An Anishinaabe Tribalography

Investigating and Interweaving Conceptions of Identity
during the 1910s on the White Earth Reservation

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Tribalography
quantum leap
revolution and evolution
weaving and writing
new worlds and old
keyboard drumming
indelible marks on the page
take shape
come together
like a sweetgrass basket
blade words
twirl together
circle around
form something whole
transform life

THE OVERTURE

This is a tribalography—not completely fiction or history but a story that
draws on the past, present, and future; documents and imagination; the
spaces between reality and rumors of memory. Choctaw scholar LeAnne
Howe created the term tribalography to explain her observation that

Native stories, no matter what form they take (novel, poem, drama,
memoir, film, history), seem to pull all the elements together of
the storyteller’s tribe, meaning the people, the land, and multiple
characters and all their manifestations and revelations, and connect these in past, present, and future milieus (present and future milieus mean non-Indians). ¹

In this article I use tribalography as a methodology and connect multiple elements in a textual weaving that constructs an Anishinaabe tribalography. As an Anishinaabe tribalography, this work will follow in the tradition set forth by Gerald Vizenor and Gordon Henry, who, as Kimberly Blaeser asserts, “shift and reshift their stories’ perspectives, turn the tables of historical events, unmask the stereotypes and racial poses, challenge the status of history’s heroes and emerge somewhere between the probable and the possible, in some border area of narrative.” Likewise, I hope this tribalography will “incite the reader to an imaginative reevaluation of both the accounts and processes of history.”² Maybe this tribalography will rise up among the Anishinaabeg and bring us new understandings of ourselves, our families, and our nation.³

This article explores the varied ways in which the Anishinaabeg of White Earth defined themselves during the early twentieth century.⁴ It consists of two primary parts. In part 1 I go beyond the “facts” in order to enliven the (hi)story, to offer an alternative way of remembering the past.⁵ In this section I have created several characters and collapsed events, but I draw heavily on historical interviews. I use many direct

Fig. 1. St. Columba Episcopal Church and congregation, White Earth. Photographer: Robert G. Beaulieu, Photograph Collection ca. 1905, Location no. E97.7W r37, Negative no. 6443-A, Minnesota Historical Society.
quotes in the interview section; all the statements that I have copied word for word from a document in the Ransom Judd Powell Papers have been italicized. It is my goal to immerse the reader in a story that extends beyond history. This section also includes historical photographs that provide an additional element of framework for the construction of the tribalography. The subheadings in part 1 are taken from A Concise Dictionary of Minnesota Ojibwe by John D. Nichols and Earl Nyholm. In part 2 I provide a traditional academic presentation of the “facts,” including details about federal and state legislation as well as an academic analysis of the interviews. The two parts of this story create a weaving;
by pulling together a wide variety of sources, including primary documents, secondary sources, and the works of other storytellers, I have tried to create something new.

PART 1

Niibidoon: Weave something

In late July 1913 the sun shone brightly, heating the air to 84 degrees. Ivy Giizhig gathered with the other Anishinaabe women in the cool air of the large open-room basement of St. Columba’s to make sweetgrass baskets and listen to the words of Father Vincent. The women welcomed the coolness of the stone basement and the company of others.

Ivy smoothed her long, dark blue skirt after taking a seat next to her best friend, Suzette Spruce. As usual, the priest was very intent on talking about the burning fires of hell that awaited nonbelievers. Few of the women were actually concerned with the afterlife that the priest discussed, but they nodded their heads in silence, knowing full well the economic value his approval brought. Last Christmas each family had received a wool blanket, three pounds of coffee, and a small bag of sweets for the children as payment for their devotion to Christ.

After what seemed like forever to Ivy, Father Vincent finally left the women for other obligations. The room came to life as the women began to talk with each other while they worked. Suzette dampened the sweetgrass to make it pliable. She watched the water easily transform the sweetgrass from brittle and dry to supple and sinuous.

Ivy took the latest edition of the Tomahawk out of her purse and pointed out the article on land policies on page 4 to Suzette. The newspaper stated that scores of people at White Earth had “sold” their allotted lands but that many of these so-called sales involved coercion and outright lies. Of course, Ivy knew that this was not really news to Suzette. Suzette had sold her allotment over a year ago because she had four younger brothers and her family had been struggling to keep food on the table. Every day for weeks a strange man wearing a brown suit had come by asking if she was ready to sell. Finally, she signed the paper. The meager amount of money she received had only been enough to pay her family’s debt at the Fairbanks Store and purchase enough flour for three months. She deeply regretted her decision, but it was sell or starve.

Ivy’s brother had been told that the paper he signed was to rent his
land, only to find out later that it was actually a bill of sale. He was trying to challenge the “sale,” but Simon Michelet, the Indian agent, had warned him not to hope for much. Ivy’s allotment had just been seized by the state because she had never paid the taxes on it.

“How can the state tax lands that are not theirs?” Ivy asked bitterly as she twisted the moistened sweetgrass together and began to create the bottom of a basket.

“It seems like they just do whatever they want,” Suzette sighed as her lips turned into a frown.

Ivy stopped to examine her work. The basket was taking shape; the spiral coil that formed the bottom was complete. The uneven colors of green, yellow, and tawny contrasted just enough to complement each other. “My brother George just found out that he might be able to overturn his land sale if he can prove he is full-blood. Rumor has it that the United States government has made a law that says that people who are full-bloods are not allowed to sell their land, but he hasn’t figured out exactly what they mean by full-blood yet. I told him this has nothing to do with blood! He was lied to about the paper he signed. This business about blood is just plain nonsense,” Ivy said.
“Hmmm,” said Suzette. “The ideas that those Americans come up with are so strange—I have never heard anything about that,” she said, shaking her head with annoyance.

“I think they made up this idea of mixed-blood and full-blood just to try and get more land from us. My cousin Mikinaak said that there is no such thing as a mixed-blood.” Ivy admired the many shades of green and yellow of each individual blade as she added new blades to the basket. She had quickly woven nearly half a basket during their short conversation and held the basket out in front of herself to see how it was taking shape. The once disparate blades of sweetgrass had transformed into a round basket. The red thread she used to stitch the coils of sweetgrass to each other formed veins around the basket, holding it together.

“Well, I hope he is right,” said Suzette. Little did she know that there was already a plan in place to protect the swindlers and buyers.

_Aabaabiigin: Unravel someone_

Attorney Ransom Powell was appointed by the United States to investigate the genealogy of the Anishinaabe families and determine which
were “mixed-bloods.” It was a crisp fall day when he arrived with his team. The pines held their unchanging form, but only a few golden leaves clung tightly to the branches of the birches. Rumors swirled like dry leaves around the reservation; Ivy heard that they would set everything straight, and the illegally taken allotments would be returned, but she wasn’t convinced.

Meanwhile, the investigators were already asking questions at the agency. Michelet had set up a room in the back for them to work in. He had a table for Powell and his associates to sit behind while the person they were interviewing sat in a wooden chair a few feet in front of them. A small picture window let in enough light. A small crowd stood gathered in the back of the room, curious to watch the proceedings.

Powell had already explained to several Anishinaabe witnesses that “full-blood” meant someone with no white blood, no white ancestors. Amik was on the stand.
“Amik, will you please state your age and place of residence?” Powell questioned.

“I was born just about the time of the 1867 treaty. My grandfather signed that treaty. You can go and look up his name. I am a Mississippi Indian. I have lived most of my life right here around the White Earth Village.”

“There were quite a number of people living around in your neighborhood at that time who were known to have some white blood, is that true?” Powell charged.

“Yes.”

Perfect, thought Powell, now I have him right where I want him. “And when you speak of these people as being of that kind, are you stating that from something you know of their family, or from your general observation of the comparison between them and these others that you know to be mixed-bloods?”

“Well, I should go by my observation and the looks of themselves and their children. You see, at that time there was no such thing—there was no distinction amongst the Indians, full-bloods or mixed-bloods; it is only within the last few years that that has come up,” Amik answered.

“They all lived in the same manner?”

“All lived in the same neighborhood; that is, they were all related, you know in groups.”

A wide smile came across Powell’s lips; he knew this was his chance. “Many of those—Isn’t this true, that many of those who were known to have white fathers were living as Indians and considered in the tribe as Indians, just as though they had no white father?” he asked accusingly.

“Yes sir,” Amik nodded.

“Thank you, Amik; that will be all.” Powell was pleased; getting Amik to admit that there were many Anishinaabeg who were biologically mixed-blood was a big step. So many others had been unable to understand what he was trying to ask them. Powell placed a big check mark next to Amik’s name and looked for the next witness.

“Will Alice Chi-Makwa please take the stand.”

Alice walked forward with confidence. Her hair was pulled back into a tight bun, accentuating the sharpness of her nose. Her young son, Migizi, was sleeping peacefully in a cradleboard on her back.

“Isn’t it true that your husband, Gordon Chi-Makwa, is a mixed-blood?”
Alice vehemently shook her head. “He was a full blood. He made himself a full blood.”
Powell raised his eyebrows with suspicion. “You mean he made himself a full blood by living like the Indians live?”
“Yes, sir, he did not even take a paper to sign as a mixed blood,” Alice smiled.11
Powell could not believe what he was hearing; what was this woman thinking? Obviously, she had no idea what he was talking about. Her suggestion that her husband could manipulate and control his identity was laughable.
Powell moved on to the next witness, Minogeshig. Minogeshig locked eyes with Powell as he walked toward the front of the room. His dark hair was smoothed back behind his ears, and he wore a black suit.
“Do you know what we mean by a mixed blood Indian?”
“No. No, there was no mixed bloods,” Minogeshig answered.
“The question I asked was, do you know what we mean when we say a mixed blood Indian?”
Minogeshig narrowed his eyes as he responded, “No, I just stated that I do not know that; I don’t understand that word.”
Powell explained, “When we say mixed blood Indian we mean that there has been some white blood or other blood mixed with the Chippewa blood?”
Minogeshig nodded, “Yes, sir.”
“And when we say full blood Chippewa Indian we mean that the Chippewa has not been intermingled with the blood of any other race?”
“I understand.”
“Now, what I want to know is, is Suzette Spruce a mixed-blood?”
“No, she is a full-blood. Her family was part of a group of Ottertail Pillagers that established themselves around the Pine Point area.”
Powell was skeptical about Minogeshig’s claims and asked a follow-up question to try and get him to admit that Suzette might be a mixed-blood. “Your statement that she had nothing but Indian blood is based upon the fact that she looked and lived like an Indian, isn’t that true?”
“Yes, sir,” Minogeshig admitted. “That is all I know.” Suzette’s family moved to Pine Point many years ago.
Powell knew he had him. “If she had a small amount of white blood, coming from [her] grandfather or grandmother, you would not know anything about it, would you, unless it showed in her face?”
“No, I would not know anything about it.”
Powell was pleased with himself. Finally, he was getting somewhere with these people! “Thank you for your testimony, Minogeshig. You may step down. Next, I would like to interview Gekek,” Powell announced.
Gekek’s presence always commanded attention. He was just over six feet tall, and the strong, definite features of his face had already brought him several marriage proposals. His golden brown eyes locked with Powell’s as he took his seat.
“Now, I want to ask you some questions about Martin Black. Some people have already testified that he is a mixed-blood. We have already heard accounts that Martin is lighter than the other Indians. Would you agree that Martin is a mixed-blood?” Powell began.
“Let me tell you how I saw him. He used to build a teepee a distance from the other teepees and call other warriors to follow him, and he went forth in the quest of the enemy. Are those the deeds of a mixed blood?”
Powell tried to redirect the questioning back to the genetic ancestry of Martin. “He was lighter complected than the other Indians, wasn’t he?”

“I could not say whether he was lighter than the others because it is so long ago. I cannot recollect. I used to see him swallow bones about that long (indicating) in his incantation for eliminating sickness among other fellow men. Is this the practice of a mixed blood?” Gekek was tired of the stupid questions Powell asked. He knew what Powell was trying to do, and he was not going to be a part of it. Gekek refused to give in to Powell’s desire for him to say Martin was a mixed-blood.

“You would not call anybody a mixed blood, would you, who wore a breechcloths, and lived like an Indian and went on the warpath? You wouldn’t have thought him a mixed blood unless he wore pants, would you?”

Gekek could see that Powell was upset with his answers, but he made one last effort to get Powell to understand. “It is no concern to me; I would not have said.”

Powell decided to change his strategy a bit and ask about Martin’s father. If Gekek would not answer questions about Martin, maybe he could get him to say something about Joseph.

“You know Mis-quah-nah-quod, or Joseph Black?”

“Yes, sir, he was here. He lived here.”

“Was he a full blood or a mixed blood Indian?” Powell asked.

Gekek smiled. “He was an Indian.”

Powell wasn’t going to let him get away with evasive answers. “What do you mean by an ‘Indian.’—a mixed blood may be an Indian?”

“It must be so.”

“You don’t know—you don’t know whether he was a mixed blood or a full blood?”

Gekek knew what Powell was up to, and he was not going to give him the satisfaction of answering such absurd questions. “He is dead long ago. I don’t know exactly what he was. You can go dig him out of his grave, and then you find out.”

As Gekek exited, Powell’s frustrations reached a breaking point. “Clearly, these Indians don’t understand what we are talking about here!” Powell began. “We have explained the definitions of full-blood and mixed-blood time and again, and yet they insist on undermining us by using primitive definitions. Clearly, they do not respect science or the authority of this investigation! This is not over; I will be contacting the proper authorities,” Powell said as he stormed out.
Dibaabiigin: Measure someone

Powell returned to the reservation a few months later, determined to discern which Anishinaabeg were full-bloods and which were not. This time he was accompanied by two anthropologists, Dr. Aleš Hrdlička of the Smithsonian Institution and Dr. Albert E. Jenks of the University of Minnesota.

A cold breeze nearly lifted their hats as they stepped off the train.

“I think you will find the accommodations here to your satisfaction,” Powell said. “White Earth has all the modern conveniences.”

Powell led Hrdlička and Jenks down the main street and pointed out the Chippewa State Bank and the post office. Two children sitting on a wooden bench on the platform outside the B. L. Fairbanks Co. Store stared at them as they entered.

The store was large and contained a wide variety of goods. Powell stepped up to the counter and asked for half a pound of peppermints. An elderly Anishinaabe man carefully measured out the red and white candy and collected Powell’s dime without comment. The group continued down the street and entered the fashionable Hiawatha Hotel. Since the government was paying their expenses, they requested the three best rooms in the hotel.

“We will begin our work first thing in the morning, so get a good night’s rest,” Powell instructed Jenks and Hrdlička.

Powell went to have a word with Simon Michelet, the Indian agent, about the new process that would definitively determine the blood status of the Anishinaabeg before he turned in for the evening.

“So you see, the doctors have created physical tests that can tell—without a doubt—the racial ancestry of any individual,” Powell explained.

“Fascinating! Science has made such advancements; it is unbelievable to think that a few simple tests can tell us the racial ancestry of a person. Now you won’t have to bother with any more of those unreliable answers the Anishinaabeg give to your questions,” Michelet responded. “I will get everyone to form a line in front of the examination tent bright and early tomorrow morning. Hmmm . . . I think I will offer an extra ration of salt pork to help motivate them.” Michelet smirked as the idea came to his mind.

Ivy watched the Essens brothers emerge from the tent. She was curious to know how it went. She knew the families of White Earth were skeptical about the work the doctors were doing, but most of them could use the extra ration of salt pork, so they lined up outside the tent.

“What happened?” she whispered. Everyone craned their necks to hear.

“They are crazy men,” the younger brother said.

The two brothers slowly opened their shirts as a small group of
Anishinaabeg gathered round. Each brother had a scratch on his chest. Eyes widened in astonishment.

“The doctor man says I am a full-blood and my brother is a mixed blood.”

The crowd was silent, stunned.17

Just then, Ivy was called. She was still reeling from the sight of the Essens brothers’ chests. Her mind raced: just who were these so-called doctors? What if they infected those they examined with a disease? Despite her fear she entered the tent to see for herself just what this examination would be like.

“Please take a seat. I just need to make a few notes, and then we can get started,” Hrdlička could see the fear in her eyes, so he added, “Don’t worry; this won’t take long or hurt.”

As Ivy’s eyes scanned the odd metal instruments laid out on the table her trepidation increased. Hrdlička carefully documented her name in his notebook. He then began the task of observing her physical characteristics. He raised her chin to get a better view of her face and began to write down his scientific findings:

- **Age:** 20, estimated
- **Eyes:** Fairly slanted
- **Hair:** Straight, thick, black
- **Nose:** Foot stout, bridge concave, less evolved

She was determined not to show her fear to the doctor, who smiled at her now, apologizing ever so slightly for any discomfort. She tried not to look and closed her eyes when she saw him pick up a set of circular forceps that looked like the jaws of a giant metal bear to her, closing in on her head.

“Do not worry,” he explained. “This is nothing but a spreading caliper.” He placed the metal tongs on her forehead, and she felt the coldness of the steel like a knife blade against her skin. He wrote again in his book, adding lists of numbers, figures, measurements, and observations.

- **Cheek bones:** Pronounced
- **Supraorbital brow ridges:** Strong, primatal
- **Forehead:** Low in appearance, large protrusions
- **Occipital bone:** Large, protohuman
- **Incisors:** Shovel-shaped, sharp
He turned to look at her, announcing his prognosis like a benediction: “You will be happy to know that you are of mixed blood descent.”

Ivy shrugged her shoulders and looked him right in the eye. “I am Anishinaabe. I don’t care what your so-called scientific tests say.” With that she turned and quickly strode out of the tent. Then suddenly it came to her. Of course, the land sales—these doctors were going to make sure they were all mixed-bloods! Then they would have no way to ever recover their lands. She became weak, and her stomach felt hollow as she walked toward the back of the line where the other members of her family awaited their turn. George could see the tears shining in Ivy’s eyes as she approached. He knew she was trying to maintain her composure.

“Are you alright?” he asked.

Ivy took a deep breath and closed her eyes. The welled-up tears began to roll down her cheeks. “I know what they are doing, but I don’t know what we can do about it,” Ivy stated.

“What do you mean?”

“The doctor told me that I am a mixed-blood. It doesn’t matter to me what he thinks about who I am, but if he says I am a mixed-blood, then I will never be able to get my land back.”

“Well, I will not stand here and let those doctors perform their nonsense tests on me. Let’s go home,” Ivy’s cousin Frances responded.

George disagreed. “You should do what you think is best, Frances, but I am going to stay. Even if they find me to be a mixed-blood, at least my name will appear on the rolls—remember when the St. Clairs didn’t collect their treaty annuities a few years ago? Now Michelet refuses them, says they abandoned the tribe; meanwhile, he gets fat from what should go to them. I am going to take my chances with the doctors.”

Frances and her husband, children, and father left the line and lost the extra ration of salt pork but thought it their best strategy.

**PART 2**

*Landing Identity*

In 1887 the U.S. government passed the Dawes Act, also known as the General Allotment Act. In “The General Allotment Act ‘Eligibility’ Hoax” John P. LaVelle details the requirements of the General Allotment
Act and the ways in which it has been misrepresented in scholarship. Contrary to popular belief and previous scholarship, the act did not require an individual to have one-half or more Indian blood. LaVelle asserts:

Indeed, in enacting the 1887 General Allotment Act, Congress imposed no blood quantum-specific “eligibility” requirement on Indians at all. Instead, Congress made eligibility for allotments under the act depend exclusively on the tribes’ own independent membership determinations.20

While the act required that those receiving allotments were members of Indian tribes, many tribes did not have official written membership or citizenship policies at this time or complete lists of citizens. Thus, the act signaled the most critical period in the evolution of U.S. involvement in citizenship among tribal nations because this new federal policy required an official census to determine who was a tribal citizen and, therefore, who would receive an allotment. The resulting “census,” then, effectively became a primary source in determining who was a citizen of a band or nation.21

Meanwhile, the U.S. government also wanted to consolidate all the Anishinaabeg onto one or two reservations. As a result, the population at White Earth expanded rapidly during the 1870s.22 In 1886 Congress appointed a commission to negotiate a formal agreement to move all Anishinaabeg to White Earth. The plan was for all Anishinaabeg to move to the White Earth Reservation and to eliminate the other reservations, but few Anishinaabeg were willing to agree to the arrangement. However, in 1889 Congress passed the Nelson Act, which declared that the Anishinaabeg would cede all reservations except for White Earth and Red Lake. Red Lake Anishinaabeg were to take allotments on their own reservation, and everyone else would take theirs at White Earth.23

White Earth leaders were not impressed with the plan and were wary of promises by the officials because so many other promised funds had never materialized. However, a majority of adult men were finally convinced once they were told that the act also allowed individuals to take allotments on their home reservations. Throughout the 1890s about 1,200 of 4,000 individuals whom the Chippewa Commission attempted to relocate to White Earth actually did. In doing so they increased the wide range of diversity already present on the reservation.24
Ultimately, the Dawes Act resulted in the loss of approximately 90 million acres of land previously held in common by American Indian nations. The first allotments were made at White Earth in 1901, with 4,372 allotments being authorized that year. Eventually, over 12,000 allotments would be made.

Legislation in the early 1900s would make major changes to the governance of allotments, and White Earth would be the center of a national scandal. In her groundbreaking work *The White Earth Tragedy* historian Melissa Meyer meticulously details the fraud and corruption that occurred at White Earth. She delineates questionable legislation and the resulting complex realities that would lead to the dispossession of thousands of Anishinaabeg and great wealth for a few. Meyer examines the complex and dynamic interactions between various political fractions of Anishinaabeg at White Earth near the turn of the twentieth century. She defines two primary political and cultural fractions at White Earth during the late nineteenth century as “conservative” and “progressive.” She argues that “conservative Anishinaabe bands located at a distance from fur trade outposts maintained a more subsistence-oriented way of life,” while progressives “participated more fully in the market economy.” Yet, she notes, “both groups had adapted to altered conditions from a foundation of continuity with past cultural constructs.” The conservative faction would eventually be known as “full-bloods” and the progressives as “mixed-bloods,” but these labels were reflective of “culturally determined values,” not biological or racial ancestry. My work builds upon and expands the various determiners of identity utilized by the Anishinaabeg Meyer describes.

In 1906 Congress passed several important pieces of legislation; possibly the most significant for the people of White Earth was the Clapp Rider. It was attached to the Indian Appropriations bill and garnered little attention. The Clapp Rider removed all restrictions to the sale of allotted land within the White Earth Reservation held by adult “mixed-bloods” in addition to those “full-bloods” deemed “competent” by the secretary of the interior, thus establishing blood quantum as a concept and concurrently correlating it with competency, which was to continue to be determined on an individual basis. No definitions of “mixed-blood” or “full-blood” were added to the legislation, which would later lead to confusion and conflict. Congressman Moses Clapp and his co-collaborator, Halvor Steenerson, claimed to have had the best interests
of the Anishinaabeg at heart. This rider opened a watershed, and land offices at White Earth were nearly instantaneously flooded with paperwork for the sale of thousands of acres of land.

There would soon be many questions about this problematic and notable legislation. While the legislation failed to define who exactly fell into the categories of “mixed-blood” and “full-blood,” there was an implicit understanding that these were scientific terms that dealt with literal, biological measures of race. However, there were many questions about the legal definition of “mixed-blood.” How much European blood did one need to be considered a “mixed-blood”? The District Court for the District of Minnesota, district 4, sixth division, ruled that an individual must possess a minimum of one-eighth “white blood” to be legally defined as a “mixed-blood.” The case was appealed, and the United States Circuit Court of Appeals overruled the district court finding that a “mixed-blood” was an individual with any amount of “white blood.” The United States Supreme Court subsequently upheld this “one drop” rule on June 8, 1914. Under the law, an individual with any European “blood” was a “mixed-blood,” with the exact percentage of “blood” being irrelevant.

By 1909 a full 80 percent of the White Earth Reservation land had passed into private ownership. That same year Warren K. Moorehead, a scholar from Massachusetts and member of the Board of Indian Commissioners, arrived at the White Earth reservation to investigate the conditions there, as he had heard rumors about the devastating circumstances. He found the rumors to be quite accurate and began to take affidavits from the individuals who claimed their land had been illegally taken. Moorehead collected a plethora of evidence and delivered it to Commissioner of Indian Affairs R. G. Valentine. Meyer notes: “The results of Moorehead’s probing [so] horrified Commissioner of Indian Affairs Valentine that he authorized Moorehead and Edward B. Linnen, a regular experienced Indian Office inspector, to undertake another investigation in July of 1909.” Their final report fleshed out Moorehead’s original findings. The fraud was so clear and rampant that, as Meyer has observed, “nearly every Indian Office official sent to look into the matter was scandalized by the ways Indians had lost their lands.”

Complaints of disenfranchised Anishinaabeg and the involvement of Indian Office officials soon caused those who had profited from the land sales to realize that their titles could possibly be revoked. With the
cooperation of congressmen, including Clapp, these landholders were able to get a provision for the establishment of a commission to “accurately” determine the blood status of White Earth allottees in the annual Indian Appropriations bill in 1913 that would, in turn, resolve which land sales were legal in accordance with the Clapp Rider. Although a blood classification roll, known as the Hinton Roll, was created in 1910, a new commission was appointed for the same purpose three years later because those who profited from the land deals complained it was seriously flawed. The primary difference between the rolls is that, not surprisingly, many individuals classified as “full-bloods” on the Hinton Roll would be reclassified as “mixed-bloods” on the new roll.

Ransom Powell was chosen to head the new investigation. He was appointed by the United States to investigate the genealogy of two hundred Anishinaabe families (about five thousand individuals) and determine which were “mixed-blood,” according to the legal definition established in the courts. Interior Secretary Franklin Lane did raise some questions about the appointment of Powell to this investigation because Powell served as attorney for a host of individuals and companies at White Earth. Indeed, the investigation of the roll commission would expedite the very cases for which Powell was serving as attorney. While the conflict of interest was clear, Powell remained head of the investigation. As Meyer has observed, “Political and economic interests in northwestern Minnesota were obviously on quite cozy terms.”

**Questionable Identities and Mixed Translations**

It is apparent that, at best, the conceptions of “mixed-blood” and “full-blood” as biological or racial categories were new to the Anishinaabeg of White Earth in the 1910s. In fact, it was likely that at the time many people rarely if ever used these terms or the metaphor of “blood” as an indication of a biological measure of race as a means to define identity within their own family, community, or nation.

It is not clear when the concepts of “full-blood” and “mixed-blood” were introduced among the Anishinaabeg or how these terms might have been initially understood. While blood symbols and rituals are widely distributed throughout cultures, the meanings and metaphors attached to blood changed over time. Meyer has observed that “the most widespread metaphorical trope attributes life-giving qualities to blood,
both in terms of procreation and agricultural fertility.\textsuperscript{42} It is not clear what beliefs Anishinaabeg held about blood during the early twentieth century.\textsuperscript{43}

Ransom Powell and those who worked under him interviewed numerous Anishinaabeg, asking them a variety of questions to determine who were “mixed-bloods” and who were “full-bloods.” The testimonies collected by this investigation provide rare, direct statements by Anishinaabeg of White Earth as to how they understood their identity.\textsuperscript{44} However, a number of important factors influenced the interviews. While the interviews were only recorded in English, language and translation were critical. The English and Anishinaabe skill level varied greatly at White Earth. Some individuals were fluent in both languages, while others possessed only partial understanding, and others spoke only one language. There is no information about the interviewees’ skill levels in English or Anishinaabe; therefore, I can only speculate when language and translation became an issue.\textsuperscript{45} However, as I will demonstrate, there are cases in which translation appears to have influenced the answers of the interviewees.

In order to establish if an individual in question was a “mixed-blood” an interviewee was often asked if the person had any “white blood.” The translation of this term would have been especially difficult even for a skilled translator because the root of the Anishinaabe word for blood, \textit{miskwi}, is \textit{miskw}. Miskw is the color red and probably references the literal color of blood.\textsuperscript{46} Consequently, red is inherently tied to the word “blood.” Therefore, the term “white blood” was entirely nonsensical for Anishinaabe witnesses who did not understand blood as a metaphor for or literal measure of race or nationality used by the investigators. In addition, in the recorded English transcripts the terms “Full-blood,” “Chippewa Indian,” and “Indian” are used interchangeably, which likely caused confusion because of the implication that “mixed-bloods” were not Indian.

Several witnesses were baffled by the investigators’ use of the terms “mixed-blood” and “full-blood” because, they claimed, these were not terms and designations with which they were familiar. The simplistic categories based on biology that the investigators insisted on were nonsensical for many of the Anishinaabe witnesses. The interview excerpt below demonstrates the nature of the exchanges between investigators and Anishinaabe witnesses.
Q. Do you know whether his father and mother were full blood Chippewa Indians or not?
A. They were Chippewa Indians, I know that.
Q. Do you what we mean by a mixed blood Indian?
A. No. No, there was no mixed bloods.
Q. The question I asked was, do you know what we mean when we say a mixed blood Indian?
A. No; I just stated that I do not know that; I don’t understand that word.
Q. When we say mixed blood Indian we mean that there has been some white blood or other blood mixed with the Chippewa blood?
A. Yes, sir.
Q. And when we say full blood Chippewa Indian we mean that the Chippewa has not been intermingled with the blood of any other race?
A. He is a full blood Indian; there is no mixed blood in him at all.47

First the witness indicates that the individuals in question are Chippewa Indians. Then he asserts that there are no “mixed-bloods,” even though he admittedly doesn’t know what the investigators mean by the word “mixed-blood.” Both translation and lack of an understanding of blood as a metaphor for race and biological ancestry likely played a role in the witness’s responses. After being informed about definitions of “full-blood” and “mixed-blood,” the witness holds his ground that the individuals in question are not “mixed-bloods.” There are several possibilities for the witness’s reaction. Maybe he considered the definitions provided by the investigators to be inadequate or inappropriate or might not have understood them at all. Another possibility is that the individuals in question were “full-bloods” as the investigators defined it. The witness’s statement could also be a refusal to use the terms and definitions provided by the investigators. He might simply have been persistent in his claim that “there was no mixed-bloods” as a way to deny the terminology and definitions pushed by the investigators.

During the investigation many Anishinaabeg who were willing to use the terms “mixed-blood” and “full-blood” caused complications for the investigators because their conceptions of “full-bloods” and “mixed-bloods” were much more nuanced and diverse than a simple calculation of genetic ancestry. For example, during an interview George Morrison argued that there was no designation of who was “full-blood” and who
was “mixed-blood” among the Anishinaabeg until the question of land titles became tied to these identities. He asserted that all those who lived with the Anishinaabeg were considered “full-bloods” due to their way of living, not because of their actual genetic ancestry. He stated:

In old times all who wore the breech cloth and blanket and also affiliated with the Indians, lived in wigwams and didn’t live in houses, they were called “Indians”; they were considered the same as the full-bloods on account of their way of living; not on account of their blood, but on account of their—it was their way of living that regulated that.

Morrison carefully noted that it was lifestyle, not blood, that determined who was an Indian. Morrison’s use of the term “Indian” in place of “full-blood” furthers his point that racial or biological divisions were not in place “in the old times.”

Investigators also asked many questions about phenotype, especially skin color, and spent a considerable amount of time attempting to connect skin color with an individual’s status as either a “full-blood” or a “mixed-blood.” Despite their attempts to make skin color a primary factor in determining if a person was a “full-blood” or a “mixed-blood,” Anishinaabe witnesses frequently noted that skin color varied and was not necessarily indicative of either an individual’s racial ancestry or his or her cultural status as a “full-blood” or a “mixed-blood.” For example, Bay-bah-daung-ay-yaush did not correlate the darkness of a person’s skin with a specific degree of blood. An investigator asked, “Wasn’t she light complexioned?” And Bay-bah-daung-ay-yaush replied, “Yes, she was light. Some Indians are light, but she was an Indian.” In this case Bay-bah-daung-ay-yaush’s use of the term “Indian,” not “mixed-blood” or “full-blood,” is a somewhat subversive way of asserting that the two categories of identity are Indian and non-Indian, thereby undermining the definitions desired by the investigators. When asked a similar question, May-zhue-sah-e-bun-dung also refused to correlate skin color with identity by replying, “Yes, he was light, but he was a full-blooded Indian.”

In addition, several people testified that they did not remember or take note of the skin color of individuals. For example, when asked if an individual was “pretty white,” Mak-ah-day-wub responded that he had “never taken particular notice.” It is possible that witnesses really did
not recall the skin color of those they were being questioned about; however, it is more likely that witnesses purposefully refused to recall or describe the skin color of the individual in question as a calculated strategy to assert that skin color did not determine an individual’s identity.

Measured Identities

The federal government ultimately refused to accept the multiple, fluid understandings of who was Anishinaabe, both “mixed-blood” and “full-blood,” and insisted that it was biological ancestry that determined which category an individual was placed in. Investigator Ransom Powell did not get the results he desired from his interviews, so he employed a new means to get answers regarding the racial ancestry of the people of White Earth. In May 1915 two nationally renowned anthropologists, Dr. Albert E. Jenks and Dr. Aleš Hrdlička, came to White Earth to administer a series of physical examinations as a way to determine the exact racial makeup of the individuals involved in the land fraud cases and create a blood roll detailing this information.53 Jenks was confident he could indisputably distinguish “full-bloods” from “mixed-bloods” through various physical examinations.54

Using the results from the texts performed by Jenks and Hrdlička, Powell finally completed his blood roll in 1920. Less than 10 percent of the five thousand allottees listed on the roll were classified as “full-bloods.” Judge Page Morris, senior judge of the United States District Court for the District of Minnesota, approved the roll, and it was accepted as final.55 The blood quantum of allottees as listed on Powell’s roll became the critical determiner in most of the allotment land fraud cases, and other key evidence was disregarded. Most of the 142,000 acres of land in question were never returned to the original owners or their descendants.56 White Earth Anishinaabe scholar David Beaulieu has observed: “It is a rare moment in the historiography of the relationship of anthropology and the other social sciences to American Indians to find an example where the colonial nature and political purposes and the uses of academic enterprise seem so obvious and direct.”57 In the land fraud cases anthropologists’ understandings of “full-blood” and “mixed-blood” were considered scientific fact. The ways in which the Anishinaabeg classified themselves, on the other hand, were deemed un-scientific and, ultimately, irrelevant.58
CONCLUSION

The statements of the Anishinaabeg during this investigation demonstrate that they did not use blood as a metaphor for racial and biological ancestry; to them, this association was illogical and senseless. Their understanding of the meaning of the terms “full-blood” and “mixed-blood” were not bound to biological or genetic requirements but were flexible terms generally tied to a variety of lifestyle choices. Ultimately, little was agreed upon except that designations of “mixed-blood” and “full-blood” in the simplistic and rigid biological understanding pushed by Powell and his investigators were unacceptable and in direct conflict with pliable Anishinaabe understandings of identity. Anishinaabe identity could not be surveyed and divided the way the reservation had been. There were no clear lines and neat allotments; rather, it was a diverse landscape interwoven with lakes, birches, pines, and prairies.

The federal government did not accept Anishinaabe conceptions of identity and insisted upon fixed measures of race as the sole determinant of an individual’s identity. This focus on race and biology resulted in the dispossession of thousands of acres of land. In addition, it legalized the conflation of “blood” with race and nationality. The racialization of Anishinaabe identity would have significant and lasting consequences, eventually leading to the dispossession of many individuals’ legal status as Anishinaabe.

EPILOGUE: WIINGASHK

Ivy’s granddaughter Anne had gathered the women together in her home to weave sweetgrass baskets. Like their ancestors, the women spun the disparate blades of grass together between their fingers while they spoke of children and politics. A sweet smell filled the room as life was transformed. As the baskets took shape, words stitched the variegated families together. The malleable coils of sweetgrass built upon each other like generations, seamlessly connected by skillful women.

NOTES


3. Anishinaabeg are known by a variety of names, including Ojibwe (also spelled Ojibwa and Ojibway) and Chippewa. I will primarily be using Anishinaabe(g) in this article but will also use Chippewa when using the legal name for government bodies.

4. In the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries there was a myriad of complex systems and social regulations that Anishinaabeg used to determine who were and were not members of their tribe. It would be a mistake to think that these systems functioned without any conflict—undoubtedly, there were disagreements and power struggles. However, Anishinaabeg were in control of these systems, and they worked out conflicts or agreed to disagree, as was their sovereign right; they determined who was and who was not a citizen of the nation.

5. I use “facts” in quotes because there is often an assumption that written documents are “facts,” that they hold the truth. In reality we know that documents can only give part of the story and that there are instances where they have been false.

7. Sweetgrass is a sacred plant used in a wide variety of ceremonies. It has a calming smell when dried and/or burned. It grows in swampy areas and is harvested during the summer. It is often woven into braids and baskets.


9. Ransom Judd Powell Papers, undated, 1843, and 1896–1938, testimony transcripts from investigation of the blood status of Indian allottees within White Earth regarding the blood status of individual Anishinaabeg, estate claims, and land titles and transfers, Minnesota Historical Society, St. Paul.


11. Powell Papers, roll 5, p. 422.


14. Powell Papers, roll 4, frame 614, p. 82.


19. This act authorized the president of the United States to allocate reservation land to individual American Indians. The United States would hold the title to the land in trust for twenty-five years as a means of protection for the allottee while he or she learned to use the land to its fullest potential. It was presumed that after twenty-five years the individual would have the skills necessary to manage his or her own affairs, and a fee patent, which allowed unrestricted ownership of the land, would be issued (Janet A. McDonnell, *The Dispossession of the American Indian, 1887–1934* [Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1991], 2). Political rhetoric surrounding the policy was that individual European-style landownership would teach Indians individualism and selfishness, which were seen as necessary characteristics for the assimilation of Native people into dominant society (Sharon O’Brien, *American Indian Tribal Governments* [Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1989], 78).


21. Individuals who for one reason or another were left off the list effectively lost their status with their tribe and with the federal government. Even though they were recognized as Indian in their communities, officially they were not counted as Indian (Melissa L. Meyer, “American Indian Blood Quantum Requirements: Blood Is Thicker than Family,” in *Over the Edge: Remapping the*
22. In fact, the population increased from about 800 in 1875 to over 1,400 a year later, as the Pembina and Otter Tail Pillager bands joined the Mississippi Band already at White Earth.

23. The vague terms used in this legislation caused confusion, and in 1895 the assistant attorney general ruled that in order for an individual to qualify as “Chippewa Indian” under the Nelson Act he or she must have Chippewa Indian blood, have a recognized connection with one of the bands in Minnesota, have been a Minnesota resident when the act was passed, and must move to a reservation with the intention of living there permanently. This ruling did not necessarily provide much clarification. In addition, it excluded children of Anishinaabe women who had married non-Indians, but it extended qualification to those who had received “half-breed script” under the 1854 and 1855 treaties (Meyer, *The White Earth Tragedy*, 59–60).


26. This counts additional allotments that were made after 1904, when the president was authorized to allot pine lands, which had been previously exempted. See Peterson, “That So-Called Warranty Deed,” 162–65.


29. Of course, competency was a term loaded with unspoken implications. Essentially, those Indians who were deemed competent by the federal government had adopted some European and American customs, spoke English, and often had European ancestry. This legislation only applied to the White Earth Reservation; however, in 1917 Commissioner of Indian Affairs Cato Sells created a policy to unilaterally release all allotted lands held by American Indians of less than one-half Indian blood. While he knew the rationale was not foolproof, he felt “it is almost an axiom that an Indian who has a larger portion of white blood than Indian partakes more of the latter” (Paul Spruhan, “A Legal History of Blood Quantum in Federal Indian Law to 1935,” *South Dakota Law Review* 51, no. 1 [2006]: 45, available at Social Science Research Network, http://ssrn.com/abstract=955032). Only a few years after the implementation of the policy Sells abandoned it.
31. “White blood” was the terminology used by the court. It was assumed that “blood” from European countries was “White blood,” but the court did not specifically name the countries that would be included under this designation.
36. Special Agent John H. Hinton created the Hinton Roll. He attended the September 1910 annuity payment at White Earth and, in consultation with Anishinaabe leaders, established the blood quantum of each individual to the sixteenth fraction (Meyer, *The White Earth Tragedy*, 162).
38. As Meyer observed, “Policy makers interpreted blood status literally at White Earth . . . with absurd consequences” (*The White Earth Tragedy*, 172).
39. Index to Powell Papers, M455. Powell was well known as an attorney for Minnesota lumber companies and had represented their interests on many occasions. He continued to advise his clients on their cases while he worked on the blood roll.
41. There is a vast literature on the symbolism of blood in a wide variety of cultures, yet no such study exists for the Anishinaabeg, making it unclear what role blood played in society during the nineteenth century.
43. It is possible that the metaphor and/or belief that blood was directly associated with racial ancestry as well as physical characteristics and mental abilities was introduced among the Anishinaabeg during the treaty period.
44. Meyer makes a brief reference to the testimonies collected by this investigation (*The White Earth Tragedy*, 169) but focuses her efforts on political factionalisms after the land fraud cases and relies on other sources, including letters, newspaper accounts, and government reports for her analysis.
45. There are occasional instances in which the interpreter interjects to clarify a term and it is recorded in the transcript. For example, a witness was asked, “Did you ever see the trader, George Fairbanks, who used to live here, have a store over here at the old agency,—trading post?” The witness answered, “He was my [sic] Frenchman.” The interpreter then stated, “That means ‘trader’” (Powell Papers, roll 4, frame 610, p. 73).
47. Powell Papers, roll 4, frame 409, p. 11.
48. This is not the famous artist of the same name.
49. Powell Papers, roll 6, p. 51.
50. Powell Papers, roll 6, pp. 50–51.
51. Powell Papers, roll 5, frame 596.
52. Powell Papers, roll 5, frame 247.
53. In his 2004 dissertation (University of Minnesota), “Weeds in Linnaeus’s Garden: Science and Segregation, Eugenics, and the Rhetoric of Racism at the University of Minnesota and the Big Ten, 1900–45,” Mark Soderstrom uses Jenks’s life and career to “examine the evolution of anthropology as a discipline within its national context” (49). Due in part to his work at White Earth, Jenks was one of one hundred people appointed by the secretary of the interior to assist the United States in creating Indian policy in 1923 (70). Dr. Aleš Hrdlička, curator of the Division of Physical Anthropology at the Smithsonian Institution, is the acknowledged “father of American physical anthropology.” In addition to his work at the Smithsonian, Hrdlička was the founder and editor of the American Journal of Physical Anthropology and cofounder of the American Association of Physical Anthropologists (73). For detailed information on the findings of the physical examinations see Aleš Hrdlička, “Anthropology of the Chippewa,” in Holmes Anniversary Volume of Anthropological Essays (1916), found at Newberry Library, Chicago.
55. Peterson, “That So-Called Warranty Deed,” 169–70; Minnesota Chippewa Tribe, White Earth, 37. As Meyer observed, “The legitimacy of the 1920 blood Roll rested on a methodological foundation devised by experts who pioneered the science of eugenics. As such it was an inherently racist document” (The White Earth Tragedy, 170).
57. Beaulieu, “Curly Hair and Big Feet,” 282.
58. Furthermore, one year after the cases had been decided Jenks tested his own hair and that of several of his colleagues and found that his hair and that of Dr. Hrdlička were of the most typical “Negro” types. He concluded: “Either the old classification of human races by hair texture is not of scientific value or Dr. Hrdlička and I are related to the negro” (Beaulieu, “Curly Hair and Big
Feet,” 305). Numerous investigations have taken up the issue of the legality of the land sales. Youngbear-Tibbetts “focuses on the equity suits filed by the United States on behalf of the Anishinaabeg who had been wrongfully dispossessed, and details the community’s response to the White Earth Land Settlement Act of 1987” (“Without Due Process,” 96–97).