THE GOONZETTE

Digital Culture • Commentary • Analysis

Daily Edition - Saturday, January 17, 2026

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Les Algorithmes de l'Âme: How Digital Trends Colonize Our Collective Unconscious

There is something profoundly melancholic about watching a TikTok trend die—the way a dance that once possessed millions of bodies simply evaporates into the digital ether, leaving behind only ghost traces in our muscle memory and the faint embarrassment of having participated in something we cannot quite explain to ourselves, much less to future generations who will excavate our phones like archaeologists sifting through the detritus of a civilization that mistook virality for vitality, engagement for genuine human connection, and the dopamine hit of notification badges for authentic recognition of our inherent worth as complex beings deserving of more than fifteen seconds of algorithmic attention.

The architecture of social media trends reveals itself as perhaps the most sophisticated form of cultural imperialism ever devised, not through the crude mechanisms of military occupation or economic sanctions, but through the infinitely more insidious method of making us complicit in our own colonization—we willingly surrender our authentic expressions, our indigenous ways of being human, in favor of whatever arbitrary format the algorithm has deemed worthy of amplification this week, whether it's the sterile minimalism of "clean girl" aesthetics (itself a whitewashing of beauty practices long present in Black and Indigenous communities) or the performative vulnerability of mental health discourse that reduces genuine psychological complexity to hashtag-ready soundbites that fit neatly into the attention economy's relentless hunger for content, always more content.

What strikes me most profoundly about these digital phenomena is how they function as a kind of reverse missionary work—instead of imposing external values through force, the platforms create the conditions where we evangelize ourselves into conformity, desperately contorting our multifaceted identities to match whatever template promises the highest probability of algorithmic favor, and in doing so, we participate in what can only be described as a form of cultural gentrification of our own interior lives, pushing out the messy, unmarketable aspects of human experience in favor of whatever performs best in the marketplace of likes, shares, and that most contemporary of currencies, *l'engagement*—a word that once meant

commitment, devotion, political involvement, and now refers primarily to how successfully we can manipulate strangers into double-tapping our carefully curated versions of reality.

The temporal structure of trends themselves mirrors the extractive logic of late capitalism, where cultural practices are strip-mined from their original contexts—often from marginalized communities who receive no attribution or compensation—refined into their most palatable, easily replicable elements, and then distributed through networks that benefit primarily the platform owners and a narrow class of content creators who have successfully gamified their existence, leaving the rest of us as both unpaid labor force and captive audience in an economy that profits from our alienation while selling it back to us as connection, community, belonging—*c'est vraiment tragique*, this commodification of human longing.

Yet I find myself reluctant to dismiss entirely these strange new forms of collective behavior, because embedded within even the most seemingly vapid trends lie genuine human needs: the desire to be seen, to belong to something larger than ourselves, to participate in shared meaning-making, to feel the particular joy that comes from synchronized movement, whether literal or metaphorical, with others of our species—needs that have always expressed themselves through ritual, tradition, ceremony, practices that social media trends both echo and hollow out, creating elaborate simulacra of community while systematically undermining the conditions that make authentic community possible.

Perhaps what we're witnessing is not simply the degradation of human culture but its adaptation to new conditions of existence, a kind of digital evolution where our ancient impulses toward mimicry, belonging, and creative expression struggle to survive within technological environments designed primarily for extraction rather than nourishment—and in this light, every awkward dance video, every earnest attempt to participate in whatever linguistic innovation is currently circulating, every vulnerable share or carefully staged aesthetic moment represents not just capitulation to algorithmic pressure but also a small act of resistance, an insistence on human creativity and connection despite platforms that would reduce us to data points in their optimization schemes.

The question that haunts me, scrolling through these endless feeds of synchronized humanity, is whether we can retain agency within systems designed to erode it—*peut-être* the answer lies not in rejection but in conscious participation, in bringing intentionality to our digital choices, in remembering that behind every trend, no matter how manufactured, breathes the irreducible complexity of human hearts seeking recognition in whatever language the current moment provides.

Dave Standing There (Hoocąk Haci Nįįc) January 17, 2026

Treaty Rights in 2024: Why Courts Keep Missing the Point

The recent flurry of treaty litigation across Indian Country tells us something important: federal courts still don't understand what treaties actually are. Last month's *Bad River Band v. Enbridge* decision and the ongoing battles over water rights in the Southwest reveal a judicial system that treats our treaties like outdated contracts rather than what they truly represent—nation-to-nation agreements that reserved our inherent sovereignty.

As Ho-Chunk people, we know something about treaty promises. The federal government relocated us from Wisconsin to Minnesota, then Iowa, then South Dakota, then Nebraska—five times in thirty years. Each move came with new promises, new papers, new lies. But here's what they never understood then and still don't grasp now: treaties didn't give us rights. They recognized rights we already possessed and specified which ones we were willing to share.

This fundamental misunderstanding shapes every courtroom argument today. When Enbridge argues they can force an aging pipeline through Bad River territory, they're operating from the colonial assumption that tribal sovereignty exists only when explicitly granted by Congress. When Arizona claims state jurisdiction over water flowing through the Salt River Pima-Maricopa reservation, they're denying that tribes retained water rights as senior appropriators.

The courts' approach reveals their bias. They apply strict construction to tribal treaty rights—if it's not explicitly written down, it doesn't exist. But they give broad interpretation to state and federal authority. This interpretive framework isn't neutral legal doctrine; it's colonization through jurisprudence.

Consider the strategic implications. Every time we're forced to litigate reserved rights doctrine or the canons of construction, we're accepting a framework that treats our sovereignty as an exception rather than the rule. We're arguing within a system designed to diminish us incrementally. The real question isn't whether we can win these cases—though we must fight them—but whether we can simultaneously build alternative structures that recognize our nationhood.

The Biden administration's approach offers mixed signals. Interior Secretary Haaland's memoranda on tribal consultation and co-management represent important shifts. The administration's support for tribal positions in recent Supreme Court cases matters. But policy memoranda can be reversed by the next administration. We need structural change, not just sympathetic appointees.

Here's where strategy becomes crucial. The current Supreme Court, hostile as it is to tribal interests, inadvertently created opportunities in cases like *McGirt v. Oklahoma*. By emphasizing that only Congress can disestablish reservations through clear and unambiguous language, the Court reinforced principles that protect tribal jurisdiction. Smart tribal lawyers are now using *McGirt*'s framework to challenge state jurisdiction across the country.

But litigation alone won't secure our futures. The most significant treaty developments are happening outside courtrooms. Tribes are asserting co-management authority over traditional territories, entering into government-to-government agreements with states, and building economic leverage through strategic partnerships. When the Menominee Nation negotiated their compact with Wisconsin over casino gaming, they weren't just securing revenue—they were establishing precedent for tribal regulatory authority.

The Ho-Chunk Nation's approach to treaty rights exemplifies this multi-pronged strategy. We've pursued federal recognition of our hunting and fishing rights through litigation, but we've also developed our own conservation programs that demonstrate responsible stewardship. We've challenged state taxation through the courts while building economic enterprises that create facts on the ground about our sovereignty.

Water rights present the next major battleground. As climate change intensifies drought across the West, tribal water rights become increasingly valuable. The Winters doctrine established that tribes reserved sufficient water to fulfill their reservations' purposes, but quantifying those rights requires expensive, decades-long litigation. Meanwhile, states continue developing water resources, creating facts on the ground that courts later accept as reasonable expectations.

Smart tribal leaders are pursuing water settlements that secure both immediate access and long-term development rights. These negotiations require understanding not just legal doctrine but political economics—who needs what, who has leverage, and how to structure deals that survive political changes.

The path forward requires what my grandmother would call "good thinking"—strategic patience combined with tactical flexibility. We must defend our treaty rights in federal court while building alternative institutions that don't depend on federal validation. We must engage in government-to-government negotiations while maintaining that our sovereignty predates and supersedes state authority.

Most importantly, we must remember that treaties aren't just legal documents—they're relationships. And relationships require ongoing maintenance, clear communication, and mutual respect. Until federal and state governments understand this basic truth, we'll keep meeting in courtrooms instead of council chambers.

That's their loss and our opportunity.