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Sustaining O-gah-pah: An Analysis of Quapaw Language Loss and Preservation

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Ouachita Baptist University

Sustaining O-gah-pah

An Analysis of Quapaw Language Loss and Preservation

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1. Introduction

The origins of human speech are enigmatic. Evidence of linguistic expression and human dialogue presents itself in ancient manuscripts, pop music, mantras, Tweets, poetry, prayers, technical jargon, amorous messages, salutations, and mourning eulogies. A forever-changing tapestry of communication and meaning, the universality of language is testament to the heterogeneity of the human experience through multilingualism.

Yet as ideal as the concept of language sounds, modernity and a wide range of factors continue to deplete the number of languages that still remain. Today, there are around seven thousand languages spoken by approximately seven billion people on the planet. Linguists, however, calculate that by the end of this century, as many as fifty percent of those world languages will exist only in archives (Thurman). Language endangerment and extinction is a phenomenon on every continent and is most often a product of cultural assimilation.

This question of cultural assimilation is one that is a defining struggle of indigenous nations in the United States. Disease, poverty, forced removal, sterilization, manipulation, extermination, and cultural genocide are all part of the litany of injustices that were committed against native peoples. Given this context, Native American communities today are faced with reimagining the aspects of their heritage that are extinct while also addressing the cultural metaphors that are on the verge of vanishing without a trace. Such issues, of which language preservation is a key topic, ultimately reveal a reexamination of the indigenous American identity as a whole in the modern age.

The story of the Quapaw, or Downstream People, and their tongue is an integral part of both the American Indian experience and the larger, universal tapestry of multilingualism. Despite historical setbacks and contemporary challenges, preserving the virtually extinct

Quapaw language adds to the diverse cultural narrative of the Americas and shares a nation's unique story with the rest of humanity. From their earliest eras to their migration to the Arkansas River Valley, the nature of their contact with Europeans around 300 years ago, and subsequent consequences of their existence alongside other indigenous nations, European imperial powers, and later United States government, the Downstream People present a rich historical experience that merits attention. More specifically, an exploration of the loss of Quapaw culture and efforts at preserving heritage reveal the intrinsic value in group identity and the indigenous experience.

My interest in Quapaw culture—its historical distinctiveness and contemporary state—is one that stems from my background in language and communications, as well as a personal conviction to help elevate the voices of the unheard. Having grown up in Arkansas, the name “Quapaw” is a familiar one to me, one that is synonymous with the Natural State. My intention with this project was to objectively investigate the cultural development and efforts at retaining the heritage of the Downstream People.

Through researching the factors that led to a loss of culture, this project will shed light on a subject that is linked to the larger themes of the Native American experience and attempts at saving indigenous traditions in the wake of modernity. Consulting linguists, historical records, tribal members, and experts on indigenous studies, I aim to answer questions concerning the state of the Quapaw language: how it arrived at virtual extinction, what is being done to preserve it, and the challenges associated with trying to maintain a dying heritage. More importantly, this project demonstrates the value of the Quapaw language, as the survival of the Downstream People serves as a powerful reminder of the North American heritage and the culturally unifying forces at the heart of the indigenous identity.

1. Ardina

At 86 years old, Ardina Moore is a self-described shut-in, but one who carries a large responsibility on her shoulders. Moore is *Ma-shru-ghe-ta*—Eagle Feather that Rises—the oldest grandchild of the Quapaw tribe's last hereditary chief, Victor Griffin (Owen). Residing in Miami, Oklahoma, Moore is considered to be the last living speaker of the Quapaw language.

Born in 1930, she grew up in a world inundated in both English and Quapaw. Moore's mother was able to speak both languages, as well as Shawnee, the language of her step-father. Following the death of her mother, however, Moore went at a young age to live with her grandparents, Victor and Minnie Griffin in Lincolnville, Oklahoma near Devil's Promenade (Moore).

This traditional home environment was where she learned the stories and heritage of the Quapaw people from firsthand sources. Moore watched as Griffin, chief of the tribe, led occasions such as funerals and dinners. Additionally serving in a leadership position in the Native American church together with the Osages, he brought Moore along with him on trips to their religious meetings, where she listened to him speaking and praying and could understand what he was saying (Moore).

Moore's childhood can be characterized as carefree and traditional. Horseback riding and even trips with her grandmother to the Quapaw Baths of Hot Springs, Arkansas, were the norm during this juncture of her life. All the while, she was exposed to the traditions and tales of the Downstream People. She attended a rural school until the seventh grade, when her grandparents moved the family into the town of Quapaw (Moore).

Graduating high school in 1949, she moved on to Northeastern State University in Tahlequah, Oklahoma. In 1957 she graduated with a degree in education and three teaching

certificates. Moore also met her husband there, and they raised family of two sons and two daughters (Moore).

It was only later in life that Moore realized the importance of her linguistic upbringing. After spending 11 years living in Montana, Moore and her family moved back to Oklahoma in 1978 (Moore). Upon returning, she discovered that the language she had grown up speaking and hearing every day under the guidance of her grandparents had all but disappeared. Moore realized the number of Quapaw speakers had diminished significantly (Moore).

Generation after generation, individual after individual, the Quapaw language began to vanish. One of Moore's childhood friends was Native American composer Louis Ballard, who had lived down the road from Moore's grandparents and also attended Devil's Promenade elementary school. She recalls the two of them whispering to each other in Quapaw, being careful to avoid speaking their language in front of their non-Indian, English-speaking teacher. The two kept in touch until his death in 2007 (Owen). The loss of Ballard came with the realization that Moore was the last living speaker of the Quapaw language. The linguistic and cultural knowledge she had accumulated was now isolated. Presently, no other native speaker has surfaced (Moore).

Moore, doing one of the most natural things she knew to do, began to teach. Beginning at Northeastern Oklahoma A&M College, Moore taught a course in the history of the nine tribes of Ottawa County (Moore). The college then asked her to teach a language course. Having spent most of her life teaching and already possessing an education degree, Moore built upon her childhood memories of the Quapaw language to develop a suitable curriculum for her class. "I started teaching it just like you would a first grader. That's the way I arranged it, even though all of my students were adults," she said (Moore).



Ardina Moore teaches during one of her Quapaw language courses (Okeson).

Victor Griffin, grandfather of Moore, in 1905. Later becoming the last hereditary chief of the Downstream People, he served as a leader in the Peyote cult. (Baird, 185).



While Moore's work in creating a language class was one that helped teach some of the basic words and phrases of the Downstream People, there were serious limitations. It is true that Moore is the last native speaker of the Quapaw language. However, she is not fluent. The last fluent speaker—the last person able to make up sentences—died in 1975 (Rankin, 45). Moore acquired the knowledge of the Quapaw language as a child only from listening to her grandparents. Having experienced beatings as children in school for speaking an Indian language, Moore's grandparents refused to let her converse with them in Quapaw, though they did speak to her in the language often (Moore).

For Moore, being the last native speaker of her language means she carries a burden for saving it. "It makes me feel very responsible, in that if I am the last person, I don't want the language to be lost," she says. "If I am the last person, I don't want to say that I had the knowledge but I didn't pass it on. That would be stingy, I think, that you're a very selfish person. And I'm not" (Moore). Moore may be one of the last living links the remaining Quapaw community and the world has to the culture and history of the Downstream People revealed through linguistic distinctiveness. Moore's goal is to leave secure this last living link.

Moore's unique life experience is testimony to the resilience of the Quapaw spirit and the larger theme of trying to keep from losing one's heritage. But the introduction of Moore, her life, and her work does little to elucidate the Quapaw story. In fact, her status as the last living speaker of the language only raises the question of *how*. How did the Downstream People go from occupying a place of prominent geopolitical significance to where they are today? What factors facilitated the virtual extinction of the Quapaw language? An investigation into these questions will provide the framework for how the Downstream People arrived at their

contemporary status, as well as establish a deeper understanding of the heritage in order to analyze how best to preserve it.

2. The Downstream People

“When our tribe was one, they were traveling. And they were crossing a stream,” begins Ardina Moore recounting how the Quapaws came to be called the Downstream People (Moore). The telling of stories of the past forges a connection between present-day Quapaws and their ancestors. In developing an analysis of the Downstream People’s heritage, it is important to understand its development and the historical eras that contributed to a loss of culture, particularly language. The history of the Quapaw people provides the context for understanding the contributions of the indigenous people, as well as the importance of their cultural metaphors and how best to preserve them.

Corroborating Moore’s migration legend, linguists and anthropologists estimate that the Downstream People arrived in the Arkansas River Valley around 1500 (Clark, 303). Archeologists point to ancient sites as indicators that the Quapaws are remnants of an Ohio Valley Mississippian population (Clark, 302). A branch of the great Siouian family, the Downstream People once lived east of the Mississippi and near the Atlantic Ocean (Neiberding, 1). Indeed, they are the only indigenous people to have inhabited the area between the Arkansas and Red Rivers and southern Oklahoma (Neiberding, 2).

According to the Quapaws, a united tribe was traveling together when they stopped to cross a river as it was flooding. The travelers split into three groups: one group that remained on the shore and the other that made it to the other side. As a third group was crossing the river, the rope they were using to aid their passage broke, sending them downstream. This faction thus became known as the *O-gah-pah*, “Those Who Went Downstream,” or Downstream People

(Neiberding, 2). Quapaw would later evolve as a Westernized version of *O-gah-pah*, which distinguished them from their two cousins: the *Omaha*, “Those Who Went Upstream,” and the *Wa-sha-she*, “People of the Middle Waters,” or the Osage (Moore).

The name of this large family to which the Quapaws belong is Dhegiha. A subgroup of the Siouian indigenous identity, Dhegiha encompasses the Downstream People along with their closest ethnic groups, the Omaha, Osage, Ponca, and Kansa. In fact, the Quapaw language is only a dialect of Dhegiha Sioux. Linguist Robert Rankin found that the Quapaw language shares over 80 percent of its basic vocabulary with the Osage (Clark, 303).

Nevertheless, the migration and subsequent schism left a lasting mark on the Downstream People. Displacing the existing Tunicas and Koroas, the Quapaws settled in the Arkansas River Valley near the Mississippi. Archeological records from Quapaw sites near the mouth of the Arkansas River indicate that the Quapaw appear to have adopted the regional material culture and substance patterns, while at the same time retaining their language in pure form (Henning, 260). This adaptability to evolving technological measures remains a major theme in the Quapaw experience, and one of the characteristics that defines the Downstream People as a nation whose story and survival has persisted despite overwhelming obstacles.

Described by French visitors as sophisticated, friendly, and “handsome men,” the Downstream People formed a society that clung to its traditional customs, language, religion, stories, and social structure (Baird, 11). Their patrilineal social structure derived from their ancestry and marriage (Sabo III, 31). Agricultural work, an acute specialization of the Quapaws, was gendered feminine, while deer and bison hunting was a task designated for males (Arnold, 14). The Downstream People also established trade relations that connected Mexico (Texas), the Caddos near the Red River, and Illinois (Clark, 304).

Like their Siouian kinfolk, the Downstream People looked to *Wa-kon-tah*, the primordial, creator force in the universe, for guidance. The Quapaws even share the same creation story with the Sioux family, describing the first people arriving on dry land from the water to be sheltered by shells (Clark, 303). Dances and religious ceremonies were also a major part of their society. The Green Corn ceremony, for example, was a time to ensure a successful harvest (Sabo III, 28). Their most solemn ceremony involved rituals for burying the dead, some of which can still be seen today (Neiberding, 5). Though there were periods of warlike behavior, the Downstream People were generally hospitable and respectful, as demonstrated by the importance they placed on the rituals of smoking the sacred calumet pipe (Arnold, 73).

The hospitality and welcoming nature of the Downstream People would be tested upon the arrival of European visitors. Occupying a prime communication route that was often visited by strangers, the Quapaws first encountered French explorers Jacques Marquette and Louis Joliet in July 1673 as the two traveled down the Mississippi (Clark, 306). The newcomers brought with them captive natives who spoke the Illinois language. When the Frenchmen asked who these host people were, one captive indicated that they had encountered the *Arkansea*, the Illinois word for Downstream People. An Anglicized form of the name would be used to describe the trading post established among the Quapaw, and later it would be the name of the territory that would become the 25th state of the United States: Arkansas (Moore).

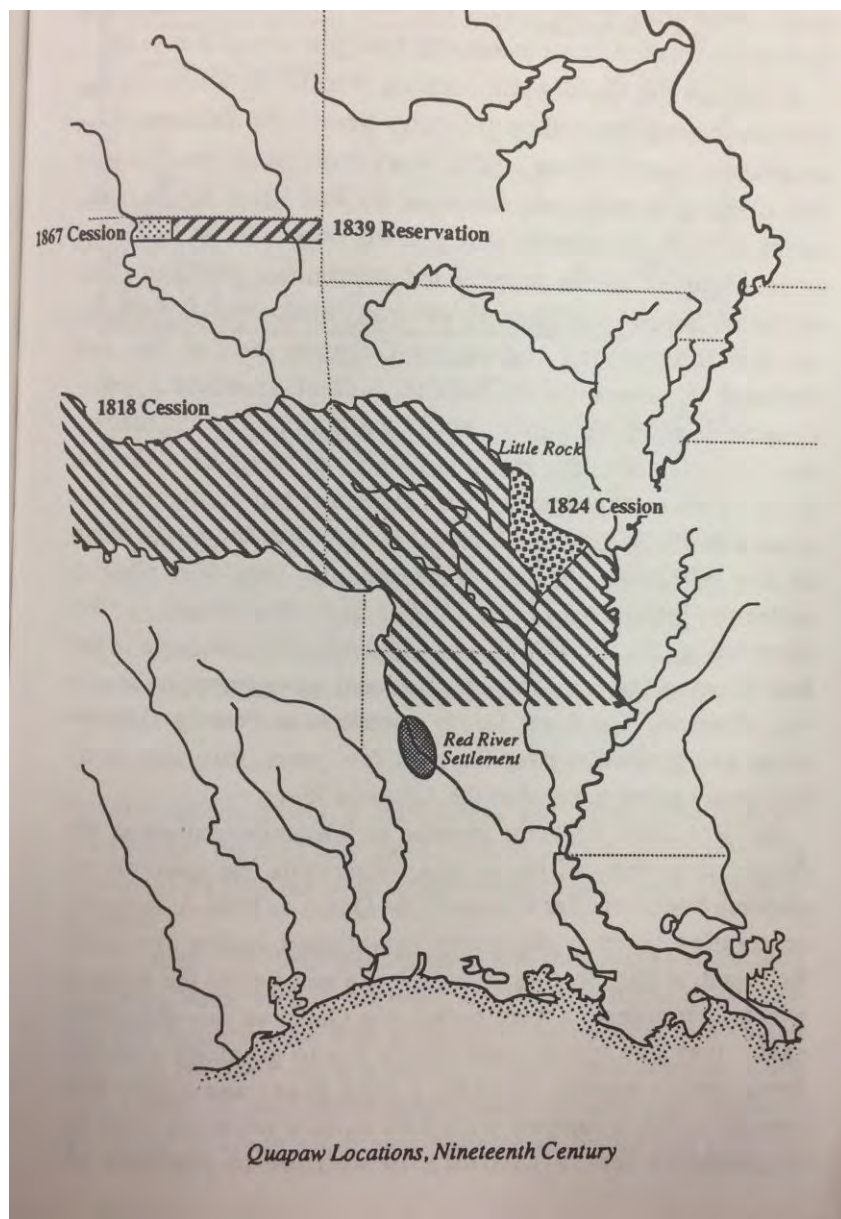
The Downstream People honored their French visitors with the calumet ceremony, forging a relationship that bound the two nations. Later French visitors would establish trade relations with their indigenous hosts. In 1682 they would claim possession of the land in the name of Louis XIV (Baird, 23). A century of French domination changed the Downstream People in many remarkable ways. The establishment of the Arkansas Post in 1721 solidified the Quapaws'

influence in trade as the French demand for fur and other products increased (Clark, 306).

Tragically, however, the demographic consequences were catastrophic. An estimated 6,000 to 15,000 in 1682, the Quapaw numbered less than 700 in 1763 due to the epidemic of European-introduced diseases (Baird, 37).

The legacy of French-Quapaw relations had profound sociocultural implications for the natives. Religious assimilative forces sought to Christianize the Downstream People in the name of the Catholic Church. The Quapaw readily accepted missionaries and showed interest in Christian doctrine (Sabo, 73). Catholic fathers admired the existing spiritual traditions of the natives, often substituting Christian symbols for traditional beliefs (Enochs, 202). Playing upon the trope of the “noble savage,” French efforts at evangelism rendered more friends than converts (Arnold, 172). Nevertheless, such assumptions were inherently rooted in ethnocentric ideals on the part of the Europeans as the introduction of trade goods, weapons, and diseases had a direct effect on loss of culture (Stein, 74). This French era of Quapaw relations, alternatively, was generally a friendlier one as the Quapaws allowed them to occupy lands in the mutual exchange of military and economic assistance. A fact not lost on historians is that there would be no Louisiana Territory for the United States to purchase had it not been for the Quapaw people’s loyalty to the French cause (Clark, 305).

Culturally, the process of assimilation and cooperation that had been nurtured by the French had serious consequences upon the arrival of the American newcomers. The growing dependence on European goods, such as steel axes and brass kettles, fundamentally altered the social structure of the Downstream People as they worked to maintain their role in the frontier exchange economy (Whayne et al. 88). This annuity system, therefore, bound the Quapaw people to the European powers, enabling them to sustain their geopolitical control of the scarcely



Top: Quapaw locations in the 19th Century (Sabo III, 75).

Bottom: Flag of the Quapaw Tribe of Oklahoma.

populated region through trade alliances with the natives. However, this complicated system of alliances mostly reflected the manipulation of the Downstream People by whites, which would have grave consequences in the years to come. Such a dependence on this system of annuities had a psychological and material effect on the Quapaw people in addition to aiding acculturation. It would also facilitate the exploitation of the Downstream People by subsequent American newcomers (Whayne et al. 88).

The Louisiana Purchase, however, ended this era of relations with the French and began one that would be characterized by ostracism and desperation. At the time of the purchase, the Quapaw population stood at 555 (Key, 272). While relations with the French newcomers were generally hospitable, no such alliances, relationships, or even intermarrying occurred between the Quapaws and the Anglo-American immigrants. Newcomers pouring into the new Arkansas Territory aimed to stake their claim at the new economy based on cotton and livestock.

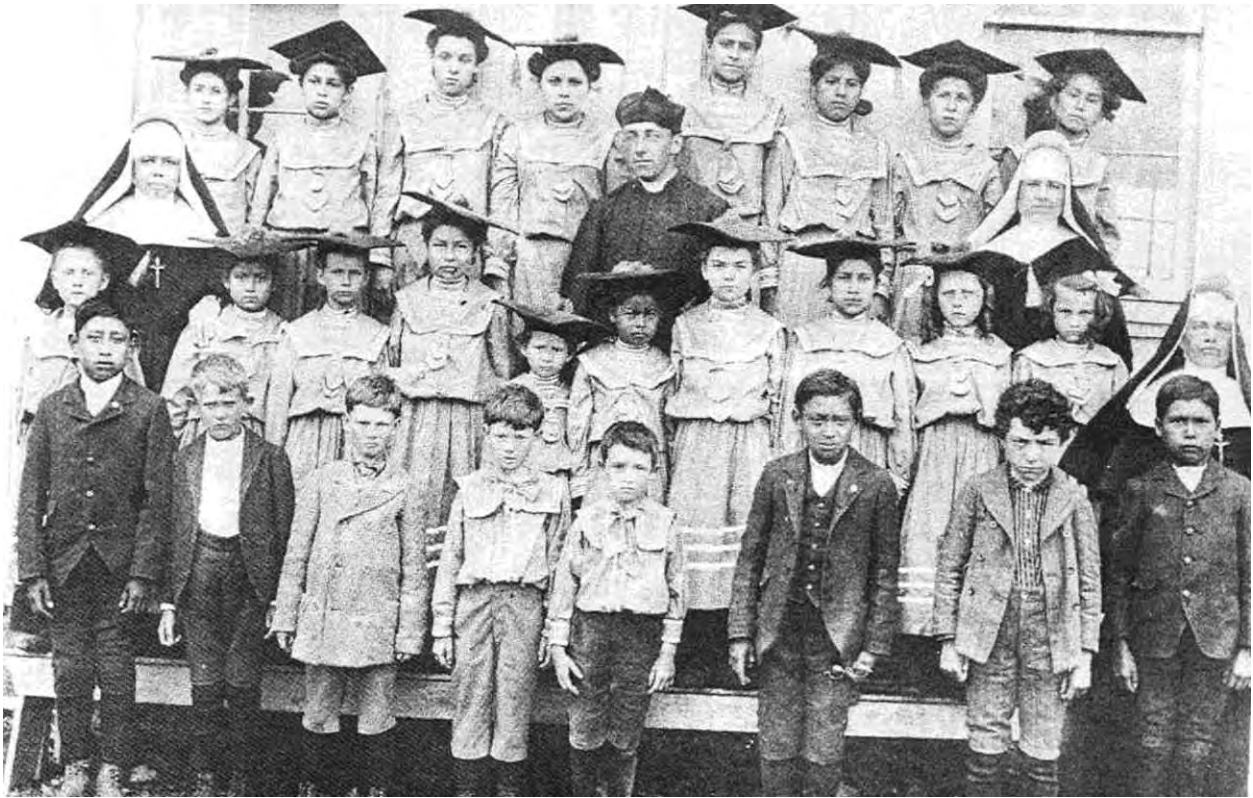
Having lost all social, military, and economic power, the Quapaw were a liability to the new inhabitants. The Anglo citizens were of the firm opinion that the Downstream People did not need the two thousand square miles they claimed (Neiberding, 61). The destiny of Arkansas would become one that sought to exclude their indigenous inhabitants. They had to go.

The signing of a treaty in 1818 with the United States of America was a far more somber affair, unlike bonds forged with French leaders. While this agreement did not have specific “civilization” goals in mind for the Downstream People, its policy objectives certainly aimed at assimilation, particularly regarding gender roles and education (Key, 280). A second treaty in 1824 agreed to move the Quapaws south onto Caddo territory in northeastern Louisiana (Key, 282). This act proved to be more disastrous than the last as flood conditions devastated the Quapaw newcomers who were maladjusted to such conditions, let alone relating to their Caddo

neighbors (Key, 284). In defiance, Chief Sarasin led a group of Quapaws back to Arkansas. Chief Heckaton, another tribal leader, pleaded on behalf of the Downstream People to the federal government, “This land we now live on belonged to our forefathers. If we leave it, where shall we go?” (Key, 283).

Impoverished and politically divided, the Downstream People consented to a final treaty in 1839, which made way for one final removal to Indian Territory (Key, 288). This treaty contained an educational provision with the goal of assimilation (Neiberding, 93). In 1843 a Methodist minister established a school near their reservation. Another school, Crawford School in Kansas, named for the then commissioner of Indian affairs, opened in 1842 as an institution aimed at civilizing the children growing up in “darkness and barbarism” (Neiberding, 95). The insidious, culturally genocidal roots for such educational systems were in the federal boarding schools of former prison commandant Captain Richard H. Pratt, who made famous the words, “Kill the Indian, save the child” (Stein, 76).

Following the tumultuous years of the American Civil War, Congress passed the Indian Allotment Act in 1887, which required reservations to be split up into individual family allotments. The act was designed to facilitate the assimilation of Native Americans across the country. The Quapaws managed to preserve a large and valuable land base while enlarging the tribal roll as they encouraged more Quapaws and Osages to move onto the reservation (Sabo III, 80). In 1893, each of the 234 tribal members received 240 acres of land (Clark, 308). Additionally, 40 acres was set aside for the establishment of St. Mary’s of the Quapaws, a Catholic-run school. This school was supported for nearly three decades by educational funds the tribe received from the federal government (Sabo III, 81).



Top Left: Illustration by Charles Banks of a Quapaw, circa 1700 (Sabo III et al). Top Middle: 1818 Treaty between the Quapaw nation and the United States of America (Baird, 55). Top Right: Fictionalized engraving of French visitors destroying a supposed Quapaw idol (Arnold, 139). Bottom: Class photo of St. Mary's School 1904-1905 (Neiberding, 200).

Both St. Mary's and the existing government boarding school facilitated the loss of culture and heritage as those running the institutions sought extermination through civilization. A child who spoke the Quapaw language would often be whipped or punished in some way to make them feel ashamed. One woman recalled having her mouth washed with lye soap. Boys also suffered the humiliation of having their long hair cut (Neiberding, 135).

These forced assimilation efforts left a legacy of pain and degradation on a proud nation. Re-education programs designed to make children adopt the "civilized" values of a race that, as they were told, had conquered them resulted in abuse, neglect, and often the subsequent death of indigenous children all over the United States (Barker, 55). The education of the Downstream People during this time connects to the larger theme of the emotional and spiritual devastation experienced by indigenous Americans and the long-term effects such indoctrination and abuse had on the retention of their heritage (Barker, 47).

Following the Allotment Act, a heavy vein of lead ore was discovered on the Quapaw lands while a water well was being dug on a farm in 1897 (Neiberding, 132). The Quapaw lands in Indian Territory were rich with lead and zinc deposits. The once grassy plains of the reservation began to make room for white-owned businesses, mines, and piles of chat—mountains of mining debris. The lead-zinc mining enriched a number of the Quapaws. Yet because of the corruption of mine owners, businessmen, and government officials who were attracted by the newfound wealth, the Quapaws became known as Oklahoma's "poor rich Indians" (Neiberding, 151). The spectrum of forced assimilation was again at work as Quapaws sought to capitalize on the boomtown atmosphere that had developed on their tribal lands, which further exposed them to American sensibilities and education.

The ideas of pan-Indianism, however, did have an effect on the Quapaws. Living together in Oklahoma in a melting pot of other Indian nations resulted in the exchanging of customs and creating friendships (Neiberding, 152). In 1872 the Quapaws established an annual powwow on July 4, which is held next to the tribal headquarters. It is still the oldest powwow in the country, combining a variety of native dances and celebrations that serve as a principal way for the Downstream People to commemorate their heritage (Clark, 310).

The theme of cultural revivalism took hold as the Quapaws adopted the peyote religion, a revitalization movement that combined elements of Catholicism and indigenous beliefs. Though this practice fostered a broader indigenous identity, it adversely displaced many traditional beliefs among the Downstream People (Sabo III, 82). Social divisions were brewing at this time. In 1927 they terminated support of the St. Mary's school (Sabo III, 82). Victor Griffin, priest of the peyote religion and staunch defender of Quapaw cultural and religious practices, became chief in 1929 (Neiberding, 153). Rejecting federal reforms, he lost favor with the federal government. The Bureau of Indian Affairs overthrew Griffin in 1956, establishing the tribal business council, the governing structure that exists today (Clark, 310).

In the years following the mining boom on the Quapaw tribal lands, environmental reclamation efforts focused on a forty-square-mile region that is believed to have been contaminated by mining activity. Tar Creek, a stream that flows across northeastern Oklahoma, coursed through the chat piles that were laced with lead and zinc (*The Creek Runs Red*). Children in the area had the highest levels of lead poisoning in the United States (*The Creek Runs Red*). After being designated as a Superfund site in 1983, Tar Creek remains a major issue for the Quapaw as they manage the forty acres of dead earth, lawsuits, and health concerns (Clark, 311).

Right: Quapaw boys John Coldspring, Alex Mudd, Frank Green Back, and Wiley Ball seen with their heads shaven (Neberding, 60).



Middle Left: Chat pile from the Tar Creek Superfund site (“TAR CREEK SUPERFUND SITE”).

Middle Right: 2016 annual powwow hosted by the Quapaw tribe (“Oklahoma”).

Bottom Left: Business Committee Chairman John Berrey (National Museum of the American Indian, 2015).

Bottom Right: Benjamin Quapaw believed to be the wealthiest Quapaws to have ever lived. Seen here in 1910 (Baird, 193).



The last two decades have proven to be much more prosperous for the Downstream People than their preceding years. The current tribal offices for the Quapaw Tribe of Oklahoma are located in Quapaw. Chairman of the Business Committee John Berrey, the seventh-generation grandson of chief Heckaton, oversees a \$500 million budget, which results in a \$1 billion impact on the local economy (TEDxTalks). The tribe's main source of revenue is the Downstream Casino, in addition to raising livestock. The tribe's website is <http://quapawtribe.com>. There are now approximately 4,800 members (TEDxTalks).

3. Fossils

Today, by the time Quapaw children begin learning to speak, their first words are in English. As the history of the Downstream People demonstrates, it was not always this way. Fighting, evolving, and more importantly, surviving, are traits that are all part of the Quapaw ethos as the nation has historically faced threats of extinction, mismanagement, environmental disaster, and—as this project demonstrates—cultural abandonment both forced and consequential. However, the attitude of the Downstream People today toward their language is not the same as it was generations ago. In exploring the loss and subsequent preservation efforts of the Quapaw language, it is important to understand what remains and the resources available to restore it. While the death of the last native speaker in 1975 left a void in the cultural development of the tribe, contemporary preservation work aims to restore and fill gaps in the linguistic legacy of the Downstream People with the dream of seeing a revitalized language being spoken in the future.

For Bill Proctor, this dream is his life's work. Proctor, a 45-year-old, is of mixed Quapaw and Osage ancestry. He did not think much of his linguistic heritage when he was a child, though his older family members pushed him to learn the language. His fascination with indigenous languages began fifteen years ago when he began attending Osage language classes (Proctor).

Proctor's primary experience with indigenous languages is with Osage, a linguistic cousin of Quapaw from the Dhegiha family. Having graduated college with an education degree, he ended up working for the Osage tribe with language preservation and education. He began teaching Osage in the public school system in Osage County, but did not continue due to the long commute to work. In his work with the Osage language, however, he frequently came across Quapaw materials as well. Later, he began working with the Quapaw tribe to help in preservation efforts (Proctor).

The oldest collection of the Quapaw language dates back to George Izard, the man appointed by President James Monroe as territorial governor of Arkansas. Izard gathered a collection of Quapaw vocabulary with the help of a French interpreter in 1827 ("Historical written works on the Quapaw language").

The most extensive and reliable sources on the Quapaw language come from Reverend James Owen Dorsey and linguist Dr. Robert Rankin. Dorsey was an Episcopal deacon who worked with Dhegiha languages after being introduced to the Omaha language in Nebraska. He visited the Quapaws various times between 1890 and 1894, gathering linguistic notes, folklore, history, names, and vocabulary ("Historical works on the Quapaw language"). Most of Dorsey's work remains unpublished and is held at the Anthropological Archives of the Smithsonian Institute.

Rankin, a professor from the University of Kansas Department of Linguistics, visited the Quapaws between 1973 and 1974, gathering more data and updating the Dorsey records. Rankin worked with the last fluent speaker and other tribal members to build upon Dorsey's work (Rankin, 45). From his investigations and field studies, he produced a list of Quapaw words and

a 415-page word list based on a combination of his work and that of Dorsey (“Historical written works on the Quapaw language”).

Since working with the Quapaw nation to aid in language preservation, Proctor’s work has mostly been in combing through archives to collect and organize materials on the language. He has compiled sources on the language and analyzes the reliability, accuracy, and utility of each piece of data (Proctor). His collections are based on the word lists gathered by those who have collected Quapaw data, as well as audio recordings tribal members possessed of their own family members. Proctor also works to find cognate words in Dhegiha languages (Proctor).

Of course, once the audio files and sounds are written down, that changes the language. With the exception of Cherokee, none of the languages indigenous to what is today the United States have their own writing system. Quapaw falls within this category. To further complicate things, most historical works on the Quapaw language use no standard method of data collection, for most early people were unable to use a system like the International Phonetic Alphabet (IPA). Rankin, however, formally adapted the Dorsey works to Siouian IPA (Proctor). The most reliable sources, according to Proctor, are the ones in which their authors use a standard system, even if it is one they themselves pioneered. Still, Proctor is charged with scrutinizing the existing data, checking for errors. One example that is a dead giveaway in validating each word involves words ending in consonants. All Quapaw words end in vowels, so words that do not conform to this rule are immediately questionable (Proctor).

Upon validating and organizing these word lists, audio files, and field studies, Proctor then works with a web designer to digitize the records to make them available online. An informal lexicon with the translation and audio recording is available online at <http://quapawtribalancestry.com/quapawlanguage>.

On the occasion of meeting Ardina Moore, Rankin told her, “Why haven’t I met you yet?” (Moore). She had the opportunity to work with Rankin as he investigated the Dhegiha languages. Unlike Proctor, Moore’s work with Quapaw has been less focused on compiling archival data and more focused on education. She began informally teaching Quapaw around 30 years ago in the backroom of a former beauty shop, which she converted into Buffalo Sun, a Native American clothing store with designs by Moore herself. Today, the tribal center still refers people to her as the go-to person for anyone curious about language classes. As chairman of the cultural committee of the Quapaw Tribe of Oklahoma, she voluntarily leads language classes twice a year for groups of six to eight students (Moore). Additionally, she has helped produce three discs on the Quapaw tongue, which are available for purchase at the tribal museum. She has also contributed to a disc on tribal history, and would like to create another on storytelling (Moore).

Cultural revitalization and preservation is no easy task; yet it is one the Downstream People want to see accomplished. Through understanding the materials used to reconstruct a dying language, it becomes easier to analyze the barriers to and steps toward revival that the Quapaws now face. The fossilized remnants of the Quapaw tongue, combined with the energy of those seeking to restore it, are a powerful force reckoning with a history of assimilation and a need to foster group identity and a connection to one’s ancestors.

“People want to see it happen. Ardina does her best teaching what she knows, but we’ve lost fluency. So now, we’re kind of just picking through the pieces,” says Proctor. “We’re looking at bones of dinosaurs. And no one’s seen that dinosaur walking” (Proctor).

4. Reversing the Trend

The question the Downstream People, in addition to other Native American nations and indigenous people around the world now face with respect to language and culture is, “Where

does one go from here?" After establishing a historical analysis answering for the loss of culture that the Quapaws have experienced, as well as investigating the existing tribal preservation materials, it is important to explore the various ways to sustain tribal heritage. Analyzing the current preservation efforts in conjunction with existing models for reversing loss of culture demonstrates how to revive dying linguistic traditions. Furthermore, such analysis illustrates why maintaining endangered aspects of cultures is absolutely vital in reversing the legacy of forced assimilation, connecting the tribe with their ancestors, and most important of all, fostering a close communal identity.

Despite her age, Ardina Moore diligently works to maintain *O-gah-pah* as she knows it. Creating audio recordings, books, and instructing her children and grandchildren are some of the ways she is preserving her personal knowledge of her people, in addition to being the only one actively teaching Quapaw at this time. She also travels around the country and interacts with other tribes facing the same situation of language loss.

One unique aspect of Moore's work is her involvement with the Dhegiha Conference, an annual event hosted by one of the Dhegiha tribes. Tribal elders come together to celebrate their shared heritage. They also share stories, folk traditions, customs, and ideas on how best to maintain their language and culture. Moore was recently appointed to the board of the conference (Moore). As Quapaw is regarded as one of the purest forms of the Dhegihan Sioux tongue, the Dhegiha Conference could prove to be a valuable avenue to pursue because of the common link between the Indian nations.

On the preservation side of the Quapaw language, Bill Proctor continues to work at collecting and analyzing language material with the intention of creating a suitable body of work in the Quapaw tongue and one day organizing an adequate curriculum for teaching (Proctor). He

identifies the large amount of effort required to learn a language as one of the major barriers to restoring the tribe's linguistic heritage. Teaching a polysynthetic language that is no longer spoken is a tremendous challenge, one that is not necessarily impossible, but requires a great amount of effort on the part of the learner.

Another challenge facing the preservation of Quapaw is the conflicting intertribal narratives about what their language looked like. In his experience teaching the Osage language, Proctor recalls intense arguments between family members about the way their relatives spoke the language or the meanings of particular words. These disagreements can be divisive in language reacquisition and can create insecurity for someone who fears experiencing disapproval from tribal elders for making a mistake. This problem is one Proctor aims to correct through his preservation work. Audio files and data dating back to 1827 are critical for creating a sound body of linguistic evidence that can keep all tribal members on the same page (Proctor).

“You'd have brothers and sisters saying, ‘That isn't how grandma said it,’” Proctor says about his experience with teaching Osage. “And I would say, ‘Oh, yeah? Isn't this your grandmother?’ I'd play [the audio]. Silence. Then it got to the point where people tended to be quiet” (Proctor).

Nevertheless, Proctor gathers materials with the goal of turning them into a curriculum for language learning. Explaining the importance of accuracy, he works to ensure that preservation efforts are faithful to the way the Downstream People spoke centuries ago. Proctor identifies conjugation as often the first thing to go with language loss, often mutating to adopt English-style conjugations. He combats this by providing a complete set of information on Quapaw vocabulary. For example, he notes the word *dog* and includes that word in a dozen or so sentences with accurate conjugations (Proctor). Trying to maintain linguistic accuracy

demonstrates the difficulty of learning a language that exists only in archives and distant memories, unlike other languages with living speakers.

“There’s no place to take it. That’s what hurts us,” says Proctor. “You don’t learn your language by reading and writing. You learn it by speaking and hearing it. So everyone is having to learn it backwards” (Proctor).

This lack of utility speaks to the larger barrier to preservation in that the language is not spoken inside the tribe, much less anywhere else in the world. In conjunction with other difficulties in preservation, this factor is arguably the biggest barrier to overcome with all endangered languages around the world, because it goes back to the main question of how personally challenging it is to not only retain your language, but also inspire younger generations to do the same.

Proctor’s work teaching Osage gave him the experience to grapple with this challenge as he had to generate a language-learning environment suitable for introducing pupils to a new tongue. One of the ways he accomplished this was by creating a shared space where students could learn together. Museum trips, for example, enabled members to discuss and speak to one another as they were engaged in a common experience where they could listen and learn from one another (Proctor). Moore also works to overcome this challenge as well, opting for fostering a traditional Quapaw environment. She does this by stopping the language lesson when a student has a question and telling a tribal story that relates to that concept (Moore). This environment cements the cultural aspect of language-learning, creating a common bond and a space where members can reconnect with their heritage.

Parallel with Moore and Proctor’s work in overcoming the barrier to creating an environment that facilitates the needs of second-language acquisition is the concept of a language center.

LaVerne Masayeva Jeanne of the University of Nevada Reno describes a proposal for a Native American language center as an institutional response to language and culture loss. This concept would include a central body that serves to promote the rich intellectual heritage of indigenous Americans, of which language is a key and vulnerable part (Hale et al. 25). The center would bring together scholars and activists to be responsive to the needs of Native American communities. Such a concept could prove useful to the Quapaw tribe in facilitating an environment that can address the cultural reacquisition needs and generate a sense of shared identity.

The Miami Tribe of Oklahoma, a tribe regionally connected to the Downstream People, can attest to the power of community language centers. Formerly located near the Great Lakes prior to their removal, they lost all of their last speakers of their Algonquian language some fifty years ago. Miami linguist Daryl Baldwin, utilizing the texts and recordings of the language that were collected, earned a degree in linguistics with a specialization in Native American languages from the University of Montana. He homeschooled his children in the Miami language and later founded the Myaamia Center at Miami University in Ohio (Thurman). This language center provides the indigenous community with cultural resources, and as a result, Miami has become a growing language.

One language that has utilized the technique of immersion to reverse language shift is the Hawaiian tongue. Following centuries of invasion and colonialism, the people of Hawai'i had virtually lost all connection to their language. Implementing immersion schools within the past two decades, native Hawaiians revitalized their language through dual-language programs that have proven to develop students' critical literacy and cultural pride (McCarty, 154). As the Hawaiian revitalization programs demonstrated consciousness and self-determination within

Hawaiian youth, likewise, a similar model for the Downstream People might borrow from the success of thorough immersion programs.

The Navajo nation has also experienced such a language shift. Having approximately 150,000 speakers, the Navajo claim the largest number of speakers of any indigenous group north of Mexico (McCarty, 155). Like the natives of Hawai'i, the implementation of dual-language programs in K-12 school systems had a dramatic effect on revitalizing the tribe's linguistic heritage. Findings indicate that the Navajo-immersion students actually outperformed non-immersion students in assessments (McCarty, 156). Both the Hawaiian and Navajo examples show how school-based efforts joined with family- and community-based initiatives can have a dramatic effect on the tribe's cultural revitalization and on the positive learning environment for the child (McCarty, 157).

Though their population and resources are limited, the Downstream People identify the nation's children as the future hope for carrying on and reviving their heritage. Of the 175 indigenous languages belonging to what is today the United States, only twenty are being naturally acquired by children (McCarty, 147). Proctor and Moore stress the importance of instructing children in the language at an early age. The state of Oklahoma qualifies indigenous languages as world languages on state school language requirements, meaning tribal languages can be used as school credits (Ruckman). The development of suitable curriculum on the Quapaw language could fit into this model and be used to instruct young children in school, resulting in further preservation of native traditions.

Certainly, children are the tribe's most vital resource for securing tribal sovereignty, given success in education and the foundational knowledge of culture and language (Meza, 361). Reaching the children of the Downstream People would help preserve the dying cultural

traditions. Additionally, in stressing the heritage of Quapaw children and the proven successes of dual-language education in indigenous tongues, they also form a connection with the past. The ancestral and communal bond formed through shared heritage is one that speaks to the heart of the individual's identity as an indigenous person.

“People will say culture, but I say identity,” says Proctor about why language revival is important to him. “It’s a link to our past, and it’s identity. It’s who we are. We were separated from everyone because of this language. We’ve got to maintain that” (Proctor)

While the task to reverse language shift and revive dormant cultural traditions is an arduous one, it is not impossible. The effort, management, and resources available, in conjunction with proven case studies on language reacquisition, demonstrate that even a dormant language is capable of reappearing as a world language. Though the historical narrative of the Quapaws highlights the larger assimilative forces at work, it really only took two generations for the language to arrive at where it is today: practically vanished. Given the efforts of activists and tribal members, however, it does not have to die. Adequate teaching curriculum drawn from appropriate source material, targeting of tribal youth, and community-based consciousness-raising can aid in language revival for the Downstream People.

Externally from the Downstream People, public policy should be aimed at restoring tribal heritage. The Native American Languages Act is a federal measure designed to work with native communities to ensure their survival (Meza, 359). Such federal policies should be crafted to aid cultural preservation in contrast to the legacy of genocide and assimilation. Recognizing American Indian languages and cultures as legitimate is only the beginning. Regrettably, Native American students continue to perform at a much lower rate than the general population (Meza, 360). A comprehensive approach, one that works with indigenous communities, must be

designed to reverse linguicide and death of culture while supporting education reforms that truly uplift native youth.

Additionally, local cooperation with indigenous communities is in order. As recently as 2013, twenty-two of Oklahoma's thirty-seven tribes have lost all fluent members of their native tongues (Ruckman). Continued support for native education that fosters a developing indigenous identity is essential. Consciousness about language endangerment is also vital in language reacquisition as people everywhere realize that Native Americans are not simply artifacts of the past. They, like their languages, are living entities that deserve recognition and for their voices to be heard.

Language preservation and revitalization would, in part, serve as a way to reverse "civilization" policies, which served to eradicate the way of life for the Downstream People. Reversing language shift would mean reconciling the generations of American Indian education that was designed to force natives to speak English, abandon their tribal identity in exchange for one centered on work and owning private property, and the adoption of Christianity (Meza, 354). Reclamation efforts directly counter this legacy of colonialism and forced assimilation, as well as the pressures for English monolingualism.

Revitalization efforts also benefit the bulk of humanity. As the world loses one language, it loses an irredeemable repository of human knowledge. Language, one of the ultimate media of intellectual life, represents diversity found in all living things. Essential for scholars of civilization and humanity, American Indian languages represent the living, sophisticated history of those who speak them, in contrast to the "primitive" or "backward" categories imposed upon them by colonizers (Midgette, 27). Indeed, it is through the preservation and revitalization of the

Quapaw language that the world can begin to further comprehend the full range of human expression.

For the Downstream People, this journey back to their roots unites both past and present. Mutually reinforcing relationships between the individual and the community, the Native American social contract is one that includes the immediate and mythic pasts (Moser, 289). Reconnecting with their heritage means reuniting with their past. The drive to see the language survive is one that comes with the recognition of ancestral bonds and the importance of carrying on the traditions of the Downstream People. For Moore, this motivation comes from her grandparents.

“I have that feeling of responsibility actually from my own ancestors,” says Moore about having the responsibility to pass along tribal traditions instilled in her from her traditional family members. “I feel like they’re looking down, saying, ‘Do this; do that.’ And that’s why I feel the need to do it” (Moore).

5. Defining *O-gah-pah*

Today, the Quapaws derive their identity through community, as they have done for centuries. While their language remains dormant now and many of their tribal customs have vanished, the Downstream People maintain a way of life today that embodies the ethos of their ancestors. In recognizing these unique characteristics, it is important to understand the role of language within the current endeavors of the tribe. Analyzing what significance the language will have in the future speaks to the identity of the Downstream People and who they are in the year 2017.

Although their language is considered dormant, the tribe continues to identify it as a persistent part of the tribal identity. “We’ve been called a dead language. But our language is not

dead,” says Moore. “As long as we have one person who can speak it and wants to learn it, it’s not dead. It might be a dying language, but it’s not dead. If I can keep it from becoming a dead language, that’s my goal” (Moore).

While Proctor works to investigate the Quapaw language and one day see it as revitalized, he recognizes the evolutionary quality of language. The language has lost its fluency; now, the important factor in its preservation is its retention by the Downstream People. “It’ll still be Quapaws speaking Quapaw. So it will be right. It’ll be the best we can do at that time,” says Proctor.

For the Downstream People today, however, their language remains a novelty, something consisting of a few words someone might read at a funeral. According to Proctor, they still bury their dead and perform their dances in the traditional manner, but in English. The Downstream People continue to progress culturally despite this language gap.

As has been part of the Quapaw identity from the very beginning, an openness and flexibility toward change is what continues to characterize them today. Still maintaining an affinity with their native lands, the Downstream People sponsor projects in Arkansas, working with the University of Arkansas and various municipalities (Sabo III, 109). Since forty acres of the tribe’s allotted Oklahoma land are poisoned, the Quapaw look for opportunity within a triangular tract in the Natural State, roughly the size of New Hampshire, investing in job creation, philanthropy, community and land development (TEDxTalks). They hope to convey their communal ethic through their tribal endeavors. “The Quapaw people are about community,” says Business Committee President John Berrey. “We are the people of Arkansas, and we’re coming back.”

The cultural committee chaired by Moore aims to continue the traditions of the Quapaw people. Offering pottery classes, art classes, dice games, and traditional craftsmanship, the

cultural committee seeks to carry on other forms of Quapaw traditions. The Downstream People look to their descendants with great hope. Moore is quick to tell about her children and grandchildren, most of whom are college-educated and have masters degrees. Several of them are quite proficient at speaking Quapaw thanks to Moore, who hopes they will carry on her dream of sustaining *O-gah-pah*.

Reclaiming their linguistic heritage would only serve to enrich the Downstream People today and add to their sense of community and indigenous identity. According to Proctor, something as simple as conducting a Native American church service in Quapaw would have a tremendous amount of meaning for the tribe. While the story of the Quapaw language is filled with tragedy, it is still an open book for an optimistic future. This future, with the addition of their ancestral tongue, would instill a qualitatively different ethos in the tribal members, one that speaks directly to the heart of who they are. “To me, it means pride,” says Proctor about the Quapaw language. “That’s who I am. That’s where I come from. That’s who my people are.”

6. The Persisting Drumbeat

Linguistic diversity is one of the defining characteristics of the human species. The mechanism through which we derive meaning and understand the world around us, our linguistic norms are vehicles for history, culture, and tradition. The complex mysteries of language, however, cannot be divorced from the struggles of social justice and self-determination.

Through our native tongue, we engage in the world around us. Language loss and revitalization, therefore, present human rights issues for which the entire world must be held accountable. As cultures and civilizations ultimately fall victim to assimilative forces and globalization, it is vital to understand the power dynamics behind such language shifts.

The indigenous experience must not be ignored. Even in 2017, indigenous rights issues are not a thing of the past. With respect to retaining heritage and native customs, preservation and reacquisition take a stand against those assimilative forces which are rooted in prejudice, violence, and greed.

The story of the Downstream People is part of such a continuing narrative. Despite historical setbacks and contemporary challenges, preserving the dying Quapaw language adds to the cultural fabric of the North American continent. More importantly, language preservation and revitalization foster a democratic and linguistically and culturally rich society for us all.

From their Dhegihan Sioux roots to their contemporary status residing mostly in Oklahoma and Arkansas, the Downstream People merit appreciation and investigation into their unique history and the circumstances upon which many of their tribal customs were lost. Through analyzing the work of historians, linguists, and active tribal members like Ardina Moore and Bill Proctor, one can grasp the uniqueness of the Quapaw experience. Despite many difficulties, their story is still being written.

That the Quapaws have survived is certainly a test to who they are as people. Their linguistic heritage is part of that identity. Yet while they maintain their distinctiveness as Those Who Went Downstream, the Quapaw story is our story. The loss and preservation of Quapaw traditions only illustrates the fragility of human society. Through language, we learn to relate to our community, the earth, the cosmos, and our past. Thus, through understanding the Downstream People and their seemingly miraculous story of survival and struggle to main a dying heritage, we understand more about ourselves through this shared sense of empathy as human beings.

The *O-gah-pah* are all of us.

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