

PARFLECHE STORIES



**Bearing witness to the American Indian Holocaust
through Testimony, Story and Prayer**

Curated and Edited by Deborah Littlebird

**THE AMERICAN INDIAN HOLOCAUST,
KNOWN AS THE 500 YEAR WAR
IS THE WORLD'S LARGEST AND
LONGEST HOLOCAUST
IN THE HISTORY OF MANKIND.
YET IT REMAINS HIDDEN.
WHEN ONE BEARS WITNESS
THROUGH TESTIMONY,
ONE BECOMES A TORCHBEARER
OF MEMORY
AND SHINES A LIGHT
ON THIS FORGOTTEN HISTORY.**

BOOK OUTLINE

1. INTRODUCTION

PARFLECHE STORIES is a story testimony project and companion book to the *Walking Backward into the Future* pilgrimages across America.

In June 2019, Pueblo Indian Elder, Larry Littlebird and Deborah Littlebird of New Mexico and Dr. Greg Valerio of the British Isles embarked on a migratory journey of healing and forgiveness to bear witness to the American Indian Holocaust. The mission for the two-year pilgrimage called *Walking Backward into the Future*, is to visit significant indigenous landscapes and hidden massacre genocidal sites and shine a light on these forgotten people and buried histories, crossing America from the East coast to the West coast. Seven regions are planned: New England/Middle Colonies; Lower Southern Colonies; Deep South; Midwest/Heartland; the Plains/Texas; the Great Southwest/Rocky Mountains; and the Pacific/West Coast.

The first pilgrimage took place in June 2019 through the region that the colonizer's named the New England/Middle Colonies. Larry Littlebird traveled with a contemporary rawhide *parfleche* handcrafted by Deborah Littlebird in which they gathered stories of the *Land and People* as they visited significant massacre sites with their colleague Dr. Greg Valerio.

The next pilgrimage planned to the Lower Southern Colonies was postponed due to the global Coronavirus Pandemic upending the world in March 2020. It was during these months of quiet reflection and lockdowns that the companion book and curriculum "Parfleche Stories" emerged.

The story pathways and maps in the book/curriculum are being gathered from the historical inspiration of our planned routes and regions across America. Once in book format, we will bring to light and tell the untold stories of the original people who lived in these regions. You will also read testimonies from Native and non-Native people who have stood at these massacre sites to pray and bear witness to the atrocities, past and present.

PARFLECHE STORIES creates a mapping of **TESTIMONY, STORY and CALL TO ACTION** for others to courageously come to ground alongside us in this root work as we begin to unearth the layers of systemic racial injustices in America.

A personal message from Deborah Littlebird:

We are living in a post genocide society and although my husband Larry and I have been working unceasingly for healing historical trauma and generational grief over the past 25 years, we sense something has finally shifted. Courageous voices in cities across America have cracked open the surface of hardened earth and hardened hearts. The soil is ready to be plowed and a serendipitous time has arrived to heal our societal sickness at the root.

Healing at the root point of contact begins with truthfully acknowledging the American Indian Holocaust did in fact happen on this American soil. This is not a guilt trip. We can't go back and change the past. However, we can bear witness to these forgotten horrors and atrocities against mankind. Healing the rising root upwards honors the lives, families, communities and cultural and spiritual contributions of the First Nations people who lived in these lands for millions of years prior to European contact. We can support and perpetuate their tribal legacies

to live on through their oral histories and through their descendants. Many tribes are now extinct, yet many are still very much alive and tenacious even though they are horribly oppressed with continued present day injustices.

All of these divides and deep hurts bring up the one big question. Can we start over? A handful of us believe it is possible. It will however take courage. Our correct restorative actions are equally as important as our healing words.

Our hope for this brave journey is to be catalysts – sparks in a holy gathering fire of witnesses to re-consecrate a mutual legacy of sacred words to kindle justice for healing the soul wounds of our nations. – *Deborah Littlebird*

2. STARTING OVER STORIES – MAPPING FROM EAST TO WEST

Why a Parfleche?

A *parfleche* is a historical envelope container used by many of the Native American tribal peoples which was painted with graphics of actual geographical maps. This intuitively felt like the appropriate container metaphorically and actual to carry these starting over stories, and for mapping the significant places of genocide and injustices, with a focus on the untold, unforgotten history alongside the ignored present.

The history of the Parfleche

A *parfleche* is a Native American rawhide container. The name “parfleche” comes from the French language *parer* meaning “to parry” or “to defend” and *fleche* meaning “arrow.” Enveloped-shaped parfleches historically were used to contain items such as dried meats and to carry maps, medicine, and ceremonial items in efficient lightweight waterproof packaging. The most common form of the *parfleche* was a folded envelope with laces. They were painted with brightly colored bold graphics often symbolizing landscape features such as rivers and mountains. Many times the designs were used as maps themselves. Traditionally, parfleche’s were created by women of the tribes, and now contemporary versions within a cultural renaissance are made by both women and men. The use of *parfleche* pouch declined drastically when the colonists slaughtered buffalo herds to near extinction and forced relocation of Indigenous peoples onto reservations. Today these historic backpacks are seen mostly in museums and expensive collections as valuable antiques. We believe the *parfleche* represents a culturally and spiritually significant traveling container to carry these healing stories, *walking backward into the future*

3. THE INVITATION

The American Indian Holocaust, known as the 500 Year War is the world's largest and longest Holocaust in the history of Mankind. It continues to this day. Yet it remains hidden and un-remembered. Why?

How could it have been different when the light skin people came to these shores? What if they had humbly and respectfully asked for permission to enter their lands? What if they had sat down for a meal together after being invited to enter a tribal Peoples homelands. What if they had respectfully and humbly listened to the stories from the People and the elders who were already living here? What if during that shared meal and listening time, they greeted one another with

respect and loving kindness: What is it like here in your home? What is it like where you come from?

4. CURRICULUM – A CALL TO ACTION

It does nothing to place guilt or linger on past hurts. We cannot change the past. For Native people today, as descendant of their tribes, there is a necessary grieving process that must take place, as an individual, as a family and as a communal tribe. This is why it is important for the non-Native people with changed hearts and an eagerness to help heal the historical wounds to be aware of the nuances of generational grief.

To move forward one must be brave enough to acknowledge the systemic injustices that has touched your heart and spirit and do so with a corresponding action. It is not enough to just speak words. This is why the many apologies that have been offered to Native people from politicians, Christian leaders and landowners are crippled from the start. Reconciliation ceremonies and gatherings, although positive in their intent and a first step for healing to begin, do not provide an action of restitution, a necessary next step for the healing process to continue once an apology has been offered. When this corresponding action doesn't come forth in a timely way, this then actually leaves the original hurt stuck and still festering, possibly even creating another layer of injustice with a renewed mistrust of words.

The curriculum includes:

- What can you do?
- How to make a culturally appropriate pilgrimage to a massacre site in your region.
- How to bear witness to the American Indian Holocaust and the genocidal atrocities on the land beneath your feet.
- What are the ways to make a meaningful realistic action of restitution.
- Become well informed. There has been so much misinformation on the historical facts. It takes time and care, but do your research with your local tribe and elders if possible. If you research on the web, be sure to fact check what you find.