

Transformation and Survival:
Achievements of the Kwakwaka'wakw (Pacific Northwest Coast)
"Indigenous Perspectives" - Monthly Broadcast on HealthyLife.Net
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Crooked Beak Mask, Kwakwaka'wakw, 19th century¹

Randy Kritkauský: Greetings, or may I say Bozho in Potawatomi, to those joining us for today's Indigenous Perspectives show. I'm Randy Kritkauský, an enrolled Potawatomi tribal member, and the co-host of Indigenous Perspectives.

Carolyn Schmidt: And I'm Carolyn Schmidt, the other co-host. For our Land Acknowledgment, we recognize Vermont, where we are, as part of N'dakinna, the unceded traditional territory of the Abenaki people, who for centuries have lived on

¹ Photo credit: Pierre Selim, Creative Commons License CC BY 3.0 Deed Attribution 3.0 Unported. <https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/3.0/deed.en> The mask is in the collection of the Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York City. https://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/thumb/5/56/Crooked_Beak_of_Heaven_Mask.jpg/440px-Crooked_Beak_of_Heaven_Mask.jpg

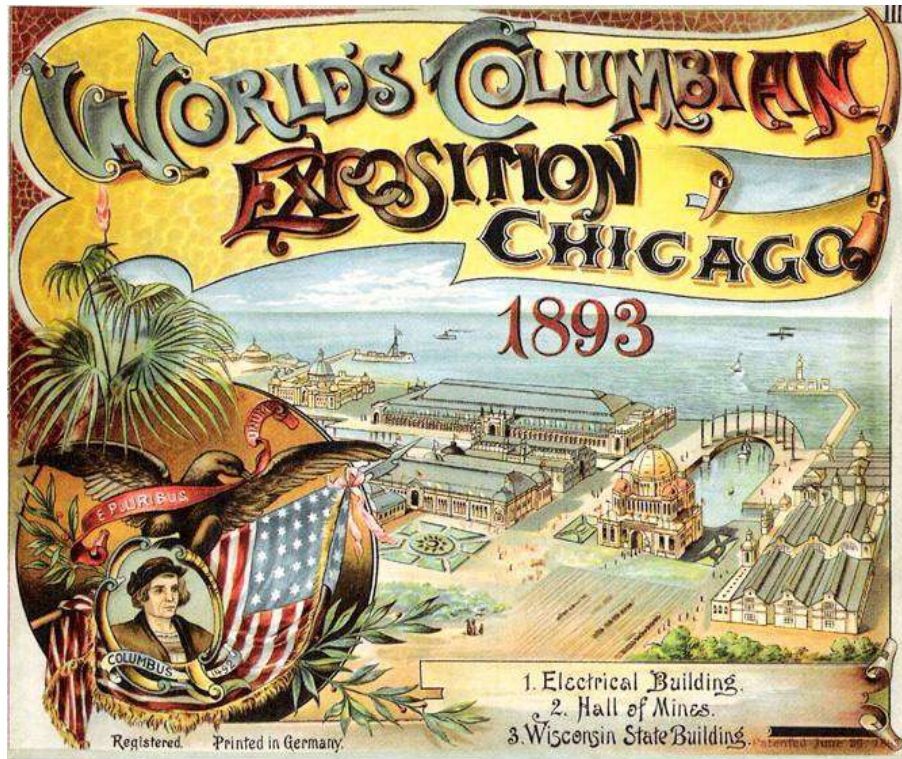
the lands now included in present-day northern New England and southeastern Canada.

Randy: We also acknowledge that this is the unceded land of our other-than -human kin - the winged ones, the rooted ones, the four-legged ones and the mountains and rivers who have been present on Turtle Island and have been partners and caretakers for countless millennia. They were here before the arrival of any of the two-legged. Before the Indigenous peoples who came over the Beringian land bridge from Asia more than 15,000 years ago, and before the European two-legged who arrived more recently.

Carolyn: Today's program is about transformation and survival. It recognizes that broad segments of the public are struggling with anxiety about environmental, social, economic and political uncertainties, and it often feels like things are bordering on chaos. We offer a relevant story about Indigenous Peoples in North America, who lived through similar and actually far more extreme crises, who worked their way out of despair by engaging in highly creative individual and collective acts of transformation. There's a lot we feel that we all can learn from their experiences.

Randy: In that spirit, we invite you to use your imagination to travel back in time and join us in Chicago on May 1, 1893. President Cleveland is addressing a crowd of 200,000 people attending the official opening of the World's Columbian Exposition. The event, also referred to as a World's Fair, is designed to showcase achievements of the United States which are being portrayed as rivaling those of Europe. The theme of the Chicago Expo is explicit and triumphalist: in the 400 years since Columbus had set foot in the western hemisphere, a new society has risen to the acme of civilization.

Carolyn: At least from the point of view of the Expo organizers and the many people who flooded in to experience it. In order to experience how far this new civilization has come, and how far it has progressed from the purportedly "primitive underdeveloped, undeveloped state" in which Europeans had found the western hemisphere, a re-constructed "Indian village" has been erected at the Expo. It's part of an illustration of the "before" stage of "before and after" people and lives - "before" being the Indigenous people, "after" being the late 19th century technology and cultural achievements like electric lighting, which was a big deal at the Expo.



Advertisement for the World's Columbian Exposition (also known as the Chicago World's Fair), held in 1893 ²

Randy: We intentionally use the words “**reconstructed** Indian village” because there had been a long-established presence of Native Americans on the place which came to be known as Chicago. Those original Native American occupants are my Potawatomi ancestors. Chicago is an English approximation of Chegago, our word for the smell of wild onions. We were forcibly removed from these lands, where the Expo now is, in 1838.

Carolyn: Listeners may well be sensing that this is going to be a struggle for Randy to deal with his awareness of how his family intimately is connected with the areas in which the Expo is occurring. And more on that will unwind as we discuss further what happened at the Expo.

So the Expo’s reconstructed Indigenous village and the presence of Indigenous peoples were carefully stage managed. By this time - late 19th century - the fabric of Indigenous society was in what many in mainstream society assumed its final unraveling under pressures such as forced assimilation at the residential schools,

²https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/World's_Columbian_Exposition#/media/File:1893_world_columbian_exposition.jpg

by the fact that many Indian religious ceremonies were legally banned. And of course the loss of land.

With the benefit of hindsight and with the advantage of witnessing the revival of Indigenous cultures today, we can now begin to understand that this Chicago 1893 Exposition indeed marks a great transformation. But it's not the transformation of vanishing Indigenous peoples into assimilated white society that Expo organizers thought was their message. Instead we can see it as the start of a survival and renewal transformation whose seeds were sown by Native hands. That transformation story was on actually on display with colorful masks used by Pacific Northwest Indigenous Peoples, though not many of the majority attendees really got the point.

Randy: But before we see those masks and that story, we need to look behind the façade that was the Expo's public face – its mask. It was created by hastily renovating existing buildings and by creating temporary giant structures, many of which were mere wooden forms plastered over to look like enduring stone structures. This was in a very real sense a mask covering colonial society - put on to disguise its troubling history and also in order to project an image of European elegance.

Carolyn: So Randy, I think you're trying to make the point that a lot is being stage managed and a lot is not real, but it's what the organizers are trying to impose - their view of reality.

Randy: You got it. So complementing these illusions, Expo organizers are showcasing living examples of how Indians lived so-called primitively, and how they are being taught skills needed to be productive members of white society. Young men display carpentry skills they were taught at Indian residential schools. My own family's Aunt Emma Johnson, a Potawatomi, is making an appearance on her ancestral homeland at age 17. She's displaying sewing skills she's learned at a residential school.

Carolyn: So Randy, just to clarify, your Aunt Emma is illustrating sort of an in-between stage for the Indigenous people? Like, she's wearing sort of white settler attire and she's showing sewing just like she's been taught. So she's going to look like someone who's getting ready to take a place in the mainstream society.

Randy: She's one of the many variations on “evolutionary success” at the fair. And her particular brand, if you wish, that she's illustrating is that some of these primitive Indigenous people can be rescued by teaching them white mainstream skills.

Carolyn: Okay. So let's in our imaginations, keep on walking past the residential school workers and find some of the other Indigenous people invited to the Expo. And these are supposed to be the quote-unquote “before” stage of evolution. We can follow the crowd to where the Kwakwaka'wakw [*pronounced “Kwok-wok-a-wok”*] from the Pacific Northwest coast are performing a dance. Fifteen Kwakwaka'wakw have traveled for six months to this Chicago area. They're living and performing daily just outside of the Expos anthropology building.

So this leads to the question, why did they travel all the way to Chicago from their homeland, which is near today's Vancouver, British Columbia. What was behind that decision?

Randy: Well, the Kwakwaka'wakw - who actually, for many people who are not aware of the new names that Indigenous people currently prefer to use³, were historically referred to very famously in the United States and around the world as the Kwakiutl . So when you hear Kwakwaka'wakw let your brains make that association, and then this group that might sound very exotic suddenly might be familiar.

So, the question, why did the Kwakwaka'wakw travel all the way to Chicago from their homeland is a really complicated and a really troubling question. First of all, they came because they were allowed to publicly perform dance ceremonies that Carolyn mentioned had been banned in the United States and Canada. Tribal members were being jailed for performing these. There were some underground invisible [*to outsiders*] performances still going on, but there was really brutal

³ Randy is trying to avoid a lengthy discussion of “new names” here. The names – of peoples and places - that are “new” to outsiders are usually more accurate phonetic spellings of the way they are pronounced in the native language. So this is reclaiming an older, traditional connection to the identity of the people and places. An analogy is the current spelling of “Beijing” for the Chinese capital city, which was written as “Peking” in documents and history books by Europeans and Americans for several centuries. Since “Beijing” is a more accurate phonetic spelling of the way that Chinese speakers actually pronounce the word, its orthographic change in the Latin alphabet has a strong reason behind it.

repression of these dances.⁴ So under the guise of being mere illustrations of a disappearing group, the Kwakwaka'wakw found this was at least one place where they could have a public stage on which to perform their most sacred rituals.

Carolyn: Let me ask first, it sounds like the Expo is bending some laws to have these performances performed openly in public. Do you think it's at least partly because they felt that it wasn't a dangerous empowering thing because the performers were doing it not in their own homeland with their own people, but doing it on stage?

Randy: Yes, it's merely a show. It's merely a performance for the fair organizers. So the context here is that these were banned, these dances were banned because the government and anthropologists and ethnologists understood that these dances fired up Native Americans. They alleged - actually stated openly - that things like Custer being defeated at the Battle of what we call Greasy Grass was the result of Indians getting just absolutely fired up and animated by their dances. So the way you solve the "Indian problem" as they called it, is prevent the dance which leads to the uprisings. So yes, if they're just dancing for white people as opposed to their own people, that's no threat.

⁴ A strong voice emphasizing the importance of the dances to the Kwakwaka'wakw is that of O'wax̱alag̱alis, Chief of the Kwagu'ł "Fort Rupert Tribes." He is cited by anthropologist Franz Boas as saying to Boas, on October 7, 1886 when Boas arrived to study Kwakwaka'wakw culture:

"We want to know whether you have come to stop our dances and feasts, as the missionaries and agents who live among our neighbors try to do. We do not want to have anyone here who will interfere with our customs. We were told that a man-of-war would come if we should continue to do as our grandfathers and great-grandfathers have done. But we do not mind such words. Is this the white man's land? We are told it is the Queen's land, but no! It is mine.

"Where was the Queen when our God gave this land to my grandfather and told him, "This will be thine"? My father owned the land and was a mighty Chief; now it is mine. And when your man-of-war comes, let him destroy our houses. Do you see yon trees? Do you see yon woods? We shall cut them down and build new houses and live as our fathers did.

"We will dance when our laws command us to dance, and we will feast when our hearts desire to feast. Do we ask the white man, "Do as the Indian does"? It is a strict law that bids us dance. It is a strict law that bids us distribute our property among our friends and neighbors. It is a good law. Let the white man observe his law; we shall observe ours. And now, if you come to forbid us dance, be gone. If not, you will be welcome to us."

Source: Wikipedia, article on Kwakwaka'wakw
<https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Kwakwaka%CA%BCwakw>

Carolyn: Wow. That also shows a sense among the both Canadian and United States governments in trying to ban these dances, these ceremonies, that they [*the dances*] are truly empowering because they're affirming the traditional Indigenous culture and beliefs, and the people are giving themselves strength. So obviously the ceremonies have a tremendous value and to - sort of like trying to get people from stopping speaking their native language. You're trying to undercut the basic foundations of the people's culture.

Randy: Indeed, indeed. I mean, there's a bit of a contradiction here at the Expo. On the one hand, the whole theme is the Indians are vanishing. That was what the newspapers said, "Come and see them at the fair before they vanish; they'll be gone in a few years." The federal government had that policy. And on the other hand, the society is still terrified of Indian uprisings, which had happened in the memory of most of the people attending the fair.

So let me continue for the complicated answer to your question, why the Kwakwaka'wakw came. One is that they actually wanted to take advantage of anthropologists' interest in capturing and salvaging the last traces of their culture because they felt that maybe they stood some remote chance of bending the minds and opening the minds of anthropologists and the public by showing who they were. Not just "primitive" Indigenous people disappearing, but people who have a rich culture, who have beautiful artifacts and beautiful ceremonies.

So they maybe were a bit naive, but again, it's a long shot and they didn't have much else to go on. So they're coming to the fair do this. Now, it's hard to understand this for contemporaries, but in the late 19th century, anthropology was a new quote-unquote "science" and it was on the rise, and anthropologists were consulted constantly by the government on issues of Indigenous peoples on the western frontier, which still wasn't settled.

So people like Franz Boas, a German anthropologist, was studying the Kwakwaka'wakw in particular. He had encountered them in Germany. He had been really impressed when he first saw the dance; it would actually be accurate to say he was completely blown away by it. Because he had been measuring their heads to find out whether they're more or less "primitive" from people who have bigger heads. And it suddenly occurred to him that maybe culture is more important than the size of someone's head, more important than racializing people.

So he invites the Kwakwaka'wakw personally, invites them to come to the fair to put on their performance in part because he's impressed with them, he knows they're colorful and enchanting. On the other hand, he's struggling with his own ambivalence about whether these people are a vanishing culture or a culture that deserves more respect than an awful lot of other anthropologists at the fair think. Most of the anthropologists at the fair are there basically to wish farewell to the disappearing people.

So what I think is probably the most important thing to understand about the Kwakwaka'wakw is that they very self-consciously and intentionally came to the Chicago Expo with a plan to deliver a message. The same message they took to Germany when they were on their tour, same message that was shown to Boas in Germany. He didn't get it then, probably isn't going to get it at the Expo either.

But the message that the Kwakwaka'wakw have to deliver is, look, we're not simple-minded "primitives." We're not a static society caught in a rut unable to change and adapt. Our dance is about transformation and about change, and that's who we are and who we've always been. Let us show you a dance with that theme and maybe you'll understand how we aren't going to vanish, how we're going to adapt.

It's a wonderful message, which I think has some modern resonance about transcending threatening circumstances in the environment and in the political and social climate around. Now that has to sound familiar to contemporaries, twenty-first century people listening to this program, because we are afflicted with the same kinds of anxieties.

Carolyn: Well, it also seems to me, obviously we can look back with the wisdom of hindsight and feel that the Kwakwaka'wakw were naïve thinking that they'd be looked at respectfully and that their message would get through to the people coming to this triumphalist Expo. But to me it's actually the same category of, if you're the first person from your minority group to have a seat at the table at some decision-making that formerly you were excluded from, chances are you're going to take it and you're going to give it your best effort because it's what you've got to work from. And I think you have to cast some hope and some optimism out there, that your communications are going to reach at least somebody and do some good.

Randy: Well, as we mentioned on a previous program about Black Elk, he joined Buffalo Bill's Wild West show as it toured Europe because it was an opportunity for

him and his contemporaries to deliver a similar message about, look, we're being misrepresented. We want to show you who we really are. And again, when you are totally marginalized, as you said, this is sometimes the best shot you can get.

But I think what we need to do now is since we've been leading people through the fair, is to get a little bit away from the immediate thing in front of us, which is this very abbreviated out of context performance of a very colorful dance, which we'll be describing in a minute here, and understand how that dance was actually performed and what it actually meant in the context of the society of the Kwakwaka'wakw from the Pacific Northwest. Because that dance, that performance reflected the times, not some frozen moment in ancient history immemorial unchanging; it reflected those circumstances, and that's what's on display at the Expo, and that's what we need to understand.

Carolyn: So listeners and readers, we're about to shift. Let me finish this segment to *[next]* look at things from the Kwakwaka'wakw perspective in their own context. So we're going to bid farewell to this Expo. See you in a minute. We'll take our first break. Stay tuned.

Section Two

Carolyn: Welcome back to Indigenous Perspectives, and our show on Transformation and Survival. So we're traveling now to the Pacific Northwest Coast looking at the Kwakwaka'wakw Raven Dancers, and we're looking at what was happening with these dances, why they were so important and why they were changing during the late 19th century. So Randy, start us off.

Randy: So first of all, we need to understand that this *[Kwakwaka'wakw]* society was experiencing demographic collapse on a scale that's hard for us to imagine. Many people know that something like 90% of the Indigenous population of the country was eliminated either through warfare or more often disease and starvation. This afflicted the Kwakwaka'wakw; they were not exempt. So entire villages, entire communities vanished from the face of the earth. Others had their population decreased so much that many villages had to basically combine their societies in order to be able to carry on.



Showing of masks at Kwakwaka'wakw potlatch⁵

And when a majority of the people in the village or the community disappear, basically all of the social structures collapse. There aren't people for leadership positions, there aren't people even to do simple tasks like fishing and hunting. It's a crisis. I hate to use the word that's overused today, but it was an existential crisis for the Kwakwaka'wakw -

Carolyn: - and for other people in the Pacific Northwest coast as well.

Randy: Absolutely, absolutely. So one of the things that was imploding was the kinship networks that were the very backbone of Kwakwaka'wakw society. Who you were in the community, the authority you had in the community, the rights you had for fishing and hunting, all related to your kinship network. And if that collapses

⁵ Photo credit: This image came from *The North American Indian* by Edward S. Curtis. These images were published between 1907 and 1930. According to the U.S. Library of Congress, they are in the public domain in the United States. Public Domain, <https://commons.wikimedia.org/w/index.php?curid=5045894>

then customary law is threatened. So the Kwakwaka'wakw are determined to put in a sense Humpty Dumpty back together again and recreate out of the fragments, surviving fragments of their culture, something new.

Now, to make the situation even more complicated, the Canadian government had basically imposed a new form of governance on the Kwakwaka'wakw. They appointed tribal councils, in some cases let the people in the community vote for their tribal leaders. But those new methods of governance replaced the old methods of governance based on customary law and kinship and traditional chiefs. So everything virtually is turned upside down.

Carolyn: I want to just clarify for - even for today, I think there's that tension among many Indigenous nations between the hereditary leaders, the clan leaders, the hereditary chiefs, whatever that particular nation has as a structure, and the Council or the sort of official recognized government that deals directly with the United States *[or Canadian]* bureaucracies. Is that accurate?

Randy: That is accurate. And at the time we're looking, in the late 19th century, this was just beginning to take hold.

Carolyn: Okay, so we've got the scene of the Kwakwaka'wakw dealing with massive threats to their very existence. So we're going to look at one of the many dances. It's a Raven Dance, a fragment of which was performed at the Chicago Expo. And a wonderful thing to start off with is that these dances are performed to this day. The whole movement, the form, the stories have been and are going strong; there are many wonderful examples available on YouTube⁶ of traditional dances in this Raven Cycle and others performed in recent years, by the Kwakwaka'wakw in particular. So that's where we're going to start.

Randy: We will put references to those in the print version of our podcast in our transcript so that those who'd like to see what this actually looked like can do. It's

⁶ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=J4s19L0Q6mk> Hamsamala - Dance of the Hamatsa Masks - filmed by John Cussins (13:06 minutes)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=f8WREmWxggU> The Spirit of the Mask - Gryphon Firstnations (5:43 minutes)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=t8S-a2E7TKU> Initiation of a Hamatsa Dancer, Fort Rupert, BC at a Hunt family Potlatch in 2004. S. Jackson. Thank you to Chief Calvin Hunt for permission to use these images. (3.23 minutes)

hard to put into words how absolutely awesome these are. But here we go. We're going to try.

Carolyn: Yes. We've done this based on looking at YouTube videos. So- our best effort.

Randy: So for the Kwakwaka'wakw, this Raven dance, the one that we're referring to that took place in Chicago, it's a ceremony marking the transition of someone from being a youth in the community. And he is going to go through a process and emerge into adulthood and leadership by virtue of becoming a member in a prestigious secret society. Secret societies and members of them basically literally owned the rights to perform these dances. And these dances are what anthropologists call a rite of passage, a mechanism, a ceremonial marking of moving from one stage in life to another stage in life. So the youth is seeking to be initiated and he first spends time in the forest before the dance - days - and other records it would suggest a week or more - fasting undergoing really strenuous fasting, sometimes not even drinking water to the point where people begin to hallucinate.

And during this vision quest in the forest, the youth encounters, because of cultural expectations, relationships with all kinds of spirits. Some of them are pretty dark and not particularly welcoming because for Native Americans, they knew that the forest and the world around them contained all kinds of spirits, some friendly, some unfriendly, and some friendly sometimes, and not at others like Bear Spirit. So this youth is in the forest, and one of the spirits he encounters is Crooked Beak. Who in Kwakwaka'wakw society is the cannibal. The spirit represents everything that is the antithesis of order and communal life. So essentially on his vision quest, he's encountering everything that's not in the village or doesn't belong in the village.

Carolyn: So he sort of has to figure out how to survive and not get drawn into the world of these evil beings.

Randy: That's not his job. He is being drawn into that. According to the ceremony, he returns to the village virtually a wild person. He's been uncivilized. So he enters a giant lodge, beautiful building with four totem poles surrounding an open space. There's an earthen floor and a fire burning in a pit in the center. And then community members are seated around to watch the transition.

Carolyn: So three dancers enter to the beat of drums and chants. The dancers wear large colorfully painted red, black and white carved wooden bird-like masks. The masks have prominent beaks. They're either curved or straight. The beaks stick out about four feet from the dancer's heads. And the dancers wear capes and skirts made of cedar bark, which sway with their movements. Their dance movements are deliberate. They involve high stepping footwork. The masks cock their heads from side to side. They swing, they move ponderously.

Also, at times the bird's beaks open and then they click closed, which adds another dimension of sound to the drumbeats. Each dancer has an assistant who accompanies his movements with a rattle, helps him stand up and sit down fluidly, even in the heavy mask, and who also activates the strings that open and close the beak. When the birds' dance is over, they exit and the young initiate - he's dressed in a cedar bark outfit - he's brought in escorted by two others, one on each side holding him really tightly. They whirl him around and present him to the onlookers at each of the four sections of the audience before they also exit.

Randy: So taken altogether, this is a dramatic and spell-binding performance for the audience, that's telling them the story of Crooked Beak's challenge to Raven, who is the hero in this story. And also it's a story about Raven's eventual triumph.

Carolyn: So we could say the ceremony has struggled to assert the power of life and the social and spiritual order against destruction and chaos as represented by Crooked Beak.

Randy: Yes. And everyone in the room at the time would've understood that that chaos is very largely the white society that has conquered them.

So what we're looking at essentially here is a purification ceremony where the evil spiritual influence that has occupied - possessed, if you wish - this young man is slowly extracted and overcome. And the subtext, which is not at all subtle, but everyone would've gotten, is this is our struggle with colonial society.

Carolyn: Okay, stay tuned listeners. We'll be back in a minute to continue our discussion.

Segment Three

Carolyn: Welcome back to Indigenous Perspectives. We're picking up our discussion of transformation and the Kwakwaka'wakw.

Randy: To remind our listeners, we have now traveled to the Pacific Northwest. We're watching the ceremony, and we have left our young initiate standing in this giant lodge in an altered state. And what I want to begin this segment by emphasizing is that he is now a unique individual in the community. He has been touched by living spirits in the forest, the most powerful forces in Kwakwaka'wakw society. And he has become through that process a bridge between ordinary life, ordinary people, and the spirit world.

Carolyn: And this is special for the young man with this special ceremony, but the whole community understands they're all intimately and continually connected to the spirit world, right?

Randy: But not as connected as someone who undergoes this transformation, not as much as someone who is initiated into this secret society and will become a knowledge keeper and a bridge, a broker conduit, if you wish, to the spirit world.

So his transformation is indeed just one of many transformations that happen in dances in the Kwakwaka'wakw society, and they involve other masks. Some of the masks - which again you can see in the videos that we'll give links to in our print transcript - are masks that literally open up to expose a face within the mask, a mask within the mask.⁷ It's absolutely astounding to see it. And what the viewers would understand is that within the spirit mask of a Raven or a Whale is a human, that there is no distinction, no radical distinction between humans and other spirits and other living beings, including wildlife.

Carolyn: And the dancers would also be having a very powerful experience every time they perform the dance because they're not just taking a role, but they have to live it to a certain extent.

⁷ https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Y_5s29JbsPM Raven Transformation Mask - John Cussins (6:15 minutes)

Randy: That is correct. The masks are not “things.” They're objects in museums today, and people collect them and put them on their walls. But for the Kwakwaka'wakw these are animate beings, living beings, not just because the parts move with little mechanical devices, but because the spirit within them makes them animated, makes them come alive.



Four-faced Hamat'sa Mask / Galokwudzuwis mask⁸

Carolyn: So these are not masks that are made to be hung on a wall in isolation. They're meant to be masks that participate in the ceremonies and dances that carry all these messages, right?

⁸ Walkus, George c. 1938, Kwakiutl, Northwest Coast Native American.

“The complex moving parts of this brightly colored mask are used during Hamatsa society ceremonies. The main face, Crooked Beak (Galokwudzuwis), has two raven heads in the back and a crane mask on top.” Denver Art Museum (1948.229) Denver, Colorado, US.

Photo credit: ya3hs3 <https://www.flickr.com/photos/ya3hs3/4935508126>

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Randy: So this celebration, this ceremony that we're seeing, is just one of many that would happen continually, including at potlatches in this society, whereby the gates, if you wish, between this world and this spirit world open. And what the Kwakwaka'wakw are doing is they're consciously activating those connections because they understand that without a spiritual transformation and recreation and re-energizing of their nearly broken society, they aren't going to be able to transcend the threats that surround them.

Carolyn: So they're using the dances to basically piece back together the most fundamental aspects of their societies: kinship among humans, kinship linking humans, kinship linking humans, and non-humans, including the spirit world. So their cosmology is being seriously threatened by so many circumstances; they're responding with these dances.



Raven⁹

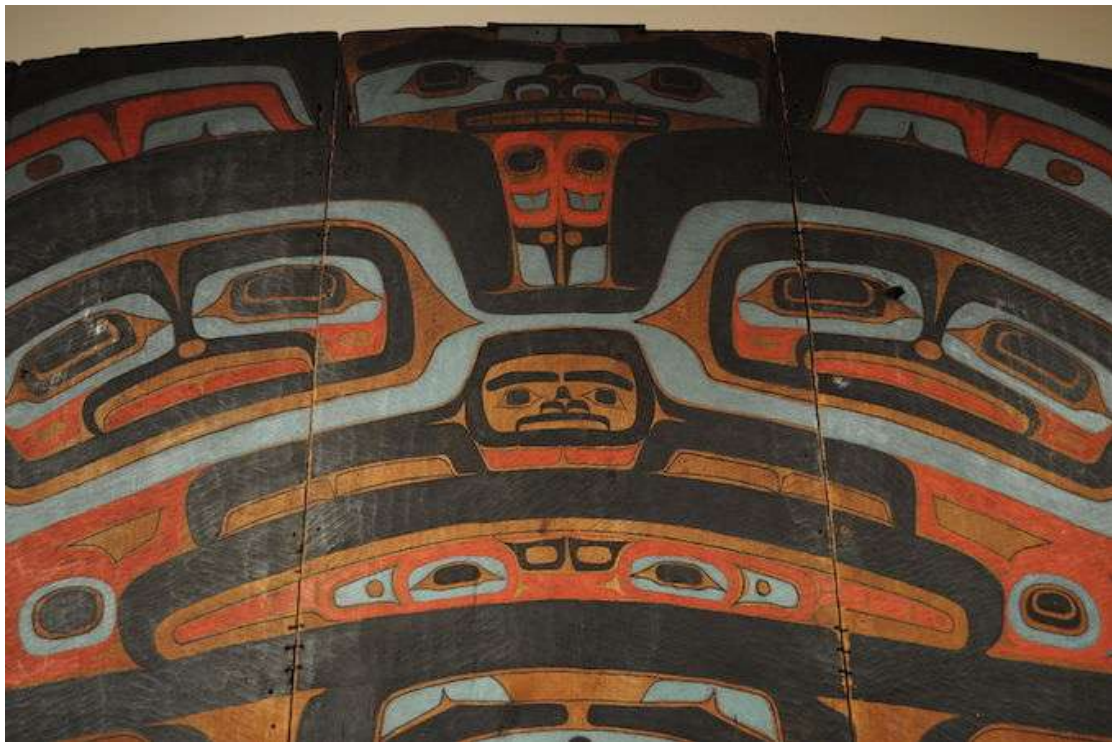
I think a lot of us are feeling this kind of threat today, but we don't have - today, mainstream society - we don't seem to have ceremony to express our angst or our hopes or different ways to connect ourselves and heal our communities. We don't have ceremonies that touch us really deeply, I don't think. People just read the news and suffer. They don't know what to do, or they look to technological fixes like get a better computer or a new gadget.

⁹ Photo credit: <https://pxhere.com/en/photo/501527> CCO Public Domain

Randy: So that's why we're doing this very show. We're trying to offer some alternative model, some hope of ways of coping with what was a very real threat for 19th century Kwakwaka'wakw and for what we - many of us today - feel is a very, very real threat. We have young people in great numbers around the world who are expressing their fears in organizations like Extinction Rebellion. It sounds an awful lot like the message at the Chicago Expo of "these people are vanishing". Only this time it's not the "lower levels on the evolutionary tree", it's the people who have reached the acme of the evolutionary tree, saying it about themselves.

But the difference is that the Indigenous people, as you said, have ceremonial ways of coping with this. We [*mainstream people*] wallow in our own individual angst.

Carolyn: And they're also, again, this keeps hitting me really strongly - the whole point about these dances, this Raven Dance we gave, the example is one of many - they, the dances themselves change. Dances change over time. They change in response to the audience. The original of the dance we described was actually created by a different Northwestern people, the Heiltsuk, and through intermarriage and through some kinship arrangements, the Kwakwaka'wakw got ahold of the dance and used it for their own selves.



Detail, *Tlingit Raven Screen* or *Yéil X'eenh*, attributed to Kadyisdu.axch', Tlingit, Kiks.ádi clan, active late 18th – early 19th century¹⁰

They integrated it with their other ideas and moved things forward. So I think that's really important because it is time for us to cast off the idea that Indigenous societies were stuck in transitions and traditions, traditions that were unchanging. Yes, these are important traditions, but they're changing over time. The people are changing them, transforming them to meet their needs.

Randy: So I think that's a really important point. So if the Kwakwaka'wakw could borrow from other Indigenous societies to promote their spiritual revival and survival, maybe there's a lesson there. And I think a lot of us in contemporary society are learning that as we're trying to borrow elements from Indigenous society to revitalize our own society.

Carolyn: Stay tuned. We'll be back in a minute with Segment Four.

Segment Four

Randy: Welcome back to our program on Transformation and Survival. In this segment, I'm going to answer the question that might be on several people's minds, which is: so the Kwakwaka'wakw have succeeded in finding a way of engaging in their own spiritual transformation. So what? So how really significant is that in the broader scheme of things?

So what I want to show in this segment is that that transformation of a small community of Indigenous people in the Pacific Northwest was enormously influential on the broader world around us, and on contemporary problems that all of us see as in the forefront of our concern.

First of all, what they did is they succeeded in getting the Canadian government – the Kwakwaka'wakw and other Pacific Northwest tribes succeeded - in getting the Canadian government's Fisheries Commission, which was doing a horrific job of

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controlling overfishing on the Pacific coast, they succeeded in getting them to change their rules.

They [*the Kwakwaka'wakw*] did this by confronting this bureaucracy, going out in their canoes and surrounding giant ocean trawlers and embarrassing the Canadian government. They embarrassed the Canadian government because they got on TV. It's like the mouse that roared, the little canoes around the big trawler. They used their moral force. And to have that moral force, they had to dig deep within their own spiritual strengths and their own new conviction to do this.

Now, we're talking here about the 21st century. This happened fairly recently, but the story goes deeper and goes back further than that. It goes back to the time period we were visiting a few minutes ago when we looked at the Kwakwaka'wakw and the transformation ceremony of this young initiate. What that ceremony did, as we said, is it recreated and re-energized the kinship system in the village, the very foundation of the society.

Well, what's the connection between the kinship system and saving fish? It's very simple and it's very beautiful. Traditional chiefs had the right to set fishing limits for the people in their own village and neighboring villages. When neighboring villages came to fish in their territory, they [*the traditional chiefs*] used their authority, which they derived from their status in the community, which came from the kinds of dances and ceremony that we were talking about. It was their mechanism for saying, "This is who I am, this is who my kin are, these are the people that respect my ruling on how many clams, how many fish can be caught." So we're finding an entire giant, powerful bureaucracy subject to the industrial influence of an incredibly powerful fishing industry upended by people who in the 21st century had discovered at the end of the 19th century how to put their broken culture back together again and make its kinship network an enforcement mechanism for customary law that protects the environment.

So what we have, in a very roundabout way, is an example of how reconstituting oneself first spiritually and then socially can be transformative, not just for the people in that society, but for Mother Earth herself. This is a really significant and wondrous story.

Carolyn: And one of the many things that keeps coming back to me is the importance of the fact that the Kwakwaka'wakw did these achievements by working within their communities. Again, you said they dug deep, they found the things of value to carry on. And I think an important point is telling ourselves stories about ourselves as humans that indicate our capacity to be self transformative is really important. So we don't just dissolve into a puddle of despair. And it's important also not just to have some highly individual weekend retreat, but to work with other people to create the communities and to reach out and connect in a positive way.

So I think those are not just words, but the Kwakwaka'wakw did it.

Randy: They did it, and more importantly, they're still doing it. And they're still doing it absolutely wondrously. And in some ways more effectively than some of our *[mainstream society's]* very strong, legally supported, financially supported organizations *[that]* can't seem to be able to achieve similar results. There's a lesson here. It should be obvious and it should be comforting to the listeners.

Carolyn: Okay, so in conclusion, we've taken our listeners on a long and circuitous journey. We've gone back through time and returned to the present, and we've done this in order to give you some sense of the formidable challenges and astounding transformations that the Kwakwaka'wakw actions exemplify. They were written off as quote-unquote Vanishing Indians at the 1893 Chicago Expo, presented as living exhibits of a culture that was reimagined and only partly understood if that by the organizers.

We saw that their culture, its masks, its dances, and its rituals were a bit commodified for Expo attendees, but they didn't let that drag them down. They then went back home. They're dealing with economic and governance obstacles, but instead of collapse, they recover, they recreate, they transform. It impacted not only the Kwakwaka'wakw, but the governments that had been attempting to erase them. The Kwakwaka'wakw restored, reinvigorated their ceremonies, reconstituted their social structure and the significance, the moral force of the traditional leaders. It became strong enough to transform how U.S. and Canadian authorities managed nature in and on coastal fisheries.

So this story is a start of an answer to the question that mainstream friends often ask: "Are we going to make it?" They're referring to the daily drumbeat of news about ecological, political, social collapses. So we hope this program will provide an

alternative to doom scrolling compulsively, checking the latest news about catastrophes as if merely staying tuned to such developments will be transformative. It won't be.

We've shown real living examples of cultures and peoples who faced unimaginable threats to their very existence, transformed themselves, kept reaching out and in so doing began the long and arduous work of transforming mainstream society as well.

Randy: I hope this broadcast has given you time and space to reconnect with your roots and Mother Earth and your ancestral roots. Before your busy day distracts you from this moment, we encourage you to reach out and feel the presence of living flora and fauna, our animate kin, and perhaps even that of your ancestors and others who have walked on. Allow yourself to touch their presence, capture that moment and to hold onto it.

Carolyn: And if you wish, write to Randy. Let him know about your experiences, or with any questions or suggestions you have for these shows. Randy can be reached at his email, randy.kritkauskys@hushmail.com or through his website, which is www.randykritkauskys.com

Migwetch [*Thank you, in the Potawatomi language*] to all.

Randy: Migwetch.

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