



# Nettles

An **ALLIED ASCENSION** Essay

To our Indigenous Americans: colonial representation of the stripes of the American flag has been shared with me. When I decided to keep it as part of the logo, it is with the intent of appreciating the healing and strength of our tribal people, with the uncompromising fight for survival through remembering where you come reflecting an appreciation that we have 574 sovereign communities in today's US that are the collective global experts in healing and protecting sovereignty for survival. The fate of the US for ALL of us may depend on these teachings, in fact, and my bias is that it absolutely does. As the flag represents the fight of my father and grandfathers to me, teachings from Indigenous Americans gives me hope that our collective people will fight our strongest fight for the sovereignty of the US distinctly and only with a united front. It is the hope that cultural symbiosis of our American people over the next 7 generations is the medicine that turns the US's trajectory of self-destruction, so that today's fracturing becomes appreciation of tomorrow, as that fracturing was necessary to make space for the strongest part of our nation to grow, as is the case with a fractured bone in our Creator's world. It would be arrogant to expect it to be received *in a good way* by all, today. The stripes remind me not only of your healing and strength, and the version of the US that we can become as a mutualistically-empowering collective people, but it reminds me why I need to listen twice as much as I speak, as a deficit of trust is a reality I've inherited, with the red and white important reminders for me to seek teachings of fearless humility as our united American people protect, revive and strengthen the American Spirit to preserve it for the next 7 generations, with acknowledgment for the significance of 7 generations, in the words of each of our own origins of *where we come from*.

My initial plan for the theme of my dissertation was to look at how to increase achievement of Native American students. Having already completed 5 college programs, it was my assumption of having knowledge, rather than a hunger for awareness of where I *didn't* have knowledge, that had blinded me. In a staff training, an ally and a personal friend, whom is one of the most respected people in my world, was speaking to the staff at the Muckleshoot Tribal School; he very passionately clarified that those of us who are not members of the tribe were distinctly *hired by the tribe* to provide a service, that the mindset of a *savior* of their people was insulting and condescending. He demanded the understanding that their culture was the root of everything they did, and the *intent* of helping, without listening to *where* and *how*, could do harm to the community, and directly violate the job we were being hired to do.

Looking at the research for any youth who grows up with hardship, there is abundant evidence that there are one of two powerful paths. Where there is no visibility or existence of tools to generate and sustain hope, the path is a continuance of the experienced hardship to the next generation. Where there are, in fact, tools provided and the understanding to clearly see those tools, the future path tends to be the generation of a *warrior-teacher*, who becomes an advocate against hardships they faced in their youth; the resilience built through the battles their life has presented, and the hope from feeling the healing of the damage from those battles in order to face tomorrow with the will to continue the fight against those hardships, are teachings that they become uniquely equipped to provide.

I have the heart of a patriot, and my blood is rooted from *warrior-teachers* of various lands in Europe, with those from the Highlands of Scotland that I am most connected to; those *warrior-teachers* in my clan were sold-out by neighboring clans, with many of them massacred, as their human value was seen as less-than that of Lowlanders and the British. It is the *idea* of a nation fleeing the de-valuation of humans based on bloodlines or affiliation that is the virtue that warrior-teachers have lost their lives for in the land of my heritage, and that my father and grandfathers have risked their lives for as veterans of foreign wars through US military service. It is that *virtue* that is in my heart and my blood.

If I forget that virtue, or fail in teaching it to my children and grandchildren, the sacrifices of those who came before in my bloodline is forgotten, and those sacrifices are dishonored. An even more powerful threat is my fear to dig inside to continuously reflect on what I am not aware of, which could slowly and silently extinguish that virtue. As our human minds have always done, we have the tendency to seek the shortest and quickest path. It is infinitely simpler and more comfortable to rationalize what makes us feel good in the moment, as opposed to digging into our wounds and fears in order to best understand them. However, my culture also includes showing up on Sundays, not so my neighbor sees me

there or gives me the righteousness to judge another, but to remind me to continuously and humbly seek the virtues that propel us to express love and nurture life; the temptation to seek the easy and comfortable path, is and always has been, a temptation in our human minds full of self-destruction and a painful destination, when we stop seeking understanding in order to take the virtuous next step in our journey, especially when it is much more difficult.

Through years of listening to traditional indigenous teachings, from traditional teachers, in the lowland marshes, high mountain elevations and on the Salish Sea, in the Pacific Northwest, the dissertation topic changed to “Building Trust as a non-Native Serving a Tribal Community”. The topic changed as a result of starting to *understand my place* in an alliance. My contribution would be guided by those who hired me to be an asset in the education of their people, with my placement a function of supporting the ascending trajectory of their people through an assigned job role I was hired to do and distinctly not assigning myself a placement that could *overwrite* the teachings of their people, aware that altruistic intent would be toxic and counterproductive if I ever stopped to rest and accepted the easy step, rather than putting in the humble and self-reflective work of seeking continuous understanding of *my place*.

An alliance is sustainable when it is symbiotic. By humbly seeking understanding to see my place, is the reward of learning and the genesis of hope. As I dig deeper to understand my place, it includes listening to the history of European-Native relations since contact. The history is quite painful and often difficult to hear, if I’m being honest, and even more difficult to process. In fact, for those who haven’t dug-deep to listen to the authentic history, I can’t even put into words how difficult it is to be presented with hope for the future of the country I hope to leave for my children, with that hope provided by tribal allies, to sit next to a hurting youth of their tribe, when I see hopelessness in the eyes of a child and know that my hope is from the perseverance and unity of their bloodline but acts over hundreds of years from those of European bloodlines may have led to that child not being able to see a path to hope through their eyes, while it has been gifted to me and the model of their people healing while our American people as a whole are hurting more with each passing day. One day, a tribal member approached me during lunch to talk to me about a sweet young lady that came to sit by me, who was as kind as any child I had ever met yet had an unmistakable heavy despair in her eyes. My colleague told me that the innocent and loving child has not been comfortable around an adult male before as long as she had seen.... *I can’t steal hope from her. I don’t know how, but I need to fight for understanding to give it back* is the thought that has resonated in my mind since that day. I don’t know how to explain both the humble appreciation and care I felt for that young lady, nor the depth of the searing in my heart, to hear those words. Undoubtedly, *saving* and *protecting* where the thoughts and feelings in my mind; and, *protecting*, not in a gentle sense, but FULL F---- WAR MODE toward anyone or anything that threatens such a tender and loving soul were the hurricane of thoughts in my mind and feeling radiating in my body. Thinking about the young man who caught me off guard as the representation of the sole member of his family during Senior Night of football season, who pulled out a napkin of lofty strength training goals I’d written down for him 4 years early, and he’d met each and every goal by his senior season..... *I can’t steal home from him*. Families have invited me into their homes to share the events in their lives, both the tragedies and triumphs, and have taught me to see the land and water or our area as a source of healing, and have taught me to see the value of sovereignty of a nation and the strength of *remembering where you come from* as the conduit of hope to heal our United States.....*I cannot steal hope from them*.

The path to learning *where I come from* is simultaneously hope-empowering and torturous, however, as I continue to learn more about European-Native relations, and don't know the unfiltered truth of the hearts, minds and actions of those in all of my European bloodlines since contact. Prior to learning from my allies, I didn't dig into the fact that it wasn't until the Voting Rights Act of 1965 that Native Americans had the right to vote, in what was solely their land prior to contact, despite life sacrifices through the first two World Wars by Native US Military Service-Members. I wasn't aware of the Boarding-School era, and the multi-generational impact of the "Kill the Indian, Save the Child" mantra, where children were ripped from their homes, where actions included attempting to *beat the culture out of them*, and those who didn't survive the beatings were thrown into mass graves behind the schools. The pain is literally nauseating when I read a deep and unfiltered account of history through the eyes of our nation's tribal people, and wonder if someone that looks like me and connected to one of my bloodlines, had hands on a lifeless tender soul, and wondering if they were internally broken in feeling their own self-destruction or viewed themselves as righteous and justified as they were throwing another child in the hole, onto the heap of the others.

As a child, I had a picture in my mind of the first Thanksgiving that looks much like an Applebee's commercial of today. When I read the historical accounts through the perspective of those indigenous to this land, it tells a different story, but ironically one that holds hope and virtue in my patriotic and European blood. Through these traditional stories, I learn of the tribal communities teaching those from Europe how to survive through what the land provided, as it lacked the shelter and farming infrastructure that they were accustomed to in Europe. The timing of Thanksgiving, as Winter approaches, is just in time to be taught to adapt for survival in an unknown land and without access to the conveniences they had grown accustomed to across the pond, before the dangers that the impending change of weather would bring.

Although painful to the core, and the temptation to stop humbly seeking understanding is extremely powerful and continuous, is there any other path to our survival as a collective nation, than a replication of the experience for Europeans upon contact to survive the first winter? The *virtue of where I come from* has balance, as do all things in life, with the reality that it was the inability to sustain that virtue that ultimately led to fleeing Europe for our bloodlines that did so. In fact, humankind *has yet* to learn how to sustain a free-market society and the "idea" that our nation was founded on. It's always been fear leading to greed, pride and idolatry that has sealed the fate of thriving free-market societies before us. What would have been the outcome if they walked with humility through the gateway to fearlessness? In seeking to sustain that virtue of *those who came before for those who come next*, are we (with European heritage) able to learn it from ourselves, when the inability to sustain it led to the formation of our government, or is the most fruitful path in listening to and learning from those who have sustainably lived on this land since time immemorial?

Prior to any experience in learning from traditional tribal teachers, the only perception I had of (stinging) nettles is that of a nuisance. I live, hunt and hike in the Pacific Northwest, with nettles a common part of our landscape, within many of our ecosystems West of the Cascade Mountains, including both in the forest directly adjacent to my property line and on my farm itself. I have accidentally kicked them, tripped over them, fell into them, and used leather gloves to intentionally rip them out. However, knowledge has recently been presented to me how to fold the leaves as to not get stung, as a healthy food source; also, teachings have been shared with me how to roll the stems of the nettles and to weave them into

cordage, strong enough to lift and hold humans, with enough layers of weaving. In order to create strong cordage, however, it requires either a lot of time or a lot of hands working together.

A way I try to continuously remind myself of the importance of seeking continuous understanding of my place as an ally, both the work to contribute and the fruits of knowledge, is an analogy with nettles. If I were to find myself among tribal allies next to a slippery ravine that one of their children had rolled down, and it was not possible to climb down, then get back up, the only way to save that child would be to craft a rope. With heavy rains setting in, and the ravine bordering a river that would wash that child away as the water rose, it would be the knowledge of my allies in creating cordage that could allow life to flourish, and I could have an assigned role according to their teachings, a humble understanding of *my place*, in order to take part in creating a cordage long enough and strong enough to help that child of their tribe climb out of the ravine. As I am becoming exhausted by working as quickly as possible to collectively create the cordage, I can quickly fold and consume the leaves of the nettles for sustenance, as I have also been shown.

By learning from those of this land, not only have I learned where my role is and isn't, according to their teachings and provide work to serve them, I am also learning how to adapt from their teachings, gaining the knowledge and skills, should I ever find *my own child* at the bottom of that ravine, and I had only the land available to provide a life-saving solution. INVARIABLY, as I am learning to work with the nettles, I will get stung; I will sting my hands as I learn to craft stems into cordage, and I will sting my mouth as I learn to eat the leaves. If I take the path of least resistance, and most comfort, I will avoid the teachings and set the nettles aside; the question I would need to have the answer to with 100% certainty, in order to make that choice, is if I will ever need the knowledge from the people indigenous to the land that, at my deepest core of truth, may hold the key to survival and experiencing the fruits of life for those *who come after* in my family line, while also honoring the sacrifices in the name of virtue, of those *who came before*? As the US is hurting, and tearing itself apart, with social fracturing and increasing arbitrary laws, mirroring social carnage that spiraled into the cause of my bloodlines emigration, I have profound appreciation for the people whose refusal to compromise the importance of *where you come from* has been the fuel for their survival. And, when I listen for *us*, and not from a degree of separation where I'm listening for *only them*, I can listen deeper. I can listen to all of the damage. And, when I understand the damage, I can start to see the strength and flourishing of life from their healing. And, when I understand the power of their healing, I thank my Creator for seeing the hope that the healing of our country is possible and ready for us to see it as soon as we are able to temper our fears. And, when I feel that hope, I feel the impact that can have on *us*, and the potential of symbiotic hope for both my bloodline and the bloodlines of my allies with our shared goal of the strongest nation for *those who come next*, as we join forces with fearless humility to revive and optimize our nation, and fight to preserve it for the next seven generations.