

[Megan Peiser](#)

[An Indigenous Future Is for Everyone](#)

Sv hochifo yvt Megan; Chahta ohyo sia. My name is Megan; I am a Choctaw woman. I am the daughter of Barry Peiser, granddaughter of Beverley Payne. I am an enrolled citizen of [Choctaw Nation of Oklahoma](#), and I write these words sitting now in the stolen homelands of the Anishinaabe people, in Waawiantinanong, currently called Detroit, Michigan.

The Chahta recently marked the [anniversary of our Long Walk, the Trail of Tears](#) — the forced removal of our people from our sacred lands in what is now Mississippi to reservations in the Oklahoma Territory — Indian Country. Our ancestors carried traditions with them in their minds, in their mouths, in the seeds [sewn into their pockets and skirt hems](#). This year my grandmother received traditional seeds from our tribe — corn, squash, tobacco. You cannot buy these seeds. These varieties were all but destroyed by corporate agriculture and genetically modified vegetables. They were scorched by raiding groups of settlers burning crops and homes of vulnerable relocated Native peoples — mostly women and children — in greed for evermore land. [These seeds](#) dwindled when government-provided foodstuffs to movement-restricted tribal peoples were mere boxes of bleached flour. Now my parents text me pictures of these sacred plants growing in pots outside my grandparents' home in a compound of senior living houses in San Angelo, Texas. I hope to grow them next year, too. In some ways, I already live in an Indigenous future.

I have been fortunate in the teachers, mentors, and elders who have taught me about our customs and my responsibilities as a Native woman. More often than not, my teachers are Native women my own age, or the land and plants I apprentice myself to. While my own family members are largely examples of “successful” assimilation — removed from our traditions by enough

generations that it is easier to practice settler customs than to work at cultivating our own — I see the seeds of our Native traditions in my childhood memories. Those memories are re-cast the more that I learn about myself as a *Chahta ohyo*. I also see in those memories the deep bruises from the abuse of our people stretching back to European arrival. They touch me even today; my learning privileges me to name them for what they are, and I hope the healing work I do now will reach back and heal my ancestors, too.

Here is what I have learned from my teachers, from plant relatives, from ceremony, from conversations with my students: an Indigenous future is for everyone.

What might an Indigenous future be? Rowen White (Mohawk) recently [posted on Instagram](#) about the importance of letting go of efficiency. As humans, we must give of ourselves to ritual, to the work of reciprocity, lest we get caught by capitalism, greed — [a monster](#) many Native cultures have a story or tradition to warn against. In an Indigenous future, we do not labor in desperation to survive; we contribute our [gifts](#). The world moves more slowly. We do not march [forward forward forward](#), desperate for some unreachable goal in the name of “progress”; we relax into the round cycles of growth, harvest, and fallowness. I often tell students, literature majors especially, that they are essential to a different future. It is hard to imagine an antiracist, anticapitalist, anticolonial future: this is a world that we, the living, have never seen before. But for the experts in imagination — these students of art, of dance, of literature, of music and theater and all kinds of storytelling — imagining new worlds is their gift. Their new worlds will always sound impossible to those people working and living in systems rooted in capitalism, in scarcity, in racism, in fear. We’ll give *those* no more space here. This is a space for Indigenous futures.

I cannot speak for all Native people; I speak from my own learning, still in motion, and my unlearning of settler-colonialist ways. [#LandBack](#) is a part of

an Indigenous future, and a movement of reparations. [Land back is not a metaphor](#). Native people need actual land with which to communicate, love, and to practice our heritage and customs — all of which are tied to our position as relatives to Earth’s plants and animals. [Land stewarded by Native peoples holds most of the Earth’s biodiversity](#). Our people practice a life of respect and reciprocity — nobody has the right to hoard resources — and Native communities who practice these tenets are thriving today. That is the Indigenous future I want for us all.

Land Back for Native peoples, Land Back for our [Afro-Indigenous kin](#), [Land Back for Black people](#) — but a connection to the Land for everyone else, too. The generational trauma of Native and Indigenous Peoples is still with us. It still shapes our lives, our communities. We are working to reawaken our ways, call up our ancestors for guidance, take up space, dance, pray once more. We lend ourselves to the land — apprentice ourselves to the seasons, to our plant relatives, to the soil, the water and the sun. And suddenly we are less lonely. We receive the constant promise of love — our Mother Earth’s love, of nourishment, of purpose. These heal us. I believe they can heal everyone.

My friend [Shiloh](#) (Ojibwe/Odawa) says, “Everyone is Native to somewhere; everyone is a person of the land.” My German and English ancestors were also stripped of their relationship to the land, some even their language, on arrival in this hostile country. Children were hushed not to utter a Deutsch syllable after World War II. I am angry and frustrated at what has been stolen from us. Often anger and determination are a fuel for my fight. But hope reminds me what I’m fighting for. Planting the Cherokee White Eagle corn, gifted down through many seed-keepers, from the hands of my friend [Kirsten \(Tlingit\)](#), and welcoming corn sister’s tall stalks into the garden — that is what stirs me. Corn sister helps me to decolonize myself, re-indigenize myself.

Embracing a world of abundance over scarcity, a slower world of more time — for joy, for rest, for grief, for food, for community — that is an Indigenous

future. An Indigenous future is for everyone.

You can support Native land and food sovereignty movements through the [Native American Food Sovereignty Alliance](#).