



## The Salt of the Earth (Inspired by Cherokee Creation Story)

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### DUSABLE AND SON'S PERSONAL LEGEND

“Did you gather the wood?” DuSable spoke to his son as if he were much older. Kana’ti was only 4 months old, though he clearly presented the height and maturity level of a 6-year old. Although Kana’ti’s rapid maturation was of great benefit to this nomadic father, he couldn’t help but wonder about this divine occurrence. Just four months ago, the two were settled in Georgia with Selu and Wild Boy, DuSable’s wife and oldest son. Kana’ti was a newborn, but was already showing signs of prophecy. Within his first month of life, Kana’ti had developed a full set of teeth. No longer was he able to nurse like other newborns. Instead, Kana’ti ate table food and was the smallest person walking in the tribe.

“It was wet from the snow so it wouldn’t light, Baba. I tried to ...”

The family was originally located in Florida but had been pushed out of Apalachee territory by French soldiers, then forced out of Georgia by the British as soon as the American Revolution started. Now the two men are traveling north. Selu and Wild Boy didn’t make it out of Georgia, a tale we will discuss when appropriate.

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“Go put some oil on it. The oil will burn first and dry out the wood. It’ll be ok...”<sup>1</sup> DuSable stated, never looking up. His understanding of the earth and how to manipulate its resources was phenomenal. He was a true student of his environment. Any other time he would have risen up and showed his son how to strike the kindling step by step. However, he was in deep thought about his current situation. They were in the mountains between Tennessee and Kentucky. The territory was hostile at the time. There were thick battles between the English, colonial soldiers, and American Indian tribes. Not to mention the sheer lack of trust for all unknown travelers. There was little safety in the region. DuSable knew how vulnerable he and Kana’ti were. In four months their small family had traveled thousands of miles. He was exhausted. His body, even his spirit wanted to rest. But he couldn’t. Kana’ti needed him. And he needed God. Faith was the only paddle he had in the sea of life. In four months his son had experienced so much loss. His rapid physical and mental growth were representations of his forced maturity (Morrison, 2015).

Kana’ti followed the instructions, feeling his father’s stress. Children are extraordinarily keen in that way. The boy grabbed the canister of oil from the wagon. It had been stored under the deer and bear pelts that DuSable collected for trade. He was a masterful barterer. He knew the key to any trade was the willingness to walk away. DuSable was one of the original and most successful American merchants. Kana’ti had trouble lifting the pelts. They were cold and very dense. He grabbed the canister and jumped down from the wagon stumbling slightly in the snow. He fell and immediately felt the chill of the cold wet snow on his butt. The canister slipped out of his hand and the pitch black oil poured onto the pure white snow. Kana’ti rushed to grab the canister, but much of the oil had already drenched the snow. The viscosity and warmth of the oil created a depression of blackness in the white snow. The metaphor of American life, especially in the prenatal city of DuSable, was nearly perfect. Except for the fact that Kana’ti wasted most of the oil.

Jean Baptiste Point DuSable saw his son struggling and ran over to the wagon to assist. Snow flung up from DuSable’s boots as he trudged over to his son. Kana’ti was embarrassed after his fall. He knew that his father traded two metal flasks full of fresh water for the oil. The boy was simply trying to

<sup>1</sup> Indigenous ways of seeing and knowing the world have been marginalized since the onset of European colonialism (Smith, 2012; Fanon, 1963). In this work, the intention is to reimagine the world in which there is common ground for Western and indigenous epistemologies. Throughout this piece, I seek to highlight indigenous science like this example of oil drying damp wood. I apply two primary frameworks to this work of creative writing. The first framework being the concept of “desettling expectations in science” proposed by Bang et al. (2012). In this work, Bang et al. offer validation and confirmation of indigenous epistemologies which have been marginalized in Euro-centric spaces where testability and quantification are supreme. The second framework, which must be simultaneously accepted with the “desettled expectations,” is Linda Smith’s (2012) “indigenous science.” Indigenous science accepts the epistemological distinctions between Euro-centric/Western science through decolonizing the methodological approach. In this work both of these frameworks are applied to offer insight into the experience of both American Indians and Foundational Black Americans within the sciences.

imitate his father's swagger by jumping down from the wagon. He had not yet developed the coordination to do so. DuSable gathered the canister salvaging a corner of the oil for the fire. Kana'ti sat in the snow and cried out of sheer embarrassment. Holding the canister in his left hand, the father scooped his son up by the arm with his right hand. "You always cry on your feet. No matter how hard this life gets, ALWAYS cry on your feet." He tossed Kana'ti on his hip and walked to the future fire pit with his son in tow. Kana'ti felt the love of his father. Even if he didn't understand why he should "cry on his feet."

In his father's arms, Kana'ti stopped crying. He wiped his face on his father's sleeve, and looked DuSable deep in the eyes. "Why did you say that? We have to cry on our feet?" Kana'ti was curious, and his father always encouraged his questions.

"Life is not meant to be easy. Every living creature has obstacles. From the bee to the bear. We all have to struggle through this life, seeking joy, happiness and balance." DuSable paused, thinking of his own imbalances. Kana'ti waited. "The obstacles test our soul. And our desire to reach our personal legends. In the obstacle you do not control winning and losing. All you control is your response to the obstacle. And your response will always be to stand in it. Because your soul is unbreakable. And if you need help standing, I am here. And we will have two unbreakable souls facing the obstacle." DuSable kissed Kana'ti on the forehead and again wiped the boy's nose with his sleeve.

Kana'ti dropped from DuSable's hip with the same bounce as when he jumped off of the wagon. "Baba, can I still light the fire on my own. I hear the oil swishing around in there. It might be enough." The father agreed with his son. It was probably enough. Kana'ti's ears were keen. DuSable nodded allowing his son to start the fire. He knew they would have to find a different camp once they started the flame. *Smoke will draw attention. We need to eat and keep moving. But how much further can the horses go? Que le ciel nous guide. (May the heavens guide us)...* DuSable thought to himself.

The boy had patience beyond his years. He sat rubbing the wood between his hands like he was palm rolling dreadlocks. The wind was picking up, and the snow was blowing in every direction. The two men were cold. The chill touched their marrow. Kana'ti showed great resilience. There was an initial spark. He tried to contain it with his whole body as he had seen his father do so many times. He looked like a rugby player huddling in the scrum. But the wind was strong, and the blinding snow was all around. DuSable sat watching, thinking of his wife, knowing how proud she would be of their son's resilience. Kana'ti continued to palm roll the stick. He blew on the embers out of habit. His breath was instantly absorbed by the strength of the wind. The embers brewed a little stronger. He slowly gathered them and transferred it to the kindling. The oil on the wood caught flame quickly. Kana'ti jumped back. The fire quickly died down and the wood began to take hold of the rumbling burn that could last through the night if they needed it. But DuSable knew that they needed to move and establish a different campsite for the night. Between

the wildlife and the war-torn country, there would be nothing to protect them after they had eaten and fallen asleep.

Leaving Kana'ti to tend to the fire, Jean Baptiste Point DuSable walked to the wagon once more to gather the deer steak and onions he and his son were preparing to eat. DuSable poked his head through the side of the Wagon. "Whoooooohhhh!" He heard a very familiar and violent sound whist past his ear. His heart skipped a beat. Without becoming conscious of his movements, DuSable grabbed one of the bear pelts and his feet were already on the ground. He was racing, moving faster than the arrows that began to frame his body. The arrows landed on either side of DuSable's long, muscular, African frame; four of the projectiles landed on the pelt. But the bear fur took most of the damage. Though DuSable felt the daggers in his back, he did not lose any steam. He dove over his son, wrapping them both in the bear fur. *Puis-je attraper le cheval? (Can I grab the horse?)* The father thought to himself. *Je dois attraper le cheval! (I have to grab the horse!)* DuSable thought. "Be calm my son. We are safe."

DuSable sprang up shielding his son from the danger as much as he could. If time was moving quickly at first, everything slowed for DuSable once he felt his son's panicked breathing below him. He was paralyzed. Flee or stay. There was no protection under the bear pelt. Thooomb. Thooomb. Thooomb. Arrows continued to hit the pelt. DuSable decided to emerge from the crouched position. He once again had his son in tow. Kana'ti was caught off-guard. But he trusted his father. DuSable attempted to run but saw a band of Shawnee coming from among the trees; some on horseback, others on foot. The arrows ceased. Looking to the left he saw a man steering his wagon. *Mon dieu, je tout perdu! (My God, I have lost everything!)* DuSable thought to himself. There was nothing to say to his son. All was understood. Power was lost. That bitter truth had to be accepted by father and son as they knelt in the snow with the bear fur draping over them. DuSable raised his hands in submission under the long kinky brown fur coat. His son crouched under him.

The Shawnee appeared intimidating. Kana'ti trembled. He was scared. He was cold. But he was with his father. Kana'ti looked up to see the militia approaching them. They looked like his mother; the child thought they were family. Kana'ti was born on the cusp of two marginalized groups in this prenatal country. He didn't fully belong to either group or country. His mother, Selu, who died tragically during a raid of the British army, was an Apalachee woman. His father an African Haitian of mixed French race. The boy favored his American Indian ancestors. His hair was stereotypically long, wavy, and black. Slightly thicker than most American Indians, but it wasn't all that noticeable. His skin was golden brown with bronze and red highlights.

Even in the harshest of winters his complexion was lovely. His eyebrows and eyes were the same deep black.<sup>2</sup>

The Shawnee recognized Kana'ti's reflection too. He was one of them. They slowed their advance.

Kana'ti broke free from his father's grip. He jogged over the snow to greet his Kentucky cousins. They were not as delighted about the reunion as their Florida relative. Three arrows came flying out to halt the boy's progress. They did not try to hit the boy. They were a warning. Kana'ti was too far for his father to reach. "We are only trying to pursue our personal legend. We have lost everything except our lives and our wagon. Please spare us both." The boy said in eloquent Apalachee, that only his father understood. *Ou a-t-il appris que? (Where did he learn that?)* DuSable thought to himself. Kana'ti's knowledge and maturity at four months of age was divine. As the men watched, Kana'ti grew several inches. The boy continued to speak in Apalachee but soon realized that his cousins did not understand his tongue. He searched his brain to find another way to communicate, but he was at a loss.<sup>3</sup>

The men began speaking in their own tongue among themselves. Kana'ti overheard them and surprisingly understood their language. "He is from the southern tribes." One of the men exclaimed. They discussed his accent and the man he was with. The entire militia looked to a short, long-haired man in the middle of the pack for their instructions. He was silent. He looked beyond the boy at his father who was now behind his son with both hands on the boy's shoulders. DuSable was now keenly aware of the injuries to his back. The Shawnee man assessed them. They were of no harm. But what were they doing alone in Shawnee territory?

Speaking in his tongue, the leader turned to his men saying "They are friends. Friends from the south. It would have been a mistake to harm them. We would have greatly upset the ancestors." Gesturing with his hand extended, he told the men to put their bows down. They obliged.

Kana'ti responded in the Shawnee tongue, "We are friends. I don't know if we are from the south but we are Apalachee." DuSable did not understand

<sup>2</sup> In this adaptation of the Cherokee creation story, I use the concepts of housing and food to represent equally important ideas in modern society. To provide a sense of equity and to directly address gender norms in work and responsibility Selu was tasked with the gift of construction. She had a particular gift for assessing materials and engineering structurally sound abodes. I use Selu's death to highlight DuSable and Kana'ti's vulnerability in the wilderness. Just like in the traditional story, the parent's gifts are used to explain the context of the lived experience of the community. Selu's gift was housing. In the city that DuSable founded, as a result of Selu's passing, housing will be precarious. Her death precipitates redlining, gentrification, and mass homelessness in the city of Chicago.

<sup>3</sup> Kana'ti aka Chicagou's rapid growth is representative of the expansion experienced by urban cities as a result of uncontrolled industrialism. Chicagou's ability to acquire new languages is analogous to the cosmopolitan nature of American cities. Modern cities, like Chicago, have expanded and sprawled without limits for over a century. This sprawl, which has been precipitated by industrialization, immigration, xenophobia, and white flight (Loewen, 2018), has caused tremendous amounts of consumption and environmental degradation.

the interaction but was impressed by his son's innate linguistic skills. His heart was no longer fearful, instead it swelled with pride. Kana'ti was of unequalled talent. He could acquire new languages by simply hearing them spoken once. There was something very special about this child.

The men in the militia stood in bewilderment. Then in unison they began to laugh and talk amongst themselves. "Chicagou!" they all said. "Chicagooooooooouuuu" they sang the last syllable together. Holding it like it had some sort of meaning. The ice was broken between these two cultures. The Shawnee welcomed their visitors with open arms. The Shawnee men had DuSable and Kana'ti follow them back to the village, which was approximately three kilometers beyond the Mississippi River. The travel was arduous for all of them and hard on the horses. The Shawnee understood the river and the mountain. They had lived with the river for as long as they could imagine. The men had a particular way of knowing where they could cross the Mississippi. It was a dangerous trek across the frozen body of water. At any point, the ice might cave under the weight of the men, horses, and wagon.<sup>4</sup>

The band of travelers was three-quarters of the way across the river. They moved slowly and efficiently. As the group approached the shoreline, it became more difficult for even the most skilled survivalists among them to identify the barrier between the icy river and the shoreline. KRRRRRRUUUUUKKKK! The resounding and indistinguishable sound of ice cracking shocked everyone. The ice was giving under the weight of the men and horses. The leader raised his hand signaling for the group to stop. He was on foot, he walked slightly ahead of the other men. Kneeling on the ice he became obscured by the whirlwind of snow. Slowly he stood up. Taking an arrow out of his satchel, he situated it on the bow and aimed it between his feet. Releasing the arrow he listened for the sound of the bow on the ice. He gained a sonorous understanding of the earth; as the metal hit the ice he listened freeing up chunks of frozen water. Feeling confident in their chosen path, the leader signaled for the men to continue their journey. His hair draped over his shoulders. He appeared regal. The men trusted him. DuSable and son also grew to trust his judgment. Along the journey, the men spoke sparingly. Mostly they endured the weather. The trek took half a day. They wanted to beat dusk, when the wolves were most active, so they pushed through the fatigue. Once they were clearly on land, they caught a second wind. The danger of falling through icy terrain into a flowing and bone chilling casket has a way of taking the spirit out of a man.

<sup>4</sup> In this work I am actively creating a space for indigenous epistemologies in the Eurocentric/Western science canon. The use of tools to identify the density of ice is science in action. Tachoma, in this example, represents a very keen scientific mind through his understanding of natural phenomena. The goal here is to "decolonize" the many layered structures which prohibit and limit recognition of the many alternate ways of knowing and understanding the world around us (Smith, 2012; Fanon, 1963). This work offers an opportunity for readers to reimagine the world of science without the historical stain of Eurocentric white supremacy. Through this reimagining, other ways of knowing and being can be recognized and humanized.

## THE FATE OF SELU AND WILD BOY

Once they arrived at the Shawnee village on the other side of the Mississippi, the men began to open up more. As they related their adventures, Kana'ti worked as translator between his father and the Shawnee. The boy's linguistic skills were flawless. Kana'ti jumped between French, Creole, Shawnee, and Apalachee without accent. As he played with the languages he simultaneously learned and absorbed their nuances. He enjoyed the beautiful flow of the Latin languages. He loved the syllables and accents in the indigenous tongues. Kana'ti thought of where these languages might have come from. He wanted to know the origin of the words. The etymology.

As the travelers shared their tales, the leader disrupted the conversation. Again he raised his hand. He gestured at DuSable, addressing the father and son. Looking toward Kana'ti, the leader spoke very humbly. "I am Tachoma. We are the Shawnee. You all are our honored guests. I really want to apologize for attacking you. But our people come from far beyond the great river. As you do as well. As you all come from the South. We refuse to move again. The land does not belong to the British or the French alone. Nobody owns the land. Rather we belong to it." Tachoma stopped speaking. Again he looked at Kana'ti but gestured with his eyes and head toward his father.

DuSable looked at his son for understanding. Still amazed at the boy's gift, DuSable patiently waited for the translation. Kana'ti now understood that he was the liaison between the two men. Nodding at his son, DuSable began to speak, as Kana'ti relayed the message in Shawnee. "I come from the island of Haiti. My son and I have been through great turmoil like you. His mother, a native Apalachee, was killed in a raid by the British soldiers. They burned our hut to the ground to build a military post. The land does not belong to them. But they took it anyway. They took Selu too." DuSable paused again thinking of Selu and Wild Boy who he found slain in the ruins of their home. He and Kana'ti still hadn't had time to mourn their loss. DuSable was waiting for he and Kana'ti to find safety before asking the boy what happened. He was out hunting game. He came back with two cottontails and a beaver. But there was no need for the dinner. He and Kana'ti had to escape. And they didn't have time to think about the loss. It would be too heavy to carry.

Kana'ti translated. Adding or subtracting what he wanted. He was a clever boy. "We have not been able to keep up with the needs of our people this winter. The patterns of the wildlife have changed since the white foreigners started clearing the lands and burning entire forests." Tachoma spoke genuinely. He too was tired of being displaced in the land of the free. "On your wagon, there were many furs. Deer, rabbit, bear, fox, and animals that I have never seen. You are a great hunter. Can you help us meet our needs?" Tachoma spoke with great sincerity.

Kana'ti translated the message to DuSable. However, he had gotten some of his mischief from his older brother Wild Boy. Kana'ti desperately wanted to know his father's hunting secrets as well. Just before the ambush by the

British soldiers in Georgia, Wild Boy wanted to know his mother's secrets. Selu was a masterful construction worker. No matter how far from Florida they traveled, she could find the resources in her environment to build a shelter for the family. In fact, when they got to Georgia, she showed the locals how to use the clay and tree bark to construct warmer, sturdier shelters that would last through the winter. Selu was especially gifted at manipulating the earth. Just before passing, she had begun to teach DuSable her secrets; he too had begun to teach her his secrets of luring and capturing game. The two brothers, Kana'ti and Wild Boy, were obsessed with their parents' mysterious gifts. The boys wanted to solve the riddle. How did Selu consistently build structurally sound abodes for them, no matter the terrain? How was DuSable readily able to find and capture wildlife for the family?

On the dreadful day when the British came and seized the territory, Wild Boy was determined to find out his parents' secrets. He told Kana'ti, who was only two months old at the time, to follow their father on the hunt and discover the mysteries of his hunting technique, while Wild Boy would stay with Selu and find out how she built the shelters. Once each boy discovered the secret to their parents' gifts, they were to kill the parent and meet at their hut where they would begin a life of independence (Perdue, 1998). As planned, at dawn, when DuSable left his family to chase game, Kana'ti, who hadn't been able to sleep all night, followed him. As he entered the woods, the father was well aware that his son was shadowing him. He didn't understand his motives. He simply thought the boy wanted to be like his old man. DuSable instead went on a very roundabout path in an attempt to lose the two-month-old stalker. Selu stayed back gardening. However, Wild Boy asked "Can we build a hut for me and Kana'ti? I want to show my brother all the things that I learned from my time with the Crocs." Selu was cautious. She knew that Wild Boy was not to be trusted, and she definitely didn't want Wild Boy teaching Kana'ti anything that he learned when he lived with the crocodiles. Wild Boy was the couple's adopted son. In fact, DuSable found Wild Boy naked and orphaned in a swamp three days before he met Selu in her Apalachee village. The boy looked to be about three years old at the time. He was floating in the murky waters like one of the crocodiles. DuSable watched as Wild Boy hunted a great blue heron just like a croc. Floating in his boat, he called to the boy who would later become his son. Wild Boy did not have a language. But he understood DuSable to be his salvation, and he left the heron, the crocs, and the swamp to journey with his new father.

Selu obliged the request; however, she withheld much of the knowledge from Wild Boy, not knowing his intentions. She, like her husband, was trying to mask the secret. Wild Boy watched his mother intently, absorbing each step and asking questions about the process. "Why do you use the red clay?" "How is the soil different from Florida?" "What do you call that tree?" Selu answered his questions, not wanting to reveal too much. As she dug in the soil with her hands creating space for the fourth pillar of the structure, she saw the redcoats on the horizon. "Go, go, go!!!" She shouted at Wild Boy pointing to



the family hut. The soldiers instigated a shock of fear that ran through every part of Selu's being. She had heard about the rumblings of a revolutionary war in this prenatal country.

DuSable was unable to shake his tiny tot. He was able to set several small traps for a couple of rabbits and a beaver. But he couldn't perform his routine because of his stalker. He planned on pursuing the hunt again at dusk. When he returned to the hut, he found the territory in flames. He located his son Kana'ti weeping among the trees. They waited in the bush for the fires to stop. It seemed like forever. There was no sound, save the crackle of a fire. The soldiers left. The wildlife had fled. They were just as scared as the father and son. DuSable understood the fate of his wife and son. But he still needed to see them and lay them to rest. Kana'ti understood more than his father. Wild Boy was beside Kana'ti in the spiritual realm. He spoke to the boy of shame and embarrassment. "We were wrong Kana'ti. I am not a crocodile like I thought. Our parents deserved better." Kana'ti only shook his head and cried more.

### SECRETS OF THE HUNT: AN EXCHANGE OF CULTURES

Kana'ti continued to translate for his father and Tachoma. But he still wanted to know his father's secrets. Not knowing bothered the boy. Especially after his brother gave his life to discover the secrets. He believed what Wild Boy's spirit told him. But deep down the boy wanted to know the secret. He was in awe of his father's ability to hunt and barter. DuSable had an air about him. Just like when Kana'ti jumped from the wagon and spilled the oil, he wanted to mimic everything DuSable did. The boy told DuSable, "The men say that they want to know the secrets to your hunting. They want to know how you hunt so many different species so efficiently." He told his father what he wanted to know. Tachoma and the Shawnee just wanted help surviving through the winter. Kana'ti needed the secrets of the hunt.

DuSable recognized the mischief in his son. He had not forgotten two months prior the boy was trailing him on the hunt. The father wanted to find a home before he picked at his son about his motives for following him out at dawn. The man also recognized that the Shawnee spared his life and he owed them some gratitude for that. So he was determined to rest and show the men many of his practices at dusk the following day. "I am honored that you think so highly of my skills. I would love to share my ancestral secrets with you. Your people must simply make a trust with me. Do not abuse the earth or the bounty that may spring forth.<sup>5</sup> But my son and I need to sleep. Where can we find shelter?" They were standing in the middle of the village around a large

<sup>5</sup> The agreement that DuSable is making with the Shawnee here represents the ontological stance of African and American Indian traditions (Smith, 2012). In both traditions there is an understanding that humankind belongs to the Earth, not the other way around.

fire. Everyone's face glowed in the circle. They all sat attentively watching the exchange of cultures and observing the legendary "Chicagou."

As Kana'ti translated Tachoma nodded. They had indeed traveled a long way. And Tachoma had no clue how far DuSable and Kana'ti had journeyed in the past months. The two had journeyed from Georgia to Kentucky. "We will house you. Do not dismay. But I would be remiss if I did not take you to see the chief. She would never forgive me. She had a dream of your arrival."

DuSable reluctantly accepted the offer. He was beyond exhausted at this point. But again, the Shawnee spared his and Kana'ti's lives. He owed them some lip service. When the three arrived at the chief's tent, they were greeted by the chief's husband, who welcomed them with a pipe. Tachoma passed the pipe to their guest. DuSable was reminded of his family gatherings in Haiti shortly after independence in 1804. He placed his lips on the pipe and pulled hard from his diaphragm. The smoke entered his chest. It was warm. He was reminded of easier times.

"Welcome weary travelers. We have awaited you for many, many moons. I had a dream that the young Chicagooooouuu would be with us soon." The chief said as she beckoned her guests to sit in her tent. She wore a feathered crown and a flowing and colorful poncho. She was younger than DuSable expected. Prettier too. Her deep brown eyes and high cheeks gave way to the loveliest dimples. He expected the chief of the tribe to be an elder.

*Ton mari est un homme chanceux. Your husband is a lucky man.* DuSable thought to himself. But he sat silent waiting for Kana'ti to translate. The boy never translated. He was confused too. *What do they mean they were waiting on me? What is Chicagou? Why do they keep calling me Chicagou?* Kana'ti thought in rapid fire. The two guests sat bewildered.

The chief continued. "Chicagou," she said, walking toward Kana'ti. She knelt by the boy touching his hair. "You have the blood of the world in you. I see it in your eyes." The boy understood what she meant. He was on the boundary of so many disparate tribes. Belonging to none of them fully. He was African, French, American Indian, Haitian, American, etc. He was truly American. "You will help your father found the new world. You mark the beginning of something greater than yourselves. Chicagou. That's the city. Named after the onion. You are the onion. Chicagou. It is you. Your many layers of culture. The many languages you will learn. You will open the new world for millions of foreigners and immigrants to find their dream. The dreamers will come because of you."<sup>6</sup>

<sup>6</sup> I chose to replace the traditional role of Kana'ti (in the Cherokee Creation Story) with Jean Baptiste Point DuSable for two main reasons. First, DuSable, an African man of Haitian descent, is historically recognized as the first settler of the Chicago area and the unofficial founder of the city. In making him a pivotal figure I was giving voice to the historically marginalized role of Africans in the Americas. I also chose DuSable because he and Selu's union represents a true convergence of cultures that makes America the beautifully diverse and unique country that it can be if we accept the contributions of

DuSable looked at his son. He knew something powerful was happening. The chief then grabbed both travelers' hands, and they left to a distant place. A place of marshes and prairies. The grass was taller than their heads. The three walked up the river. The Mississippi River, to a lake. It was an expansive body of water. It was blue and green. Shimmering in the sun. With the tall grass behind them. They saw native men and women gathered water in clay pots. "This is your destiny." The chief looked at the father and son. They were no longer in reverie. They understood better. DuSable puffed the pipe again. He felt anxious about this destiny. He was tired. He wanted to mourn his loss but was being pulled in every direction by life. The lake felt right. He knew that he could settle by the lake. Maybe even garden and trade animal furs. He puffed the pipe once more and passed it to Tachoma who was still standing.

When he and Kana'ti arrived at their own tent, Tachoma gave DuSable a musket. "There have been raids by the westerners. The mountains have protected us. We got this in the last one. I thought you would know how to use it." Tachoma left without providing ammunition or gunpowder. To Tachoma, DuSable represented the West. He believed that he would be able to make the Western tool work.

Inside the tent DuSable turned to Kana'ti, dropped the musket, and hugged his son tightly. They had been through so much. He was just glad they were in one piece. Kana'ti understood the sentiment but was really excited to tell his father exactly what the chief told them. The hug lasted some time. DuSable needed Kana'ti to know that he would always be there. Kana'ti believed that.

When DuSable released Kana'ti the boy was overly excited to discuss their legend. "Baba, did you see the lake too?"

"Yes, son." DuSable explained, wiping his eyes.

"Did you understand what she was showing us?" Kana'ti inquired with a Curious George-type of excitement. "They have been talking about us for over 1,000 years Baba. They say that we will open the new world." Kana'ti could not contain his excitement. "What do you think this new world will be? We get to open it. Baba! We get to open it!" Kana'ti fell to his knees and placed both hands over his mouth, grinning with joy, thinking about the vision. "We get to open the new world to all types of people. It is our destiny."

DuSable placed his hand on his son's head. Looking down at the boy, he said, "We will do all of that in the morning." He then blew out the oil burning lamp that lit up their tent. And the two collapsed from exhaustion.

The next day the men of the village were ready for the hunt. They arrived at DuSable and Kana'ti's tent early. They even brought the wagon. Tachoma offered the two a stew. They ate and were off to teach the Shawnee DuSable's Haitian secrets. DuSable lead the men back to the Mississippi River. They did not cross it this time. Instead DuSable followed the river until the men reached a tributary that branched off into the mountains. They followed the

those groups who have been traditionally othered. In this recasting, Kana'ti, aka Chicagou, is the son of DuSable, representing DuSable's birthing of the Second City.

tributary into a valley that was lush and green. It had been protected from the desertification of winter by the mountain top. The Shawnee were astonished by DuSable's ability to find such an island of life. The father told the Shawnee that they would have to wait until dusk to catch the best of the hunt. The men obliged. Everyone waited with expectation. They had all seen the furs in DuSable's wagon. They knew that he was a masterful hunter. While waiting, the men taught Kana'ti how to shoot a bow and arrow. The boy was quite a natural at that too.

At dusk, the group headed deeper into the tropical island. DuSable halted the wagon with some effort. Even the horses were excited to be out of winter for a period. This was one of the secrets that DuSable was keeping from Kana'ti on the dreadful day they lost Selu and Wild Boy. DuSable hopped off of the wagon with a lion's coat in his hands. It looked like John the Baptist's lion skin. The head and paws were still attached. He handled the fur very delicately, as if he were installing a window frame. Kana'ti jumped off after his father. The boy had grown overnight. His landing was much smoother than the previous day. He now had a mustache and was almost as tall as his father. His clothes no longer fit properly but he didn't mind. He enjoyed his Hulk-like appearance. He was his father's unappointed apprentice. DuSable laid the lion's fur down to his left. The head of the fur faced up. He looked at Kana'ti. The boy had never seen such an animal. Neither had the Shawnee men. They all looked in amazement. Then, kneeling over a fresh patch of green grass, he pulled a spade out of his back pocket. The spade was formed out of the lion's claws. DuSable passed a second spade to his son. The second spade was formed out of the lion's teeth. Then he began to dig. With the little spades and some time, the two men dug a pit that was quite sizeable. The pit was three cubic meters exactly. DuSable instructed Kana'ti to spit in each of the corners of the pit. Then the father laid the lion's coat in the area.

The men waited but nothing happened. DuSable took five deep breaths and then addressed the men. "Get those arrows ready. There is going to be a stampede." He pointed east in the direction that the lion's head was facing. In moments, the lion's fur was ejected from the pit. At first a black and white hooved leg popped out of the pit. Then suddenly three full zebra emerged from the pit running hysterically. Although the Shawnee were ready with their arrows, they were so astonished by the birthing of these animals they had never before seen. Only one was able to fire his bow in time, dropping one of the zebras. Several other Shawnee gave chase on horseback, but the other zebra frantically escaped into the distance.

The Shawnee were all amazed at DuSable's mysterious methods. "What type of horse is that?" One of the men called to DuSable. Kana'ti looked to DuSable without translating. "It is a Zebra." DuSable understood. "That is a lion." He said pointing near the pit. Kana'ti needed more of an explanation than that. *What was the secret? Why dusk? What happened at dusk? Why use the spade? How did he find the lush island?* So many questions rushed through the boy's mind. But DuSable couldn't explain. He looked at his son, who was

almost eye to eye, and said, “In due time son.” Kana’ti remembered the plan that Wild Boy had devised. He thought about what it would have meant had he followed through on it. He would have been alone. A tear fell from the boy’s eye.

DuSable and his son spent one more night with the Shawnee. In that time DuSable taught Tachoma the true secrets of his birthright and left the Shawnee with the lion’s fur. Tachoma was incredibly grateful to DuSable for his insights and for revealing secrets of the world to him. Tachoma promised to escort the two men, and by all means Kana’ti was a man at this point, back to the Mississippi River in the morning to continue their journey. He knew that their destiny was great. Both of the men possessed divine gifts, and the city they established and the lineage they created would produce endless possibilities. And Chicago has done just that.

After traveling several kilometers north up the river with DuSable and Kana’ti the next day, the men bid farewell.

“Chicagou. We will never forget the lessons that you both have taught us,” Tachoma said with great humility and gratitude.

“Our encounter has been one of great fortune. We have learned about ourselves as well.” Kana’ti responded before translating to his father.

“You will accomplish many things with your skills great Chicagou. Your father too.” Tachoma paused for a second, trying not to reveal too much. Only the chief can reveal and interpret dreams. Tachoma did not want to overstep. “But remember the two rules of life, great Chicagou. First, you belong to the earth and not the other way around. And if you ‘support yourself heaven will help.’ You will need those lessons on your journey” (Collins, 2019). Tachoma and the four Shawnee men who accompanied him turned on that note, and left DuSable and Kana’ti to their path. Kana’ti thought long and hard about Tachoma’s last words. Again he had not translated them for his father. DuSable assumed that he did not need to know them.

## THE SECOND CITY

The two continued their long trek to the lake. In the chief’s vision, they understood that the river would lead them to the lake. The lake was where the city would be founded. The city that would open the “new world,” as the chief coined it. They traveled for months. The weather changed and so did Kana’ti. He now had a beard similar to his father’s. He was even slightly taller than Jean Baptiste. The men looked very much like brothers. The men found a tributary that they followed north. This tributary would later become known as the Chicago River. Named after the legendary Chicagou himself. The river led the men to their destiny.

As they approached their destiny, Kana’ti began to get more and more interested in DuSable’s hunting secrets. *Does he know about mom’s construction secrets too?* Kana’ti thought to himself. He wanted to know what his father was hiding. *Why didn’t he tell me earlier?* Kana’ti was envious of his

father's knowledge. *What does a living lion look like?* He thought to himself in Apalachee. He wanted to be able to make the animals appear too. He even practiced performing the exact ritual as his father night after night. But nothing happened. He would follow the order of operations exactly. But no animals would spring forth.

DuSable and Kana'ti camped out less than two kilometers from the super-abundant lake that would serve as the primary resource for their newly founded city. They were the first Westerners to settle the area. It was a rugged and brutal environment. The winters, as the two would find out, were much harsher than those of Georgia or Kentucky. They had arrived in the middle of spring. The territory was beautiful. It appeared just as the chief's vision had shown. Birds like larks and robins fluttered about. "We are close, Baba. Close to our destiny," Kana'ti whispered to his father as they searched for a campsite. Along any journey, when you get closer to the treasure, there is a final test. Kana'ti, aka Chicagou, was going to receive his final test. The test to see if he had learned the lessons from his journey (Coelho, 1988).

Chicagou and DuSable walked the land, scanning their new home. The sun was bright. The two approached the lake. They did not have a name for the lake. But they understood its beauty nonetheless. A large painted turtle rested on a log near the shore. It lay there completely comfortable. Legs and neck outstretched, absorbing the sunlight. Chicagou wanted to possess the turtle as a pet. But he knew that was against nature. "It is time for you to learn the secrets of the hunt my son. We shall discuss the heaviness of our hearts once we get settled." Kana'ti nodded, understanding that he had to finally tell his father about the plot to kill both he and Selu.

Again, the two men followed the Chicago River beyond the mouth of the lake. They traveled until they got to a clearing. The grass was low and greener than most. "You must listen to the earth. She will tell you where to hunt. Can you hear her Chicagou?" DuSable liked his son's new name. He felt like it suited the boy. Kana'ti shook his head indicating no. "You will learn. Now son, it is important that you do everything that I say. I know that you have been practicing at night while I am asleep. But son, remember that our connection with the earth is strongest at dusk and dawn. The spirits of the earth and all who belong to it are oriented to the sun."

"What about the lion, Baba?" Kana'ti had so many questions.

DuSable had so many answers. "It is best to choose a top predator for the hunt. Lions come from the Motherland. Africa. They rule the Sub-Saharan terrain and prey on many of its herbivores." DuSable paused, trying to search for the correct explanation. "I gave you a spade to dig with. The spade has to be made of the teeth and claws of the predator. By digging the pit, we conjured the spirit of that animal." DuSable felt the Ogun spirit of the lion possess him.<sup>7</sup>

<sup>7</sup> The Ogun Spirit is a deity who appears in many African and West Indian religious traditions. Ogun is a warrior spirit traditionally.

Chicagou understood the spirit. Wild Boy stood next to him co-signing what the father was saying. He told Chicagou grand stories about lions and their hunting patterns. “They are much stronger than crocodiles. I thought us crocs were top predators,” Wild Boy said, slapping his knee. Chicagou looked at DuSable with great intrigue. “How big do you make the pit? Why do you spit in it? Where do the black and white horses come from?” Kana’ti asked rapidly, forgetting the name of the black and white horses.

“I will explain as we dig. We first have to make new spades. I gave Tachoma the lion’s relics.” DuSable then pulled out one of the brown bear fur coats. Pulling a small cloth from underneath the fur he passed his son a block of wood, string, the bear’s claws, and a small knife to fashion a bear claw spade. DuSable took the teeth of the bear and used those objects to fashion the bear tooth spade. The men worked until dawn making the spades and digging the pit. This time the pit was five cubic meters. The two were covered in soil. “The size of the pit,” DuSable explained, “determines the number of animals that will spring up from the pit. The predator’s spirit is particular in that way. The earth will reward our work, nothing more.”<sup>8</sup> Last time it was three meters. This time we made it five.”

“Baba? You still didn’t answer why we spit in the pit.” Kana’ti wanted to know everything about the ritual.

“Oh, the most important part. The earth is a gracious but begrudging provider. You must give her love and offering for her bounty.” DuSable paused again. He thought about the spiritual currency that had been spilt on the soil of this prenatal country. He wondered how the earth would seek to balance the atrocities of slavery, racial tyranny, and mass genocides of Black and indigenous people in this land, America. DuSable thought of his own journey as a free Black man traveling throughout this colonized slave state by way of colonized Haiti. “The spit is physical currency for the predator. We give them the authority to return to the physical realm. This is why you need to follow everything I say closely. We give them the authority to return to the physical realm. The earth makes sure that it is only the prey that returns. After we put the bear’s fur back in the pit you cannot touch it. Like I said the earth is a begrudging provider.”

Chicagou was anxious. He wanted to see the mysterious occurrence again. He had tried so many nights to get it to work on his own. He knew that since his father had walked him through the steps and they had done it at the proper time of day, it was guaranteed to work. “Can we do it, Baba?” Kana’ti said eagerly.

“Hold on son. Like I said you have to follow the ritual completely. The predator’s head must always face the east. The sun is our source. We must give him gratitude, just like the earth.” DuSable pondered once again. “The

<sup>8</sup> This experience of reciprocity with the Earth represents a wrapping of Tachoma’s comment: “support yourself and heaven will help.” In this example DuSable suggests that the Earth will reward one’s work one to one.

earth hears all things and the sun sees all things. The sun communicates with the earth what he sees. And they only give to those who are deserving. If you hold onto any evil deed the earth will not provide sustenance.” DuSable ended his thought optimistically, looking forward to his first official hunt with Kana’ti.

Kana’ti wanted to tell his father about the plot that he and Wild Boy conjured before the British raid. He thought that talking about it now would destroy the hunt. But he knew that it was an evil deed that he still carried. Kana’ti was too ashamed to admit his sin. “Ok, Baba. I want to try my new bow and arrow out. I’ve been practicing since we left the Shawnee.” Wild Boy’s spirit stood close to Kana’ti and whispered grave warnings.

Kana’ti spit in the corners and placed the bear fur over the pit. “It was five meters you should get five animals out of your pit” DuSable said encouragingly. *My pit*. Kana’ti thought to himself. He waited for the five animals to emerge. They never did. DuSable sat patiently believing in the ritual. He was completely unaware of the heaviness on his son’s spirit. The earth was withholding her bounty. The sun told her of Chicagou’s plot to kill his father. She would not reward such evil. Kana’ti grew impatient. Though he had grown into a man rapidly, he was still learning life’s lessons. One lesson that he had yet to truly learn was the importance of listening. The men waited over two hours. The sun was fully up. Kana’ti grew irritated and rushed to the pit. Jean Baptiste attempted to stop him. Kana’ti ran to remove the bear fur. The earth knew his intentions. She listened deep to his soul. She knew just how mischievous the young man was. But she had a reward in store for his impatience. As Kana’ti ripped the bear fur out of the pit, hundreds of thousands of animals escaped from it never to be returned. DuSable knew what the Earth was communicating, but his son was unaware. No longer would she support such faithless men. Humankind would now be responsible for supporting ourselves; she was not going to give willingly to those who took her for granted.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> In this tale Selu had the gift of construction. When she was slain by Wild Boy, DuSable and Kana’ti became homeless and vulnerable until they reached the Second City. Likewise, Jean Baptiste Point DuSable was gifted with the ability to hunt. Much like Kana’ti in the Cherokee tale. Similarly, DuSable’s son Chicagou aka Kana’ti in this rendition misbehaves and releases the animals. This symbolism is representative of the extreme starvation found in urban areas including Chicago. It represents the current epidemic of food deserts, physical starvation, intellectual deprivation, and cultural marginalization that is occurring in modern cities across the globe.



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