

NEWENEIT NA AHAS

THE PROPHECY OF THE FOURTH CROW

As told by Robert Red Hawk Ruth
Translated by Shelley DePaul

Lomewe, luwe na okwes xu laxakwihele xkwithakamika. Long ago it was said that a fox will be loosened on the earth.

Ok nen luwe newa ahasak xu peyok. Also it was said four crows will come.

Netami na ahas kenthu li guttitehewagan wichi Kischelemukonk. The first crow flew the way of harmony with Creator.

Nisheneit na ahas kwechi pilito entalelemukonk, shek palsu ok ankela. The second crow tried to clean the world, but he became sick and he died.

Nexeneit na ahas weneyoo ankelek xansa ok koshiphuwe. The third crow saw his dead brother and he hid.

Neweneit na ahas kenthu li guttitehewagan lapi wichi Kischelemukonk. The fourth crow flew the way of harmony again with Creator.

Kenahkihechik xu withatuwak xk-withakamika. Caretakers they will live together on the earth.

>> TREATMENT SPOTLIGHT

The Fourth Crow

The Prophecy of the Fourth Crow, an ancient story of the Lenape people, offered a central theme for “Fulfilling a Prophecy: The Past and Present of the Lenape People,” a special exhibit at the University Museum of Archaeology and Anthropology presented from September 2008 through July 2010.

While the story of the Fourth Crow is distinctively Lenape, its meaning has much greater relevance. Exhibit co-curator Chief Robert Red Hawk Ruth interprets the story in this way: “We now know that the First Crow was the Lenape before the coming of the Europeans. The Second Crow symbolized the death and destruction of our culture. The Third Crow was our people going underground and hiding. The Fourth Crow was the Lenape becoming caretakers again and working with everybody to restore this land.”

The University Museum exhibit has received wide-spread praise for its celebration of the resiliency of the Lenape Nation, revealing the many ways in which the Lenape people have continued to live in their Southeastern Pennsylvania homeland and clandestinely kept their culture alive. Artifacts in the exhibition are emblematic of the four Crow time periods: For Chief Red Hawk, the photographs of rock piles suggest the sacred ceremonies of the First Crow, and the carved wood Meesing Mask conveys a message of the time of the Second Crow. His fellow co-curator, Shelley DePaul, Assistant Chief of the Lenape Nation Council, sees the time of the Third Crow in a doll with a hidden Indian face behind her hair, and in the stenciling of some Pennsylvania German homes, where traditional Lenape symbols were incorporated by Lenape who married into the community.

There is an artifact currently being conserved at CCAHA that is powerfully emblematic of the time of the Second Crow, when Native American traditions were threatened with annihilation. CCAHA conservators are treating the Carlisle Indian Industrial School photograph album, a record of the early years of the U.S. government’s first off-reservation boarding school for the education of Indian children and youth. It represents a national policy designed to transform America’s native cultures into European-style cultures—a policy of extreme assimilation.

The Carlisle Indian Industrial School photograph album boldly announces its work of educational transformation. Most strikingly, it includes “before” and “after” pictures of a number of the school’s students. In the “before” picture, male

students have traditional long hair, native clothing, and are sometimes holding objects representative of their culture. In the “after” pictures, their hair is cut short and they are dressed in 19th century European fashion. There are no signs of any family or tribal possessions to link them to their past.

It is believed that Anne Ely, head mistress at the school for many years, assembled the photograph album in the late 1800s, preserving images from its founding in 1879 onward. The volume consists of 40 scrapbook leaves, each featuring photographs of students, teachers and administrators, and the school buildings. It includes portraits of school founder Captain Richard Henry Pratt and his family, large group photographs of the student body, and photographs of special occasions, such as Christmas dinner.

But the meaning of the book is different than its presentation. In the late 19th century, the idea of assimilating Indians into the dominant culture by education was innovative. The photograph album celebrates it. However, viewing these policies in retrospect, more controversial meanings are suggested. From the perspective of the Lenape exhibit at the University Museum, the Carlisle photograph album begins to look like a disturbing view of the time of the Second Crow — “the death and destruction of our culture” in the words of Chief Red Hawk.

Times change, as do the things that we celebrate. The “Fulfilling a Prophecy” exhibit celebrates the fact that the time of the Second Crow did not succeed in fully destroying a culture. Native traditions went underground and proved resilient. Chief Red Hawk believes that the time of the fourth crow, a time of renewed harmony with the Creator, has already begun. In 2002, representatives of the Lenape Nation gathered for a three-week canoe trip, the Rising Nation River Journey, which concluded with the signing of a Treaty of Renewed Brotherhood. The Lenape Nation is committed to renewing the Treaty every four years, with the next signing scheduled for Saturday, August 21, at the University Museum.

Chief Red Hawk sees the 2002 signing as a turning point in Lenape history: “The signing of that first treaty began a new chapter in Lenape history. By working together for the good of all the Creation, we are returning to what our Creator meant us to be — caretakers.”

—LEE PRICE

