

Spoken-word and sung lyrics for ***Fifteen Hundred Blackfeet***, a literary / music / art / cinematic project on the Blackfeet Indian Reservation, Montana, to be released in 2024. Written by Gregg Paisley, Blackfeet (*Amskapi Piikani*).
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Memory In My Blood

(Any Indian, any place, any time in history)

I know people from long ago I never met
I see what they saw
Feel what they felt

They speak to me in words, emotions, memories
Sometimes I am awake, sometimes asleep
Sometimes I cannot tell the difference

I know times and places I have never been
Events I never saw
It's not a dream, I carry my past in my blood

The way I think, the way I act
My nature, my beliefs
Were in me when I was born

You believing me or not changes nothing
I know what I know
But do you know what you know?

Do you believe in instinct?
Are your instincts not merely memories from your ancestors?
So like me, you carry your ancestors in your blood

Now you believe me, don't you?

We Are Human, You Are The Savage

(Through the eyes of a buffalo tribe Indian warrior, Northern Plains, 1870s)

We have no word for genocide in our language
But we know it when we see it
And we see it in your blue eyes

A thousand feet between your battle line and ours
Across the tall grass, rippling in the wind, we feel your hatred and cruelty
Because we are human, you are the savage

Us in deer skin, paint, feathers, and beads, you in blue wool coats and metal buttons
In moments it begins, this grass will soon be red
And most everyone here will die today

We die with souls intact
But you lost your souls long ago
When you came here to steal, to kill, to rape

The last thing we will see as we die will be our children
The last thing you will see is us taking your life
Then you will find what your soul was worth

As spirits, we will see our children again
But you will never again see your mother or home
All you were or could ever be ends here, now

Death doesn't frighten us, we know where our souls go next
But death should terrify you, for with no soul
You will never leave this blood-soaked plain

Across the tall grass, rippling in the wind
Your empty eyes tells us you know nothing
About unconditional love, humanity, empathy, sacrifice

We know you will keep killing after all our warriors are dead
You will kill our daughters, mothers, and sisters to end our blood
Because we are human, you are the savage

We know we will lose this war between our two worlds
So today we distract you with violence beyond your imagining
While just over the horizon our women and elders move our children to safety

We learned blinding hate, cruelty, and scalping from you
Now we turn it back on you, tenfold
What made you think you could come here and take everything from us?

Your leader said we are the fiercest, deadliest cavalry in history
Today you find out what he meant
With five arrows in your heart before you reload once

In your last breath, do you finally understand why we fight?
We kill and die out of love for our people so our tribe, our ways, can survive
But what do you fight for?

WE... fight for all of us, you fight only for you, for conquest
WE... are the opposite of you
WE... are human, you are the savage

Whispering Wind

(Many true stories made into one)

On our Blackfeet Reservation is Whispering Wind
A sweet smiley young girl, a tribal member from ancient blood
Loved by all, a friend of my youngest child

She slept on a couch her entire life
Never a bedroom of her own, never a stable home
But never a complaint

Flitting among us like a happy sparrow
I often see her around the rez...
Or for a heart-leap I think I do

One day, a day that will always be yesterday
Whispering Wind left her lodge, calling back with cheerful see-you-laters
That may be the only lie she ever told

Floating through the cool night air on a swift breeze
Whispering Wind went to her secret place and hung herself
To be discovered hours later after a desperate search

The Amskapi Piikani see too much death to count
So one tragedy must stand for many
Whispering Wind, who belongs to us all, never leaves my mind

So often, this is how Indians end things:
Suffer in silence, then one day leave the lodge like nothing is wrong
And go straight to their last task

Yet even in those last moments, they do one last kindness
It will be someone who loves you that finds your body
So try to make it neat and clean

What can our tribe do to help those who have lost hope?
Crushed spirits, souls racked with pain, backed up to the brink of the abyss
Carrying a dark, final secret they won't share until it's too late

Choctaws and Irish Potatoes

(Indian Territory, 1847, a story of love, empathy, generosity, humanity. Inspired by the movie Black '47)

A soldier, dressed the same, but different from the others
Red hair, green eyes, a different way of speaking English
Kinder, even with agony in his soul and great loss in his eyes

He sat at our fire and told us his people's story
About what the English were doing to his tribe across the sea
Just as they had done to us, here

Twenty years ago, guns to our backs
Our children, too, had starved to death
As we marched a long trail of tears

This was the first white man we knew with the same heart and soul as us
Like us, this man had lost all that matters most
At the hands of the same invaders

It is too late to help us, but can we help his people?
We told him we had nothing, either
But after he had gone off to sleep we talked late into the night

We would scrape together what we could
And send it to his home called Ireland
If we save just one child, we save a world entire

We sent all we could raise, \$170
And gladly went without
Then we prayed for our Kindred Spirits across the sea

It was all we could do
A small kindness
Surely to be lost in time



Kindred Spirits sculpture, County Cork, Ireland

<https://time.com/5833592/native-american-irish-famine/>

The following spoken-word and sung lyrics are complete in draft form but await further input from other tribal members before being published

Invisible

(Why you know almost nothing about us)

Tiny Angels Pleading To Come Home

(Indian boarding schools and the countless, nameless children who died there)

The Blessed Few

*(Do not feel sorry for us, the buffalo tribe warriors of the Plains;
Save your sorrow for the Western and Eastern tribes...)*

Everything Is Alive

(The only question is: Can you see it, too?)

There Is No One Left To Teach Me

(The shared tragedy of all American Indian tribes: too many of our “libraries have burned to the ground”)

Come Back, My-Girl

(Missing and murdered indigenous women, girls, and two-spirits)

Lights In The Sky

(Do you think they are aliens, natural phenomenon, or illusions? They aren't)

YOU DON'T BELONG HERE!

(A true, firsthand story about the afterlife. 2013, Blackfeet (Tribal) Hospital, Browning, Montana)

A dull pain everywhere in my torso
With me for days
Suddenly exploded into agony

*Oh, so this is what dying is like, hmmm...
But... wait! I have children, a mother, people who need me
Please... can I have a little more time?*

I crawled to my car through the dark in a drenching rain
Drove myself to the tribal hospital, not quite making it, but within sight
A panicked security guard dragged me to triage

He set me down in a chair
I started to say something: *“I think I'm going to...”*
I slid from the chair and he ran for a stretcher and to find help

I didn't know my lifeless body
Was face down on the cold floor
I had already crossed over

Some call it the Bright Light
Others, the White Light
For me, it was Silver

Open, joyful, smiling faces everywhere
Some I knew, most I didn't, but all looking in my eyes
All embracing me in their warmth and love

My father, long dead, put his hand behind my head
He pulled my ear to his mouth and whispered only to me
Just like I had done to my own children all their lives

But this wasn't a welcome because...
I didn't know I had just arrived...
This Silver Place was where I had always been...

...Because I couldn't remember my previous life
If I had, I would have tried to fight my way back
Is this the Creator's trick to help us adjust to our fate?

But as I reveled in the embrace of all my Silver relatives and friends
In the love, the happiness, the new, the old
I heard faint, chaotic shouting in the darkness behind me

Frantic, unseen commotions, convulsions, and many hands
Were tugging me backwards through a thick black liquid
Flailing and fighting, I screamed *No, No, No! Let go of me!*

A lifetime later, I opened my eyes
To find myself in bed connected to tubes in the tribal hospital
An excited voice said: Doctor! He's awake, come now...!

Good to have you back, cuzzin', we weren't sure we would ever see you again
Do you remember what you said when we revived you on the floor?
No, I only remember falling off a chair and then living in a new place

You opened your eyes and looked up at all our faces looking down at you
You were surprised, confused, agitated, annoyed
You must have thought you were somewhere else

Then you said something none of us on the crash cart had ever heard before
No, I don't remember any of this
Hmmm... Gregg, you looked up at us and angrily said:

YOU DON'T BELONG HERE!

Everything Means Something

(Tribal people notice and take in what others miss, and for good reason)

Look Me In The Eyes

(The tribal world is all about other humans, not about things, and that can make outsiders uncomfortable)

A Tribe Is Freedom

(Indian tribes are the most natural and best way for humans to live)

I Can Teach You Nothing

(We are here only to help you understand tribal peoples, not to presume to impart wisdom or insight)

A People Like No Other

(The Blackfoot Confederacy)

You Changed, We Never Have

(We refused to become like our invaders, a choice time has proven to be right)