Introduction

How I Came to Be Here

This is not my story. My ancestry is East European-North American and not, to my knowledge, Indigenous. However, ethnicity is seldom sufficient to explain one's interests and convictions. Let me briefly clarify how I came to be here.

I was born in New York and raised in Oklahoma in the 1950s. It was a time of rapid change—from oppression and discrimination to sociopolitical unrest, activism, and change. Oklahomans annually celebrate the advent of statehood on "'89ers Day." When I was a child, this meant "White Christian People's Day," and dressing up as "pioneers." African American, Hispanic, Jewish, and other ethnic- and religious-minority Oklahomans tended to feel less celebratory about their arrival as slaves, migrant laborers, refugees or migrants who were variously abused and unwelcome. For Native Americans, Oklahoma was the final stop at the end of what has become known as the Trail of Tears—the forced migration and consequent decimation of an array of Indigenous peoples that was aimed at clearing them from more desirable lands. I grew up alongside the myths of "American settlers" of "the West." It took a long time to learn that "settler" often meant "stealer of other people's lands."

As a child, I was regularly attacked by other children, who sometimes called out, "You killed our Lord," while beating me. Being a transplanted "Yankee" was considered almost as bad as being Jewish. On the playground, the US Civil War was re-enacted daily, along with "Cowboys and Indians" play that set Native Americans in continuing opposition to "real" Americans—all of the children being descendants of relative newcomers to the North American continent. Oklahoma practiced what in South Africa was called *apartheid*. Public buses had prominent signs saying "Colored please step to the rear." Public places had separate toilets and drinking fountains labeled "Colored" and "White" and separate

(and unequal) schools. My family was harassed for being Jewish, for advocating equality, and for including people who then called themselves Negroes among those who visited our home. There were threatening phone calls; hate literature regularly appeared at my father's downtown office, where he served as executive director of the Jewish Community Council.

In the peculiar hierarchy of 1950s Oklahoma, Native Americans were less often derided than exoticized. I had Native American and ethnic minority classmates, but African Americans attended only "colored" schools. Recently, while cleaning out old papers, I came across an '89ers Day program from the University Elementary School, run by the University of Oklahoma in Norman. It was more progressive than the public schools (I was one of the first girls to take wood shop, in what was considered a radical experiment). The '89ers Day celebration featured "Cowboys" and "Indians"; the silk-screened, black and brown, program cover includes both. Even so, the "cowboy" is on the front and the "Indian" is on the back and both (of course!) are men. Both men have brown faces—though incongruously, the "cowboy's" hands are white, while the "Indian" has brown hands and chest—and what looks for all the world like a "caveman" style, one-shoulder, leopard-skin robe. Both are stereotypes, but the "Indian" is more "primitively" dressed.

It was 22 April 1954 and I was twelve years old. We sang "Songs of the '89ers"—"Prairie Schooner," "Wagon Wheels," and "Home on the Range." The show's three acts were called "NEW LAND AND HOMES," "GOOD TIMES ON THE PRAIRIE," and "BRAND NEW STATE." There was no indication of whose land and homes we were singing about. Among the 14 numbers was a song called "Shoot the Buffalo" and another called "Buffalo Head Dance," of unknown (but presumably Native American) cultural origin. The children were divided into two groups of "Indians" and "Cowboys," set into "INDIAN TERRITORY" and "OPEN RANGE." Most children were in the chorus. None of the "Cowboys" were girls. In fact, only two girls appear on the program: Lucia Rohrbaugh and Valerie Graber (me!). We are both in the "INDIAN TERRITORY" section, and—to my eternal horror—are designated "Squaws." For the record, the University of Oklahoma is now one of the outstanding publishers of books by and about Native Americans.

If that was 1950s Oklahoma's more enlightened side, you can imagine the rest. Not long after returning from Norman to school in Oklahoma City, I became involved in the Civil Rights Movement. I served on the National Conference of Christians and Jews youth steering committee, spoke in public and on radio and television. I marched, met, strategized, supported, and participated in lunch counter sit-ins, including the piv-

otal ones at Katz's Drug Store and Brown's Department Store in Oklahoma City. Much of my learning took place out of school; I was taught by an amazing group of powerful women: Clara Luper (teacher, activist, and civil rights leader), Hannah D. Atkins (the first African American woman elected to the Oklahoma House of Representatives, later named by US President Jimmy Carter to the UN General Assembly), Evelyn La Rue Pittman (composer, choir director, and champion of African American music) in Oklahoma; and Jenny Wells Vincent, concert pianist-turned folk singer who pioneered in using songs to teach language and culture across New Mexico's Spanish American, Native American, and Anglo communities. Among numerous, mostly unsung accomplishments, my father quietly broke the "color barrier" by organizing a major social work convention at Oklahoma City's main hotel. When the owner said, "OK," but "Colored will have to use the rear entrance," he replied that African American participants would use the front door with the other delegates, or the convention could take its business elsewhere.

Music was always important in my life. My earliest memories are of listening to 1978 recordings of Paul Robeson. Between New York and Oklahoma, we spent a couple of years in Phoenix, Arizona, where, at age four, I had a formative experience. Robeson was scheduled to sing; my father, Julius Graber, was his designated host. We attended the concert. As he often did, Robeson gave a free, second concert at a union hall, after which my dad brought him back to our home to relax. As if I had always known him (which in a way, I had), I climbed onto his lap and he sang me the Russian lullaby I had heard and loved since birth. I can still recall the layout of our living room, the chair, his wonderful smile, the enormity of the man … that Voice. His life and work continue to inspire; I remain angry and saddened by the shameful treatment he received at the hands of official America.

In the 1980s, I worked with colleagues at York University and several Ontario First Nations on a communications networking project. In the early '90s, Bud Whiteye and I developed the First Nations Intensive seminar for University of Western Ontario journalism students. Bud founded Native News Network of Canada, on whose board and advisory board I proudly served. When I met Pete Steffens in 1996, things came full circle. Pete had worked for decades with African American, Hispanic, and Native American people, particularly members of the Lummi Nation in Washington State. His own story features lifelong political and social consciousness. His parents were the great "muckraker," Lincoln Steffens, and the activist-writer, Ella Winter. Pete's dad was one of my own dad's heroes; Lincoln Steffens was often quoted in our home.

His works are enjoying a revival; it is perhaps unfortunate that they are still so timely.

Having reached the maturity that is supposed to bring understanding, I remain perplexed by the persistence of inequality and discrimination, and stunned by the achievements of people who struggle against what often seem insurmountable odds. It is with the greatest respect and admiration that I have watched the emergence of The New Media Nation.

In 2008, while chatting over coffee, I told an otherwise well-educated woman that we had just attended the North American Indigenous Games in Duncan, British Columbia. When I mentioned the Indigenous media booths, she sounded surprised and said, "What a shame, there's almost no Indigenous media." I have heard similar comments in Europe, the United Kingdom, and the United States. The thousands of people worldwide, who are creating and energetically using Indigenous media, know how mistaken she was. I hope this book will help to spread the word.

Indigenous-run media do not just fill the airwaves, they carry new worldviews, in sometimes unexpected ways. One recent afternoon while watching the weather report on APTN, the Aboriginal Peoples Television Network, I realized that a new map of Canada has been created, quietly and without fanfare. The station shows weather conditions and forecasts for small, remote communities that are almost never included on other channels. On APTN's maps and reports, communities of importance to Indigenous people receive the same prominence as major cities; it is people, not population size that counts. Thus, the viewer understands the tiny Nunavik community of Inukjuaq to be as important as the urban centers of Ottawa and Montreal. Among the communities having a substantial presence are those of Yukon, a fitting tribute to a small territory that has made a disproportionately large contribution to Indigenous politics and media. As of December 2007, the territory's population totaled 32,714 (Government of the Yukon 2008). Northern Native Broadcasting Yukon (NNBY) was one of the organizations that founded Television Northern Canada and later, the Aboriginal Peoples Television Network. The illustration that follows shows a team from NNBY's television service on location.

Television crew filming a documentary for NEDAA, weekly television magazine program, Northern Native Broadcasting Yukon (NNBY). Photograph by Robin Armour.