Praise

"Calling on powerful soul medicine and his own wide and deep life-lived experiences, Brandon carves a path forward for U.S.ALL. With equal doses of hard truths and uplifting ideas, this passionate purposeful guide coaxes us onward and inward to places we just must go if we are to survive times like these. I am ALL IN."

Susan Lucci, JD, Co-founder, Global Purpose Leaders

"...a powerful and well-researched illumination of the origin story and highest purpose of the United States, along with proposing a practical path forward from today's chaos toward finally actualizing our national purpose."

David Gruder, PhD, Center for Enlightened Self Sovereignty

Brandon is a brilliant searcher and thought leader. Here you'll find his deep thoughts and perspectives about the transition we are all undergoing as a nation here in the U.S. and globally. There is hope! I have a feeling my fellow Naval Academy and Marine Corps brothers and sisters will particularly enjoy this book."

Gabrielle Blocher, CEO, Sunflower Fuels

"The book isn't about the left or the right. It's the bridge between, and the road forward. It's what we need more than ever."

Ezra Bookman, Founder, Ritualist

"Powerful, nourishing - a map for regenerating the very purpose of our nation, and the wisdom of our Founding Fathers - adding whole new layers of wisdom. Who do we truly want to be - and stand for? What truly gives us energy, as a people?"

Robin Athey, PhD, Oxford Leadership

"... a critical call to action for our nation. *Bison Medicine* is a key to our healing. Thank you Brandon for providing us a roadmap to do our individual and collective part to co-create the world we seek - with liberty and justice for all."

Bobby Bakshi, Co-leader, The ManKind Project

"...a wise approach to weaving both the triumphs and the dark history of our country and inviting us to reimagine what our future could look like... It's widened my imagination and approach to being an American citizen."

Rachel Zargo, Creative Director, Late Love

"Brandon Peele presents an inspiring and insightful vision into the spirit and motivating energy of this country. By offering a unique and stirring perspective, he invites us to clarify our intentions, to hone our skills, and to connect as community to to raise ourselves up into the full potential of this grand American experiment."

Dave Klaus, JD, Zen Priest

"I found *Bison Medicine* mind expanding. If you care about the U.S., do yourself (and your country) the favor of reading it. The fresh perspectives, rooted in our collective historical vision, contained in this book are exceptional. You don't have to agree with everything in it to be served by it. Some of my favorite parts are those that differed from my views."

Bea Boccalandro, President, Veraworks

"On January 27, 1838, in Springfield, Illinois, Abraham Lincoln addressed the importance of upholding the nation's institutions and laws to preserve

the Republic. In what is known as the 1838 Lyceum Address, Lincoln admonished, 'If destruction be our lot, we must ourselves be its author and finisher. As a nation of freemen, we must live through all time, or die by suicide.' As in 1838, *Bison Medicine* is a prophetic call for us to ponder and reconsider our path as a Nation. We either commit to the path of our common humanity — or division and strife. If we follow our better angels, we can follow the bison's individual and collective power. Thank you, Brandon, for reminding us to choose wisely."

Luis Marrero, PhD, CEO, Boston Institute for Meaningful Purpose

"*Bison Medicine* is an important book... a foundation to understand what is needed to heal our nation. I highly recommend this book, especially for our youth."

Michele Lyons, Spanish Teacher

"My sincere hope is that more and more people consider the power and healing that can come to America by embracing *Bison Medicine*."

Eric Zimmerman, Chief Innovation Officer, Kumanu

"The spark, the fire for this book and movement was divinely entrusted to Brandon. And, the process to nurture and develop it was the most collaborative process, inviting feedback, pushback, tending, and consideration from start to finish through multiple perspectives. Truly remarkable and soul-nourishing as I look back on it. Who knew we would benefit from medicine about collective purpose at this time?"

Dena Wiggins, Senior Facilitator, Translator

"The gift of *Bison Medicine* can be summed up in one word—restorative... Brandon didn't just sit in a room like some mad scientist creating a solitary vision of what he thought this country should look like. He included other

people who are here on this land mass trying to make it a home. This book is very literally an inclusive community in book form. The book was born of a process of studying, learning, doing inner work, reflecting, having conversations, and being in wonder--everything that you would want in a founding document... a treatise on considering what this place could be if we learned from our mistakes... a vision that any American can locate themselves in... The American idea that Brandon is inviting us to consider has the superordinate quality born of the awareness that if an American People will ever exist, it will have to be a 'People of Peoples' (My words, not his.) But, you can tell that Brandon is aware of this, because he acknowledges the myths, symbols, and identity forming narratives that have prevented us from getting there. And he is doing so from the social position where--in theory at least--he would have to give something up. No one does this unless they have come in contact with something greater."

Pedro Silva, Director of Engagement, YOUnify

"Groundbreaking. What I loved most was the way this book provided a shift in how we can think about leveraging change and creating a fair society. I am used to thinking about political and grassroots activism, the nonprofit sector, and religious institutions as arenas for influencing society, but the corporate world hasn't been a possible party to those efforts, at least in my imagination. To me this book is groundbreaking and brilliant."

Atieno Bird, Principal, Two Bird, LLC

"There is so much potential in this country, and if we can look forward, keep our minds open and bring everyone along for the ride, anything is possible. You will see specific policy prescriptions,... big thinking that is going to be necessary to enable us to reach our potential and be worthy of our purpose. Let's all challenge the status quo thoughtfully and constructively. It's a powerful read..."

Alan Iny, Partner, Boston Consulting Group

“In a crowded field that often leaves you wanting real solutions to healing the social and political fault lines in society, Peele offers a fresh and practical approach to the conversation. Drawing upon the symbol of the American bison, he provides a compelling new narrative that challenges our current values and ethics, and in doing so, masterfully calls us to something greater than what we could ask or imagine as a country. I came away from reading this book both encouraged and excited for a renewed sense of civic purpose.”

Joel Domingo, EdD, Research Director, City University of Seattle

"... a fascinating examination of how we got here, replete with stories and concepts from America’s early history that have been largely forgotten, but that are the seeds of what we have become... Then, it offers a path forward to a brighter future, filled with love and community, where all can thrive and be inspired. This is a book we all need to read."

Chris Pollak, Founder, Wayside Ventures

"... an unflinching and honest look at the problems and promise of our country. Nothing is swept under the rug. But at the same time there is hope and resilience... Highly recommended!”

Tim Ash, Author, *Primal Brain*

“*Bison Medicine* is a monumental work of art, a spiritual poetic journey of history and possibility. It is at the same time a tribute to an enlightened experiment, an indictment of a quest gone terribly wrong, and a detailed blueprint of how to reclaim what has been lost. The framers of our Constitution (the great American experiment) imperfect as they were, set a purpose for our nation based on the moral and spiritual wisdom traditions of the ages. They created a unique, inspired manifesto firmly anchored to ALL CREATED EQUAL, universal access to LIFE, LIBERTY AND THE

PURSUIT OF HAPPINESS and E PLURIBUS UNUM, each person loving the other as much as himself. *Bison Medicine* will clarify your understanding of the origins and purpose of our grand experiment. And if you permit, it will provide The Cure for a Troubled Nation as it expertly escorts us to regain control of our dangerously drifting country and steer it back onto the enlightened path envisioned by The Founding Fathers."

Jon Robison, PhD, Author *The Spirit and Science of Holistic Health*

"Important, integral, and inspiring! As a therapist, one of the universals I see with clients is that healing cannot happen without honesty... an integral, fundamental part of the healing. To heal and to grow is to look honestly at our past, atone for our transgressions so that change can then occur and to do so without demonizing ourselves. To tell the truth. We are fundamentally good people who have erred. What is true of individuals is true of communities, nation-states, and global civilizations. And what Peele has done here is to invite us, as individuals of a nation-state born of both divinely-inspired ideals and horrendous actions, to tell ourselves the Truth of ourselves so that we may become the people our ideals envision. He has provided a path forward for doing so with the Bison. The Bison here is more than metaphor; it and the medicine it embodies give us tangible, actionable ways, rooted in fundamental values, to achieve these goals. Just as the Bison help to create the unimaginably large swaths of open prairie by the virtue of its hooves, so too does it offer to help us create an open, fertile future for our nation, and by extension, the world.."

Cameron Meyer, Mental Health Clinician, Hidalgo Medical

Bison Medicine:

The Cure for a Troubled Nation

“A patriot is one who wrestles for the soul of her country…”

Adrienne Rich

"...an archetype can break with shattering force
into an individual life and into the life of a nation."

Carl Jung

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Foreword

Whether you've ever seen a solitary bald eagle in flight near that place where the clear lake meets the tree line, or a herd of bison roaming and grazing upon what seems like an endless prairie, now is the time to bring them both into your heart and mind.

Brandon Peele loves the United States of America enough to publicly advocate replacing its national symbol—the majestic in-flight, predatory, scavenging, bald eagle, with the majestic-on-the-prairie, courageous, inclusive, generative, and protective bison—named in 2016 as America's National Mammal through bipartisan Congressional support of the National Bison Legacy Act.

As a manifestation of this love, Peele offers us both "invitation" and "provocation" in the pages of *Bison Medicine: The Cure for a Troubled Nation*. Beyond its sweeping contribution to contemporary American literature, this gift is, in the best meaning of an overused word, a manifesto and call to action for the redemption and re-membering of the American Family on its circuitous road toward a more perfect union through true equality for all. He makes clear that our Family is in trouble—we've been orphaned, we've lost individual and collective purpose, and we move "from foster home to foster home...halfway house to halfway house...seeking to gain something real and permanent, seeking a lasting connection to the sacred – our land, our identity, our souls, our purpose, a sense of belonging to other people, our ancestors, and a shared future."

In a detailed exposition of the corporate-government collusion that both renders us orphans and benefits from that rendering, Peele reminds us that it is on each of us to embrace Bison Medicine for the good of all of us. Help isn't coming. We are the help—we have to be the adults—and if we are serious about the task we face, we must dive into the depths of the deceptively simple promises that we are all created equal, that we have rights

to life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness, and that from the many we are, a true one may emerge.

Bison Medicine offers a multidisciplined excavation of the United States—its history, its growth, its current state—and the author implores us to look unflinchingly at our individual and collective development and shadow, our physical, emotional, and spiritual health, and again, always, our sense of purpose. He calls on the Wisdom of the Haudenosaunee, Whitman, Melville, and contemporary writings that embrace and transcend conventional views of democracy to include the nature of an authentic spiritual democracy and how it might manifest through a collective American vision and effort.

Finally, in addition to this manifesto and call to action, Peele offers us a broad and detailed map of possible ways forward. From a People's Constitutional Convention, to Bison Medicine-based approaches to education, business, and community, every path on the map honors both individual and collective purpose. Brilliantly conceived, extensively researched, and passionately presented, Brandon Peele's *Bison Medicine* offers a rigorous and healing way forward for Americans who fully embody—or want to—the proposition that we are all created equal.

Reggie Marra, Author of *Healing America's Narratives* and *Enough With the Talking Points*

December 24, 2024

Northfield, CT

Acknowledgments

You

First and foremost, I acknowledge and honor the part in you that aches for a country that works. That aches for a true story of us: one that coheres our good and evil, our shadows and soul, our past, present, and future, one that roots us firmly in the truth. That composts what must be composted, that honors what is beautiful within us. That gives us a wide and firm foundation to stretch towards the future.

I honor your wisdom and resourcefulness. I write to the wise, resourceful adult inside of you, the one vested with intelligence, power, and agency. This honoring means that you'll have to work a bit harder than you might be used to working. You'll have to bend, stretch, question, and fight. You'll have to check my sources. You'll have to note your questions and disagreements in the margins or in your journal. And if you decide to take this journey with friends as I recommend – reading it socially, and debating its merits – you will be a changed person, and more of your potential and power will be realized. I acknowledge you for the intellectual, emotional, psychological, spiritual work that Bison Medicine will demand of you.

Since it can never be finished, I believe the best grade a work of non-fiction can get is a B+, and while I've made every effort to get this work there, calling on dozens of experts and dear friends to provide feedback, it will never be perfect. Like our nation's work "towards a more perfect union", I ask your help in making the next edition more perfect. If you find any error or take

issue with anything offered herein, please drop me a note at BisonMedicine.com. Thank you in advance.

Bison

Secondly, I acknowledge the medicine of the bison, as a "shattering force" that calls us into greater courage, care, inclusion, play, independence, generativity, protection, and redemption. I first encountered it in a ceremony in February of 2016 (see Appendix E), and have been ongoingly healed and enlivened by it. In April of the same year, the bison was officially recognized as our National Mammal in the National Bison Legacy Act. Our nation acknowledged that it too should be explicitly working with Bison Medicine. As a way to give thanks, pay our debt to the bison, and restore their right to flourish, the net proceeds of this book will benefit the American Prairie Foundation, an organization that partners with First Nations to acquire and protect the natural habitat of the bison and their entire ecology. If you received this copy as a gift, please consider including the APF in your annual giving (http://americanprairie.org).

Medicine

It is important to acknowledge that, although I use the term "medicine" in the indigenous and shamanic sense of the word, conveying a spiritual and psychological power, I have no First Nations' blood, nor have I been initiated or adopted by a First Nation. That said, like every one of us, my bones belong somewhere to some soil. 23andMe says I am indigenous to parts of Europe, the Middle East, and Africa – and yet these are not the lands that shaped my soul. To that end, I thank the land and the many caretakers of the land of my youth in Illinois and the land I now call home in California.

Additionally, although I'm not a medical doctor, I use the term "medicine" in the Western medical diagnostic sense. Wherein, I seek to understand the root causes of the malady, not only the symptoms of a singular biological organism or species, but the whole physical, social, emotional, spiritual, economic, and political condition of our nation. I seek to diagnose the maladies that plague the entire nation. This book leverages both indigenous and Western medical frames to explore a path to cure ourselves and our nation.

Nature

I thank Nature and its billions of winged, four-legged, furry, and scaled creatures, first cared for by First Nations people. Like our Framers, I hold Nature's God sacred, above all other gods, for she carries many gifts, provides us many freedoms, and demands many responsibilities. In this sense, Nature is our mother, teacher, and charge. If we prepare and humble ourselves, then we may receive her teachings as the First Nations do and our Framers did. Nature always asks something of us in return. It is my intention to honor this sacred relationship and offer this book as a devotion.

Feminine

It is important to acknowledge that bison are central symbols of the divine feminine in numerous cultures through the Americas, Europe, the Middle East, and Asia. To many cultures, bison represent fertility, providence, motherhood, gentility, sacrifice, protection, nourishment, safety, generosity, and many other life-giving, grounded, and lunar qualities. It is important to acknowledge the feminine in all things, in all men, women, children, Nature, and spirituality. However, our national historical record omits almost all of the feminine contribution and journey and our culture and economy persistently persecutes the feminine at every turn.

Until women like Elizabeth Cady Stanton, Sojourner Truth, and Emily Dickinson put pen to paper, became leaders, or mounted the stage, very little was recorded of the experience of our female country folk. We also had little sense of how men or society understood, honored or reconciled the feminine within themselves until the 1800s when Herman Melville and Walt Whitman showed us the fullness and beauty available to men when we do. So let us acknowledge and begin to honor the feminine in all of us, as well as the foundational influence of women upon our nation.

Origins

I thank my parents, Nancy, Robert, and Dennis, for their love and care, for ensuring that my brother and I were safe, fed, loved, educated, challenged, immersed in nature, and had the opportunity to be awed by her beauty. I give thanks to the rolling hills, forests, prairies, lakes, and rivers of Illinois,

Indiana, Wisconsin, and Michigan. I give thanks to the National Parks that have shaped my soul: Yosemite, Grand Canyon, Zion, Yellowstone. I give thanks to the redwoods under whose shade and protection I write, and the deer, turkey, and hawk who continue to summon me.

Teachers

I give thanks to my friends, teachers, and colleagues, alive and dead, who have guided me and helped develop this project. I give special thanks to Lara Lee, Bea Boccalandro, Robin Athey, Susan Lucci, Dena Wiggins, Steven Herrmann, Rod Bacon, Robin Wall Kimmerer, Reggie Marra, Eric Liu, Kelly Doughty, Herman Melville, Walt Whitman, Carl Jung, Emily Dickinson, Canassatego, Benjamin Franklin, Thomas Paine, Thomas Jefferson, Kondiaronk, Deganawida, Ayawenta, Black Elk, Crazy Horse, Sitting Bull, Vanessa Andreotti, Justin Skoda, Tyson Yunkaporta, Joshua Michael Schrei, David Graeber, David Wengrow, Stephan Mackenzie, Wolfgang Arose, Brian Edgar, Marianne Williamson, Jon Eden Khan, Jonathan Erlich, Marcus Woo, Manly P. Hall, Ted Frelke, Dave Booth, Rashmir Balasubramaniam, Matt Stillman, Ezra Zohar, Rachel Zargo, Andy Swindler, Joel Domingo, Ann Marie Clinnick, Susan Mashkes, Craig Wheeler, Brian Hammond, Jon Robison, Pedro Silva, and Sarah Jane Crespo.

Invitation

Hear this work as an invitation from love, to love, in the spirit of love, as love itself, seeking to unfold in every imaginable way.

In tender embrace, in the sweet sense that all is well, safe, and joyful, that 40 houses in every direction from you is the unfolding of love,

a love enfleshed, a love in awe of Nature's God, her wonders, her mysteries, her deep longing for you and all life to become and express love fully in every form.

Hear this from the deepest place in your heart that yearns to be free, loved, and supported, that yearns for all to be free, loved, and supported.

Hear this as a marriage proposal from this land and from the bison, to love each other as much as we love ourselves, to stand in our dignity, agency, and nobility, as the bison do, as a keystone species who make life flourish for all.

Hear this as a completing love, one with wide eyes trained upon truth and wild eyes seduced by our ideals and potential, upon all that is beautiful and broken, on all that can be known, on all that demands blessing, curiosity and care.

Hear the necessary hard truths herein as love – the type of truth spoken only by ones who love you enough to say what needs to be said, even though it will hurt at first.

Hear this in the soothing voice of a mother removing painful splinters so that her child may be healed and free to play.

Provocation

As our democracy crumbles before our very eyes,

As our most wounded rise to positions of unprecedented power and wealth,

As the world descends further into chaos,

As the United States' leadership role in addressing our numerous and increasing existential threats diminishes,

As our shadows are venerated as virtues,

As extractionary capitalism, deglobalization, and climate change accelerate famine, migration, war, genocide, and depopulation,

We find that the old ways no longer work.

Democracy no longer works. Capitalism no longer works.

Some say they never did. The old institutions are crumbling under the weight of trauma, ignorance, and corruption, and are falling far faster than reforms allow. After decades of neglect, the spine of our nation is beginning to show its age, perhaps even fracture.

What if this polycrisis is a necessary catalyst for the United States (and all of humanity) to fully and finally know itself? What if this moment is ripe for a deep remembering of who we really are – who we were before every moment of our days was gobbled up by the grind? What if this is the cry for a new national myth? Or for a third founding (following the first in 1776 and the

second during the Civil War)? What if – for it to work at all – democracy must work on all three levels: ideal, political economy, and spiritual practice?

These are the questions we will be asking, debating, and attempting to answer.

The United States of America is more than a country, more than a land, more than a people, more than its original sins of genocide and slavery, and more than an idea or experiment. It is not just a democracy, but the idea of democracy embodied in the practice of it – warts and all. As we'll explore, unity is our destiny, and democracy is more than our form of government. It is our origin story and a deeply spiritual practice. If democracy is to survive, we cannot relate to it passively, nor can we take it for granted. As should now be abundantly clear, we can no longer merely tend to it with our votes, vocations, and taxes. We need to actively tend to it spiritually, and breathe it into all we do, moment by moment.

However, very few of us know the purpose of our nation. Hell, most can't even name more than a handful of our states. Few have been seduced by our shared purpose. Far fewer have taken vows to fulfill it.

As such, we must make ourselves familiar with the contours of our purpose, including understanding our shadows that almost entirely obscure it, so that we may know what is required of us to call this place home. By embracing our traumas and family history, we can soberly take our vows to fulfill our purpose, and heal, transform and integrate our shadows.

Introduction

Outside the vows required of our nation's service members and naturalized citizens, U.S. citizens are not given the opportunity to truly know and take vows to the purpose of our nation. We have not been given the opportunity to know ourselves; we weren't given the opportunity to become initiated as adults and rooted in our personal purpose. We have never been given an opportunity to authentically choose and commit to the nation's purpose ("All... Created Equal", "Life, Liberty, and the Pursuit of Happiness", and "*E Pluribus Unum*") from a position of being rooted in our unique life's purpose.

Instead, we were born, raised, and came of age in a nation that gives us only patriotic pageantry, performative pledges, broken promises of politicians, and meaningless and often dangerous pseudo-initiations (sports, alcohol, drugs, decontextualized sex acts, heartbreak, stunts, poverty, illness, bankruptcy, jail, etc.). We end up with identities born not of purpose and connection, but of generational trauma, economic hardship, physical impairments, societal exclusion, and psychological wounding. By default, we define ourselves by who we are not – instead of by who we are, what we have in common or our shared destiny. We define ourselves by our respective caste[1], depending on our age, race, gender, income, religion, geography, education, and sexuality. We didn't know any better. We were not given another choice. This is not our fault.

Yet, until recently, many of us assumed our flawed nation was the best of all possible worlds (vs. communism or monarchy). The election cylces of 2016, 2020, and 2024 have made it increasingly clear that we are *not* living in the best of all possible worlds. We need a new way forward – beyond just throwing more capitalism, technology, experts, policies, and votes at the social, economic, and environmental problems that capitalism, technology, experts, policies, and votes keep creating. We can't expect different results while doing the same thing. We need something beautiful and inspiring that calls us to work together and remake our nation.

Enter the bison.

In 2016, as a result of a bipartisan coalition in the House and Senate along with the InterTribal Buffalo Council, Wildlife Conservation Society, and the National Bison Association, our nation chose the bison as our National Mammal. The bison is a majestic and powerful herd species, a symbol, and source of ethical guidance (in Chapter 4, we'll explore the moral teachings of Bison Medicine: courage, care, inclusion, play, independence, generativity, protection, and redemption) that can lead us back to ourselves, each other, our great national purpose, and help us create a flourishing future.

In this sense, Bison Medicine invites you into a future worth fighting for – one that is worthy of our hearts, minds, and bodies, our brilliance, creativity, and leadership. In the coming pages, we'll root ourselves in our shared family history (Part 1), the impoverished way of life we experience because we are separated from our personal and collective purpose (Parts 2 and 3), the enlivening and healing medicine of the bison (Part 4), a high-definition view of our nation's purpose (Parts 5-8), and a path forward to activate Bison Medicine in our lives and careers (Part 9 and Conclusion), and remake our nation (Appendices).

At the end of each part is a three-bullet summary as well as three discussion questions to give you a feel for the arc of this journey and encourage you to read this socially. As we'll explore, much like the bison, we are a herd species who learn through conversations, stories, and relationships. While we can be guided by a text, the real magic happens when we experience something powerful together, tell stories, and discuss the meaning we make. You are

invited to share this book with your friends, family, work, alumni, professional, civic, and spiritual groups. You are encouraged to meet to discuss your experience (see Appendix C for guidance on creating a book club).

Part 1

Our Family Portrait

"Nations reel and stagger on their way; they make hideous mistakes; they commit frightful wrongs; they do great and beautiful things. And shall we not best guide humanity by telling the truth about all this, so far as the truth is ascertainable?" **W.E.B. DuBois**

"I think it's very important that students learn history, both the positives and the negatives, because this is where they live. And they have to understand where we came from as a country so that we don't repeat some of the same problems over and over again."[1] **Jake, 35-44 white man, Republican, Georgia**

"We shouldn't be ashamed to be American because we learn from the mistakes by writing laws to change the messed-up things that were once legal, from lynching, or segregation. We changed the laws, so we should be proud. So, we should admit our mistakes but...be proud that America fixed and changed the laws."[2] **Andy, 35-44 Black man, Democrat, New York**

It is easy to just pick one neat narrative for our nation. *We are great. We ain't. We were and must be again.* These quips are too simplistic for a family as complex and diverse as ours, for a history as majestic and blood-soaked as ours. Our nation is neither purely good nor purely evil, and most of us know that.[3] As with every human heart, every group of humans has a line of good and evil running through it. Our task is to be curious where that line is at play in each thought, conversation, relationship, group, neighborhood, company, and township. Our task is to accept and love our good *and* our evil, to hold the tension created by them, and to soulfully trace their lines so we can tend to our wounds, elevate our beauty, and realize greater prosperity and unity.

If you were (mis)educated in public schools like I was, it's likely you're now going to encounter some things that will be new or bizarre or confound you in this exploration of our family history. You may even get mad. And that's okay. As Gloria Steinhem said, "The truth will set you free, but first it will piss you off!" If we really want to be free, we have to risk feeling sad, betrayed, ashamed, guilty, or angry. Like all hard emotions, these are part of who we are, and they are actually important, signaling that something we value has been negatively impacted. On the other side of our hard emotions is care for what we love and value. On the other side is a truth and unity far more rich and a future far more hopeful than the simplistic bumper stickers that dominate our civic life today.

Our family, purpose, land, and history are stretched upon a canvas of possibility. This canvas is not just composed of U.S. citizens dreaming their great dreams, but it is also where humanity's deepest aspirations are painted. This is a place where exiles and adventurers established the complex societies of our First Nations. This is a place where those known commonly as the Iroquois Confederation, or Haudenosaunee, painted an intense spectrum of spiritual practices, agriculture, commerce, ecological stewardship, multicultural unity, and philosophical, political, spiritual, economic, and social debate.

This is the place painted with the fullness of life available in a democracy: individual freedom, shared purpose, the dignity, agency, and nobility of

women and children, guaranteed happiness, sexual liberation, freedom of worship, collective responsibility, right of recall, peace, and diplomacy. Our predecessors painted a life and government free from racial, religious, and gender oppression or class stratification. As a result, our nation is home to the first fully functioning democratic government, known as The Great Law of Peace, The *Kaianerekowa* (1000-1450 CE).[4]

Wa... wa... wait, what?! What about the French Enlightenment? *Well...*

In the 1500s and 1600s, French Jesuit and Spanish Franciscan scholars began studying the peoples and cosmologies of Turtle Island, or "The New World", in hopes of converting the First Nations to Christianity. In the north, the Jesuits interviewed members from the Haudenosaunee (Iroquois) Confederation of Nations. In these interviews, they discovered – not savages and nomads – but mature leaders and elders who embraced and embodied happiness, liberty, and equality, and ensured them through their cultures, practices, governance, social policies, and diplomacy. One philosopher-statesperson, Kondiaronk, was so formidably regarded by the Governor of New France that he was a frequent guest of the Governor's proto-Enlightenment salons held in Montreal. It is also quite likely that Kondiaronk, the Ambassador of the Wendat Nation, was called to advise the Court of Louis IV in 1691.[5] Subsequent delegations to France from other First Nations were to follow, including the Osage delegation in 1725.[6]

It is beyond the time for acknowledging that the Enlightenment has much more to do with the refined wisdom of several millennia of nightly "New World" council fires than the spontaneous awakenings of Voltaire, More, Locke, Marx, and Rousseau. Despite being aware of the proto-democratic philosophizing and uprisings during the previous 700 years in England, as Jefferson observed in his correspondence with Monroe, there was no comparable framework or theory to leverage from the entire European continent from which to build a free country. "There does not exist a good elementary work on the organization of society into civil government; I mean a work which presents one good and comprehensive view of the system of principles on which such an organization should be founded, according to the rights of nature."[7]

Although Jefferson, along with Paine, Franklin, and Washington, read the works of the European philosophers of the time and exchanged letters with their colleagues in Europe, it was their firsthand experience working with the First Nations that sparked their yearning for freedom and equality. These four Framers and many others during the decades before our founding held numerous council fires with the Haudenosaunee, and eventually sought to adapt the *Kaianerekowa* to unify the colonies. In a speech at the 1744 council fire in Lancaster, Pennsylvania captured by Benjamin Franklin, the Haudenosaunee Statesman Canassatego invited the colonies to democratize and unify:

> "Our wise forefathers established union and amity between the Five Nations [becoming six nations shortly thereafter]. This has made us formidable. This has given us the weight and authority with our neighboring Nations. We are a powerful Confederacy and by your observing the same methods our wise forefathers have taken you will acquire much strength and power; therefore, whatever befalls you, do not fall out with one another."[8]

As a result of the power and possibilities revealed in this and dozens of other council fires, Franklin lobbied the Colonies for unification, imploring them to consider that, "It would be a very strange thing if Six Nations of Ignorant Savages should be capable of forming a Scheme for such an Union and be able to execute it in such a manner, as that it has subsisted Ages, and appears indissoluble, and yet a like Union should be impracticable for ten or a dozen English colonies."[9] His first attempt to unify – the Albany Plan (1754) – failed to gain sufficient support. But Franklin and other Framers kept at it. They fought hard to establish a working democratic government and finally succeeded with Articles of Association in 1774. In late 1775, commissioners from the Colonies held another council with the Chiefs of the (now) Six Nations. They smoked the pipe of peace, and expressed their gratitude:

> "Our business with you, besides rekindling the ancient council-fire, and renewing the covenant, and brightening up every link of the chain is, in the first place, to inform you the

> advice that was given about thirty years ago, by your wise forefathers... when Canassatego spoke to us, the white people... Our forefathers rejoiced to hear Canassatego speak these words. They sunk deep into our hearts. The advice was good. It was kind. They said to one another: 'The Six Nations are a wise people, Let us hearken to them, and take their counsel, and teach our children to follow it.' Our old men have done so. They have frequently taken a single arrow and said, Children, see how easily it is broken. Then they have tied twelve arrows together with a strong string... and our strongest men could not break them. See, said they, this is what Six Nations mean. Divided, a single man may destroy you; united, you are a match for the whole world. We thank the great God that we are all united; that we have a strong confederacy, composed of twelve provinces... These provinces have lighted a great council fire at Philadelphia and sent sixty-five counselors to speak and act in the name of the whole, and to consult for the common good of the people..."[10]

In the following year, we signed our Declaration of Independence (1776), and then strengthened the national covenant twice more with the Articles of Confederation (1778) and our Constitution (1787). Over 200 years later, the U.S. House and Senate passed a resolution recognizing the foundational impact the *Kaianerekowa* had on the founding of our nation.[11] While this chapter of our history is largely unknown and unrecognized, it is nonetheless a critical element of our family history, character, and heritage – and, as we will discover, the key to our flourishing future.

This, of course, begs the question: Why did democracy find such a hospitable home in the hearts of the English colonists? Why not the French, Dutch, Portuguese, or the Spanish? At the time of exploration and conquest, the Spanish, Dutch, and Portuguese were deeply dismissive of native cultures, wisdom, and rights (e.g. the *Doctrine of Discovery*) and were known as brutal slavers. And while the French weren't as brutal, they did not have the 700-year history of democratic philosophy, experimentation, and uprising that the English had, and so the English regarded themselves as more civilized,

more practiced in the virtues of liberty and equality. For example, the Church of England banned the slave trade in 1102, the *Magna Carta* was established in 1215,[12] and the Crown banned slavery in 1807 (although the practice continued until the 1840s).

When the Mayflower arrived, the hearts of the English delighted in finding democracy well established in the New World. Because of these initial exchanges with the First Nations, democracy became established as law in *The Massachusetts Body of Liberties* in 1641. This document protected the rights of free speech, property, due process, jury trial, and use of public lands, and prohibited practices such as slavery, estate tax, domestic abuse, cruel and unusual punishment, and animal abuse. Our nation is thus a place where native democratic practices and ideas married with the democratic yearnings of the early English Colonists, where these ideas settled into their bones, birthed a collective identity, and ignited the Spirit of '76.

However, because the Colonists had not also adopted the First Nations' cultural, moral, and spiritual development practices required for a people to actually be free, equal, and unified, a full democracy was not possible. Our covenant thus amounted to little more than a situationship among rich white men. Some important rights were declared, but we pledged no responsibilities to each other, and no plan was made to ensure that "Life, Liberty, and the Pursuit of Happiness" could be realized by anyone. Intentionally left out of consideration were: women, children, the elderly, natives, people of color, poor people, and the uneducated.

While powerful and necessary for the times, our founding documents did not include any legal responsibilities to one another. They did not include the moral, cultural, and spiritual development practices required to support a democratic state. Perhaps this was because each of our Framers descended from traumatized immigrants, exiles, and perpetrators, who never had the opportunity to heal, and thus became perpetrators themselves. Perhaps the 1735 Franklin maxim, "An ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure," wasn't fully understood. Perhaps this was mere pragmatism, knowing that establishing a plan to protect all life would make a union of 13 Colonies impossible, given the dependence of our nation's economy upon

enslavement. Perhaps we assumed religion would fill in the gaps, or that future generations would work out the details.

Regardless of our reasons for this increasingly deadly omission, our Framers knew that the law alone would be insufficient to govern a civil society. They were aware that First Nations people experienced such freedom and leisure due to the moral and spiritual norms and practices of their cultures. As Jefferson noted, "Their only controls are their moral sense of right and wrong... An offense against these is punished by contempt, by exclusion from society, or, where the cause is serious, such as that of murder by the individuals whom it concerns... crimes are rare among them... The principles of their society are... led by duty and enterprise by personal influence and persuasion... Their leaders influence them by character alone...."[13] Not having the culture, rituals, and practices required to heal and evolve themselves and the culture, our Framers omitted a critical aspect of a functioning democracy.

While numerous attempts were made to clarify, bolster, and expand our purpose on paper with the 13th, 14th, 15th, 19th, and 24th Amendments, the Civil Rights Acts of 1866, 1871, 1957, 1960, 1964, 1965, and 1968, the New Deal, and the Great Society, we paid no explicit attention to character, trauma, purpose, or culture. As James Madison observed in 1787, the reason any confederation fails is "in the people themselves".[14] While each of these pieces of legislation signaled a deepening commitment, expanding who we are, who matters, and who has freedom, rights, and power, and moved us closer to the intent of the *Kaianerekowa*, we failed to address the moral fiber and spirit required to fulfill it. We failed to develop ourselves. We failed to take our vows to each other and honor the many responsibilities that are needed to fulfill these vows.

We just kept slapping more duct tape on the jalopy. As is supremely evident, this approach didn't work. We can't have rights without responsibilities. We can't have freedom without equality. We can't have liberation without truth, reconciliation and repair. Take for example Officer Darren Wilson's murder of Michael Brown in Ferguson, Missouri, White Supremacists marching in Charlottesville, Virginia, and Officer Derek Chauvin's murder of George

Floyd in Minneapolis, the January 6th Insurrection, the 2024 CPAC where Nazis mingled freely with mainstream politicians,[15] and the manner in which sexism and racism have shaped and continue to shape our presidential elections. As we'll explore in the back half of this book, we have serious soul, shadow, and trauma work to do, and also the means to do it swiftly, sustainably, and at scale.

And yet as imperfect and unfulfilled as these vows were and are, they still managed to capture the world's hearts and imaginations. They inspired democratic uprisings, experiments, and evolutions all over the world. A cursory review of the historical record from the *Kaianerekowa* to the *Body of Liberties* to the *Rights of the British Colonies Asserted and Proved* to *Common Sense* to the Declaration of Independence to the Articles of Confederation to the U.S. Constitution to the United Nations' Declaration of Human Rights[16] to the 72 democratic constitutions now in effect all around the world, reveals a causal line of thought, suggesting that the seeds of the *Kaianerekowa* have flowered throughout the world, that most of humanity imagines itself and aches to be what our nation set out to become: fundamentally free, just, equal, united, and democratic.

But our journey didn't start with the Haudenosaunee. The ancestors of the Six Nations did not paddle, sail, and walk here empty-handed, empty-minded or empty-hearted. These ideas, and their moral, philosophical, and spiritual foundations (e.g. *ubuntu*, "I am because we are", *name nwu na mawu*, "God does not die, so I cannot die") were forged around thousands of nightly council fires in Africa. From here, they were walked out to Alexandria and Cairo, through the Fertile Crescent and then upon the Silk Road. They settled into the bones of philosophers and sages, eventually finding their way into the Bible ("love your neighbor as yourself"), Quran ("everyone is equal") and numerous Hindu, Jain, and Buddhist texts as *ahimsa* (noninjury to other living things).

> "...the origin of the language we speak carries us to India; our religion is from Palestine; of the hymns first sung in our churches, some were first heard in Italy, some in the deserts of Arabia, some on the banks of the Euphrates; our arts come

> from Greece; our jurisprudence from Rome."[17] **George Bancroft**

The scent of liberty and democracy can be found in every corner of the globe. To the northwest these ideals traveled and mixed in Greece, Malta, Catalonia, Switzerland, and England, and eastward through Kashmir, Delhi, Shanghai, and Kyoto. To the east, they ventured to Turtle Island, where thousands more nightly council fires tested and refined the ideas and practices of justice, unity, liberty, and equality. They settled into the bones of the Mayans as "I am you. You are me." (*en lak ech hala ken)* , Inca "immortal love" (*ama guaña*), and the Lakota "all my relations" (*Mitákuye Oyás'iŋ*) and were legally constituted in the *Kaianerekowa*.

Now this spirit of democratic evolution encircles the planet. For example, during Gandhi's fight for civil rights in South Africa and the liberation of India, he was mentored by Tolstoy and influenced by Thoreau's 1849 *Civil Disobedience* essay. Gandhi, in turn, mentored the Reverend Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., who in turn mentored many other civil rights leaders the world over. This liberating spirit is eternal and we see it evolve (and regress) in real time.

As such, it is more accurate to say that democratic ideals (unity, justice, liberty, equality), practices (philosophical debate, regenerative land management, checks and balances, right of recall, civil rights, public housing and sanitation, the dignity, agency, and nobility women and children, councils, confederations), and the inner work required to deliver them (rites of passage, ceremony, healing practices, mentorship from elders, etc.) are not the intellectual property of the First Nations or the French Enlightenment, but more bluntly: They are human ideals. They have been tested and refined through hundreds of thousands of nightly debates by elders around council fires from Timbuktu to Tel Aviv to Tokyo to Tenochtitlan to Tampa. President Reagan was more right than he knew when he proclaimed "all... created equal" is "our birthright... our heritage". It is humanity's heritage and birthright.

It is also important to note that democracy wasn't the only gift from the First Nations. The land itself had been cultivated for centuries to support human

life. To do this, the First Nations partnered with nature, leveraged the seasons and topographies to naturally irrigate and fertilize farmland that produced food for centuries. They burned, enriched, and expanded prairies to encourage burn-resistant grasses that bison love. Bison herds followed the food from Oregon to Virginia and from Canada to Mexico. The First Nations also planted the three sisters (corn, squash, and beans) – a steady, healthy, and complete source of nutrition. They also planted and protected stands of nut trees through controlled burning; one such chestnut stand fed them for over 3,000 years.[18] It is perhaps no surprise that half of our states bear native names, and more than half of our food crops and hundreds of medicines are gifts from the First Nations.[19]

Unfortunately, our nation is also a place where these first 150 years of First Nations influence, intellectual exchange, respect, partnership, and diplomacy were quickly forgotten.[20] Because we did not develop the moral, spiritual, and cultural practices required to sustain and fulfill our democracy, our traumas and shadows consumed us. Another word for shadow is the Cree word, *wetiko* (pr. weh tee ko). As Paul Levy, author of *Wetiko*, summarizes, "*Wetiko* is a cannibalizing force driven by insatiable greed, appetite without satisfaction, consumption as an end in itself, and war for its own sake, against other tribes, species, and nature, and even against the individual's own humanity."[21]

This evil force works in the shadows, hijacking our baser instincts, convincing us that only others are *wetiko*, or that *wetiko* doesn't exist within us or at all. Worse yet, *wetiko* frequently comes disguised as the good guy.

> "The greatest trick the Devil ever pulled was convincing the world he didn't exist." **Charles Baudelaire**
>
> "The second greatest trick the Devil ever pulled was convincing the world he is the good guy." **Ken Ammil**

Wetiko's mission is to teach us about the light, by making us dance with the dark. It shows us empathy through our hatred, generosity through our greed, freedom through our oppression. It shows us who we are and what we are capable of – good and bad – forces us to reckon with it, heal it in ourselves and others in order to bring forth ever more goodness, truth, and beauty. To

fulfill its purpose, *wetiko* has to replicate itself first within an individual, and then move virally from individual to individual. Then it becomes the norm, is venerated as virtue, and seeks new horizons.

Wetiko has been the animating evil of the discovery and colonization of the New World since go. As Hernán Cortés observed, "I, and my companions, suffer from a disease of the heart that only gold can cure." It was there at our founding too. There was not just a yearning for liberty and justice motivating our Framers, but also greed, aristocracy, and oppression.

A significant motivation of the Revolution was Lord Dunmore's offer to emancipate any enslaved person who joined the fight on the side of the Loyalists. Several of our Framers, such as George Washington, Peyton Randolph, and Patrick Henry, lost their "property" as a result of the emancipation. This tipped the scales of the Second Continental Congress towards severance with the Crown. As Edward Rutledge, a member of South Carolina's delegation remarked, Lord Dunmore's offer did "more effectually work an eternal separation between Great Britain and the Colonies - than any other expedient...",[22] more than any other tax levied by the Crown. As such, *wetiko* fills in many of the blank spaces of our founding documents.

Wetiko is the devilishness of "Gotta break a few eggs to make an omelet", "Better to have it and not need it, than need it and not have it", "Greed is good",[23] and "Fuck Your Feelings". It takes over our institutions, until the final stage when the host / humanity chooses to either shine the light on *wetiko* and transform it, or let it destroy us.

This force is behind all projections onto others, such as in our pop culture's use of terms such as "garbage people", "sheeple", "demons", "devils", "zombies", "vermin", and "basket of deplorables". This force is commonly referred to as the *devil* in the Judeo-Christian tradition, the *hungry ghost* (Buddhism), *iblis* (Islam), *apaton* (Greek), *archon* (Gnosticism), *ifituumbu* (Tanzania), *tulpa* (Tibet), *vampire* (Transylvania), *'e'epa* (Hawaiian Kahuna), and *pishtakos* (Peru). Regardless of the term we use to describe it, *wetiko* exists in every human heart. While our religious institutions have some understanding of *wetiko*/evil, they are very light on practices for transforming it. Prayer, hymns, and "WWJD" bracelets can play a role,

however, we clearly need something more substantial and sustainable to wake up to and confront the *wetiko* running our institutions and ruining our lives. In part 9 of this book, we will begin this process. But, first we've got to add a few more hues to our family portrait.

Wetiko drove us to bring in more Europeans, especially the Scots-Irish,[24] to maintain and expand the Western Front. We institutionalized our *wetiko* with scalping bounties (intended just for First Nations men, but unofficially sanctioned to include women and children), making state-sponsored and funded genocide one the first orders of business for the Massachussetts and Connectictut colonies. We took and destroyed what we wanted (native lives, land, cultivated fields and forests, agriculture and building methods, bison herds, and democratic institutions)[25]. As we "secured" the frontier, we trafficked millions of Africans to toil and breed in forced labor camps throughout the South, and tens of thousands of Chinese indentured servants to build our railroads throughout the West.

> "Another chapter opened in the American book of *Genesis*: liberty and slavery became the American Abel and Cain."[26] **Jill Lepore**

Citi, Wells Fargo, Wachovia, and JP Morgan financed the trafficking. New York Life, AIG, and Aetna insured it. Brooks Brothers clothed it. Tiffany's reaped it's profits. *USA Today* (Scripps / Gannett) glorified and expanded it.[27] And all of us who ate corn, potatoes, and sugar, who wore leather, fur and cotton, or smoked tobacco enjoyed it. To keep the forced labor camps running smoothly, we brought in more Scots-Irish to form slave patrols in the South and to break strikes in the North. These forces evolved into the Texas Rangers on the Western front, and the standing / occupying forces that we know today as the police.[28] Of course, we needed some justification for this plainly obvious desecration of our bonds with the First Nations, our heritage, and our purpose.

Our *wetiko* worked feverishly to elevate our sins as virtues through reprehensible and institutionalized propaganda. We built a *wetikology* of moral ("White Man's Burden"), literary (Daniel Boone, Davey Crockett, Horatio Alger, etc.), scientific (eugenics), and mythical (Manifest Destiny)

warfare. We waged a literal culture war to "civilize", "christianize" and "save" native people through Indian Schools, while also enacting a genocidal ground game through starvation, dispossession, and conquest.

Under the same spell of *wetiko*, we sought to exterminate the bison, a revered spiritual symbol and primary food source of many First Nations. The First Nations' extermination program also included rape, death-marches, and slaughter. This dehumanizing and exploitative enterprise can also be considered a literal war on the feminine. Bison are central symbols of the divine feminine in numerous cultures through the Americas, Europe, the Middle East, and Asia. They are symbols of fertility, providence, motherhood, gentility, sacrifice, protection, nourishment, safety, generosity, and many other life-giving, grounded, and lunar qualities. The massacre and almost total erasure of the First Nations and Bison Nation is one of the most literal and visceral acts of *wetiko* in our history. Because we never owned and completed our past, many more devastating expressions of this pathology followed.

> "The past isn't dead and buried. In fact, it isn't even past."
> **William Faulkner**

As *wetiko* infected the settler Colonialists, imploring them to forget the mutual love they once had with the First Nations, *wetiko* also infected members of the First Nations. None of us are immune to its stealth and power. As the white man's demand for bison hides, meat, tongues, and leather (for use as belts in factory machines, along with whale oil for lamps, axles, and joints) rapidly grew along the Atlantic seaboard and throughout Europe, and as demand for iron and whiskey similarly expanded among the First Nations, the sacred vows they made to the Bison Nation were broken. As they succumbed to *wetiko*, members of our First Nations slaughtered upwards of 1,000 bison a day in order to harvest just a few parts for the white man. They also engaged in a lucrative slave trade of native and white women to process the hides. They competed with, betrayed, and turned on each other to get more of the white man's horses, muskets, and whiskey.[29]

As the genocide / assimilation project of the First Nations appeared to be complete, we turned our ghostly gaze to the horizon. In the early 1900's, our

government and corporations, such as the U.S. Fruit Company / Dole, employed Edwin Bernays, Sigmund Freud's nephew, to use his uncle's map of the psyche,[30] not to help us heal our *wetiko* and become the types of people who could uphold a democracy, but to help *wetiko* go global through devastating psychological, economic and political warfare.

On the demand side, we manufactured psychological desire for redundant and frequently useless consumer goods and vices. In the century to follow, we built a lowest common denominator economy to glamorize and institutionalize our dehumanization through violence (UFC, *Game of Thrones*), vanity / mutilation (cosmetic surgery, tattoos, fast fashion), objectification (Tinder, porn), youth ("30 Under 30" lists), wealth (cryptocurrencies, *Shark Tank*), dominance (*Billions*, unpaid wages), division (NFL, populists, nativists), and vices too many to mention.

> "Sustaining our pursuit of life, liberty and happiness at home requires increasingly that Americans look beyond our borders... Whether the issue at hand is oil, credit or the availability of cheap consumer goods, we expect the world to accommodate the American way of life."[31] **Andrew Bacevich**

On the supply side, in order to secure contracts to cut down their forests, exploit their labor, drill their oil, mine their mountains, and farm their valleys to feed our factories, we manufactured consent to influence and/or overthrow several Latin American, African, and South East Asian governments (with ample help from our military).[32] We effectively turned the Southern Hemisphere into a "legal" network of economic colonies / subsistence wage labor camps. This pattern of establishing racialized underclasses abroad for white pleasure and comfort at home continues to this day in the form of everything we buy and the wars we fund, arm, start – and increasingly lose – throughout the Middle East, Africa, and Asia.

While generally out of our increasingly distracted and fragmented awareness, the world's history books document these sins extensively. Our graveyards and genes remember our sins. Mother Nature also remembers:

> "The continent is filled with roaming revenants, giant spirits of destroyed forests, buffalo spirits, slaughtered tribes,

> drowned valleys behind dams, ghosts of the lynched hanging from trees, miasma over rapacious levelings and extractions, unjust executions named 'due process', knifings, abattoirs. The land not only remembers, it is humming with agonies, a pulsing layer of the collective unconscious deposited there by American deeds recorded as American history."[33] **James Hillman**

And we must also remember. This war on Mother Nature and on the feminine continues to this day. Ask any woman how safe she feels. As women are being punched in the face and pushed onto train tracks by strangers in Manhattan, as violent assaults against women are on the rise nationwide,[34] as they lose bodily autonomy, as they are increasingly mutilating themselves to feel safe / whole / wanted[35] and murdering themselves,[36] we must name the ongoing war against the Feminine. We must train our attention upon the root cause, as Black Elk urged us in his telling of the White Buffalo Calf Woman story,[37] and go within to seek the unholy within each of us, surrender it to the Great Mother and be healed.

Our nation is thus a place painted daily – thick with the tears, blood, and unrealized potential of an ever expanding portion of our planet. No amount of greenwashing our groceries, textiles, or Teslas, or flag waving from our speed boats is going to change that. No amount of white paint can wash away these sins. No amount of white paint can dilute the still-running rivulets of racialized crimson. No amount of white paint can cover the genocide, specicide, human trafficking, torture, rape, and forced labor that our current U.S.-led global political-economy – yes, current political-economy – requires and perpetuates.

Some of you might be thinking, "But what about all the good things we've done?" We've produced many innovations and cultural achievements, almost too many to name. We make medicines. We educate. We heal. We return lost wallets. Many of us love and respect women. Many institutions have been just, inclusive, and sustainable from the outset. Most of us don't steal, even when no one is looking. So, what about our better angels and finer achievements? Well, it's hard to find one not tinged with *wetiko*.

Modern medicine has evolved from saving lives to a bureaucratic network of insurance companies and private equity profit centers. Cellphones and the Internet were supposed to educate, connect, and liberate us, but have instead made us dumber, more divided, depressed, and uniform. The music born of Black pain (jazz and blues) was aped by mostly white businessmen, turned into chart toppers, and now penetrates our daily lives as ambient AI-generated muzak. Just as Europe's amazing cathedrals, plazas, museums, inventions, and art required a global war to secure domination over resources and racialized underclasses abroad, are we any better? Was it really worth it? Unfortunately, how we answer these questions largely depends on our age, gender, portfolios, and the quantity of melanin in our skin.

As *wetiko* shaped our past (e.g., slavery economy, native genocide, attempted whale and bison speciecide, Manifest Destiny, *Ultra,*[38] KKK, etc.), it continues to shape our:

- present (e.g., January 6th, DEI whitelash,[39] SCOTUS Dobbs vs. Jackson ruling, restrictive voting laws, book bans, all-time high number of hate groups, 1,225 vs. 599 in 2000, most of which are above the Mason-Dixon,[40] extractionary capitalism) and
- paints a future none of us wants (e.g., *Handmaid's Tale, Don't Look Up, The Man in the High Castle, The Road, Civil War.*)

With the rise of other *wetiko* regimes across the globe (most armed with cheap carbon, skilled hackers, legions of drones, and some notable ones with nukes), and the escalating deglobalization/ depopulation/ climate crisis,[41] we are in for, at minimum, another rough decade. Yet, despite our madness, on occasion, we do atone and liberate each other. Perhaps now is such a time. Let us pray it is.

Our home is also a place painted with our prayers. It contains the hopeful orange, purple, pink, yellow, and green hues of solidarity, civil rights, reparations, and conservation. It is a place where a Black man, Barack Obama, painted his dreams upon the highest office in a nation that enslaved the ancestors of his wife Michelle. With these hues of liberation and atonement (our Revolution, Civil War, Reconstruction, Civil Rights, New

Deal, Great Society, and the UN Declaration of Human Rights) we honor the sea of our crimson sins and can chart our course to a flourishing future.

It is a place painted over and over by Transcendalists, such as Walt Whitman, Emily Dickinson, Herman Melville, and Ralph Waldo Emerson. As we'll explore in Part Five, these great souls were enamored by the truths of an ever-expanding scientific tradition, one that included astronomy, ecology, comparative religion, and anthropology. Collectively these souls gave voice to this science, made art with it, and liberated themselves. They expanded our national character, and illuminated our virtues and sins. They paddled counter-cultural currents against *wetiko*. To do this they mined the depths of not only the indigenous wisdom of our First Nations, but those of Hindu, Kabbalist, Sufi, Zoroastrian, and Christian mystics as well. They surrendered to the Divine, to Nature, and the reflection of their peers.

Their works illuminate pathways for personal faith and national integrity, by healing and integrating our shadows and reconciling our opposites. Their prose and poetry seeded the soil for a deeper expression of the nation's soul, inspired abolition, suffrage, environmentalism, and made necessary our noble, yet gruesome, Civil War. From these composting fields of poetry and prose, virtue, and sin, Freud, Jung, and James tended the saplings of psychology and religious experience, making the path to healing and wholeness again accessible to those of us of European descent. They stretched open the portal for all who had been orphaned by the politicization and depersonalization of spirituality during the expansion of Europe's empires.

While our hands are stained with the blood of countless innocents, our nation is also a playground of the world's Wisdom Traditions, cultures, and languages. They continue to gather, inform each other, contrast each other, reveal new connections and patterns, and blend with each other to form hues, shapes, and textures never before seen. Our land is a place where North meets South, East meets West, new meets old, and linear logic meets indigenous circularity. It continues to be a place where many of the world's brightest and most creative minds congregate to fulfill their potential and

push past the perceived limits of our species, to build liberating and unifying structures, such as the International Space Station and the United Nations.

Today, we need only pull up a screen to see these ideas evolve (and regress) in real time. We see Socratic dialogue thrust against Orwellian newspeak. We see Pierre Teilhard de Chardin's noosphere recede into Edwin Bernays' propaganda. We see Greta Thurnberg's moral righteousness face-off against hand-wringing cowardice at Davos. We see John Dewey's pragmatism blend with Thorsten Veblen's conspicuous consumption. We see Henry David Thoreau's civil disobedience shade Tomas de Torquemada's inquisition. We see flat-earthers make surprising headway against the Copernican Revolution.

Thus, our family portrait is not a blueprint, or a linear scroll, but a winding and recursive river shaped by illuminating progress, *wetiko* eddies, and oxbow lakes of forgotten wisdom and mysteries. This river twists with soulfulness and depravity, with creation and destruction, with our most holy and evil thoughts, and through every human heart. Mine. Yours. Everyone's. It winds ever forward towards the dream of humanity: to reach the ocean, where all life and all people may live freely, peacefully, fulfill their potential, find solidarity with each other, and celebrate each other's gifts.

To continue painting this great work, we must dutifully attend to the color palette of our nation's soul, as Steven Herrman so beautifully traced in *Spiritual Democracy,*[42] and *wetiko* / shadows (arrogance, ignorance, fear, bigotry, violence, greed, excess, bullying, untrustworthiness), as Reggie Marra so painfully rendered in *Healing America's Narratives,*[43] and ask them how they want to be painted. If we do not keep our *wetiko* in front of us and take the time to relish in the vibrant spectrum of our nation's soul and shadows, we will mistake them. If we do take this time, we can be led by Kondiaronk's wit and wisdom, united by Canassatego's call, freed by Whitman's "barbaric yawlp", married by Dickinson's vows in the "wedding of the soul", and gathered together upon King's "mountaintop", "free at last."

Given what is at our gates and lying within them, the stakes are total. Jung's words are truer now than when he penned them: "We are threatened with a

universal genocide, if we cannot work out the way of salvation by a symbolic death...".[45] We must illuminate and transform our *wetiko*, harmful ideas, divisive practices, and necrotic institutions; honor, and integrate our shadows; crucify ourselves upon the altar of our highest self; and fulfill our purpose.

Our path is messy and fraught with peril, but what has kept us and will keep us going is the greatest of loves, the liberating dream of democracy fulfilled, to be wedded in heart, mind, and body to all who call this land home. While our nation is not alone in this dream, it is perhaps the largest and most fertile garden where humanity's soul, dreams, heartaches, ideas, shadows, and questions can be composted, sprouted, and become fruit. If the United States fails to fulfill its great purpose, then humanity will miss its current best chance to stand up a just, lasting, equitable, and flourishing multicultural democracy in spirit, idea, and function. At risk of stating the obvious: if democracy loses and *wetiko* wins, the wealthiest, most technologically advanced, and heavily armed nation in human history will accelerate the destruction of all life. Of all that is sacred.

> "The cause of America is in great measure the cause of all mankind... 'Tis not the concern of a day, a year, or an age; posterity are virtually involved in the contest, and will be more or less affected, even to the end of time." **Thomas Paine**

Although our politics have and will surely fail us again, the march of democracy is eternal, immutable, and guaranteed. It is as old as humanity itself. It is our shared destiny to make democracy real with our hearts, heads, and hands. As such, we must play both the short and long game to protect and nurture it.

Summary

- Democracy is the shared heritage and destiny of humanity.
- If we do not trace the contours of our souls and our shadows, *wetiko* will lead us to confusion and many more will suffer and die.
- To fulfill the promise of democracy, we must recognize, heal, and repair our original sins of genocide and slavery.

Discussion / reflection prompts

- Which of the expressions of *wetiko* (arrogance, ignorance, fear, bigotry, violence, greed, excess, bullying, or untrustworthiness) impact your experience of life?
- With this understanding of democracy's journey and the workings of *wetiko*, how do you feel about being a U.S. citizen?
- What do we owe First Nations people? What would it take to heal our original sins?

Part 2

The Orphanage

"I have to own America. I have to give credit where it's due. And give hell where it's due." **Phyllis Young**

"...a nation founded on ideals, universal truths, also opens itself to charges of hypocrisy at every turn. Those charges do not lie outside the plot of the story of America, or underneath it. They are its plot, the history on which any twenty-first century case for the American nation has to rest..."[1] **Jill Lepore**

To fully own our story, we have to expose the lies we tell ourselves. We have to dispel the fantasy of the American Dream, which is that one day, with enough hustle and grit, we'll have enough income and wealth to be safe, free, and happy. We have to understand that all of us – rich or poor, Black or white, male or female – do not live in this reality. We are inhabiting and co-creating a nightmare where none of us are, will be, or can be safe, free, or happy. As the bison courageously turns towards the coming storm to move through it quickly, we too must courageously face these facts together. We'll hit nerves, maybe even arteries or organs. Take breaks if you need to, but please don't quit. You are needed. The healing begins in Part 4.

To do this we'll need eyes trained on truth. The same fierce, sober eyes that are confronted daily by the truth that our culture and political-economy is primarily driven by *wetiko*, a nearly inescapable *wetikology* that shapes every aspect of our lives and every sector of society.

However, if we only train our awareness on *wetiko,* raise our activist fists, and project it onto others, that's actually *wetiko*, too. It is what *wetiko* wants. It grows stronger when we only look for wrongdoing outside ourselves. It feasts on our fear, anger, and despair. As we will explore in the back half of this book, there is a way out of the grip of *wetiko* – and that is to activate our purpose, heal our traumas, repatriate and integrate our parts, and build soulful community. As countless sages and philosophers across traditions (Jesus, Jung, and Aurobindo) and our nation's finest poets (Dickinson, Whitman, and Hughes) have illuminated, becoming purposeful, healed, whole, and connected is the sole defense against *wetiko*.

To do this, we can't skip to the end. We will need an in depth survey of the perilous world we fashioned through our *wetiko*, what Philip K. Dick called the "Black Iron Prison"[2] police state. After doing so, you'll leave Parts 3 and 4 with zero hope that any current politician or technocratic solution will save us. You'll leave with zero hope that things will be any better after the ruling generation sunsets. You'll be confronted with the terrible and beautiful truth that only the inner path to our healing, purpose, wholeness, belonging, and creativity can save us. Let us now face the storm together.

We are not the land of the free and home of the brave, we are not a society of mutual love and support; but rather, we are orphans in an orphanage (defined here as an institution, or group of institutions, that only wants to preserve and extend its control over human behavior, to ensure that its orphans believe they are free, but never actually become free, that they never reach the developmental stage of adulthood; see 'developed adult' below). Our orphanage pulls for our cruelty, poverty, and resignation, and not for our purpose, potential, and prosperity.

While some of us were orphaned in the literal sense of being raised without birth parents, nearly all of us have been orphaned in a general sense. We were raised in a world devoid of fully developed adults (defined here as a soul-activated, on purpose, healed and healing, whole and wholing, human over the age of 30, who is enmeshed in a soulful community, experiencing every area of their life in explicit and increasing alignment with their purpose over time). Because few of us have met such a person, almost all of us have failed to be initiated into adulthood by other adults, but rather have been molded by psychological adolescents, or as Robert Bly terms, by our fellow siblings...

> "I use the phrase 'sibling society' to suggest a culture fundamentally without fathers, mothers, grandfathers, grandmothers, or ancestors. The thinking is horizontal... The sibling society is the flattening out of the previously democratic society... democratic culture doesn't exist without highly informed citizens capable of thinking well, and if you have schools in which 40 percent of the people coming out of them cannot make change for a dollar, you don't have a democracy. You have a sibling society...
>
> "Adolescents believe that the world belongs to the living, or more particularly to living people their age, so they feel within their rights if they destroy the canon or rewrite the fairy stories or act like Red Guards. **An elder is someone who understands that the world belongs to the dead.** The dead made this world. We didn't make it. They made the poetry and the songs and the customs. The ancestors are very much

> invested in the children, because the children are the ones who are going to continue the world that the ancestors made. When an elder turns to face the dead, that means he turns... and finds himself facing the children. To me, the hope lies in adults forgetting about their retirement and turning toward the adolescents and helping pull the adolescents over that mysterious line drawn on the ground into adulthood. If we don't do that, the adolescents are going to stay exactly where they are for the next 30 or 40 years."[3] **Robert Bly**

In this sense, we all have lost something essential. We've lost decades to our prolonged adolescence, having surrendered our life force to the orphanages. We've lost the sacred connection to ourselves, each other, our ancestors, and the land. We must accept that, in a myriad of ways, we are all *Goonies*, latch-keyed and betrayed, abandoned and forgotten. We've been left to our own devices to struggle in the tunnels of a nation that pulls for our demise.

We have been orphaned, skipping from foster home to foster home (junior high to high school to college), from halfway house to halfway house (employer to employer, town to city to suburb), from dating app to partner and back again, seeking to gain something real and permanent, seeking surrogates for the company of our souls. We fill this giant hole in our lives with anything that makes us feel something – with the next thing – reckless behavior, screens, overwork, sex, alcohol, fandom, hobbies, drugs, consumer goods, and experiences.

The result is that we die trying to win the *wetiko* "Monopoly" game. At best, this means we trade four decades of our lives for a modest retirement in Florida and death by heart attack during a condo board meeting. At worst, it means we retreat and isolate, losing friends and family, until one day, a neighbor calls the cops to report a smell. Every year, 100,000 of us die alone and unclaimed.[4] No friends, no kin, no memorial, no stories or memories of the impact we had on others. Not even a blurb in the paper, just a smell, a phone call, and a black bag. Cue no credits.

But for most of us, it will be something with far less drama. It will be an undignified shuffle between doctor's appointments and early bird specials,

until we're moved into a home to spend our last years battling dementia and filled with regret. This is not normal, this is not the way it has to be. There have been times and places all over the world when this wasn't the living and dying game that humans played.

There have been times and places when we had an almost entirely uninterrupted connection with our souls, with the sacred. We were claimed by others, who were claimed by the land itself, who were wedded to each other, and Nature's God. We had villages, tribes, and aunties and uncles who looked out for us. Each valley, ridge, and watershed wedded our peoples and birthed our cultures, languages, traditions, rites of passage, beliefs, and responsibilities. We were nourished by each other, mentored to develop our gifts, and we eagerly gave them to each other. We joyfully tended to the common good, became revered elders, and mentored the next generation. We died a noble death, surrounded by those we loved, and welcomed by ancestors on the other side.

Of course, times and places like these were not perfect, as no human or society is or ever was. *Wetiko* has always been and will always be with us, and it needs vigilant attention. In many of these prior times and places, most of *wetiko*'s sins, traumas, and shadows were acknowledged, healed, and learned from through ritual and in community. However, not all were. Every person and every society has its limits and blindspots. Sins, traumas, and shadows that could not be acknowledged, healed, and learned from in community were projected.

We projected them on others. Generally, these folks were either murdered or expelled from the community and further traumatized. These outcasts found each other and formed new groups with norms and cultures driven by their shared *wetiko*. They warred against their common enemies. They raided villages and developed new weapons and methods of war that proved to be no match for those without them. *Wetiko* that isn't healed must, by its very nature, grow. It did and eventually set up shop.

Sometime between 15,000 BCE and 5,000 BCE, the wounded warlike *wetiko* exiles eventually stopped raiding and began to rule the villages. Over time, their *wetiko* norms and practices supplanted the healthier norms, laws, and

cultures of the more stable, soulful, legacy societies. Then the exiles co-opted the legacy religions, created hierarchical dependencies, and legalized economic schemes to extract the heart, soul, time, and labor from the many for the enjoyment of the few.[5]

As our historically high income inequality[6] suggests, as Robert Bly illuminated in his accurate rendering of society in *The Sibling Society* (above), and if you just have a look around right now, wherever you live, *wetiko* is the current state of the union. Although we are all good, well-meaning people who try to make life better for ourselves, families, and neighborhoods in various ways, this nice story we tell about ourselves is only part of the truth. On the whole, we are still playing out the traumas and wounds of our history.

We have become a nation of exploited and orphaned siblings, of grown bodies developmentally stuck in adolescence. Over time, each of us – myself included – in some manner, traded our ideals, our moral imagination, our righteous outrage, and our dreams for a better world, for a paycheck and benefits. For nearly all of us, our only opportunity to make a living now is to run some part of the orphanage and perpetuate further harm upon our fellow orphans.

> "If the young are not initiated into the tribe they will burn down the village just to feel its warmth." **African Proverb**

No one wants it to be this way, of course, but a several millennia of white lies and compromises have made it so. Our reality is the guaranteed result of incrementally normalizing our shadows and wounds. It is the guaranteed result of institutionalized *wetiko.* Our cruelty towards one another and the earth has been rewarded. Although some of us spend some portion of our lives purposefully engaged in our work, alumni, career, civic, neighborhood, and spiritual groups – and while some of us are working to improve them – most of us do not. The result is that our default is an abiding sense of disconnection.

Most of us do not experience a deeply felt sense of 'home': a sense that all is well on our street, neighborhood, and community. We did not have a legitimate intact culture that binds us, and few meaningful rituals, traditions, and paths to wholeness. Most of us have only the increasingly tenuous

security of our made-up notions of employment, careers, gates, titles, deeds, and wealth. These made-up notions – many of which are secured through the state's monopoly on violence – fluctuate widely and rapidly based on feelings of the ultrawealthy regarding their ability to continue exploiting the many (e.g., equity indices, GDP, etc.).

Suffice to say, *wetiko* has taken us far off the trail of democracy. We've lost the scent of *Kaianerekowa:* life, love, liberty, equality, and happiness. We've lost the plot. The only plot is that of the orphanages. They continue as highly-coordinated, mutually-reinforcing, trauma-perpetuation machines that generate ever-greater numbers of wounded orphans, all of whom are dependent upon the orphanages for survival. If we no longer wish to be pawns on this chessboard – if we want to break free from the grip of *wetiko* – our first step is to acknowledge the countless deals our ancestors made and that we keep honoring. This will require the courage and fortitude of the bison.

Yet, as Upton Sinclair observed, "It's difficult for a man to understand something when his paycheck depends on him not understanding it!"[7] And, rest assured, *wetiko* will surface every type of resistance to our pursuit of truth. It will distract us, deflect the inquiry, and deny the truth. It will bargain, imploring us to take a break, convince us that we've done enough, that just this little bit of distraction won't hurt. It will tell us we're tired. It will beg us to let it off the hook.

As Jefferson observed, "the price of democracy is eternal vigilance", so we must be eternally vigilant. We must linger in the discomfort. We must heed the wisdom of Tracy Chapman and let our brave hearts "Hunger only for a world of justice. Hunger only for a world of truth." If we can courageously sustain this inquiry, then we will find the "...hope to dream, a hope that I can sleep again / And wake in the world with a clear conscience and clean hands."[8]

Let's now bravely examine our network of mutually-reinforcing orphanages: big business, finance, politics, military, criminal justice, education, experts, religion, households, healthcare, media, and nonprofits. But first, it is

important to note that these orphanages have produced, and still so produce, some good things, such as:

- Big business - home appliances, computers
- Finance - small business loans, risk analysis
- Politics - civil rights, social security, EPA
- Military - defeated the British, the Confederacy, and the Third Reich, universal healthcare
- Education - literacy, Montessori, Waldorf
- Experts - cell phones, NASA, renewable energy, water treatment
- Religion - rites of passage, ethical guidance
- Households - generosity, mutualism, play
- Healthcare - preventative health, nutrition, acute treatments
- Media - journalism, *The Good Place*, *Ted Lasso*

Despite these mostly good contributions, what is the net impact of each orphanage?

Big Business

While our 'media orphanage' trains our attention on our 'political orphanage' as the cause of, and solution to, our suffering, it is the 'big business orphanage' that deserves most of our attention. It is the orphanage *über alles*. *Wetiko* feasted on it first. Well before we understood the full picture of life available in a democracy – the true picture of success revealed in the *Kaianerekowa* – the tendrils of *wetiko* had already laid the foundation for our exploits on Turtle Island. *The Doctrine of Discovery*[9] justified our native genocide, slavery-based economy, business dealings, legal system, and management techniques.[10]

The Colonialists brought over the legal notions of property rights, whose origins are rooted in the *wetiko* of the Roman Empire. These rights granted them the right to use, enjoy, abuse, and destroy their property, their land, animals and people at will, and use violence to defend any threat to their

property.[11] For example, these Latin words correspond to familiar phrases: (1) *famulus* – family and familiar, and refer to all family members other than the male owner as slaves); (2) *dominus* – domicile and dominate; (3) *capitalis* – head, chief or first; and (4) *labor* – hardship, pain, toil, and fatigue. All of these well-used phrases are rooted in and enforce a master-slave relationship by distinguishing the dominator from the dominated (free vs. enslaved, capital vs. labor, male vs. female, economy vs. nature, *et al*). This dehumanizing logic still guides our nation's business, language, culture, organization, structures, legal agreements, employee contracts, and moral reasoning.

Just as the big business orphanage betrayed our nation's purpose and laid waste to our First Nations, the beaver, bison, and whales for profit, it also trafficked and enslaved Africans to toil in forced labor camps. After this project neared completion it turned most of Latin America, Africa, and Asia into a network of dependent labor camps / economic colonies.

As Vice President Henry Wallace observed in 1944 in *The Dangers of American Fascism*, the big business orphanage moves largely without restriction, all while wrapping itself in the flag:

> "They claim to be super-patriots, but they would destroy every liberty guaranteed by the Constitution. They demand free enterprise, but are the spokesmen for monopoly and vested interest. Their final objective, toward which all deceit is directed, is to capture political power so that using the power of the State and the power of the market simultaneously they may keep the common man in eternal subjection."[12]

This orphanage has no principles. It will feign progressive values or lick the boots of autocrats[13] depending on which approach will most benefit shareholders. This orphanage controls our politics (via lobbies and PACs), military (via private sector defense contractors), criminal justice (via private sector prisons and prison unions), education (via private schools, experts, lenders, and research grants), healthcare (via private sector experts, insurance, pharmaceutical, and medical companies), religion (via donations that reward doctrines of shame and individual responsibility, xenophobia, and white

nationalism), media and social media (via advertising and consumer goods companies).

This orphanage continues to direct and impact all other orphanages today, effectively making it an unelected shadow legislature. It works diligently to corrupt our politicians and decrease our wages far below a living wage (one that would allow a single earner to provide for a family, save, and invest). Big business likes to wave the efficiency flag, saying we have to either reduce wages or the workforce because technology makes people obsolete. While that is true in a few cases, the vast majority of "efficiencies" realized over the last 40 years were not technological, but were rather labor arbitrage[14] – cutting decent, living wage jobs at home and opening up coal burning factories abroad, while paying pennies on the dollar.

And it's worked incredibly well, as evidenced by the $50T wealth transfer from the bottom 90% to the top 1% over the last four decades.[15] This means that a college-educated worker earning $72,000 today loses between $48,000 and $63,000 of income per year.[16] Big business makes no apologies about the matter, as only 5% of the 200 largest U.S. companies venture to support the idea of a living wage[17] (which is not to say that these companies pay one).

We knew this was going to happen. We knew it from the beginning. Tutored by his Haudenosaunee colleagues, Benjamin Franklin understood the danger of this orphanage:

> "Private property... is a Creature of Society, and is subject to the Calls of that Society... the public has the rights of regulating Descents [inheritance], and all other Conveyances of Property, and even limiting the quantity and uses of it. All the property that is necessary to a man in his natural Right [for basic needs], which none may justly deprive him of, but all property superfluous to such Purposes is the property of the public who, by their Laws have created it and who may, by other Laws dispose of it."[18] **Benjamin Franklin**

Obviously, he was not successful turning this wisdom into legislation. The result is that we're continually convinced of the *appearance* of expanding autonomy and freedom, but never experiencing true autonomy and

freedom. For example, despite adding a second wage earner to the household over the last few decades, 75% of us now live paycheck to paycheck.[19]

This orphanage keeps most of us in a survival state, unable to bring forth our greatness, unable to provide for our families, much less invest in the future. Because we are tapped out in every way, we can't manage to pick our heads up long enough to question the orphanage's propaganda, the narrative that has us working harder and harder for less and less. And so we turn on each other, or hang our heads in shame, or curl up inside our feeds, screens, liquor, and pill bottles. Or all the above.

Despite the near total victory of this orphanage, we have always had it in our power to change it. We have that power today and we always will. Remember, everything is made up: The rules, wealth, trust, and power of the big business orphanage are granted to it by us. We can simply stop doing this and do something else – just like we did in 1776 and as our ancestors before did countless times overthrowing tyrannical rule. In the back half of this book, you'll discover an authentic and meaningful way to honor and continue our rebellious heritage.

Now, where were we? Ah yes, the orphanages...

Finance

Our 'finance orphanage' – co-managed by real estate developers, private equity firms[20], banks, and Wall Street – makes sure that, even if we make a decent wage or start a business, almost all of it is gobbled up by rent, mortgages, and student loans. The Latin origin of the word "economy" means the management of a household. As the founder of capitalist theory, Adam Smith, understood and articulated, we first need a moral context, a moral foundation, to manage our household.[21] Otherwise, as Thomas Jefferson understood, "the general tendency of the rich to play upon the poor" will prevail.

Unfortunately, few if any financiers are fully developed adults. Few have received training in ethics or have a robust spiritual practice – and none operate within a morally-designed economy. The finance orphanage works hand in glove with big business to render us servants to the capital caste who

hoard unassailable wealth for the few – legally, in full partnership with the State.

Politics

Our 'political orphanage' fails to name, center, or honor our nation's purpose. It moves about in ignorance of the dignity of the office or the sanctity of service. It fails to provide a path for people to do the inner work necessary to become fully developed adults and lead. This orphanage only knows how to gain and hold power, line pockets with money from big business lobbyists, grab the spotlight, and congratulate themselves for passing yet another incremental and toothless law.

Our 'political orphanage' sells off our natural resources to the lowest bidder, subsidizes the decimation of our forests, top soil, and groundwater, lets the great technological advantage we worked so hard for in the last century slip away, and ships our manufacturing jobs to impoverished nations working for pennies on the dollar under horrific conditions and with little to no environmental restrictions. This leaves us only subsistence wage service jobs, flickering screens of hate, lust, and violence, and an endless stream of brown boxes filled with cheap toxic crap.

To keep us from asking questions, our 'political orphanage' turns us against other groups of our exploited countryfolk, stokes our anger, arms us with assault rifles, and every couple of years, spins a new yarn to get our vote. They do this without any sense of their purpose or our nation's purpose. This ignorance and neglect ensures that we stay orphaned, ignorant, resentful, resigned, impoverished, addicted, angry at each other, and eager to join the side of the victor by enlisting in the military.

Military

Our 'military orphanage' trades the blood of our youth for cheap resources, sacrifices tens of thousands of our poor, diverse, and undereducated countryfolk to destroy millions of mostly brown, poor, and uneducated people in other countries – to keep the oil pumping, sweatshops churning out fast fashion, and shipping lanes open.[22] Our brave women and men of service come home – not to hero's welcome – but to a hollowed out place, a

caste system separated by overpasses and freeways. They question if it was worth their service or the sacrifice of their friends. Or if any of it was ever real. They come home traumatized and struggle more than most to simply live, much less thrive. All too often, they find themselves staring down the barrel of a gun or needle, or sitting in a jail cell.

Criminal Justice

Our 'criminal justice orphanage' profits from our crimes of poverty, thereby keeping us poor, shackled, and dependent. It ensures that people of color remain over-represented in our justice-impacted family, trapped in a cradle-to-poverty-to-prison-to-cradle death spiral. For example, 70% of the kids in our child welfare system are arrested before age 26.[23] This system denies the sanctity of our souls. It avoids any responsibility to remedy the conditions that have us put our own survival above the law and common good. Obviously, sending the kids of our most vulnerable to orphanages, foster homes, and public schools isn't the great equalizer we were told it was.

Education

Our 'education orphanage' turns us and our children into dumb debt peons. A properly functioning education system has three jobs: (A) Teach us the real and unvarnished nature of reality to help us understand the underlying dynamics that got us here; (B) Empower us to develop the capacity to reason critically, morally, and intuitively, so we can think clearly and find our own relationship to reality; and (C) Help us discover who we are – our purpose, values, and talents – so we can authentically move into our relationships, society, and careers.

The 'education orphanage' receives a failing grade at all three levels. It denies and represses our gifts. It only wants our test scores and willingness to trade five decades and the truth of our souls for marginally better status, marginally tastier scraps, marginally fancier trinkets from China, and marginally more exotic vacations to our colonies. And some of us go on to receive pieces of paper with the letters "PhD" in exchange for a couple decades of obedience – only to find that jobs for people with this piece of paper are extremely scarce. So they do what they can to advise orphanages and add words like "consultant" or "trusted expert" to their LinkedIn profiles.

Experts

Our 'expert orphanage' – co-managed by academics, economists, consultants, and behavioral psychologists – talks a big game, asks us to trust them, denies us the power of our soul's gifts and our joyous role in creating a better life and nation. It believes that only experts can fix the problems of the orphanages – the ones that tortured and oppressed them, and upon which they depend to remain in their marginally superior caste. Our economists gin up fantasies disguised as numbers and sworn as truth. They trick us to believe that our 8-10% inflation is only 2-3%.[24] They exalt GDP and S&P 500 growth, while our wages remain flat, and our housing, healthcare, education, and transportation costs skyrocket. They measure job growth by how many of us drive for Uber and Doordash. And it's working really well, with three-quarters of us hustling paycheck-to-paycheck, and all of us pounding vices to escape the lies we tell ourselves. Burning the candle at both ends makes us all sick eventually.

Healthcare

Our 'healthcare orphanage' – co-managed by insurance providers, healthcare systems, biotech, and the pharmaceutical industry – feasts on the 97% of us living unhealthy lifestyles[25] and the 75% of us being labeled as overweight or obese.[26] It ignores the causes of our diseases and profits from our illnesses by treating the symptoms of our profoundly sick society with addictive drugs that expedite our demise and exorbitant bills that bankrupt us. *Luckily we can always pray on it.*

Religion

> "No state, no church, no vested interest, has ever wanted people to have strong souls because a person with a strong spiritual energy will inevitably be a rebel." **Russell Means, Oglala Lakota, American Indian Movement**

Our 'religious orphanage' skims off the top of our meager winnings to build castles, while preaching that all the dysfunction of our world is due to our personal, moral failing. If only we pray harder, turn our cheeks more frequently, and fill the basket more generously, then life won't suck. While

they know better – as each religion has a soul activation path – they deny us these paths. They tell us that, by ignoring our own dreams and desires and submitting to a far away God, he will provide. Well, has he? No.

And deep down we know it. We need more than moralizing rhetoric and promises of the afterlife. We need our dreams, desires, and dignity to be fulfilled here and now. But these things threaten our dependence on clergy, so they simply tell us to "pray on it," toe the line, and fill the basket. If we're dissatisfied with the incoherent cosmologies and unattainable moral purity they peddle, then we can always reject religion and turn to crusading journalists for the sobriety and safety of objective truth.

News Media

Our 'news media orphanage' stokes our fear, herds us into factions, and convinces us to point our fingers and assault weapons at our brothers and sisters – all to keep the news bleeding, the ads running, and piles of worthless, ecocidal, "must-have" trinkets extracted, produced, shipped, marketed, bought, delivered to our doorsteps, and then trashed in landfills. *Luckily, there is a way to fix this orphanage and all the others! We can start a nonprofit.*

Nonprofit Organizations

Our 'nonprofit orphanage' pulls at our heart strings and begs us to help them stop the other orphanages who decimate the planet and dehumanize us as their normal course of business. Their strategy? Give them our money and time to lessen some of the suffering for a short while. While they are very much aware of the aforementioned interlocking system that makes life less and less secure everyday, they choose to focus on making a symptom or two a little less painful for those impacted. This isn't to say they aren't acutely helping – they are – but they aren't solving the root causes of the problems. As Anand Girirandhas revealed in his book *Winners Take All*, nonprofits are primarily a luxury item, a humanistic identity-label that gives those of us who are marginally more wealthy a moral self-license to continue our *wetiko* behavior in other areas of life and in the orphanages we run.[27] Nonprofits are not the solution to any of our problems, but rather evidence of a failed state, a nation in the grips of *wetiko*, on death's door. If we find these orphanages

too complex to understand or too heartbreakingly broken to fix, we can simply ignore them and focus on raising our families.

Households

It is no surprise that our homes must also be orphanages. In the face of all the other orphanages that shape us, how could they not be? Our parents rarely acknowledged the dignity of our souls and could not offer us the compassion, curiosity, or resources to help us discover our soul's purpose. This was not our parents' fault. They and their ancestors didn't have any time or money to attend to matters of the soul. Our parents didn't have their souls acknowledged, loved, nurtured, and stood for by their parents. They also had unprocessed trauma and mortgage payments. Regardless of their lack of fault, this is still a grave betrayal of human dignity and of our birthright. It is a breach of the ancient contract between parent and child.

Because most parents are hustling and grinding in hopes that the hustle and grind will one day end with something other than a heart attack at the condo meeting or a black bag and phone call, we are raised less and less by our parents and more and more by our feminized and racialized economic underclasses (teachers, nannies, etc.), our media orphanage, and the other orphans in our schools, neighborhoods, companies, and online. All of us are effectively latch keyed kids: unseen, untutored, and uncared for – simply because our parents never became fully developed adults themselves. They couldn't actually parent us towards any defined and enlightened end. They just did their best, making it up as they went along. *The result?* Your complex trauma. Your depression, anxiety and neurodivergence. Your loneliness. Your poverty. Your neglect and abandonment.

And that's if you were lucky to have parents who had sufficiently hidden or managed trauma and were able to raise you themselves. If you weren't so lucky, you were repeatedly and acutely traumatized on the streets selling what you could to survive or get the next fix. Working hand in glove with the free market, our nation has become the world's top sex trafficker, where between 50-60% of those trafficked are supplied by our foster care orphanage.[28]

At our nation's largest annual ritual, the Super Bowl, we traffic thousands of underage girls to the city in which it is played.[29] That's thousands of children who are coerced into sex slavery several times in one weekend. How numb and damaged must we be to say to ourselves some version of "a few minutes of my pleasure is more important than this child's entire soul"? In light of just this one annual ritualized atrocity, how much good could we possibly do in the other 364 days and still feel good about saluting our flag? How much trauma and ignorance would be required to know this and have the gall to say that our nation is the best country in the world?

Now is a good time to take a break. Walk around the block. Hug a tree. Tell someone dear to you that you love them. When you're ready, come back. We've got more work to do. You are needed.

...

Our country pulls for our weakness, our apathy, our resignation. A death by a thousand cuts puts it lightly. Our country is not a beacon of freedom and prosperity, but an orphanage, a halfway house, a cage match over scraps taken from the most vulnerable members of our human family.

To move forward, we must accept that our way of feeling, being, knowing, and doing things here does not fulfill our purpose. All of it is beneath us. On some level, each of us knows it. We feel the divides, the poverty, the discrimination, the political opportunism and gridlock, the hopelessness, the deep soul ache of living life in a nation unmoored by ancestors, unmarried to, and unguided by, a vision for a shared future. We feel the inability to make clear moral choices. We desecrate our purpose in our homes, careers, on the road, at the market, and in response to our many crises.

To move forward, must never forget that we are indeed orphans. We must own that *wetiko* has disconnected us from who we are. It's not just the wealthy, big businesses, and Super Bowl rapists. It's all of us, every day. With this sad and sober truth, we can begin the process of reparenting ourselves together, and generously extend grace to each other, wherever we are on the path to healing, growth, and connection. This reparenting process requires that we heal our wounds, activate our purpose, seek the mentorship of

genuine elders, build and be nourished by community, develop rituals and traditions, and care for ourselves, our families, communities, and land in a manner befitting of our dignity, of the beauty within our souls and our great national purpose.

To move forward, we must refuse to succumb to despair. We must stand firm in the faith that we are – like all who came before us and those who will come after us – good, but imperfect people charged with a great task. We must trust that it is only our wounds, shadows, ignorance, and lack of vision and a path forward that is in the way of our destiny. We must acknowledge that just as *wetiko* cannot function without our consent, we can also consent to live inside a more life-giving idea.

Summary

- The lights are on. We now know *wetiko*'s institutional footprint, our network of orphanages.
- The orphanages reward us for hurting ourselves, each other, and our children.
- To flourish, we need a full-scale transformation of every sector of society.

Discussion / reflection questions:

- Which of the ways we've been orphaned has impacted you the most?
- Can you forgive those who harmed you? Can you forgive yourself for harming others?
- What do you need to transform in order to fully forgive yourself and others?

Part 3

It's On Us

"These are times that try [our] souls. The summer soldier and the sunshine patriot will, in this crisis, shrink from the service of [their] country; but [one] that stands by it NOW, deserves the love and thanks of men and women. Tyranny, like hell, is not easily conquered; yet we have consolation within us, that the harder the conflict, the more glorious the triumph."[1]
Thomas Paine

As should now be painfully clear, help isn't coming from the orphanages. No elected savior is going to ride in on a white horse and make the pain go away. We can't agree on truth, argue for best practices, or pass significant legislation. There are no fully developed adults, much less elders, in the rooms in which they are needed. Our shadows (arrogance, ignorance, fear, bigotry, violence, greed, excess, bullying, and untrustworthiness) dance along the D.C. Beltway. They are in the sugary processed foods poisoning our children. They are in media platforms and business models that herd, puppet, and exploit us. They infect our homes and offices, shape our business strategy, and have embedded themselves in our local places of worship, neighborhoods, and institutions.

At the federal, state, country, city, and school board levels, polarization, lobbying, gerrymandering, disinformation, cancel culture, religious fundamentalism, and hate speech have made it political suicide to stand on principles[2], cooperate, or put forth bipartisan solutions. Only the most wounded and rigid ideologues can get elected. Only those most ignorant of our sacred purpose attain power and wealth. The result is that, even when sound legislation is popular with voters, or has produced powerful outcomes for other G20 nations, it doesn't become law, and our fellow citizens continue to suffer and die.

The last 30 years of congressional dysfunction has left us with only one anemic option for change: a president declaring national emergencies and issuing executive orders. And yet, our unelected Supreme Court Justices with lifetime appointments, can and frequently do declare them unconstitutional. We are all now effectively governed by an unelected Supreme Court that is no longer a responsive or neutral arbiter of constitutionality, but rather, an activist organization fulfilling a Gilead agenda[3] and governance strategy: Project 2025,[4] one designed to propel a christofascist movement,[5] consolidate power,[6] and live high on the hog without any shame or ethics oversight.[7]

In short, our SCOTUS is saying the quiet part out loud now, as they ensure we get more of what we don't want, like mass shootings,[8] and less of what we do want, like bodily autonomy.[9] The result is that between 2020 and 2024,

confidence in the U.S. Judiciary dropped 24 points, from 59% to 35%,[10] igniting a thirst for violence and vigilante justice,[11] such as the killing of the CEO of United Healthcare. However, as we have explored, this *wetiko* isn't new. It's been with us forever, accelerating for centuries.

We have fulfilled the purpose of *wetiko*, not that of our souls or our nation. In 2014, researchers from Princeton and Cambridge proved that our nation is effectively an oligarchy of wealthy and corporate interests;[12] in 2016, *The Economist* downgraded the U.S. from a "full" to "flawed" democracy,[13;] and in 2024, Gallup revealed that the U.S. ranked dead last among the G7 in "confidence in government".[14] As Supreme Court Justice Louis Brandeis observed, "We may have democracy, or we may have wealth concentrated in the hands of the few, but we cannot have both."

And all of us know it's broken. We feel it. We feel what Dr. David Gruder has termed Societal Traumatic Stress Disorder (STSD), wherein we feel helpless, confused, fed up, and hopeless as a nation because of how poorly our government fulfills on our purpose.[15] On some level we know how silly, abstract, contrived, and inefficient our entire US-led global political economy has become. On some level we know what scientists already know, that we can provide enough for all 8.5 billion of us to thrive with only 30% of our current energy and resource usage.[16] As such, it is no surprise that we have already issued several "no confidence" votes in our system:

- 64% of us do not believe in the "American Dream"[17]
- 72% of us are dissatisfied with the way democracy works[18]
- 76% of us believe democracy is under threat[19]
- 84% of us distrust the government[20]
- 85% of us believe we need significant political reform[21]
- 96% of us believe random citizens can govern better than politicians[22]

The two main parties in the United States are aware that they keep failing. They are aware that they fail to fulfill our nation's purpose with increasing neglect and incompetence. They are aware they fail to speak for the

powerless, protect the most vulnerable, ensure free and fair elections, and pass meaningful reform. And yet, they refuse to change their tactics. Our parties are just trying to look busy by doing things like:

1. Turning up the volume on rhetoric to divide and orphan us,
2. Keeping the revolving door spinning among public offices, lobbies, infotainment programs, and boardrooms, and
3. Pumping out endless "churn and burn" fundraising emails.

As inflation impoverishes us, gun violence destroys our communities, our civil and electoral rights are stripped, poverty, addiction, and mental illness lay waste to our loved ones, and climate change guns down our future, the Democratic and Republican parties are all thumbs.

> "I don't know what I identify as these days, because everything has gotten so scrambled... I'm not a Democrat or a Republican, I don't even think I could define myself narrowly as either a liberal or a conservative anymore. The one thing I know that I fundamentally do believe is... the dominant institutions of American life—in education, in the arts, in politics—are either totally broken or so weak or corrupt that they're becoming irrelevant. In a way, the only thing I know that I believe in is ... brokenness."[23] **Ryan, a Black West Point Graduate from Ohio**

It is no surprise then that a record 49% of us do not identify with any political party[24] and that disillusioned legislators are retiring in droves.[25] But that doesn't mean we've given up entirely. In fact, we're more engaged than ever. Voter turnout in 2020[26] and 2024[27] were among the highest on record. This increased engagement is an expression of what political scientist Samuel Huntington terms "creedal passion", a natural, predictable, cyclical yearning that arises when reality drifts too far from its purpose and promise, when the data no longer fits the model, when the country's leaders have irreparably broken their contract with the people.[28] When this happens, we ache to get back to first principles and hope that our votes will get us back on mission.

Yet, even if we vote in record numbers, a single election cannot change the whole system of interlocking institutions, nor heal the trauma that created it. Despite our civic engagement, the institutions cannot change without a full systemic reboot. As Valerie Kaur observed, "...some institutions are so monstrous they cannot be remade. Instead, we have to imagine the world without them."[29]

The death grip the orphanages have on our experience of life reveals we are not dealing with a democracy, but tyranny. While our tyranny is not the tyranny of monarchs and feudal lords, its nature and impact are the same. We live in a more sophisticated, networked, and abstract tyranny than we did under monarchy, and so we must become wiser, more whole, and more skillful in our righteous rebellion and re-imagining. It is time to reclaim that Spirit of '76 and recognize that we have the power to remake our nation.

Even though we're more politically engaged than ever...

Even though we're voting, marching, and protesting our little hearts out...

Even though we're practicing all sorts of internal resistance, sabotage and whistle blowing...

The manner in which we are engaging is still within the rules of the system. It is driven by the individualistic, divisive mentality of *wetiko* (BIPOC vs. white folks, women vs. men, conservative vs. liberal, poor vs. rich, nature vs. capitalism, Bernie vs. the DNC, MAGA vs. the RNC, etc.). We are ready and willing to be part of the change, but we need a new way to get there. This new way is not one forged in hand-to-hand combat or pining away for our leaders to suddenly "get it", but to go through it, by facing and healing the underlying moral and spiritual crisis. It is our only path to our salvation. On the other side of this deep reckoning is the beauty of who we really are and the collective wisdom and solidarity required for long overdue systemic change.

We have a choice...

to continue playing the same old game...

without a deep reverence for our purpose and the guidance of the bison...

without becoming whole ourselves by healing ourselves and integrating all our internal parts...

without the willingness to name and repair our many harms...

and allowing our current leaders and institutions to maintain their power and increase their wealth...

by working at the level of the symptoms of our soul sickness...

with the same horrifying results...

OR...

We can allow our sacred purpose to work on us. We can let the bison transform us. We can let them work through us to activate our purpose, integrate our parts, take our vows, reimagine how we live together, and build a new system to ignite and support our flourishing.

If we choose to spend our time and energy within the status quo, then our suffering will increase, many more will die, and the Republic will fall[30]. If we choose purpose, healing, and community, then we have a chance to become who we are meant to be and thrive.

We must accept the heartbreaking fact that help isn't coming. It's on us regular folk. It begins with us. We have to be, feel, think, and do everything differently. Take heart, because as Margaret Mead reminds us, "Never underestimate the power of a small group of committed people to change the world. In fact, it is the only thing that ever has."

Luckily, we have the bison to guide us home.

Summary

- *Wetiko* is working perfectly, just as designed, and is nearing total victory.
- *Wetiko* cannot and will not self-correct. Help isn't coming from D.C.
- It's on us: to be, feel, know, think, and do things differently.

Discussion/reflection prompts

- Who is the most principled leader you know? And why?
- Were they able to enact lasting systemic change?
- How willing are you to try something new, something that's never been done before?

Part 4

Bison Medicine

"We recognize the bison as a symbol of strength and unity."
Fred DuBray, Cheyenne River Sioux

"The American bison is inextricably intertwined with Indigenous culture, grassland ecology, and American history."
Deb Haaland, Pueblo of Laguna, U.S. Secretary of the Interior 2020-2024

To break the lock that the *wetiko* orphanages have on our lives and fulfill the promise of democracy, we need the "shattering force" and spiritual power of Bison Medicine. The symbol, strength, and guidance of our National Mammal comes to our nation in this dark hour to offer us their medicine: a transpartisan national identity, ethical guidance, and transformative community practice. They can lead us into a greater fullness as individuals and as a nation, into a more flourishing, dynamic, creative, inclusive, and sustainable future, and empower us to remake every sector of society in their image.

The bison have long been part of our national identity, recognized as the state animal of Kansas, Wyoming, and Oklahoma, and as the symbol and seal of The Department of the Interior since 1912. "Buffalo" is also the name of a town in 18 states, and along with "bison" are the mascots of 103 high school, college, and professional sports teams.[1] Further, bison trails throughout the nation became the first wagon trails, and later, our first roads.[2]

Recognizing its spiritual, ecological, and economic power, the InterTribal Buffalo Council sought to solidify the bison's central role in our nation's

history and identity. After four years of outreach to Congress and the White House, and building a coalition with the National Bison Association and the Wildlife Conservation Society, they were successful. They worked with Rep. William Lacy Clay (D-MO), Rep. Kristi Noem (R-SD), and Rep. Jason Chaffetz (R-UT) to bring the National Bison Legacy Act to the floor.[3] The bill received unanimous support during a deeply divided election season. As Rep. Clay told me, "The bill was a victory for American History, a victory for Native people, and a victory for the legislative process."[4] Each legislator who spoke in support of the bill revealed their unique connection to the unifying, healing, and resilient medicine of the bison:

> "I support the National Bison Legacy Act because it is a very important bill to the tribes in my State and also to the heritage of South Dakota and the United States. It is a bill that I helped Representative Clay of Missouri introduce... I am thrilled to sponsor this bill with my colleagues, to raise up an enduring symbol of our Nation's Native American heritage, the American frontier, and the resilience that has long distinguished America from others around the globe. The Tatanka is important both physically and spiritually in Native American culture. These animals offered food, shelter, tools, and clothing. Native Americans could make soap from the fat and homes from their hides. Every piece was used, which is why bison were, and continue to be, a symbol of survival and a cultural example of how to live in a healthy and productive manner. This bill recognizes that. There are also lessons to be learned about resilience from these animals. Bison roamed across most of North America before nearly being wiped from existence. Through the efforts of tribes, ranchers, conservationists, and others, the species has survived and can once again be lifted as a literal and cultural example of productivity from which each of us can learn. I am proud that my family has raised bison as well. They are majestic animals that represent the Plains that we are so proud of and that I am so honored to represent today." **Rep. Kristi Noem (R-SD)**

"The bison are dear to me because they have a historical and spiritual link to the United States Colored Troops who were first organized in 1863 to 1866 as the 9th and 10th Cavalry and the four all-Black infantry regiments. Despite facing relentless racism and woefully inadequate military supplies, nicknamed the Buffalo Soldiers because of their tireless marching and dogged trail skills, they had earned the name of the rugged and revered buffalo. By way of reference, my great-great grandfather and his brother were members of the Buffalo Soldiers after coming out of slavery. The North American bison is a unifying symbol in the United States." **Rep. William Clay Jr. (D-MO)**

"...one of the most majestic animals on the face of the planet is the American bison. You go to see it and you just sit in awe and you think of the rich history and the role that it has played in our Nation... I just want to say that I hope all Americans – especially the youth – get a chance to see one of the bison out in the wild. It was close to extinction, but it was brought back. There are hundreds of thousands of them now." **Rep. Jason Chaffetz (R-UT)**

As we'll explore, Bison Medicine isn't just a subject of awe for civil servants, but a much more accurate expression of the purpose of the United States of America ("All... created equal", "Life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness", and "*E Pluribus Unum*") than our our national bird. The bald eagle is a raptor, a solitary hunter, who swoops down from on high to steal, scavenge, and retreat to its high perch to enjoy the spoils of conquest, while avoiding any responsibility for the impact of its actions below.

This bird was described by Benjamin Franklin as a one "...of bad moral Character. He does not get his Living honestly..., too lazy to fish for himself, he watches the Labour of the Fishing Hawk; and when that diligent Bird has at length taken a Fish,... Bald Eagle pursues him and takes it from him. With all this Injustice, he is never in good Case but like those among Men who live by Sharping and Robbing he is generally poor and often very lousy... he is a

rank Coward... by no means a proper Emblem for the brave and honest..."[5] Now bring to mind the image of the bald eagle. What colors do you see?

Like the distribution of wealth and power in our nation, the eagle is also white on top and brown on bottom. Perhaps this is why it was chosen to represent the Roman Empire and Third Reich. Perhaps the symbol of the eagle serves a powerful purpose; it reminds us of our collective *wetiko*. It allows us to keep our shadows in front of us (versus behind us and out of view). The eagle implores us to ask whether what we are doing serves the highest good for the commonwealth, or if it serves the delusion of separation and isolation.

This, of course, in no way diminishes the important role of eagles in our ecologies. They play a critical role in regulating fish, snake, rodent, and bird populations and distributing nutrients from the water to the soil. This is also not to discount how many First Nations regard and use the medicine of the eagle (e.g., vision and persistence, though more often associated with the golden eagle), but rather, to assert that the symbol of the bald eagle is not the best match for our sacred purpose, the interconnected nature of reality, nor the countless global problems we must collectively and immediately address.

Compared with the bald eagle, the bison have a presence and behavior that is much more consistent with our shared mammalian nature and the stated purpose of this nation. The bison elicit something deep in our souls. They connect us to rolling prairies, lush forests, rushing rivers, majestic peaks, the rising sun, a prismatic dusk, and a starry sky. They call us into individual and collective power. They call us into relationship with wild nature, play, community, and adventure. They ask us to be free – truly free, and connected to all of life. They beckon us to be grateful for natural beauty, and summon us to care for all life.

Just as the ancestors of our First Nations walked and paddled the Bering Land Bridge, the ancestors of *bison bison bison* (Plains Bison) and *bison bison athabascae* (North American Wood Bison) made their way to Turtle Island, commonly known as North America. Just as our democratic ideals evolved as they wandered the globe, so too did the bison. They adapted to a wide range of climates and terrain, and got faster and smaller to avoid predators.

In partnership with the First Nations, bison flourished from Oregon to Virginia and from Canada to Mexico. Many First Nations recognized the bison as their own nation, one they partnered with for physical and spiritual sustenance. They regarded the bison as a nation worthy of care, respect, and honor. Some First Nations cosmologies (such as those of the Blackfoot, Crow, Cheyenne and Kiowa) claim that the bison and human nations co-arose together and for the benefit of each other.[6] Recent research suggests that the psilocybin mushrooms used in ceremonies for healing, growth, and renewal, and rites of passage throughout the Americas hitched a ride with bison dung, as they ventured out of Africa through Europe, the Middle East, Asia and across the Bering Straits,[7] suggesting a more explicit connection between the bison and indigenous spiritual practices. As the bison proliferated, feasting on a bounty of grasses, they brought life to the prairies, forests, and streams. They tilled the soil, dug up and protected fresh water springs. Through their wallowing, they created millions of seasonal ponds that benefitted all of life. They tended this land. They still do.

In this spirit, they guide us to become fully who we are and meet the moment. As bison are neither liberal nor conservative, they evoke and

include a more powerful expression of both attitudes. With their guidance, we find greater compassion and power, greater equity and individual achievement, greater connection and self-expression. Let's us explore a few of the teachings the bison offer us:

Courage

Trait: Unlike cattle, who run away from the storm and prolong their suffering, bison turn to face the storm to move through it more quickly, minimize their suffering, and protect the most vulnerable.

Teaching: The medicine of courage allows us to face the hard truths, the shadows we must acknowledge and transform, and the necessary reforms and resources we must deploy to address the impact of our shadows (native genocide, slavery, polarization, racial injustice, rape culture, climate change, and income inequality). Courage allows us to face our *wetiko* and group think. Courage allows us to opt out of bad situations, relationships, and dynamics. Courage gives us a voice to explain why we say "yes" to our purpose and values and why we say "no" to what desecrates them. Courage is our license to share our wild ideas and dissenting opinions.

Care

Trait: Bison care for the most vulnerable, the young, old, and sick by placing them in the center of the herd.

Teaching: The medicine of care allows us to honor and heal our sick, depressed, traumatized, young, elderly, disabled, and strategically undervalued populations. Care invites us to reimagine how resources are distributed and invested so that all beings have what they need to flourish. Further, the medicine and practice of care is a transcendent, spiritual practice itself, empowering us to move beyond our own fears and desires in service to those most in need.

Inclusion

Trait: Bison share pastures and rivers with other large mammals, such as elk, moose, caribou, antelope, deer, and bear. Unlike predatory species, such as raptors, mountain lions, wolves, and coyotes, who are territorial and

frequently skittish and aggressive, bison easily share space with other large mammals. They protect themselves only when their physical boundaries are violated.

Teaching: The medicine of inclusion allows us to honor the dignity of all life and celebrate the diverse backgrounds and gifts of all who reside here. It summons us to develop healthy and diverse relationships in our careers, communities, ecologies, and foreign policy. It invites us to consider what conditions of care and safety need to be present for each person to be included, feel like they belong, and have access to what they need to fulfill their potential. It invites us to reflect upon our own ways of being and behaving that exclude others, that support exclusionary and extractive ideas, entities, and practices.

Independence

Trait: Bison also make themselves a priority. Although they move about as herds, they can often be found wandering alone, as if solitude, leisure, and discovery were all that mattered. There is an old saying among bison ranchers, "You can get a bison to go anywhere it wants to go" – a strong testament to the autonomy and independence of the bison.

Teaching: The medicine of independence guides us to honor our truth and follow our passions. It allows us to mine our inner resources to meet our challenges, to creatively self-express, assert our agency and autonomy, and live in integrity with our highest self, our purpose. This is a medicine of self-love and self-care, empowering us to take stock, slow down, and listen to what our body and soul needs in each moment. The bison's movement within and outside the herd points to a healthy balance of intimacy and solitude, a love of self and other.

Play

Trait: Bison spend a good deal of time at play, laying about, wallowing, sparring, nudging each other, or running off together.

Teaching: The medicine of play allows us to enjoy each other, our crafts, our art, our music, our games, our communities, our questions, and the

illimitable beauty of this land. Play calls us into whimsy, silliness, the laughter of children, dancing, costumes, theater, and comedy. Play is especially needed and healing in these dark times.

Generativity

Trait: Through their play, wallowing, and grazing, bison till the soil, protect fresh water springs, and have created millions of fresh water ponds throughout the country (almost all of which have now been filled in or plowed over) to provide an abundance of aqueous ecologies. As such, they are a keystone species, leaving every place they inhabit or roam better by cultivating a diversity of plant, insect, reptile, bird, and mammal populations. For example, where bison roam, one-third of all nesting bird species, as well as rodents use bison fur for their nests.[8] They increase the biomass and carbon capture of their ecosystems by 500-1500%. A herd of 170 bison sequesters the annual carbon emissions of 43,000 cars.[9] providing a powerful service not only to their local ecology, but to our whole biosphere. Bison meat fed natives and settlers alike, and it continues to feed us. Their presence is a gift. Their behavior is a gift. Their flesh, fur, and bones are gifts. It is no surprise that the bison are regarded as a symbol of genuine prosperity for many First Nations, a symbol of "give-away," of purpose, of generously contributing their gifts towards the betterment of all.[10]

Teaching: The medicine of generativity invites us to once again claim our role as a keystone species, as so many First Nations have done and continue to do, by shaping the land to protect and increase life. This medicine is one of partnership and listening, one of experimenting, learning, and sharing that allowed hundreds of First Nations to thrive in a wide range of diverse climates and ecologies. The medicine of generativity asks us to consider the impacts of our decisions beyond the next quarter, fiscal year or election cycle, and extend our care to seven generations ahead. This medicine charges us with the task to leave every place better than we found it. It means picking up after ourselves and creating the conditions for others to flourish. It means not just rescuing folks drowning in the river, but marching upstream to prevent them from falling in. It means creating the conditions for all of life to be safe and flourish. It means implementing time-tested organizational

structures and economic rules that enhance life, that have net-zero, living wage, externality-free supply chains, and business models. It begs us to understand our core needs and consider the most elegant and generative way of meeting those needs. It guides our behavior in our relationships, careers, civic life, and marketplaces, and orients us towards long (seven generations) and wide views (interdependence).

Protection

Trait: Bison are ornery if provoked. They are fiercely protective of themselves and their community, leveraging: their incredible strength, ability to leap six feet in the air, acceleration, and speed (up to 40 mph) to avoid predators, and their horns to toss and gore when necessary. Their existence depends on their ability to protect and fight. Bison mothers give birth alone, without the protection of other members of the herd. As such, the strongest test of the bison mother is not the birth, but the ensuing battle she must withstand against the wolves watching her, as they always do. In the first few minutes after giving birth, she must fight upwards of two dozen wolves to keep her calf alive and guide it safely back to the herd. Bison cows win more than they lose, but sometimes lose calves and their own lives. Bison remain vigilant in protecting their young well after birth, as it is estimated that wolves kill upwards of one-third of all bison calves.[11]

Teaching: Protection moves us to not just stop violence, but the causes of violence: *wetiko*'s injustice and exploitation. As FDR said "We must do more than end war. We must end the beginnings of all wars." Given that more women and children die in war than men, ending the beginnings of all wars means we honor, care for, and expand the feminine in all matters. This means protecting women and children not only from violence, but the causes of violence. It also means honoring and protecting sensibilities and virtues in boys and men that have been conventionally regarded as feminine. It means honoring and nurturing the emotional and creative expressions of not just girls and women, but boys and men. It asks us to protect the feminine in our ways of knowing, in our rights, language, customs, careers, rituals, and organizations. Protection means having a sacred relationship with all life and aligning our lives, careers and civic activities to honor, protect, and support

life. Protection enlivens us with the spirit to tend to the social, emotional, and environmental health of our people and communities, as well as the power and responsibility that every sector of society and every organization has to protect and enhance life. The medicine of protection charges us with stopping immediate harm without perpetuating further harm. It moves us to acknowledge responsible and complicit parties, beliefs, and behaviors. It doesn't respond to violence with more violence. Rather it asks us to stop harm, summon understanding, and deploy rehabilitative and restorative justice approaches to bring people back into the fold of their own souls and in right relationship with their community and the web of life. The medicine of protection means we set strong boundaries, but we don't sharpen our horns and turn them upon each other. We don't arm ourselves with assault rifles designed solely to maximize human fatalities. Just as any reputable doctor would recommend surgery only as a last resort, we, too, must let the bison guide our foreign policy and public safety. We center our purpose and values in all matters, let them guide us, and resort to violence only when all else has failed. Never as a preventative measure (e.g., "War on Terror"). Never as a course of business (e.g., economic imperialism). Most importantly, protection begins at home; it invites us to protect others from ourselves by examining and transforming our own harmful beliefs and behaviors. Protection means we do our inner work ongoingly in our men's, women's, and all-gendered circles, with our therapists, clergy, mentors, and coaches.

Redemption

Tragedy: To clear the west for the farms and ranches of Settler Colonialists, and the mines and the railroads of wealthy industrialists, our *wetiko* guided us to enact a native genocide. We fought a multi-front genocidal war with countless tactics including: broken treaties, scalp bounties, death marches, cultural annihilation, forced religious conversion, rape, torture, raids, and starvation. A favorite and foundational war crime of all expansionary empires like ours is the siege: starving people in order to kill them or force them into slavery and servitude. We starved the First Nations through the specicide of the bison, one of their most plentiful and nutritious sources of food. We were almost "successful" – murdering 99% of all the bison that once roamed Turtle Island, resulting in the extermination of 90% of the First

Nations' peoples (~50M) and trafficking, enslaving, and assimilating almost all of the remaining survivors. While we tried to forget this chapter of our history, we cannot and will not. Because of the majesty of the bison—their moral and aesthetic value to us— and the critical role they play in our ecosystems, several brave conservationists in the late 1800s, including William Hornaday and President Theodore Roosevelt, led the charge to bring back the bison and many other endangered species.[12] While other brave souls have engaged in the process of repairing the incalculable harm we inflicted upon our First Nations, these tragedies are far from being repaired.

Teaching: Bison remind us that we can and have repaired harm. We can always be redeemed. As Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. reminds us "The time is always right to do what is right." The medicine of redemption is unique, because it is not a moral quality of the bison. They are not in need of redemption – we are. Redemption is a moral quality available to us when we recognize we have been under the spell of *wetiko*, and can repair the harm we have caused. Just as John Newton, a former human trafficker / slaver, who wrote "Amazing Grace", found his own redemption in Abolition, we too must liberate the oppressed among us. We do this, not just for their liberation, but for all of our liberation and redemption. If we honor and restore the bison to their full glory and repair the harm we have inflicted upon our First Nations, the descendants of those we enslaved, and the dozens of countries harmed by our military, economic, and cultural warfare, we too can find redemption. By turning to the bison for guidance in our lives, careers, and civic activities, we can become whole. While our path to reckoning, repair, and redemption is far from complete, we are on our way. The die has been cast. The medicine of redemption also invites us to hold the view that no one is worthless, beyond redemption, or undeserving of the care of the village.

Taken together, we have a model for a noble life – another path to the good, true, and the beautiful. As any creed or set of ethics faithfully upheld makes us better humans and better citizens, we could faithfully ingest this medicine and become the type of people necessary for a democratic society to function. As the Haudenosaunee knew and executed, and as Montesquieu

and Tocqueville echoed, where faith guides our behavior, the control of the state is not necessary.

And it is not like we have to give up our current faith traditions to practice this medicine. If you soften your eyes, it is easy to see Christianity, the religion claimed by two-thirds of us, in these teachings. We find Christ's compassion in the bison's care. We see Christ's forgiveness in the bison's inclusion. We feel Christ's fearlessness in the bison's courage. We become our "brother's keeper" through the bison's generativity and protection. We see Christ's 40 days in the desert in the bison's long saunter.

As the teachings of the bison can renew us as Christians, they can also guide us to become better Jews, Muslims, Buddhists, Hindus and Mormons. For example, in Judaism, we realize the bison's care in *gemilut hasadim* (loving-kindness) and *kehila* (community), inclusion in *kavod* (respect) and *hakhnasat orhim* (welcoming guests), generativity in *tzedek* (righteousness) and *tzedakah* (charity), and redemption in *tikkun olam* (repair the world).

And yet there are good reasons that we are leaving our legacy religions in droves. Most religions lack a coherent origin story, one that resonates with and amplifies the findings of the scientific tradition. Most have distanced themselves from or have forgotten their mystic and soul initiation pathways to adulthood and elderhood. While all faiths profess a set of live-giving virtues, due to our *wetiko*, the practice of these virtues varies widely, leaving many of us out in the cold spiritually. The bison offer us a "both / and" spiritually and morally. Their teachings allow us to be both good disciples of our religious faiths and better citizens in a multi-faith, multi-cultural democracy. The two-part Bison Medicine protocol (1. activation of your unique purpose in 2. true community), that you'll discover in Part Nine, allows each of us to rediscover an initiatory pathway that deepens our experience of faith (in ourselves and each other) without requiring us to submit to any particular faith.

And if we're being honest, we can also project another set of qualities onto the bison – such as mindlessness, conformity, or fear – because bison can also be driven off cliffs, sacrifice slow moving members of the herd in a panic, get stuck in the mud, drown in fast moving water, and perish by the thousands.

Perhaps they too struggle with *wetiko*. Or we try something else altogether. Just as we contain Whitman's "multitudes", so do the bison. Like humans, the bison refuse to be completely penned in, both physically and metaphorically. They keep us guessing at who they are and who we are. They only ask that we pay them attention and reflect.

> "I sometimes imagine that we saved the buffalo from the brink of extinction for the simple reason that the animal provided a handy mirror in which we could see our innermost desires and failures, and our most confounding contradictions. Our efforts to use the buffalo as a looking glass have rendered the animal almost inscrutable. At once it is a symbol of the tenacity of wilderness and the destruction of wilderness; it's a symbol of Native American culture and the death of Native American culture; it's a symbol of the strength and vitality of America and the pettiness and greed of America; it represents the frontier both forgotten and remembered; it stands for freedom and captivity, extinction and salvation. Perhaps the buffalo's enduring strength and legacy come from this chameleonic wizardry, this ability to provide whatever we need at the given moment."[13] **Stephen Rinella**

So, what does all this mean for us? It means that we can invite Bison Medicine to work on us individually—to bring us whatever we might need in the moment, to allow this medicine to move through us and into greater courage, care, inclusion, play, independence, protection, generativity, and redemption.

It means we can turn to this medicine as we confront, heal, and transform the *wetiko* in our beliefs, behaviors, and orphanages. We can turn to it to shine a light on our formidable national shadows of arrogance, ignorance, fear, bigotry, violence, greed, excess, bullying, and untrustworthiness. It means we courageously and continuously do our inner work, heal our traumas, reflect, repair the impacts of our sins, activate our purpose, and contribute our gifts to create a more flourishing world. Now, let us provisionally swallow this potent medicine and see if it helps us understand what our shared purpose actually means, and what it calls each of us to do.

Summary

- Bison Medicine came to us in our dark hour with intertribal and bipartisan support.
- The bison is a better symbol of our stated purpose than the bald eagle.
- Bison Medicine guides us into greater courage, care, inclusion, play, independence, protection, generativity, and redemption; deepens our faith; and empowers us to be the type of people who uphold and fulfill the promise of democracy.

Reflection

- In which areas of your life do you act like an eagle? In which areas do you act like bison? What does the tension between the two reveal about your life today?
- If we waved a magic wand and presto-chango, Bison Medicine was now our new cultural norm, – felt, experienced, and governing every sector of society – what would be possible for our nation now?
- If you were the screenwriter of a movie about our nation, why did you choose 2016 the year to consecrate the bison as our National Mammal? What role do you want Bison Medicine to play in our nation's next act?

Part 5

The Prairie of Possibility

"We bear the ark of the liberties of the world." **Herman Melville, 1850**

"... the time is always ripe to do what is right. Now is the time to make real the promise of democracy, and transform our pending national elegy into a psalm of brotherhood." **Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., "Letter From Birmingham Jail"**

As our nation approaches its 250th birthday, as new generations of leaders take the helm, we would do well to refresh our understanding of our first principles. We would do well to let the bison guide us as we honor the unprecedented beauty of our moral, psychological, cultural, ecological, and scientific landscapes – and the new possibilities now available to us. The best time to examine first principles is everyday, or at minimum, before every decision of consequence. While we cannot turn back the clock, we can begin today sourcing ourselves in our nation's purpose.

What we find will not be merely words on the page written by dead men, but an entirely new picture of success, and it's a future worth fighting for. The last 100 years of scientific progress, civil rights, and demographic diversification has revealed much more about the true meaning of our nation's purpose. While we fought tooth and nail to update and expand what "all" meant in "All Created Equal", we have spent no time updating or legislating "created equal", "life", "liberty", "happiness", or "*E Pluribus Unum*". It is incumbent upon us to finish the work of our Framers, President Lincoln, and Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. and make our sacred purpose real. As Valerie Kaur elucidates in *See No Stranger:*

> "...the founders had invoked words whose power even they could not constrain - justice, freedom, equality, the guarantee of life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness. These were magical words that had a power of their own and seized the imagination of the people for whom they were never meant."[1]

We'll explore these deeper meanings and implications in the coming pages. You will be invited to take our purpose into your heart and become a steward of our nation's purpose, a lay minister of our nation's civic faith. You will be invited into a civic kinship that makes no other person, faith, ideology, or orphanage wrong, but rather, sees the good in all of them, lovingly transforms and integrates their shadows, and invites them into a greater fullness. You will be invited to join a movement that drives you closer to your family, neighbors, community, and the land. You will be invited to join a movement that stands for your unique gifts, and a society where everyone

has an opportunity to develop their unique gifts, to rejoice in them, to be celebrated for them, and thrive. You will be asked to make a choice that will fundamentally change your experience of life for the better. But it won't be easy.

Wetiko is everywhere and it will do its darndest to stop you, to stop all of us. Of course, you can stop reading now. But odds are, if you made it this far, if you braved the gauntlet of our orphanages and sensed the possibilities of life and a nation guided by the bison, you won't want to stop. You'll want to see what is over the ridge. You'll want to roam this prairie with us. Yet, it is important that you pause and stop reading for a moment to reflect. Take a walk or water a plant, and consider leaving if you don't want to be tempted by what your purpose, our nation's purpose, and the bison will ask of you.

...

Thanks for coming back! Let's explore what this great purpose asks of us.

Our nation's powerful tri-partite purpose – "All... are Created Equal", "Life, Liberty, and the Pursuit of Happiness", and to realize the unity in our diversity, "*E Pluribus Unum"* – is rarely acknowledged. It is even less well-understood, and as we've explored, it does not guide our society, economy, or government. Before we dive into the specifics of our purpose and do the necessary root work, let's take a moment to explore what it actually means to be connected to our nation's purpose at a personal level. We'll look at how two of our finest American souls – Walt Whitman and Herman Melville – understood and embodied our purpose.

Walt Whitman illuminated our nation's soul (and shadows) in his life by seducing Nature's God, living an aligned and creative life, remaking his country through service in the Civil War, and obliterating any boundary in the way of his fraternal, romantic, and patriotic love. He was the walking meditation of *E Pluribus Unum*. In his prose (such as *Democratic Vistas)* and poetry (such as *Salut au Monde!*), he made a home for democracy in his heart and body. Further, he restated the case that democracy can only work if it is more the core idea (equality) and material reality (a political economy that secures life, liberty and happiness for all). It must also be supported by a personal devotion, a spiritual transformative practice. In so doing, he

accepted the wisdom given to us by our First Nations in the 1700s and later observed in practice by Abraham Maslow during his time among the Blackfeet Siksika in the 1930s (more on this in Part 7).

As Whitman, as well as his Transcendentalist compatriots (Herman Melville, Emily Dickinson, and Ralph Waldo Emerson) discovered, democracy must be ingested in heart, mind, and body,[2] which requires us to:

1. Become whole ourselves, to consecrate a union of self, a growing activation, coherence, and integration of all our internal sub-psychic parts (good and evil, masculine and feminine, *eros* and *agape,* soul purpose, shadows, and ego parts: critic, wounded child, skeptic, risk manager, image consultant),[3]
2. Develop an intimate and transcendent relationship to Nature's God (as articulated in the Declaration of Independence) so as to be physically healed by, spiritually sourced in, and act as a protector of all life, and
3. Be an unshakeable stand for our vocations, so we can bring forth the beauty in our hearts (soul, purpose, vision, values, and craft) into action through our careers.

Whitman lived these edicts and became our nation's purpose enfleshed in the body of a single person. He became the mission and message of our nation. Through his pain, ecstasies, sexuality, service, and writing, he took on the task of full self-awareness: the integration of masculine and feminine, transcendent and material, his soul, ego parts, shadows, and his connection to Nature's God.[4] In doing so, his self-concept approached the whole of Nature / Cosmos.

Against the wise and considered advice of his friends (Emerson and Thoreau), Whitman published his heretical, embodied, barbaric, homoerotic, and liberating poems. He stood firm in what Jungian analyst, John Beebe, termed "lunar masculinity"[5]: the unwavering devotion to his own limitless, serpentine soul, and evolving vocation, no matter the cost. Whitman stood fast, erect, published his works, and in so doing, bore the wrath and rejection of New England society.

He actualized by greater degrees a selfless self-love, a love that shined so bright, it reaches us today, some six generations hence. While he was not the first or only one to walk this path, old Walt made it to King's mountaintop. His example, his words, and his legacy are forever secured by his courage to live in total alignment with his soul, body, and Nature's God. As the embodiment of a whole person and the whole of the nation, we can safely count him as an intellectual and spiritual forefather of our nation's Abolition, Civil Rights, Conservation, Women's Suffrage, and Gay Rights movements.

Melville took another equally important path to wholeness. To say *Moby Dick* is the greatest American novel is stating the matter too lightly, as Melville dissected, explored, and integrated our nation's collective soul and shadows as no other had before or has since. It is perhaps more apt to say that he wrote the central parable of our national bible. He illuminated our autocratic and demonic shadows in his characterization of Ahab and Fedallah and contrasted them with the democratic and inclusive souls of Ismael and Queequeg. He teased apart the tensions between our stifling white Christian New England autocratic selves and our increasingly inclusive, brown, queer, pagan, and indigenous selves. He cleaved Nature from man, and then through his circuitous and rhythmic plot, sub-plots, and character arcs, reconciled them in a myth to heal himself, integrate his parts, and illuminate the spiritual path to make our nation whole. Like Whitman, his light extends six generations beyond him. I pray it will guide us for many more.

These Transcendentalists, and the activists and psychologists they inspired, stood on the shoulders of not just the world's wisdom traditions, but also the scientific tradition. They personalized and magnified the possibilities illuminated in Alexander von Humbolt's *Cosmos*, the first grand Enlightenment survey of nature and humanity[6]. Freud, Jung, and James breached these same vistas of soul and science, articulated the schisms, pathologies, and archetypes on the road to wholeness, and laid the foundation for the new field of psychology. They democratized the path to soul embodiment and psychological individuation, granting anyone the ability to achieve what the Transcendentalists had to figure out for

themselves. Upon all of their shoulders stands the human potential movement of the 20th and 21st centuries, revealing a myriad of paths up to King's mountaintop.

The Reverend Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. understood that the struggle was not just a political and economic struggle, but a spiritual struggle, one that requires us to follow the lead of the Transcendentalists and become whole ourselves. He understood that we need to become "new" people in order to fulfill our purpose: "We need a qualitative change in our souls as well as a quantitative change in our lives." We don't get to have our nation in part. We don't get to have our nation unless we welcome all of it into our souls. We must become it. This reintroduces a critical element to the political process. As Gandhi said, "Politics should be sacred." With that in mind, let us begin our path to personal and political wholeness with what Lincoln called the "central tenet of our ancient faith": "all… created equal."

Summary

- At the personal level, democracy requires us to become: (1) integrated and whole, (2) sourced in Nature's God, and (3) on purpose in our lives and careers.
- Melville and Whitman demonstrated what this looks like at both personal and collective levels.
- Freud, Jung, James, and others developed the field of psychology to democratize the path to wholeness.

Discussion / reflection prompts

- What would you need to surrender in order to become whole, sourced in Nature's God, and on purpose in your life?
- What practices and communities would you engage with for support on this path?
- How would your experience of life be different if all of your alumni, career, organization, neighborhood, and spiritual groups centered the path to purpose and wholeness?

Part 6

All Created Equal

"I am of the old and the young, of the foolish as much as the wise,

Regardless of others, ever regardful of others,

Maternal as well as paternal, a child as much as a man,

Stuff'd with the stuff that is coarse and stuff'd with the stuff that is fine,

One of the Nations of many nations, the smallest the same and the largest the same,

A Southerner soon as a Northerner...

A learner with the simplest, a teacher of the thoughtfulest,

A novice beginning yet experient of myriads of seasons,

Of every hue and caste am I, of every rank and religion,..

I resist any thing better than my own diversity..."[1]

Walt Whitman

To understand this "central tenet of our ancient faith", we'll follow the lead of the Transcendentalists and the founders of psychology by again turning to reason and science for guidance. The last 150 years of research have revealed remarkable specificity about the meaning of "all... created equal" as well as a host of scientifically-validated best practices to fulfill it. This approach is both an originalist (going back to the words and intentions of the *Kaianerekowa* and our Framers) and living (letting the last 150 years of science reveal how these principles can be optimally fulfilled) interpretation of our founding documents.

From this hybrid understanding, there is hope and a vision that empowers us to transcend our differences, and work together to establish a government, economy, and society that allows all who call this place home the ability to fully realize their potential. Let us begin with our first vow, the keystone of our nation's purpose, as it was first offered in our Declaration of Independence:

> "We hold these truths to be self-evident, that **all are... created equal**, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness.--That to secure these rights, Governments are instituted among Men, deriving their just powers from the consent of the governed..."

Unfortunately, in order to pacify the patriarchal caste societies of the North and the slavery-based economy of the South, we had to sacrifice our first vow to get agreement on our Articles of Confederation and Constitution. As we explored in parts one and two, this is our heritage - big ideas, partially executed. Yet since our founding, we have endeavored to bend the moral arc of the universe towards our original intention – equality – while our judicial branch, K Street, and ultra wealthy attempt to defile it. We must now complete the task, fulfill this vow, and bend the moral arc all the way to equality and justice. To do so, we will have to do as Whitman did (above), and become democracy ourselves, whole, on purpose, sourced in Nature's

God. We have wed our souls to it and transform everything that violates our covenant of equality.

We accelerated our journey to wholeness during our second founding – the Civil War –, when equality became our nation's singular clarifying principle. It is what President Lincoln called, "The central tenet of our ancient faith." During the Civil Rights uprisings and murders of the 1950s and early 1960s, President Kennedy called it "our moral crisis". In the decades to follow, President Reagan, despite his administrations' efforts to defile it, heralded it as "our birthright" and "our heritage". President Obama elevated it further to "the most evident of truths", our "God-given promise", and "the star that guides us".

To help our nation envision and become equality-enfleshed, our poets (Dickinson, Emerson, and Whitman) along with the ongoing philosophical and religious movements happening in Europe at this time, borrowed heavily from the wisdom of our First Nations and also the spiritual vistas offered by mystics and shamans across traditions, especially those of Christian, Kabbalist, Hindu Tantra, Zoroastrian, and Sufi traditions. Together, these poets imagined a post-slavery, post-oppression nation, one that would do the world's work of honoring, transcending and including the multitudes of our diversity, and reveal the unified beating heart of our species, planet, and the Cosmos. A prime example of this call to equality is in this section of Whitman's poem, *Salut au Monde!*

> Within me latitude widens, longitude lengthens,
>
> Asia, Africa, Europe, are to the east—America is
>
> provided for in the west,...
>
> I hear the Arab muezzin, calling from the top of the mosque,
>
> I hear Christian priests at the altars of their churches
>
> —I hear the responsive base and soprano,
>
> I hear the wail of utter despair of the white-haired

Irish grand-parents, when they learn the death
of their grand-son,...

I hear the wheeze of the slave-coffle, as the slaves
march on—as the husky gangs pass on by twos
and threes, fastened together with wrist-chains
and ankle-chains,

I hear the entreaties of women tied up for punishment
—I hear the sibilant whisk of thongs through
the air;

I hear the Hebrew reading his records and psalms,
I hear the rhythmic myths of the Greeks, and the
strong legends of the Romans,
I hear the tale of the divine life and bloody death
of the beautiful God, the Christ,
I hear the Hindoo teaching his favorite pupil the
loves, wars, adages, transmitted safely to this
day from poets who wrote three thousand years ago.[2]

These sentiments of equality, as well as those of empathy and unity, took hold of our nation and inspired a moral and spiritual reckoning that culminated in many movements, such as Abolition and Suffrage. These sentiments carried the spiritual call for a second founding – our Civil War – and subsequent reforms, such as our Civil Rights acts. Countless civil rights leaders, organizations, and movements carried and still carry this flame. They

continue to work tirelessly to protect and expand our concept of "all" and fight for "life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness" to be realized in ever-greater degrees.

However, as the word "all" has grown into greater fullness over the last couple of centuries, our understanding of "created" still has much catching up to do. Let's begin with this most troubling of words: "created". Obviously, all babies are created equal, in that they all have inherent worth. However, the original phrasing is not "all babies are created equal", but rather "all *men* are created equal", implying that our purpose is an adult purpose. We are talking about adults, not babies. So what does it actually mean to create an adult? And what does it mean to create all of them equally?

The First Nations knew (and know) how to create adults. They knew and relied upon the power of mentorship (especially in developing virtues, such as honor, humility, integrity, and respect), rites of passage, spiritual practices, and rituals. They knew it was no easy task to become an adult:

> "To be a common man is one of the hardest things you can do because you have to put the needs of other people in front of yours. When somebody is sick you try to heal. When somebody is crying, you wipe their eyes. When somebody is hungry, you feed them. When a child is crying, you comfort them. First in battle, last to eat. All these things. The people will learn to depend on you."[3] **Milo Yellow Hair**

To find our way back into true adulthood, let us marinate on how bison create adults versus how eagles create adults. Eagles spend a few months with their kids to feed them and teaching them how to fly and hunt. After that point, they are on their own. Whereas bison are together from birth to death, consistently receiving the care they need at each stage of their development from their parents and the roaming village of other adult bison. They play, wander, receive corrections, and develop a sense of group dynamics and norms.

Similarly, modern humans raise children as bison do, up to a point. We attend and attune to the needs of our children as best we are able given the constraints of our orphanages, careers, commutes, and never-ending chores,

leaving the remainder of our children's upbringing to teachers, sitters, and screens. And then, at some point, we just stop trying altogether and push them out. Some time between the ages of 13 and 30, we push them out of the nest and leave them to their own devices to become adults and figure life out.

Some of our kids do. Most don't. While most are able to get jobs and pay rent, and some partner, and others go on to get married, have a family, and own a home, a paltry few do the inner work (heal their traumas, activate their purpose, etc.) and outer work (develop a purpose-driven career, authentic community, etc.) to become fully developed adults. Far fewer reach this developmental stage before making more humans, thereby continuing the trauma-perpetuation machine and keeping the orphanages chock full of traumatized, dependent adolescents in big bodies.

Thus "Created" isn't simply a matter of insemination and birth, but rather, an ongoing creation process throughout the entire lifetime of a person. This process requires a village and must be supported and sustained by numerous rights and resources, such as:

clean air and water, healthy food, safe and affordable housing...

loving, available, and present parents, aunts and uncles, affordable healthcare and childcare...

great schools, safe and vibrant communities, access to mentors, teachers, and...

elders to steward the community, help us activate our purpose, and guide us into becoming adults endowed with dignity, agency, and nobility, and the ability to reach our full potential in our careers and society.

"Created" involves decades of caring, mentorship, connection, empowerment, and challenge – not just minutes of sexual congress or months of gestation or slogging it out until high school graduation. It requires decades before we are able to mature into fully formed biological, psychological, cognitive, social, and spiritual adults. This demands physical safety: a home free from violence, poverty, and hunger. This means living

wages for parents. This means true community: where we feel seen, honored, stood for, and challenged to become our highest selves, where we are safe and belong, where schools leverage best practices such as student-directed learning, small class sizes, and diverse, peer learning groups.

This is, of course, not to say we helicopter-parent or coddle our young, but that, with each phase of our children's development, we have the support and resources to ensure they have the experiences, rites of passage, and guidance to move into greater awareness, connection, contribution, and responsibility. Of course, our kids will still be doing chores. They'll still be pushing boundaries, experimenting sexually, babysitting for neighbors, and other service jobs in their teens. They'll still be engaging in internships, apprenticeships, jobs, and romantic relationships in their twenties.

But what we're no longer doing is asking our 18-year-olds – whose parents have been out of the house for 100 hours a week for most of their lives – to borrow $200,000 based on a guess about what the next five decades of their career will look like. To make a decision like this requires numerous rites of passage, exposure to different cultures, self-awareness exercises, mentors, and most importantly, a fully developed brain. Cognitively, our neocortex isn't fully mature until around the age of 30. This is the part of the brain required for self-awareness, abstract thought, and moral reasoning – all of which are needed to make any authentic decision, especially those that will cost a small fortune and encumber us financially for decades.

Imagine what kind of country we would have if we got this one word ("created") right? If we fully understood what a created adult was and enacted legislation to ensure that all adults were created equal, imagine how many of our problems would simply just go away? What impact would a nation of fully created adults have on our prison and criminal justice system? How much soda and fast fashion would be sold? How many of us would be okay buying anything that wasn't the product of a living wage, sustainable supply chain? How many of us would work a "bullshit job"[4] or engage in any career that didn't improve the human and ecological condition inclusive of all costs of doing business? How many of us would stay home on election day?

It is also clear that "equal" does not mean just equal protection under the law, it means equal access to the above conditions and resources that are required to be fully created (for at least our first 30 years). The Reverend Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. understood that this central tenet of our purpose would not be fulfilled if we only had the bill of sale: equality before the law. We need the actual goods: equity delivered in our lives, careers, and communities. We can't just stop beating people down. We have to help them get back up. We have to keep helping them get up until they tell us they no longer need our help. This is why after the 1965 Civil Rights Act, Dr. King turned his attention to achieving economic equity with the Poor People's Campaign. It's why Fred Hampton assembled the Rainbow Coalition of poor and oppressed Black, Latin, Indigenous, and white communities.

And of course, the *wetiko* within the rich and powerful among us deeply resisted and resented this. As Heather McGhee revealed in *The Sum of Us,*[5] few whites wanted to pay for and deliver the goods, leading to the closing of public parks and pools, and stripping the social safety net (that after 1965 legally had to include Black folks) bare over the last 50 years. It is why King and Hampton and so many other civil rights leaders were harassed by the FBI, and then illegally killed by police forces and their operatives.

It's why administrations under Nixon, Reagan, Bush I, Clinton, and Bush II – through crimes of commission and omission – destroyed Black communities with the War on Drugs and militarized policing. It's redlined neighborhoods, freeways through Black communities, "three strikes" laws, and "broken windows" theory. It's why we have private schools, private drives, private security, private pools, and country clubs. It's why our SCOTUS does what it does. It is why white nationalists and neo-Nazi groups have developed a weekly cadence of public events and incidents throughout the nation.[6] It is all a violent whitelash. A racist dine and dash. This shadowy payback is a desecration of our purpose and humanity.

And yet, these shadows have not broken us. We are still here, aware of who we are and must become. Despite our recent losses, we defiantly assert that all people, regardless of their race, creed, ability, gender or sexual identity, are created equal.

Upon this foundational contract of equality, we must agree and commit to delivering the goods to fulfill it, whatever the cost, or we shall find ourselves at odds with the very essence of our nation's reason for being: "all... created equal". This commitment is necessary. It is the unalterable principle, without which our nation cannot stand. As a covenantal nation, one not sourced in ethnicity or creed, but rather a covenant, we are a nation only insofar as we uphold the agreement of, and sacralize, equality. All who reside here must choose to embrace it, or else find themselves outside the chapel of "our ancient faith". As FDR proclaimed in his first inaugural address, "We may now restore that temple to its ancient truths..."

If we do not choose "all... created equal" and courageously charge forth under its banner as bison, we are not talking about democracy and have no shot at unity. We are not talking about our nation's sacred, noble, and covenantal purpose. We are not talking about the United States of America. Instead, we are talking about a caste system, an apartheid where some are more equal, where only they have access to be created and experience life, liberty, and happiness, while the majority of us toil and suffer in their servitude as traumatized, dependent, and addicted adolescents.

In order to go any further on this path, you must choose "all created equal". Without making this choice, you will feel increasingly "not at home" here, especially as the country becomes majority non-white. There are many other places to choose from who could care less about "all... created equal" and more effectively protect their nativist apartheids and oppress their racialized underclasses. This world tour of anti-democratic oppression includes places such as Russia, China, Brazil, Venezuela, Hungary, Syria, Poland, and India. Additionally, if we look at the data from the UN's Inequality-adjusted Human Development Index,[6] there are over a dozen other countries (e.g., Costa Rica, New Zealand, South Korea, and Denmark) that fulfill "all... created equal" far better than we do.

If you are not ready to make and continually make this choice, what follows is not for you. This nation is not for you. So, I invite you to let "all... created equal" in. Let it settle into your bones and tattoo it on your heart. If your soul accepts it as true, and has a hunger to integrate it, then what follows is for you.

...

On behalf of all who have and continually make this choice, thank you. Thank you for your courage. You matter and belong here. Now let us examine the material expression of our "ancient faith", "Life, Liberty and the Pursuit of Happiness".

Summary

- "All created equal" is the singular clarifying principle of our nation.
- "Created" means we have lifelong access to the conditions to become actualized, connected, and fulfilled human beings.
- If we do not choose "all... created equal", then we will find ourselves outside the sacred chapel of "our ancient faith".

Discussion / reflection prompts

- What percentage of adults do you think have access to the conditions to be "created"? How does that make you feel?
- What feelings come up for you when you consider the toil and body count that the struggle for "all... created equal" has produced, and may still produce?
- As you picture yourself taking your last breath, surrounded by the people whose lives you've impacted, who love you and will mourn you, do you want to be remembered as someone devoted in heart, mind, and body to equality?

Part 7

Life, Liberty, and the Pursuit of Happiness

"Glory to the memory of the heroes of the revolution, to the generous godfathers of liberty. Glory to the memory of George Washington and his heroic compatriots. They were the chosen instruments in the hands of Providence, to turn the wheel of events in favor of liberty forever; and they proved worthy of their great mission, of their instrumental work... The millions of oppressed men and women in all countries, whose chains have been broken, and whose prisons have been razed, are the grand chorus, who sing the praise of the American revolution... The framers of the Constitution were wise enough to confront the destiny of the nation... The people of the United States, on accepting this Constitution, had formally and solemnly chosen its destiny, to be now and forever the palladium of liberty... We are Americans... Every child born on this soil is Americanized. Our country has a peculiar people to work out a new and peculiar destiny... Nothing can arrest our progress, nothing

> drag our country down from her high place in history, except our own wickedness working a wilful desertion of our destiny, the desertion from the ideal of liberty. As long as we cling to this ideal, we will be in honor, glory, wealth and prosperity."[1]
> **Rabbi Isaac M. Wise, 1869**

> "americans are the least rebellious people on earth who also like to congratulate themselves on being rebellious more than anyone. 'i'm a renegade. my favorite people are the cops and my boss!'"[2] **umo, 2024**

We fulfill "all created equal" by delivering the goods to ensure that all who reside here have everything they need to be created equal. We are guided to deliver the goods that empower all to fulfill their potential and realize equality by our twin animating aspirations in body ("Life, Liberty, and the Pursuit of Happiness") and in spirit ("*E Pluribus Unum*", which we'll explore in part eight).

Let's take a deeper dive into what these words actually mean. In the 1700s and 1800s "life" was, in retrospect, a very short and brutal affair, as evidenced by the life expectancy of 35 years in 1800,[3] with 46% of children not reaching their 5th birthday.[4] Our time on the earth was short, and given the need to focus on daily survival, our ability to spend time exploring what it means to be alive or to live a good life, or read the seminal texts of religion or philosophy, or have an informed and fruitful debate was nil (as we explored in part two, it has again become nil for most of us). While many of us could read, we had no libraries. Most of us only had access to extremely biased newspapers and trashy dime novels. *Sound familiar?*

But the scientific tradition was just getting started, and even among the most learned, their understanding was limited to borrowed books and writing each other letters a couple times a year. The fields of psychology, sociology, anthropology, and ecology had not yet been developed. While many of our Framers understood and respected the cultures and practices of the First Nations that supported the *Kaianerekowa*, they lacked the knowledge, academies, and critical frames necessary to transform an exploited,

traumatized, rag-tag group of European exiles into a truly free and unified nation of mature adults. We now have access to significantly better science and best practices to legislate and manifest the true meaning of these powerful words. Let us begin.

Life

These four key disciplines (psychology, sociology, anthropology, and ecology), among dozens of other new and important subdisciplines, have revealed much more about what it means to secure the right to life and cultivate a quality life. With the help of these disciplines, we now understand that life must be substantially more purposeful, inclusive, communal, and safe.

Purpose

"Life" isn't about filling up our empty minds and lives. We are not *tabula rasa*, devoid of emotions, connection, purpose, and inspiration. We each have unique gifts that need to be developed and shared. Having a life purpose (defined here as a transcendent identity that is larger than a concern for self and family, that calls us to awaken our most cherished virtues and greatest gifts and apply them towards a vision that is personally inspiring) is correlated with a wide range of positive life outcomes, such as: a seven year increase in longevity;[5] higher levels of income and wealth;[6] better mental health;[7] improved cognitive functioning;[8] 32% fewer doctors visits;[9] better sex;[10] more and more robust relationships;[11] and stronger marriages.[12] Thus, if our concept of "life" is to mean a long, loving, fulfilled, healthy, joyful, prosperous, and connected life, it must include the liberating and enlivening power of purpose.

Inclusion

We now understand that "life" means much more than the lives of wealthy white men. Since the 1850s, our nation's concept of the right to "life" has increasingly come to include the lives of women, people of color, and LGBTQIA+ folks. It now includes children, the elderly, and the disabled. Because of our understanding of ecology and quantum entanglement, we now understand that "life" means the abiding kinship and mutual

flourishing of *all* people and life forms that inhabit our ecologies and upon which we all depend. It means thriving biodiverse watersheds. It means that our air is healthy to breathe, our water is clean to drink, our food is healthy to eat, our increasingly diverse communities are safe and joyful to live in, and our homes are affordable to rent and own (e.g. housing costs no greater than 30% of our income).[13]

Further, as we are an increasingly racially diverse nation, nurturing and sustaining our diverse society means opening ourselves to life in all its diversity and splendor. It means being secure in who we are, fulfilling our potential, and honoring our fellow countryfolk for who they are in all their splendor and diversity. Here again, purpose plays a critical role in helping us flourish together. Having a connection to our life purpose reduces our anxiety in diverse environments by 4x[14] and increases our desire to live in diverse communities by 4x.[15]

This orientation towards diversity is likely due to the central role that purpose plays in driving our growth and development into full adults, leaders, and elders. It is perhaps no surprise that a strong sense of purpose in life is correlated with a wide range of prosocial virtues, beliefs and behaviors, including:

- wisdom, transcendence, curiosity, and temperance;[16]
- gratitude, compassion, and grit;[17]
- generativity, personal growth, and integrity;[18]
- other-centeredness;[19]
- reflection on past and future, consideration of our impact on others;[20]
- forgiveness and post-traumatic growth;[21] and
- conscientiousness, openness to experience, and agreeableness; and a negative correlation with neuroticism.[22]

As such, having a connection to our individual life purpose empowers us to become the type of human that can flourish in any society – especially one as

diverse as ours, and one that is committed to the realization of life, equality life, liberty, and happiness for all.

Community

> "I think that part of what a culture of domination has done is raise that romantic relationship up as the single most important bond, when of course the single most important bond is that of community." **bell hooks**

Bison are social animals that travel in herds. Therefore, there is no such thing as a single bison or even a bison nuclear family. We would do well to follow their lead by absolving ourselves of the myth of hyperindividualism and the mistaken belief and cultural practice of trying to survive as a married couple with children. Some households do "make it work", but that almost always involves throwing money into the gaping hole that a community would otherwise fill. Today, most nuclear households can only keep bellies full and appearances up by decimating the environment and exploiting a racialized underclass to provide them with child and home care services. Just as the primary unit of the bison is the herd, the primary unit of humans is not an individual, a couple or a family, it is the community. If we want to live in accordance with our true nature, if we want to center and honor life, we should consider that we are first a village.

Because our neurobiology can only flourish in connection with others,[23] we need to give special attention to creating and sustaining communities of care. Caring and contribution are the key to our social and emotional health.[24] driving social integration, increasing our life spans by 10% (~8 years), and increasing the likelihood that we reach the age of 85 by 41%.[25] When we develop high-trust relationships with each other, we are able to share our fears and anxieties and discover new perspectives on our challenges.[26] Further, regular check-ins with those we care about empower us to complete our stress cycles and avoid burnout.[27]

However, can we truly belong to a community if we don't first belong to ourselves? Can we be truly loved and cared for by others if we don't even know who we are? If our identity is only sourced in the stories and norms of our caste (our unique composition of our gender, race, sexuality, religion,

income, and education), how can others love us for who we really are? Once again, being connected to our individual life purpose plays a critical role. Experiencing the purpose activation process initiates a move in our identities from socialized self to authentic self, or what Harvard psychologist Robert Kegan terms "the self-authoring mind" and "self-transforming mind".[28] We are able to source our identity and choices – not in our default groups or what family or society tell us we are – primarily in who we truly are: our unique, multidimensional, and evolutionary life purpose.

From this place, we can more authentically self-express, be seen and valued for who we really are, make aligned choices, and build authentic community (more on this in Part Nine). "Life" is not simply a measure of the biological health of a human organism or the economic health of a household, but also a matter of emotional health, social integration, and vibrant and equitable communities. "Life" must now include the activation of purpose, empathy, trust, and mutual concern in all of our core life contexts: love, family, community, work, and civic life.

Safety

It goes without saying that "life" doesn't mean running for your life. Rather, it means that your life feels safe and secure, free from disease, violence, poverty, homelessness – and the threat of disease, violence, poverty, and homelessness. As we've explored, 97% of us live unhealthy lifestyles and 75% of us do not make a living wage, so we're not physically and economically safe. We are also emotionally unsafe, as 54% of us believe our fellow citizens are the greatest threat to our nation.[29] This is especially terrifying, because we have 400 million guns in our country and over 20 million of these are assault rifles whose sole purpose is to quickly kill large numbers of humans.[30]

As should be clear by now, our lack of safety is not uniformly felt. Women live in fear of assault and rape. Given our history of racial prejudice, slavery, and discrimination, most BIPOC communities live in constant fear of police terror. It should be clear that we currently do not have adequate economies, laws, and institutions to safely secure "life".

Properly considered, "life" means not investing our time in protecting ourselves from poverty and in fear of each other, but rather that the rights to,

and protections of, life are secured through our economy, laws, and institutions. We don't have to think about being safe or having enough money for food and shelter. When life is safe and we are protected, we are free to experience "liberty" and pursue "happiness" and can invest our time in creative pursuits, leisure, and in service to others, each according to our unique purpose.

Liberty

In a very real sense, liberty is the (Native) American way. As Benjamin Franklin observed: "Having few artificial Wants, they have abundance of Leisure for Improvement by Conversation... Our laborious Manner of Life, compared with theirs, they esteem slavish and base...".[31] As FDR also understood and invoked in "A Rendezvous with Destiny" speech: "Necessitous men are not free men. Liberty requires opportunity to make a decent living – a living decent according to the standard of our times, a living which gives a man not only enough to live by, but something to live for. For too many, the political equality we once had won was meaningless in the face of economic inequality."[32]

We cannot be free if we are impoverished. We must have a way to make a living wage, enough to provide for our families and pursue our passions. Unfortunately, the living wage exceeds the minimum wage by between 20-500%, depending on where we call home.[33] Let us marinate further on what liberty really means and how we can get back to its original and full Native expression.

While many of our Framers understood the freedom, leisure, interconnection, power, autonomy, dignity, honor, responsibility, equality, and respect that the indigenous notion of liberty contained, it was not how most folks understood it then and still isn't how most relate to it today. Without understanding liberty in this greater moral, social, economic, spiritual, and ecological context, liberty is reduced to a hyper individualist license to do whatever you want within the confines of the law (or without getting caught breaking it), aka *wetiko*. This lesser view of liberty carries with it no responsibilities. It weighs the freedom to exclude equally with the freedom to include. It weighs the freedom to destroy nature equally with the

freedom to nourish it. It weighs the freedom to exploit our family equally with the freedom to empower them.

This understanding of liberty arbitrarily allows us to exert power through force, such as by denying someone their bodily autonomy. This understanding is what grants the orphanages free reign to exploit us in any way that serves their interests. And they have. This is not true liberty. This is not our purpose. This is not the way of the Haudenosaunee. This is definitely not the way of the bison.

Further, our contemporary notion of liberty infers that we have the freedom to choose (and presumes that the capacity to choose freely is inherent in all adults). Nothing could be further from the truth. For example, the nascent field of moral psychology has revealed that we are, by default, not free individuals. We do not make decisions selfishly or altruistically, neither from logical analysis nor ethical guidance, but rather *groupishly,* wherein we make decisions based on a moral calculus, solving for the mean value set of the group with which we identify.[34]

This default decision-making process is motivated by our desire to remain included in our group – regardless of the logic, morality, authenticity, congruence, or impacts of that decision. And that's not necessarily a bad thing, provided the group with which we identify is the whole human community, web of life, and seven generations into the future. But for most, it's a much smaller group – our family, coworkers, our church, our school mates, or our neighbors – which are generally segregated along the lines of age, race, gender, and sexuality.

We need only look at the way in which we've ingested dozens of unexamined beliefs and behaviors wholesale, versus examining the true nature of the need and the best practices for meeting it, e.g., our obsession with:

- Driving (vs. bicycles or mass transit),
- Single family homes (vs. communal living),
- Aspirational brands (vs. buy-nothing),
- Mono-cultured lawns (vs. gardens),

- Leaf blowers (vs. just letting leaves decompose),
- Cosmetic surgery (vs. self-love),
- Screens (vs. arts and crafts)
- Fairytale romances (vs. conscious communities and coupling), and
- "Get rich quick" schemes (vs. right livelihood).

Compared to the influence that the customs of our social groups have upon our decisions, the notions of liberty, logic, and reason have a very weak grip on our lives. As James Gimpel and Dante Chinni revealed in *Our Patchwork Nation*, after sifting our nation's demographic data by zip code, they revealed that our nation is composed of 12 segregated groups: 12 morally, ideologically, economically, socially, and frequently, racially homogeneous subnations.[35] Each of these groups is composed of people who believe and do more or less the same things. Bring to mind the area you live in. It's likely you can see where the sub-nations start and stop. You know the blocks, county lines, tracks, and freeway overpasses that mark the borders. Having lived all around the San Francisco Bay Area, I can guess which train stop a fellow rider will get off with about 80% accuracy, based on their age, ethnicity, fitness, clothing, behavior, and time of day. Odds are you can do this too. Some part of our brains is always looking for an excuse to say some version of: "Y'all ain't from around here."

Additionally, the last 30 years of neuroscience and gut-biome research[36] reveals that our decisions are not made first in the head and then acted upon by our words and body. Rather, our actions are first taken by our bodies, which are influenced by our subconscious mind. Our subconscious is shaped by our media diet, family dynamics, childhood traumas and social conditioning and comprises about 95% of our thoughts.[37] Our conscious "decisions" occur a few microseconds later as rationalizations by the brain. So, even though we have the experience of choosing as individuals with free will – and our orphanages treat us as individual actors with complete agency – the data and our neighborhoods prove otherwise. Whether we like it or not, freewill is scientifically only a useful fiction.

Taken together, our decontextualized sense of toddler / tyrant liberty and our default *groupishness* and lack of free will present a problem for our nation. We value freedom and liberty, but how can we actually be free if we cannot make choices? How can we be free if what we are able to choose from is dictated to us by our groups and the orphanages that run them?

To regain the full indigenous experience of liberty, we must create the conditions to liberate ourselves from these impediments. We must do the inner work to be free and experience what our Framers originally envisioned, what James Madison fought for as "the full and legal rights of conscience"[38] and what Melville called "one's own inexorable self".[39] This liberating process occurs over time and is lifelong, including activities such as: healing the traumas of our past, engaging in self-reflection, purpose activation processes, shadow integration work, spiritual practices, experiencing other cultures / travel, and receiving ongoing reflection from trusted mentors and elders further along on the journey. The more of this we take on, the more actual freedom and liberty we are able to experience.

Happiness

Similarly "happiness" was also narrowly understood by most colonists in the 1770s, but among our Framers, the term could be thought to refer to either the First Nations understanding of the term, or the classical European Enlightenment definition, or some elements of each. The European definition referred more to virtue, describing a state of being good versus feeling good. As Jeffrey Rosen, the President and CEO of the National Constitution Center writes in his book, *The Pursuit of Happiness*, "...happiness meant being a lifelong learner, with a commitment to practicing the daily habits that lead to character improvement, self-mastery, flourishing and growth."[40] As David Brooks similarly observes, this understanding of happiness is required to sustain a civil society and democracy:

> "America's Founding Fathers understood that when private virtue fails, then relationships fail and the constitutional order crumbles. The crucial struggle of our time is not merely the global macro struggle between democracy and authoritarianism;

> it's the day-to-day micro-contest between the forces that honor human dignity and those that spread dehumanization."[41]

And while this is true, there is even more at stake than virtue according to many First Nations, who hold "happiness" as well-being brought about by the harmony of our individual and collective identity, the unity of our spiritual, energetic, emotional, and physical experience. Frank Bracho, a scholar of indigenous culture throughout the Americas who synthesized the indigenous wisdom of peoples, such as the Waraos, Piaroa, Arawak and Maya, states:

> "Happiness can be understood as a state of satisfaction or contentment and well-being, based on our natural identity. Insofar as our natural identity is concerned, it is generally accepted that we human beings are matter and spirit, body and soul, depending on what we want to call our two characteristic identity components: the dense and the subtle. Well-being's dimension in the concept of happiness refers to the more physical, dense and external aspects of our being. While satisfaction/contentment's dimension would refer to the more spiritual, more subtle and inner aspects of our identity."[42]

The European understanding of happiness and practice of virtue can be seen as the connective tissue that binds spirit and matter and collective and individual identity. However, while the indigenous actually practiced the virtues and had the multi-dimensional experience of happiness, those opining in the salons of Europe likely faced greater difficulty, due to their collective trauma, hierarchical societies, and exploitative political economies.

Further, it was common knowledge among those who worked with the First Nations that they were significantly happier by Western standards. As Arthur Barlowe, one of Sir Walter Raleigh's captains observed in Roanoke, "We found the people the most gentle, loving, and faithful, void of all guile and treason and such as lived after the manner of the Golden Age."[43] As Jefferson noted, "I am convinced that those societies [natives]... enjoy in their general mass an infinitely greater degree of happiness than those who live under European governments."[44] As Franklin observed "happiness is more

generally and equally diffused among savages..."[45] Even Christopher Columbus observed that the people he encountered, raped, tortured, enslaved, and murdered – the Taino – "...are the best people in the world, and the sanest. They love their neighbors as themselves. They are faithful and do not covet what others have... their speech is always sweet and gentle, accompanied by a smile."[46]

Further, in a recently unearthed 1942 paper from pioneering psychologist Abraham Maslow, we now understand what the cultures and personalities of the original caretakers of this land were like. Maslow spent the summer of 1938 with the Siksika Blackfoot in Alberta, Canada, one of the few relatively intact native communities at the time. These people had yet to be decimated by poverty, alcohol, and the assimilation policies of the Canadian government and Christian Church. Maslow found a society with remarkable happiness, freedom, self-esteem and security; he surmised that 70-80% of the Blackfoot people were more secure than the top 5% most secure Westerners. He discovered that they had:

> "...feelings of being liked and loved; the perception of the world as a warm and friendly place; a tendency to expect good to happen; feelings of calm, ease, and relaxation; self-acceptance; a desire for adequacy with respect to problems rather than for power over people; 'social interest' (in the Adlerian sense); cooperativeness; kindliness; interest in other; and sympathy... Children are not humiliated by their parents as they are in our society... Inferior men are not humiliated by superior men, nor are the poor humiliated by the rich... The typical personality of the Northern Blackfoot Indian is one characterized by dignity and friendliness and containing little insecurity, suspicion, envy, jealousy, antagonism and hostility or anxiety..."[47]

It is perhaps no surprise that European colonialists preferred the life, liberty, and happiness of First Nation societies. When they were captured in battle by First Nations' people and then given the opportunity to return, they overwhelmingly chose to stay among the natives. Even captured children,

when confronted with their biological parents, chose to stay with their indigenous captors[48]. As Benjamin Franklin observed,

> "...when white persons of either sex have been taken prisoner young by the Indians, and lived a while among them, tho' ransomed by their Friends, and treated with all imaginable tenderness to prevail with them to stay among the English, yet in a short time they become disgusted with our manner of life, and the care and pains that are necessary to support it, and take the first opportunity of escaping again into the Woods, from whence there is no reclaiming them."[49]

So what does this mean for us in the world we now inhabit? If we're so inclined – and wealthy enough – we can buy a homestead, live off the land, start a community, seek native teachers, and listen to the teachings of Nature's God. But most of us are not so inclined or wealthy. Regardless of whether we're inclined or wealthy, we can also leverage a scientifically-validated best practice right here and now in society to swiftly, substantially, and sustainably improve our happiness.

The last 20 years of positive psychology research has revealed that "happiness" is best and most sustainably realized through fulfilling endeavors versus gratifying endeavors.[50] Fulfillment is the net effect of taking actions over time at home, in our relationships, at work, and in the community that are authentic to us (aligned with our purpose) and have a generative impact on others. To take actions that are fulfilling, we need to know what fulfills us. Here, again, purpose plays a foundational role. The purpose activation process is what allows us to know how we are uniquely called to impact others and be creatively fulfilled. The result is that people who have a strong connection to their purpose are 64% more likely to be fulfilled,[51] have happier marriages[52], and stronger social networks.[53] So our concept of "happiness" must include being sourced in our unique purpose.

The centrality of a life purpose is found across cultures[54], for example, the Mayan notion of *Nawal*: "...Happiness and complete fulfillment in life are achieved by carrying through the work or function given to us at the moment of conception and birth... No one comes to the world because he wants to

come, say the Elders, who wisely assure us that we all have a mission to fulfill in life; a role to play to benefit humanity. Every human being has a Nawal that defines a particular personality and makes him different from other persons... the life-mission will depend, then, on his qualities, aptitudes, virtues and defects as ruled by his Nawal, which is not more than a divinity that guides and helps the individual. It is his gift, his donation, his responsibility, and if he should resign the mission, he would fall sick, or worst of all, would die."[55] Purpose is not a nice-to-have, but critical to life itself, as Jesus begged us to consider in the Gospel of Thomas: "If you bring forth what is within you, what you bring forth will save you. If you do not bring forth what is within you, what you do not bring forth will destroy you."[56]

Additionally, recent neuroscience research reveals that we literally suffer when others are suffering,[57] so alleviating or protecting people from suffering increases our ability to be happy and fulfilled. Perhaps this is due to our empathy or perhaps it is because we are interconnected with all that is, as quantum entanglement suggests.

Further, connection to and immersion in wild nature has shown to make us feel greater *eudamonia*, meaning, connection, contentment, and peace.[58] This also echoes Native wisdom, such as that of Chief Luther Standing Bear, who said "The old Lakota was wise. He knew that man's heart, away from nature, becomes hard; he knew that lack of respect for growing, living things soon led to lack of respect for humans too. So he kept his children close to Nature's softening influence."[59] Therefore, we must make service to others in need, interconnection, and immersion in wild nature part of our concept and fulfillment of "happiness".

As we've explored previously, the *Kaianerekowa*, was not just a framework for rights, governance, and diplomacy, but was the expression of a culture of liberty, equality, and happiness, a culture that required rites and rituals, that connected each person to themselves, the land, each other, and Nature's God. As James Adair observed in *The History of the American Indians* in 1775: "Their whole constitution breathes nothing but liberty; and when there is equality of condition, manners, and privileges, as there is in every Indian nation... there glows such a cheerfulness and warmth of courage, as

cannot be described."[60] In this sense, to become fully alive, free, and happy, we have to develop similar rites, rituals, and practices as the First Nations, activate our purpose, develop deep connections, serve those in need, immerse ourselves in nature, and become truly, deeply American.

> "The real epic of America is the yet unfinished story of the Americanization of the white man."[61] **Felix Cohen**

As we all know, our government has not made good on its promise to ensure our rights to life, liberty, and happiness. Given that happiness is a critical part of our purpose and knowing that we're incredibly capable people who want to be happy – why haven't we rioted? Perhaps, we've just been ignorant of what happiness is. Perhaps, *wetiko* has blinded us to the existence of real happiness or the proven means of delivering it, such as through purpose, nature, service, etc. Perhaps, it is because happiness is bad for business. If being unhappy is our baseline, our orphanages can sell us unlimited bits of pseudo-happiness. Regardless of the causes, to right this wrong, we will need more than a devotion to equality and a clear understanding of life, liberty, and happiness. We will need to activate democracy's spirit-layer - "*E Pluribus Unum*".

Summary

- Life is inherently social, inclusive, interdependent, and requires safety, socialization, and sustenance.
- Liberty and happiness require us to initiate a move from our socialized to authentic self by activating our unique life purpose.
- Purpose, connection, service, and nature are the keys to our happiness, fulfillment, and well being.

Discussion / reflection prompts

- On a scale of 1-100, with 100 being the most free and 1 being the least free, how free are you really? Why?
- On a scale of 1-100, with 100 being the most happy and 1 being the least happy, how happy are you really? Why?
- How would your life be different if we optimized our society, economy, and government for "Life, Liberty, and the Pursuit of Happiness"?

Part 8

E Pluribus Unum

"...to provide for our posterity... to doe Justly, to love mercy... wee must be knit together in the worke as one man, wee must entertaine each other in brotherly Affeccion, wee must be willing to abridge our selves of our superfluities, for the supply of others necessities, wee must uphold a familiar Commerce together in all meeknes, gentlenes, patience and liberallity, wee must delight in each other, make others Condicions our owne, rejoice together, mourne together, labour and suffer together, allwayes haveing before our eyes our Commission and Community in the worke, our Community as members of the same body, soe shall wee keepe the unitie of the spirit in the bond of peace... wee shall be as a Citty upon a Hill, the eies of all people are uppon us: soe that if wee shall deale falsely with our god in the worke wee have undertaken and soe cause him to... shame the faces of many of gods worthy servants, and cause theire prayers to be turned into Cursses..."[1] **John**

Winthrop, 1630, aboard the Arbella en route to New England

"I have so much faith in the general government of the world by Providence, that I can hardly conceive a transaction of such momentous importance to the welfare of millions... should be suffered to pass without being in some degree influenc'd, guided and governed by that omnipotent, omnipresent and beneficent Ruler."[2] **Benjamin Franklin**

"We hold these truths to be sacred and undeniable..." **Thomas Jefferson, in an early draft of the Declaration of Independence, 1776**

"This country cannot afford to be materially rich and spiritually poor." **President John F. Kennedy**

Before we move into the spirit layer of our democracy, "*E Pluribus Unum"*, we need to illuminate the role that faith plays in our lives and the origin of our nation. Although our Constitution explicitly forbids the state establishing an official religion, the faith and spiritual life of the Framers, which varied from religious rationalism to deism to Freemasonry to Christianity, greatly informed their work. While the Framers refused to allow any specific mention of religion other than the novel term "Nature's God", spirituality was implied in, and the overarching context for, the establishment of our government. This part seeks to make this connection explicit and personal. As such, what follows may be challenging, especially for those of us who: take issue with religion, have been spiritually abused, are aware of the manner in which *wetiko* has co-opted all religions to wage war and even enact genocide, and/or have not developed a personal spiritual practice or identity. In the way that the *Kaianerekowa* and First Amendment makes room for all faiths and relationships to faith (including the lack thereof), in the way that Unitarian Universalism and reformed Judaism welcome the atheist and agnostic orientations of its members, we, too, make room for it all here in the United States.

Yet, we must also acknowledge that even atheism, scientific materialism, and secular humanism are beliefs. They require believing in the unprovable. For example, atheists willingly choose to ignore or dismiss the vast amount of firsthand testimony, literature, and research on spiritual experience. Scientific materialism cannot isolate and establish the zero-, one-, two- or three-dimensional realities required to validate the experience of the four (height, width, depth, time) or more dimensional (quantum mechanics) reality that we experience. Thus, this, too, is faith. Further, the core practice of the scientific method is not itself solid. Given the Heisenberg Uncertainty Principle and the manner in which subject and object have been shown to be quantumly entangled, they are therefore not separate – rendering the scientific method deeply flawed, as it cannot meet this foundational requirement that it set for itself.

All of us believe in something that we cannot prove. Making meaning of our observed reality or the human condition is endemic to the human condition. Whether we're religious or anti-religious, scientific or anti-scientific, whether we believe in the Flying Spaghetti Monster or the Marvel Universe or the next paycheck or fix, we don't get a pass on meaning-making. All of us believe in and thus worship at least one unprovable idea, whether or not we want to admit it.

As we've explored, our nation is not a religious ethnostate, but rather, a multi-faith, multi-racial, covenantal nation devoted to the idea of equality above all else – in feel, form, and function. A covenant, while not a religion per say, is a matter of faith, like that of a marriage or the spirit of any other contract. A covenant is an active, deliberate binding of oneself to another or others. Unfortunately, only those of us who are naturalized citizens, public servants, first responders, or armed service members have had the opportunity to bind themselves and take their vows to our nation. The rest of us have not been given the opportunity. In this sense, we've left our Framers at the altar. But what exactly are these vows?

To develop our vows and root us in this civic faith, in the Fall of 1776, Franklin, Jefferson, and Adams were tasked by the Continental Congress to create a seal and motto for the new nation. Their efforts failed to produce a

consensus and the committee was disbanded. It took eight more years and two subsequent committees to finalize the seal in 1784 with *E Pluribus Unum* as our motto, suggesting that a great deal of debate (and likely prayer, reflection, counsel, and ritual – as many Founding Fathers were Freemasons and/or deeply connected to their First Nations counterparts) went into divining and consecrating the spirit layer of this new nation.

Perhaps it took eight years, because they were looking for the precise wording that would honor all faith and contemplative traditions, including those without. If that is true, *E Pluribus Unum* (out of many, one) would be a great choice, as it is sourced in ancient and archetypal wisdom – and increasingly our physical sciences. From the West, sages such as St. Augustine, Cicero, and Pythagoras, invite us to become one through love. From Cicero, we understand that: "When each person loves the other as much as himself, it makes one out of many" (*unus fiat ex pluribus*). This is the open tent of Abraham, the orphan at home with Muhammad. It is *ubuntu* (Bantu: "I am because we are"*), Tat tvam asi* (Hindu: "I am that") *Mitákuye Oyás'iŋ* (Lakota: "all my relations"), and *en lak ech hala ken* (Maya: "I am you. You are me."), *Mainū kōʻī ajanabī nazara nahīṁ āʻundā. Mainū kōʻī duśamaṇa nazara nahīṁ āʻundā* (Sikh: "I see no stranger. I see no enemy."). It is the Bible's call to "love thy neighbor as thyself". It is worth noting that the power of this wisdom is a two-fold expression. It is a realization of love of others AND of self.

These are nice sentiments and a worthy goal, but these are not our lived experience. This is not how our political-economy functions. It's not how we scroll, return shopping carts, or drive during rush hour. So how do we make it real? This depends on how we understand and frame the problem of lovelessness in our lives. We cannot love anyone that we do not truly know. We cannot love ourselves until we deeply, wholly know ourselves. To fulfill this love, this spiritual aspect of our national purpose, it is incumbent upon each of us to develop the necessary self-love that can only come from inner work, from personal and spiritual development. Here, again, we are called to turn to practices such as healing the traumas of our past, engaging in self-reflection, purpose activation processes, shadow integration work, contemplative practices, experiencing other cultures / travel, and receiving

ongoing reflection of trusted mentors and elders who are further along the journey. Once established in our own wholeness, we can love ourselves fully, warts and all, access the ability to see the dignity and beauty in others, and truly love others as much as we love ourselves.

When we take this task on, we become the expression of *agape*, the ancient Greek notion of universal love and divine goodwill towards all (including ourselves). Beyond *eros* (romantic love) and *philia* (brotherly love), the Greeks understood *agape* to be the highest expression of love, expressing the divine and deeply interconnected nature of reality in thought, word, and deed. From this place, we unlock what the Judeo-Christian and Buddhist traditions practice as compassion, and the Hindu practices of *karma* (service to those in need) and *bhakti* (worshiping the divine in all). Thus, "*E Pluribus Unum"* is not just a phrase on our paper and coins, but an active, guiding, and lifelong spiritual practice that amplifies the world's soul, and honors its diverse peoples and faiths. Beginning at home, with ourselves.

Unfortunately, the power and meaning of "*E Pluribus Unum*" fell from view over time as *wetiko* defiled our national character through human trafficking, forced labor camps, native genocide, bison and whale specicide, Manifest Destiny, rape culture, Jim Crow, etc. To mark our fall from grace, as part of our Cold War / Red and Pink Scare propaganda efforts to conflate heteronormative Christianity, capitalism, and democracy, in 1956 we changed our motto to "In God We Trust". This dark spiritual coup legitimized our shadows and laid the foundation for a white corporate "Christian" ethnostate.[3] This is obviously a faithless violation of our covenant, our founding documents, our Great Seal, the 1st Amendment, the *Kaianerekowa*, and Bison Medicine. While that was not our fault because we weren't there, we have the opportunity and the obligation to stop white Christian nationalism and the megafunders who believe that God wants the U.S. to be a Christian nation.[4]

It is time to push back against our corrupt and faithless *wetiko* masquerading as religion and history. It is time to resurrect and recommit to our first principles, and re-establish them as an explicit article of faith. As our Framers understood, "*E Pluribus Unum*" is the third layer of democracy, the spirit

level, that completes our nation's holy trinity (along with "all... created equal" / mind and "Life, Liberty, and the Pursuit of Happiness" / body) that is required to sustain our democracy. With this third layer our state can truly become a nation. We need more than a shared history, more than a working democratic government, more than principles; we need an active civic faith.

While our nation intends and aspires to honor all faith traditions and communities – and those without faith traditions – here in the United States, there is also an omnipresent, inclusive, binding, and spiritual task of our covenant. As Whitman, Melville, and Dickinson showed us, when we discover, love, and integrate all parts of ourselves, we become whole, a full, loving, and upright adult, capable of vocation, integrity, and agency. Similarly, when we love all others as much as ourselves, we become whole and united as a nation. When we do both, we will become the United States enfleshed, fulfilling our covenant with a loving faith, honoring of, and unified in, our diversity.

Josiah Royce, John Lewis, and Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. described the world available to us within this faith as "beloved community" – meaning that love is the primary state and currency of all our relations. In King's speeches and writing, he illuminated a vivid loving picture, suggesting that *E Pluribus Unum* is the "mountaintop", the goal of our nation and humanity itself – where we love each other, where all are actively and ongoingly created equal, where justice prevails, and every person who calls this nation home has dignity, belongs, and has the rites, rights, and resources to fulfill their unique potential. As Dr. King said:

> "In a real sense all life is interrelated. All... are caught in an inescapable network of mutuality, tied in a single garment of destiny. Whatever affects one directly, affects all indirectly. I can never be what I ought to be until you are what you ought to be, and you can never be what you ought to be until I am what I ought to be... This is the interrelated structure of reality."[4]

It wasn't just the Lakota, Haudenosaunee, Transcendentalists and our civil rights leaders who saw this mountaintop, believed in it, and worked tirelessly

towards a more perfect union. This vision is also available to us if we open our hearts and soften our eyes. Whether we find ourselves in the valleys, or on the plains, deserts, shores, or streets, *E Pluribus Unum* is always here, waiting for us to do the inner work and experience this greatest of loves. It's there on cross-country road trips, basketball courts in Harlem, soccer pitches in Florida, at harvest festivals in Illinois, in basic training at Fort Liberty, at vigils in Oakland, and at Unitarian Universalist Churches, YMCA's, DMV's, karaoke bars, open mic nights, and county fairs throughout the nation. It's here. It's real and it's ours if we soften our eyes, open our souls, receive it, and devote ourselves to it. And we must make it our lasting expression, our legacy, the spiritual purpose that our society, economy, and government must fulfill for all of life here, and on behalf of all of humanity.

Summary

- *"E Pluribus Unum"* resonates with, welcomes, and amplifies every spiritual tradition.
- *"E Pluribus Unum"* is democracy's spirit layer, the third leg of the stool, without which our Republic will not stand.
- *"E Pluribus Unum"* requires that we first love ourselves, by healing our wounds, activating our purpose, and becoming whole, and then meeting each other with love, understanding, and devotion.

Discussion / reflection questions

- What moment or place most spiritually connected/s you to our nation?
- What do you need to let go of in order to fully love yourself?
- What beliefs and judgments do you need to transform in order to love your fellow country folk as much as yourself?

Part 9

Bison Medicine Protocol

"Delight is to him—a far, far upward, and inward delight—who against the proud gods and commodores of this earth, ever stands forth his own inexorable self... Delight is to him, who gives no quarter in the truth, and kills, burns, and destroys all sin..." **Herman Melville**

"...if the soul of the nation is to be saved, I believe that you must become its soul." **Coretta Scott King**

With this understanding of our nation's covenant, we must now **open our hearts** to the humanity, dignity, and potential of all people who call this land home, **create structures and policies that repair** the sins of our past and present and **provide** actual safety, equity, and flourishing in our communities, demonstrating in full that in this nation is where each person loves the other as much as themself. For any of this to happen, **we need an inspiring and robust vision, guided by the symbolic power and medicine of the bison** to complete our shared mission.

What would it feel like if we all were safe, secure, on purpose, healed, prosperous, educated, creatively expressed in our careers, connected to our communities, civically engaged, and immersed in the natural world? What would be possible if we felt and experienced goodwill towards all in every aspect of our lives? What would be possible if each community was the full expression of "All Created Equal", "*E Pluribus Unum,*" and "Life, Liberty, and the Pursuit of Happiness"? How would you feel if isolation, polarization, poverty, hunger, obesity, homelessness, racism, rape, pollution, imperialism, and police terror were nothing but a distant memory from our misspent youth?

What if the vision in each human heart was realized? I'd like to begin exploring this question with a story. Having led purpose work for tens of thousands of people around the world, I have never encountered a vision for the world that was evil. I've never seen a purpose about hate or domination or exploitation. Whether high school students, CEOs, tradespeople, defense contractors, church folk, Marines, or homemakers, every single person I've worked with has a life-giving, peaceful, loving vision for humanity in their hearts.

In 2019 I was invited to the Monroe Correctional Complex, just outside of Seattle, to lead a half-day purpose exploration for a population of 60 protected inmates. Because of their identities and/or crimes, they could not be held in the general population. Among them were rapists, drug traffickers, gang members, transgender folks, pedophiles, and murderers. After completing an exercise to reveal what most breaks their hearts and discern

what kind of world would heal their heartbreak, each of these 60 souls stood and delivered their visions for the world. Each vision was breathtaking; many produced tears, demonstrating to all of us in that room that no human is without love, forgiveness, and beauty in their hearts. Each of these souls reminded us that none of us is beyond redemption. As Bryan Stevenson observed, "Each of us is more than the worst thing we've done." We are far more.

With this in mind and with Bison Medicine and the purpose of our nation in our hearts, allow me to offer a draft vision for our nation at the most tangible felt level:

- **We are all healthy.** We breathe clean air, drink clean water, eat healthy food, move our bodies, and have equal access to health-enhancing opportunities.
- **We are all safe.** We are free from violence, poverty, oppression, hunger, pollution, and disease, and the threat of violence, poverty, oppression, hunger, pollution, and disease.
- **We all belong.** Our dignity is recognized and we are cared for in our families, neighborhoods, communities, and workplaces.
- **We are all actualized/ing.** We are healing/ed, sourced by our unique life purpose and creatively and sustainably express it in our civic, vocational, leisure, and community endeavors.
- **We all enjoy life.** We are immersed in Nature and relish the illimitable ecological, cultural, scientific, and creative expressions of our diverse nation.
- **We all have faith.** We love and believe in our fellow Americans and our government to: fulfill our nation's purpose, secure our rights and the conditions for all of us to flourish, ensure free and fair elections, and enact legislation that meets the moment, that meaningfully addresses our polycrisis, and continually expands our ability to flourish.

- **All of our children thrive.** We have become a fantastic place to have a child, to be a child, with each of us growing into a whole, joyous, healthy, connected, and inspired adult.
- **All of our elders thrive.** We have become a fantastic place to elder. Our fully actualized adults have matured into elders, are a part of our daily lives, are revered and celebrated, and play numerous critical roles to guide us into an even more flourishing future.
- **We are all inspired.** We are spiritually sustained by our shared purpose and our progress towards fulfilling it; we are a beacon of inspiration to people and governments the world over.

Even though the vision in your heart may be worded differently or include other important elements, most folks want some version of this world. Take a moment to draft your own vision, replacing these elements with your own or adding missing elements (e.g., We all wake up fully rested; We all savor each day's sunset with our closest friends and family; We all continue to have the best sex of our lives; We all are surprised and delighted by the human excellence we witness throughout the day; We pause to connect with every person and experience loving kindness towards them; We all have turned our eyes towards the skies, having solved earth's problems, and venture boldly into the great unknown; etc.). Please don't move on until this vision feels real, personal, and resonant for you.

We all...

We all...

We all...

We all...

We all...

Thank you for adding your unique contribution to our collective vision.

What would it take for these sentiments to be instinctual? Such that we could keep the faith, hold firm, and withstand the sneakiness of *wetiko* – our

shadows of arrogance, ignorance, fear, bigotry, violence, greed, excess, bullying, untrustworthiness?

There is a cure, a path, a protocol. When we activate our personal purpose, we take the first and most important step towards wholeness, towards the bison, towards our nation's great purpose. Our identity shifts from a self that is socialized and fashioned by our *wetiko* society to our authentic self. We become centered in our purpose instead of our caste and orphanage. We have access to the motivation needed to embody and integrate our purpose in every area of our lives: health, home, love, family, community, career, finances, and our spiritual life.

While this journey begins with purpose work, it also requires years of other healing and transformative modalities. Progressing along our purpose journey, we will discover and heal wounds. We will transform beliefs and behaviors that are out of alignment with our purpose. As we've explored, the impact of embodying and activating our personal purpose over time, is that we thrive biologically, psychologically, socially, spiritually, and economically. The impact is that we fulfill and amplify "Life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness" in our lives.

As we've learned, it is also a great service to others. When we activate our personal purpose, we are able to find an authentic connection to larger sources of meaning, such as those in our relationships, neighborhoods, faith community, our company's mission and values, or our nation's purpose. Having awakened purpose in ourselves, we unlock the spirit layer of our national purpose ("*E Pluribus Unum*"), opening our hearts, and letting us see that others also have dignity, purpose, unique gifts, and the right to fulfill their full potential.

We become better friends, coworkers, lovers, parents, siblings, and members of civil society. Through the increased levels of prosocial attributes that purpose delivers, which we've explored in previous chapters (wisdom, inclusion, compassion, gratitude, generativity, personal growth, integrity, other-centeredness, forgiveness, empathy, self-reflection, and conscientiousness), we become our own unique expression of "All created equal". We become the steady prayer and the walking meditation of "*unus*

fiat ex pluribus", experiencing unity as we love each other as much as ourselves.

Just as important as the personal and collective benefits of purpose is the discovery of the map of our own heart. As we start to trace the contours of our ego's parts (critic, skeptic, risk manager, image consultant, wounded child, etc.) and soul[1], of our shadows and our wounds, we develop a detailed map of our inner world. While this map is unique to each of us, it also allows us to understand the maps of others better as we navigate our relationships. We can feel what's real and true in our own hearts, each other, and in society. We know when we're driven by *wetiko* and when others are driven by it. We know when we're doing something that is aligned with our souls and when we aren't. Similarly, this inner map helps us see what beliefs and behavior serve our collective soul, and which ones do not.

This inner map allows us to meet each other with compassion, seeing that everyone is doing the best they can given their access to resources, support, and their level of inner development. As the old parenting wisdom goes, children need the most love when they are the hardest to love. Similarly, a grown up is the age they are acting like in that moment and needs the appropriate type of love for their behavior / momentary age. Inside every act of anger is a two-year old whose agency and autonomy isn't respected. Inside every act of selfishness is a four-year old who won't share her toys with her friend. Inside every act of rebelliousness is a teen trying to meet their needs for love and acceptance. And every face tattoo, cosmetic surgery procedure, and luxury brand reveals a soul aching for love and acceptance, asking to have their gifts valued by true adults and wizened mentors.

Yet, as we've explored, we are a social / herd species who are by default *groupish,* so being the only one with a sense of purpose, while foundational, is insufficient. We need purpose-centric community or purpose-friendly environments to actually live our purpose; and only a teeny tiny percentage of us have these. If we don't have these communities and environments, we will either recapitulate to the norms and identities of our *wetiko* castes and orphanages, or we will be ejected. Both of which are painful and suboptimal

outcomes – a desecration of your purpose, our nation's purpose, Bison Medicine, and our mammalian nature.

> "We have all known the long loneliness and have learned that the only solution is love and that love comes with community." **Dorothy Day**

To guide us to firmly fulfill our purpose, let's reflect on the teaching of another powerful being: the butterfly and its transformation from a caterpillar. The caterpillar is about as *wetiko* as metaphor can be. It is a larva that voraciously consumes until it can no longer stay awake. It then weaves a cocoon for a "nap". Inside this cocoon, the caterpillar dissolves its entire body into a gooey toxic mess. Then an imaginal cell of the pupal butterfly is formed, but it is not long for the world. The gooey toxic mess kills it. Then two imaginal cells form, and the gooey toxic mess kills them. Then four cells form, then eight, etc. until they have sufficient strength in numbers, link together, cooperate, and stave off the toxicity. Together they form a base camp, receiving and integrating the rest of the imaginal cells as they emerge. These cells eventually become the pupa, growing wings, abdomen, legs, etc. The fully developed pupa then breaks the cocoon to become a butterfly, spending its remaining days serving, pollinating, delighting, flying, mating, and laying eggs.

While this whole process is magical and wondrous, the part that has the greatest relevance to this moment is the relationship between the imaginal cells and the gooey toxic mess. The imaginal cells (soul) are created in the tension of the gooey toxic mess (*wetiko*). Yet they cannot survive alone. The emerging imaginal cells need each other to normalize their new butterfly identities, cooperate, and defend themselves against the gooey toxic mess (*wetiko*). The same is true for humans. If we only activate our purpose, then *wetiko* will crush or eject us. We need to activate our purpose with other people. As such, Bison Medicine is a two-part protocol, including both purpose activation and a community of peers on purpose. We have to activate our individual purpose in community with others who are also activating their purpose, in order for our purpose transformation to reach its

fullness and have a lasting effect. Think diet AND exercise, vitamin C AND zinc, self-expression AND compassion, liberty AND equality.

Unfortunately, few of us have experienced a true community or are aware that true community exists. Virtually all networks, associations, neighborhoods, religious institutions, organizations, and clubs in our nation are just groups, not true communities. Most are simply affinity groups or transactional networks, composed of people who do not know their purpose, seek personal gain or pleasure, and derive their identity from the group's norms, shadows, codes, symbols, and regalia. This is another way of saying that these groups are frequently defined by what they are *not*, and in many instances, which people or castes they stand *against*.

As knowing our individual purpose alone is insufficient to live our purpose individually or collectively, simply being a member of a group is also insufficient. Perhaps one of the greatest lessons we can learn from the 1960s is that well-intended groups that don't activate individual purpose is a recipe for disaster. While awesome, the rock'n'roll, free love, LSD, and gurus of the 60s lacked a purpose activation plan and community of transparency and accountability. As such, they could not stave off the many faces of *wetiko*.

> "I have seen that we cannot fully create effective movements for social change if individuals struggling for that change are not also self-actualized or working towards that end." - **bell hooks**

While student protests played a pivotal role in ending the Vietnam War and expanding civil rights, the vast majority of this generation quickly recapitulated to forces of *wetiko*. After they turned on, tuned in, and dropped out, they wanted back into the status quo. They got married, cut their hair, finished their degrees, and suited up for a role in the orphanages. Those who didn't want back in, started or joined cults – where *wetiko* roamed freely and evolved into new forms within the prophet and among the followers. And almost always, with spectacularly disastrous results (e.g., Jonestown).

As such, any well-intended group that does not empower people to activate their unique personal purpose, fulfill their potential, find their unique

connection to the group's purpose and values, and build authentic connections with others at the soul level, isn't a true community, but a breeding ground for *wetiko*. More bluntly, groups that don't help their members activate their unique purpose in community desecrate the purpose of our nation, denying the authentic self-expression, potential, and thriving of their members, and codifying existing group polarization and inequities within their groups and outside of them. As such, all groups and organizations must be reformed and reimagined with purpose activation and belonging at the center of their members' experience.

While we can bring our purpose and gifts to any conversation, there are some environments that have a greater role to play in empowering us to live our unique purpose and fulfill the stated purpose of our nation. Given that we spend 2,000 hours a year at work, with an average tenure of 4 years,[2] and spend one-third of our lives at work, the workplace is the #1 place to activate purpose and belonging. Although the United States continues to get more diverse over time, it is also becoming more segregated.[3] The result is that for most of us, the workplace is our main experience of diversity – and for many of us, it is our *only* experience of diversity.

While some of us may attend a diverse church or play in sports leagues with diverse folks, we spend a paltry 20-100 hours a year in these environments, or 1-5% as much time as we spend at work. For a multi-racial nation with a purpose as bold, loving, and inclusive as ours, all roads lead through the workplace. It is where we spend our time. It is where we regularly receive onboarding, communications, career development, and leadership training. It is where we regularly interact with people who are not like us. While legacy DEI programs have historically been expensive and ineffective,[4] and have become now a cultural third rail and activist investor issue,[5] creating a culture of purpose and belonging actually delivers the intended effect of DEI and the purpose of our nation, but without vilifying white folks in the process.

The good news is that all company stakeholders benefit from purpose activation. In chapters 4, 5, and 6 of *Purpose Work Nation*, I shared the purpose and belonging business case: Purpose-driven companies outperform the market 15:1[6] and their peers 12:1.[7] They experience a 125-225% increase

in productivity.[8] a 30% increase in innovation,[9] a 7.4 month increase in tenure,[10] and a doubling of company valuation over five years.[11] I also shared best practices for scalable culture change, and a suggested approach to begin. If you are eager to begin the purpose and belonging journey in your organization, please reach out to Unity Lab (http://unitylab.co) or any of my colleagues in the Global Purpose Leaders (http://globalpurposeleaders.org).

But we, of course, shouldn't stop at developing purpose and belonging in the workplace. Every context, relationship, and interaction needs to be on purpose, face its *wetiko* and reform. Beyond work, there are groups that are more friendly to purpose and belonging. Unitarian Universalist churches have a friendly relationship to the stated purpose of the nation, in that they honor folks who have walked spiritual and soul paths from all traditions, welcome all peoples, genders, creeds, races, sexualities, faiths or lack thereof, abilities, and paths, and exist to connect their members with Nature's God, each other, pro-social ethics and social and ecological justice practices. Additionally, many mutual aid networks, inner city PTAs, interfaith coalitions, and YMCAs have a similar orientation towards equality, inclusion and collective thriving. Many men's and women's organizations – such as the ManKind Project and Woman Within – have similar values, aspirations, and practices.

This is sadly, a very short list, representing at most 5% of groups in any given area. That said, even most organizations on this short list do not center or cultivate personal purpose or soul-level connections among their members. By default, this sets these groups in opposition to other groups, non-members, as well as within the groups themselves, (e.g., old members vs. new members, poor vs. rich, men vs. women, etc.) and at cross-purposes with the nation. This doesn't serve their members, the thriving of their communities, or society, and opens the door to *wetiko*. So, these organizations must also center the activation of purpose and belonging in their member experience.

To activate Bison Medicine, you'll need to choose or join a group to engage with. Once you choose an organization or group, you'll need to activate your purpose with three other members of the group (more on this in the Conclusion). After you complete this journey, just like the butterfly, you will

have established a soulful base camp, a cabal of soul-deputized conspirators. As Paul Levy illuminates, this is a group of "killer T-cells", "antipsychotic agents" who are the immune response of our collective soul that heals the soul sickness / *wetiko* that has invaded it. Together we "come together so as to create the necessary external structure to contain... [*wetiko*], keeping it from going rogue, and going out of control. Connecting with each other through our shared lucidity, we can collaboratively help each other to stabilize and deepen our mutual awakening. How this would look in our collective body politic as we wake up together we can only imagine."[12]

If you wish to see a faster transformation of your group or organization, you must be strategic and engage your purpose activated basecamp in a discussion about what it would take to have purpose and belonging become the new normal. Once your group is clear and aligned, together your basecamp can begin transforming the larger entity. As each organization or group is different, there is no one-size-fits-all approach to a purposeful transformation for your group or organization. Culture change books such as *Leading Without Authority*, *Culture Code*, and *Change*, can guide your exploration and help you formulate your plan. If you'd like help envisioning the path forward for your organization or group, reach out to me or any of my colleagues in the Global Purpose Leaders.

And this is just the beginning. Once there is a critical mass of purpose-activated souls in an organization or group, they have the opportunity to substantially reform it. Research suggests that critical mass is 25% of a population,[13] after which a belief or behavior or developmental achievement (e.g., purpose and belonging) becomes the norm over time. With this critical mass met in an organization or our nation, the next stage of the work begins.

We can then operationalize the movement. We can certify organizations led by Bison Medicine, stand up bison-led private equity and consulting firms to accelerate the transition to a bison-led economy, stand up a media organization to present current events through the lens of our nation's purpose / Bison Medicine, stand up charter schools and communities to practice Bison Medicine, and generate other bison-led social engineering projects, to exemplify what it actually looks like to fulfill our nation's

purpose (see Appendix A). With a critical mass and multiple examples of communities, organizations and municipalities guided by Bison Medicine, we can take on fulfilling our nation's purpose at the federal level, such as through a Constitutional Convention (see Appendix B).

Summary

- Each of us brings something unique to the shared vision of our future.
- We have a two-part protocol to begin this journey: purpose and belonging in true community.
- After we engage with the two-part protocol, we have a team we can collaborate with to expand our impact and support each other as soulful conspirators.

Discussion / reflection prompts

- What aspects of our shared future do you take issue with? What fears arise? What "yeah buts" do you need to name?
- In which of your alumni, career, neighborhood, or spiritual groups do you want to begin the purpose and belonging journey? Who are the three people you will ask to join you?
- Picture yourself at the end of a purpose and belonging journey with your group. With no constraints around resources, time, power, or what's happened in the past, what possibilities would you love to help realize?

Conclusion

"The kinship of the soul begins with your own, at times, withering self-examination."

Ken Burns

Many hearts make light work. While our task is great, if we all do our part by activating our purpose, nurturing belonging, and sharing this adventure with our local alumni, career, work, neighborhood, and spiritual groups, we will reach the mountaintop together. It will take time. We must be patient. As should be clear by now, this isn't a matter of an election cycle, or even a generation. It's bigger, deeper, longer, and far more important than any of us.

As matters of the heart are a long game, matters of a nation are infinite. As we end this leg of our journey together, let us breathe in the invitation from the beginning...

Feel this work as an invitation from love, to love, in the spirit of love,

As love itself, seeking to unfold in every imaginable way.

In tender embrace, in the sweet sense that all is well, safe, and joyful, that 40 houses in every direction from you is the unfolding of love.

A love enfleshed, a love in awe of Nature's God, her wonders, her mysteries, her deep longing for you and all life to become and express love fully in every form.

Feel this from the deepest place in your heart that yearns to be free, loved, and supported,

That yearns for all to be free, loved, and supported.

Feel this as a marriage proposal from this land, from the bison, to love each other as much as we love ourselves,

To stand in our dignity, agency, and nobility, as the bison do, as a keystone species who make life flourish for all.

Feel this as a completing love, one with wide eyes upon truth and wild eyes upon our ideals and potential, upon all that is beautiful and broken, on all that can be known, on all that demands blessing, curiosity, and care.

With this feeling in our hearts and wisdom in our bones, let us reflect on our journey. After the softness of this invitation, we confronted a sharp provocation: where we had our lapels grabbed and were thrust against the

wall, where we were yelled at, and begged to meet the questions of this perilous moment...

What if this polycrisis is a necessary catalyst for the United States (and all of humanity) to fully and finally know itself? What if this moment is ripe for a deep remembering of who we really are, who we were before every moment of our days were gobbled up by the grind? What if this is the call for a new national myth? What if, for democracy to work at all, on any level, it must work on all three levels: idea, political economy, and spiritual practice?

Idea: Above all else, we believe and ensure that all are created equal.

Political economy: We secure life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness for all.

Spiritual practice: We love each other as much as ourselves - *E Pluribus Unum.*

The Bison Medicine symbol contains three red stripes and three white stars that represent the three levels of a democracy (idea, political economy, and spiritual practice) that are required for democracy to be realized. The perimeter circle evokes the wholeness, flourishing, connection, and homecoming that we will all experience when we activate our purpose in true community and allow Bison Medicine to heal, guide, and enliven us.

To answer these questions, we began tracing the contours of our family portrait, the shared adventure we've been on since we walked out of Africa. From *ubuntu* to The Golden Rule to *ahimsa* to *en lak ech hala ken* to *ama guaña* to *Mitákuye Oyás'iŋ* to the *Kaianerekowa,* we followed the roots of our Constitution deep down into the human soul. We watched our path blocked at almost every turn by those who found democracy inconvenient to their personal gain.

With eyes trained on truth we met the enemy in the mirror, the *wetiko* inside all of us. We witnessed our orphanages incentivize our worst behavior, exploit us, indoctrinate us into the false belief of superiority and inevitability, implore us with every message and interaction to think of ourselves as solitary

eagles who need to deceive and rob each other in order to survive. Knowing that help isn't coming, knowing we are deep behind enemy lines, we marched into the prairie of possibility in search of a future worthy of our souls.

To guide us on our path we invoked the symbol, power, and medicine of the bison. We marinated upon its teachings: the eight moral molecules of courage, care, inclusion, play, independence, generativity, protection, and redemption. We turned to them to lead us back to ourselves, each other, and our great national purpose. With Bison Medicine in our hearts, and the overwhelming scientific evidence in our hands, we explored what our purpose now means – what it must mean and the actions it now summons us to take. We began with "the central tenet of our ancient faith": "all... created equal". We paused to ask ourselves if we'd let it into our hearts and stand for it. We then boldly crossed this threshold and wedded ourselves to each other.

From here, our science revealed that our national purpose requires us to provide the conditions for all of us to become fully "created" adults. We learned we need 30 years of supportive rites, rights, resources, and relationships to become an adult. We learned that developing a sense of purpose and belonging plays a central role in realizing "Life, Liberty, and the Pursuit of Happiness". We learned that, without civic faith, the spiritual practice of loving each other as much as ourselves, our democracy dies. We completed our journey with a picture of success, our vision fulfilled, and a choice.

Our choice is simple. We either surrender to *wetiko* and cower to the orphanages intent upon the fall of our Republic and the destruction of all life, or to follow the path of the bison by activating our unique life purpose, fulfilling our potential, and loving each other as much as ourselves, in community with others.

Our future is fulfilled when you fulfill your unique life purpose together in community. For yourself and on behalf of the nation, your task now is to take what you've felt, learned, and experienced, and move it into your life, career, relationships, and neighborhood. Your task is to activate your

purpose in true community, to co-create the world you want to live in, right here and now, right where you live and work.

The first step is to find people in your local alumni, career, work, neighborhood, or spiritual group to join you. [Note: If you are one of the many Americans who don't feel a sense of belonging in a community, you are invited to read Appendix F for guidance on how to become enmeshed in a true community.] You need people you know, like, and trust to accompany you on the journey. People who also understand the power of purpose, and are willing to confront the devastating and seemingly inescapable orphanages, who get the stakes of doing nothing, and understand that purpose and belonging liberate and enliven every person and are critical to the survival and flourishing of our nation.

As such, you are encouraged to share Bison Medicine with members of your local alumni, career, work, neighborhood, or spiritual group, and begin a series of book club discussions together. As you recall, each part has three summary take-aways, and three reflection questions to guide you in exploring your relationship to the material. See Appendix C for a guide on setting up your discussion series. Additionally, you can kick off this experience by inviting me to deliver a keynote, author chat, or workshop.

Once your book discussion series is complete, the next step is to activate your purpose and nourish a sense of belonging in your community by beginning a group purpose journey together. You can reach out to any certified purpose or soul practitioner, such as one of my colleagues in the Global Purpose Leaders to guide your group. Or you can engage with a group purpose and belonging journey, such as the Bison Medicine Path (see Appendix D).

Once your small group has completed the journey, you can share your experience with others, and invite them to participate. As we explored, once 25% of any group has a sense of purpose and belonging, it is only a matter of time until purpose and belonging become your culture's new normal, and a host of purposeful ways to heal and transform your culture will be revealed, workshopped, and implemented. Your purpose will guide you to take new actions, launch new projects and relate to others differently. If your purpose allows, you can also co-lead the Bison Medicine movement by launching

bison-led initiatives (a few examples in Appendix A). Send me a note at bisonmedicine.com if you'd like to discuss your idea!

Regardless of what your purpose has in store for you, you will need support and accountability. Your *wetiko* will go along for the ride. The eagle will always be perched on your shoulder. You'll need the support of people who love you enough to question your beliefs and behavior, who know your purpose and stand for you to be the walking, talking, eating, breathing, loving embodiment of your purpose. Men's, women's and all-gendered transformation circles are critical. Mentors are critical. Periodic deep dives into soul, trauma, and shadow work are critical. Spiritual practices are critical. Along the way, you can ask for help and support or share wins by sending me a note at bisonmedicine.com. I look forward to celebrating you and our future together!

It is time to show ourselves, our children, and the world that our purpose is more than just words on a page. Our purpose is a practice, a lived reality, and what President Lincoln decreed to be "The last, best hope of Earth". Let's demonstrate what is possible with a purpose as mighty as ours. We are a nation who, from time to time, does big things, ventures boldly, takes a big idea and runs with it, often doing what other nations can only dream of. Given the stakes, we know that now is such a time.

When we are successful – and we will be – we will have fulfilled the great task of saving the nation. As Lincoln prophesied, "We shall have so saved it, as to make, and to keep it, forever worthy of saving."

Summary

- This book will have the maximum impact on your life and the nation if discussed over time with three other people.
- The path to fulfilling our national purpose begins with you activating your purpose with others.
- Your purpose will guide you to launch and contribute to projects that simultaneously fulfill you and the purpose of our nation.

Discussion / reflection prompts

- Within which group will you choose to have a series of discussions about Bison Medicine?
- What is your plan to discover and activate your purpose?
- What support will you need to embody your purpose and transform your wounds, and your limiting thoughts, beliefs, and behaviors?

Appendix A

Future Expressions of Bison Medicine

Future entity: The Bison Medicine Community (BMC)

The BMC is a community that places the nation's purpose at its center and cultivates Bison Medicine as a way of being. The BMC remedies the lack of true purpose-centric communities (a community defined by a shared common purpose, a devotion to individual purpose activation and fulfillment, and a deliberate effort to nurture belonging), inspires and connects people, provides them tools to activate purpose and belonging in every area of their lives, and develop the skillset to build true purpose-centric communities in their local area / groups.

The BMC gathers virtually twice a month, to reflect, connect, and create. We have special gatherings throughout the year to mark key moments in the development of our nation's soul, in the expansion of "all", during our month-long civic season from June 19th to July 19th:

- June 19th - Juneteenth
- June 25th - Battle of Little Bighorn
- June 28th - Stonewall Riot
- July 2nd - 1964 Civil Rights Act
- July 4th - Independence Day
- July 19th - Seneca Falls Convention

This community has three levels of participation:

1. Graze. Includes a monthly newsletter and private online community to learn and discover information related to our nation's purpose, the bison, and best practices for purpose and belonging;
2. Wallow. A five-week Bison Medicine Path (see Appendix D) program to activate purpose and belonging (offered twice a year in January and September); and
3. Bellow. A two-year program that meets online twice a month and in-person twice a year to activate purpose-driven leadership skills and a purpose-driven organizational transformation.

Future entity: Certified Bison Corporation (CBC)

The CBC is a certification granted to organizations that (A.) activate purpose and belonging for all employees; (B.) grant them at least 25% of the ownership and board seats; and (C.) hold themselves accountable to practicing Bison Medicine in their culture through purpose-driven career pathing and living wages, with their customers, through their living wage, sustainable supply chains, and in the communities / ecologies upon which they depend.

Future entity: Bison-led private equity funds and consulting firms

These firms work with businesses to become a CBC, and double the company's valuation within five years by activating a purpose-driven strategy and culture transformation.

Future entity: The Bison Union

The Bison Union is a Sunday periodical that explores current events through the lens of our nation's purpose and Bison Medicine, exploring which current events promote, secure and expand them, and which events desecrate them. Editorials and opinions follow similar guidelines. Ad-supported by CBC organizations.

Future entity: Public Bison Charter Schools

Public Bison Charter Schools leverage best practices for learning, e.g., Jigsaw Method, small class sizes, student directed learning, social and emotional intelligence, systems thinking, as well as cultivate purpose and belonging / "beloved community" among students, and a devotion to democratic ideals. Civic education includes numerous:

- Books such as *A Documentary History of the United States, The 1619 Project, A People's History of the United States, An Indigenous People's History of the United States, These Truths, Forgotten Founders, Spiritual Democracy, Become America, The Dawn of Everything, Debt: The First 5,000 Years, Patchwork Nation, Natural Capitalism, Upswing, and Healing America's Narratives,*

- Films and series such as *What the Constitution Means to Me, Exterminate All the Brutes, The English, Bury My Heart at Wounded Knee, Where to Invade Next, Lincoln, J. Edgar, Judas and the Black Messiah, Born on the Fourth of July, Oppenheimer, 12 Years a Slave, Best of Enemies, 13th, Harriet, All the President's Men, Roots, Nomadland, 13 Days, Bowling for Columbine, Selma, and American Buffalo,* and
- Field trips to the Grand Canyon, Yosemite, Yellowstone, and Zion National Parks, Washington DC (African American History and Culture Museum, American Indian Museum, Natural History Museum), Minneapolis (American Craft Museum), Detroit (Motown Museum), Montgomery, Alabama (Legacy Museum, National Memorial for Peace and Justice), and South Dakota (Black Hills / Crazy Horse Memorial).

Future entity: Bison Charter Communities

Bison Charter Communities are townships that chose to become islands of sanity, and recharter to practice and embody democratic and humanistic ideals. Thirty families are granted land to collaborate over at least three years to become self-sustaining, with the goals to optimize human potential, belonging, community, and culture, and demonstrate democracy at the most micro / tangible level.

Future entity: The Bison Oath

The Bison Oath is a pledge to center "All... Created Equal" in your life, career, and community, a viral effort to proclaim to those in your life that equality is central to your identity, and that you want to be held accountable to it.

Here is the Oath:

> I believe in and am wedded to ALL CREATED EQUAL. It is what President Lincoln called "the central tenet of our ancient faith", what President Kennedy called "our moral crisis", what President Reagan called "our birthright" and "our heritage",

and what President Obama called our "the most evident of truths", our "God-given promise", and "the star that guides".

I will continually transform everything in my thoughts, beliefs, behaviors, and surroundings that inhibit equality.

I will continually take actions in my family, community, career, and civic life that ensure all people who call this place home have everything they need in their first 30 years of life to be fully created, to fulfill their potential, contribute their gifts, and be justly rewarded.

By taking this vow, I make it known that I ask to be held accountable to living ALL CREATED EQUAL, and encourage my fellow country folk to do so as well.

In solidarity,

Name: _____

Town & State: _____

Date: _____

[Optional] Enter your email (not shared publicly or sold) to receive a badge to share on social media:

_____

[Optional] Invite up to 5 friends to join you in taking the oath, by entering their email addresses here:

_____

Appendix B

A People's Constitutional Convention

"I am not an advocate for frequent changes in laws and constitutions, but laws and institutions must go hand in hand with the progress of the human mind. As that becomes more developed, more enlightened, as new discoveries are made, new truths discovered and manners and opinions change, with the changes of circumstances, institutions must advance also to keep pace with the times." **Thomas Jefferson**

"That song 'We're Not Gonna Take It' came out almost 40 years ago but I feel like we have, in fact, continued to take it." **Michael Ian Black**

As we've explored, now is not the time for denialism, wishful thinking, incrementalism, exodus, or doomsday prepping. That's your *wetiko* talking. That's the eagle squawking. That's what got us here. Now is the time for sober minds, open hearts, and wild eyes. Our nation needs both spiritual and structural reform, not more politics as usual. This is the time for a spiritual revival of our civic religion and a good faith re-imagining of the union. This is the time to psychologically, spiritually, and materially repair the cracks in the foundation of our nation, reconsecrate our purpose and renegotiate the terms to fulfill it.

Make no mistake, this is a time for grand gestures, for our wild-eyed courage and creativity. We've been this way before. We are rebels. It is our way. Just as we created and iterated in the 18th and 19th centuries, in a respiratory rhythm of imagination, deliberation, and feedback – taking inspiration from the *Kaianerekowa* to Canassatego's 1744 speech to the Haudenosaunee and colonial ambassadors, to the Albany Plan in 1754, to our Articles of Association in 1774, to our Declaration of Independence in 1776, to our Articles of Confederation in 1778, to our Constitution in 1787 – we find ourselves in need of another series of rhythmic, respiratory rebirths.

This heritage is neither progressive or conservative, but one that seeks to simply do what we set out to do: fulfill our shared purpose by forming institutions that guarantee the rights and deliver the resources we need for all to be fully "created equal", enjoy "Life, Liberty, and the Pursuit of Happiness", and love others as much as ourselves (*E Pluribus Unum*) – to be a beacon of freedom and flourishing to guide the planet's peoples and governments into their fullness.

As such, it is with a sober mind, heavy heart, and in good faith that we firmly declare our current form of democracy dead. We are a failed state. Our political economy is a mindless automaton of orphanages that persist only because we have forgotten who we are and what we stand for. It persists because we aren't doing our inner work to heal our traumas, illuminate our *wetiko*, and activate our purpose. It persists because we have stopped our imagining, generating, and deliberating new dreams sourced in our purpose. Instead of remembering, healing, activating, and imagining, we've been

tightening our sphincters, holding our breath, and taking in small sips of civic air every four years, when we really need to fall to our knees, humble ourselves before our sacred purpose, take our deep belly breaths, put our hands in the soil, and prepare ourselves for the great task ahead.

It is abundantly evident that help isn't coming from technocrats in D.C.. It is abundantly evident that more extreme weather, school shootings, domestic terror events, hard-hitting journalism, or scientific research are not going to magically wake us up to the decay and need for change. As the climate and public health research reveals, it is abundantly evident that we cannot merely invest in education in hopes that future generations are up to the task. If we wait that long, we'll all be dead. It's on us. Now. It is incumbent upon us to breathe life deep into our sacred purpose, imagine, deliberate and guide our nation into a new future of unprecedented freedom, prosperity, and goodwill.

Now with a more current understanding of what "created", "equal", "life", "liberty", "happiness", and "*E Pluribus Unum*" actually mean, we have an explicit duty – and the authority – to ensure every U.S. citizen reaches their full potential. Once we have a critical mass devoted to our great purpose and guided by the medicine of the bison, our task now is to consecrate them in form, feel, and function at the federal level. Given the aforementioned post-mortem of our current government, we will hold the first of many citizens' constitutional conventions to create and adopt a new constitution, re-envision and re-charter each branch of government, each federal agency, and each sector of society to fulfill our purpose.

Each of these must not only be optimized for our purpose and vision given the most current research and best practices, but also be agile and adaptive, with short feedback loops that allow us to refine and evolve each function of our government as we learn, as we take transformative action on our many pressing emergencies, and govern in our increasingly interconnected, chaotic, and ambiguous environment. Once approved at the convention, we will petition the people's support, and then Congress. This may involve many rhythmic cycles of inspiration and respiration lasting many years, if not

decades. At least that's how it happened the first time we tried to stand up a government (1754-1787).

So what might a bison-led federal government look like? What social, economic, and political structures would be necessary to fulfill our purpose?

These are questions that we can only answer together. Answers to these questions require a purpose-activated, healed/ing, diverse, representative, patient, informed, and self-aware group of citizens. They require us to embody our purpose as we seek to find its full expression in our structures, laws, policies, and processes. In this convention, we will generate and consider hundreds of structures and policies. By way of example, here are some ideas that we might surface and debate:

Our elections: As most other democracies do, we make the right to vote an affirmative constitutional right, versus a states' discretionary right. We abolish the Electoral College, political parties (such as the DNC and RNC), lobbying, campaign contributions, party primaries, and debates. Our federally funded election cycle now lasts three weeks. During the first two weeks, voters will be able to review (via a voter information guide distributed by mail and online) each candidate's statement of purpose, the inner work they completed to know it, a written 10-page policy plan, a 15-minute video speech, a resume, and the last 10 years of income tax statements. As debates are nothing more than a spectacle of *wetiko* zingers, there will be no debates. Instead, candidates who secure the signatures of at least 1% of the voting population in the first two weeks will be given the opportunity to make their case via an hourlong, PBS-moderated, nationally televised town hall in the third week. Federal elections are determined by ranked-choice proportional electoral voting (vs. winner take all), ensuring that all votes in all districts matter and liberating the nation from the tyranny of two-party gridlock. Voters are automatically registered upon their 18th birthday. All citizens over the age of 18 are required to vote or face a $50 fine. We nationalize all election and redistricting commissions. The nation is redistricted by an independent, non-partisan body every 10 years.

Our legislature: 4-year terms with 3-term limits for the House and the Senate, to wed leaders to the concerns of the people. We expand the Senate

to ensure that each state has at least one Senator, and that no Senator represents more constituents than another (e.g., 1 Senator from Maine and 28 from California). We abolish the filibuster. In the first two years of each elected legislator's term (as well as in the onboarding and certification of each law enforcement officer, teacher and health professional), public servants embark on 3 hours a week of intense personal development (including healing their traumas and further purpose activation work), and 5 hours a week of civics, communication and team building skills in small groups of four, diverse peers to build authenticity, trust and empathy across divides, and develop critical skills such as conflict resolution, de-escalation, and peace-building. Upon election, all business interests and financial assets of public servants are sold and placed in a blind trust that can only hold domestic municipal debt, thereby cementing the financial interests of the individual and the prosperity of the nation. After their terms expire, they may either hold other public offices OR take a living wage pension and retire. When they retire from public office, no further income generating activities may be pursued (e.g., lobbying, government contracting, board advisory positions, etc.). They may write and speak, make art, write books, volunteer, and serve their communities, but cannot receive any further income from their activities.

Our SCOTUS: 8-year term, 2-term limit. They are not appointed, but elected by the people, in the same manner as our Senate and House. [During the first two weeks voters will be able to review (via a voter information guide by mail and online) each candidate's statement of purpose, the inner work they completed to know it, written 10-page case deliberation plan, a 15-minute video speech, a resume, and 10 years of income tax statements. Candidates who secure the signatures of 1% of the voting population in the first two weeks will be given the opportunity to make their case via a 1-hour nationally televised town hall in the third week. Federal elections are determined by popular ranked-choice voting.] Upon confirmation, all business interests and financial assets must be sold and placed in a blind trust that can only hold domestic municipal debt. They must sign an ethics pledge, ensuring they remain uncorrupted. After their terms expire, they may either hold other public offices OR take their living wage pension and retire. No

further income generating activities may be pursued (e.g., lobbying, government contracting, board advisory positions, etc.). They may write and speak, make art, write books, volunteer, and serve their communities, but cannot receive any further income from their activities. Further, a no confidence vote may be called every four years. A simple majority of a popular vote is all that is required to terminate a Justice's service, thereby establishing a check on the Judicial: the people.

Our economy: Employees must own at least 25% of the company they serve and hold at least 25% of the board seats. GAAP now requires labor to be an asset on the balance sheet, to ensure it is cultivated and invested in. Salaries, benefits, and training are now capital investments. Ecological and community impact costs of business are measured, reported on the income statement, then tripled, and distributed to the county governments in which the entity operates. For-profit entities will have 3 years to become Certified Bison Corporations (CBCs) and implement the necessary business, audit and reporting processes. If they do not become CBCs by this time, their charter will be revoked, the debt and equity claims will be nullified, their assets will be auctioned, and the proceeds will be distributed to their employees. Foreign companies exporting goods and services to the U.S. must also meet the same requirements.

Our media: We implement a journalist licensure / bar, similar to other professions, such as securities, accounting, real estate, and law, to ensure that articles labeled as news are written, edited, and produced by licensed professionals. We reinstate the FCC Fairness Doctrine, expand it to include social media, and ascribe legal liability, to reduce fake news, polarization, and restore trust in journalism. All media companies will observe a "black out" on upcoming elections, until the three-week election cycle begins. Prior to that period, they may explore the issues, causes, and solutions, but not feature or name particular candidates.

Our justice system: We ensure each officer candidate has completed purpose work, understands that it is their purpose to preserve the peace, lives in the community they serve, and is trained in conflict resolution and de-escalation. We remove all liability protections. We adopt a restorative justice

approach, viewing each transgression through the lens of trauma, individual and collective responsibility, avoiding future degradation at all costs, the incarceration or physical harm of the parties involved, working towards solutions to repair the harm, and lead to healing, learning, and growth.

Our agencies: We will stand up a new federal agency and cabinet position with broad domestic policy oversight and authority to focus and coordinate all agency activities on long-term, holistic health and thriving of our people. Similar to the manner in which the Department of Homeland Security coordinates our intelligence and national security efforts, this agency will establish and manage cross agency priorities (CAP goals) to provide each person, according to their needs, everything they need in the first 30 years to fulfill their potential, (e.g., safety, shelter, healthy food and water, clean air, and rights, rites, resources and programs to heal, activate their purpose, and belonging). We will provide acute, substantial, and sustained care for those who have been strategically undervalued, dehumanized, terrorized, excluded, exploited, and murdered (e.g. women, BIPOC, and LGBTQIA+ citizens) until their income, longevity, and wealth reach the national average. We will work towards and agile / responsive decision making structures to meet the ever changing needs of our multicultural democracy and interdependent ecology.

Our policies: The above structures allow us to get to work and do the business of the people by enacting policies that have wide popular and scientific support, such as universal basic income (UBI), universal healthcare, college debt forgiveness, universal free K-16 education and community college / civil service programs (focused on civics, communication, social and emotional health, trauma healing, purpose activation, multiple intelligences, liberal arts, creativity, community service, infrastructure development), urban planning for "20-minute neighborhoods", economic development plans inspired by "doughnut economics", robust "turn in" program for assault weapons and handguns (e.g., turn in a gun and receive a $1,000 donation to a civic organization in your community), guaranteed living wages / rent caps, and public housing to ensure that income is greater than four times rent, and our commutes are less than 30 minutes via bike or public transportation.

Who gets to be a part of this convention?

You do. Participants over the age of 18, from each state, reflecting the current number of their Representatives in the House (538), will be selected at random (excluding current public servants). Those selected and who agree to participate will furnish a resume, social media profiles, and the last 10 years of income tax statements (or as many as are available). Each participant will receive travel, room, board, and $300 per day to compensate them for lost wages during the convention. It is estimated that this first convention will cost $20-30 million dollars.

What happens before the convention?

The six-month period prior to the convention is a pilgrimage, a descent into the purpose and origins of our nation. In addition to discussing US History and the ideas that shaped and evolved our founding documents, participants will also develop a deeper connection to their personal purpose and values, and build critical communication skills required for the convention. The result will be that after six months, 538 citizens will understand US History, themselves, the nation's purpose, and have the skills to navigate the many concerns that are sure to arise during the convention.

They will complete a purpose and values activation program, be inspired by a vision for their own lives, and therein build the foundational capacity to collectively dream the future of the nation. Once complete with that program, they will take a communication skills program, which empowers them with critical communication skills such as "I" statements, active listening, effective apologies, expressing gratitude and conflict management. In each program, they will be placed into small groups optimized for multiple aspects of difference (gender, race, ideology, geography, sexuality, political affiliation, etc.), and will leave each program with three new authentic diverse relationships. The result of completing both programs is that they will have a greater understanding of the lives of six very different fellow citizens, and experience empathy and trust among them. These will all be done virtually via video calls.

During this pilgrimage, they will also begin to develop their own ideas for what our Constitution should look like. At the end of the pilgrimage, they

will have two weeks to submit the matters they want to vote on: their ideas about how to fulfill our nation's purpose, what rights need to be secured, and what structures and institutions must be created to fulfill these rights. Once all matters are submitted, participants will then rank the matters that will be voted on first.

What happens at the convention?

The convention will begin with a three-day Future Search Process to generate a shared history, understanding of the present, vision for the future, common ground, and a plan of action for the convention. Afterwards, they will set to work on a new Constitution to best fulfill our shared vision. This plan of action could look like this:

1. Participants will be given two weeks to research, reflect, and generate their ideas for new structures and reforms across the above categories (elections, legislature, SCOTUS, economy, media, justice, agencies, policies). They will then submit up to three, two-page proposals.
2. All proposals will be heard / read aloud. After hearing the proposals, participants will form working groups with those who submitted similar proposals. They will have two days to integrate, strengthen, and refine their proposals. The integrated / refined proposals will be heard again.
3. The order of proposals being voted on will be rank-choice voted. Each proposal will then be heard and voted on in order. Two hours of private research and reflection will follow after each proposal before the vote. Fifteen people will be selected at random to present their views on the matter for two minutes each.
4. A vote will be cast. A simple majority will determine whether it passes.
5. The convention will last eight weeks, be filmed and broadcasted, and at the end, the new Constitution, in whatever form it is in, will be made public.

What happens after the convention?

Petition. We will take this new Constitution to the people and seek to get over two-thirds of registered voters to endorse it. If we cannot, we will gather the feedback of those who do not endorse it and hold a second convention in a similar fashion. If we cannot gain two-thirds support after the second convention, we will keep holding conventions until we have over two-thirds of the people's support.

Thought leadership. Once supported by a two-thirds majority of the people, we will enlist our citizen legislators (those who participated in the convention/s) to write, speak, and be interviewed about their experience in their home districts and encourage their communities to understand how this new constitution would work.

PR and Media. We will build awareness of the movement online and via local news channels.

Elections. A sister organization / PAC will be launched to run and/or endorse candidates in the Executive, Legislative, and Judicial branches, who share one goal above all others: to call a formal convention to adopt the citizens' new Constitution.

Community. Events will be held around the country to connect citizens who believe in the purpose and promise of the nation and support the new constitution. An online platform / strategy will be developed to encourage folks to dive deeper into our nation's history and purpose, cultivate their purpose, and form local coalitions who gather regularly to renew our purpose and explore resonant local actions (e.g., mutual aid, community gardens, employee owned businesses, community service, mentor networks, and local police reform, etc.)

Appendix C

Bison Medicine Book Club

To get the most out of your Bison Medicine journey, please read this book socially and meet in person to discuss your experience. While you can try to host a virtual book club, it is not recommended. You'll want to experience this with people in your local work, alumni, career, neighborhood, or spiritual group, so that you can build and deepen mutually enriching relationships with people you're likely to see at the market, the park, or your children's events. The reason for this is that belonging is just as much about bumping into people you know, like, and trust, as it is about having deep conversations about what matters most.

If you've participated in a book club in the past, you know the basic drill. However, I encourage you to do this journey in a different manner. Most book clubs involve reading a book prior to getting together, pouring some tea or wine, and having a broad discussion about the book, exploring what about the book did or didn't resonate with folks. Given what's at stake and what our nation's purpose summons us to do, I recommend a marination over time by structuring this journey as a series of five weekly sessions:

Week 1: Up through Part 1

Week 2: Parts 2 and 3

Week 3: Parts 4 and 5

Week 4: Parts 6, 7 and 8

Week 5: Part 9, Conclusion, and Appendices

For each session, I invite you to begin with two agreements: (A.) one person talks at a time while the others listen with an open heart / mind, and (B.) a confidentiality agreement, inviting people to keep what others say in confidence. The purpose of these agreements is to allow people to share as openly and honestly as possible, knowing they will not be interrupted and that what they shared stays in the room. Begin by inviting folks to do a brief one-minute check-in, such as sharing a high and low moment from the last week. This allows everyone the opportunity to speak and also to get a sense of each other's lives, to deepen connection.

After the check-in, split the group into smaller groups of 3-4 people to discuss the prompts at the end of the assigned parts for 20-30 minutes. Then have a discussion in the larger group around what people found surprising, moving, and/or took issue with. Then end each session with a brief check-out about what you are leaving with (e.g, a feeling or a thought, and what's one new action you will take: activate my purpose, launch a Bison Medicine journey with another group in your life, book a trip to Yellowstone to see the bison, etc.).

If you think it's unlikely that your folks can meet for five weeks in a row, you can also do a three-session 90-minute format (e.g., week one: through Part 3, week two: Parts 4-7, and week three: Part 8 through the Appendices). If three sessions even feels like a stretch, then you can do just one 120-minute session, but please follow the same format above, assigning different parts to each small group (e.g., group A does up to Part 3, group B does Parts 4-7, and group C does Part 8 through the Appendices). In the general discussion after the small group discussions, please allocate equal time for each small group to share what they found surprising, moving, and/or took issue with, and end with a check-out (feeling or thought and a new action).

Once you have a sense of the structure that you'd like to use, invite people to join you on the journey. This is the most important part of the experience. If the invitation isn't extended with care, it is unlikely anyone will say "yes." To prepare an invitation with care, begin by writing out a list of 4-12 people within one of your local alumni, career, work, neighborhood, or spiritual groups that you most want to connect with around this material. They can be people you enjoy, respect, and admire already. They can be people you don't know well and want to get to know better. They can be people who have influence. But what's most important is that they already are a part of a single group together. This ensures that the transformation you all will experience on this journey can be maintained through your group's existing relationships and cadence of gatherings.

To prepare the invitations, for each person you want to invite, write their name, one thing about them that you appreciate (e.g,. they are a great parent, open-minded, make you feel seen, are a great friend, etc.) and why you think

they would add value to the book club experience (e.g., they have a background in economics, are a local leader, ask great questions, travel extensively, have a deep spiritual practice, etc.) Take a moment to complete the form below so you have a general idea of what the experience could be like and who you want to be involved.

Name of the experience (e.g., Bison Medicine Book Club, Radical Republicans Book Club, Hippy Brain Food, The Learning Lawyers, Ladies Who Lead, Concerned Citizens Collective, Bold Baptists Book Club, Awesome Accountants Book Club, etc.)

_____

Name of the existing group that they are all a part of (e.g., local family, neighbors, church friends, coworkers, etc.)

_____

Number of planned sessions (1-5)

_____

Duration of each session (60-120 minutes)

_____

Location (e.g., my home, a local park, 2nd floor conference room, etc.)

_____

Participant names, what you admire about them, and what unique value they bring:

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____
4. _____
5. _____
6. _____
7. _____
8. _____
9. _____
10. _____
11. _____
12. _____

As the nature of this journey and the discussion prompts are highly personal and frequently confronting, you'll want to be sure that the people you are inviting feel connected to you before they receive the invitation. If they're just trying to empty their inbox before their next commitment, the odds are low that they will be present to the connection they have with you and will ignore the invitation. So please avoid inviting people via written word (e.g., email, messaging app, text, etc.).

I recommend inviting each person to join you for lunch, a cup of coffee, or a hike in a park and at a time when you both won't feel rushed. Let them know that you want to catch up, that you are starting a unique book club and want to ask their opinion about it, so that they know you have an intention beyond just catching up. If you know you're going to see them at a gathering, ask them to connect privately 1:1 about your book club. If you don't know when you're going to see them next, send them a brief note (e.g., "I'd love to catch up 1:1 and pick your brain about a unique book club I'm launching. When is good for a cup of coffee?").

When you see them at the agreed upon time and place, greet them, thank them for taking time to connect and share their perspective on the book club. Take between 10-20 minutes to catch up, being sure to share at least one thing you're finding challenging in your life and one thing you find inspiring or joyful, before you turn the conversation to the book club. The deeper and more real your check-in, the more connected they'll feel to you and more likely they will be to join you on the journey.

The most important thing for them to feel after being connected with you is that they understand that you like them and want to connect more with them – so share what it is about them that you respect, admire, or appreciate and why you thought of them for this book club (e.g., "I really enjoy your wisdom about current affairs and that you always seem to share your perspective in a kind and considerate way", "I love how well-read you are, and think your understanding of our local ecology would add a great deal of value to this book club", etc.).

Then share with them how you discovered this book, the main ideas of the book, and the experience you're envisioning (e.g., "I heard the author speak

on a podcast and knew that I wanted to read this with some of my favorite people. So, of course, I thought of you. The book explores three key ideas. The first is that we have a beautiful national purpose that can be realized if we understand what it means and what science tells us about how to fulfill it. The second idea is that we have a majestic National Mammal, the bison, whose behavior is a better match for our nation's purpose than the bald eagle, and that it provides us with ethical guidance to fulfill our nation's purpose. The final point of the book is that each person can live their best life and fulfill our shared purpose, by activating a sense of purpose and belonging. At the end of each part, there are three thought provoking prompts that will make for a rich discussion. I'm envisioning reading this book together over the course of five weeks, where we'd meet to discuss a few parts a week at my house. I was wondering what you think of this idea, if you'd like to participate, and who else you think would be fun to invite.")

As they share their feedback, take note of it, and thank them. Then ask if there is anything that would make this a more compelling invitation. If their suggestions resonate with you, agree with them, and again ask them if they'd like to participate. If you have questions, need support, have ideas to share, or just want to celebrate a win, please send me a note at bisonmedicine.com. I can't wait to hear about it!

Appendix D

Bison Medicine Path

The Bison Medicine Path (BMP) is a five-week journey completed in groups of four people from your local alumni, career, work, neighborhood, or spiritual group. Together, your group of four will complete a weekly purpose discovery exercise, a purpose activation exercise and have an hour-long peer-facilitated conversation (peer = you and three other members from your group) following a discussion guide.

You'll leave the BMP with a purpose statement to guide you in every area of your life, and three authentic relationships to help you integrate your purpose, take purpose driven actions, support you on the journey, and celebrate your wins. This group will be your island of sanity, your people who see you for who you really are, who vulnerably share their own purpose and values, and help you stay on the path. On this journey you will develop greater clarity, confidence, courage, connection and coherence. Below you can see a sampling of what BMP participants have experienced:

CLARITY: "I have more strength and clarity of purpose, which is a constant reminder to be a better person."

CONFIDENCE: "I was able to find out other people's view of me – an incredibly refreshing experience to go through. It leveled up my perspective of myself and helped me see the good sides of my character."

COURAGE: "I appreciated having a safe space to talk... to step outside of my comfort zone."

CONNECTION: "It is nice to have validation.. that we all have similar needs, wants, and desires, and can rely more on others."

COHERENCE: "I think more about ways I can find and incorporate my purpose through my career, rather than seeing it as something separate."

You can learn more about this journey at bisonmedicine.com.

Appendix E

True Name

In February of 2016, I learned my true name. I was in a nine-day intensive as part of an eight-month Purpose Guide™ training and certification with the Purpose Guides Institute. During the three months leading up to this intensive, we performed many rituals and nature-based soul encounter exercises, read several books, and worked with several leading soul activation teachers, such as Bill Plotkin, Joanna Macy, Terry Patten, Tim Kelley, and Jean Houston.

Leading up to the eighth day of this intensive, we completed many more exercises and rituals to prepare ourselves emotionally, physically, intellectually, and spiritually for our quest: a one-day immersion in the realm of soul. During the quest, we observed silence, abstained from food for 24 hours, of which the last eight were spent at a ceremony spot that we self-selected in the woods. In advance, we each designed our ceremonies with guidance from texts from The School of Lost Borders, Animas Valley Institute, and reflection from our peers.

On the evening before the quest, we performed a fire ceremony, naming the chapter of our lives that was ending that night. We wrote each belief and behavior that supported this chapter on a piece of paper, and then read each aloud to the group, giving thanks for them, releasing them, and burning them in the fire. I named the chapter that was ending as one of righteous anger, post-modern activism, and vilification of the existing order (extractive capitalism, patriarchy, et al). I named the chapter that was beginning as one of compassionate leadership, effectively setting up a problem statement for my soul. I could not complete the quest unless some significant transformation occurred, as I was filled with, and trapped by, righteous anger. I needed to transform something in myself in order to step through righteous anger and into compassionate leadership. After the fire ceremony, we entered into silence and slept.

At dawn on the next day, we set out to begin the quest, crossing a threshold into the realm of soul, after which all bets were off – meaning our preparation prior to the quest, while necessary, would take a seat behind the guidance of our souls once we crossed the threshold. My soul guided me to a spot where I set an eight-foot diameter perimeter with branches, cleared the

center, set down a tarp, made a small altar, added an opening in the East, and set a timer for eight hours on my watch (which I left outside the circle along with all my other belongings, with the exception of my water bottle, pen, and journal).

To begin the ceremony, I entered the circle at the eastern opening, gave the land a gift, welcomed the energies of the seven directions (North, South, East, West, Above, Below, and Within), and asked for guidance and protection from my deceased brother and my two deceased grandmothers.

During the ceremony, I verbally told the stories of my life and my ancestors. I then shared why I was there and that I needed help. I prayed, cried, danced, chanted, screamed, lamented, and begged. I conversed with the trees, the wind, the birds, and the sky, receiving powerful soul information which I captured in my journal. About six hours in, I asked for my true name, the name of my soul, the deeper name beneath and beyond my given and family names.

After some time, "Buffalo Heart" came through. But, it didn't resonate with me. I couldn't feel it. It didn't sound right. I needed confirmation. The trees, who had been so generous with soul information earlier, were now silent. So I left the ceremony circle to confront them. I placed my hand upon one tree and asked "Am I Buffalo Heart?" I heard nothing. I went to the second tree and asked "Am I Buffalo Heart?" Nothing. I went to the third tree and asked "Am I Buffalo Heart?" Nothing. I began to feel a sense of betrayal and abandonment.

On my way to the fourth tree, the second part of the name came through: "Who Loves and Wholes the World". I crumpled. My body collapsed on the forest floor. Each word in "Buffalo Heart Who Loves and Wholes the World" produced shaking and crying. I was overtaken by the beauty and the resonance of the name, and the terror of all that this name would require of me. Something new had begun. I was, and am still, far from actualizing this name. But a process had begun.

I returned to my ceremony circle, gave thanks, journalled, and carved this name into a small log as a memento of the experience. When my timer went off, I released and thanked the seven directions and my ancestors. I thanked

the land, broke down my altar, and returned the land to the state I first found it. I gathered my belongings, walked back across the threshold, and returned to camp.

We then sat in an integration circle and broke our silence to share, mirror, and integrate our experiences. After this circle, we enjoyed a feast, letting the soul information of our journeys settle into our bellies and bones.

...

In April of 2018, I had another vision during a guided purpose process. I saw a warrior riding atop a giant bison. In the clouds were the faces of Black Elk, Crazy Horse, and Sitting Bull. From atop the bison, the warrior shot three flaming arrows into a straw circular building that resembled the Roman colosseum. Inside that building, all of humanity was held prisoner. As the fires burned holes in the colosseum, the people fled and were free.

Appendix F

An Approach to Community and Belonging

If you're one of the many folks who isn't a member of any group, or you don't feel a sense of purpose and belonging in your life, know that you are not alone. Unfortunately, many folks share this experience. What follows is an approach to help you change that. And it will take some time.

Let's begin by distinguishing the difference between a group and a community. Groups are everywhere, defined by the beliefs and/or behaviors their members share (e.g., a bowling team bowls together, a business unit works together, school mates learn and play together, political parties vote together, churches explore faith and worship together, civic organizations serve together, regulars at a bar drink together, neighbors live on the same street, etc.). Groups are important, but they are not by default communities.

A community is a special type of group that:

1. Has a clear and explicit purpose, a set of values, agreements, and rituals that are known, upheld, and celebrated;
2. Is composed of folks who are discovering and fulfilling their unique purposes in life;
3. Encourages folks to love themselves and each other;
4. Has a clear boundary (who is in the community and who is not); and
5. Has an ascension path to greater levels of mastery, responsibility, and belonging within their community (such as: visitor > new member > committee member > committee leader > president > board member).

Odds are there are no true communities like this in your area, so you'll have to build your own. To build a community and have a sense of belonging within it, you need two things:

1. A rough sense of your purpose in life, and
2. A group of people to start with.

The reason you need a rough sense of your purpose in life is because you don't want to try to build community with people who believe things or

exhibit behaviors that are not aligned with who you are. For example, if your rough draft of your purpose is The Golden Rule: "Do unto others as you would have done unto you" then a church is a better group to join than a cryptocurrency meetup. If your purpose is to expand your mind, then a book club is a better group to join than a judo dojo. If your purpose is to nurture life, then a gardening club is a better group to join than a car club. If your purpose is to honor all people's differences, then a Unitarian Universalist church is a better group than a white nationalist group.

You can create a rough draft of your purpose (and all purpose statements are drafts) by reflecting on the type of world you want to live in and the qualities of people you most respect and admire. You can then combine them into a rough draft purpose statement, following this formula: *I create a* _____ *world by being*_____, _____, *and*_____. If you want to live in a thriving world and the people you respect and admire have qualities, such as kindness, hope, and resourcefulness, your rough draft would be: "I create a thriving world by being kind, hopeful, and resourceful."

Now use this rough draft to guide you in exploring groups in your area. You can find these groups on websites such as meetup.com, your town's website, or through an internet search, (e.g., "service organizations in Springfield", "churches in Springfield", "volunteering in Springfield"). Once you've found a handful of groups in your local area that could be a good fit, visit each group a few times to get a feel for the group's culture, the leaders, and their members. During this exploration phase, you'll want to keep your purpose statement present to gauge which groups are most aligned with your purpose. If your purpose is "I create a thriving world by being kind, hopeful and resourceful.", you'll want to ask yourself these questions:

1. Do the members of this group value thriving?
2. Do they express hope?
3. Are they kind to each other?
4. Are they resourceful?

Once you have a rough sense of alignment with a group (it doesn't have to be perfect), join it and commit to being an active member. If it doesn't work out for whatever reason, you can always quit and join another group.

Once you feel like you've found the right group for you for now, then you can begin the journey of community by inviting some of your group's members to do a group purpose journey with you. Once you complete the purpose journey, you'll be able to sense if this group is truly aligned with who you are. You now have a choice to continue being a member of your group or find a new group or start your own. If you choose to stay in your group, your task after completing the journey is to share what you and your group experienced on the journey, and invite other group members to do so as well. Keep sharing and inviting until at least 25% of your group is purpose-activated. Once you reach this milestone, a purposeful norm will be established in your group. From this place, you and your fellow purposeful members can start to enact changes to the group, by joining the leadership and putting forth motions such as:

1. Developing/updating a clear and explicit group purpose, a set of values, agreements, and rituals that are known, upheld, and celebrated,
2. Develop/update programs to help members fulfill their unique purpose in life,
3. Develop/update rituals to create authentic connection between members so they can know and love each other,
4. Develop/update a clear boundary (who is in the community and who is not), and
5. Develop/update a purposeful ascension path to greater levels of mastery, responsibility and belonging within the community (visitor, new member, committee member, committee leader, president, board member).

If you get stuck, need support, or want to share a win, please reach out to me at bisonmedicine.com.

Endnotes

In order to make the source material easy to explore, and due the likelihood that you'll be engaging with these sources online, all the sources cited below (books, articles, studies, films, etc.) follow the same simplified format: author last name, author first initial, *title*, source / publisher, date, page (if applicable), link.

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