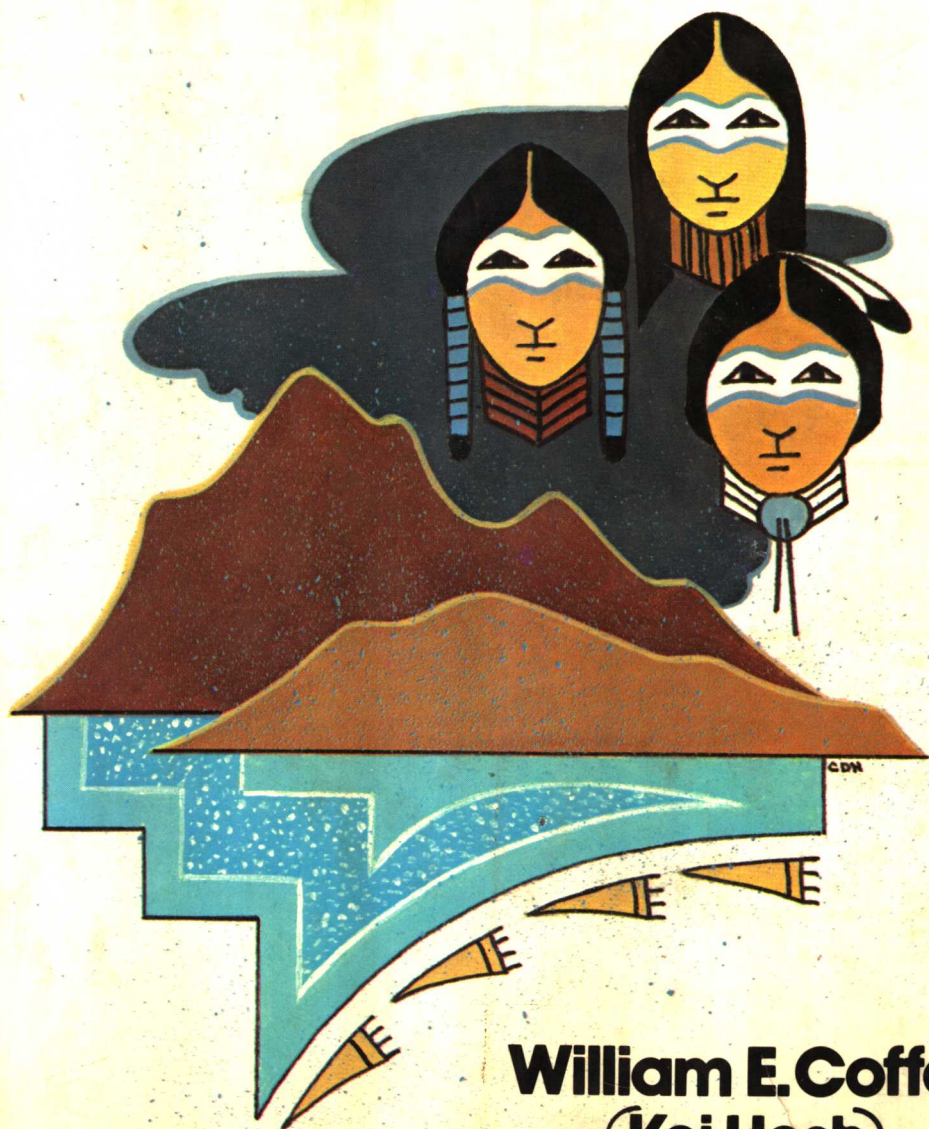


Spirits of the Sacred Mountains

Creation Stories
of the American Indian



William E. Coffey
(Koi Hosh)

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To

Nishkin Yukpa mih alla

Preface

From the beginning of man's time on this earth, he has pondered the question of his origin. Just as he feared death, the unknown termination of life, he also feared birth, another unknown factor. To compensate for this lack of knowledge and to alleviate the uncertainty of life and death, man has developed intricate and sophisticated stories concerning life after death and the origin of man.

In contemplating death, man, almost without exception, refuses to acknowledge that there is nothing beyond the grave. For thousands of years there have been "revelations" of rewards and punishments adjudicated according to various formulas, generally correlating to the "good" or "evil" done in this physical realm of existence called "life." Most cultures establish rules which, if not obeyed by those in the group, will determine the degree of punishment to be received after death. These same rules, if adhered to, will ascertain the indemnities to be received in the world of spirits. This psychological manifestation serves as a counterbalance for the fear of the unknown

quality of death. Man, through the vehicle known as faith, can therefore convince himself that life does continue in some other medium after physical death.

Because the human mind cannot fully comprehend the genesis of man, it is also necessary for us to relate the origin in terms which can be understood and accepted. Without such rationalization it would be impossible to maintain the sanity of mankind. The unfathomable magnitude of the situation would far exceed the capacity to cope with it.

Myriad books have been written attempting to placate man with the reassurance of a glorious condition of "afterlife." One of the most popular of these "scientific" publications is *Life After Life* by Raymond Moody. In his manuscript Dr. Moody relates experiences of persons who were clinically "dead" and then returned to life. It is interesting to note that most of these stories tell of being greeted by loved ones or by some religious figure who was significant in their life and who coincided, naturally, to their own religious philosophy. Advocates of this concept find death much easier to face when they convince themselves that the "glad reunion" will occur.

With the same fear of the unknown and the apparent innate need to establish a valid version of the Creation, man has devised many accounts as to how he happened to be. Most of these accounts incorporate an omnipotent superbeing who through various means "creates" all things. Since it is impossible to assign empirical evidence to substantiate the theories, it is necessary to rely on faith to accept them. The same faith which allows man to live with death also allows him to accept the Creation.

Just as the first primitive man gazed in awe at the universe around him and questioned his origin, modern man, with all his technological sophistication, faces the same situation. Did man evolve from some lowly form of life into what he is now? Man finds it almost impossible to humble himself to subscribe to this theory. Therefore, even though he reluctantly and begrudgingly

assigns some credence to evolutionary development, man clings tenaciously to the more acceptable possibility of divine creation.

In the following pages the author offers many different beliefs concerning the origin of man, and, more specifically, the origin of the American Indian. Perhaps as the reader contemplates these stories and theories, one story or theory will ameliorate the problem for him. If not, hopefully, he will be able to develop his own philosophy which will bring the ever longed for peace and acceptance of his fate.

Yakohe cha imola
(Koi Hosh)

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Introduction

God created the Indian country, and it was like he spread out a big blanket. He put the Indians on it. They were created here in this country, truly honest, and that was the time this river started to run. Then God created fish in this river and put deer in the mountains and made laws through which has come the increase of fish and game. Then the Creator gave us Indians Life; we walked, and as soon as we saw the game and fish we knew they were made for us. For the women God made roots and berries to gather, and the Indians grew and multiplied as a people.

When we were created we were given our ground to live on and from this time these were our rights. This is all true. We were put here by the Creator — I was not brought from a foreign country and did not come here. I was put here by the Creator.¹

Another old Indian once remarked concerning the origin of his people:

The Gods and the Spirits of the Sacred Mountains created Man. He was made of all rains, springs, rivers, black clouds, and sky. His feet were made of earth and his legs of lightning. White shell forms his knees and his body is white and yellow corn; his flesh is of daybreak, his hair darkness; his eyes are of the sun. White corn forms his teeth, black corn his eyebrows, and red coral beads his nose, his tears are of rain, his tongue of straight lightning, and his voice of thunder. His heart is obsidian; the little whirlwind keeps his nerves in motion, and his movement is the air. The name of this new kind of being was "Created from Everything."

How much more eloquent and spiritual can a humble human describe the act of Creation? Surely, the Indian reverence is more appropriate than the rather blunt biblical account of, "So God created man in his own image, in the image of God He created him; male and female created he them."²

Many other versions of the beginning of man and of the origin of the American Indian exist today. Variances of concepts range from the evolutionist's approach to the Mormons who propound a theory which suggests that God was a man and man will become God.

It is not the purpose of this manuscript to ridicule, to denigrate, or even to judge the validity of any religion or philosophy. Although this writer has strong opinions concerning the Creation, an attempt to present an objective account will be made. If, by chance, this objectivity becomes a little weak and subtle prejudices creep into the narration, please be tolerant and consider the background and environment of the author.

WILLIAM E. COFFER
(Koi Hosh)

Contents

Preface vii

Introduction xiii

- 1 The Beginning of Man / 1**
Evolution / 1
The African Theory / 4
- 2 The Origin of The American Indian / 7**
Continental Drift / 7
Bering Strait Theory / 11
- 3 The Discovery of America / 15**
Visitors from Space / 18
Atlantis and Mu / 20
Old World Visitors / 22
 Hebrews / 22
 Phoenicians / 23
 Basques / 24
 Celts / 26
 Chinese / 26
 Vikings / 27
 Scots, Irish, and Welsh / 31
 Mormons / 32

xvi CONTENTS

4 How it Really Happened / 37
American Indian Creation Stories / 37

Choctaw / 41
Cherokee / 43
Delaware (Lenape) / 45
Hopi / 46
Navajo / 48
Jicarilla Apache / 52
Paiute / 54
Omaha / 57
Natchez / 58
Klamath / 59
Miwok / 60
Gabrielino / 62
Papago / 63
North Pacific Coast Tribes / 65
Modoc / 66
Miccousukee / 69
Cahuilla / 70
Wintu / 73
Yakima / 74
Ojibwa / 77
Winnebago / 78
Cheyenne / 81
Seneca / 83
Spokane / 85
Kansa / 89
Shawnee / 90
Acoma / 91
Comanche / 93
Blackfoot / 94
Kiowa / 97
Other Tribes / 98

5 Conclusion / 100

Footnotes / 105

Bibliography / 111

Index / 117



EVOLUTION

Where did man originate? This question has preoccupied man for thousands of years and will probably concern him until the end of his time on this earth. Until comparatively recent years, the last one hundred or so, it was generally accepted that man was created by some deity. He was placed on earth to fulfill some purpose prescribed by this omnipotent Creator, and when the task was completed, man would cease to exist in this plane of activity and would be rewarded with a "better life."

Throughout the ages there have been those who have rejected this theory and expounded on various doctrines concerning the origin of man. Most of these revolutionaries made little impression on the philosophy of their time until about a century ago. At that time a scholar named Charles Darwin brought forth a theory which astounded the world and caused men to at least consider in a rational manner the concept of natural selection.³

Darwin developed a theory that arrived at the conclusion that man is descended from some lowly form.⁴ Many churchmen

2 SPIRITS OF THE SACRED MOUNTAINS

considered Darwin a heretic and his works an affront to the biblical portrayal of the Creation. Darwin readily admitted his theory would be quite distasteful to many but considered there was no doubt that modern man had evolved through an untold number of years from some primitive source of life. His conclusion states quite simply:

We must, however, acknowledge, as it seems to me that with all his noble qualities, with sympathy which feels for the most debased, with benevolence which extends not only to other men but to the humblest of living creatures, with his god-like intellect which has penetrated into the movements and constitution of the solar system – with all these exalted powers – Man still bears in his bodily frame the indelible stamp of his lowly origin.⁵

Darwin also concluded that if man had through his own exertions risen to the summit of the organic scale and because he had thus risen instead of being aboriginally placed there, he had hope for a still higher destiny in the distant future.

Thus Darwin in his wisdom not only excites the imagination and inquisitiveness of man concerning his past, but also stirs him to postulate the future of mankind. Many science-fiction writers have had a field day in following this hypothesis. One such writer, although apparently more scientific than fictional, is Robert Jastrow. In a very logical sequence of events and using inductive reasoning, Jastrow suggests that by the twenty-second century machines may rule the world.⁶

Contrary to popular thought, Darwin does not necessarily propose that man descended from monkeys. However, he does recognize some redeeming qualities from such an evolutionary process:

For my own part I would as soon be descended from that heroic little monkey, who braved his dreaded enemy in order to save the life of his keeper, or from that old baboon, who descended

from the mountains, carried away in triumph his young comrade from a crowd of astonished dogs — as from the savage who delights to torture his enemies, offers up his bloody sacrifices, practices infanticide without remorse, treats his wives like slaves, knows no decency, and is haunted by grossest superstitions.⁷

This author would likewise prefer tracing his genealogy to some lowly chimp or orang than some of the humanoid groups I have encountered. However, I am sure if the monkey had anything to say in the matter, he would prefer not being too closely associated with humans. There is no record of a simian killing one of his own kind for a thrill, nor a monkey deserting or abusing its offspring, nor do they participate in wars or discriminate against another because of appearance or color. If man did descend from some simpler life form, undoubtably the monkeys would strongly disclaim it was from them.

DARWIN'S MISTAKE

Three monkeys sat in a coconut tree
 Discussing things as they're said to be
 Said one to the other "Now listen, you two
 There's a certain rumor that can't be true,
 That man descended from our noble race,
 That very idea is a disgrace.

No monkey ever deserted his wife
 Starved her babies or ruined her life,
 And another thing you will never see
 A monk build a fence around a coconut tree
 And let the coconuts go to waste,
 Forbidding all other monks to taste.

If I put a fence around this tree,
 Starvation would force you to steal from me.
 Here's another thing a monk won't do,

4 SPIRITS OF THE SACRED MOUNTAINS

Go out at night and get on a stew,
And use a gun or club or knife
To take some other monkey's life.

Yes, man descended, the ornery cuss —
But, brother, he didn't descend from us.

Anon.

THE AFRICAN THEORY

Until the middle of the twentieth century, scientists had not been able to accurately date archeological discoveries, so many conjectures had occurred when new fossils were found. This promulgated many unfounded theories and even introduced some which were outright hoaxes. One of the best known of these hoaxes was the Piltdown man "discovered" in 1912 by an amateur archeologist, Charles Dawson.

Dawson, in his archeological digs near the English town of Piltdown, uncovered portions of a skull which were found to be from a human. When reconstruction of this skull was completed, it was found that the lower jaw was definitely apelike. Dawson received much acclaim for his "Piltdown Man" which was given the scientific name of *Eoanthropus dawsoni*, or Dawson's "dawn man."

So complete was the plot, that it was not until 1953 that the inaccuracy of the 1912 conclusions were verified. At that time, after exhausting chemical and anatomical examinations had been conducted, the Piltdown hoax was exposed: the skull was that of a modern man and his jaw was that of an ape with its teeth filed to disguise them. With the sophisticated dating methods in use today it would be virtually impossible to repeat such a deception. Because of this, the finds of Dr. Louis Leakey and other reputable archeologists are received by the scientific community as valid and form vital links in the evolutionist's chain.

In the 1920s when Dr. Leakey began his quest to find the origin of man, few authorities believed that man could trace his beginnings

back as far as 100,000 years. Leakey was reared in Africa and felt that man came into being someplace in the eastern part of the "Dark Continent." He spent his life pursuing his theory. He was adopted by the Kikuyu tribe and only because of this membership was he able to continue his work through many troubled years in Africa. He was given the name Wakaruigi and referred to as the black man with the white face.⁸

During the nearly one-half century he spent searching for the origin of man, Louis Leakey made many startling discoveries. He was able to date the habitation of eastern Africa by man, or man-like creatures, back to 1,750,000 years ago. Through his work, archeology now possesses portions of *Ramapithecus* or *Kenya-pithecus wickeri*, the fossil member of a scientific group that includes both man and the apes. The striking fact about this find is that it dates back 14 million years.

Although Louis Leakey is recognized as the foremost archeologist in this area, since his death in 1972, his son Richard has made discoveries which date man even earlier.

Richard Leakey is the Administrative Director of the National Museum of Kenya and is following in the footsteps of his famous father. He has been focusing on Lake Rudolph in Kenya for his search. At this site one of his expedition members, Bernard Ngeneo of Kenya, made a startling discovery. He found an extraordinary skull which moved man's chronology back some 850,000 years. In remarks prepared for a scientific meeting in London on November 9, 1972, Richard Leakey described the skull as "almost certainly the oldest complete skull of early man." He gave his estimate of the age of the skull as 2.6 million years. This was not just a figure pulled from thin air, but, rather, one arrived at through scientific analysis and after much research. It is generally accepted as quite accurate.⁹

The search continues, still centered in Africa, and new finds are reported from time to time. One of these new discoveries moves the site of the earliest man from Kenya to Ethiopia. In the latter part of 1974, Dr. Donald C. Johanson, Curator of Physical