

TELLING THEIR OWN STORY:
THE PRESENTATION OF AMERICAN INDIAN HISTORY RECONSIDERED

by

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(Under the Direction of Wayde Brown)

ABSTRACT

The United States has presented a biased representation of American Indian history since the formation of the country. By understanding the complex evolution of historic perspectives, we gain a better understanding of how to remedy the situation and create a more balanced presentation of history. This thesis will analyze past Euro-American perceptions of American Indians and how this point of view has affected the interpretation of American Indian history at historic sites and museums. Through examining past and present presentations of the American Indian, this thesis will identify several tools that historic sites can use to break away from biased and outdated notions of America's history.

INDEX WORDS: American Indian, United States, Canada, Interpretation, Historic preservation, History

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DEDICATION

This thesis is dedicated to the memory of Darrell Ray Martin, Little Shield (*Assiniboine*), Standing Bear (*Gros Ventre*). He was a phenomenal mentor and I will never forget his eagerness to share his knowledge. May his passion and dedication to cultural history live on in my work.

Ginnii hei eec

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CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

The preservation of American Indian historic resources dates back to the earliest efforts of historic preservation within the United States. With the American *Antiquities Act* of 1906, President Theodore Roosevelt initiated one of the first national historic preservation movements in America that identified culturally significant landscapes and nationally significant historic resources that would be preserved and protected as national monuments. Many of the first culturally significant landscapes that were chosen for protection, including Devils Tower in Wyoming and Montezuma Castle in Arizona, were already identified by American Indian tribes as sacred sites.

While President Roosevelt set out to conserve many sacred sites in the United States, he also carried a prejudiced outlook on the peoples who made those landscapes significant. As much as he appreciated the beauty and significance of America's natural and cultural landscapes, he embodied the stereotypes and perspectives of a nineteenth-century view about American Indians, a view that American Indians were "reckless, revengeful, and fiendishly cruel."¹

This paradox in the preservation and presentation of American Indian history can be seen even today. While preservation programs and tribal historic preservation offices have been established to involve American Indian communities in the preservation of their history, the presentation of American Indian history is still a one-sided story, favoring the actions of the United States. The preservation movement in America "still has historically had a White Anglo-Saxon Protestant cast to it, with the majority of its members and leaders drawn from the upper

¹ Mieder (1993: 45-46)

middle and upper classes.”² While efforts have been made to include a diverse population in the preservation of history, historic preservation, and many relevant academic and scientific fields, are still managed and run by the upper middle and upper classes.

This one-sided story can no longer be acceptable within twenty-first century heritage preservation. With the popularity of heritage tourism, heritage tourists are looking for accurate information on the past. Providing multiple perspectives on history not only provides a voice to all underrepresented groups, but it acknowledges the complex, rich and pluralistic history of the United States. In *Marketing Heritage*, Barbara J. Little notes that “the creation of parks and the choice of what messages to present to the public are an important part of building a sense of national identity.”³ As stewards and interpreters, it is the responsibility of preservationists and historians as to what national identity and presentation of history visitors encounter at historic sites, national parks, and museums.

The presented message at a historic site is as important as the preservation of the physical structures. What history are we presenting and preserving at cultural sites? How can we break away from historic viewpoints and create an inclusive presentation of history at national sites and museums? More specifically, how can historic sites incorporate American Indian perspectives and methods of recording history to reflect a more balanced presentation of the nation’s past? Through examining past and present presentations of the American Indian, this thesis will identify several tools that historic sites can use to break away from biased and outdated notions of America’s history.

By understanding the complex evolution of historic perspectives, we gain a better understanding of how to remedy the situation and create a more balanced presentation of history.

² Ibid, 5-6.

³ Little (2004: 272)

Chapter two of this thesis will examine nineteenth-century perceptions and events concerning American Indians in the United States. This analysis will provide the groundwork for exploring opportunities for changing this historic mindset. Chapter three discusses a comparable history of the treatment of indigenous peoples in Canada and how preservation efforts in this neighboring country are working to dispel past prejudices. With these reflections on past actions, chapter four moves on to several current trends in the interpretation of U.S. history and how many cultural sites are reconsidering the presentation of American Indians. Building upon the modern efforts in Canada and the United States, the conclusion of this thesis will present several methods for creating more opportunities for American Indian tribes to become involved in the presentation of their history.

The presentation of American Indian culture and history can be found in every corner of the United States. Because of the wide diversity of issues surrounding American Indian history, this thesis focuses on a few methods that can be used by a variety of organizations, parks, and museums to create a more balanced presentation of history. This thesis will not address issues concerning tribal sovereignty, the legal issues surrounding museum collections or tribal property, or efforts made in every field related to American Indian history. I have included three case studies of efforts made in the United States to change the presentation of history. These case studies should be considered only a sample of what countless other parks, museums, and historic sites are doing to bring American Indian perspectives into the spotlight.

Throughout this thesis I have chosen to use the term “American Indian” over other popularly used terms like “Native American.” This is a personal choice based on current preferences by institutions and indigenous tribes who use the term American Indian to identify indigenous peoples when discussing them as a collective whole. I also follow the lead of

Canadian scholars and institutions by using the term “First Nations” when referring to the indigenous tribes of Canada.

While indigenous groups were the first inhabitants of the Americas, modern states that were formed on this land were created with the assistance and support of a diverse mix of cultures, including the indigenous tribes. Countless immigrant populations came to the United States to find their own opportunities and create their ideal community. The growing pains and struggles to form new countries contain the history of disputes and battles between various cultural groups. The strained relationship between the United States and American Indians is an integral part of this history.

The difficult moments in history must be addressed side by side to the more celebrated events. An objective perspective must be used when considering the positive and negative effects history had on the numerous groups involved. What may have been a brilliant moment in American history may have proven detrimental to the lives of American Indians.

“As preservation continues to professionalize, it will have to confront serious social issues and become more reflexive about its role in shaping collective memories of groups and nations.”⁴ This endeavor is not an easy one but it is necessary. Whether intentional or not, cultural diversity is part of the foundation of the United States, and as such, should play an active role in the presentation of American history. As David Lowenthal remarks, “It is vital to celebrate local diversity. But for minority impress, we must look to other realms of culture – worship, foods, social traits, the arts. There, more than in building or landscape, ethnic America displays a dynamic living heritage.”⁵

⁴ Barthel (1996: 29)

⁵ Lowenthal (1992: 161-162)

Re-examining our presentation of history will bring needed change to the field of historic preservation. Finding ways to present the difficult topics of our history will help us move forward as a multicultural nation. This alteration in how we view history will enrich the stories presented at historic sites. As Diane Barthel notes,

Minority sites are creating a preservation boomlet in part because they solve two of the fundamental problems facing preservation: namely, the perpetual search for new sites and new types of sites to save, and the need to counter charges of elitism and to demonstrate public service to all segments of the population.⁶

It is the responsibility of preservationists as stewards of history to provide the whole story and reach out to cultural groups whose perspective on history needs to be represented.

Reconsidering the presentation of history is a healthy tool for effective heritage preservation.

⁶ Barthel (1996: 24)

CHAPTER TWO

THE INVENTION OF THE AMERICAN INDIAN

Creating the tools to move forward with a balanced presentation of history requires the understanding of past perspectives. While many interpretive programs within the United States are based on exhibits and viewpoints from the early twentieth century, it is important to explore the nineteenth-century events and perspectives that influenced these exhibits. Through understanding the context of national viewpoints, the relationship between the United States and American Indians will become clear. This analysis can then lead to solutions for improving this delicate relationship.

The history of the New World was constructed from European minds from the moment that Christopher Columbus set foot on this land. In the New World, the indigenous people of the Americas formed a specific the image, created by Europeans explorers and settlers. Ideas of religious righteousness and Manifest Destiny turned this new land, and all of its inhabitants, into an experiment of European conquest and assimilation. The newly labeled “Indians” were seen as peoples that needed religion and civilization.

Soon after first contact, European settlers began a relentless effort to increase the size of the colonies which became the United States and other nations of the Americas. One of the first accounts of this expansion relates a peaceful interaction between the New England colonies and the Pemaquid tribe.

Settlements began crowding in upon each other. In 1625 some of the colonists asked Samoset to give them 12,000 additional acres of Pemaquid land. Samoset knew that land came from the Great Spirit, was as endless as the sky, and belonged to no man. To humor these strangers in their strange ways, however, he

went through a ceremony of transferring the land and made his mark on a paper for them. It was the first deed of Indian land to English colonists.⁷

While the first agreements were pleasant and friendly, not all colonists believed that they needed permission to occupy the land. As Roy Harvey Pearce explains this change in land ownership, “The Indian’s fortune after the Revolution was to learn that he had no right to exist independently and to live as and where he pleased.”⁸ As colonies expanded, tribes were pushed further west and began to see their lives restricted by the new inhabitants. Battles for land ownership began to shape the stereotypes of American Indians as aggressive savages that should be beaten into submission.

As warfare and communication between settlements and tribes went through highs and lows within the first two hundred years of contact, the perception of American Indians’ temperament changed little over time. Accounts of western exploration and encounters with tribes did nothing to relieve the settlers’ minds as to the “savagery” of the American Indians. Even as negative images and thoughts about indigenous tribes had been communicated to Europe since the time of Christopher Columbus, the newly established country of the United States had to figure out how to live side by side with the indigenous tribes in the nineteenth century.⁹ The stereotypes and portrayals of American Indians continued to play a role in the relationship between the indigenous tribes and the United States. The stereotypes turned into a firm portrayal of American Indians that have existed through the twenty-first century.

Nineteenth-century newspaper reports, national expositions, visual representations of indigenous life, and actions by the government all solidified the image of the American Indian as

⁷ Brown (1991:3)

⁸ Pearce (1967: 54)

⁹ Berkhofer, Jr. (1979: 11) Christopher Columbus’ accounts of travels and encounters with Indians, as labeled by him, were published and distributed across Europe as one of the first descriptions of the indigenous people of the New World.

viewed by Americans. An analysis of these documents and events reveal the long-term implications of the nineteenth-century depiction of the American Indian. Not only have these events confirmed the stereotypical view of the American Indian, they have forever recorded history in defense of the actions of the United States. The following discussions highlight the lasting effects that popular accounts have on the presentation of American Indian culture and history.

Print Media

John M. Coward begins his book, *The Newspaper Indian*, with, “To say that Native Americans received ‘bad press’ during the nineteenth century is to state the obvious.” He thus confirms the power that public media had in influencing everyday American’s understanding of American Indians.¹⁰ With constant reports from the West and accounts from the front-line of battles between the United States and tribes nationwide, newspapers and other national publications provided the Euro-American perspective of the conflicts with American Indians. This written perspective solidified the popular viewpoint in the United States and contributed to the writing of American history.

Like the very diverse encounters between the first settlers and Eastern tribal communities, so too was there a diverse mix of positive and negative situations as the United States expanded across the land. Many positive meetings and partnerships became overshadowed by the more exciting stories of war and treachery. Newspapers would often choose the stories that would grab a reader’s attention. “But in the papers, these critical conflicts as well as stories of cooperation and mutual respect were often obscured by reports of violence, stories rich in drama and easily understandable to journalists and readers alike.”¹¹ Newspaper

¹⁰ Coward (1999: 5)

¹¹ Ibid, 5.

editors had a great deal of power in determining which stories America would read. By highlighting only the negative or violent accounts, these newspapers fueled America's distrust and hatred of American Indians.

If a newspaper chose to run anything coming from the perspective of the American Indian, it was often justifying or supporting the efforts of the United States. In 1881, after the Battle of Little Bighorn brought an end to the Lakota rebellion against reservation life in 1876, Lakota leader Sitting Bull surrendered to federal authorities at Fort Buford.¹² The death of General George Armstrong Custer during the battle enraged the United States and would eventually cause the devastating backlash that is now known as the Wounded Knee Massacre in South Dakota in 1890. As Sitting Bull remained in custody, reporters and photographers flooded Fort Buford to gain a story. The *New York Times* published a statement by Sitting Bull while he was at Fort Buford. From the pages of a newspaper, Sitting Bull announced to the American public,

I came in to claim my rights and the rights of my people. I was driven in force from my land and I now come back to claim it for my people. I never made war on the United States Government. I never stood in the white man's country. I never committed any depredations in the white man's country. I never made the white man's heart bleed. The white man came onto my land and followed me. The white man made me fight for my hunting grounds. The white man made me kill him or he would kill my friends, my women, and my children...I expected to stay but a few days at Buford. When I came in, I did not surrender. I want the Government to let me occupy the Little Missouri country. There is plenty of game there. I have damages against the Government for holding my land and game. I want the Great Father to pay me for it.¹³

Even as Sitting Bull was making his plea to keep the freedom of his people's land, American's saw this as a confession for the unlawful actions by Sitting Bull at the battle of Little Bighorn.

The reporters added to their report of the arrest that, "It is the intention to treat Sitting Bull as one

¹² Bird (1996:30)

¹³ Fort Yates (Dakota) Correspondence of the St. Paul (Minn.) Pioneer-Press (1881:2)

who will bear watching, and not give him further opportunity by cunning counsel to stir up strife among the Sioux.”¹⁴

In her analysis of the capture of Sitting Bull, S. Elizabeth Bird describes the “frenzy” of reporters who rushed to get photographs, reports, and artifacts of the Lakota leader. She explains, “...there were reports of Sitting Bull selling his autograph and personal trinkets. In the *Chicago Tribune* of August 1, 1881, it was reported that he ‘sold a pipe for \$100 and goggles for \$5.’”¹⁵ The publications chose to reflect Sitting Bull’s actions in a negative light and most readers seemingly accepted this position. The newspapers reported the capture of Sitting Bull as a victory for the United States.

While many reporters made the journey to see the incarceration of Sitting Bull for themselves, many reports and newspaper articles were created based on rumors or secondhand accounts. Since many eastern readers would never travel west to verify the reports, newspaper accounts became ‘truth’ and a powerful tool to shape the minds of Americans. If newspapers were conscientious enough to research or correct written statements, the damage had already been done in the education of their readers. John M. Coward explains this as,

When the Albany *Argus* published a rumor about Indians gathering for an attack in Missouri, the editor inserted this disclaimer: ‘As to the verity of this, we cannot speak – but we feel it a duty we owe to the public to publish all the information which has been put in circulation relative to this important subject.’ In other words, the information was not verified and may not have been true, but the paper was publishing it anyway...¹⁶

During the nineteenth century, newspapers ran stories and reports that were tenuously attached to any sort of fact.

¹⁴ Bird (1996: 32)

¹⁵ Ibid, 32.

¹⁶ Coward (1999: 55)

The questionable news reporting of the nineteenth century also filled the need to explain the actions by the government to control the Indian population. While the Trail of Tears, the Battle of Little Bighorn, or the Wounded Knee Massacre were some of the bloodiest episodes in this country, news reports validated the efforts of the United States.¹⁷ The expanding country and United States economy needed more space to ensure the prosperity of all of its citizens. When one concerned citizen rallied against the Cherokee removal in 1838, a news correspondent countered the concern with the statement that “Georgia is, at length, rid of her red population, and this beautiful country will now be prosperous and happy.”¹⁸ Most citizens viewed the safety and success of the country to be a priority over the treatment of the first inhabitants of the land. With this belief, and news reports of tribal conflicts, many readers would agree with the news correspondent over any concerned minority.

To counter the mainstream ignorance of the United States, author Helen Jackson Hunt began her fight against the mistreatment of American Indians in written debates chronicled in the pages of newspapers in 1879. Before the 1881 publication of her book, *A Century of Dishonor*, Jackson’s support of American Indians received a great deal of criticism from newspaper editors and other contributors to newspapers like the *New York Tribune* and the *Daily Rocky Mountain News*.¹⁹ “Between November 1879 and February 1881, she published at least twenty-six articles and letters dealing with Indian reform.”²⁰ As Jackson quoted passages of investigations, reports, and legal documents, politicians discounted her research, and supported government actions as

¹⁷ While the Trail of Tears was not an official battle with documented casualties and losses, the Cherokee removal from the South caused deaths by harsh weather, disease, malnutrition, and accidents and reduced the Cherokee Nation by one-third. This was a tragic loss by the Cherokee Nation and a comparable “massacre” as those occurring in the West. Huhndorf (2001: 143)

¹⁸ *Savannah Georgian* quoted in *Niles’ National Register*, 18 August 1838, 385 as found in Coward (1999: 65)

¹⁹ *Ibid*, 218.

²⁰ Found in Grace Mary Gouveia’s introduction of Jackson’s *A Century of Dishonor*, p. xi

“a natural response to the ‘evidence of barbarism.’”²¹ Even after Jackson’s detailed account of oppression within *A Century of Dishonor* was published, critics continued to dismiss her claims which made it difficult for the American public to consider an alternative perspective than the one laid out by the United States government and popular news articles.

By the close of the nineteenth century, readers began accepting the stories and reports found in print media. A definitive blow to the presentation of the American Indian came in a speech by one of America’s most revered leaders. In January of 1886, Theodore Roosevelt gave a speech in New York that solidified his position as an ‘Indian fighter’. In this speech, Roosevelt stated,

I suppose I should be ashamed to say that I take the Western view of the Indian. I don’t go so far as to think that the only good Indians are dead Indians, but I believe nine out of every ten are, and I shouldn’t like to inquire too closely into the case of the tenth. The most vicious cowboy has more moral principle than the average Indian. Turn three hundred low families of New York into New Jersey, support them for fifty years in vicious idleness, and you will have some idea of what the Indians are. Reckless, revengeful, fiendishly cruel, they rob and murder, not the cowboys, who can take care of themselves, but the defenseless, lone settlers on the plains.²²

If Roosevelt’s public speeches did not reach the home of every American citizen, his bestselling book *The Winning of the West*, published in 1889, certainly reached a wide audience.

Considering Roosevelt continued on to become the president of the United States, some of his followers and supporters surely had a similar mindset concerning the character of American Indians.

Newspapers and other print media played a powerful role in the portrayal of the American Indian in the nineteenth century. These perceptions continued into the twentieth century and eventually made this biased history permanent in history books and chronicles of

²¹ Coward (1999: 218)

²² Mieder (1993: 45-46)

American History. This written history perpetuated the stereotypical American Indian and the growing divide between the prosperity of the United States and the demise of indigenous culture.

Visual Media

Visual representations of American Indians and tribal culture went hand in hand with newspaper reports and accounts of expeditions to the West. Romantic views of the wilderness and the primitive societies that inhabited the West were promoted across the United States and Europe. While some images strengthened the notions of primitivism and savagery that were documented in print, many artists set out into the West to capture more realistic representations of tribal life. Whatever the reason for capturing an image of Western life, most artists portrayed American Indians through a lens of nineteenth-century bias and prejudiced perspective.

Just as newspaper reports used facts loosely in their accounts, visual representations were loosely based on the real subjects of the image. Many scenes of American Indians were painted in the name of science or cultural studies, but often took on the understanding of the Caucasian artists. The mixture of science and social viewpoints bled into the artwork and scientific analyses of American Indians. As Robert F. Berkhofer Jr. reflects,

Eyewitness description prior to this century and so much still in our time combines moral evaluation with ethnographic detail, and moral judgments all too frequently passed for science in the past according to present-day understanding. If ideology was fused with ethnography in firsthand sources, then those images held by Whites who never had experience with Native Americans were usually little more than stereotyped and moral judgment.²³

Social perspectives in the United States affected the images that were being produced throughout the nineteenth century and beyond.

Within this social context, artists like George Catlin, Karl Bodmer, and many editorial cartoonists captured the life of the American Indian as they believed they should be represented.

²³ Berkhofer Jr. (1979: 27)

These artists created images of the American Indian in the name of science and set out to record what they believed to be reality. The images sent back to metropolitan areas and published in travelogues solidified the Western view of American Indians permanently. The examples of American Indian life that were encapsulated in nineteenth-century images reflect the social trends of the time and the messages being sent to the world about the battle between civilization and savagery.

Many research expeditions to western North America set out in the hopes of scientifically recording the uncharted territory. Swiss artist Karl Bodmer accompanied one of these scientific expeditions led by Prince Maximilian of Wied in May of 1832. Prince Maximilian set out to record the wilderness that was largely unknown to Europeans.

Whilst previously the people of Europe had scarcely occupied themselves with the strange “wild men” of America, numerous researchers in the early 19th century became increasingly intrigued by them, for they seemed to embody man in his “natural state.” Maximilian Prince of Wied was similarly in search of the “natural countenance of North America” as he prepared for his second expedition to the New World.²⁴

Karl Bodmer assisted Maximilian in his campaign to “embody man in his natural state.” The prince continued to impress upon Bodmer that “the Native people, in particular, should be depicted with the greatest possible accuracy.”²⁵ Under this command, Bodmer and Maximilian embarked on their mission in across the continent.

Throughout the journey, Bodmer created over eighty color images of a diverse range of topics from scenic views along the route to the vibrantly dressed warriors and chiefs they encountered along the way. The images were reproduced in Maximilian’s travel book along with the prince’s own descriptions and reflections on the expedition. The travelogue was

²⁴ Lamers-Schütze (2005: 10)

²⁵ Ibid, 12.

published in English in 1843 and provided Europe with one of the first accounts of American Indian life in the American West.²⁶

Unlike more romantic notions of the “Wild West,” Bodmer’s images captured life-like images of ceremonies and dress that often no longer survive today. His painting entitled “Offering of the Mandan Indians” reflects a specific sacred area used by the Mandan to make offerings and perform ceremonies to the “lord of life.”²⁷



Figure 1: *Offering of the Mandan Indians* by Karl Bodmer²⁸

Maximilian describes the scene as,

The Mandans have many other medicine establishments in the vicinity of their villages, all of which are dedicated to the superior powers. Mr. Bodmer had made a very accurate drawing of those near Mih-Tutta-Hang-Kusch, one of which consists of four poles placed in the form of a square; the two foremost have a heap of earth and green turf thrown up around them, and four buffalo skulls laid in a line between them, while twenty-six human skulls are placed in a row from one of the stakes at the back to the other; some of these skulls are painted with a red stripe. Behind the whole a couple of knives are stuck into the ground, and a

²⁶ Ibid, 14.

²⁷ Ibid, 156.

²⁸ Wied (1840-1843) digital image taken from Library of Congress online records <http://lccn.loc.gov/02005383>

bundle of twigs is fastened at the top of the poles with a kind of comb, or the teeth of a rake, painted red. The Indians repair to such places when they desire to make offerings or put up petitions; they howl, lament, and make loud entreaties, often for many days together, to the lord of life.²⁹

This representation and description documented a very real moment and presented it in a style that leaned more toward an objective scientific approach as opposed to a morally biased perspective.

Unlike the objective description of the Mandan offering ceremony, some descriptions revealed Maximilian and Bodmer's European bias and unfamiliarity with American Indian practices. To describe Bodmer's painting entitled "Funeral Scaffold of a Sioux Chief near Fort Pierre," Maximilian called the custom "peculiar" and continues on to describe the different occasions for tree and ground burials among the Dakota Sioux.³⁰ This type of personal commentary exposes the background and ultimate principles driving Maximilian and Bodmer's expedition.



Figure 2: *Funeral Scaffold of a Sioux Chief near Fort Pierre* by Karl Bodmer³¹

²⁹ Lamers-Schütze (2005: 156)

³⁰ Ibid, 43.

³¹ Wied (1840-1843) digital image taken from Library of Congress online records <http://lccn.loc.gov/02005383>

Representing the American Indian in a more romantic light than Bodmer, American-born artist George Catlin painted images that emerged from an American perspective of the “Wild West.” During the 1830s and 1840s, Americans viewed the western territories as a primitive wilderness that contained a disappearing simple lifestyle. Notions of the “Noble Savage” and romantic views of simple life infiltrated American art during this time.³² George Catlin hoped to travel through the “Wild West” during this time to document “the wild Indian before the onslaught of civilization.”³³ Nineteenth-century romantic images portray American Indians as the artist imagined they would be living before civilization infiltrated the West.

“By reliance upon classic analogy and/or romantic conventions in painting, these and other artists ennobled the Indian on canvas during the beginning decades of American art at the same time that they thought they were only recording a fast-disappearing phase of history.”³⁴ Under the guise of historic documentation, Catlin’s paintings reflect the ideas of wilderness versus civilization and the simple life of American Indians living in the wild. While Catlin believed that he was attempting to preserve American Indian lifestyles through his work, he perpetuated the biased views by representing American Indians in wild and uninhabitable settings.

The romantic views in Catlin’s work also solidified stereotypes about American Indians as viewers of his works believed all Indians dressed and looked like his depictions. In his famous work *Máh-to-tóh-pa, Four Bears, Second Chief, in Full Dress*, Catlin painted a Mandan/Numakiki chief in all his regalia including a feather headdress that reached the ground.

³² Berkhofer, Jr. (1979: 89)

³³ Ibid.

³⁴ Ibid.



Figure 3: *Máh-to-tóh-pa, Four Bears, Second Chief, in Full Dress* by George Catlin³⁵

This painting

came to represent the stereotypical image of the American Indian around the world. Even today, some people think that all American Indians used to dress like this. They do not realize that there were, and still are, hundreds of different Indian tribes, each with its own language and culture.³⁶

³⁵ Image from the Museum of Nebraska Art, <http://monet.unk.edu/mona/artexplr/catlin/aecg4.html>

³⁶ Reich (2008: 59)

Instead of educating the American people on the disappearing customs of the diverse tribes, Catlin's paintings prolonged the myth of homogeneity among American Indians and continued the misunderstood novelty of observing indigenous people.

Another representation of the changing indigenous lifestyle can be seen in Catlin's painting entitled *Wi-jún-jon, Pigeon's Egg Head (The Light), Going to and Returning from Washington*.



Figure 4: *Wi-jún-jon, Pigeon's Egg Head (The Light), Going to and Returning from Washington* by George Catlin³⁷

In this painting, Catlin depicts the damaging events of an Assiniboin/Nakota chief after his visit to Washington D.C. After returning from his visit to Washington D.C., Wi-jún-jon is eventually

³⁷ Image from the digital collection of the Smithsonian American Art Museum, <http://americanart.si.edu>

killed by his fellow tribesmen for being considered a liar for his descriptions of the capital city. Catlin portrays the chief before and after his visit with Wi-jún-jon dressed in a fancy European suit upon his return. Catlin's romantic image of the changing Indian drew both sympathy and curiosity by Euro-Americans.

Catlin's work went as far as feeding on this curiosity by turning his artwork into one of the first Wild West shows. Catlin opened his exhibition in New York City in 1837 and welcomed New Yorkers to view American Indians on display. He filled the gallery with his paintings and artifacts he had collected along his journeys. "A twenty-five-foot-high Crow tipi, made from the hides of twenty buffalos, occupied the center of the room."³⁸ Catlin would often address visitors in Indian attire and would invite visiting tribes to speak to the crowd in their native languages. The show-like setting provided more entertainment than education on American Indian culture.

The images of American Indians used in Catlin's commercial ventures mirrored the images displayed in newspapers and magazines during the nineteenth century. While Bodmer and Catlin painted images under the realm of historic documentation, newspapers and mainstream media chose caricatures to represent American Indians as the villain and savage as reflected in the newspaper articles. The drawings and images placed in various media outlets supported the biased stories that were being published at the time. As news articles ventured far from the truth, so did the images that accompanied them.

Caricatures and overdramatized accounts of events supported the justifications and explanations for prejudiced actions against indigenous tribes. *Harper's Weekly* published an

³⁸ Moses (1996: 15)

image of American Indians scalping “the young ‘Mother Country’” as the cartoonist made a statement against the naming of New York businesses with American Indian names.³⁹



Figure 5: *After Mother Country's Scalp* by Thomas Nast⁴⁰

The cartoon shows the savage nature of the American Indians as already understood in popular culture.

³⁹ Coward (1999: 128)

⁴⁰ Ibid.

Ten years earlier the *New York Graphic* printed an image entitled *The Right Way to Dispose of Sitting Bull and His Braves* as a backlash to the demise of General George Custer at the Battle of Little Bighorn.⁴¹

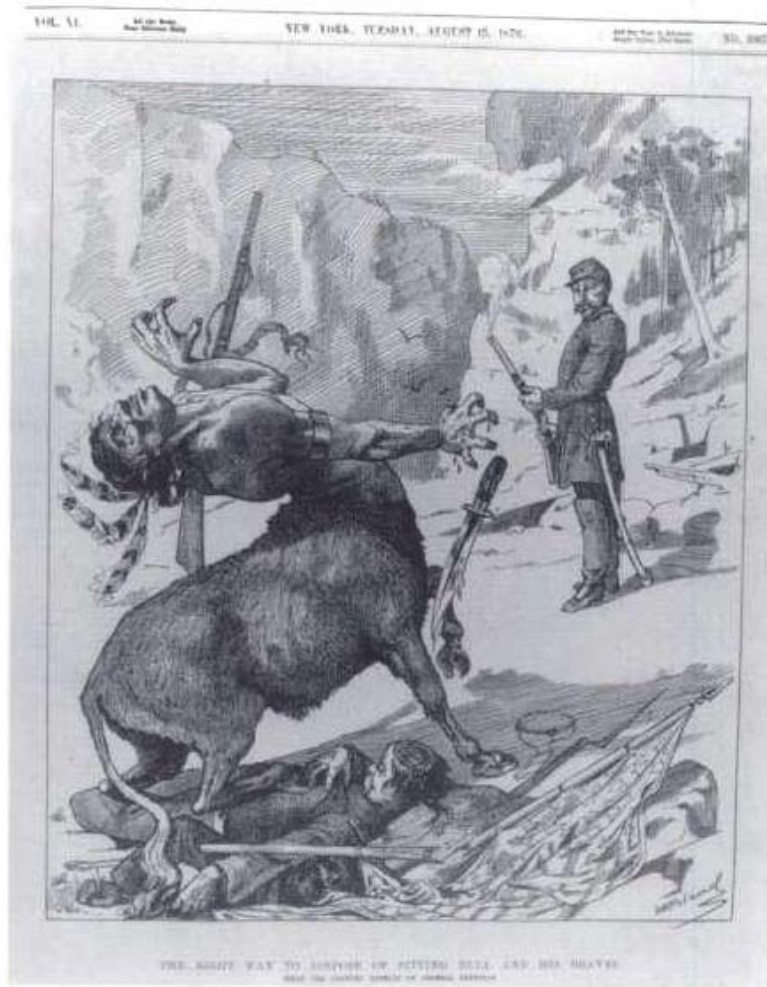


Figure 6: *The Right Way to Dispose of Sitting Bull and His Braves* from the *New York Graphic*⁴²

The racial hatred grew to such a peak after the battle that newspapers were publishing images like this one where Sitting Bull is depicted as a mutant beast that must be destroyed. The cartoons and images fueled the hatred and retaliations by the United States on indigenous people that were seen as inferior and violent.

⁴¹ Ibid, 131.

⁴² Ibid.

The images in art galleries, travelogues, and mainstream publications fed the misunderstandings and prejudices about events and indigenous culture. Visual media echoed the messages generated by articles, stories and other print media. A variety of artists contributed to the myths and stereotypes by representing American Indians as a disappearing race and people who only stood in the way of American progress. Adding to the detrimental viewpoint on American Indians, artists created more lasting harmful impressions than their supposed good intentions provided.

Nineteenth-Century Expositions

Public expositions had as much affect on the negative presentation of the American Indian as did written documents and visual media. World expositions were popular events in the nineteenth century. Countries had the opportunity to show off their prosperity, their inventions, and the unique aspects about different cultures. A mix between a stage show and a scientific exhibit, the expositions carried the mark of the beliefs and perspectives of the time.

Two expositions were hosted in the United States at the end of the nineteenth century, the Philadelphia Centennial Exposition in 1876 and the World's Columbian Exposition of 1893. These events not only showcased the American advances in farming, economic progress after the Civil War, and the latest fashions of the United States, but coordinators also created spaces for visitors to experience the "living history" of tribal life.⁴³ These two events took American Indians away from their tribal communities across the country and placed them on a stage for the world to see.

After the struggles and internal fighting that came during the Civil War, the United States needed to prove to the world that the country could still be a strong power. With a foundation built on slavery and the near eradication of the indigenous tribes, the United States had to prove

⁴³ Huhndorf (2001: 25)

that liberty and equality were still ideals in every corner of the country. As Shari M. Huhndorf explains in her book, *Going Native*, the United States needed to explain to the world how the past posed no threat to the future of the country. She explains,

Native America challenged Europeans' occupancy of the continent and, thus, threatened the legitimacy of the nation itself. In telling the nation's story, then, European Americans had to explain this part of their past. What, exactly, was the relationship between European America and Native America? And how could white Americans tell the story of a bloody conquest in a way that justified their presence as well as their privileges?⁴⁴

The United States would use the nineteenth-century expositions to shed light on these questions and highlight the benefits that reservation life had for American Indian tribes.

The Philadelphia Centennial Exposition of 1876 highlighted the progress and prosperity that the United States had experienced at the centennial of the country's creation. "The exposition thus commemorated the birth of the white nation, while its vision of a unified America hid the massive racial and class conflicts which plagued the United States during the late nineteenth century."⁴⁵ To tell this story, the Corliss Steam Engine, the telephone, and many other American inventions took center stage, highlighting the country's accomplishments.⁴⁶ All of the flashy mechanical exhibits then overshadowed the more museum-like exhibits that told the story of the American Indian tribes.

The U.S. Department of the Interior, which controlled the reservation systems at the time, chose to portray the indigenous tribes with simple displays of "Indian specimens."⁴⁷ Stone axes, animal hides, and wooden idols were a few examples that coordinators brought from throughout the country to put on display at the exposition. A clear message of inferiority was evident in these displays. Huhndorf describes these exhibits as,

⁴⁴ Ibid, 23.

⁴⁵ Ibid, 25.

⁴⁶ Ibid., 26.

⁴⁷ Ibid, 27.

Weapons, in fact, outnumbered all other Native objects exhibited. Their dominance likely aimed to demonstrate the savagery of their makers. But one clear effect of the exhibition was to portray primitive, weapon-making Indians as inevitably vanishing peoples whose significance and fate lay in their obvious inferiority to (white) civilization. Thus, just as the planners intended industrial technology to reflect on the state of civilized societies, so too did displays of “primitive” objects indicate the level of advancement, the character, and the fate of their makers.⁴⁸

Surely after seeing the American and American Indian exhibitions side by side, visitors would understand the intended message and the need to educate, convert, and civilize the ‘inferior’ Indians.

The American Indian exhibit was based on the contemporary anthropological and religious views of the time. Civilization and the progress of man were a part of an evolution that started with primitive beginnings and led up to the golden ages of the most evolved civilizations. These ideologies were mainstream beliefs in the scientific world during the Philadelphia exposition and influenced the set-up of the American Indian exhibits. Charles Hau, creator of the exhibit, explained his view: “The extreme lowness of our remote ancestors cannot be a source of humiliation; on the contrary, we should glory in having advanced so far above them, and recognize the great truth that *progress* is the law that governs the development of mankind.”⁴⁹

With this framework, American Indians and their lives were not connected with, or equal to, the story of the United States. European settlers had already *progressed* beyond the primitive knowledge of the indigenous people and set the stage for the United States to be a highly developed civilization. American Indians were seen in a completely different league as Americans, and thus, seen as a separate story that only got in the way of the advancement of the official United States image.

⁴⁸ Ibid, 27.

⁴⁹ Rydell (1984: 24)

If cultural progress was shown on a small scale during the Philadelphia Exposition, the 1893 World's Columbian Exposition in Chicago delivered the message on a grand scale. The coordinators of the event not only wanted to highlight the progress of America but wanted to celebrate the discovery of the New World by Christopher Columbus.⁵⁰ "The arrival of Columbus, so the tale went, brought enlightenment to a hopelessly backward continent."⁵¹ This theme carried through every exhibit at the exposition.



Figure 7: The Central Fairgrounds of the Columbian Exposition⁵²

The cultural displays were separated from the overly literal 'White City' to make a clear distinction between the European progress in America, shown in the 'White City,' and the more inferior cultures, shown in the Midway area. The central fairgrounds were dubbed the 'White City' for the formally arranged, clean, and classical style of the exposition buildings, designed by a team of architects including Daniel Burnham, Hunt, McKim, Mead and White, and Peabody

⁵⁰ Huhndorf (2001: 37)

⁵¹ Ibid.

⁵² Image taken from the digital collection of the Library of Congress, www.loc.gov

and Stearns.⁵³ While everything in the ‘White City’ was done on a grand scale, so too were the exhibits about the land’s American Indian tribes. Coordinators made a great effort to provide living exhibits where Indians would actually live at the exposition during the entire event. “On the Midway organizers constructed a series of seventeen villages showcasing exotic subjects living and working in simulations of their ‘natural’ environments.”⁵⁴

Harvard professor F. W. Putnam was assigned the task of creating the cultural exhibits within the Midway. From a review of the exposition, writer Stewart Culin describes the exhibit with the following collections,

It was the intention of Professor Putnam to bring together representatives of various American tribes, living in their native houses upon the shores of the South Lagoon, adjacent to the Anthropological Building. Lack of adequate means prevented the fulfillment of this plan in its entirety, but a number of aboriginal American houses were built here, comprising a Penobscot village, with numerous representatives of that tribe from Oldtown, Maine; a number of Iroquois houses of bark, including the famous “long house,” in which were domiciled members of the Tuscarora, Seneca, and other tribes from New York; a Navajo Hogan, in which dwelt a native silversmith, a blanket-weaver, and other Navajo people, who lived in their native fashion, pursuing their usual avocations; and a North Pacific coast village, consisting of native houses from British Columbia, where a colony of Kwakiutl Indians resided during the continuance of the Fair.⁵⁵

The review goes on to report the scientific benefit of “studying” these tribes and the anthropological wonder of these exhibits. Treated more like museum exhibits than living people, the American Indians at the exposition were confined within the exhibit cases that took the form of traditional houses.

The villages were set up to take visitors through the cultural progression found in the country. The *Chicago Tribune* noted that the set-up “afforded to the scientific mind to descend the spiral of evolution, tracing humanity in its highest phases down almost to its animalistic

⁵³ Gelernter (1999: 203)

⁵⁴ Ibid, 42.

⁵⁵ Culin (1894: 54-55)

origins.”⁵⁶ The fair handbook even called out to visitors to take note of the unsanitary living conditions and the primitive tools that were connected with tribal life.⁵⁷ This overt message of the differences between tribes and Euro-Americans also served to defend the need for reservations and control over American Indians. By displaying tribes in this light, exposition coordinators were assuring visitors that the “problems” were being taken care of.

Just like the Philadelphia Exposition, the differences between tribal exhibits and the other national exhibits were clear at the Columbian Exposition. American Indian tribes were seen as separate, and even placed in a separate location away from the White City. Tribes were described as inferior, savage, and ill-equipped to be left to their own devices. Catholic boarding schools and reservations were needed in order to maintain control within the United States. The coordinators of both expositions wanted to show America’s progress and promising future as the country’s movement moved forward. American Indian displays were notably highlighting the savage past that Americans wanted to box up and leave behind. “Organizers implied that nonwhites belong to humanity’s past rather than to the historical present.”⁵⁸

Government Legislation

Popular media and events echoed the sentiments of the beliefs and ideology of most Americans. The actions by the United States government also stemmed from popular views and affected American Indians on a much larger scale than news reports and exhibits. The legislation and actions of the government not only permanently affected the lives and livelihood of American Indians, but they also were actively supported by the citizens of the country.

This support of the government made it clear that most Americans agreed with federal policies and believed that actions were necessary to control the resistant American Indians. By

⁵⁶ Rydell (1984: 65)

⁵⁷ Huhndorf (2001: 46)

⁵⁸ Ibid, 42.

the end of the nineteenth century, the United States had removed most tribes from their original land, established the reservation system still in place today, and broken several treaties in the name of U.S. prosperity. These actions perpetuated the myth of the unruly Indian that only got in the way of civilized progress. Leading into the twentieth century, many people, including United States presidents like Theodore Roosevelt, continued to promote these ideas and create a firm foundation for unending stereotypes.

During the establishment of the United States, the new government began identifying benefits of federal involvement with American Indian tribes. Until that time, towns, communities, colonies/states, and regions were handling relationships with neighboring tribes themselves. This created an inconsistent mix of policies and actions based on the beliefs of each party involved. In 1789, George Washington's Secretary of War, Henry Knox, laid out a new policy that would officially identify Indian tribes as "foreign nations" that should be dealt with by the federal government directly. In the document, Knox reports,

As the great source of all Indian wars are disputes about their boundaries, and as the United States are, from the nature of the government, liable to be involved in every war that shall happen on this or any other account, it is highly proper that their authority and consent should be considered as essentially necessary to all measures for the consequences of which they are responsible.

No individual State could, with propriety, complain of invasion of its territorial rights. The independence nations and tribes of Indians ought to be considered as foreign nations, not as the subjects of any particular State.⁵⁹

This statement forever separated the country of the United States from the "foreign" tribes of the original inhabitants. Carrying this mindset into the nineteenth century, the United States set up a clear division of "us" and "other" that would lead to stricter laws and policies concerning American Indian tribes.

⁵⁹ Berkhofer (1979: 143)

Leading into the nineteenth century with promise of expanding the country, Thomas Jefferson carried the views of “foreignness” to his commission of the Lewis and Clark expedition. Being a scientific man, Jefferson was inquisitive about the “wilderness” of the west and all that it contained. But as progressive as Jefferson might seem, he believed in Manifest Destiny and the need to push westward to spread religion and civilization from coast to coast.⁶⁰

The belief that American Indians were “foreign” or separate from the United States placed them in the way of American progress and expansion. John M. Coward explains,

The outsider status had important and continuing consequences for Indian-white relations. For one thing, it positioned Indians as impediments to American ideas of progress, expansion, and national destiny. In the march across the continent, the Indian was something to be removed, exterminated, or otherwise subdued. Thus the American belief in Manifest Destiny was openly hostile to Indians and unsympathetic to their culture and their interests.⁶¹

If American Indians were not supportive of the expanding practices of the United States, then they were obstructing the natural progression of the country.

Popular culture mirrored the sentiments of the government. Representations of American Indians in the media supported the domination and removal of tribes for the sake of progress. It described mainstream media’s role in this way of thinking, Coward goes on to explain,

Indians were in no position to counter advancing whites materially or militarily, but the assignment of the Indian to a no-man’s land helped justify white injustice and domination. That is, the image of the Indian as an inferior and hapless “other” made it easier to justify policies that removed Indians from their land or punished them for attacks on whites. By promoting Indian “otherness,” eighteenth and nineteenth century journalists, writers, and artists created Native American representations that undermined native status and provided support for a language and culture of domination. For the natives, the choices became increasingly stark. By the waning years of the century, they had given up most of their land. All that was left was their culture – and that too was under siege, both symbolically and in fact.⁶²

⁶⁰ Coward (1999: 6)

⁶¹ Ibid, 38.

⁶² Ibid, 38.

The United States government carried out policies and actions that promoted the oppression of American Indians. Programs to bring education and Christianity to indigenous tribes increased the cultural divide and strengthened the idea of ‘otherness.’

To carry on the campaign to Christianize and educate American Indians in a European tradition, Congress began funding educational programs for American Indians in 1819.⁶³ These programs often took the form of religious boarding schools and missionary work to convert American Indians to Christianity. “Congress, beginning in 1819, appropriated ten thousand dollars annually ‘for the purpose of providing against the further decline and final extinction of the Indian tribes adjoining the frontier settlements of the United States, and for introducing among them the habits and arts of civilization.’”⁶⁴ Schooling in the benefits of agriculture and domestic life would also prepare tribes for the eventual creation of reservation life.

Increasing problems with land rights and a growing population in the east caused many politicians to consider actions that would remove American Indians from established states altogether. Instead of continuing the constant game of trading land for other land or creating treaties only to have to go back and negotiate land titles, presidents like James Monroe and Andrew Jackson looked for more permanent solutions to these problems.

Many politicians tried to persuade tribes to move to unsettled lands in the West by bribing them with funding for education and other methods of transforming them into civilized people. Tribes like the Cherokees saw loop holes in these proposals by offering to assimilate to European culture while remaining on their original lands in the south.⁶⁵ The Cherokees did such a good job at assimilating that states like Georgia became worried that they would not be able to take tribal lands, like their proposals had suggested. To counter this new development,

⁶³ Berkhofer (1979: 145)

⁶⁴ Ibid, 149.

⁶⁵ Ibid, 159.

Georgia's legislature created a resolution around 1827 that decidedly changed the game plan.

The resolution proclaims,

Resolved, that all the lands appropriated and unappropriated within the conventional limits of Georgia, belong to her absolutely; that the title is in her, that the Indians are tenants at her will, that she may at any time she pleases determine their tenancy, by taking possession of the premises, and that Georgia has the right to extend her authority and laws over the whole territory, and to coerce obedience to them from all descriptions of people, be they white, red, or black, within her limits.⁶⁶

The south had run out of patience in dealing with American Indian neighbors. This frustration created the opportunity for Congress and Andrew Jackson to support Georgia in future plans to permanently remove Indians from the state.

In a formal letter to the Cherokee Nation, President Jackson reminded the indigenous groups in Georgia of his constant recommendations of their voluntary movement out of the state. He begins his letter as a friend and supporter of the Cherokee Nation. "Your fathers were well known to me, and the regard which I cherished for them has caused me to feel great solicitude for your situation."⁶⁷ Jackson quickly turns his message to strong demand that they move quickly out of the South. "Listen to me, therefore, while I tell you that you cannot remain where you now are. Circumstances that cannot be controlled, and which are beyond the reach of human laws, render it impossible that you can flourish in the midst of a civilized community." These demands echo the official policies and legislation enacted under Jackson's presidency to forcibly remove the Cherokee from the South.

Any resolutions or policies oppressing the Cherokee's sovereign right to remain on their tribal land went against countless treaties and agreements that had been set up between the government and American Indian tribes. Believing that signed treaties held merit with their

⁶⁶ Ibid, 159.

⁶⁷ Jackson (1835)

relationship to the United States, the Cherokees took their case to Congress to seek support against the legislation created in Georgia.⁶⁸ The Cherokees not only encountered a Congress that was unsympathetic, they also soon realized that treaties did not hold much power in the eyes of national leaders. The Governor of Georgia, George Gilmer, described his view on treaties as,

Treaties were expedients by which ignorant, intractable, and savage people were induced without bloodshed to yield up what civilized people had the right to possess by virtue of that command of the Creator delivered to man upon his formation – be fruitful, multiply, and replenish the earth, and subdue it.⁶⁹

The Cherokees lost their battle with Georgia in a Supreme Court case, *The Cherokee Nation v. The State of Georgia* just before Andrew Jackson announced their formal eviction from the Southern states.⁷⁰ After the court case, Georgia held a lottery of Cherokee land and property and sent in the Georgia militia to enforce new land ownership.⁷¹

America's move west continued to affect every tribe in the way. While Southern tribes were moved to Indian country (which later became Oklahoma) and other areas nearby, planners and politicians were uneasy about creating an official "Indian Territory" for fear that it may impede further developments in the West. As pioneers and settlers flooded the western territories, the United States had to constantly change policies concerning the relocation of American Indians. Robert F. Berkhofer, Jr. explains the situation as,

Lands just designated as permanent Indian country in the 1830s became desirable as settlers followed the trails to Santa Fe, Oregon, and California. They requested that the federal government remove and concentrate the Indians inhabiting the midsection of the newly expanded America. The treaties negotiated with the tribes inhabiting this area in the 1840s and 1850s started the second phase of removal.⁷²

⁶⁸ Berkhofer (1979: 160)

⁶⁹ Ibid, 161.

⁷⁰ Ibid, 163.

⁷¹ Nies (1996: 248)

⁷² Berkhofer (1979: 165)

Everywhere the government relocated American Indian tribes became the next hotspot of settlement for American pioneers. The pattern would continue through the creation of the reservation system.

Promises of land to American Indians in the mid-nineteenth century were similar to promises as were made to the Cherokees in Georgia just a few decades before. The 1851 *Treaty of Fort Laramie with Sioux, etc.* laid out specific territories that would be identified as strictly Indian Territory.⁷³ The treaty covered a large area of land from the Missouri River to the Yellowstone River and affected approximately nine separate tribes.

As this treaty was as quickly broken as the ones with the Cherokees, the government revised their promises in another treaty in 1868. This treaty, known mainly as the “Fort Laramie Treaty,” identified the area of the Black Hills of South Dakota as the homeland of the great Sioux Nation. As long as the listed tribes adhered to this confined space, the government promised that

The United States now solemnly agrees that no persons except those herein designated and authorized so to do, and except such officers, agents, and employés of the Government as may be authorized to enter upon Indian reservations in discharge of duties enjoined by law, shall ever be permitted to pass over, settle upon, or reside in the territory described in this article, or in such territory as may be added to this reservation for the use of said Indians, and henceforth they will and do hereby relinquish all claims or right in and to any portion of the United States or Territories, except such as is embraced within the limits aforesaid, and except as hereinafter provided.⁷⁴

The American Indians of the Midwest would have to submit to reservation life in order for the benefits of the treaty to take place. On the other hand, the United States would also have to keep Americans out of the territory in order to keep their promises outlined in the treaty.

⁷³ Kappler (1904: 594)

⁷⁴ Ibid, 998-999.

George Armstrong Custer's expedition through the Black Hills opened up the settlement of mining towns all throughout the area designated as Indian Territory within the Fort Laramie Treaty. The United States violation of the agreement was soon followed by the Battle of Little Bighorn and the final submission of the Lakota to reservation life. As mentioned before in regards to the media coverage of the event, America found easy villains in the Lakota and Sitting Bull as the warfare was an affront to American security, safety, and any attempts at bringing civilization to 'inferior groups.'

As the United States was continuing the battle against the disruptions and protests to forced relocations and resettlements, Congress enacted the *Dawes Severalty Act: an Indian Homestead Act* in 1887. The nation held out hope that this act would mean the "solution to the Indian problems."⁷⁵ Members of federally recognized tribes were provided land allotments within reservations and were subject to any laws or regulations laid out in the state where they resided.⁷⁶

This allotment system also brought the opportunity for U.S. citizenship to any American Indians who decided to live away from the tribes. Berkhofer explains the details of the deal as,

United States citizenship was conferred upon allottees or other Indians who resided 'separate and apart from the tribe' and who had 'adopted the habits of civilized life.' Citizenship was granted, however, only to those natives born within the bounds of the United States. Reservation lands remaining after allotment to tribal members were to be purchased by the federal government with Indian consent, and the sale price held in trust for the 'education and civilization' of the former tribal members.⁷⁷

Citizenship and civilization were sold together and remained a large theme of American Indian submission through the end of the nineteenth century.

⁷⁵ Berkhofer (1979: 174)

⁷⁶ Ibid.

⁷⁷ Ibid.

It was not until 1924 that all American Indians were issued certificates of citizenship. *The Indian Citizenship Act* of 1924 provided American Indians a written declaration of equality with other U.S. citizens that was rarely seen as a reality. Services, funding, or any other beneficial attention would seldom make it to the reservations. American Indians continued to remain foreign entities within the United States and never quite loose the stigmas that were created in the nineteenth century.

Nineteenth-century definitions of the “American Indian” were influenced by the frustrations of tribes and Euro-Americans in trying to survive with competing ideologies. Efforts by American Indians to protect their land and ways of life only spurred Euro-Americans on to find new ways to spread their ideas of religion and education. Every difficult relationship, every dispute, and every battle convinced the United States that the savage Indian needed supervision and control. The ideologies behind Manifest Destiny and cultural evolution permeated the perception of the savage Indian into the twentieth century.

These ideologies created a biased history of the founding years of the United States. Actions towards American Indians in the nineteenth century were justified and explained by Christian principles of savagery and ignorance. Historical events were written and presented with American Indians as the villains who instigated fights and complications with the United States government and its citizens.

While racism and inequality continued to prevail in the early part of the twentieth century, Americans accepted these accounts and perpetuated the myths and stereotypes of American Indians. Historic sites and museums portrayed the American Indian as a part of prehistory or as a static culture left in the past. Museums continued the practice of placing

American Indian artifacts in natural history museums and treating them much the same way they were treated at the national expositions in the nineteenth century.

The manufactured image of the American Indian in popular culture has maintained its hold on the presentation of indigenous peoples today. Romantic notions of the historic Indian can be seen in Wild West shows, in the Westerns of the 1950s, and even leading into the late twentieth century with films like *Dances with Wolves* and *Pocahontas*.⁷⁸ The stereotypes constructed in the nineteenth century have yet to disappear.

Historic sites and museums maintain many of the same interpretive programs and exhibits that were created during the twentieth century. The stories told at these sites often contain the same images of American Indians that were produced during the earliest understandings of the country's history. As will be laid out in chapters four and five, the shattering of the stereotypes and antiquated images of American Indians can only be achieved through a new presentation of American history.

⁷⁸ *Dances With Wolves*. Dir. Kevin Costner. Tig Productions, 1990. *Pocahontas*. Dir. Michael Gabriel and Eric Goldberg. Walt Disney Feature Animation, 1995.

CHAPTER THREE

CANADA'S FIRST NATIONS

Divided only by imaginary national borders and different sets of federal legislation, American Indians have seen a similar treatment in Canada as in the United States. Many of the same indigenous groups now are ruled by two very different countries. Both countries have struggled to find a way to explain past actions while trying to find a place in the nation's history for first peoples. The background may be similar but the outcomes have been vastly different. Exploring the actions and preservation tools used by Canada can offer a useful comparison to the methods used by the United States. Through analyzing Canada's approach to forming a relationship with many of the same tribal groups, many constructive tools can be identified and possibly beneficial to use at historic sites in the United States.

The nineteenth century was a pivotal time in both the United States and in Canada. As both governments sought to increase public lands and economically viable resources, indigenous people found themselves being constantly forced off their native lands and into reservation areas. Little thought was taken on the welfare of indigenous peoples in either country. The ideology of the evolution of culture that was popular in United States carried similar popularity in Canada.

As in line with the legislation and treaties found in the United States, so too was Canada attempting to create policies and solutions to the struggling relationship between indigenous groups and the government. Canada also had vastly different regions of the country to contend with and different problems in each remote area. Solutions to these problems were often handled very differently in each region.

While the first public lands in Canada were managed individually without national policies and regulations, Canada's government came to a diverse range of ways to handle interpreting the history of indigenous peoples.⁷⁹ These outcomes are also vastly different than the outcomes seen in the United States. By analyzing the history of Canada's take on First Nations, the efforts made in one country can create further avenues for other countries to explore.⁸⁰ Every country and every government handles the presentation and preservation of national history differently. Through a discussion of the successes of one country, many others can benefit as well.

Canada's perceptions of indigenous people started in a manner similar as seen in the United States. Writers, artists, and explorers were the first to describe the inhabitants of the New World. The romance of the wilderness and the "savage" qualities of the first nations were the topics chosen to highlight. One of the first images of indigenous people came in a painting by Benjamin West entitled "The Death of General Wolfe." As the painting displays the image of General Wolfe's last breath before death, West inserts an Iroquois warrior in the corner who is watching over the death of the European. So beloved was this painting in Europe that West received praise and a promotion by the King of England.⁸¹ Europe was so enamored by the information being passed through this painting that they completely ignored the fact that it was a fictional scene. Canada's national story began with the fictionalized struggle between Europeans and Indians.

⁷⁹ McNamee (2002: 29)

⁸⁰ Peepre and Dearden (2002: 325) explain the use of the term 'First Nations' as: "The Constitution Act, 1982 defines three categories of 'aboriginal peoples': Indian, Inuit, and Métis. However, these three categories of Aboriginal people are not homogeneous cultural groups, but contain a great variety of peoples with differing histories, languages, and cultures. Accordingly, the name 'First Nations' has been adopted by many Aboriginal peoples when referring to themselves, to reflect their perception of their status as separate, and sovereign entities.

⁸¹ Francis (1992: 13)



Figure 8: *The Death of General Wolfe* by Benjamin West⁸²

By 1845, the land that would later become Canada witnessed the near extinction of indigenous peoples. As early as 1824, with the establishment of Newfoundland, practically no members of the Beothuk tribe were left and became officially extinct with the death of the last Beothuk woman in 1829.⁸³ Many other tribes had been pushed into wilderness that was not yet developed by Europeans. As Daniel Francis explains the story, the portrait artist, Paul Kane, ventured out into “Indian country” to capture rare images of indigenous peoples. Francis explains,

Kane believed the “red man” to be disappearing: “All traces of his footsteps are fast being obliterated from his once favourite haunts, and those who would see the aborigines of the country in their original state, or seek to study their native manners and customs, must travel far through the pathless forest to find them.” Before the Indians vanished, Kane intended to preserve their traditional customs and appearance on canvas.⁸⁴

⁸² Image taken from the digital collection of the National Gallery of Canada, www.gallery.ca

⁸³ Dickason (1992: 96)

⁸⁴ Francis (1992: 16)

Kane's original intent of studying the "natives" led him to a group of Ojibway that not only met his expectations of a primitive people, they had also become tainted by the spoils of traders, including European liquor and the traits that come with the dependency on traders.⁸⁵

Explorers and travelers also tried to capture the images they believed were "true" Indians. Some writers and painters portrayed a romantic version of indigenous people while other travelers were disappointed by the real inhabitants that they encountered on their travels. One traveler witnessed a young Cree boy shooting toy arrows at a horse and commented that "From his very childhood the Indian learns inhumanity to animals."⁸⁶ These types of reports fueled the misunderstandings and popular portrayals of indigenous people.

The end of the nineteenth century saw the creation of the Northwest Mounted Police in 1874 and the perpetuated myth of the unruly Indians.⁸⁷ Legendary stories of the formation and initial battles of the mounted police place the Indian as the villain and perpetrator to the safety and peace of the country. The North-West Mounted Police were dispatched to attacks on territory forts, like the Cree attack on Fort Carlton in 1870.⁸⁸ As American Indians were seen as threatening the prosperity of the United States, so did the first nations of Canada threaten the growing country and require a mounted guard to control them. The police were sent out to the west to solidify the country's control over the entire land. "And with the raising of the flag, the dark ages ended and history began. Quite literally, the chroniclers of the Mounted Police claimed that the West, and its Native inhabitants, had no past."⁸⁹ What was a part of the wilderness was not part of the Canadian story. The nation's history began with the taming of the land, and the people on it.

⁸⁵ Ibid.

⁸⁶ Ibid, 45.

⁸⁷ Ibid, 51.

⁸⁸ Dickason (1992: 295)

⁸⁹ Francis (1992: 63)

During the same time as the national expositions held in the United States, Canada was also beginning a nationwide project to collect indigenous artifacts to fill national museums. In the same mindset as the expositions, Canada's ethnological museums collected items to be treated as historical artifacts.⁹⁰ Items that indigenous people continue to use even through today were collected and treated as relics, artifacts, or specimens of a dying or extinct race. The ethnological museums treated indigenous cultures as curiosities and groups that were decidedly different than mainstream Canada.

As the world was collecting cultural artifacts from every corner of the world as quick as they could be looted, Canada saw this removal of goods to be an opportunity to collect materials for national museums. Daniel Francis describes this phenomenon as,

Canada was not immune to museum mania. Concerned that they were losing their heritage to foreign institutions, Canadians created their own museums in an attempt to keep some of the artifacts at home. In 1910, the federal government created a Division of Anthropology within the Geological Survey and expanded its small Geological Survey museum into the Victoria Memorial Museum...the forerunner of the modern Museum of Civilization. Provincial governments in Nova Scotia, Ontario and British Columbia earlier established their own local museums. All these museums were created in a climate of urgency. Not only were foreigners looting the country of its finest artifacts, but it was firmly believed that the Indian people themselves were vanishing and would soon be gone. The museum was created as an institution to preserve their remains so that future generations would be able to see what had once existed.⁹¹

The creation of museums under a Department of Anthropology fell in line with the United States and most European countries who considered the study of indigenous cultures to belong within natural history, or separate from the history of European-born civilizations.

The preservation of indigenous artifacts and history gathered further credence with the *Indian Act* of 1927. This act "forbade the acquisition or destruction of Indigenous grave houses, totem and grave poles, carved house posts, pictographs and petroglyphs found on reserve

⁹⁰ Ibid, 105.

⁹¹ Ibid, 104.

lands.”⁹² These cultural artifacts may have still been considered a separate part of Canada’s history, but the government identified them as resources needing protection.

Considering the separation between national history and the “prehistory” during the time of pre-contact, the First Nations of Canada rarely found a place in the history books during the end of the nineteenth century. Describing the history of the foundation of the country, the first history books in Canada would typically put the Indian in the way of explorers, settlers, or pioneers who were patriotically settling the land for their country.⁹³ Textbooks grew silent on the subject of the Indian after the War of 1812 and would only occasionally mention them when discussing matters of the settlement of the west.⁹⁴ “The textbook Indian is very much a figure of the past, frozen in time like a butterfly in amber. If they did not state outright, that the important business of civilization went on without them. History was something that happened only to White people.”⁹⁵

As Canada grew, the populations of indigenous tribes diminished and were pushed away from their original homelands. The fate of the First Nations grew bleaker with the creation of public lands and national parks. Just as the American Indians were pushed out of their homelands to create Yellowstone National Park in the United States, indigenous groups were removed from their land to create Canada’s first parks, including the establishment of Banff National Park in 1885.⁹⁶ Indigenous groups not only lost land and property, but they were losing the power to tell their own history. In the earliest national museums, like the Royal Ontario Museum, and national parks, like Banff National Park, Canadians were interpreting the history of the vanishing peoples.

⁹² Fafard (2006: 32)

⁹³ Francis (1992: 167)

⁹⁴ Ibid, 167.

⁹⁵ Ibid, 167.

⁹⁶ Peeple and Dearden (2002: 323)

Canada's national park system started out focusing on naturally significant resources. Even through the beginning of the twentieth century, many tribes were removed from land in order to create a national park. "When Riding Mountain National Park was established in 1933, the Keeseekoowenen Band was evicted and their houses burned."⁹⁷ This mindset began to change in the 1970s when political and preservation groups began to open opportunities for First Nations to become involved in the management of public lands.

The changing mindset also opened opportunities for Canada to preserve and present historic sites that are directly tied to indigenous history. Predominately used by the Blackfoot tribe as a hunting site, Head-Smashed-In Buffalo Jump became a World Heritage Site by the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) in 1981. Under this protection, Canada developed an interpretive center and opened the site in 1987.⁹⁸ The site tells the stories of the local environment, the relationship between the indigenous tribes and the land, and the traditional hunting techniques used at the site. Site managers have involved the local Peigan people to help in the preservation and protection of this historic site.⁹⁹

In 1994, the Canadian government officially invited indigenous groups to participate in the presentation of their history. Parks Canada revised its policies in 1994 to include "a more comprehensive approach to working with Aboriginal peoples."¹⁰⁰ A long guarded responsibility left to only specialists and archaeologists, the invitation to indigenous groups opened up the world of interpretation to accept multiple perspectives of natural and cultural history.

Before this change in policy, specialists were entrusted with the responsibility of presenting the history of the First Nations. Mélanie Fafard describes this situation as,

⁹⁷ Ibid, 329

⁹⁸ Reid (2002: 33)

⁹⁹ Ibid, 38)

¹⁰⁰ Peepre and Dearden (2002: 330)

Archaeologists do not only consider themselves as the caretakers of the archaeological record, but they also largely perceive themselves as the stewards of the past. As such, they have taken it as their duty to make their interpretations accessible to the public through publications, films, or museum exhibits. However, such presentations have often contributed to portray Native peoples as part of the prehistoric world, which the public most often associates with “dinosaurs, volcanoes and primitive people living in cages.” Inuit and First Nations protest against such representations because they give the impression that they are peoples of the past with ways of life long gone.¹⁰¹

Fafard goes on to confirm that the new policies within the park service acknowledge that there “is not necessarily one true version of history and that voices other than those of archaeologists or historians have a legitimate right to be heard.”¹⁰²

The policies have also opened up opportunities for indigenous groups to not only interpret their history but to also keep their culture alive that is normally only seen under glass at a museum. The Six Nations Woodland Cultural Centre in Ontario allows First Nations to use the museum’s collection in tribal ceremonies. This use of artifacts not only involves the indigenous groups in the preservation of their heritage but it also shifts the perception of artifacts from being static museum specimens to cultural items that are still used in ceremonies today. As Miriam Clavir explains in her book, *Preserving What is Valued: Museums, Conservation, and First Nations*, the Woodland Museum “has had the opportunity to ‘loan’ the Medicine Masks in our collection to the traditional community for ceremonial purposes. In these ceremonies, the Masks are ‘renewed,’ meaning that they are cleaned and conserved according to customary procedures.”¹⁰³ Collaborations between museum institutions and First Nations broadens the understanding of conservation and history.

The benefits of collaborations with indigenous tribes can also be seen with the knowledge needed to preserve cultural sites and history. Fafard explains,

¹⁰¹ Fafard (2006: 52)

¹⁰² Ibid, 56.

¹⁰³ Clavir (2002: 95)

In addition to improving cross-cultural communication, partnerships such as those described bring interesting benefits to both communities and archaeologists. In some cases, the integration of traditional knowledge and archaeology gives a more complete and accurate version of the past. Throughout their involvement with Indigenous peoples, archaeologists are usually able to identify a greater number of sites and they can also situate them more easily within cultural landscapes. The knowledge that they gain about aspects of Indigenous cultures that are not necessarily revealed through the study of material remains also allows archaeologists to interpret data in a more comprehensive and meaningful way.¹⁰⁴

Intangible knowledge about sacred sites, historic sites, and traditions can only be discerned from the oral traditions and knowledge base of the indigenous tribes.

The inclusion of intangible significance and traditional knowledge has led to a broader understanding of significant resources within Canada. With guidance from UNESCO, Parks Canada created a designation of Aboriginal cultural landscape within their National Historic Site Program.¹⁰⁵ An Aboriginal cultural landscape is defined as:

...a place valued by an Aboriginal group (or groups) because of their long and complex relationship with that land. It expresses their unity with the natural and spiritual environment. It embodies their traditional knowledge of spirits, places, land uses, and ecology. Material remains of the association may be prominent, but will often be minimal or absent.¹⁰⁶

Within the scope of this designation, Indigenous groups have the opportunity to identify and protect sacred sites and cultural resources that are significant to their tribe.

This designation also acknowledges that indigenous groups have different world views and perspectives on significant resources. In many world views held by indigenous groups, “The relationship between people and place is conceived fundamentally in spiritual terms rather than primarily material terms.”¹⁰⁷ Through partnerships between First Nationals and the Historic

¹⁰⁴ Fafard (2006: 57)

¹⁰⁵ Ibid, 63.

¹⁰⁶ Ibid, 63.

¹⁰⁷ Bugey (1999: 1)

Sites and Monuments Board of Canada (HSMBC), these different views can be taken into account when identifying significant resources.

This focus on a different way to view the world is at the heart of this new change in preservation. “Aboriginal peoples in Canada, like indigenous peoples worldwide, approach history not primarily through the western constructs of casual relationships, record, and time sequence, but through cosmology, narrative, and place.”¹⁰⁸ Western culture cannot interpret or present the beliefs of the First Nations in western terms. Collaboration and partnership must occur in order for the indigenous meaning and significance to be presented in the best way. Through the mix of scientific research, traditional knowledge gathered through oral tradition, and the presentation of history by First Nations themselves, Canada is creating an innovative method for preserving cultural resources. This method of understanding history is a new concept that could be helpful for historic sites in the United States.

Mélanie Fafard highlights another significant collaboration between the Canadian government and indigenous tribes to preserve native history. The development of programs “aimed at providing training and/or employment opportunities for Indigenous peoples to increase their number in the fields of archaeological research, management and interpretation.”¹⁰⁹ These programs not only ensure the protection of cultural resources, but it places the management and presentation of the history in the hands of trained specialists, specifically indigenous peoples who have intimate knowledge of the resource.

These programs are similar to the Cultural Resources Diversity Program that was set up by the United States’ National Park Service in 1998. Where Canada created programs specifically geared towards members of First Nations, the Cultural Resources Diversity Program

¹⁰⁸ Ibid, 3.

¹⁰⁹ Ibid, 56.

was established to “develop programs and approaches that will diversify the professional workforce in the cultural resources/historic preservation field.”¹¹⁰

By empowering First Nations to play an active role in the presentation of their history, multiple perspectives and interpretations of history can break traditional modes of thinking. In researching the role of indigenous interpreters at historic sites, Laura Peers discovered that diverse interpretations can help shed light on history. She explains,

Native interpreters are particularly effective at challenging ignorance and prejudice that maintains the status quo, and at voicing their own perspectives on the past, their own and their peoples’ histories, and revising standard national histories...As well as communicating revisionist academic research on Native histories, Native [and many non-Native] interpreters address visitors’ stereotypes, misconceptions, and lack of firsthand information about present-day Native people.¹¹¹

The Native interpreters today are pioneering the field of indigenous firsthand interpretation that will continue to clean up the misconceptions and misunderstandings that have been laid out in centuries of stereotypical portrayals of indigenous peoples.

The history that is presented at historic sites will continue to be one-sided until a holistic approach is demonstrated on every wayside exhibit, every exhibit text, and every interpretive talk. The strides taken today in the field of First Nations’ history are just the beginning of a long road to mutual understanding. Canada’s efforts to incorporate First Nations in the presentation of their history can only improve in the future with constant communication and open dialog about the realities of the past.

The use of traditional history and the active collaborations between Canadian sites and First Nations have proven successful in the changing presentation of history. These efforts are evidence of constructive methods that historic sites in the United States and other countries could

¹¹⁰ Quoted from the NPS’s Cultural Resources Diversity Program website:
<http://www.nps.gov/history/crdi/description/prgm.htm>

¹¹¹ Peers (1996: 9)

incorporate to create more balanced history of indigenous groups and their relationships with modern states. Canada has proven that communication, involvement, and rethinking preservation practices can improve the understanding of indigenous history.

CHAPTER 4

THE CHANGING PRESENTATION OF THE AMERICAN INDIAN

While efforts to protect indigenous history have progressed in a similar pattern in the United States as they have in Canada, exhibits in the United States continue to lag behind modern worldviews. Since the nineteenth century, the history of American Indians has either been glamorized in the media or ignored. Museums, historic sites, and exhibits that were interpreted based on information from the nineteenth century have reflected the white American side of history and ignored the other sides of the story. While communication between the two groups continues to be poor, efforts to break away from nineteenth century thinking have been largely unsuccessful.

Non-profit organizations, state and federal agencies, and private sites have attempted to tell the whole story, but have fallen short of understanding the cultural differences in the presentation of history. How are the modern interpretations any different than the nineteenth-century exhibits made by anthropologists? How can one cultural group interpret the history of another when it is supported by past biases and misunderstandings?

Historians and historic sites have struggled to find ways to integrate American Indian history into the melting pot of American history. Many tribes and indigenous people may feel that this has not yet occurred even today. While scientific fields continued to hold tight to theories on cultural evolution into the twentieth century, Americans as a whole began travelling and investigating the diverse cultural groups that make up the United States.

With presidents designating American Indian sacred sites as important National Monuments as early as 1906, the United States began to piece together the whole history of the country. For good or bad, the United States began identifying culturally significant landmarks as distinctly “American.” The 1906 *Antiquities Act* was one of the first pieces of legislation that protected American Indian historic sites as they were then considered part of American history. In the act it states,

That the President of the United States is hereby authorized, in his discretion, to declare by public proclamation historic landmarks, historic and prehistoric structures, and other objects of historic or scientific interest that are situated upon the lands owned or controlled by the Government of the United States to be national monuments...¹¹²

Devils Tower, one of the most sacred sites to the Lakota, was designated a National Monument by President Theodore Roosevelt. Presidents have continued to preserve and protect important American Indian landmarks including Effigy Mounds in Iowa, and Wupatki in Arizona just to name a few.

Even with the United States acknowledging American Indian sites as an important part of the nation’s history, the presentation and interpretation of history has continued to be one sided. Until recently, American Indians were not invited to participate in the presentation of their own history. Historic sites across the country have been realizing this serious misstep in the interpretation of American Indian history and have taken measures to broaden the scope of historic perspectives.

Three sites discussed below highlight some of the efforts made across the country to reconnect American Indians to their history and to help them tell their story. These three examples are only a sampling of the many historic sites and museums taking great strides in the twenty-first century to involve American Indians in the presentation of history. These three

¹¹² 16 U.S.C. § 431-433 (1906)

examples highlight three different ways that historic sites are changing the way history is presented in the United States.

Little Bighorn Battlefield National Monument

When Custer Battlefield National Monument was established in 1940 as a national monument, the focus of the park was to tell the story of “Custer’s Last Stand.” “Interpretation of ‘Custer’s Last Stand’ long tended to stress if not glorify Lt. Col. George Armstrong Custer at the expense of his Sioux and Cheyenne adversaries.”¹¹³ America’s perspective on the battle directly influenced the original motives for preserving this historic site.

While celebrating Custer, the historic site, and history books, failed to consider the lives of the American Indians that were involved in the battle. The capture of Sitting Bull and the publicity surrounding the death of Custer were enough to convince America that the Seventh Cavalry had been a victim of Indian violence. America never considered the battle a victory for the tribes as they would surely be held accountable for their crimes.

The historical interpretation at the site originally focused on Last Stand Hill where members of the Seventh Cavalry were killed. A wrought-iron fence surrounds and protects the tombstone of several military leaders in the battle, including Custer. A monument stands in the middle of the cemetery and dedicates the land to the fallen soldiers, “In memory of the officers and soldiers who fell near this place, fighting with the 7th United States Cavalry, against Sioux Indians. On the 25th and 26th of June A.D. 1876.”¹¹⁴ C. Richard King analyzes the deeper implications of this monument as establishing “two hierarchies of memory. First, it delimits the

¹¹³ Makintosh (1987: 59)

¹¹⁴ King (1996: 172)

imagined community (the United States) and its citizen-heroes (the white soldiers), while defining its limits (the frontier) and its alien-enemies who populated it (Indians).”¹¹⁵



Figure 9: Image of Last Stand Hill with the Memorial to the Seventh Calvary in the background¹¹⁶

The presentation of the battle at this site reflects the accepted history of the United States by scholars and preservationists alike. The managers of this historic site chose to maintain the popular understandings and explanations for this battle. Even leading into the 1960s and 1970s, the nineteenth century views on this battle remained intact in the visitor center, in monuments dedicated to the battle, and in the interpretive programs concerning the history.

In response to increasing attention by American Indian groups to create a more inclusive national monument, Congress changed the name of the historic site to Little Bighorn Battlefield National Monument in 1991. With the change in name, Congress also ordered the construction

¹¹⁵ Ibid.

¹¹⁶ Photograph taken by author on July 13, 2006

of an Indian Memorial.¹¹⁷ Although a physical memorial may not have corrected the decades of social injustice caused by the biased presentation of history, the gesture by Congress began a new movement to change the way the battle was interpreted at the site.

The Indian Memorial was constructed in 1997. A collaboration between the American Indian tribes affected by the battle, historians, and landscape architects created a moving memorial area dedicated to the memory of the fallen tribal members and the hope for unity in the future. Indeed, the theme of the memorial “Peace through Unity” radiates through the contemplative space.

One of the most moving elements of the memorial is the concerted effort by the designer to capture forgiveness and unity through the form of the memorial. The Little Bighorn Battlefield website explains the symbolism,

From a distance the memorial appears to be an elemental landform, recalling the ancient earthworks found throughout the continent. An Integral relationship is established with the 7th Cavalry Monument via an axis which connects the center of each element. Where this axis bisects the earthen enclosure, a weeping wound or cut exists to signify the conflict of the two worlds. Two large adorned wooden posts straddle this gap and form a "spirit gate" (not for passage of visitors) to welcome the Cavalry dead and to symbolize the mutual understanding of the infinite all the dead possess. This gate also serves as a visible landmark and counterpoint to the 7th Cavalry obelisk.¹¹⁸

The connection with the seventh cavalry, through warfare and racial prejudices, is an uplifting message. The Lakota world view concerning the historic event and the connection of all people is exhibited through this memorial.

¹¹⁷ Information gathered from the National Park Service’s website: <http://www.nps.gov/libi/indian-memorial-at-little-bighorn.htm>

¹¹⁸ <http://www.nps.gov/libi/winning-design-entry.htm>



Figure 10: The Spirit Gate Entrance to the Indian Memorial¹¹⁹

The memorial also contains many quotes by American Indian leaders that reflect their understandings and perspectives about the battle and the nature of events through history. One of the most notable quotes is by Sitting Bull. In 1881, Sitting Bull is quoted as saying, “They attacked our village and we killed them all. What would you do if your home was attacked? You would stand up like a brave man and defend it.”¹²⁰ This explanation of their actions connects with natives and non-natives alike. Sitting Bull spoke logically and simply about the nature of the event. This explanation would have been considered legitimate at the time if it was told between two pioneers or two military men, but it did not hold authority from the mouth of an American Indian. America could not look past the threat of its own domination to see a different perspective to the situation.

¹¹⁹ Photograph taken by author on July 13, 2006

¹²⁰ I documented the quote with a photograph taken during my visit of the site in July of 2006.

Little Bighorn Battlefield is among many American Indian battle sites that have reconsidered the history of events in light of multiple perspectives. The Wounded Knee Massacre, the Sand Creek Massacre, and the Bear River Massacre all have monuments and stories that tell multiple points of view.

Community groups, state agencies, and the National Park Service have all erected monuments and plaques at the Bear River Massacre site that tell very different stories about the incident. One of the earliest monuments was placed at the site by the Franklin County community.¹²¹ The community also added two plaques on the monument to commemorate the battle site. “Combined, the two plaques tell a story of a battle between hostile Indians guilty of depredations against Cache Valley’s ‘peaceful inhabitants,’ and brave soldier who battled ‘deep snow and bitter cold’ to defeat the Shoshones.”¹²² The first memorials to the site were dedicated to the history understood by the local community.

In 1990, both the National Park Service and the state of Idaho placed monuments on the site telling a very different story. The state’s monument acknowledges that the Shoshones were trapped and destroyed by the military.¹²³ The National Park Service’s plaque designates the place “Bear River Massacre Site” as a National Historic Landmark.¹²⁴ Both of these recent monuments identify the site as culturally significant for the massacre that occurred. Shifts in words, in thinking, and in the perception of the event have enveloped a new perspective on history.

The most recent additions to the site include seven interpretive signs erected by the Shoshones in 2006. These exhibits tell an emotionally detailed story of the massacre and the

¹²¹ Barnes (2008: 83)

¹²² Ibid, 84.

¹²³ Ibid.

¹²⁴ Ibid.

men and women who perished at the site. While emotionally charged, the stories presented within the signs are expressing the perspective of the underrepresented minority who stood by and watched the soldiers become heroes through the erection of the very first monuments.¹²⁵

Battlefields and massacre sites are naturally filled with emotions, reflections on the loss of loved ones, and monuments to the fallen soldiers and civilians. When preservationists and interpreters consider multiple perspectives to these events, ideas of right and wrong, victors and victims, and consequences become fluid. Is there a victor at a massacre site? Was Custer or the Lakota right at the Battle of Little Bighorn? These questions become senseless when considered from a multifaceted perspective. Multiple perspectives give way to a deeper understanding of history and the significance and meaning of our historic sites.

Mount Rushmore National Memorial

As national parks within the United States represent the collective heritage of the nation, Mount Rushmore National Memorial has begun to present the multiple perspectives of American history. While the integration of an American Indian perspective has not always been well received with the local community, park management is taking action to provide a more complete story of the nation's past.

Mount Rushmore National Memorial is situated within the Black Hills of South Dakota. This geographic area is the same area that was mentioned within the Fort Laramie Treaty of 1868. The gold rush of the 1870s and the formation of South Dakota reservations have removed the Lakota and many other tribes from their sacred sites within the Black Hills. These violations of the Fort Laramie Treaty still have many tribal members involved in court cases today to reclaim their rights to the Black Hills.

¹²⁵ Ibid, 102.

While this conflict is still in court battles, many American Indian tribes feel resentment and anger towards a memorial that desecrated sacred land to permanently carve a monument to white leaders out of a natural resource. The multiple layers of disrespect have created an enormous rift between communities in South Dakota. American Indians, young and old alike, rarely visit the memorial and many of them refuse to go out of principle.

This complex history of the Black Hills sets the foundation for the history of the memorial. Started in 1927, the carving history reflects the stories of the Great Depression, America's patriotism towards the ideals of freedom and democracy, and the dedication of over 400 workers who risked their lives to create an American icon. All of these elements of the sculpture's history are represented in the memorial's museum and historic Sculptor's Studio.

Other presentations of history include the significance and meaning behind the four presidents on the mountain. Intended as a "Shrine of Democracy," artist Gutzon Borglum set out to represent four defining moments in the first 150 years of the nation's history. The four presidents, George Washington, Thomas Jefferson, Theodore Roosevelt, and Abraham Lincoln, represent the foundation, expansion, development, and preservation of the country during the founding years. Their stories have been traditionally told at the memorial in relation to their efforts in the progression of the United States.

The one attempt to highlight local American Indians occurred in the 1950s and 1960s at the memorial.¹²⁶ Ben Black Elk, a member of the Oglala Lakota, was a semi-permanent fixture at the memorial following World War II. The tall Indian could be seen at the memorial on a regular basis in traditional dress and a feather in his braids. Instead of providing interpretive

¹²⁶ While American Indian culture has only been presented at Mount Rushmore since the 1950s, Crazy Horse Memorial, located 17 miles from Mount Rushmore, was started in 1938 in response to the presidents on Mount Rushmore as a mountain sculpture to represent an American Indian leader.

programs or lead discussions on history, his main role was in the pictures of families vacationing at Mount Rushmore.

Ben Black Elk served more as a tourist attraction than as an authentic presentation of American Indians in the community. His presence at the memorial echoed the contemporary trend of using American Indians more for tourism than seeing them as an integrated part of society. Creating an attraction out of him reiterated the idea that American Indians were separate from the American history that was carved on the mountain.



Figure 11: Ben Black Elk with a Family at Mount Rushmore National Memorial¹²⁷

These presentations of history reflect a biased view of United States history. While interpreters have traditionally focused on the positive moments in American history, they have failed to mention the damaging effects of the president's decisions. While Thomas Jefferson is praised for the opening of the west to pioneers, this action resulted in the demise of freedom for

¹²⁷ NPS photo, catalog number MORU 3767

American Indian tribes across the land. Until recently, the memorial has only focused on the positive and ethnocentric perspectives of American history.

In 2006, the interpretation division and park management began taking steps to remedy this situation. With a Mandan-Hidatsa Superintendent who was interested in bringing American Indian history to Mount Rushmore, the management team travelled to the nine reservations in South Dakota. Meeting with tribal elders and council members, the National Park Service staff listened to the voices of the Lakota, Dakota, and the Nakota. These consultations not only brought up many of the deep wounds and frustrations of each tribe, but they also revealed many of the hopes and desires of American Indians to have a place among America's historic sites.

Taking the discussions with the tribes to heart, the interpretation division began presenting American Indian history to visitors in the summer of 2006. With one tipi standing off of the Grand View Terrace, park service rangers provided programming that discussed everything from the history and use of the buffalo to the gender roles within a traditional Lakota household to the complex issues surrounding the Black Hills and the Fort Laramie Treaty.

The inaugural summer season identified several strengths and weaknesses about integrated American Indian history at the memorial. At the tipi, rangers were able to dispel some of the myths about indigenous peoples that were expressed by visitors. Visitors that were only familiar with the commercialization of native peoples, like the presence of Ben Black Elk in the mid twentieth century, brought up questions about "Indians by the road" or only wanted to take their picture in the tipi. Unprepared interpreters were frustrated and shocked at some of the more mainstream discriminatory remarks or comments made by visitors. Daily comments about "scalping with a tomahawk," sitting Indian style, or remarks about squaws were hard to counter with meaningful education time and time again.

Non-native interpreters could have also been seen as an understanding ear when visitors chose to express their traditional beliefs about American Indians. Learning from the challenges of the first season, American Indian cultural interpreters were hired in 2007 to provide first-hand knowledge and programming at the tipi. Lakota interpreters were able to talk about their experiences, life on the reservation, and their perspectives on American history. This change in staffing made a great difference as to the quality and nature of the programming.

As a follow-up to the initial visits to the reservations in 2006, Mount Rushmore hosted approximately 50 American Indian elders at the park in the summer of 2007. This was the first time that many of them had ever visited the park, let alone personally invited to share their views about the memorial. Some spoke in traditional Lakota while the women waited until the end of the meeting to speak their opinion, as is the custom in Lakota culture.

The concerns about lost culture and a floundering younger generation were repeated themes throughout the meeting. Many elders were also passionate in their interest for the park to tell their perspective of history and about the atrocities against American Indians. Park management took these suggestions and planned ways that interpreters could share these stories. Without destroying the positive experiences that visitors have at the memorial, interpreters were encouraged to explore difficult historic topics during their programs. Bringing up multiple perspectives about the Fort Laramie Treaty or Indian policies of each president provided visitors with a more complete understanding of the struggles experienced during the formation of the United States. By emphasizing multiple viewpoints, visitors could come to their own conclusions about the cause and effect of events within American history.

The presentation of American Indian history at the memorial continued to expand in 2008. In February, park managers carried out the first Elders Summit at the memorial.

Involving two days of discussion, tribal elders from three local reservations were invited to the memorial to continue discussions that had taken place in 2007. The park staff updated the elders as to the developments within the past year of the interpretation of American Indian culture at the memorial. As in the 2007 meeting, tribal elders contributed ideas and offers to help develop more American Indian programming.

As a result of this meeting, Mount Rushmore National Memorial created a partnership with the Akiticta Society to gain insight and help in researching topics about the local tribal community. The summer interpretation was also expanded to a three tipi heritage village off of the Presidential Trail that continues to provide interpretive programming by Lakota interpreters.

The efforts and accomplishments of the memorial are nowhere near close to the desires and suggestions of the tribal elders. Park managers have to find a healthy balance between the requests and wishes of every cultural group. The expanded interpretation of American Indian history has many local Euro-American communities outraged that focus has been taken away from what they see as the main point of the memorial – the four presidents on the mountain.

Neither side of the argument understands the significance and meaning of the place to the other group. Historic sites and historic significance often mean something different to every person and every cultural group. The notion of a different world view than mainstream thought is a very foreign concept to some Americans. Breaking away from traditional modes of thought will take some time. Historic sites must continue to endeavor the campaign to bring respect and attention to every group involved. Going back to the idea of stewardship, these historic sites have been set aside and preserved for everyone, and as stewards, it is the responsibility of managers to present multiple perspectives of our collective past.

National Museum of the American Indian

Before the establishment of the National Museum of the American Indian (NMAI) in 1989, most American Indian history had been presented in natural history museums. Traditionally seen as scientific artifacts placed behind glass, American Indian history had been viewed as a static memory of the past. Archaeologists and other scientists held the key to interpreting indigenous culture.

One of the first American museums to provide exhibits on American Indian culture was the Brooklyn Museum in New York. Mannequins dressed up in traditional dress stood among artifacts representing an array of tribes from across the country. Evan M. Maurer analyzes this approach,

The exhibition tried to present American Indians in a full sense by looking at as many aspects of their traditional lives as possible. However, the effect was to depict Indian people in a frozen, timeless past without any reference to their present lives or to their struggles with the growing disruptions and influences of Euro-American society.¹²⁸

This approach to the presentation of indigenous history was typical of exhibits presented in museums across the country in the twentieth century.

Scholars estimate that many museum exhibits in history museums were in place by 1900.¹²⁹ School groups, public programs, and special interest groups have relied on these exhibits for much of the twentieth century. Portrayals of American Indians in these exhibits demonstrated the mainstream stereotypes concerning indigenous groups. Texts and displays examined the primitive nature of tribes and the comparatively inferior tools and dress than those found in European societies.

¹²⁸ Smithsonian Institution (1999: 24)

¹²⁹ Ibid, 36.

In response to the *Native American Graves Protection and Repatriation Act* of 1990, museums began gathering more information about the objects within their collections. Artifacts that were not returned to American Indian tribes were displayed in a different style than in traditional exhibits. “At the Smithsonian Institution’s National Museum of Natural History, there are new displays that differ fundamentally from older models because they include the ideas and voices of Native American men and women as prime sources of information.”¹³⁰ During this time, indigenous world views and knowledge made their way into the museum collections and public exhibits.

To fully break away from the traditional exhibits of history museums, the Smithsonian Institution opened the National Museum of the American Museum in 1989. The NMAI even started its planning drastically different than any other museum in history – they started with community consultations across the country.¹³¹ American Indians throughout the United States were asked about their thoughts, dreams, and goals for the new museum. Through these consultations, museum planners gained new ideas on how to present culture in a museum setting. George Horse Capture describes the experience,

At every meeting, someone suggested a concept that was truly brilliant, that changed or crystallized our evolving ideas. One such observation was that to truly represent Native people, the museum and its exhibits and programs should not be shaped by a solely anthropological or historical framework. Instead, it was suggested that to tell our story we would have to invent a new discipline, one that would involve history, anthropology, and other well-established fields, but would equally draw on resources from our communities, including knowledge rooted in oral traditions and kept by our elders and spiritual leaders.¹³²

A new approach to researching, exhibiting, and presenting American Indian history began to transform the museum into a visionary project purely dedicated to indigenous peoples.

¹³⁰ Ibid, 26.

¹³¹ Blue Spruce (2004: 36)

¹³² Horse Capture (2004: 42-43)

The former director of the NMAI, W. Richard West, Jr., has an inclusive view on the presentation of history from the perspective of tribes across the Americas. He explains,

We do not feel that our goals are necessarily iconoclastic; we believe rather, that our incorporation of the Native voice restores real meaning and spiritual resonance to the artifacts we are privileged to care for and put on public display. We are, in many ways, more a hemispheric institution of living cultures than we are a museum in the traditional sense, because our view of Native cultures is as prospective as it is retrospective; it is as focused on a cultural present and futures as it is on a cultural past. We see Native cultures as dynamic and changing, indeed, often brilliantly adaptive, rather than static, which is a status I normally associate only with dead cultures. We believe that the voices of Native people themselves are an invaluable, essential, and authentic component of interpreting the past, present, and future cultural experience that has been and will continue to be ours in Native America.¹³³

The ideas behind the Native voice, living cultures, and the value in traditional knowledge resonate within his message as well as in the new methods of presenting American Indian history and culture.

These messages are also prevalent in the construction of the new museum facility. Based on the early consultations with tribes across the nation and across the continent, planners heard time and time again the interest of groups to be represented in the building.¹³⁴ The building would be distinctively different than any other Smithsonian museum. To reflect many American Indian homes that face east, the entire structure was aligned north and south which is opposite to every other building along the Mall. The curvature of the exterior was designed to emulate the wind hewn landscapes of the West.¹³⁵ These references to nature are also evident in the materials and symbolism within the building. Heather Livingston outlines the different natural elements in the building. She notes,

Upon entering the museum you immediately sense its strong connection to the land: the abundant stone, wood, and bronze that encircle the gathering space; the

¹³³ Smithsonian Institution (1999: 7-8)

¹³⁴ Blue Spruce (2004: 68)

¹³⁵ Livingston (2006)

red pipestone circle embedded in the floor signifying fire in the center of traditional Native dwellings; the 120-foot high domed ceiling that opens to the sky through an oculus; and a south-facing cut-out that refracts sunlight through prisms, daily performing a graceful solar dance.¹³⁶

From the Minnesota Kasota limestone used on the exterior to the welcoming red pipestone circle on the inside, the museum evokes the deep connection between nature and American Indian culture.

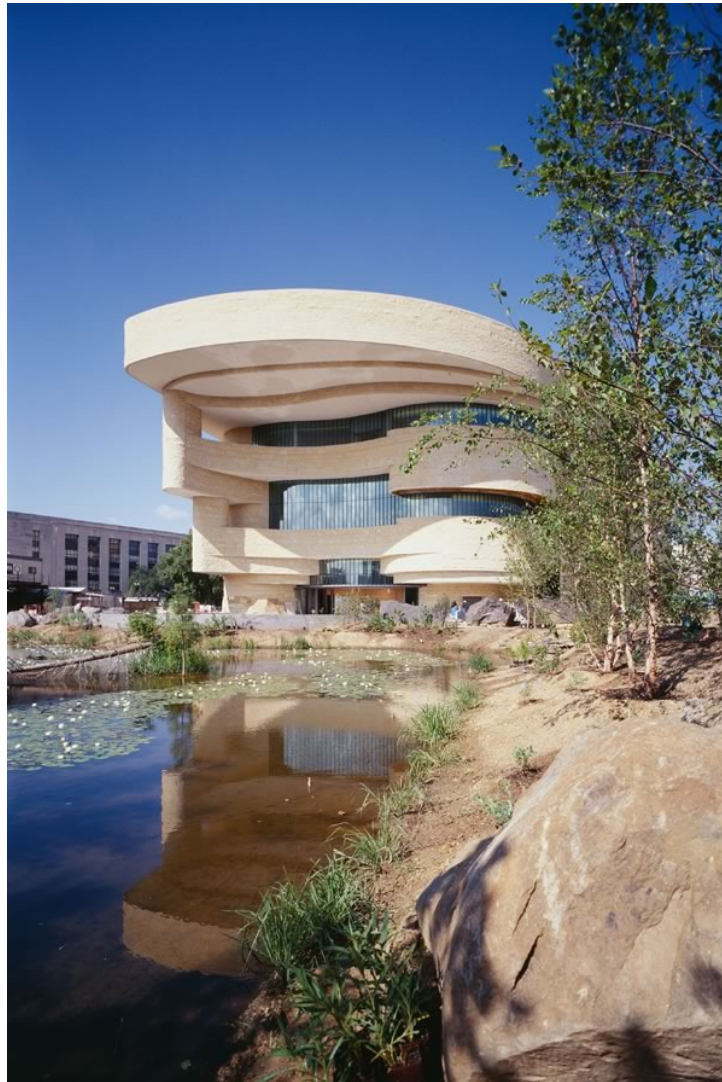


Figure 12: East façade of the National Museum of the American Indian¹³⁷

¹³⁶ Ibid.

¹³⁷ Image taken from online article “National Museum of the American Indian Takes Rightful Place on the Mall” by Stephanie Stubbs, AIArchitect, Industry News, September 2004, <http://www.aia.org/aiarchitect/thisweek04/tw0924/0924nmai.htm>

With Blackfoot architect Douglas Cardinal's initial plans for the building, the Smithsonian institution took Cardinal's vision and moved it into reality on the National Mall. The project team was not only concerned about the cultural significance of each and every corner of the structure, but they also took great care to respect the natural resources that went into the construction of the building. As architect Duane Blue Spruce explains, "At a quarry near Alma, Quebec, we met with the chief and representatives of the Montagnais people of Mashteuiatsh to bless the boulders, or Grandfather Rocks, that are the elders of our landscape, and to wish the stones a safe journey to Washington."¹³⁸ Every natural item used for the building was treated in this fashion to reflect the American Indian respect for the natural world.

The infusion of American Indian cultural practices can be seen not only in the unique structure but also in the construction of the exhibits held inside. As a chance to tell the story of every indigenous tribe, the museum brings in the use of traditional knowledge and skills to bring history to life. Even though this may appear to be a considerable break from conventional research and science used to explain history, Director West believes the involvement of tribes to be a healthy approach to presenting indigenous history. He explains,

...nor will we exclude the voices of non-Native scholars from the interpretation of Native cultures. We have, however, gone an unprecedented distance down the path of Native representation and interpretation by inviting whole Native communities, from North, Central, and South America, to say what they would like to say in the extensive community-curated sections of our exhibitions.¹³⁹

Community-curated exhibits not only bring in fresh views of American Indian perspectives, but they also create opportunities for indigenous people to be actively involved in presenting their culture.

¹³⁸ Blue Spruce (2004: 24)

¹³⁹ West, Jr. (2004: 60)

Other opportunities for community involvement include internships, workshops, and museum careers. The NMAI has cultivated all of these avenues to encourage education and public involvement. The hiring of American Indians to serve as consultants or museum specialists provide an excellent opportunity for museums to gain even more understanding about their collections. Evan M. Mauer analyzes this partnership,

More museums are hiring Native Americans as consultants for permanent collection displays and special exhibitions, and as professional staff members. Museum professionals are learning that local Native American consultant committees, as well as outside Native American consultants, are a valuable resource in building an exhibition that effectively portrays Native American culture with accuracy and sensitivity. In some instances, this has resulted in museums withholding objects from public display out of respect for the cultural values of Native peoples.¹⁴⁰

First-hand knowledge and insight are invaluable tools for museums and historic sites when they are involved in presenting the history and cultures of indigenous peoples.

Internships, workshops, and artist in residence programs fill out the training available to students interested in gaining experience at the NMAI.¹⁴¹ Funding to provide field-trips to school groups provide history lessons that are rarely experienced in other museums. Connecting American Indian school children with objects created by their cultural groups offer connections and experiences that will last a lifetime.

The NMAI is breaking the mold on the presentation of American Indians. Celebrated as dynamic, thriving cultural groups, American Indian tribes have a place in American history, American art, and American culture through the establishment of the NMAI. Tribal involvement and the use of traditional knowledge in the presentation of history are two pioneering actions used at this museum to change the way American Indian history is viewed and presented at public institutions.

¹⁴⁰ Smithsonian Institution (1999: 27)

¹⁴¹ Horse Capture (2004: 43)

The methods used at the NMAI, Little Bighorn Battlefield, and at Mount Rushmore National Memorial are tools that can be used at any historic site or museum. These sites have changed the way that managers and visitors perceive American Indian history. They have involved tribal consultations and opinions at every level of planning and invited indigenous people to sites and museums that have historically excluded their story. The changing presentation of American Indian history has not only affected perspectives on history but also has changed the way historic sites consider historic events. A comprehensive history composed of multiple perspectives brings historic preservation up to twenty-first century expectations of a multicultural worldview composed of tolerance and equality.

CHAPTER FIVE

CONCLUSION

In 1927, Americans opened U.S. history books to learn about the foundation of the country. These books in the early twentieth century described pioneer life in early America as “prolonged adventure with danger ever near. Any night might bring the savages to burn, scalp, and torture.”¹⁴² The earliest television programs romanticized the “Wild West” and shootouts in the popular Westerns. Many American children grew up playing cowboys and Indians and perhaps even used similar vocabulary as the history books when they pretended to use tomahawks or “scalp” one of the cowboys.

American Indians have indeed played a large role in the romantic views of the west. In film, advertising, and in literature, indigenous ways of life have continued to be portrayed as primitive. The bow and arrow, buckskins, and stone tools remain fixed icons of American Indian life. As in modern media, museum exhibits and educational programs on American Indian culture is infused with these notions of a fixed, static culture of the past.

As Shari M. Huhndorf expresses it in her book, *Going Native*, “particular visions of the nation’s history have become dominant.”¹⁴³ American history has told the stories of the past in the perspective of the European American immigrant. By describing and thus believing that Indians were savages, America “has historically provided a necessary justification for colonization, including the annihilation of countless societies and cultures to make way for

¹⁴² Hockett (1927: 61)

¹⁴³ Huhndorf (2001: 12)

European settlement in the Americas.”¹⁴⁴ History has pushed American Indians into the past as a necessary stepping stone for future progress.

As more and more American Indians voice their frustrations and uneasiness at the presentation of their past and their involvement in America’s history, more and more historic sites are reevaluating their exhibits and interpretation of history. Ideas of multiculturalism and diversity have also brought minority histories to the forefront of discussions about the past. Each individual cultural group that comes together to make the larger melting pot of America seek their own personal identity and story within the collective history.

This play on individual identity and a collective whole comes through in the notion of “pluralistic multiculturalism.” Within this idea, each group maintains their own identity while contributing to the larger whole.¹⁴⁵ A pluralistic view can also be taken when discussing history. Each cultural group had and still has a distinct role in the evolution of the United States and contributes to the entire story of the country. In this light, each cultural group, including American Indians, should be invited to tell their perspective on the collective history.

Breaking free of traditional viewpoints and interpretive programs is not easy. The process of integrating multiple perspectives is an endurance race that takes patience and time. Through collaboration and communication, the managers of historic sites can not only adopt new practices for presenting history, but they will also be reaching out to an entirely new audience. New methods of interpretation will bring the field of historic preservation up to date within the current movement of pluralistic multiculturalism.

As seen in the discussions within this thesis, several key actions have proven effective in re-presenting history. Getting American Indian tribes involved at historic sites and institutions is

¹⁴⁴ Ibid, 6.

¹⁴⁵ Ashworth (2007: 15)

an essential first step in reinterpreting history. The involvement should then open up the discussions and research into history to involve multiple perspectives. This should not simply be a disconnected presentation of two histories but a collaboration and open understanding of individual roles in the collective history. The use of traditional historic research methods, such as archaeology and primary source documentation, should also be combined with methods used by American Indians to understand and record the history of their culture. Oral histories, winter counts, and many other means of relaying history should be considered when presenting American Indian history.

Many agency offices, non-profit groups, and organizations have strong relationships with American Indian tribes that will be a very useful connection to bridge the divides between scientific research and tribal knowledge. The National Park Service's ethnography program connects to community groups across the country to create comprehensive background studies of park histories, to connect affiliated groups to the parks, and to carry out policies outlined in federal legislation and park service mandates. Specialists within these types of fields should be at the core of creating a collective history of the United States.

Finally, the creation of effective programs and avenues for American Indian communities to tell their own histories is crucial for the sustainability of this new approach to presenting American history. The Tribal Historic Preservation Offices and other established programs should be reviewed for usefulness and success. If the programs are not in line with how American Indian tribes would approach the preservation of history, then the programs should be changed to benefit the groups. Government agencies and non-profit institutions need to understand the differences in viewpoints and methods of American Indian tribes and not try to force assimilation into a preexisting structure.

Tribal Involvement

The institutions and parks discussed within this thesis found effective ways to involve American Indian tribes into the planning process at historic sites and museums. These partnerships with indigenous groups have resulted in the shift in the presentation of American Indian history. When tribes are invited to participate in the management of historic sites, a richer view of history unfurls and allows every group to have a voice in the presentation of American history.

Countries around the world have found tribal involvement in the protection of resources to be a beneficial partnership for everyone involved. The World Commission on Protected Areas (WCPA) listed eleven case studies within their publication “Indigenous and Traditional Peoples and Protected Areas: Principles, Guidelines and Case Studies.”¹⁴⁶ These case studies span the globe from Belize, Sweden, Russia, to Australia. Many countries have found that traditions and beliefs of many indigenous tribes are based upon the conservation of resources and worldviews deeply rooted in an understanding of their surroundings. While this publication focuses on the preservation of natural resources, the principles and guidelines are applicable to the preservation of cultural resources as well.

Principle one of the WCPA’s guidelines states that

they [indigenous and other traditional peoples] should be recognized as rightful, equal partners in the development and implementation of conservation strategies that affect their lands, territories, waters, coastal seas, and other resources, and in particular the establishment and management of protected areas.¹⁴⁷

This principle identifies the importance of involving indigenous groups in the management of protected resources. Carrying it over to cultural resources, the history and perspectives presented at historic sites should be the result of collaborations from multiple sources. Indigenous tribes,

¹⁴⁶ Beltrán (2000)

¹⁴⁷ Ibid, 7.

oral histories, and multiple historic sources should be used when creating the interpretive themes at historic sites. American Indian tribes “should be recognized as rightful, equal partners” in the management of cultural resources that deal directly with tribal history.

Traditional lifestyles and ceremonies might also be directly linked to cultural resources. When agencies and institutions understand the relationships between resources and indigenous groups, policies and respectful management plans can be put in place to allow the continuation of traditional practices to take place. When American Indian tribes become involved in the management of historic resources they not only gain ownership in the site and the history being told, but also the agencies and institutions in charge gain a better understanding of the full spectrum of significance of the historic site. Respectful dialogue and management solutions can promote active involvement by indigenous tribes and create a more balanced history of the nation’s past.

Devils Tower National Monument in Wyoming is not only a natural wonder that was protected by Theodore Roosevelt in 1906 but it is also an identified sacred site to over twenty American Indian tribes.¹⁴⁸ Many of these tribes continue pilgrimages to the site and place prayer bundles near the tower and perform ceremonies. The National Park Service not only allows these rituals and traditional uses under the 2006 *Management Policies* but the Devils Tower management team has developed other programs to further protect the sacredness of the site.

One notable action at Devils Tower was the creation of a voluntary climbing closure during the month of June every year. In collaboration with concerned tribes, the park created a Climbing Management Plan that involves the voluntary climbing closure. According to the description of the climbing closure on the park’s website,

¹⁴⁸ Information obtained from Devils Tower National Monument’s website:
<http://www.nps.gov/deto/historyculture/people.htm>

Some [tribes] perceive climbing on the Tower as a desecration to their sacred site. It appears to many American Indians that climbers and hikers do not respect their culture by the very act of climbing on or near the Tower. A key element of the Climbing Management Plan is the June Voluntary Climbing Closure. The National Park Service has decided to advocate this closure in order to promote understanding and encourage respect for the culture of American Indian tribes who are closely affiliated with the Tower as a sacred site. June is a culturally significant time when many (not all) ceremonies traditionally occur.¹⁴⁹

By asking visitors and the community to respect the sacredness of the site, both American Indian tribes and visitors can create a balance between the use, preservation, and protection of the park. Involvement by American Indian tribes is a vital tool in the creation of a comprehensive view of history. As David Lowenthal observes,

Only a heritage that is clearly ours is worth protecting. “The issue is ownership and control,” says a civil-rights veteran battling both Hollywood and the National Park Service for interpretive stewardship of the movement and its sites. “If we don’t tell the story or control the telling, then it is no longer about us.”¹⁵⁰

This message rings true with the involvement of American Indian tribes. If they are not able to control the telling of their history, it is no longer about them. American Indian history has been told from a European American perspective for so long, it is time to correct this imbalance and invite all viewpoints to participate.

Mixing Methods

As discussed with the National Museum of the American Indian and Parks Canada, the integration of traditional knowledge and modern scientific approaches can create a unique tool to use in the presentation of history. Many indigenous tribes maintain their tribal history and their perspectives on American history through oral traditions. Ceremonies and beliefs are handed down from generation to generation and cannot be captured by history books or archaeological

¹⁴⁹ Information obtained from Devils Tower National Monument’s website:
<http://www.nps.gov/deto/planyourvisit/junevoluntaryclosure.htm>

¹⁵⁰ Lowenthal (1998: 22)

studies. Mixing different methods of understanding history is important for the integration of American Indian perspectives of history.

Combining different methods of recording and presenting history requires an understanding of the differences in the meaning behind history and memory. Many American Indian tribal traditions bring history, the present and the future into one perspective. Ancestors, traditional customs, and events in the past play an active role in today's living and planning for the future. Diana Drake Wilson explains this as,

For many American Indians, even those who do not speak an indigenous language, remembering is understood as not only the passive recall or representation of events gone by, but also a creative action instantiating the present and prefiguring the future. Active or passive memory cannot be straightforwardly associated with either Euro-American or American Indian traditions; such sweeping generalizations will always break down when one looks at specific instances of memory use. But recognizing structural differences in memory practices leads to a more articulate recognition of subtle distinctions in what may otherwise be assumed to be similar memories of shared events. This recognition affords a more detailed and reflexive comparison of the psychocultural practices of memory.¹⁵¹

The differences in perceptions of memory and history should be considered when presenting different historical points of view. These diverse views can create a very unique and powerful presentation of past events and relationships. Presenting history with multiple perspectives will enrich the opportunities of interpreting the past at historic sites.

Mixing approaches and methods will also bring to light the previous imbalance of viewpoints. This combination of methodologies will naturally create a pluralistic view of history instead of a one-sided story. Acknowledging the importance of American Indian practices will bring them into the spotlight of historic preservation. Instead of relying on only one type of research tool, like primary sources of European American decent or archaeological reports,

¹⁵¹ Wilson (2000:116)

American Indian perspectives allow historic sites to bring in their story with confidence in the accuracy of the information. Robert Berkhofer, Jr. explains this pluralistic idea,

The application of new ideals of cultural pluralism came to the history of the American Indians first in ethnohistory and then in what I christened the New Indian History. Both ethnohistory and the New Indian History aim to see beyond traditional white prejudices and scholarly specialties so as to portray native peoples in their own right, acting for their own reasons in light of their own cultural norms and values. To accomplish this goal the New Indian historians search beyond the traditional white-produced documents of past Indian contact to locate new sources in oral history and artifact. Moreover, the New Indian historians try to tell the history of Indian tribespeople not in relation to white visions, policies, and confrontations but as integral to the tribe itself. This new Indian-centered history moves Indian actors to the front of their historical stage, as opposed to subordinating them to be simple background actors reacting to white expansion.¹⁵²

While oral traditions or intangible information may have previously been regarded as inferior resources for historic research, integrating these methods with other research tools will balance the field of history and place American Indian history on an equal footing as the traditionally established history of the United States.

“Indian-centered history” builds upon the multicultural diversity of American history. As African American history, Asian American history, and many other cultural histories are finding their voices in the presentation of the American story, American Indians are one of the last groups of people that have been recognized. Just as spirituals, historic districts like Chinatowns, and other unique cultural identifiers have been used to chart cultural history in America, the oral traditions and ceremonies of America’s indigenous groups should be used to help tell their stories and promote a better understanding of their history.

Effective Programming

Many institutions, programs, policies, and non-profit organizations have been put in place to promote the preservation of history among American Indian tribes. The *Native American*

¹⁵² Berkhofer, Jr. (1986: 36)

Graves Protection and Repatriation Act (NAGPRA) of 1990 as well as Section 106 of the *National Historic Preservation Act (NHPA)* of 1966 are only two examples of legislation that supports the protection and preservation of American Indian history. While many of these programs are used and federally mandated, use by American Indians to manage their history may not be as effective as planned. Legislation may be a useful tool on paper, but it must be evaluated in the field to determine effectiveness.

With the strained relationship between the United States government and American Indian tribes across the country, tribal involvement is not as high as it could be. Federal actions, even before and after the *National Historic Preservation Act*, were not always in favor of the protection of American Indian lands, artifacts, or other cultural resources. In many events, tribes were encouraged to reveal their sacred places only to find rulings in favor of destroying the sites.¹⁵³ Not only did the sites become compromised, “tribal traditionalists were forced to violate proscriptions against revealing the information required to support the suit.”¹⁵⁴ Distrust grew between tribes and the very government that promised to protect their rights.

This background led to reluctance on the part of American Indian groups to use the protective policies laid out in the legislation of the 1960s and beyond. “Memories of deliberate desecration and destruction of traditional religious and cultural places as a matter of federal policy and distrust of scholars who came seeking this information ran deep.”¹⁵⁵ As policies continue to rely on the divulgence of sacred information, American Indian tribes will continue to choose to not participate in the discussion of preservation.

Policies and programs should change to promote a more active role on the side of tribal groups. If tribes were able to have the authority to protect their own historic resources, without

¹⁵³ Downer (2003: 413 – 411)

¹⁵⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵⁵ Ibid.

revealing the place or nature of the sacred sites, then they would have more control over the preservation work under their own decisions. At times, a separate management agency, solution, or policy might be the most effective way for American Indian tribes to protect their history and decide how that history should be presented. Giving local tribes power to be involved would put the control of historic preservation and the presentation of history into their authority as well.

Even though Tribal Historic Preservation Offices (THPO) have been created under the *NHPA* to better capture the needs of tribal preservation, the program could be developed even further to help tribes take control of their resources. In 1992, the *NHPA* was amended to create THPOs. Found under Section 101(d) of *NHPA*, this amendment added an interesting scope of control for American Indian tribes. According to Alan Downer,

The “Indian Provisions” are found in Section 101(d) of *NHPA*, which enables tribes to establish tribal historic preservation officers when they can do so (on application to and approval by the secretary of the interior). Section 101(d)(2) authorizes tribes to assume any or all of the functions of state historic preservation officers on Indian lands. To assume these functions, the chief governing authority of the tribe must request them, the tribe must appoint a THPO, and the THPO must develop and submit a plan that describes the functions that the tribe proposes to assume, the means of performing these functions, what functions will be left for the SHPO or the secretary of the Interior to continue performing, and the means by which the traditional religious and cultural authorities of the tribes will be consulted on matters pertinent to them.¹⁵⁶

Based on this assessment of the role of THPOs, they are still tightly tied to the operations of SHPOs and the actions of the Department of the Interior. It is also understood that the THPOs realm of power is restricted to their authority within their specific Indian reservations.

This legislation does not extend tribal preservation authority to cultural resources outside of the reservations. Considering most American Indian tribes are no longer on their ancestral land, this limitation is fatal to the comprehensive history of American Indian tribes. They may have control of preservation activities on the reservations, but they are left to trust Section 106

¹⁵⁶ Downer (2003: 416)

and *NAGPRA* procedures to ensure the protection of their historic resources outside of the reservation. This constraint should be evaluated to see if THPOs could have a more active role in the preservation of tribal history, on and off the reservations.

If American Indian tribes played a larger role in the preservation of all tribal resources, on and off reservations, they would have a larger investment in the protection of their history. While government agencies are encouraged to consult American Indian tribes on the presentation of history, many parks, historic sites, and other government lands often leave out these consultations when creating their interpretive programs. Non-profit organizations, museum institutions, and government agencies should consider how they can better incorporate American Indian opinions, suggestions, and involvement in the preservation of history. While the acts of legislation may provide tribal involvement in federal building projects, tribes should also be actively involved in the creation of interpretive programs or museum exhibits, as seen in several case studies found within this thesis.

The National Park Service recognized this need for more effective collaboration and communication beginning in the 1980s. Even with the multitude of policies and mandates for the involvement of American Indian tribes in federal projects, communication was still a stumbling block in the process. As David Ruppert explains in his article “Redefining Relationships: American Indians and National Parks,”

New ways of conducting business for the NPS means establishing a new set of rules for fielding and responding to tribal concerns. These concerns have revolved around the management of American Indian items in storage or collection facilities, the treatment of Indian burials and burial sites, and the protection of natural resources considered culturally important by tribal communities. For American Indian peoples these concerns are not new, but they have been repeatedly ignored by government agencies for decades, if not centuries. For federal agencies, these concerns *are* new, in the sense that federal agencies have only recently been forced to acknowledge them and have only just begun to craft ways to respond.

The recent efforts by the National Park Service and many other groups are in response to the need to create a “new set of rules” for working with American Indian tribes.¹⁵⁷

The tools and methods discussed in this thesis can help historic sites to accurately present American Indian heritage and history. Communication, effective programs and respecting American Indian traditions of recording history can be used to promote a multicultural history of the United States. These tools can help bridge the gap between viewing indigenous peoples as a static part of history and celebrating a thriving culture that is an integral part of the past and present story of the United States.

The efforts seen across the United States to welcome indigenous groups into the preservation of history are mirrored on a larger scale across the world. The International Council of Monuments and Sites (ICOMOS) drafted the Ename Charter in 2007 entitled “The ICOMOS Charter for the Interpretation and Presentation of Cultural Heritage Sites.”¹⁵⁸ The goal of the charter is to “define the basic principles of Interpretation and Presentation as essential components of heritage conservation efforts and as a means of enhancing public appreciation and understanding of cultural heritage sites.”¹⁵⁹ Within the charter, ICOMOS lays out seven principles of interpretation and identifies several ways that historic sites can implement each principle.

The charter recognizes the same tools that I have explored within this thesis. Within principle two, “Interpretation and presentation should be based on evidenced gathered through accepted scientific and scholarly methods as well as from living cultural traditions,” ICOMOS explains that it is important to integrate a variety of research methods. In point 2.2, the charter explains,

¹⁵⁷ Ruppert (1994: 11)

¹⁵⁸ ICOMOS, 2007

¹⁵⁹ Ibid.

Interpretation should be based on a well researched, multidisciplinary study of the site and its surroundings. It should also acknowledge that meaningful interpretation necessarily includes reflection on alternative historical hypotheses, local traditions and stories.¹⁶⁰

ICOMOS recognizes that multiple perspectives and traditional records are important tools in creating a comprehensive interpretation of the past.

The charter also identifies the importance of involving many groups to help create an interpretive program at a historic site. Principle six states that “The Interpretation and Presentation of cultural heritage sites must be the result of meaningful collaboration between heritage professionals, host and associated communities, and other stakeholders.”¹⁶¹

Incorporating the opinions and perspectives of many groups will create a healthy balance of participants and yield a more balanced presentation of history.

Creating a balanced presentation of history is at the core of the process to re-present American History. The struggle to recognize and accurately represent American Indians is ongoing and may not be fully resolved within this decade or century. Historic sites should make an assertive effort to rethink the interpretation of American history so that all stories may be told. The complex history of the United States is necessary to be told in order to completely understand past events and actions. Without a comprehensive history, historic sites continue to present a one-sided view of the formation and evolution of this nation.

Everything is part of the American story. Every perspective is a part of the story. Every unique cultural tradition makes up the larger identity of the nation. We all desire to be understood, to be represented, and to have our story remembered for future generations. As American Indian cultural traditions are being lost across the country, efforts to preserve history and create a clear voice are more and more important. The diversity of America should be

¹⁶⁰ Ibid, 7.

¹⁶¹ Ibid, 11.

reflected in the interpretive programs and presentations at historic sites. The nation's historic resources tell the story of all Americans and the managers of these sites are responsible for the presentation of this history. Breaking away from past perspectives and creating a more multicultural interpretation of history will bring the significance of the diversity of American heritage into the spotlight. Reevaluating past presentations and moving forward with a more balanced view could be the next breakthrough within the field of historic preservation. The stewardship of cultural resources can only move forward if all races, creeds, and perspectives are able to tell their own story.

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