

TALKING STORY IN ASIAN AMERICA

■ Polo



# Love letter to Native America

*Salaam pribumi manis*  
(Peace, dear earth people):

I'm offering peace, dear Native America, because I tell you true: If you and we were meeting on the shore of our fragrant island home instead of here, on your blessed continent, and if you didn't properly express respect for the blessings our ancestors cultivated, or the wisdom our elders accumulated — we would surely shove you and your leaky boat back out to sea. Pacific sea or stormy sea: See you later. Selamat djalaan.

So I'm asking for peace, dear people of this generous land, because we newcomers have broken a traditional protocol shared by the beautiful children of Mothers Mexico and Africa, the bright children of Mothers India and China, and the brave children descended from Abraham. Peace be upon Him, and upon us all.

For our wrong, we ask your pardon. Humbly. And we ask for just enough peace to get better acquainted. And should it all go well, we'll dream of when we may all conscientiously construct an accord — a sacred one, on how Native and settled and New Americans might best share the grand continent cultivated by your ancestors' elegant teachings and your elders' stubborn faithfulness. Insh'allaah.

Pero please, ahead of exploring your pardon and our peace — I need your patience a moment more to explain why this rudeness. This long.

**Why we've been rude**

Scholars call us "transnational migrants." Evening news is packed with our families' desperation, while diplomats argue over whether we're "refugees," deserving protection under international law, or not. Politicians abbreviate our sorrow and devalue our ambition by

**Asia's largest movie festival set to kick off in Busan**

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last year despite pressure not to.

The state-run Korean Film Council cut its support to the film festival this year by nearly half, to 800 million won (\$677,000) from 1.46 billion won (\$1.2 million). Many viewed the budget cut as punishment for the festival's decision to screen the documentary, which was about the 2014 sinking of a ferry that left hundreds of people dead, most of them South Korean students on a school trip, and the government's much-criticized rescue operation.

"I felt then that our society's democracy had a long way to go," Kim said.

After the standoff with the government, Kang Soo-yeon, an award-winning actress, was appointed the festival's co-director. She has since vowed to stand for the value of freedom of expression.

The festival opened with *Zubaan*, an India coming-of-age drama, and will screen 303 movies from 75 countries, including 94 world premieres.

calling us "immigrants" — an unmentionable word, until someone else brings it, or us, up first. Usually not in a kind way.

This love letter is so late in arriving, dear sisters and brothers, because we arrive here, on the confluence of your generous matriarchs, Rivers Willamette and Columbia, badly shaken. Social scientists say we suffer from *profound dislocation*, or from *traumatic discontinuities*. Or both. Leaving cozy homes and ancestral homelands, hurts. Killed or disappeared loved ones, hurts even more. We know, dear host First Nations, how this is your history too. Oh ampun'illaah. May our common creator have mercy on us all.

And then, trying to get inside America's accelerated mainstream, hurts. We are further injured in ways our ancestors could not prepare us for, and our elders cannot protect us from. We know that you know this too. We are humbled dear earth people, by your sorrow. By sorrow that's become elementally bonded into Umatilla's painted hills, into Celilo's rounded river rocks, into this verdant valley's chocolate soil. Sorrow from President Jackson's Removals to President Eisenhower's Terminations to Wounded Knee and Pine Ridge. 400 years of sorrow.

We've neglected to properly express our respect to you, pribumi manis, because our hearts are broken, our heads are spinning, and our elders warn that our ancestors' blessings, the protective optimism clothing all immigrant families, has a short shelf life. We have eight to 10 years to integrate into America's accelerated economic mainstream. Then we disintegrate. First individually, then communally. Then we're done.

**Robot revolution sweeps China's factory floors**

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companies achieve another national goal of shedding their reputation as shoddy, low-cost producers to compete with global rivals.

Automation will allow Chinese factories to grab a bigger share of industries where accuracy and precision are crucial, such as aerospace, medical devices, and optical components, said Derick Louie of the Hong Kong Productivity Council.

Makers of toys and other low-profit consumer goods, however, "probably will have to move outside of China due to rising labor costs and environmental taxation," he said.



Brightly wrapped Native American tobacco bundles offered to ancestors are seen at the auspicious confluence of the Willamette and Columbia Rivers.

And yes, we know that you know this too. **What happens here**

So early mornings, our households' elders rush to dress well their bright grandbabies, to show respect to their beloved teachers. Earlier still, our parents dashed to catch two-hour bus rides to work. Many don't know about minimum wage, most don't think about maximum hours.

Newcomers' focus is short. Our jaws are clenched. From where we live, downtown Portland and this super-sized society, looks and feels hurried and heartless.

Now, none of this means to minimize the inspiring concrete, glass, and steel infrastructural assets America has superbly constructed, or the astonishing financial and technological capital that policy leaders have set in motion. River City's robust mainstream and our 70-or-so ethnic streams running through here, are beneficiaries of all that.

And none of this intends to negate that kind and creative America loved by everyone, everywhere. Our grandpas still weep about the respect Yank soldierboys gave their wives and daughters, after freeing us from Imperial Japan's ugly occupation army. Our grandmas still smile about lanky guys called Red and Smitty, Brooklyn and Chief, who handed thick Hershey bars to our kids. Your warriors among them. Always slightly apart, eyes focused elsewhere.

They knew then, you know and we know now, that something deep and something dark divides this great nation's soul into two distinct bodies of behavior. One America sincerely hates tyrants and loves families. And acts on these ideals. The other America keeps her faraway neighborhoods constantly in fear. In shock and awe. That *something*, so splitting this nation's core identity and conduct, swings wildly — from loving Indian country to disintegrating Indian households. Then it swings again. Then again. Five centuries of that.

It's the same dark *something* that earnestly embraces Mexican salsa; Hindu yoga; Persian poet, jurist, and scholar Rumi; then suddenly swings into humiliating the proud fathers and provoking the impulsive teenage sons of these proud traditions. Two centuries of this.

**Please know that we know, that you've always known how native and settled and new Americans might best share River City, this chocolate soil, and the blessed continent our common creator entrusted to you.**

**How we need peace**

This deep and dark thing is the reason our relationship, the one between Native and New America, matters so much.

You see, our ancestors are pribumi too. Earth people like you. Their whispers inform us daily. And they're saying it's your families' sorrow soaked into Willamette Valley soil, your sorrow passed into orchards exploding with Queen Anne peaches, Bing cherries, and Hood River apples — it's your sorrow ultimately absorbed into mainstream America's bellies and bones — that animates U.S. soldiers and business suits searching every far corner of our precious little planet for relief. Relief from the suffering they inflict on this land, and the people of this land. Medicine for America's pain.


America's darkness, our ancestors say, comes from the pain passed by the hands of earth peoples into the ribs of your sacred Coho and Sockeye and Chinook. It's pain elementally bonded to the calcium of your salmon's skeletal remains. It's Native America's anguish sequestered in the vast carbon deposits that fuel this nation's excesses. Excesses driven by the pain of the pulsing heart shared by every natural element under our blessed sun.

Pribumi manis saya (my dear earth people), please know that New America suffers with you. And please know that we know, that you've always known how native and settled and new Americans might best share River City, this chocolate soil, and the blessed continent our common creator entrusted to you. We know that when you, when your swollen rivers and their urgent salmon are healthy and happy — grandparents, parents and their pretty babies rising in neighborhoods near and far, are less anxious about the moody giant.

It is a newcomer's duty to ask how we may help bring peace to your household. To Indian country. And to hope that a less hurting United States may ease our shared little planet's fears. Everywhere, everyone wants those generous and respectful Yanks back in our neighborhoods. Back in our dreaming. How may we help.


Terima kasih (I offer our love, in gratitude to you).

-- Polo



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