



# PARFLECHE STORIES

Bearing witness to the American Indian Holocaust through Testimony, Prayer and Story

The American Indian Holocaust, known as the 500 Year War is the world's largest and longest Holocaust in the history of Mankind. Yet it remains hidden. When one bears witness through testimony, one becomes a torchbearer of memory and shines a light on this forgotten history.

**PARFLECHE STORIES** is a story testimony project that runs alongside the *Walking Backward into the Future* Pilgrimage. Beginning June 2019, Pueblo Indian Elder, Larry Littlebird and Deborah Littlebird of New Mexico and Dr. Greg Valerio of the British Isles will embark on a migratory journey of healing and forgiveness across America from the East coast to the West coast.

Larry Littlebird will travel with a handcrafted contemporary *parfleche* in which he will carry stories of *Land and People* as they visit significant indigenous landscapes. During the two-year project, pilgrimages will cross four regions of America: East Coast/Thirteen Colonies, Midwest/Heartland, Texas/Great Southwest, Rocky Mountain States/West Coast. **PARFLECHE STORIES** creates a mapping of **TESTIMONY, STORY and RESPONSE** culminating into a multi-media exhibition bearing witness to the American Indian Holocaust.

Larry Littlebird and Greg Valerio will respond to **STORY CARDS** on **LIVE VIDEO CHATS** along the pilgrimage route. As they connect and encounter people, it is their hope to re-consecrate a mutual legacy of sacred words to kindle justice for healing the soul wounds of our nations.

## HISTORY OF THE PARFLECHE

A *parfleche* is a Native American rawhide container. The name "parfleche" comes from the French language *parer* meaning "to parry" or "to defend" and *fleche* meaning "arrow. Enveloped-shaped parfleches historically were used to contain items such as dried meats and to carry maps, medicine, and ceremonial items in efficient lightweight waterproof packaging. The most common form of the *parfleche* was a folded envelope with laces. They were painted with brightly colored bold graphics often symbolizing landscape features such as rivers and mountains. Many times the designs were used as maps themselves. Traditionally, parfleche's were created by women of the tribes, and now contemporary versions within a cultural renaissance are made by both women and men. The use of *parfleche* pouch declined drastically when the colonists slaughtered buffalo herds to near extinction and forced relocation of Indigenous peoples onto reservations. Today these historic backpacks are seen mostly in museums and expensive collections as valuable antiques. We believe the *parfleche* represents a culturally and spiritually significant traveling container to carry these healing stories, *walking backward into the future*

PARFLECHE STORIES is curated by Deborah Littlebird in collaboration with Listening Ground and the Slow Story Project.  
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