Íⁿ'zhúje'waxóbe: Shokhí (Coming Home)

By C. Huffman (Kaw) and Tai S. Edwards, in consultation with Curtis Kehkahbah (Kaw)

INTRODUCTION

In Lawrence, Kansas on the north end of Massachusetts street, just south of the bridge over the Kansas river, is Robinson Park, named after the state's first governor and a former superintendent of Haskell Institute (at the time, it was a federal boarding school for **Indigenous** youth). In 1929, a large pink quartzite rock was erected in the park as a monument to the town's "pioneers" and to celebrate the 75th anniversary of Lawrence's founding. The City of Lawrence's website in 2021 stated, "In an article in the Topeka State Journal on September 7, 1929, it was suggested to move the rock to the Statehouse grounds in Topeka because of its geological importance *and that it was held in spiritual reverence by the Kanza Indians*. Before Topekans could act, a man from Lawrence, with the aid of the Santa Fe Railway 200-ton crane moved the rock by rail and placed it in Robinson Park."[i]

A placard, affixed to the rock in 1929, reads: "To the pioneers of Kansas who in devotion to human freedom came into a wilderness, suffered hardships and faced dangers and death to found this state in righteousness. These were the first to come under the auspices of the New England Emigrant Act Company. They founded the City of Lawrence. The first party of twenty-nine men left Massachusetts July 17, 1854 and arrived here August 1, 1854. The second party of one hundred-fourteen left Boston August 29, 1854, and arrived September 15, 1854." Then the plaque lists the names of these "founders".[ii]

The importance of the "Big Red Rock" or *Íⁿ'zhúje'waxóbe* to the Kanza people is well-documented in articles, books, and by Kaw citizens. In 2019-2021, the Interchange Grant project "Between the Rock and a Hard Place," commenced the process of reimagining Robinson Park and Íⁿ'zhúje'waxóbe role in it through community workshops and outreach to the City of Lawrence and Douglas County commissions. In March 2021, this culminated in the City and County formally apologizing to the Kaw Nation for defacing and appropriating Íⁿ'zhúje'waxóbe and agreeing to its unconditional return to the Kaw people.[iii]

LOCATION

Íⁿ'zhúje'waxóbe is also known as a red Sioux quartzite **glacial erratic**, native to eastern South Dakota and southwestern Minnesota. This boulder, and others like it, were pushed into what is now Kansas during the last ice age, between 600,000 and 1 million years ago.[iv] (For reference, scientists date the emergence of our human species, homo sapiens, to 315,000 years ago.[v]) For hundreds of thousands of years, this boulder lay at the junction of Shunganunga creek and the Kansas river, near present-day Tecumseh, Kansas, until its removal to Robinson Park in 1929.[vi]

The land that is now Robinson Park is part of the historic homeland of the Kanza people (Kaw Nation) and part of the hunting territory of their relatives, the Osage. Caddoan peoples, such as the Pawnee, likely frequented this region too. The Kansas river and other waterways also served as important routes for travel and trade among Indigenous North Americans bringing many people to and through this region. U.S. demands to displace Indigenous people in order for U.S. citizens to possess their land resulted in reduced land holdings for the Kanza and other local Indigenous nations, while eastern Indigenous people were forcibly resettled in this area in the 1830s-1840s. As a result, Robinson Park's land was part of the Shawnee reservation, but the Delaware people, whose reservation was on the north side of the Kansas river lived and farmed in closest proximity to what is now Robinson Park.[vii]

In 1853, Congress authorized dispossessing Kansas's Indigenous people and in 1854 Kansas territory was officially opened to non-Native settlement. This prompted the New England Immigrant Aid Company, commemorated on the plaque affixed to Íⁿ'zhúje'waxóbe, to establish Lawrence. One of the company's leaders, Charles Robinson, would use his role in the town's founding to amass a personal fortune in Indigenous land and eventually serve as the state's first governor. Over the next two decades, Indigenous land holdings were significantly reduced in the state, with the Kanza, Shawnee, and Delaware forced to move again, this time to what we now call Oklahoma. For the Kanza, *this means the loss of the last of their homeland*.[viii]

In 1873 the Kanza were officially expelled from the state that bears their name. As was the case with all forced Indigenous migrations in the U.S., the result for the Kanza people was disease, death, and significant population loss. Between 1800 and the 1870s, their population had declined by over 1,000 leaving just over 500 Kanza survivors. By the late 1880s, on their Indian Territory (now Oklahoma) reservation, only 194 people remained. In 1902 Congress "legally obliterated the tribe" and allotted the Kaw reservation, meaning it was divided up into individually owned properties. Much of the former reservation was flooded when the Army Corps of Engineers built the Kaw Reservoir in the 1960's. Consequently, the nation's Council House and cemetery had to be relocated.[ix]

Despite these assaults the Kanza people endured. Today the Kaw Nation is a federally-recognized and self-governing nation with over 3,500 members. The nation holds 168 acres in Kansas, has a service area in Oklahoma, and is actively working towards economic **sovereignty**.

LISTENING TO THE LAND

"Do you know about the Big Red Rock?" After we exchange our usual greetings in **Kaáⁿze íe**, we switch back into English and my Elder asks me this question in his excited gravely and insistent voice. As soon as he asked and I answered that I did not, I knew that I soon would. What I did not know is that this question was the beginning of a journey of return to the roots of our people, roots which nourish and sustain us still. When I learn of "Big Red Rock" he is in Lawrence Kansas, having been kidnapped and taken there in 1929. Very quickly we start to call him in our language, Íⁿ'zhúje'waxóbe, and talk about him, too much. It means "sacred red rock"- the big is implied by the English habit of capitalizing pronouns. When I refer to Íⁿ'zhúje'waxóbe I

always capitalize the word, even if only in my mind, implying a certain enormity. Within a week I called a tribal member, an auntie to myself, and who is working on a grant to get him back, sort of. I ask her to start simply by telling me the story, and among other things she tells me there are many of these rocks dotted around the plains, this one is ours. They are glacial era erratics; they are wanderers, they mark the way. Rock and roll. I volunteer my services. Somewhere Iⁿ'zhúje'waxóbe laughs.

Slowly things are starting to coalesce. The Kanza Heritage Society is watching the grant process in Lawrence, Kansas develop, and after reviewing the notes from the town meetings, the town is amenable to returning the rock back to the Kaw Nation. They also will apologize for the theft. It is a starting place.

I'm still waiting to meet Íⁿ'zhúje'waxóbe for the first time in person. There is another event which cannot be dismissed, something worldwide and epic which could change (is indeed changing?) the Western economy and way of life. There is a virus in the land, this is nothing new for our people, viral plague. The Nation closed the doors early, before the rest of the country. So instead of taking the train back east from the foot of the big rocky mountains into the soft Kansas prairie to meet Íⁿ'zhúje'waxóbe and my Elders, we stay home this year, watching and waiting a little while longer.

THE STORY

Kanza Elder Curtis Kehkahbah tells Íⁿ'zhúje'waxóbe's story to Kanza youth (recorded March 9, 2021).

Link: https://vimeo.com/540895035

Password: Kanza

WRITING ACTIVITY

Creative Prompt: *You came to me last night old man, shattered glacial pieces in my hands, vibrating with heart's erratic speech, a cracked tongue fluency the rusted color of dried blood tamed by time and sun. So heart in hand this journey is one foot in one time, all time, counterclockwise way, ever is the promise of return. We begin again.*

Writing Exercise: Imagine you have awakened to find that your place of worship, your school, your favorite most special place, is gone. Someone has taken it for a trophy. How do you feel?

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

- How did Íⁿ'zhúje'waxóbe end up at the junction of Shunganunga creek and the Kansas river?
- Why/how is Íⁿ'zhúje'waxóbe's journey significant for Kanza people?
- What does it mean for Íⁿ'zhúje'waxóbe to be in Robinson Park?

- Why is it important for the City of Lawrence and Douglas County to apologize for taking Íⁿ'zhúje'waxóbe?
- How is “Between the Rock and a Hard Place” a model for restorative Land justice in Kansas? Can you think of other restorative projects? How do they build relationships between the people and Land? And between each other?

VOCABULARY

- **Indigenous Peoples**: peoples or nations who take their tribal identities as members of the human species from the landscapes and seascapes that give them their unique tribal cultures.[x]
- **Íⁿ'zhúje'waxóbe**: the red rock which is sacred.
- **Glacier**: a mass of ice that originates on land.[xi]
- **Erratic**: stones and rocks that were transported by a glacier, and then left behind after the glacier melted.[xii]
- **Sovereignty**: a nation’s power to self-govern, to determine its own way of life, and to live that life free from interference.[xiii]
- **Kaáⁿze íe**: to speak Kanza language, to hold Kanza worldview.
- **Shokhí**: to return to one’s home.

EDUCATOR RESOURCES

Teaching is difficult, under the best of circumstances. Without tools, without multiple perspectives and diversity of world view, we are trying to build a house with only a hammer. In order to tell a story of what happened, we need to listen to all of the voices involved so that a picture may emerge, a tapestry full of depth and nuance, a weaving which brings an image to light. This history and way of telling may not be familiar to the learner and yet it is precisely that which makes one uncomfortable which often brings about the greatest understanding.[xiv]

There are over 574 federally recognized Native Nations in the United States today, there are more which are not recognized federally. Federal recognition is a specific political and legal designation within which Indigenous governments exercise sovereignty.[xv]

Each history, from each locale, will be different and yet will follow a familiar pattern of pre-colonization, contact, and post-contact with the colonial experiment. The truth-story we are telling is that of Kanza people. We cannot tell the story of our people without including our language and Land, after all, language informs world view, a view which is also, intimately connected to “the beginning.” Our origins, the way we believe we came to be, are essential, “because they show how life is a symbol to be lived.”[xvi]

Our stories of creation, how we came to be, our “history,” if you will, “they encourage people to understand themselves, physically, mentally, and spiritually.”[xvii]

Restorative justice is a process, an ongoing dialogue which makes use of a way of engaging with the world which does not necessarily view the past and the present as separate. This is particularly true when discussing Kanza culture and heritage, both material and spirit. The

closest I have come to encountering the same sort of overlap in historical memory in Western culture is a concept in German of “erinnungskultur”- memory culture. It means that we live with the presence of memory and that the memory of our history informs (ideally for the better….) the choices we make in the present.[xviii]

Here in Lawrence, Kansas there is the opportunity to practice memory culture, and to turn that into a process of restoration and healing, for all people. Robinson Park has been a profoundly difficult space, one whose history should not be erased but addressed so that the present can become a place of growth and compassion.

We have a, perhaps unique, moment to share our stories and to make new ones. This process of redress and witnessing will allow for a more complete history, one which includes our collective experience. It is a chance to begin the process of restoration, for everything. Wíblahaⁿ.

Find out where you live! https://native-land.ca/

---

[i] Emphasis added; “Robinson Park,” City of Lawrence website, https://lawrenceks.org/lprd/parks/robinsonpark/, accessed October 15, 2020.
[ii] “Robinson Park,” City of Lawrence website, https://lawrenceks.org/lprd/parks/robinsonpark/, accessed October 15, 2020.
[iii] Rochelle Valverde, “Project takes on sacred Kanza prayer rock that Lawrence made into monument to settlers,” Lawrence Journal-World, January 25, 2020, https://www2.ljworld.com/news/city-government/2020/jan/25/new-project-takes-on-the-shunganunga-boulder-a-sacred-kanza-prayer-rock-that-the-city-made-into-a-monument-honoring-settlers/, accessed April 2, 2021; Rochelle Valverde, “Lawrence City Commission approves resolution committing to unconditional return of sacred prayer rock to Kaw Nation,” *Lawrence Journal-World*, March 16, 2021, https://www2.ljworld.com/news/2021/mar/16/lawrence-city-commission-approves-resolution-committing-to-unconditional-return-of-sacred-prayer-rock-to-kaw-nation/, accessed April 2, 2021; “Between the Rock and a Hard Place,” https://www.robinsonpark1929.com/, accessed April 2, 2021.
[iv] Patricia J. O’Brien, “The Sacred Red Rock of the Kansa,” unpublished manuscript, p. 2-3; James S. Aber, “The Glaciation of Northeastern Kansas,” *Boreas*, vol. 20, issue 4 (1991), 300, 311.
[v] “Homo sapiens,” Britannica Academic, *Encylcopaedia Britannica*, 11 Jan. 2019, academic-eb-com.ezproxy.jccc.edu/levels/collegiate/article/Homo-sapiens/40899, accessed October 15, 2020.
[vi] George P. Morehouse, “Religion of the Indians, Especially of the Kansa or Kaws,” 27th Biennial Report of the Kansas State Historical Society, 1928-30, 40-50.
[vii] Jewett, J.P. & Company, “Map of Eastern Kansas, Kansas Memory, https://www.kansasmemory.org/item/213048 accessed October 15, 2020; Homer E. Socolofsky and Huber Self, *Historical Atlas of Kansas*, Second Edition (University of Oklahoma Press, 1988), map 13; Brice Obermeyer and John P. Bowes, “’The Lands of My Nation’: Delaware Indians in Kansas, 1829-1869,” *Great Plains Quarterly*, vol. 36, number 1 (Winter 2016), 1-30.
[viii] Tai S. Edwards, *Osage Women and Empire: Gender and Power* (University Press of Kansas, 2018), 106; Tai Edwards, “Charles Robinson,” Between the Rock and a Hard Place,

https://www.robinsonpark1929.com/robinson-park, accessed October 15, 2020; Craig Miner and William E. Unrau, *The End of Indian Kansas: A Study of Cultural Revolution, 1854-1871* (University Press of Kansas, 1990); Brice Obermeyer, John P. Bowes, "'The Lands of My Nation': Delaware Indians in Kansas, 1829-1869," *Great Plains Quarterly*, vol. 36, no. 1 (Winter 2016), 1-30.

[ix] Ronald D. Parks, *The Darkest Period: The Kanza Indians and Their Last Homeland, 1846-1873* (University of Oklahoma Press, 2014), 216, 233; Agreement of the Kansas or Kaw Indians of Oklahoma Territory Among Themselves Relative to Their Tribal Lands and Funds, and Memorial to Congress (Kaw Allotment Act), U.S. Statutes at Large, 57th Congress, Session 1, chapter 1361 (1902), https://www.loc.gov/law/help/statutes-at-large/57th-congress/session-1/c57s1ch1361.pdf, accessed April 8, 2021; "Kanza People," Kaw Nation website, https://kawnation.com/?page_id=72, accessed April 8, 2021; "History of the Government of the Kaw Nation Since 1902," Kaw Nation website, https://kawnation.com/?page_id=3330#:~:text=The%20Kaw%20Allotment%20Act%20was,on%20the%20final%20allotment%20rolls.&text=In%201955%2C%20the%20General%20Services,where%20the%20Kaw%20Agency%20stood., accessed April 8, 2021.

[x] Daniel R. Wildcat, *Red Alert! Saving the Planet with Indigenous Knowledge* (Fullcrum, 2009), 32.

[xi] "Glacier," National Snow & Ice Data Center website, https://nsidc.org/cryosphere/glossary/term/glacier, accessed April 8, 2021.

[xii] "Glacier Landforms: Erratics," National Snow & Ice Data Center website, https://nsidc.org/cryosphere/glaciers/gallery/erratics.html, accessed April 8, 2021.

[xiii] Amanda J. Cobb, "Understanding Tribal Sovereignty: Definitions, Conceptualizations, and Interpretations," *American Studies*, vol. 46, No. 3/4 (Fall 2005/Spring 2006), 118.

[xiv] Guy W. Jones and Sally Moomaw, *Lessons from Turtle Island: Native Curriculum in Early Childhood Classrooms* (Redleaf Press, 2002).

[xv] National Congress of American Indians, "Tribal Nations and the United States: An Introduction" (2019), https://www.ncai.org/tribalnations/introduction/Indian_Country_101_Updated_February_2019.pdf, accessed April 8, 2021.

[xvi] Barbara C. Sproul, *Primal Myths: Creation Myths around the World* (Harper San Francisco, 1979), 30.

[xvii] Barbara C. Sproul, *Primal Myths: Creation Myths around the World* (Harper San Francisco, 1979), 29.

[xviii] Restorative Justice Initiative, https://restorativejustice.nyc/, accessed April 8, 2021; Susan Neiman, *Learning from the Germans: Race and the Memory of Evil* (Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2019).