

Nation-to-Nation Evaluation: Governance, Tribal Sovereignty, and Systems Thinking through Culturally Responsive Indigenous Evaluations

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Abstract: *This paper was presented as part of the opening plenary panel at the 2018 Canadian Evaluation Conference in Calgary, Alberta, on May 27, 2018. Through telling the origin stories of First Nations/Indigenous people and Western evaluation colleagues, we can begin to understand the history and practical applications for advancing the truth through evaluation. The Doctrine of Discovery is rarely told as part of the Western canon of history or contemporary evaluation practice. There are significant and negative cultural, human rights, and social impacts that have deep institutional and systemic roots that continue to cause harm to First Nations/Indigenous populations throughout the world. To change centuries of old negative outcomes and impacts, we must understand our personal origin stories and the origin stories embedded within evaluation. Governance, policy, and evaluation can work as transformative levers for professional and sustained change if systems, critical and Indigenous theories, and methods are utilized. This paper offers origin stories of First Nations and colonial nations as a historical perspective and a new Tribal Critical Systems Theory to change contemporary Nation-to-Nation evaluation practices.*

Keywords: *culturally responsive evaluation, First Nations, government evaluation, Indigenous evaluation, Native American, sovereignty, systems evaluation*

Résumé : *Le présent article a été présenté dans le cadre de la séance plénière d'ouverture du Congrès annuel de la SCÉ à Calgary (Alberta) le 27 mai 2018. En racontant les récits des origines des Premières Nations/peuples autochtones et de nos collègues occidentaux en évaluation, nous pouvons commencer à comprendre l'histoire et les applications pratiques de faire connaître la vérité par l'intermédiaire de l'évaluation. La doctrine de découverte est rarement racontée dans le cadre des canons de l'histoire occidentale ou de la pratique contemporaine de l'évaluation. Des effets significatifs et négatifs en matière de culture, de droits de la personne et de société, qui ont des racines institutionnelles et systémiques profondes, continuent de causer du tort aux Premières Nations/populations autochtones partout dans le monde. Pour changer des siècles de résultats et d'impacts négatifs, nous devons comprendre notre origine personnelle et les histoires d'origine de l'évaluation. La*

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gouvernance, les politiques et l'évaluation peuvent servir de levier de transformation pour les professionnels et pour le changement durable si les théories et les méthodes autochtones sont utilisées. Cet article présente des histoires sur l'origine des Premières Nations et des Nations coloniales dans une perspective historique, ainsi qu'une nouvelle théorie tribale des systèmes critiques pour faire évoluer les pratiques d'évaluation contemporaine de Nation à Nation.

Mots clé : *évaluation adaptée à la culture, Premières Nations, évaluation gouvernementale, évaluation autochtone, Amérindien, souveraineté, évaluation des systèmes*

[This paper was presented as part of the opening plenary panel at the 2018 Canadian Evaluation Conference in Calgary, Alberta, on May 27, 2018. Through telling the origin stories of First Nations/Indigenous people and Western evaluation colleagues, we can begin to understand the history and practical applications for advancing truth through evaluation. Both verbatim excerpts from Dr. Bowman's presentation as well as additional information from the original keynote paper are provided in this article. Additional information is presented in this article, and it expands upon the original keynote address, which was limited due to the time constraints. Dr. Bowman's original keynote address was one presentation within a panel of four presenters, each limited to a 10–12 minute presentation. For the original keynote addresses, see [Bowman, Bremner, McKegg, and Wehi-peihana \(2018\)](#).

Dr. Bowman's opening plenary remarks began with her introducing herself: "Good Morning! Hello! We're sold out, we should be excited! My Indigenous spirit name, given to me by my Mohican and Lunaape-Munsee (e.g., Delaware) traditional leaders, is Lenapexkwe Waapalaneexkweew Neeka Ha Newetkaski Nawa Oplanwuuk. This translates roughly to Flying Eagle Woman Who Is Accompanied by Four Eagles. My clan is Laawewapooosish (Lynx) and I reside in Wisconsin as part of the Stockbridge-Munsee Nation in Bowler, Wisconsin, USA. I would like to say Anushiik (thank you) to all the conference folks who believed in me. When the Canadian Evaluation Society (CES) asked me to be a plenary speaker, the first thing they said to me was, "you don't behave, that's why we're picking you!" My response was, "YES!" As I said, I am from the Stockbridge-Munsee Community. I'm Mohican and Lunapee and my mother is Polish. I identify culturally and practically first as a traditional Mohican woman, bi-racial, and a knuckle-dragging, blue-collar scholar. I'm going to talk a little bit today about going beyond feathers and beads, and I don't mean that in a disrespectful way. I've done a lot of work to prepare to come here; my Elders have prepared me through our ceremonial and traditional ways. I'd like to recognize my Elders in the room, and my ancestors who spiritually may be floating around too. And in my community, calling someone an Elder, with a capital "E," is a sign of respect. I would just like to say that I'm proud to be living my traditions through my academic work and this plenary. And it is from this traditional ground from which I stand

on, moccasins and all, that I share my plenary perspectives with you today. Please know that I am very humbled and honored to be chosen to be here today. I thank the Indigenous ancestors of whose bones I stand on. This sacred responsibility is not lost by me.”]

SPEAKING YOUR TRUTH THROUGH POWERFUL CREATION STORIES

“Speaking truth to power opened my eyes to our job as evaluators and how much the truth influences those engaged in all aspects of the evaluation. Truth is a powerful tool. Speaking truth to power made me realize that honesty is one of my greatest gifts. Providing the truth is one of my greatest powers.”

—D. Pingel (Brothertown Nation)

The 2018 Canadian Evaluation Society (CES) conference theme of “co-creation” was about meaningfully engaging people to create mutually valued outcomes together, collaborating towards common goals. The foundation to making good relations with First/Tribal Nations and Indigenous people must be founded on truth. Shaaxkaaptóoneew (speaking the truth, straight talk) is available to everyone, but few have the courage, humility, or discipline to ground themselves in this sacred manner. Truths regarding First/Tribal Nations are uncomfortable and traumatic. However, they are supported by historical and contemporary facts—facts which are often unknown or ignored by western (i.e., colonized) institutions, systems, and people for various resource, capacity, or ethical reasons (Waapalaneexkweew & Dodge-Francis, 2018). Nevertheless, in instances where Indigenous and non-Indigenous people responsively, respectfully, and resourcefully work together, the truth provides a fertile ground for transformative and sustainable change.

For example, the Lunapee are also called Delaware Indians; the colonized words are Delaware and Indians. Those labeled as Delaware Indians would identify themselves as Lunaape and Mohican Nations. This is important to know because pre- and early contact with European/colonial populations included working under treaties that recognized Lunaape (and other Native/First Nations) as sovereign Nations. Work between Nations still should be governed by treaties, for First Nations and Canada as well as Tribal Nations and the United States. All have treaty law ensconced in contemporary constitutional laws—starting first in the Eastern door where the sun rises and the color is red for Native/First Nations, talking about the origin stories of Lunaape people and Mohicans coming from Kukakha Ahkuy (Mother Earth). Lunaape call this place Turtle Island, which is now called the United States, Canada, and North America. This becomes important in the Lunaape creation story. It is illustrated within the decolonized map in [Figure 1](#). How Lunaape define and talk about who they are and where they are now as Indigenous people living in North America really shows the level of assimilation and

colonization (Waalaneekweew, 2018, p. 5). This is important to understand the Lunaape origin story and the western/colonizer origin story via the Doctrine of Discovery, which will be discussed later.

The responsibility is ours (i.e., the field of evaluation), not just mine or that of Indigenous people and First Nations governments. Knowing how history happened from diverse and accurate perspectives, how western/colonizer history impacts Lunaape history, and explicitly linking those histories to the contemporary legal, policy, governance, and sovereignty aspects that should be embedded in evaluation are requirements for all. Evaluators are standing on contested land. Evaluators make designs, collect data, and offer recommendations about Nations and people. Therefore, evaluators have a professional, ethical, and moral obligation to seek knowledge about and understanding of the Nations and people where they work. These responsibilities speak not only to personal scholarship but also to personal, cultural, and academic competencies, humility, and capacities as a professional evaluator. Typical Indigenous approaches include smudging, singing or nods to culture, and language, but evaluators must move to the legal, political, and governance systems aspects of evaluation with Indigenous people and First Nations. This is where the rubber hits the road, or where theory becomes practice. Without legal and political frameworks and theories to inform policy and evaluation, there will be no institutional or systemic changes. Therefore, it is important to understand origin stories, and how these apply to the field of evaluation and individual professional evaluation practice.

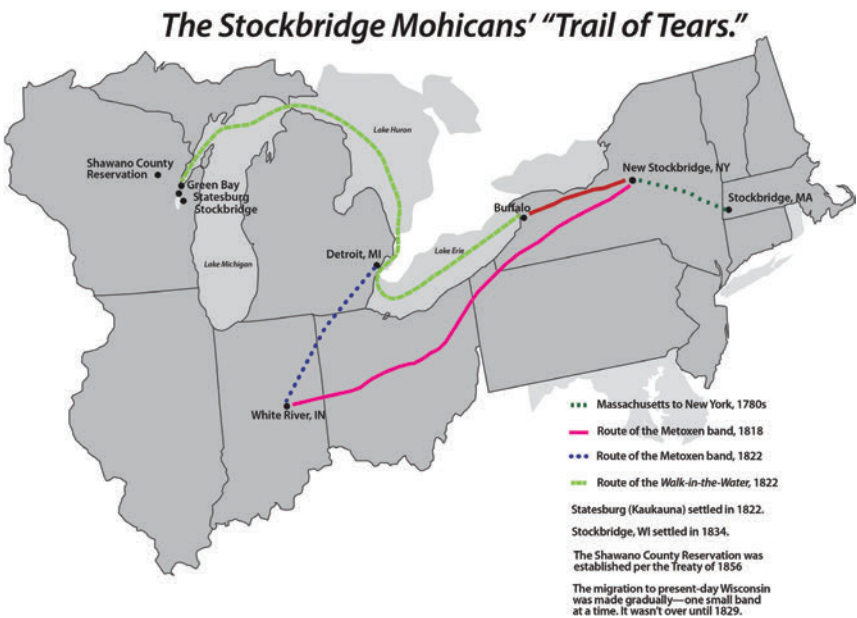


Figure 1. Mohican Nation: The Munsee/Lunaape (Delaware) Trail of Tears Map

THE UNVARNISHED TRUTH: WESTERN CREATION STORIES BEGIN WITH THE DOCTRINE OF DISCOVERY

Evaluators ask questions, investigate, apply tools, collect data, and measure results. Evaluators combine expertise and objectivity to understand different perspectives, realities, and interests. Evaluators often operate from a position of privilege and influence, representing a funder or the agency responsible for delivering a program. Traditionally, clients or target groups are perceived as object(s) of the evaluation. Is it possible that evaluators ignorantly privilege their personal worldviews or methodological choices? Do evaluators carry in epistemic or other privileges (Fricker, 2007; Grosfoguel, 2013)? Or do evaluators truly make space to honor and incorporate the knowledge, values, culture, and lived experiences of those who engage with us, thus resulting in an evaluation that is by and for Indigenous people and Tribal/First Nations (Prussing, 2018; Rodriguez-Lonebear, 2016; Wehipeihana & McKegg, 2018)? Developmental evaluation, participatory evaluation, and empowerment evaluation have attempted to address power imbalances through a variety of methods (Patton, McKegg, & Wehipeihana, 2015). Indigenous and decolonized framing of evaluation (Bowman, Dodge-Francis, & Tyndall, 2015; Commonwealth of Australia, 2018; LaFrance & Nichols, 2008) have also focused on addressing power imbalances. However, adequate and sustainable resources for collaboration and reciprocal relations often fall short of true partnerships with First/Tribal Nations and community members. Applying the 2018 Canadian Evaluation Society's conference theme of co-creation, this article will unpack the concept of evaluation without dominion. In the Canadian context (and in other colonized nation-states where Indigenous people were conquered), the language of dominion matters. When Canada, or other nation states, conquered Indigenous people, the destruction and political or Christian justification to do so is documented through the Doctrine of Discovery (Alexander VI, 1493; Cobb, 2015). Dominion is about territory at the time of the earliest contact of Europeans with North America. In the field of evaluation, it is primarily people of European descent that control the "original" evaluation narratives and are often most cited in theory, method, and practice. Unpacking the complexities of evaluation must be done with unconquered minds. Bringing an awareness or open-mindedness to learning about concepts of Indigenous evaluation (original evaluation) needs to be done without dominion. To do this requires starting from the beginning. What is the Western/colonizer "creation story" and that of the institutions and systems from where evaluation begins? How is the Western/colonizer "creation story" informed by policy and funding? If it is unknown, then trying to use evaluation as a tool for emancipatory and empowering practice to solve social and other issues will be a fleeting effort. Worse than that, evaluators are likely to be replicating trauma and harm, whether or not they realize it.

The creation story for Western civilization and institutions begins with the Doctrine of Discovery (DD). The DD is the religious and legal justification for the domination and destruction of Indigenous populations (Cobb, 2015). The DD was written in 1493 (Alexander VI, 1493) and has been carried out for centuries

thereafter. This Conqueror model (Newcomb, 2008) continues to have contemporary policy, practice, and academic impacts, including impacts in evaluation (Waapalaneekweew, 2018). It is important that evaluators and other non-Indigenous people have an understanding of the Western civilization origin story and the DD, as it relates to the context(s) in which evaluators work. They should know how the history of the land and Western/colonizer history is explicitly and legally linked to policy, governance, and sovereignty of the contested land that everyone is standing on. This is all very important for the field of evaluation and for evaluators' academic and professional evaluation practices. In addition to incorporating cultural protocols for Indigenous populations (e.g., smudging, culture, language, etc.), evaluators must also consider the legal, political, and policy aspects of sovereign Tribal/First Nations when conducting evaluations.

The Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) in Canada includes 94 recommendations, of which 44 have been started or completed, according to the Beyond 94 website (CBC, 2018). The remaining recommendations have not been started or are in the very early stages of implementation. These slower-to-implement recommendations (and difficult-to-evaluate impacts and changes) are mostly about the legal and policy changes needed for sustainable impacts regarding the TRC and Indigenous people and Tribal/First Nations. Simply put, the education, outreach, and public service announcements regarding the TRC are not enough. The hard work will be realized when policy, practice, and evidence of change are being documented through responsive evaluation. These legal and policy foundations are critical to the short- and long-term success of the TRC. This authentic work must include and allow Tribal/First Nations to lead or co-lead the efforts. A "Nation-to-Nation Agenda" is what is needed in order to realize that "indigenous rights do not derive from the [Canadian] Constitution" (Shepherd & McCurry, 2018). Therefore, it is critically important to understand what happened, how long ago it happened, how it applies to individuals, and how it applies to individuals' evaluation and policy work. This is very important, even though it may seem that the DD happened long, long ago.

In the United States, the Marshall Trilogy, written in the early nineteenth century, demonstrates the "Constitutional dehumanization of American Indians" (Goetting, 2010). These are the case laws that are situated within our contemporary constitution. They continue to undermine Tribal sovereignty and harm Tribal Nations and communities to this very day in the United States (National Congress of American Indians, 2018; Parker, 2018). Hence, non-Indigenous stakeholders need to know the whole story. The story behind protests of oil pipelines, diamond, and/or iron ore mines. The story behind unaddressed issues of missing and murdered Indigenous women, forced removals of children (e.g., boarding or residential schools, foster care system, etc.), and related intergenerational trauma. The story behind the impacts of assimilationist policies that continue to come up in policy, practice, and academic studies. Again, to reiterate, non-Indigenous stakeholders need to know the whole story, from the beginning, because not much has changed, including the devastating and disproportionate educational,

social, economic, and health outcomes for Indigenous people. Oral history is not recognized as legitimate evidence under the US constitutional government. The academics doing the research and making the rules about what evidenced-based policy and programs are practicing (Bipartisan Policy Center, 2018; Schoenefeld & Jordan, 2017) continue to omit Native/First Nations people from history and contemporary participation in broad policy, leadership, and academic initiatives. Canada and the Canadian Constitution are not much different when it comes to policy, governance, and evaluation practices with First Nations (Canadian Press, 2018; Diabo, 2018; Green & Starblanket, 2018). For Canada to fully embrace the *Principles Respecting the Government of Canada's Relationship with Indigenous Peoples* (Government of Canada, Department of Justice, 2018) or implement the *United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples* (UNDRIP) (United Nations, 2008), a change in theory, method, and practice will be needed at all levels (i.e., systems, institutional, and practitioner). Evaluators can be facilitators to the critical levers of change that are needed to make policies, principles, and declarations operational and impactful. Through research on evaluation, evaluation policy, evaluation technical assistance, and development activities, and as co-leaders with Indigenous scholars and Tribal/First Nations designing and implementing evaluations, the field of evaluation can be the catalyst for needed changes that should have happened centuries ago.

CRITICAL TRUTH TELLING: AN EMERGING TRIBAL CRITICAL SYSTEMS THEORY

Co-creation of an evaluation and a re-thinking of our evaluative practice challenge traditional power relationships. It requires an evaluator to be a methodological expert, facilitator, critic, ally, and strategic thinker with the ability to move evaluation toward empowering change, while sharing multi-jurisdictions (Reinhardt & Maday, 2005), Tribal/First Nations governments, other public governments, and non-profit or private-sector partners need to collaboratively work together on initiatives. It requires knowledge of origin stories, developing trusting and reciprocal partnerships, properly resourcing evaluations from the ground up, and acknowledging that other methods and leadership/governance perspectives (i.e., sovereignty) are equally influential to non-Indigenous governments and agencies. Using a government-to-government framing of evaluation, it is proposed that the field of evaluation should consider how an emerging Tribal Critical Systems Theory (TCST) can be applied to evaluation. Blending systems theory and thinking, critical systems theory, Tribal Critical Theory (TCT), and Indigenous Evaluation (IE) can begin to conceptualize how Tribal sovereignty can be raised to a systems level. At a systems level it can influence evaluation policy and evidence-based practice through Tribal/First Nations and public government initiatives.

TCST provides an emerging framework for raising critical consciousness, activating culturally responsive practices in systems, and emancipating public government, policy, and practices. TCST reflects more equitable and valued

approaches to working with (not on) Tribal/First Nations government partners. Indigenization can be a tool for inclusion, reconciliation, and decolonization and can also be a new vision for how Canadian academics respond to the TRC's calls to action (Gaudry & Lorenz, 2018). Indigenous visioning can be applied not only to the TRC's calls to action but also to systems evaluation or other evaluation efforts with Tribal/First Nations governments and Indigenous people globally. Table 1 offers a way to begin thinking through a new TCST by building on Tribal Critical Theory (Brayboy, 2005). TCST was developed through evaluation policy and practice applications to academic and professional activities that I implemented in the US geographic context. This emerging theory could be tested and applied to systems thinking for Nation-to-Nation activities as Tribal and non-Tribal governments work together on policy, research, and evaluation across North America or in other Indigenous contexts and evaluation initiatives globally.

Table 1. Applying TCT to systems for an emerging TCST Nation-to-Nation evaluation model

Tribal Critical Theory (Brayboy, 2005)	Toward a new Tribal Critical Systems Theory (TCST) (Bowman)
Colonization is endemic to society	The political power of public governments was achieved and is sustained through illegal, unjust, and unethical means
US policies toward Indigenous peoples are rooted in imperialism, White supremacy, and a desire for material gain	Public government constitutions and policies are founded on Christianity and the Doctrine of Discovery, both of which did not consider Indigenous people humans, and continue currently through directly related federal and case law
Indigenous peoples occupy a liminal space that accounts for both the political and racialized natures of our identities	Tribal/First Nations governments and people are the only racial/ethnic group that has inherent political and legal rights equal to US federal and international governments through treaties and constitutional law
Indigenous peoples have a desire to obtain and forge tribal sovereignty, tribal autonomy, self-determination, and self-identification	By UN Resolution, the UNDRIP (2008) provides 46 articles that outline the global rights of Indigenous people and Tribal/First Nations, which most countries have formally agreed to
The concepts of culture, knowledge, and power take on a new meaning when examined through an Indigenous lens	Culture, knowledge, and power are defined uniquely and locally through both traditional Indigenous governments and contemporary Tribal/First Nations constitutions, ordinances, policies, and community practices

Tribal Critical Theory (Brayboy, 2005)	Toward a new Tribal Critical Systems Theory (TCST) (Bowman)
Governmental and educational policies toward Indigenous peoples are intimately linked around the problematic goal of assimilation	Tribal/First Nations government and educational policies are strengths-based, locally define, and have equal (or more) influence in federal (or state and municipal) public policy and non-Tribal federal (or state and municipal) government contexts
Tribal philosophies, beliefs, customs, traditions, and visions for the future are central to understanding the lived realities of Indigenous peoples but also illustrate the differences and adaptability among individuals and groups	Traditional, cultural, and community-based philosophies, knowledge, and practices are the foundation to contemporary Tribal/First Nations governments who are working with non-Tribal governments to create responsive, effective, and sustainable systems, institutional, and policy changes
Stories are not separate from theory; they make up theory and are, therefore, real and legitimate sources of data and ways of being	Traditional history and knowledge that are orally transferred are essential to the scholarly and culturally responsive development and implementation of more effective policies, programs, and models
Theory and practice are connected in deep and explicit ways such that scholars must work toward social change	Evaluating, generating, and replicating more effective Tribal/non-Tribal governance models that theoretically and practically provide better supports, improvements, and outcomes for sustained positive changes in Tribal/First Nations and Indigenous communities represent a professional and ethical responsibility for all government and academic partners

CONCLUDING THOUGHTS: THE TRUTH CAN SET EVALUATORS FREE

Today, evaluators are asked to think about their personal origin stories and that of the geographic place where living and work occur. Start there. Put in effort toward education from sources, places, and people that normally are not on standard reading lists and are not in the bibliographies of the most current published articles. Without new sources to interrupt and challenge current cognitive frameworks and lived experience, there is a risk of repeating what Columbus and the rest of the “discoverers” of the earth did. Understanding political and scientific colonialism becomes very important to the work of evaluators, policymakers, and government leaders. When evaluators engage in research or evaluation, then publish an article, was permission granted from the elders or entity with the authority to bestow blessings or grant such permissions? Is that in current policies? Is that in

current contract language? Are institutions hiring Indigenous scholars or sharing (or giving) intellectual and human-subject protections to Tribal/First Nations? If evaluators are doing studies and teaching others, is that a sacred responsibility? If not, evaluators should be passing it by traditional councils or Tribal/First Nations governments. Lunaape know what their sacred responsibility is because the Elders have taught them and hold them accountable to that on a daily basis. Why do some evaluators feel entitled to claim access and ownership to data, knowledge, findings, etc.? Traditionally, Lunaape believe that people do not own knowledge but are caretakers of it. Therefore, having cultural and academic humility and giving back to the Indigenous community are also Lunaape responsibilities. How and to whom are evaluators responsible?

Beyond considering the importance of not continuing colonial practices, as it relates to evaluation or other disciplines, what I am presenting here is an emerging way to think about the human, legal, and political rights of Tribal/First Nations and Indigenous people through TCST. I am also highlighting the growing literature and leadership on evaluation, including within Tribal/First Nations. Many of the references in this article offer future reading and ways to become engaged practically and professionally. If you identify as a non-Indigenous professional, please observe, experience, and listen—first and foremost. This practice is not intended to shame; it is focused on healing. Evaluation can be good medicine if done properly. Evaluators need to first understand their personal history and how that history sustained or destroyed others. From those truthful origin stories, everyone can begin not only to heal, but also to change present practice and future history.

In conclusion, the field of evaluation and evaluators must understand the origins of authority structures, power sources (e.g., political, financial, etc.), and systems. These support, create gaps, or continue to silence Tribal/First Nations and Indigenous voices. As Tribal/First Nations and Indigenous communities continue working with public governments and other non-Indigenous partners, the new TCST framing can help academic and government agencies and partners to reconceptualize how the field of evaluation might move forward. This re-framing of and re-commitment to the scholarship, humanization, and professionalization of the field of evaluation can be carried out through evaluation policy, evaluation research, and evaluation studies. Comprehensively, multiple strategies and multi-jurisdictional partnerships that are adequately resourced will be needed to generate future evidence-based policies, practices, and effective relationships within and across evaluation systems and institutional partners. It's time to break the sounds of silence. Will you join us? Together all evaluators can break the sounds of silence (Bowman, 2018).

(Break the) Sounds of Silence (video played at the CES 2018 Plenary; link at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?reload=9&v=7fpo5Lc1-U0>)

By: N. Bowman as adapted from Simon (1964)

Koolamalsi, darkness my old friend
I've come to talk with you again

Because the visions that I am seeing
 Are born from places when I am dreaming
 And the sunrise visions are still planted in my brain
 Ancestors teachings still remain
 Within the sound of Silence
 In your visions and dreams you never walk alone
 Your Ancestors and relatives are all around
 Our spirit, blood and bones are all within this land
 What has been done to us was part of the Christian and colonial plans
 And my eyes can't stand seeing these things in my spiritual sight
 We have to make it right
 Let's break the sound of silence
 And in the sunrise ceremony I saw
 Millions of traditional people, maybe more
 Ancestors are talking, we are listening!
 Our spirits are strong, we are rising!
 We are dancing and singing songs that our people have always shared
 We're not scared for we will break the sound of silence
 Fools who think that we do not know
 We will not let your silent cancer grow
 Hear our prayers so we may teach you
 Take our hands so we may reach you
 Let our words be like medicine raindrops that fall and stop this living hell
 Put your voices in the sound of silence
 Don't go back to bow and pray to the false gods and scholars that are made
 Our Ancestors prophesized this warning:
 The Seventh Generation is here, are you coming?
And the signs of our Ancestors and Warriors are written on Spiritual walls
 Can you hear them call?
 They are whispering to you in the sounds of Silence.

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