CHAPTER 1

HISTORY FROM THE NATIVE AMERICAN POINT OF VIEW

INTRODUCTION

The history of the peopling of the Americas raises many questions that spark intensive debates among two oftentimes opposing segments of American society: the scientific community and native peoples themselves. Some of the most important questions are when and how the ancestors of present-day indigenous peoples populated the Western Hemisphere. Rather than offer the prevailing scientific point of view found in almost every U.S. history textbook—about the Bering Land Bridge, glacial recession, and Siberian migrants as big game hunters—this chapter tries something else. It tries to engage readers in the debate about human origins in the Americas from the native perspective. Many Native Americans see their stories that talk about relationships between animals, humans, places, and time—their “ways of being” as opposed to the science’s “ways of knowing”—are all they need about themselves and their origins. Scientists, however, look to archaeology and other disciplines. Archaeologists, in particular, theorize about waves of migrant peoples coming to North and South America once glacial ice receded and opened the Bering Land Bridge between Siberia and Alaska. Sometime between roughly 14,000 and 16,000 years ago, the Bering Land Bridge was indeed free of ice, as geological core samples of the Bering Strait waters have confirmed. If there was a pathway open, science argues, the ancestors of present-day Native Americans were the ones who made the difficult journey, along with the large game that they hunted such as bison and mastodons. Once these initial migrations ended, cultural and social practices developed and changed over thousands of years. Archaeological excavations of community settlements and sites where indigenous peoples killed animals yield evidence that has been tested by various methods including radiocarbon dating, geological samples of sediments, and tree ring dating. Bringing the data together, scientists now have a timeline of indigenous development in North America. Beginning with hunter-gatherers who hunted the big game to extinction, the timeline ends with the emergence of complex, agricultural societies, before the arrival of Europeans. Each document—some by historians and native activists, and others, the oral stories from Native Americans about where they came from—tries to have readers think about Native American perspectives on their origins.
Controversy: Native Americans and Science

Native American Memories of Their Origins

Widely recognized for his many books about Native Americans, Vine Deloria Jr. (Standing Rock Sioux) challenged academics as well as the public to work toward better ways of interpreting and writing about Native American origins and identities. In this selection, Deloria asks readers to think beyond the prevailing scientific arguments about native origins. Deloria wants readers to consider native oral stories in a different way: as rich sources on various North American geological activities dating thousands of years before Europeans arrived.

In correcting inadequate theories such as the Bering Strait migrations or the big-game hunter “overkill” we inevitably come into conflict with the prevailing scientific paradigm. The points of conflict spread out from anthropology to archaeology and then to paleontology in a disconcerting manner. Evolutionary biology, as represented by the field of paleontology, has been, in an incestuous relationship with geology ever since the Darwinians wrested the symbols of authority from the theologians. Therefore, as we raise questions about glaciation, land bridges, and the disappearance or transformation of megafauna, we are led into an examination of some aspects of geology.

Three basic concepts stand in the way of examining the traditions of Indians in a fair and intelligent manner: “myth,” and its progeny “euhemerism” and “etiology.” “Myth” is the general name given to the traditions of non-Western peoples. It basically means a fiction created and sustained by undeveloped minds. Many scholars will fudge this point, claiming that their definition of myth gives it great respect as the carrier of some super-secret and sacred truth, but in fact the popular meaning is a superstition or fiction which we, as smart modern thinkers, would never in a million years believe.

Within the broad classification of myth are two subcategories of story-line creations: “euhemerisms” and “etiological” myths. The euhemerism is a narrative which contains some participation of the supernatural that is wholly constructed by primitives and which they insist is historically true. For decades the Trojan War was believed to be a euhemerism until Heinrich Schliemann began to dig tells in Asia Minor and proved the conflict to have a historical basis. An etiological myth is a narrative made up to explain something which people have observed or which they wish to explain in familiar terms. Looking at various kinds of landscapes, in the etiological format we simply assume that primitive and ancient people would make up a story, based on their knowledge of nature, to account for waterfalls, volcanos, rivers, and so forth. Most of modern science is, in fact, etiological myth, since we cannot explain fossils, we cannot explain sedimentary deposition, and we cannot explain the causes of glaciation.

It is possible to separate non-Western traditions from the mainstream of science and keep them comfortably lodged in the fiction classification because most of them contain references to the activities of supernatural causes and personalities and are not phrased in the sterile language of cause and effect, which has been the favorite language of secular science. It is unfair to do so, however, when scientific writers have complete license to make up scenarios of their own which could not possibly have taken place and pass them off as science and therefore as superior to other traditions.

In the early 1970s, Dorothy Vitaliano attempted to show that some information possessed by ancient peoples and the non-Western tribal groups, and classified as “myth,” might indeed be useful. She began to match some accounts with modern geologic knowledge to create a new discipline which she called geomythology. Geomythology, according to Vitaliano, is an effort “to explain certain specific myths and legends in terms of actual geologic events that may have been witnessed by various groups of people.” In a very real sense, linkage of traditions and legends with present-day knowledge might provide some additional data for scientific experimentation; it would also verify the historical basis of the legend, take it out of the category of folklore, and give it some real status.

The Bridge of the Gods

Native Americans of present-day Washington and central Oregon have a story passed down about an ancient rock bridge. At one time this sacred rock bridge passed over the Columbia River. Volcanic eruption many years ago collapsed the bridge into the river where the Dalles is presently located. The Dalles earns its name from the rocks that formed a gorge and rapids along the Columbia River where native peoples of the Pacific Northwest met and traded long before white people arrived. Native Americans say they have used the Dalles as a greeting place for 10,000 years. And native peoples have explanations as to how the rock bridge gave the Dalles its unique shape when Mount Saint Helens and Mount Hood quarreled with each other. Both mountains erupted in anger, “threw fire” at each other, and hit the bridge, which then fell into the Columbia River. Such stories are striking as they seem to suggest that the ancestors of native peoples of the Pacific Northwest witnessed and kept stories about geological events long before European colonization.
Several Indian tribes in the Pacific Northwest have traditions regarding a geological formation which they say once existed west of The Dalles dam on the Columbia River. One version of the story suggests that the Columbia River once went underground, presumably as it passed below the Cascade Mountains, finally emerging near the coast. This phenomenon is not unusual, since the Humboldt River “sinks” in several places in Nevada as it moves west toward the Sierra Nevadas.

In 1921, a very old Wishram woman, well over a century old, who could remember when Dr. John McLoughlin established Fort Vancouver in 1825, told her tribe’s story of this formation. The underground tunnel was frequently used by the Indians to avoid climbing the Cascades when traveling to the Pacific Ocean. “Whenever a party of Indians reached this long tunnel,” she said, “they would fasten their canoes together, one behind the other, so that they would not crash against each other in the darkness. Then they would pray to the Great Spirit for courage and guidance as they paddled through the long, dark tunnel.” Some scholars, including Vitaliano herself, have expressed skepticism about this geological formation, claiming that the sides of the present Columbia gorge do not indicate the possibility of any bridging structure having been there.

Many tribes have stories about the Bridge of the Gods and when these accounts are compared, the Wishram version seems to be the earliest. The most frequently repeated narrative suggested that Mount Hood and Mount Adams quarreled (usually over a maiden, since all old tales are eventually romanticized) and began to hurl hot rocks at each other. The conflict became so intense that the bridge over the river collapsed, in effect freeing the river from its underground course and creating the present-day Columbia.

Vitaliano suggests that an earthquake was involved and dumped a massive amount of material into the Columbia to form The Dalles. Geologic evidence suggested that there was once a giant landslide between Table Mountain and Red Bluffs which did block the Columbia. I suspect that a couple of places along the Columbia could qualify as the location and that all versions of the story refer to one or the other site. . .

Surely the Indians had seen the Cascade volcanos erupt. If we can only suggest that they marked the occasion of two volcanos erupting simultaneously by making up a story about a bridge across the Columbia River, which would have no connection whatsoever with volcanos no closer than fifty miles, what possible motivation can we suggest? Combining many geological formations in an etiological myth might be a way to deal with the fact of creation. But it seems unlikely that so many tribes would put together the same basic narrative about the site unless there was some reality behind the tale.

Therein lies the difficulty in approaching the oral traditions of Indians from a Western scientific perspective: instead of postponing judgment and viewing the anomaly as a prospect for future research, conclusions are drawn prematurely, are almost always in favor of rejecting the Indian account, and the usefulness of the tradition is lost. Instead, we are given doctrinal assurances that Indians made up the story.

MOUNT HOOD

One of the two volcanos cited in the Bridge of the Gods story, involves the giant Indians . . . so we know that the time period, if this story holds up as a historical memory, is very early. We will take portions of [the Indian] narrative which deal with the geomycological points

Years and years ago, the mountain peak south of Big River was so high that when the sun shone on its south side a shadow stretched north for a day’s journey. Inside the mountain, evil spirits had their lodges. Sometimes the evil spirits became so angry that they threw out fire and smoke and streams of hot rocks. Rivers of liquid rock ran toward the sea, killing all growing things and forcing the Indians to move far away.

The chief did battle with the evil spirits by throwing rocks down into a crater on the mountain. The battle continued for many days until:

The rivers were choked, the forest and the grass had disappeared, the animals and the people had fled.

The chief knew he had failed to protect the land and sank down upon the ground in exhaustion and discouragement and was soon covered by the lava flow.

When the earth cooled and the grass grew again, they [the people] returned to their country. In time there was plenty of food once more. But the children, starved and weak for so long, never became as tall and strong as their parents and grandparents.

It is said that the chief’s face can be seen on the northern face of the mountain.

According to the story, the shadow of the mountain was so great that it cast a shadow that extended a day’s walk to the north. The present-day Mount Hood does not cast such a shadow, so this element of the story may also testify to much earlier times than we can anticipate.
“Although there is no historical record of activity of Mount Hood, the geologic evidence suggests that it may have erupted as recently as a century ago.” We should not, at least for the sake of investigating the tradition, assume that the eruption had to have been in recent historical time. It may well have been a very long time ago.

The key to interpreting this legend, it seems to me, is in the casual mention of the size of things. The Indians are large, Mount Hood casts a long shadow, and the tunnel under the Cascades is a tunnel not a bridge. The Indians are reporting accurate facts in their story, but modern interpreters, without telling us what limits they are putting on the story, narrow the possible interpretations to the modern time period and thereby lose the essence of the information which the story contains. No present formations on either side of the river indicate a bridge, but such information which the story contains. No present formation could easily have been destroyed completely by the gigantic floods that once scoured the Columbia River valley. Almost certainly this legend cannot be referring to an eruption within historic times, since it would take a long time to restore the land and entice the people to come back near Mount Hood to live.

**The Way of the Human Being**

Calvin Luther Martin lived among as well as taught present-day Alaskan peoples. Elders told him stories about bears, elk, and moose that talk. When statewide animal conservationists arrived in the Yukon, the Yupiit, known for being pacifists, verbally attacked scientists who wanted electronic collars attached to the necks of moose and bear to study their mating patterns. As elder Paul John explained to Martin, then the board of conservationists, animals such as bears and moose think and act like independent beings, and had since the beginning of time. The Yupiit have always treated animals as independent beings so their patterns of hunting and living respected the animals. Paul John's attack against the conservationists, as told by Calvin Martin, reveals important differences between indigenous peoples and the scientific community.

Now and then, the Fish and Wildlife people in Bethel invite their native advisory board (of which Paul John is a member) to attend a bit of bureaucratic theater called a meeting, where the Yupiit are asked if they would kindly advise the U.S. government on wildlife policy. (“Yupiit” is the plural form of “Yup’ik.”) This pleases the Yupiit, who are treated briefly like big shots, although they know that their Uncle Sam isn't really listening to what they have to say. The meeting is very decorous and utterly official. There is a long table, a gavel, a chairman, and *Robert's Rules of Order*.

**But the language is wrong.**

The meeting is barely under way when Paul John (who is being interpreted in English) suddenly delivers a long passionate speech on that problematic word “subsistence,” as in that phrase “subsistence hunting.” Washington and its bureaucrats in Alaska are fond of the phrase. Paul John says that he thinks “people” (he's being delicate) can't understand what natives mean when they use the word. He recites that when his son was in college he was once asked by friends what all this “subsistence” business was about, anyway. The young man explained and from that day on was ostracized. It must have been a sizzling explanation.

Paul John was struggling to explain something. Here the Yupiit at his table were being asked to approve bureaucratic guidelines for dividing up moose “resources,” and some were even haggling over interregional access to these “resources,” when, you know, in former times, Paul John reminded, the people were careful to take care of each other. . . .

Then came another report on the dwindling moose population in some lower river drainage. Maps were put up. The biologist explained how the feds were using planes and other data-gathering devices to survey moose populations all along this particular stretch of river. He then dimmed the lights and projected a chart bristling with bureaucratic jargon, outlining how Fish and Wildlife intended to generate a resurgence of moose in this particular region.

Paul John's hand floated up again. He said quietly that this proposal was okay with him . . . but that it should not be talked about loudly, for it was common knowledge that moose could hear these conversations and might take offense at what was being planned for them, possibly even disappearing altogether.

Paul John was dead serious. He reminded the room that experience had confirmed this. Moose owned and regulated themselves. . . . Today, however, the government biologist was a man from a different story; he stared blankly at Paul John for a moment, then continued with his plan of action, as though nothing had happened.

But something of huge import had truly happened. Which was that once upon a time a Yup'ik child—“he was a young child like you,” said Paul John, with a curious familiarity—had gone and lived in the seals’ “qasgiq (communal men's house), where an adult bearded seal hosted him and taught him to view the human world from the seals’ point of view.” From that boy’s experiences, “people came to understand how the seals saw humans and how humans must act to please them.”

The man from Toksook Bay knew the truly important stories about seals and, evidently, moose as well. The stories
of kinship, incarnation, protocol, the gift, and ultimately of beauty. In that windowless government conference room he was appealing to the experience of those founding stories—and a wholly different reality. The biologist, on the other hand, was unencumbered by any such experience, probably would have found the stories charming and irrelevant, and was thoroughly naive about Paul John’s way of the human being. . . .

Increased sport hunting (of brown bears, in particular, for trophies) had driven the biologists to conclude that it was time to measure the bear population in the vast Yukon National Wildlife Refuge, to get an idea of how well they were reproducing and what their foraging behaviors were like.

Measurement consisted of biologists traveling upriver into the foothills, where bears, once spotted, were shot with a tranquilizer dart. Down and drugged, each was branded, suffered one of its teeth being pulled, and was fitted with a collar carrying a small radio transmitter. For the next several years radio would send out a signal revealing the bear’s whereabouts to listening biologists.

But bears are not a thing to be measured, I quickly learned. The Yup’ik Eskimos were incensed. Normally a pacific, agreeable people, resigned to being deceived or steamrollered by kassaq (white) laws and programs—this time they drew the line.* At bears. They took their complaint to the highest levels of government, where the project was put on indefinite hold.

What was the problem? The scientists running the survey could never quite figure that out. I visited one of them in his office in Bethel one autumn day, a man with a Ph.D. in wildlife biology. I can still see the heavy metal desk littered with scientific reports. “We’re using the very best scientific techniques,” he says plaintively, with a sweeping gesture of the hand. Radio-tracking: state of the art.

Yet the Eskimos still say no.

I try to explain that bears are special, that they’ve been sacred as long as humans have been humans. How bears, more than any other thing, form the spiritual center of gravity for traditional people like these Eskimos. I can see from his blank look that he’s uncomprehending. I gather he thinks it’s an interesting anthropological story, but certainly not science. (I sit there thinking about a button a student once handed me: “Your theory is interesting . . . but stupid.”) He keeps telling me he needs empirical data. Numbers. When I suggest that he ask around and find some Yup’ik elders who—how should I put it?—“know” bears, who “feel” bears, to get their advice on how to proceed, he is mute. This isn’t science at all, I can almost hear him thinking. I sense I don’t belong in this man’s office.

Soon thereafter the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service held its fall meeting with the Yup’ik advisory group, the one where Paul John reminded everyone that moose can hear us talking about them. I found it odd that nobody, either on the panel or in the room, said a word when the government delivered its report on the state of the bear census.

The next day was different. As the reports from the day before were summarized, an elderly Eskimo asked to speak. He spoke out passionately against the mistreatment of bears, warning that it was like “playing” with them and worrying that the biologists were hurting them. He said the same thing about reindeer. He had friends who had been out hunting when they heard a wheezing sound nearby. Searching around, they discovered a reindeer and realized that it was gasping for air because of an ill-fitting radio collar. They shot it, out of compassion—afraid it wasn’t going to make it.

That was all he said. . . . Strange things happen in bush Alaska.

I had noticed at the meeting how several times either a Yup’ik panel member or someone in the audience had made an earnest plea that the old ways be honored. When it came time to hear general testimony, the chairman invited, Joe Chief, Sr., to please come take the microphone. Joe, like Paul John, is an elder esteemed throughout the delta, and I watched with fascination how the older councilmen fixed their attention on him as he spoke, as though he were saying something sacred and somehow fragile—like a spider’s web in its inclusiveness.

The old man’s voice rose and fell as he talked long and solemnly about the necessity of following tradition. He didn’t seem to want to argue specifics, such as the bear project, but instead addressed the whole problem. The old ways of conduct, he said, almost desperately, must not be allowed to die. He began by explaining that what he was going to say he had heard from elders. This is common among Eskimos; the oldest person, generally the oldest man, will summon the wisdom of the elders from the generation gone by, who doubtless had done likewise in their time. Eskimo authority derives from the accumulated wisdom of the ancestors.

But it is largely for naught. The Yup’ik have been robbed of a proper medium in which to discuss their relationship with the land. I could deplore their frustration in having to meet this way: as a kassaq corporate board following Robert’s Rules of Order. We straitjacket them with our

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Yupiit call all white people kassaqs (pronounced “gussuks”), since the first whites they saw were Russians who called themselves Cossacks.
language (as in our gloss on the word “subsistence”) and our structure of discourse. Their call for respect for old ways has no soil, in our reality, to take root and grow. Their words seem quaint in our western empirical, utilitarian, marketplace way of seeing things. I sense a reciprocal frustration in the Fish and Wildlife officials I have talked to: they seem to genuinely want to work with the Eskimos but are intractable in their scientific superiority.

I witnessed this one evening as my wife and I entertained a biologist friend for dinner. The man had worked for Fish and Wildlife for years and was a formidable bird ecologist. I noticed a curious way of knowing (epistemology) during the course of the evening—an epistemology of nature, as it were. Our friend had entered the field of ecology because of his profound love for the subject. This is what keeps him in Alaska: his immersion in the habitat of these birds. He is happiest when with them, he said, as he rhapsodized about one glorious day sitting perfectly still in an alder thicket watching thrushes. The changes in light, sometimes creating a dappling effect on the feathers and other times, especially in late afternoon as the sun beamed directly onto the bushes, showing them in a wholly different aspect—how magical they seemed. He had joined them in the joy of full presence.

His desk job was nowhere near as charming: the tedious hours of producing reports and grant proposals and scientific papers. I winced when he added, "But I don't know the high-powered math required to do my job well." So he planned on spending several years away at some university, learning statistics. There was a woman who had worked with him on a project—absolutely brilliant, he exclaimed. She had managed to subject the data, fragmentary as it was, to a statistical model that boggled, his mind. He was envious.

There is, I think, a crazy objectification going on here. Thrushes, harlequin ducks, eiders are removed from the individual's experience with them into "resources" or "objects" to be "managed" or "studied" (terms used liberally throughout the evening). Here is the man who sits for a day in an alder thicket, bathed in "thrushness" and its unmeasurable meaning, and likewise the man who is the (unwitting) agent for the delaminated view of the earth that characterizes western science. A powerful and dangerous epistemological shift is transpiring here. On one hand there is the reality of linkage, we might call it, and on the other the reality of separation. The latter troubles me. It results, I believe, in a kind of cultural vertigo: we don't know who we are or where we are.

That evening around the supper table we talked as well about the Yup'ik hostility to much of this research, including the bird studies. Our guest tensed up. I was alluding to a native's account of a bird study he had helped with near Hooper Bay, where there is a large and marvelous breeding site. This is native corporation land controlled by the Hooper Bay traditional council. Tom Ayagaliak had described how the biologists had put flags by the nests of certain breeding birds and had handled the eggs. Tom declared that where this had occurred the parents had abandoned the nest.

Our biologist friend protested that Fish and Wildlife research might often appear intrusive, but in fact it does not endanger activities like feeding—the allegation was simply not true (he had zeroed in on the oft-expressed native charge that research threatens wildlife well-being). He said Eskimos are invited to visit the sites to see for themselves that wildlife are not being damaged, which strikes me as being akin to taking them to Bethel for a corporate-style meeting with Fish and Wildlife officials to gaze at the charts and listen to the statistics on how the animals are being well treated throughout the Yukon National Wildlife Refuge. While in the company of biologists they appear convinced, he went on—but did he realize that Yupiit, like all Eskimos, were unlikely to contradict someone to his face? These are people who prefer to say no through a third person, a trait long entrenched in this culture. Anyhow, they get back to the village council meetings—and out of range of kass'aq logic—and change their story. The consensus from the council meetings is that the biologists are tampering with the welfare of the birds and should be stopped (one is reminded of the man's complaint about "playing" with bears). Our friend conceded that Yupiit are tenacious in their conviction that all this research is strange, discourteous, and vaguely dangerous. At the same time it was evident he regarded all this as superstition and nonsense.

However inadequately they may explain it in kass'aq terms, this is nonetheless Yup'ik epistemology. "He plainly points out"—the room full of elders is hushed as Maxie Altsik speaks, barely above a whisper. Charlie Kilangak later translates from my recording: "He plainly points out that whatever is on the land or in the water, in our custom it is not a playful thing to play with an animal spirit, or animals that are in the water or under the water. That's what he's saying. That's our custom, that's our tradition."

The aboriginal view simply cannot pierce the armored chauvinism of western science. Moreover, the natives know that with these supposedly innocuous studies come regulations from both federal and state agencies about hunting for birds and eggs. Restrictions and guidelines—a language and power that redefine the ancient relationship between these things and with this place, redefining their very selves. At what point in the process do they stop being the real people, one wonders? All this is intolerable and frightening to them.
When making preparations for going out hunting, the man won’t tell people he’s going hunting. In the old days he would not assert he was going to get such-and-such animal. There was no bragging. It was more a case of his wife or mother saying “We’re out of seal oil,” say. The man draws on experience; it’s what we are given.

Even if there are many game he may not catch anything. The animal doesn’t want to give itself to the hunter on certain occasions. If he can’t catch the animal, even drawing on experience; it’s what we are given.

The animal doesn’t want to give itself to the hunter on certain occasions. If he can’t catch the animal, even drawing on experience; it’s what we are given. If the man needs, say, more sealskins to re-cover his kayak, he may catch one or two, though he needs seven. He can catch just a few. That’s all he was given and the time ran out. He’s disappointed. That’s all he gets; he will have to make do. If there’s lots of seals, yet he may not get as many as he wants. This is all he’s given.

My dad, when I was growing up, used to say, “Don’t be stupid. Don’t say you’re going to catch things when you go out. Don’t think you’re—don’t specify, don’t say you’re a great hunter, ‘cause you catch a small duck.”

There is a certain hour near dawn when the animals are not scared, and it’s easy to take them then. This was before there were guns. Nowadays with snowmachine or plane and gun with scope—we can kill far and instantly. Now the hunter doesn’t have to rely on the animal’s lack of fear. We lost that instinct of being spiritual, respectful, motivated.

The old hunters knew how to read the weather, the terrain, and the animal’s habits and ways.

### Native American Voices about Their Beginnings

**Cherokee Origin Story Kana’ti and Selu**

A product of anthropologist James Mooney’s fieldwork among Cherokee elders of the late nineteenth century was the best written account of the Cherokee origin story. The Cherokee story is very rich for gaining some understanding of Cherokee society and culture. Origin stories seem odd at first but, when read carefully, reveal a lot of information about the proper roles for men and women and relations between human beings and animals, and sometimes talk about how other members of Cherokee society ought to behave.

Long years ago, soon after the world was made, a hunter and his wife lived at Pilot Knob with their only child, a little boy.

The father’s name was Kana’ti (The Lucky Hunter), and his wife was called Selu (Corn). No matter when Kana’ti went into the woods, he never failed to bring back a load of game, which his wife would cut up and prepare, washing off the blood from the meat in the river near the house. The little boy used to play down by the river every day, and one morning the old people thought they heard laughing and talking in the bushes as though there were two children there.

When the boy came home at night his parents asked him who had been playing with him all day. “He comes out of the water,” said the boy, “and he calls himself my elder brother. He says his mother was cruel to him and threw him into the river.” Then they knew that the strange boy had sprung from the blood of the game which Selu had washed off at the river’s edge.

Every day when the little boy went out to play the other would join him, but as he always went back again into the water the old people never had a chance to see him. At last one evening Kana’ti said to his son, “Tomorrow, when the other boy comes to play, get him to wrestle with you, and when you have your arms around him hold on to him and call for us.” The boy promised to do as he was told, so the next day as soon as his playmate appeared he challenged him to a wrestling match. The other agreed at once, but as soon as they had their arms around each other, Kana’ti’s boy began to scream for his father.

The old folks at once came running down, and as soon as the Wild Boy saw them he struggled to free himself and cried out, “Let me go; you threw me away!” but his brother held on until the parents reached the spot, when they seized the Wild Boy and took him home with them. They kept him in the house until they had tamed him, but he was always wild and artful in his disposition, and was the leader of his brother in every mischief. It was not long until the old people discovered that he had magic powers, and they called him I’nage-utasvhi (He-who-grew-up-wild).

Whenever Kana’ti went into the mountains he always brought back a fat buck or doe, or maybe a couple of turkeys. One day the Wild Boy said to his brother, “I wonder where our father gets all that game; let’s follow him next time and find out.”

A few days afterward Kana’ti took a bow and some feathers in his hand and started off toward the west. The boys waited a little while and then went after him, keeping out of sight until they saw him go into a swamp where there were a great many of the small reeds that hunters use to make arrow shafts. Then the Wild Boy changed himself into a puff of bird’s down, which the wind took up and carried until it alighted upon Kana’ti’s shoulder just as he entered the swamp, but Kana’ti knew nothing about it.

The old man cut reeds, fitted the feathers to them and made some arrows, and the Wild Boy—in his other shape—thought, “I wonder what those things are for?” When Kana’ti had his arrows finished he came out of the
swamp and went on again. The wind blew the down from his shoulder, and it fell in the woods, when the Wild Boy took his right shape again and went back and told his brother what he had seen.

Keeping out of sight of their father, they followed him up the mountain until he stopped at a certain place and lifted a large rock. At once there ran out a buck, which Kana'ti shot and then lifting it upon his back he started for home again.

“Oho!” exclaimed the boys, “He keeps all the deer shut up in that hole, and whenever he wants meat he just lets one out and kills it with those things he made in the swamp.” They hurried and reached home before their father, who had the heavy deer to carry, and he never knew that they had followed him.

A few days later the boys went back to the swamp, cut some reeds, and made seven arrows, and then started up the mountain to where their father kept the game. When they got to the place, they raised the rock and a deer came running out. Just as they drew back to shoot it, another came out, and then another and another, until the boys got confused and forgot what they were about.

In those days all the deer had their tails hanging down like other animals, but as a buck was running past the Wild Boy struck its tail with his arrow so that it pointed upward. The boys thought this good sport, and when the next one ran past the Wild Boy struck its tail so that it stood straight up, and his brother struck the next one so hard with his arrow that the deer’s tail was almost curled over his back. The deer carries his tail this way ever since.

The deer came running past until the last one had come out of the hole and escaped into the forest. Then came droves of raccoons, rabbits, and all the other four-footed animals—all but the bear, because there were no bear then. Last came great flocks of turkeys, pigeons, and partridges that darkened the air like a cloud and made such a noise with their wings that Kana’ti, sitting at home, heard the sound like distant thunder on the mountains and said to himself, “My bad boys have got into trouble; I must go and see what they are doing.”

So he went up the mountain, and when he came to the place where he kept the game he found the two boys standing by the rock, and all the birds and animals were gone. Kana’ti was furious, but without saying a word he went down into the cave and kicked the covers off four jars in one corner, when out swarmed bedbugs, fleas, lice, and gnats, and got all over the boys. They screamed with pain and fright and tried to beat off the insects, but the thousands of vermin crawled over them and bit and stung them until both dropped down nearly dead. Kana’ti stood looking on until he thought they had been punished enough, when he knocked off the vermin and gave the boys a lecture. “Now, you rascals,” said he, “you have always had plenty to eat and never had to work for it. Whenever you were hungry all I had to do was to come up here and get a deer or a turkey and bring it home for your mother to cook; but now you have let out all the animals, and after this when you want a deer to eat you will have to hunt all over the woods for it, and then maybe not find one.”

“Go home now to your mother, while I see if I can find something to eat for supper.” When the boys got home again they were very tired and hungry and asked their mother for something to eat. “There is no meat,” said Selu, “but wait a little while and I’ll get you something.”

So she took a basket and started out to the storehouse. This storehouse was built upon poles high up from the ground, to keep it out of the reach of animals, and there was an opening to climb up by, and one door, but no other opening. Every day when Selu got ready to cook the dinner she would go out to the storehouse with a basket and bring it back full of corn and beans.

The boys had never been inside the storehouse, so they wondered where all the corn and beans could come from, as the house was not a very large one; so as soon as Selu went out of the door the Wild Boy said to his brother, “Let’s go and see what she does.” They ran around and climbed up at the back of the storehouse and pulled out a piece of clay from between the logs, so that they could look in. There they saw Selu standing in the middle of the room with the basket in front of her on the floor. Leaning over the basket, she rubbed her stomach around and around—counterclockwise—and the basket was half full of corn. Then she rubbed under her armpits in the same way and the basket was full to the top with beans. The boys looked at each other and said, “This will never do; our mother is a witch. If we eat any of that it will poison us. We must kill her.”

When the boys came back into the house, she knew their thoughts before they spoke. “So you are going to kill me?” said Selu. “Yes,” said the boys, “You are a witch.” “Well,” said their mother, “When you have killed me, clear a large piece of ground in front of the house and drag my body seven times around the circle. Then drag me seven times over the ground inside the circle, and stay up all night and watch, and in the morning you will have plenty of corn.” The boys killed her with their clubs, and cut off her head and put it up on the roof of the house with her face turned to the west, and told her to look for her husband.

Then they set to work to clear the ground in front of the house, but instead of clearing the whole piece they cleared only seven little spots. This is why corn now grows only in
a few places instead of over the whole world. They dragged the body of Selu around the circle, and wherever her blood fell on the ground the corn sprang up. But instead of dragging her body seven times across the ground they dragged it over only twice, which is the reason the people still work their crop but twice.

The two brothers sat up and watched their corn all night, and in the morning it was full grown and ripe. When Kana'ți came home at last, he looked around, but could not see Selu anywhere, and asked the boys where their mother was. “She was a witch, and we killed her,” said the boys; “There is her head up there on top of the house.” When he saw his wife’s head on the roof, he was very angry, and said, “I won’t stay with you any longer; I am going to the Wolf people.”

So he started off, but before he had gone far the Wild Boy changed himself again to a tuft of down, which fell on Kana'ți’s shoulder. When Kana'ți reached the settlement of the Wolf people, they were holding a council in the townhouse. He went in and sat down with the tuft of bird’s down on his shoulder, but he never noticed it. When the Wolf chief asked him his business, he said: “I have two bad boys at home, and I want you to go in seven days from now and play ball against them.” Although Kana'ți spoke as though he wanted them to play a game of ball, the Wolves knew that he meant for them to go and kill the two boys. They promised to go.

Then the bird’s down blew off from Kana'ți’s shoulder, and the smoke carried it up through the hole in the roof of the townhouse. When it came down on the ground outside, the Wild Boy took his right shape again and went home and told his brother all that he had heard in the townhouse. When Kana'ți left the Wolf people, he did not return home, but went on farther. The boys then began to get ready for the Wolves, and the Wild Boy—the magician—told his brother what to do. They ran around the house in a wide circle until they had made a trail all around it excepting on the side from which the Wolves would come, where they left a small open space.

Then they made four large bundles of arrows and placed them at four different points on the outside of the circle, after which they hid themselves in the woods and waited for the Wolves. In a day or two a whole party of Wolves came and surrounded the house to kill the boys. The Wolves did not notice the trail around the house, because they came in where the boys had left the opening, but the moment they went inside the circle the trail changed to a high brush fence and shut them in. Then the boys on the outside took their arrows and began shooting them down, and as the Wolves could not jump over the fence they were all killed, excepting a few that escaped through the opening into a great swamp close by. The boys ran around the swamp, and a circle of fire sprang up in their tracks and set fire to the grass and bushes and burned up nearly all the other Wolves. Only two or three got away, and from these have come all the wolves that are now in the world.

Soon afterward some strangers from a distance, who had heard that the brothers had a wonderful grain from which they made bread, came to ask for some, for none but Selu and her family had ever known corn before. The boys gave them seven grains of corn, which they told them to plant the next night on their way home, sitting up all night to watch the corn, which would have seven ripe ears in the morning. These they were to plant the next night and watch in the same way, and so on every night until they reached home, when they would have corn enough to supply the whole people.

The strangers lived seven days’ journey away. They took the seven grains and watched all through the darkness until morning, when they saw seven tall stalks, each stalk bearing a ripened ear. They gathered the ears and went on their way. The next night they planted all their corn, and guarded it as before until daybreak, when they found an abundant increase. But the way was long and the sun was hot, and the people grew tired. On the last night before reaching home they fell asleep, and in the morning the corn they had planted had not even sprouted. They brought with them to their settlement what corn they had left and planted it, and with care and attention were able to raise a crop. But ever since the corn must be watched and tended through half the year, which before would grow and ripen in a night.

When Kana’ți did not return, the boys at last decided to go and find him. The Wild Boy took a gaming wheel and rolled it toward the Darkening land. In a little while the wheel came rolling back, and the boys knew their father was not there. He rolled it to the south and to the north, and each time the wheel came back to him, and they knew their father was not there. Then he rolled it toward the Sun Land, and it did not return. “Our father is there,” said the Wild Boy, “Let us go and find him.”

So the two brothers set off toward the east, and after traveling a long time they came upon Kana’ți walking along with a little dog by his side. “You bad boys,” said their father, “You have found me when I didn’t want to see you again.” “Yes,” they answered, “We always accomplish what we start out to do—we are men.” “This dog overtook me four days ago,” Kana’ți said, but the boys knew that the dog was the wheel which they had sent after him to find him. “Well,” said Kana’ți, “As long as you have found me, we may as well travel together, but I shall take the lead.” Soon they came to a swamp, and Kana’ți told them there was something
dangerous there and they must keep away from it. He went on ahead, but as soon as he was out of sight the Wild Boy said to his brother, “Come and let us see what is in the swamp.” They went in together, and in the middle of the swamp, they found a large panther sleep. The Wild Boy got out an arrow and shot the panther in the side of the head. The panther turned his head and the other boy shot him on that side. He turned his head away and the two brothers shot together—tussst, tussst, tussst! But the panther was not hurt by the arrows and paid no more attention to the boys.

They came out of the swamp and soon overtook Kana’tî, waiting for them. “Did you find it?” asked Kana’tî. “Yes,” said the boys, “We found it, but it never hurt us. We are men.” Kana’tî was surprised, but said nothing, and they went on again. After a while he turned to them and said, “Now you must be careful. We are coming to a tribe called the Anadadtvaski (“Roasters”), and if they get you they will put you into a pot and feast on you.”

Then he went on ahead. Soon the boys came to a tree which had been struck by lightning, and the Wild Boy directed his brother to gather some of the splinters from the tree and told him what to do with them. In a little while they came to the settlement of the cannibals, who, as soon as they saw the boys, came running out, crying, “Good, here are two nice fat strangers. Now we’ll have a grand feast!” They caught the boys and dragged them into the townhouse, and sent word to all the people of the settlement to come to the feast. They made up a great fire, put water into a large pot and set it to boiling, and, then seized the Wild Boy and put him down into it.

His brother was not in the least frightened and made no attempt to escape, but quietly knelt down and began putting the splinters into the fire, as if to make it burn better. When the cannibals thought the meat was about ready they lifted the pot from the fire, and that instant a blinding light filled the townhouse, and the lightning began to dart from one side to the other, striking down the cannibals until not one of them was left alive. Then the lightning went up through the smoke-hole, and the next moment there were the two boys standing outside the townhouse as though nothing had happened.

They went on and soon met Kana’tî, who seemed much surprised to see them, and said, “What! are you here again?” “Oh, yes, we never give up. We are great men!” “What did the Cannibals do to you?” “We met them and they brought us to their townhouse, but they never hurt us.” Kana’tî said nothing more, and they went on. He soon got out of sight of the boys, but they kept on until they came to the end of the world, where the sun comes out. The sky was just coming down when they got there, but they waited until it went up again, and then they went through and climbed up on the other side. There they found Kana’tî and Selu sitting together.

The old folk received them kindly and were glad to see them, telling them they might stay there a while, but then they must go to live where the sun goes down. The boys stayed with their parents seven days and then went on toward the Darkening land, where they are now. We call them Anisga’ya Tsunski’ (The Little Men), and when they talk to each other we hear low rolling thunder in the west.

After Kana’tî’s boys had let the deer out from the cave where their father used to keep them, the hunters tramped about in the woods for a long time without finding any game, so that the people were very hungry. At last they heard that the Thunder Boys were now living in the far west, beyond the sun door, and that if they were sent for they could bring back the game. So they sent messengers for them, and the boys came and sat down in the middle of the townhouse and began to sing.

At the first song there was a roaring sound like a strong wind in the northwest, and it grew louder and nearer as the boys sang on, until at the seventh song a whole herd of deer, led by a large buck, came out from the woods.

The boys had told the people to be ready with their bows and arrows, and when the song was ended and all the deer were close around the townhouse, the hunters shot into them and killed as many as they needed before the herd could get back into the timber. Then the Thunder Boys went back to the Darkening land, but before they left they taught the people the seven songs with which to call up the deer.

It all happened so long ago that the songs are now forgotten—all but two, which the hunters still sing whenever they go after deer. ■

**John Norton’s 1816 Account of the Iroquois Origin Story of the World on the Turtle’s Back**

The Iroquois origin story existed long before the arrival of Europeans, shared among the Five Nations (Seneca, Cayuga, Onondaga, Mohawk, and Erie). John Norton who was of Scottish and Cherokee descent but adopted by the Mohawks recorded the following version of the Iroquois origin story in 1816. Norton’s is one of the earliest written accounts of the Iroquois origin story we have. The story provides a glimpse into how Iroquois peoples viewed the world and their place within it.

The tradition of the Nottowegui or Five Nations says, “that in the beginning before the formation of the
earth; the country above the sky was inhabited by Superior Beings, over whom the Great Spirit presided. His daughter having become pregnant by an illicit connection, he pulled up a great tree by the roots, and threw her through the Cavity thereby formed; but, to prevent her utter destruction, he previously ordered the Great Turtle, to get from the bottom of the waters, some slime on its back, and to wait on the surface of the water to receive her on it. When she had fallen on the back of the Turtle, with the mud she found there, she began to form the earth, and by the time of her delivery had increased it to the extent of a little island. Her child was a daughter, and as she grew up the earth extended under their hands. When the young woman had arrived at the age of discretion, the Spirits who roved about, in human forms, made proposals of marriage for the young woman: the mother always rejected their offers, until a middle aged man, of a dignified appearance, his bow in his hand, and his quiver on his back, paid his addresses. On being accepted, he entered the house, and seated himself on the birth of his intended spouse; the mother was in a birth on the other side of the fire. She observed that her son-in-law did not lie down all night; but taking two arrows out of his quiver, he put them by the side of his bride: at the dawn of day he took them up, and having replaced them in his quiver, he went out.

After some time, the old woman perceived her daughter to be pregnant, but could not discover where the father had gone, or who he was. At the time of delivery, the twins disputed which way they should go out of the womb; the mother was seen on the other side of the fire. She observed that her son-in-law did not lie down all night; but taking two arrows out of his quiver, he put them by the side of his bride: at the dawn of day he took them up, and having replaced them in his quiver, he went out.

The twin brothers were nurtured and raised by their Grandmother; the eldest was named Teharonghyawago, or the Holder of Heaven; the youngest was called Tawiskaron, or Flinty rock, from his body being entirely covered with such a substance. They grew up, and with their bows and arrows, amused themselves throughout the island, which increased in extent, and they were favored with various animals of Chace. Tawiskaron was the most fortunate hunter, and enjoyed the favor of his Grandmother. Teharonghyawago was not so successful in the Chace, and suffered from their unkindness. When he was a youth, and roaming alone, in melancholy mood, through the island, a human figure, of noble aspect, appearing to him, addressed him thus “My son, I have seen your distress, and heard your solitary lamentations; you are unhappy in the loss of a mother, in the unkindness of your Grandmother and brother. I now come to comfort you, I am your father, and will be you Protector; therefore take courage, and suffer not your spirit to sink. Take this (giving him an ear of maize) plant it, and attend it in the manner, I shall direct; it will yield you a certain support, independent of the Chace, at the same time that it will render more palatable the viands, which you may thereby obtain. I am the Great Turtle which supports the earth, on which you move. Your brother’s ill treatment will increase with his years; bear it with patience till the time appointed, before which you shall hear further.”

After saying this, and directing him how to plant the corn, he disappeared. Teharonghyawago planted the corn, and returned home. When its verdant sprouts began to flourish above the ground, he spent his time in clearing from all growth of grass and weeds, which might smother it or retard its advancement while yet in its tender state, before it had acquired sufficient grandeur to shade the ground. He now discovered that his wicked brother caught the timid deer, the stately elk with branching horns, and all the harmless inhabitants of the Forest; and imprisoned them in an extensive cave, for his own particular; use, depriv ing mortals from having the benefit of them that was original intended by the Great Spirit. Teharonghyawago discovered the direction the brother took in conducting these animals captive to the Cave; but never could trace him quite to the spot, as he eluded his sight with more than common dexterity!

Teharonghyawago endeavoured to conceal himself on the path that led to the cave, so that he might follow him imperceptibly; but he found impossible to hide himself from the penetrating Tawiskaron. At length it observed, that altho’ his brother saw, with extraordinary acuteness, every surrounding object, yet he never raised his eyes to look above: Teharonghyawago then climbed a lofty tree, which grew near to where he thought the place of confinement was situated: in the meantime, his brother passed, searching with his eyes the thickest recesses of the Forest, but never casting a glance above. He then saw his brother take a straight course, and when he was out of sight, Teharonghyawago descended, and came to the Cave, a short time after he had deposited his charge; and finding there an innumerable number of animals confined, he set them free, and returned home.

It was not long before Tawiskaron, visiting the Cave, discovered that all his captives, which he had taken so much pains to deprive of their liberty, had been liberated: he knew this to be an act of his brother, but dissembling his anger, he meditated revenge, at some future period.

Teharonghyawago laboured to people the earth with inhabitants, and to found Villages in happy situations, extending the comforts of men. Tawiskaron was equally
active in destroying the works his brother had done; and in accumulating every evil in his power on the heads of ill-fated mortals. Teharonghyawago saw, with regret, his brother persevere in every wickedness; but waited with patience the result of what his father had told him.

At one time, being in conversation with his brother, Tawiskaron said, “Brother, what do you think there is on earth, with which you might be killed?” Teharonghyawago replied, “I know of nothing that could affect my life, unless it be the foam of the billows of the Lake or the downy topped reed. What do you think would take your life?” Tawiskaron answered, “Nothing except horn or flint.” Here their discourse ended.

Teharonghyawago, returning from hunting, heard a voice singing a plaintive air: he listened and heard it name his Mother, who was killed by Tawiskaron; he immediately hastened towards the spot from whence the voice proceeded, crying, “Who is that, who dares to name my deceased mother in my hearing?” When he came there, he saw the track of a fawn, which he pursued, without overtaking it, till the autumn, when it dropped its first horns; these he took up, and fixed upon the forked branches of a tree.

He continued the pursuit seven years; and every autumn, when its horns fell, he picked them up, and placed them as he had done the first. At last, he overtook the deer, now grown to be a stately buck: it begged its life, and said, “Spare me, and I will give you information that may be great service to you.” When he had promised it its life, it spoke as follows, “It was to give you the necessary information that I have been subjected to your pursuit, and that which I shall now tell you was the intended reward of your perseverance and clemency. Your brother, in coming into the world, caused the death of your Mother; if he was then wicked in his infancy, his malice has grown with his stature; he now premeditates evil against you; be therefore on your guard: as soon as he assaults you, exert yourself, and you will overcome him.”

He returned home; and not long after this adventure, was attacked by his brother. They fought; the one made use of the horn and flint stone which he had provided: the other sought for froth and the reed, which made little impression on the body of Teharonghyawago. They fought a long time, over the whole of the island, until at last Tawiskaron fell under the conquering hand of his brother. According to the varied tones of their voices in the different places through which they passed during the contest, the people, who afterwards sprung up there, spoke different languages.

Questions for Analysis
1. What is Deloria’s argument and how does it challenge the scientific community?
2. Does the story of the twin gods from the Pacific Northwest support Deloria’s argument about geomythology? If so, in what specific ways?
3. How did native peoples in the Pacific Northwest understand the role of animals? As Calvin Luther Martin suggests, indigenous perceptions of animals conflict with modern-day scientific approaches. Are there any ways to reconcile the conflict between indigenous ways of being and scientific methods of knowing?
4. What can be learned about the cultures and societies of the Cherokees and the Iroquois from their stories? What are the similarities and differences in the two as found in their stories?

End Notes