

Bows & Variety & Culture Sharing - Joseph Marshall - OSEU 2

That's true. I mean...anymore than if you say the word "Caucasian." That's just an umbrella. No. I'm into bows and arrows big time...since my grandfather taught me. I make my own bows and arrows. I mean I love bows and arrows. I just bought a Mongolian horse bow...just to have it...just to see it...from another culture...how they did there...and so forth. But...but I make my own bows and arrows. It's a special connection when you do that...when you can do that...when you know that the bow that you've made...and there are different kinds...even among the Lakota bows, there is the hunting bow which is longer...and there's the combat bow, or the war bow which is shorter...and then there's is a very specialized bow used to hunt buffalo. So it was shorter. They became shorter after the horse came. Once the horse came, we had to have a bow that could be maneuverable on the back of a horse...so we shortened it up. So there's different kinds of bows, even among the Lakota. But, when you consider...some anthropologists...I heard somewhere that there now sort of grudgingly saying, "Well there might have been as many as 2,000 different native tribes in North America when Columbus came." I happened to think that myself. I think there was a lot more than 500. Then, if that was the case...whether there was 500 or 2,000...there were that many different languages...and that many different ways of identifying ourselves. So, we look at things so much differently than everybody else. There's that many different ways to make bows and arrows. That variety is still here.

There's a pan-Indianness now...because...in the last century...certainly within the last 75 years...we've had much more contact with one another...with different diverse tribes across the country. And so, some of us are copying the dance customs of tribes elsewhere...and the Northern Plains tribes are copying...and other people down there are copying our songs and customs and way of doing. Well, that's the pan-Indianness. The variety is still there. I mean...we all have our own way of...even different ways that we dance...and our songs are different. Generally, our perception of our environment is different because we all come from different parts of this continent. The people who lived in the East were all sedentary hunters and gatherers, they stayed in one place. While those of us in the Plains were all nomadic, we moved around and followed the game. And the people in the Southwest learned how to irrigate because water was a scarce commodity. And for heaven's sakes, the people in the Northwest coast chased

whales in skin boats. And so, all the variety is there and that variety was sort of directly influenced by the environment itself. And that gets back to the earlier question about how we are related to the earth. It made us who we are. And that's really the source of our variety. We can be resilient. I make bows and arrows...and one of the things that impressed me about a well-made bow...is how resilient it can be time after time after time. You bend that sucker back and the arrow flies...and you think "Well, if I pull it back too far, it is going to break." But then you rely on what you've been taught as a bowmaker...what your grandfather said...ok.

First of all, he said it's gotta look like a new moon...the thin sliver of a new moon. That's the shape of our Lakota bows. And if you look at...the next time you have that opportunity...look at the brand new moon...it's just thin in the sky...it's thickest in the middle and tapers gracefully out to both ends. That's what our bows look like. Interestingly enough, that shape enables it to be resilient because it withstands the stress of being drawn...over the amount...both limbs, top and bottom. If you make it too thick in the middle, then it puts too much pressure on the outer limbs and it will break. But if you use that shape, it gives them the ability to be resilient time after time after time. And we can be the same way if you stop to think about it. And part of our resiliency is all the ways that we are different...that variety...even among our own selves...the Lakota are different than the Nakota and the Dakota. They chose to stay on the east side of the river... and we went west... and scattered ourselves all over the place. Variety is a good thing.