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WASHITAW NATION COMES UNDER INVESTIGATION



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The bizarre story of the Louisiana-based 'sovereign' Washitaw Nation might be funny if it weren't for investigations of its possible financial crimes.

It was the night of the "high waters" on the Louisiana bayou when the "empress of the Washitaw" was born. A levee on the Mississippi had broken, and a swirling, stinking flood was raging outside as she burst from her mother's womb onto the cold, cement floor of a public courthouse. Within seconds, the empress says, there was a sign.

"I was born in my placenta," Her Highness explains. "I kicked out of it on my own, and then [the placenta] rolled up on my head like a crown."

And so, on that stormy night 72 years ago, Verdiace Turner — the woman who would one day call herself Empress Verdiace "Tiari" Washitaw-Turner Goston El-Bey — came into this world.

rightful place as supreme ruler of the ancient, 30 million-acre empire known as Washitaw De Dugdahmoundyah — the Washitaw Moorish Nation.

Officialdom is not amused. A major, multiagency federal investigation is looking into the dealings of the Washitaw Nation and its principals, and the states of Colorado and Louisiana have opened their own criminal probes.

Authorities are investigating possible money laundering and offshore banking fraud, the sale of apparently illegal license plates and other practices derived from antigovernment "common-law" ideology.

The empress denies any illegal dealings.

Partners with Problems

But difficulties are beginning to crop up around her. Already, her one-time "minister of finance" has pleaded guilty to bank fraud and conspiracy. Officials say her current legal

advisor, a man who recently gave her a Mercedes that may have been acquired fraudulently, has a history of larceny and theft arrests. Another associate was convicted in a federal court in November on 11 counts of bank and mail fraud.

Around the country, people have been jailed for using Washitaw license plates and driver's licenses. And although charges were ultimately dropped, the empress, then going by her married name of Verdiacee Goston, was indicted in 1984 for the alleged embezzlement of \$150,000 in federal funds.

Like the neighboring [Republic of Texas](#) (ROT), a separatist group that claims Texas was illegally annexed by the United States in 1845, the Washitaw's empress claims that the land sold by France to the United States in the 1803 Louisiana Purchase was fraudulently obtained — and actually belongs to her.

Like ROT, too, the Washitaw Nation employs the pseudo-legal language and theories of "common law" — an ideology birthed by hard-line American white supremacists in the 1970s and 1980s.

But the Washitaw are not white supremacists.

They are, in the weird language of the empress, "indigenous" — descendants of the "Ancient Ones," the "black ones" who Goston insists peopled this continent tens of thousands of years before white Europeans arrived.

The empress, a grandmotherly black woman who wears graying dreadlocks, is the living exponent of what her writings describe as the "Emperial" [sic] line of matriarchs, royal women who she says have ruled here from time immemorial.

Driver's Licenses and 'Sovereignty'

This latest empress, a woman who in recent years has developed a fondness for Rolls Royces, Bentleys and Mercedes-Benzes, may have hit on a winning combination.

Using something called the Sanctuary Christian Resource Center as an agent, Washitaw Nation has sold a cornucopia of dubious common-law products — including "driver's licenses" and "registrations" that have turned up in Arizona, California, Colorado, Kansas, Louisiana, Nebraska, New Jersey, New Mexico, New York and Pennsylvania.

A Washitaw birth certificate will run you \$65 (send two color photos) and a Washitaw passport (another two photos, please) \$250. "To appease those who wish to see a driver's license when you're traveling," there's an "international motorist certificate" for \$100, unless you want the \$150 commercial model.

Get a two-year "Motorized Conveyance Registration" for \$250 ("This procedure," the Washitaw pitch goes, "insulates you from all of the corporate States compulsory insurance laws, licensing and registration requirements, emissions testing, safety inspection and more"). Remember to ship your Certificate of Title to Washitaw's

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inspection and more). Remember to ship your Certificate of Title to Washitaw's "Ministry of Transportation" once the Registration comes in the mail.

And don't worry about the "corporate" authorities. Washitaw officials will answer the phone if police call, and they promise to make "every attempt" to pacify them.

Another benefit of Washitaw citizenship: no state or federal taxes.

The Washitaw documents, and the theories they derive from, are classic common law, the notion that one can declare one's "sovereignty" and separate from state and federal governments.

Originally, these ideas were propounded by the [Posse Comitatus](#), a violent, racist, anti-Semitic and anti-tax organization that raged across the farm belt in the 1970s and 1980s. Some of this nation's most dangerous terrorists — including [Terry Nichols](#), convicted in the Oklahoma City bombing — were imbued with Posse ideas.

Another aspect of common law used by some Washitaw "citizens" is the filing of false property liens against those perceived as enemies. In June 1997, for instance, self-described Washitaw Ima Deana Conklin, 24, was sentenced to two years in a Missouri prison for her part in filing a \$10.8 million lien against a judge who refused to throw out a speeding ticket.

Property liens can prevent targets from selling their homes or other property and can, even if meritless, cost thousands of dollars to clear up.

Mound Builders and 'The Ships of Shitta'

There are a few kernels of truth in the wild story the empress tells, although these are buried in a mountain of pseudo-historical and -archeological gobbledygook in *Return of the Ancient Ones*, her unpublished book, and other Washitaw literature.

Archeologists *have* found evidence of an ancient culture in the northern part of Louisiana where Goston operates — the so-called "Mound Builders" that she describes. Historian Roger G. Kennedy writes that the Ouachita area (the preferred spelling of what the empress calls "Washitaw"), especially around Monroe, contains "the most profound mysteries of American ancient architecture."

When European settlers arrived, they reported finding a few remaining Ouachita and evidence of a once-great civilization.

But they are a group "lost to history," writes anthropologist Tristarum Kidder, and almost nothing is known about them. "If some story tellers ... did not assure having seen five or six," French military commander Jean Filhiol wrote in 1786, "one would doubt that a nation so-called might ever have existed."

Goston, though, says she knows the whole story.

The Ancient Ones, the first Washitaws, were Africans — “a highly intelligent race of shipbuilders, masonry [sic], a tribe of Israel, black and bushy-headed” — who crossed the Atlantic and made their way to what is now northern Louisiana. They built octagonal mounds, and traded “via the ships of Shitta.”

The empress explains the derivation of their name like this: “Ware-shittinwood or water-shitta-washita — now Washitaw.”

Actually, there were some Washitaw here even before the Africans arrived, the empress says, dating to when all the continents of the world were one. Their lands — the lands of all the earth — were known by the indigenous term “Mu.”

“Are you aware that you are from Mu?” the empress writes in the January 1999 *Washitaw Post*. “Are you aware that your beginning was with Queen Mu? She was actually Empress Moo.”

And the Cattle Said ‘Muu’

Confused? “Muu is the name taught to all nations by the Creator,” Goston explains in *We are the Washitaw*. “All over the planet, the cattle teach the same name, Muu. ... We are in a land called Muu, thus we are the Muurs. ... We are the Ancient Ones.”

Further proof of this hidden history lies in the fact that an “Egyptian” city was discovered in 1909 in the Grand Canyon. “No one need wonder why the Grand Canyon had to be flooded by the U.S. federal agencies,” writes the empress.

Goston’s particular beef with the United States — aside from its “racist and sexist psychopathic” nature — goes back to the Louisiana Purchase. Unknown to conventional history, the empress says, her 30 years of research have turned up a vital fact: Napoleon actually sold only “the streets of New Orleans and a military barracks.”

The rest of the Purchase land, she says, was stolen from the Washitaw. And she’s doing something about it: She’s filed an \$80 quadrillion claim against the U.S.

“There’s no such thing as the United States of America,” Her Highness said. “The U.S.A. never purchased any land and the Washitaws never granted them any. ... They’re just the people that came to dinner and stayed.”

Washitaw lore today is an interesting cocktail of New Age vocabulary and United Nations tidbits (The UN, Goston insists, registers the Washitaw as indigenous people No. 215). Music buffs will be amazed to learn that the blues came from the Washitaw.

Goston was cured of cancer through traditional Washitaw medicine (although the methods cannot be revealed). And feminists will like the empress’ firm belief in matriarchy.

"[I]t has always been the woman who reigned supreme over the family and the nation," Goston writes. "In ancient times she was called Mam-muur, Empress of the Muurs. During more modern times she was simply called Grandma or Mama... ."

Whites and the Washitaw

Despite such unconventional theories, the Washitaw Nation appears to be growing in influence, at least in some circles. The best estimates are that there may be 200 hard-core members, with many thousands more on paper.

There's increasing evidence of Washitaw penetration among followers of Moorish Science, a 70-plus-year-old sect advocating black "sovereignty" from white America.

And now, whites are joining up, too.

When asked about the Washitaw's racial makeup, and if a white person can become a bushy-haired "ancient one," the empress answers with a loud, imperial summons: "Daaaaaaaniell!"

Daniel Joseph Weeks, 48, is an effusive white man who explains that he lives in the "Floridæ" province of the Washitaw, a part of which "is what you call Florida." Introduced as the empress' "legal adviser," Weeks says he has been a Washitaw for three years and that he is trained in "natural and international law."

Officials say that Weeks, who's based around Tampa, is also a man with a history. He has a record of theft and larceny arrests in New York and Georgia over a 20-year period, they say. He and partner Richard Allen Charbonnier have been investigated in connection with a Florida real estate fraud, as well as a 1996 pyramid investment scheme in which Weeks was arrested at one point as a material witness, the officials said.

Also in 1996, both men were investigated in a third case, this one involving allegedly fraudulent employment information used to get a loan to buy five luxury cars.

Federal officials expected Weeks to testify against Charbonnier in the case, but when it finally went to trial in 1997 both men claimed immunity from U.S. law under the theory that they were citizens of Washitaw Nation. Despite Weeks' refusal to testify, officials say, Charbonnier was convicted of fraud.

It was one of the cars from this case, a 1988 Mercedes SEL, that Weeks allegedly gave to Goston this January. Goston, however, seemed to want more.

Rolls Royces and Bentleys

A month after Weeks' apparent gift, Goston and a Washitaw entourage showed up at a luxury car dealership in Miami. After indicating that they might have a claim to the state of Florida thanks to the recent archaeological discovery of an ancient, 38-foot

circle carved into Florida's limestone bedrock, the Washitaw officials cut a \$750,000 deal with an amazed salesman for seven Rolls Royces and Bentleys.

They would be paying, they announced, in gold and silver coins. They told Richard Kovacs of Brieman Motors that "they don't believe in United States currency and reserve notes," according to a report in *The (Monroe, La.) News-Star*.

That disdain for U.S. currency hasn't stopped some at least one Washitaw official from doing what he could to obtain more of it.

On Nov. 13, 1996, just days after Washitaw officials struck up a "treaty" with their separatist compatriots in the Republic of Texas, black officials from both groups found themselves together on a Lear jet bound for San Juan, Puerto Rico.

On board were Steven Crear, a former security guard who had been elevated to ROT vice-president; Jasper Baccus, the owner of several laundromats in Dallas, a pillar of the black community there and a man who would become involved in a fraudulent ROT scheme to create a black bank; and Donald Norvile Calhoun, the empress' "minister of finance."

But in San Juan, Secret Service agents seized \$1.5 billion in worthless ROT "deposit warrants" — documents that looked like cashier's checks and were supposedly backed up by ROT liens against the government — in Calhoun's briefcase. The men apparently intended to deposit them in a Spanish bank branch.

It was, ROT/Washitaw member Mark Hernandez would tell *The Dallas Observer*, a process they called "monetizing the lien."

Officials say it was also illegal.

Calhoun, indicted by a federal grand jury that December along with Baccus, Crear and Hernandez for conspiracy and fraud, eventually pleaded guilty. But not before he went on a shopping spree — allegedly, as he told authorities later, for the empress.

Six days after the San Juan arrest, Calhoun was seen driving around Louisiana in a Lexus 400SC, trying to buy \$2 million in property in Winnsboro, seat of the Nation.

The Nation responded with outrage after Calhoun was detained, sending out a press release entitled "\$2.5 billion stolen!" In it, Goston complained angrily of a "blatant violation" of international law perpetrated by "an estrangled [sic] member" of the UN — the United States. Today, the empress still defends Calhoun, Baccus and Crear.

"They sent three black men to jail who had nothing to do with the money," she says.

Another Goston associate who found himself in trouble with the law was Ronald Griesacker, a 42-year-old Republic of Texas member who officials say frequently visited

and lived with Washitaw officials in Louisiana.

Over the last several years, Griesacker, 42, had become one of the country's leading proponents of common law, giving seminars and teaching followers how to concoct phony financial instruments. One of them was Crear, who testified in his own trial that it was Griesacker who had schooled him.

Last November, it ended for Griesacker when he was convicted in Kansas of trying to pass more than \$2 million in bogus documents. A federal court found him guilty of nine counts of bank fraud, one of mail fraud and one of conspiracy to commit fraud.

Today, the Nation is believed to have followers in some 20 states. About 100 people attended a Washitaw convention held in January, and more may be joining up.

In her interview, Goston pulled out a large black notebook of applications, complete with photos, and investigators recently found a trove of other applications in Colorado. The benefits of "citizenship," it seems, may well outweigh the empress' eccentricities.

"She is goofy," concludes Gary Clyman, a special investigator for the Colorado attorney general. "But how much of that is just an act? ... I'm pretty amazed at what [investigators] have stumbled on. It blew my mind, the financial aspect."



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