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Big History seeks to understand the integrated history of the Cosmos, Earth, Life, and Humanity, using the best available empirical evidence and scholarly methods.

Big historians look to the scientific study of nature to place the stories of the human past within the natural record of the entire known past. Many not only respect all these stories, but seek to learn from them. Brilliant and profound people have lived on Earth for some 300,000 years, with our ancestors having lived since their evolution out of the Earth's chemicals and former stars' elements. We are the latest chapter in a very long story. Future chapters have yet to be told.

We begin here with a part of one version of the origin story of the Dine'è (Navajo) nation. There is benefit to all of us from listening and learning. We move from there to Dave LePoiré's search for stories linking him to past generations.

Part of our stories are those of tragedy and demise. They are hard to listen to; what we learn from them is bitter.

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Lowell Gustafson
Editor, *Origins*
lowell.gustafson@bighistory.com

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# Dine'è (Navajo) Creation Story— The First World “Nihodilhil” (Black World)

as written by Don Mose, Jr.

Dine'è (Navajo) origin stories begin with a First World of darkness (Nihodilhil). From this Dark World the Dine'è began a journey of emergence into the world of the present.

It had four corners, and over these appeared four clouds. These four clouds contained within themselves the elements of the First World. They were in color: black, white, blue, and yellow.

## Things in the Black World

1. Insects – Ch'osh
  - a. Black Ants – Wo'ia'zhini Dine'è
  - b. Bee People – Tsi's'na' Dine'è
  - c. Wasp People – Na'azozii Dine'è
2. Divine Spirit
3. First Talking God
4. Second Talking God
5. Coyote
6. Primordial Dawn
7. Primordial Blue Sky
8. Primordial Twilight
9. Primordial Darkness
10. Everlasting life and happiness

The Black Cloud represented the Female Being or Substance. For as a child sleeps when being nursed, so life slept in the darkness of the Female Being. The White Cloud represented the Male Being or Substance. He was the Dawn, the Light Which Awakens, of the First World.

In the East, at the place where the Black Cloud and the White Cloud met, First Man was formed; and with him was formed the white corn, perfect in shape, with kernels covering the whole ear. Dohonotini is the name of this first seed corn, and it is also the name of the place where the Black Cloud and the White Cloud met.

The First World was small in size, a floating island in mist or water.

On it there grew one tree, a pine tree, which was lat-

er brought to the present world for firewood. Man was not, however, in his present form. The conception was of a male and a female being who were to become man and woman.

The creatures of the First World are thought of as the Mist People. They had no definite form but were to change to men, beasts, birds, and reptiles of this world.

Now on the western side of the First World, in a place that later was to become the Land of Sunset, there appeared the Blue Cloud, and opposite it there appeared the Yellow Cloud. Where they came together, First Woman was formed, and with her the yellow corn.

This ear of corn was also perfect. With First Woman there came the white shell and the turquoise and the yucca.

First Man stood on the eastern side of the First World. He represented the Dawn and was the Life Giver. First Woman stood opposite in the West. She represented Darkness and Death.

First Man burned a crystal for a fire. The crystal belonged to the male and was the symbol of the mind and of clear seeing. When First Man burned it, it was the mind's awakening. First Woman burned her turquoise for a fire. They saw each other's lights in the distance.

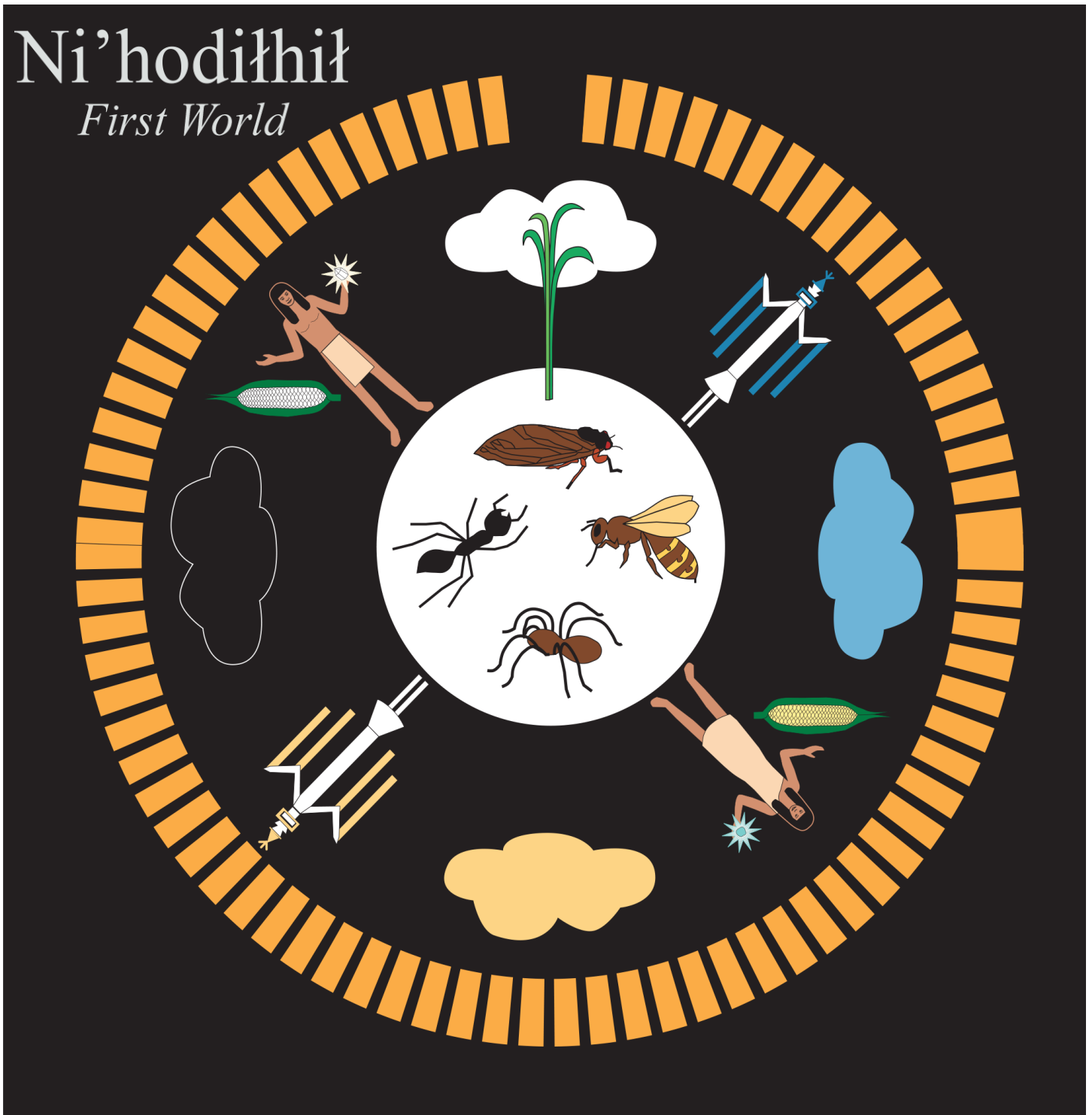
When the Black Cloud and the White Cloud rose higher in the sky, First Man set out to find the turquoise light. He went twice without success, and again a third time; then he broke a forked branch from his tree, and, looking through the fork, he marked the place where the light burned. And the fourth time he walked to it and found smoke coming from a home.

“Here is the home I could not find,” First Man said.

First Woman answered : “Oh, it is you. I saw you walking around, and I wondered why you did not come.” Again the same thing happened when the Blue Cloud

# Ni'hodíłhił

## *First World*



Ni'hodíłhił, the First World, was a black world surrounded by four cloud columns: White Dawn on the east, Blue Daylight on the south, Yellow Twilight on the west, and Black Night on the north. In the beginning, only Holy People and insects lived there.

Later, First Man and First Woman were formed in the First World. First Man was formed where Black Cloud on the north met White Cloud on the east. Along with him was formed a perfect ear of white corn with twelve rows of kernels covering the whole ear. First Woman, along with a perfect ear of yellow corn, was formed where Yellow Cloud on the west met with Blue Cloud on the south.

The First World was destroyed when the Gods became angry and set it on fire. But First Man brought a Big Reed and planted it in the east, where it grew very quickly. All the creatures fled into Big Reed and escaped through it into the Second World.

and the Yellow Cloud rose higher in the sky. First Woman saw a light and she went out to find it. Three times she was unsuccessful, but the fourth time she saw the smoke and she found the home of First Man.

“I wondered what this thing could be,” she said.

“I saw you walking and I wondered why you did not come to me,” First Man answered.

First Woman saw that First Man had a crystal for a fire, and she saw that it was stronger than her turquoise fire. As she was thinking, First Man spoke to her. “Why do you not come with your fire and we will live together.” The woman agreed to this. So instead of the man going to the woman, as is the custom now, the woman went to the man.

About this time there came another person, the Great-Coyote-Who-Was-Formed-in-the-Water, and he was in the form of a male being.

He told the two that he had been hatched from an egg. He knew all that was under the water and all that was in the skies. First Man placed this person ahead of himself in all things.

The three began to plan what was to come to pass; and while they were thus occupied, another being came to them. He also had the form of a man, but he wore a hairy coat, lined with white fur, that fell to his knees and was belted in at the waist.

His name was First Angry or Coyote. He said to the three: “You believe that you were the first persons. You are mistaken. I was living when you were formed.” Then four beings came together. They were yellow in color and were called the wasp people. They knew the secret of shooting evil and could harm others. They were very powerful.

This made eight people.

Four more beings came. They were small in size and wore red shirts and had little black eyes. They were the spider ants.

They knew how to sting and were a great people.

After these came a whole crowd of beings. Dark colored they were, with thick lips and dark, protruding eyes. They were the black ants. They also knew the secret of shooting evil and were powerful; but they killed each other steadily.

By this time there were many people. Then came a multitude of little creatures. They were peaceful and harmless, but the odor from them was unpleasant. They were called the wolazhini nlchu nigi, meaning that which emits an odor.

After the wasps and the different ant people there came the beetles, dragonflies, bat people, the Spider Man and Woman, and the Salt Man and Woman, and others that rightfully had no definite form but were among those people who peopled the First World.

This world, being small in size, became crowded, and the people quarreled and fought among themselves, and in all ways made living very unhappy.

The First World “Nihodilhil” (Black World)  
Nihodootlzh – Second World (Blue World)  
Nihaltsoh -The Third World (Yellow World)  
Nihalgai – The Fourth World (Glittering or White World)

# Ni'hodootł'izh

## *Second World*



Ni'hodootł'izh, the Second World, was a blue world. In the Second World, First Man and First Woman found birds, insects, and animals. When they arrived, First Man opened his medicine bundle, which contained the four clouds he had brought from the First World, and the clouds rose again at the edges of the Second World.

Just as in the First World, there was suffering and sorrow in the Second World. The Gods eventually became angry and destroyed the Second World with wind. When the people asked First Man to find an escape, he sent Zigzag Lightning, Straight Lightning, Rainbow, and Sunray into the four directions, but they were unable to find a way out. Finally, First Man made a prayer stick of Whiteshell, Turquoise, Abalone, and Jet. On the prayer stick, he drew four footprints. When the people stood on the footprints, they rose up through the reed planted in the south and escaped into the Third World.

When they escaped from the Second World, First Man carried with him the inner forms of earth, plants, and clouds.



# Ni'haltso

*Third World*

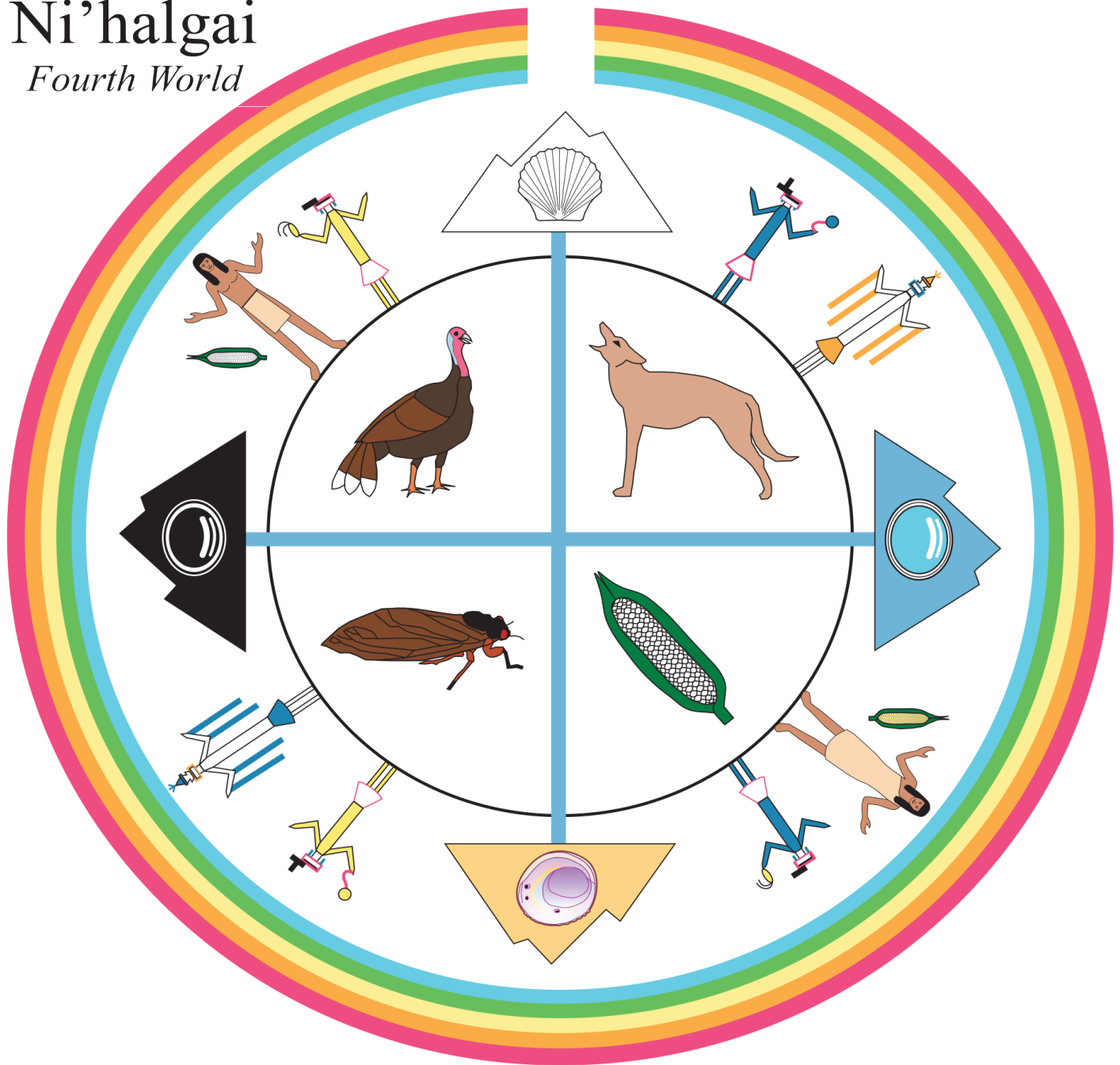


Ni'haltso, the Third World, was a yellow world. When the people emerged into the Third World, they found two rivers, a female river running east to west and a male river running north to south. First Man put the jewels where they belonged: Whiteshell in the east, Turquoise in the south, Abalone in the west, and Jet in the north. When he blew on them four times, they expanded and met overhead, where they made a hogan that became the world. Then First Man took the earth he had brought from the Second World and made the sacred mountains: Dawn Mountain in the east, Turquoise Mountain in the south, Abalone Shell Mountain in the west, and Jet Mountain in the north.

When Coyote stole Water Monster's babies, Water Monster flooded the Third World. The people escaped just in time through a tall reed. Turkey was the last to leave; his tail feathers touched the water, which turned the tips white.

# Ni'halgai

## *Fourth World*



Ni'halgai, the Fourth World, was a glittering world. When locust and the Holy People first emerged, they found the world covered with water. They tried several times to drain the flood, but every time the waters came back up. Then First Man discovered that Coyote had stolen Water Monster's baby. He forced Coyote to throw the baby back down the reed and the floods receded. After First Man replaced the sacred mountains, he took out the stars, the sun, and the moon and placed them in the sky. He began placing the stars carefully, but Coyote grew impatient. He snatched up the corner of the blanket that held the stars and flipped them randomly across the sky.

Changing Woman was born, grew to womanhood, and gave birth to the Twins, Monster Slayer and Born for Water. After a hazardous visit to their father, they killed the monsters and made the world a safe place to live.



What is reproduced with permission is one version of the Dine'è (Navajo) creation story. Versions differ according to clan and region.

Illustrations by Theresa Breznau

<http://navajopeople.org/blog/navajo-creation-story-the-first-world-nihodilhil-black-world/>

With appreciation for assistance from Rebecca Stoneman-Washee, Coordinator,

San Juan School District Heritage Language Resource Center

28 West 200 North

Blanding, UT 84511

Additional resources include:

Haile, Berard. *Origin Legend of the Navajo Enemy Way*. New Haven: Yale University Press. Yale University Publications in Anthropology, no. 17, 1938.

Gluckhohn, Clyde, Leonard McCombe, and Evon Z. Vogt (1951) *Navajo means People*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press

Wyman, Leland C. *Blessingway, with Three Versions of the Myth Recorded and Translated from the Navajo by Father Berard Haile*. University of Arizona Press; First edition (February 1, 1970)



# Seeing the Forest through the Genealogical Trees

Dave LePoire ([david.lepoire@gmail.com](mailto:david.lepoire@gmail.com))

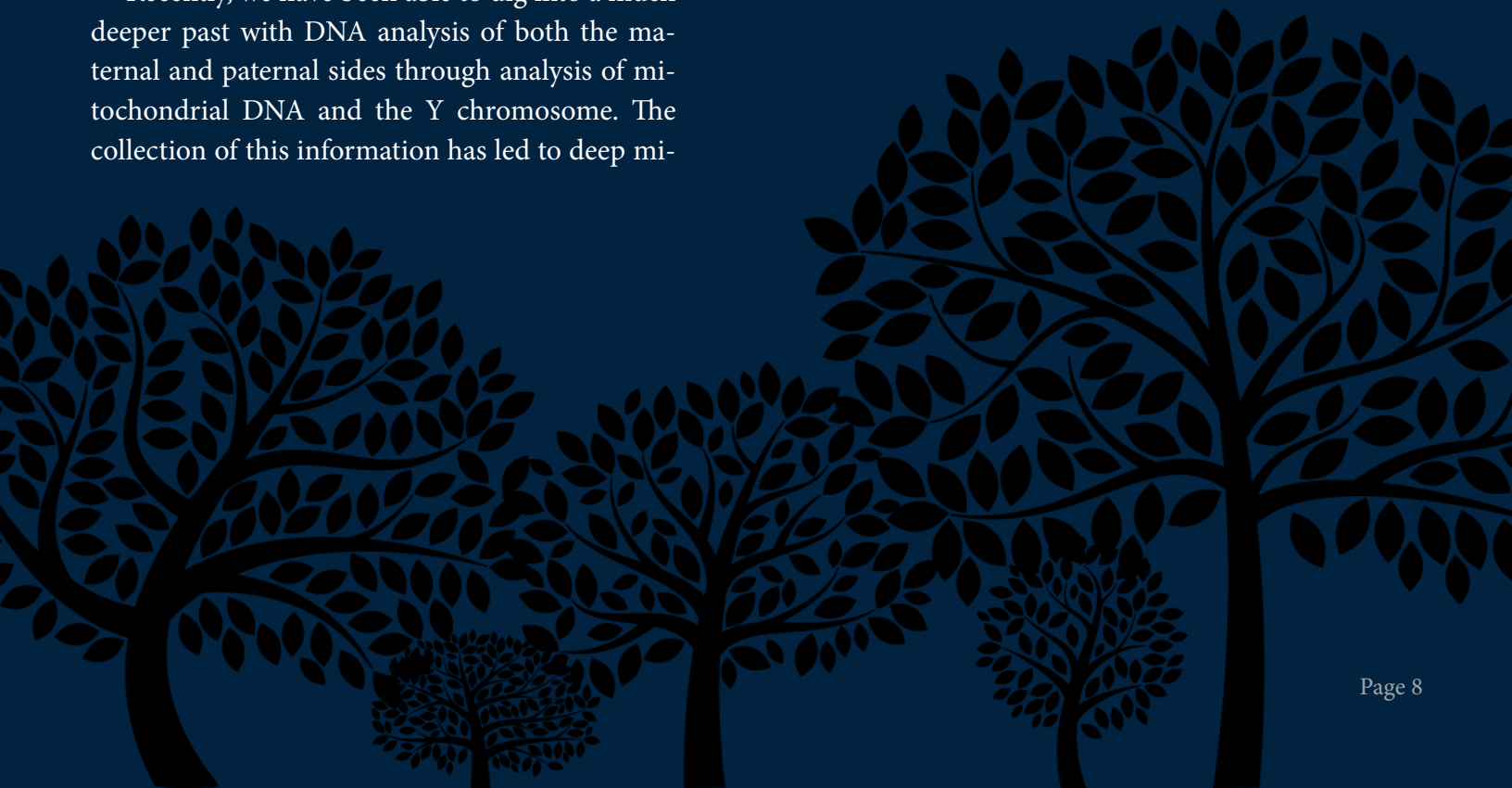
Sometimes it is refreshing to take a break from the large scale view of history and instead focus on the details and connections around us. This is an appeal of Little Big Histories. Looking around us we can ask what is the history of the gold atoms in this ring? What is the story behind this bread? But often the big question concerns the history of ourselves. This takes us through the personal connections and stories that have been passed down (such as immigration). This only goes so far into the past as the information quickly condenses to births, marriages, and deaths. [I started doing this the old-fashioned way by ordering microfiche from the Mormon collection in Salt Lake City while I was in college in the early 1980's.]

Recently, we have been able to dig into a much deeper past with DNA analysis of both the maternal and paternal sides through analysis of mitochondrial DNA and the Y chromosome. The collection of this information has led to deep mi-

gration patterns and timing in the far past. The mitochondrial DNA has led to stories concerning “Eve” the mother who had the last common mitochondrial DNA.

We don't have to go too far back to a time when we are descendants of most of the people living in an earlier civilization. Just consider that there might be 3 generations in 100 years (generation about 33 years). This means that there would be about 8 ancestors living at 100 years ago (great grandparents). If we round this to 10, and then realize that for each great grandparent there would be 10 ancestors in the previous 100 years, then the total number of ancestors living  $N$  centuries before us would be approximated as  $10^N$ . So an estimate of the number of ancestors at 1,000 years ago would be 10 billion which is quite a bit more than the global population at that time. Clearly the lineage contains duplicates of the same person, especially in relatively small closed societies.

But there is a gap of stories between this deep knowledge based on DNA and the personal stories of the last few generations. During high school I liked reading the historical fiction of James Michener, who wrote personal stories about generations of families living in one particular place. These books included “The Source” about stories somewhat based on the town of Megiddo, now in Israel. A book about U.S. history was “Chesapeake”



concerning the development of life along the bay. Edward Rutherfurd continued this genre with books of European development with “Sarum” about England and “Russka” about Russia. These books serve as a motivation for my vacations. [I was fortunate to have the opportunity to meet James Michener as he was the commencement speaker when I graduated from college. He was invited because of his book on the history of space exploration, “Space”, which included stories from the university’s associated Jet Propulsion Laboratory.]

Over the years, I have unsuccessfully attempted to construct stories in the same way as Michener and Rutherfurd. However, in the process, I was led to more deeply consider the intersection of how daily life changed and the impacts from the larger historical trends. I was able to track down distant relatives in the eastern part of the Netherlands and hear their stories. I found historical fiction about specific time periods (e.g., *The Sea Beggars* by Cecelia Holland, *The Huguenots* chapter in Michener’s “The Covenant”). There was also a Dutch artist, Rien Poortvliet, who also explored and shared his reconstructed past in drawings. A Dutch geologist, Peter Westbroek (a former IBHA member), explored the intersection of life and geology in general and explained how those forces helped form the Low Countries (*Life as a Geological Force*).

It was only later after I had two daughters that I looked into different ways of presenting their ancestors stories. I found the key is to be a bit creative when looking for patterns in the stories. Themes emerged which expanded the locational theme. These themes involved 1) focusing on one period of recent history, in this case the World War I to World War II period (i.e., the time of my daughters’ great grandparents); 2) a pattern of



Figure 1. Each quadrant has 4 photos concerning each of the grandparent's families in Europe and the USA both in the 1920's and 1940's. The top right concerns the Jewish family, the lower right the WWI soldier. The family photos on the left correspond to two families emigrating from the Netherlands who provided flowers, furniture, and moonshine to Chicago.

marriage along the maternal line in which the bride (with a mixed heritage) would marry a groom with a relatively simple heritage, and 3) a characteristic trait that led to various emigrations.

### Focusing on one period of recent history

I chose the period starting about 100 years ago, which include the World Wars and Great Depression. My daughters had eight great-grandparents at this time but the stories mostly concern the jobs of the 4 great-grandfathers. At the time there were still known relatives in Europe. So for each of the 4 families there were 4 photos to cover the combinations of the two times (1920's and 1940's) and two locations (Europe and America). It was an interesting time with immigration, participation in wars (WWI and WWII), use of new technology, and the prohibition near Al Capone's Chicago. The most dramatic pair of stories



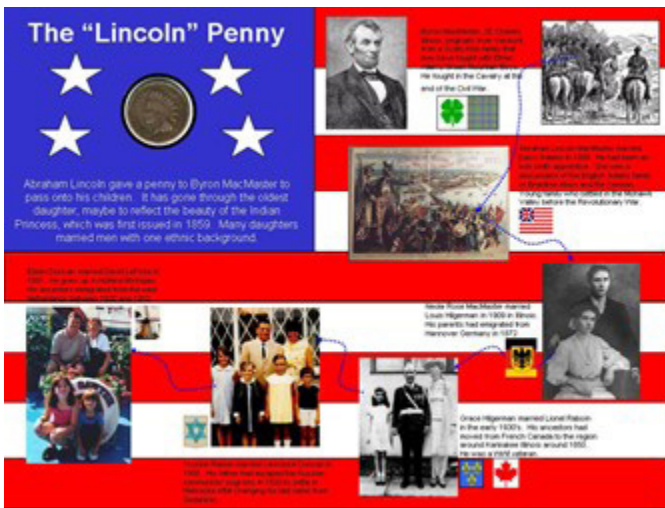


Figure 2. The maternal line of ancestors from the time of Lincoln (covering about 160 years) where the bride married into a recently immigrated family. All the families lived near Chicago.

involved a post-World War I soldier's romance with a German woman who bore a son in the U.S. The woman soon dissolved the marriage and moved back to Germany with the son who would be of prime military age during World War II. A later daughter of the World War I soldier married into a Jewish family that still had relatives in Russia (now Belarus) where atrocities occurred in 1942.

### A pattern of marriage

One iron smith moved from Vermont in the mid 1800's to Illinois (much like John Deere). This smith seemed to interact with Abraham Lincoln either through attending the Lincoln-Douglass debates or participating in campaigns. He named a son after Abraham Lincoln and later fought in the Midwestern cavalry campaigns of the Civil War. The story was that he was given a penny by Lincoln which was passed on through the generations. In each generation the bride married a groom that was relatively new to the U.S. with ethnic groups including Scottish, English, German, French Canadian, Jewish, and Dutch. The

original penny could not be found so I made framed posters with the 6 families' stories and ordered 1860's vintage pennies from eBay.

### A characteristic trait

There were bits of information that I could use as a frame for constructing a themed history. Most ancestors were Dutch, but I have a French last name from a Huguenot, who fled France to the Netherlands after King Louis XIV revocations of the Edict of Nantes in 1685. There are still some people with the same last name in Northeastern France near Nancy, which was historically part of state of Burgundy. There are some indications of a similar named person who participated with William the Conqueror. The DNA suggests early Scandinavian ancestors. The Frisians of the northern part of the Netherlands were known to be quite independent and resisted religious conversion.

From this set of clues, a theme of rebellion was selected. The goal was then to form stories from events in history that could help explain the movements. Eight stories were formed from the Frisian resistance, the formation of Cistercian monasteries, the 100 Years War, participation in the Calvinist reformation, the later escape from France as a Huguenot, the participation in the Dutch Patriot movement, the immigration to the U.S., and my story.

But stories are often not sufficient. Visuals can help keep the story alive by their constant reminder of the people and events. While I thought about trying to accumulate real artifacts of those events and times, it would be difficult and expensive. So after understanding the capabilities and limitations of my 3-D printer, I started to search for ways I could print items to represent those periods. There is no doubt that the printed items would ever be confused with real artifacts but they would serve their purpose to be a constant reminder of the stories. So I designed most items with the simple 3-D development tool called TinkerCAD.



Figure 3. Set of “artifacts” from constructed stories based on a rebellion theme.

The printed items included a Thor’s hammer for a necklace, a quill pen nib as used in a monastery, an arrowhead from the 100 Years War, coins from Calvin’s Geneva, a Huguenot cross pendant, and a printer’s movable type. The next artifact was a copy of an Ellis Island Identification tag, and a memory stick that contains the stories and 3D formatted files to reconstruct the set.


The artefacts were combined with images of individuals from those time periods. Labels connecting

them to the story and year were made with type fonts (and languages) that corresponded to the story. The “artifacts” and pictures were then placed in a shadow-box.

### Conclusion

I’m continuing to explore other themes and lines of ancestors. However, I really like to hear the stories of others, so if you want to discuss and explore possible options for doing something similar, please contact me.





After Hiroshima and Nagasaki, Americans worried through forty years of the Cold War. Concern intensified as several other nations went on to develop nuclear weapons--atomic and hydrogen bombs, missiles with atomic warheads. In 1980 Jonathan Schell published a shocking book called *The Fate of the Earth* that described what all-out nuclear war might mean: the possible extinction of life on Earth.

This scenario was so bad that most people put it away, wishing to believe that the nations of the world now know better than to use nuclear weapons to end a war, as we did in 1945, or begin a war, intentionally or accidentally. Suppressing the possibility of Mutually Assured Destruction (MAD), we have forgotten the continuing but often hidden tragedies of the Nuclear Age.

Every spring semester I teach a course I developed many years ago called Native American Literature. Alongside the literature, I encourage students to look at Native American history and to write brief essays on a variety of topics I provide. One of the topics I suggest is "The Demise of Native Americans." This semester, a young woman submitted the essay on the next page, which I feel I must share.

I would like to thank Annalia for granting permission to reprint her essay.

## Tragedies of the Nuclear Age are Still with Us

Barry Wood  
University of Houston



## The Demise of Native Americans

Annalia Martinez

ENGL 3349

The demise of Native Americans has been going on for generations and will continue into the next generations. As I sit and think of my own impression of loss among Native Americans, I cannot stop thinking of the diseases that infiltrated many Native American communities and my own tribe. I can write about so many losses to Native Americans regarding land, pride, language, traditions, citizenship status, and their right to vote. But what is worse than one's life?

For years the federal government has oppressed Native people on lands that they title reservations, providing them with little resources, food, and adequate housing for survival. To this day, when I go home to the reservation, the sight is that of a third-world country in the United States. In addition, [nuclear testing] exposed the Navajo Reservation to radiation, leaving long-term effects for generations. The current generation of Navajo people are forced to watch their parents or grandparents suffer from different forms of cancer caused by exposure to radiation.

In 1990, the federal government finally recognized that the Navajo reservation and surrounding area were exposed to hazardous radiation. From January 21, 1952, to October 31, 1958, and June 30, 1962, to July 31, 1962, the government developed and conducted nuclear weapons testing at a site in Nevada. During the testing of nuclear weapons, the wind would carry the radiation downwind to the Navajo reservation, exposing many people, and others in the surrounding area. The government did not provide any warning to the testing site employees and people in the nearby areas. It took years to force the government to recognize their faults and mistake, but one can say that no lesson has been learned from this costly mistake.

So now, one must question, how does this affect a loss to Native Americans? Easily; our elders are dying slowly with pain and suffering. As life continues, we understand that we are not on this earth forever. But the loss of efficient language passing on to the next generations is slowly diminishing because it takes a toll on a family to care for someone who is slowly dying from cancer. The traditions and ceremonial heritage are lost because our elders are suffering and too sick to teach the next generations. The cycle goes on and on and on, but at the end of the day, no lesson has been learned here because many Native American tribes are still fighting for their clean water, clean air, and land.

At one point in my lifetime, I had five generations of women living, my great great grandmother, my great grandmother, my grandma, my mom, and me. Now, we are left with three generations of women. My

great-grandmother and her mother both died from some form of cancer caused by radiation exposure. Watching my great-grandmother sick in bed is a loss we as a family cannot replace. She was the last known fluent Navajo speaking in our family. For the last ten years of her life, she tried to teach me but was in pain all the time. She lived with cancer for ten years.

**Note:** Though most nuclear testing has now ceased, nations with nuclear weapons have conducted 2,121 nuclear tests. Of these, 1,032 were conducted by the United States. More than thirty-five occurred at the Nevada Test Site 65 miles north of Las Vegas, two hundred miles west of the Navajo Nation. Of these, Operation Plumbbob, consisting of 29 tests in Nevada between May 28 and October 6, 1957, was the most intensive testing program of the Atomic Era.

**Annalia Leona Martinez** has a Mexican father and a full-blooded Navajo mother from whom she has inherited double ancestry in the Salt (Ashjhi) and Bitterwater (Dich'ii'nii ) clans. Annalia graduated from the Texas Online Preparatory School (TOPS), then did four semesters at Houston Community College, and is now a junior at University of Houston majoring in sociology. Annalia's great-great grandmother passed away some years ago; her great-grandmother, born in 1932, passed away in 2018; both died of cancer brought on by radiation exposure on the Navajo reservation.

