed from her flesh. When human beings anger her, she withholds these sources of food, and the people suffer. In order to placate Sedna and keep her happy, Inuit shamans travel to her realm and comb her tangled hair because, without fingers, she cannot do so herself. According to Rasmussen, Sedna's father is in charge of chastising those who have been wicked in this world before they can enter the land of the dead.

As in the Cherokee narrative, a male figure or figures dismember a female body, and her remains undergo a transformation that provides food for the people. Where Corn Woman recognizes the necessity of her death and exerts some measure of control by instructing her sons how to dispose of her body, Sedna's sacrifice is not of her own making. In one sense, this narrative of productive female sacrifice is appropriate among the Inuit, whose harsh environment necessitated population control that sometimes took the form of female infanticide. The power ascribed to Sedna is much like that of Corn Woman, however, in that her story explains tribal economics. Sedna exerts control over all the whales, seals, and walruses in the sea, which are the primary source of meat, oil, and skins needed by the Inuit to survive.

The handful of examples discussed here are but a tiny sample of the many Native American creation stories in which women figure prominently. Given that balance between male and female is a key principal in most tribal structures, stories of female creators are the rule rather than the exception. White Buffalo Calf Woman gives to the Lakota nation the pipe and seven sacred ceremonies that order their lives. For the Tlingit and Haida, the first two women made by Raven critique his creation and decide that one of them should be a man, thereby re-creating humanity. For the Mescalero Apache, 'Isánáklésh was one of the five sacred beings

present at creation, and her power brought the people trees, plants, and medicinal herbs. For the Laguna, Thought Woman is the creator that gives shape and name to all things through the power of her imagination. In the words of Laguna poet Leslie Marmon Silko,

Ts'its'tsi'nako, Thought-Woman
is sitting in her room
and whatever she thinks about
appears.

(Excerpted from Silko's *Ceremony*, 1)

SOURCES: Collections with a range of creation stories from various tribes in North America include Stith Thompson, ed., *Tales of the North American Indians* (1929); Richard Erdoes and Alfonso Ortiz, eds., *American Indian Myths and Legends* (1984); Ella Elizabeth Clark, ed., *Indian Legends of Canada* (1960); and Susan Feldmann, ed., *The Story-Telling Stone: Traditional Native American Myths and Tales* (1965). Most of these stories are reprinted, retold, or compiled from one or more earlier sources, with varying degrees of contextualization. For an analysis and examples of different tribal creation stories, see Jace Weaver, *American Journey: The Native American Experience* (1998). Vine Deloria, Jr., in *God Is Red* 2nd ed. (1992), provides a comparative analysis of Native, Christian, and Jewish accounts of creation. Further study should focus on tribally specific materials. Hopi sources are Harold Courlander, ed., *The Fourth World of the Hopis* (1971), and H. R. Voth, ed., *The Traditions of the Hopi* (1905). Edmund Nequatewa in *The Truth of a Hopi* (1936) offers a Hopi account. Iroquoian stories of Sky Woman include David Cusick [Tuscarora], *Sketches of Ancient History of the Six Nations* (1827); Jeremiah Curtin and J. N. B. Hewitt [Tuscarora], "Seneca Myths and Fictions" (1918); and Arthur C. Parker [Seneca], *Seneca Myths and Folk Tales* (1923). The story of Corn Mother is found in James Mooney, *The Myths of the Cherokee* (1900), and a Cherokee perspective can be found in Jack F. Kilpatrick and Anna G. Kilpatrick, *Friends of Thunder: Folktales of the Oklahoma Cherokees* (1964). Sedna accounts are given in Franz Boas, *The Central Eskimo* (1888), and in Knud Rasmussen [Inuit], *Across Arctic America: Narrative of the Fifth Thule Expedition* (1927). Leslie Marmon Silko, *Ceremony* (1971), incorporates stories of Thought Woman in a novel about Laguna life during the mid-twentieth century.

NATIVE AMERICAN WOMEN AND CHRISTIANITY

Kim Stone

WHILE STEREOTYPES PREVAIL that Native women in the Americas were subordinate to Native men, recent scholarship consistently indicates that Native women were equal to men in their communities. However, the status of Native women eroded after Christian colonization utilized four strategies: diminish female tribal de-

Source Information:

Weaver, Laura Adams. "Native American Creation Stories." *Encyclopedia of Women and Religion in North America*. Rosemary Skinner Keller and Rosemary Radford Ruether, eds. Bloomington: University of Indiana Press, 2006. 83-89.

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