



REGENERATION OF LAND AND CULTURE

A Documentary

Regeneration of Land and Culture

*Directed and edited by Brooke Bierhaus,
in collaboration with Quapaw Nation*

Kaniké // thank you



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A note from the filmmaker:

While you witness the strength and success of Quapaw in current times, it is important to recognize the trauma, betrayal, injustice, and painful hardships the Quapaw Nation has continued to overcome.

In order to provide additional context for the film, we have included a brief history of Quapaw Nation and information about both the cultural and ecological role of buffalo.



A Brief History of Quapaw Nation

“We are a smaller tribe, but we punch well above our weight class.”

- Chairman Byrd

The Quapaw were once part of a larger group of people called the Dhegiha Sioux, who later diverged into distinct tribes, including the Quapaw, Osage, Kanza (Kaw), Ponka (Ponca), and Omaha peoples.

The origin of their name is Ogazpa (O-gah-pah), which can be translated to “downstream people”— a tribute to the oral history of the Quapaw’s crossing of the Mississippi River.

As the story goes, the Dehegiha people came upon the river encased in dense fog. They braided a grapevine into a rope, but it snapped as they were attempting to cross. The Omaha people emerged from those who had already made it safely to the bank. The Quapaw descended from those who floated downward along the river.



A Modern History

(1541 - Present day)

The Quapaw first contacted European colonists in 1541 when they encountered the Spanish conquistador, Hernando de Soto, near the Mississippi River. The Quapaw also crossed paths with numerous French villages. In

1699 the Quapaw people were ravaged by smallpox. Only 300 warriors survived.

The people of Quapaw Nation moved to the south bank of the Arkansas River around 1800. In 1818, they were pressured by the U.S. government to cede most of their lands. Six years later, in 1824, a second treaty with the U.S. government stripped away the Quapaw Nation’s rights to their remaining stake. The Quapaw people were forced to relocate to the Red River in Louisiana, in what became known as the Quapaw Trail of Tears.

In 1834, the Quapaw people moved north to what was then known as “Indian Territory”, just west of the Missouri line in Northeastern Oklahoma (where Quapaw Nation stands today). In an effort to evade the Oklahoma Indian agent at the time, who forbid many aspects of traditional living, some Quapaw continued on to Kansas—a decision that further splintered the tribe.

During the Civil War period, many Quapaw served in the Union Army, and two Quapaw chiefs were held prisoner at Fort Gibson by the confederates.

Life on the Oklahoma reservation was very difficult, and it was reported that in 1868 that the Quapaw were surviving primarily on yonkapins and roots of pond lilies. In 1877, Tall Chief, the last hereditary chief of the Quapaw, led two villages back to Osage country. Thirty-eight Quapaws stayed behind on the reservation to maintain their claim there. In 1882, Tall Chief’s daughter, Mi-koi-she (later known as Grandma Supernaw), was born. Grandma Supernaw became a beloved figure among the Quapaw, passing on important oral histories and cultural knowledge that survives to this day.

The Quapaw’s history is one of migration, resilience, and connection to the land.

Their story is one of strength and survival.



The Role of Buffalo in

Quapaw Culture

Buffalo are the largest terrestrial animals in North America. Their original range stretched from the arctic lowland taiga forests of Alaska down to the western grasslands of Mexico, and from the Great Basin of Nevada to the eastern Appalachian Mountains. They played an essential role in the culture of the Quapaw people for thousands of years.

The word for 'buffalo' in Quapaw language is “te”. The word ‘te’ has a double meaning: it means buffalo and also refers to buffalo meat.

The buffalo are sacred to the Quapaw, and the animal is featured prominently on the Quapaw Nation’s seal. The Quapaw people were semi-nomadic and participated in seasonal buffalo hunts. They depended on the animals for sustenance and other uses, including molding their hides into long buffalo robes for winter. The Quapaw used every part of the buffalo, and only took as many animals as they needed. The Quapaw consider the buffalo to be their relatives, and have built a relationship with the animal founded on honor and respect.

Buffalo, Soil Health, and Regenerating Grasslands



Scientists named the buffalo, “The American Bison”, and you will often hear and see those names interchangeably. Bison are a keystone species that have historically played an important ecological role across prairies, forests, and grassland ecosystems of North America. Their grazing kicks off a well-researched dynamic biological process integral to maintaining healthy ecosystems and

solving the climate crisis through carbon drawdown.

The disturbance patterns created by a large herd of buffalo moving across the landscape help to aerate the soil, support biodiversity, fertilize the land, and contribute to soil carbon sequestration. When deposited, bison feces and urine provide an important source of nitrogen, phosphorus, calcium, sulfur and magnesium that feed microorganisms, plants, and ultimately insects, birds, and mammals. Buffalo play a major role in the nutrient cycle of thriving ecosystems. Behaviors such as wallowing, trampling, and horning help to till up the soil and distribute seeds.

Entire species of animals, including dung beetles, box turtles, and many birds co-evolved with the buffalo herds. Dung beetles place nutrient-rich buffalo dung directly into the soil—triggering microbial activity that feeds the soil and helps facilitate carbon sequestration. High-intensity, managed grazing (where the animals move across the landscape) can increase soil organic carbon (SOC) storage and improve soil quality indicators, including increased water infiltration, forage biomass, and species composition.

Buffalo play an integral role in the web of life across much of this continent—a fact Indigenous people, including the Quapaw, have always known, honored, and protected for thousands of years. The return of the buffalo to their historical range represents a cultural revival for many Indigenous peoples and a regeneration of the continent's critical ecosystems.

Discussion Questions

We hope that following the film you might find some time to reflect on the themes and stories showcased in the documentary, and to seek avenues to continue engaging in issues of Indigenous rights, cultural preservation, and climate change mitigation.

Here are some discussion questions to spark further discussion and exploration:

- Whose ancestral land do you live on today?
- Why is it important to understand the history of the land?
- How might Indigenous knowledge and practices help heal the planet?
- How does language influence the way we interact with the world? Quapaw tribal members speak about the buffalo as a family member, brother, or a kinship. How do you think that influences their relationship?

- What do we need to do to restore ecosystems here and around the world?
- How do buffalo help combat climate change?
- In what ways can you use regenerative practices in your own life and home?
- Did anything in the documentary surprise you?

Beyond the Screen: Action Steps

- Learn more about Quapaw history and culture on the [Quapaw Nation official website](#).
- Purchase [beef](#) from the Quapaw Cattle Company, or buy your [coffee](#) from O-gah-pah Coffee to support the Quapaw Nation.
- Follow [@nativelandnet](#) and download their free [Land Acknowledgement Guide](#) to learn more about how territory acknowledgement can become a powerful and meaningful practice—deepening your historical knowledge and advocacy for Indigenous land rights.
- Donate to the [Intertribal Buffalo Council](#) to foster efforts to restore buffalo to Indian Country--re-establishing the animals across their historical range and preserving a cultural cornerstone for generations to come.

- Implement regenerative practices in your own life. Consider:
 - Planting a garden
 - Starting a compost bin
 - Shopping at your local farmers market
 - Supporting efforts to restore natural ecosystems in your area

How can you contribute to an Indigenous-led, regenerative future?



Want to reach out to the director and filmmaker directly?



Learn more about Brooke's work:

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