

# POLICY FORUM

## *Listening to the Stories of a Storied People*

### Introduction

When my congregation dissembled its 1890s white-clapboard building and steeple and moved it from just north of Winston-Salem to nestle onto the 15 acres we purchased at the northern edge of Chapel Hill, we knew both the church and the land were sacred. They were consecrated by the First Peoples of the Triangle, who inhabited it long before us.

Each fall we reconsecrate this place by recalling the Eno, the Shakori, the Occaneechi, the Tutelo, and the Cheraw, whose descendants are now citizens of the Occaneechi Band of the Saponi Nation. The tribal names are poetic, near forgotten, and as we worship safely socially distanced outside, are carried off by the wind.

Despite the 1838 forced march of the Cherokee to reservations further west in the shameful Trail of Tears, North Carolina is still home to more American Indians than any state east of the Mississippi. The experiences of these people, often overlooked, must be understood in order to serve their health needs.

So many articles in this issue are more painful than poetic. Our authors, most American Indian themselves, are storytellers. They speak of not finding their lives in the literature, of their deaths not being worthy of investigation, of their culture being ignored, shamed, and cast aside, and of their very history being denied and unrecognized. Some articles are heartbreaking. All are illuminating.

There are horrific statistics, such as American Indians experiencing 100% more motor vehicle accidents and 440% more homicides than White populations, alongside stories describing a culture of hope, care, and resilience. Those stories reveal a people long misunderstood, who populated this land thousands of years before anyone dreamed of crossing an ocean to arrive on their shores.

As one author writes, an American Indian worldview that might frame this read centers on history, spirituality, kinship, community, place, and harmony. Carry it with you. NCMJ

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