

A Colloquy with COUN-HA-CHEE of the Miccosukee Tribe

By [Guido Mina di Sospiro](#) (February 2019)



The Golden Forest, Edward Foster

During both my childhood and adolescence I read countless books—some historical, most fictional—on the struggle “Red Man vs. White Man,” always rooting for the designated loser, i.e., the Native American. Despite that, here in the US I never sought to meet with a Native American. It took the editor-in-chief of an Italian travel magazine to make me do just that. When I used to live in Miami, he asked me as a favor to write an article on the Miccosukee, of Creek descent, who dwell in South Florida’s Everglades. I drove out to meet with their public relations manager, who in turn directed me to their

village. There, he introduced me to various members of the tribe, including a humble and serene man, a promulgator of the Old Ways, or COUN-HA-CHEE, as their public relations manager said. As it turned out, he came from a family of healers, or medicine men, as he himself called them.

In the article I published in the magazine I did mention COUN-HA-CHEE but none of the things he revealed to me; it was just not the right readership for them. But I did tape our exchange, and have transcribed every word of it.

During our colloquy, COUN-HA-CHEE spoke very slowly, each word much apart from the other, *sotto voce*, sometimes down to a whisper. The reader, while reading my questions at a normal pace, should make an effort and read his words extremely slowly. Clearly, he spoke as a spokesperson with a voice *not exclusively* his. I've added some endnotes. It is COUN-HA-CHEE himself who uses the word "Indian." Now follows the colloquy, transcribed word for word (my questions in italics).

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The Miccosukee Indians and maybe all of the native Americans have always had stories about the white people. We were told that when these white people arrive they would signal the beginning of the end of the Earth. And for us, we were told to recognize these people. We have, in our vocabulary, an ancient word; and in our vocabulary we have two names that are both ancient and they refer to white people. The first word is AH-NAHT-KEE. AH-NAHT-KEE in the Miccosukee language refers to 'not humans'—an existence that resembles human but that is not

human. The second word is YAHT-TAT-KEE. YAHT-TAT-KEE is a white human being.

So most whites are AH-NAHT-KEE?

When we see destruction being condoned, we refer to it as AH-NAHT-KEE. We refer to the condoning of the killing of nature as the way of the AH-NAHT-KEE.

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We see people who live an everyday way of life such as yourself. We see people approach us, and they talk and they ask questions about Old Ways; we refer to them as YAHT-TAT-KEE. YAHT-TAT-KEE is a white human being. We feel that Old Ways of Native Americans were also taught to all children around the world, and for some reason most of the people around the world forgot them. They laid them aside for the sake of progress. Maybe it was to gather more food, maybe their thoughts were on their food, but for some reason they laid down the teachings. And when they got to the pinnacle of what they were after, they forgot to bring the teachings with them. But we feel that all the people around the world have the same teachings as the American Indians; only, they have not decided to pick them back up.

Blinded by greed?

For us, we were introduced to money. Money never existed here in this Land. We were introduced to it in the time that the Spaniards came. We fought with the Spaniards because they were killing our people. And they couldn't defeat us, and our Land, so they made peace with us. And they gave us money, guns, horses, cows, and traded for the natural products of this Land. For us, squash, beans, pumpkins, tomatoes, potatoes, sweet potatoes, corn—all of the natural produce of this Land. It was food like the Spaniards never saw before. But they needed it to survive here. They did not recognize it as food, we introduced it to them. So they gave us money; we didn't know what to do with it; so we made jewelry out of money. It was not important, and for our people we still carry on this way of thinking, that money is very bad. But today not only the Indian people see it as being bad; we even hear the white people refer to it as 'root of all evil.' So we assume that they also understand.

For us, we are told that if you take a person's existence and you follow his ways and at death you make him into a symbol or a part of life that the world cannot live without, then you are doing a very bad thing, you are creating a sickness. When human beings die you should not use that person's spirit in place of God. So most of the time that you see Miccosukee Indians you will find that they carry very little or no money at all. And the Miccosukee Indians will tell you that the reason for this is because the Americans at death of their people have taken their faces and put them on to this piece of paper; and the piece of paper which has taken the place of religion and way of life. A piece of paper with a picture that they will kill you for, they are all willing to die for.

So you will find the Miccosukee Indians carrying very little or no money at all, because we feel that it is carrying the

ghost of a person, and an idol.

And where does the spirit go when a man dies?

For our people, we have been asked many times where the American Indian believes that the spirit of human beings travel to. When we tell them that we believe that there is such a place as heaven that they speak of, they will ask us, 'Where do you believe heaven is?' We tell them that heaven is not beyond the blue sky as you look upward. Heaven is only as far away as the air that you breathe^[1]