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CONTESTATIONS OVER SACRED SPACES IN NORTH AMERICA

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> *[…] there are places of unquestionable, inherent sacredness on this earth, sites that are holy in and of themselves. Human societies come and go on this earth and any prolonged occupation of a geographical region will produce shrines and sacred sites discerned by the occupying people, but there will always be a few sites at which the highest spirits dwell.*
>
> (Deloria 2003: 279)[1]

The connections between the spiritual and natural worlds and the temporality and permanence of sacred places, as articulated by Vine Deloria, Jr., have found constant expression throughout the history of North America. Places of power drew ancient Indigenous peoples, who came to them to "communicate and commune with higher spiritual powers" (Deloria 2003: 279). They interacted with the landscape, developing a unique sense of space, building shrines, roads, and mounds, and other structures. While some of these places may have been abandoned over time (some due to demographic changes before the arrival of the Europeans, others due to the forces of settler colonialism), they continue to hold

1. Vine Deloria's seminal book *God Is Red: A Native View of Religion*, originally published in 1973, is now celebrating its fiftieth anniversary. The citation here is from the thirtieth anniversary edition (2003: 279).

spiritual meaning for contemporary Native Americans. However, Native claims to these places of power are often challenged by competing claims from the dominant society that often feels entitled to ownership of these places (see Robert Weiner and Sandra Garner in this issue).

As European colonial settlement advanced, many sites sacred to the Indigenous peoples were abandoned (often forcibly), desecrated, destroyed, or left in obscurity for their own protection, only to gain new meanings within the conquering or enslaved cultures taking root. The newly arrived settlers interacted with the landscape, bringing with them their own cultural perspectives. Some of these communities settled in areas where the land's topography and sounds reminded them of their homelands, and they named them accordingly. For example, the rolling hills in Tama County, Iowa, were named by Czech immigrants the "Bohemian Alps" because they reminded them of their homeland in Southern Bohemia (Darrow 2019: 44–46). The settlers' religious institutions often played a significant role in the establishment of their communities, producing "shrines and sacred sites discerned by the occupying people," to use Deloria's words, from the colonial era through the nineteenth century and into the twentieth century (see Lukáš Perutka in this issue). As the occupation of the land by the newcomers continued, places of worship and reverence developed and were layered over those that came before them. The landscape then became a visual record of the various expressions of the diverse cultures. Thus, we see the Metropolitan Cathedral in Mexico City rising from the grounds which were once occupied by Tenochtitlán's sacred pyramids, or the likenesses of US presidents carved into the granite face of the Paha Sapa (Black Hills), sacred to the Lakota and the Tsistsistas (Cheyenne) people.

The emergence of such new places of reverence will often desecrate or destroy its predecessor. Rarely, it may unintentionally aid in efforts to preserve an Indigenous site. One prominent example is Mt. Vernon, which overlooks the Potomac River south of Washington, DC. As the residence of George Washington, the first president of the United States, it has acquired national importance, even reverence. From its porch, Mt. Vernon offers a view of an undeveloped

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tract of land across the river in Prince George's County, Maryland, a view George Washington supposedly once enjoyed (see fig. 1).

In the early 1950s, this view was threatened by potential commercial and industrial development. The Mount Vernon Ladies' Association, the owner and caretaker of Mount Vernon, joined by the National Park Service (NPS), Charles Wagner of the Moyaone Association and Representative Frances Bolton (R-Ohio) launched an "'Operation Overview' to preserve the viewshed and protect the scenic value that so enhances the site's [Mount Vernon] historic setting" (Sprinkle 2016: 79, 82, 85–86).[2] They proposed the creation of Accokeek Park, justifying it with the area's archaeological and historical importance, but mainly with the offered "spectacular views" of the river and Mount Vernon, "the most important historic home in the United States" (Sprinkle 2016: 85). In the words of then-Superintendent of the NPS, Edward Kelly, the proposed park would thus help to "permanently preserve this important vista from this hallowed spot" (qtd. in Sprinkle 2016: 85). Their efforts led to the establishment of the Piscataway National Park in 1961 (McDonnell 2020, 3, 13, 69; "Piscataway Park" 1968: 61; Sprinkle 2016: 91). The establishment of the park did not only preserve Washington's view, but it also unintentionally protected sites historically, culturally, and spiritually important to the Piscataway people of Maryland. The park's land encompasses the sites of a large, stockaded, sixteenth-century village of the Piscataway Confederacy and their burial grounds, Moyaone (McDonnell 2020, 20–21; Tayac 2002: 29; Tayac 1999: 51; Ferguson and Ferguson 1960: 12; Jacobsen). Unlike many Indigenous sacred sites throughout the Americas, which were destroyed by advancing colonization, Moyaone survived because of the reverence of the dominant society for the historical site across the river.

Establishment of state and national parks may help to save sacred lands from industrial development, but they do not guarantee access and ability to conduct traditional ceremonies there or for their continued protection. During the 1970s and 1980s, the Piscataway had contentious relations with the national park and with the Ferguson Foundation, who owned the only vehicle access road and therefore controlled access to the burial grounds.

2. For more detail on this moment in the history of Piscataway National Park, see also Janet A. McDonnell's "Preservation and Partners" (2020: 50).

Fig. 1. A view from Mount Vernon across the Potomac River toward Piscataway National Park. Author Lucie Kýrová, August 2017. Used with permission from the author. The picture recreates as accurately as possible the image on postcards from the early 1970s which were used in a second campaign to preserve George Washington's view. During this campaign, citizens sent these postcards to their elected representatives, including President Richard Nixon, urging them to secure money for land acquisitions to complete the Piscataway National Park. Some of these postcards are housed in the National Archives at College Park, RG 79 Records of the National Park Service, Administrative Files, 1949–1971, Box 2644

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Gates on the road were often blocked and tribal members never knew if they would be granted entry. Other times, they would be allowed onto the burial grounds only with an escort by the park rangers who would then stand around while the Piscataway prayed and conducted their ceremonies. Remembering the times, Maurice Proctor reflected: "[…] it was very hard to stay spiritual" in such a situation (Proctor interview 2017; Williams interview 2015; Tayac, 2002: 28).[3] The Lakota and the Tsistsistas (Cheyenne) have faced similar restrictions and intrusion in the Paha Sapa (Black Hills), specifically at Bear Butte, a place used for vision quest ceremonies located on the eastern edge of the sacred mountains. After the area became Bear Butte State Park in 1962, the state of South Dakota altered its natural topography by constructing park infrastructure such as hiking trails, roads, camps, or parking lots and a permanent visitor center. These changes to the natural features of the mountain desecrated the natural religious shrine. As Gonzales argues, such desecration "denies access by destroying what makes a holy place holy, and renders worship ineffective" (Gonzales 2010: 117–118).

These struggles over protection and use of Indigenous sacred sites located on public lands is indicative of a larger issue of claims of ownership and the definitions of what religion and sacredness are. The several-centuries long occupation of the Americas by the colonizing and enslaved societies not only led to the creation of new hallowed places and shrines, but also to contested claims of ownership by multiple stakeholders over the lands and Native American places of power, such as the Serpent Mound and the Newark Earthworks in Ohio, or the Onondaga Lake in Central New York discussed in this issue by Sandra Garner and Holly Anne Rine, respectively. The dominant society's claims of entitlement to such lands has been legally and intellectually rooted in the Doctrine

3. Today, the Piscataway have good working relations with the park and the Ferguson Foundation, and they hold three annual ceremonies at the burial grounds: the Awakening of Mother Earth in the spring, Green Corn Ceremony in September, and the Feast of the Dead in November. Further, in 2012–2013, the Accokeek Foundation at Piscataway Park conducted a series of oral history interviews with members of the Piscataway, leading to an exhibit presenting indigenous interpretation of the landscape. Lucie Kýrová served as oral historian on the Foundation's oral history project.

of Discovery, as well as the different understandings of religion and definitions "of the sacred v. secular between Indigenous and non-Indigenous cultures" (Lobo, et al. 2010: 303; McNally 2020: 53; Holly Anne Rine in this issue). Religion, as McNally argues, has been central to the "dispossession, colonization, and regulation of Native people" (McNally 2020: 52). That Native American religious worldviews were different from those of the newly arrived Europeans was grounds enough for these newcomers to designate Indigenous peoples as "savages" and to subject them to colonial control. So too did it serve to justify legal and moral debates over the merits of colonization and land dispossession. Through the Doctrine of Discovery to John Marshall's decision in *Johnson v. McIntosh* (1823), savagery and heathenism served to reduce Native rights to their lands to occupancy titles only (McNally 2020: 52–54).

The Doctrine of Discovery and the differing definitions of religion, spirituality, and sacredness underline the US legal system, further complicating Native American attempts to protect these places of power. Naturally formed, "mountains, springs, rivers, lakes, caves, and rock formations can be a part of sacred geography and landscape" and play a major part in Native American spirituality (Lobo, et al. 2010: 303). While non-Native religions also recognize places of spiritual importance, for example the River Jordan for Christians or the River Ganga for Hindus, the mainstream Western society in general considers land as a commodity producing profit (Deloria 2003: 276; Lobo, et al. 2010: 304; Harjo 2010: 339). This Western capitalist view secularizes the land, and the differing definitions of sacredness, spirituality, and religion remain a focal point of conflict between Native Americans and the settler state today, playing out in federal court cases regarding protection of and access to sacred sites (Lobo, et al. 2010: 304; Seth Schermerhorn in this issue).

Native activists and leaders have strategically used the discourse of religious freedom in legal litigations to challenge state and federal authorities under the First Amendment and the American Indian Religious Freedom Act (AIRFA, 1978) to achieve protections of and rights to their traditional spiritual sites and burial grounds (Harjo 2010: 337; McNally 2020: 144). There exist cases of local and federal authorities willingly following the provisions of AIRFA

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by engaging in meaningful cooperation with Indigenous peoples to ensure safe access to sacred sites, as in the example of the former navy bombing range Kaho'olawe in Hawaii.[4] More often, however, Native activists and leaders encounter resistance. In collective sacred lands cases involving tribal governments and public lands, the courts have misrecognized Native religion as "merely spirituality" (McNally 2020: 114). Combined with the Euro-American understanding of the nature of religion as time-oriented rather than "place-based piety of Native American religion," the courts fail to recognize the sacredness of naturally formed features and the substantial burdens on exercising religious practices that obstruction of access to these features would bring to the Indigenous peoples (McNally 2020: 114, 124).

In 1988, the Supreme Court of the United States (SCOTUS) in *Lyng v. Northwest Indian Cemetery Protective* ruled that a construction of a logging road and logging in Gasquet and Orleans Ranger Districts in California, an area considered the most sacred and used for traditional religious practices by Pohlik-lah, Karuk and Tolowa, did not constitute a substantial burden to them or an unconstitutional prohibition of their religion (Wilkinson 2010: 112). The SCOTUS ruling established a precedent on how to determine what "will constitute burdened religion beyond mere diminished spiritual fulfillment" (McNally 2020: 28, 131), which continues to influence litigations over sacred spaces and poses a challenge to equal treatment of Native spirituality.[5] One illustration of this continuous struggle is the contestation over Arizona's San Francisco Peaks by the Navajo, discussed by Seth Shermerhorn

4. Kaho'olawe is a traditional ceremonial place, situated within a former US Navy bombing range. Native Hawaiian people were willing to risk injuries from unexploded ammunition to conduct ceremonies there. In 1979, the US Navy, aware of the AIFRA provisions, started to cooperate with Hawaiian traditional religious leaders to ensure everyone's safety. The Navy conducted a clean up and in 2003 Kaho'olawe was formally transferred back to Hawaii. Harjo 2010: 339.

5. In reaction to the SCOTUS decision, President Clinton issued two Executive Orders to help strengthen AIRFA: "Indian Sacred Sites" (Executive Order 13007, 1996) and "Consultation with Indian Tribal Governments" (1998), however ensuring that government officials and courts comply with them is a continuing challenge for Native American nations (Wilkinson 2010, 112; Harjo 2010, 338).

in this issue, or the 2016 Dakota Access Pipeline litigations over the protection of Lake Oahe, a source of sacred water for religious sacraments, in which the District Court for the District of Columbia ruled against the Indigenous plaintiffs (McNally 2020: 144–147, 173–176). Thus, the courts continue to use the concept of religion, as defined by the dominant society, to regulate Native Americans, their traditional practices and their sacred sites, effectively legislating what is and what is not "authentically" sacred.

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The very question of authenticity in this regard points to problems inherent in the term "sacred" and, although the title of this issue of *RIAS* is "Sacred Spaces in North America," that concept can be misleading as in the Western tradition the "sacred" is often defined in opposition to the "profane" or secular. The articles included here aim to broaden the understanding of these and other terms by approaching "sacredness" from a number of perspectives. The authors featured here present a wide range of disciplinary and conceptual approaches to examine the temporality and permanence of the ancient and the modern, the contested definitions of sacredness with their legal and political ramifications, or the questions of cultural appropriation of the Indigenous sacred in art and entertainment. Ukjese van Kampen (Northern Tutchone), the artist of the image reproduced on the issue's cover, offers a personal essay, "Our Death is Our Strongest Surviving Tradition," in which he reflects upon the impact of colonization on his people. Paying attention to the cultural and political changes that colonization brought to Yukon First Nations, he points out the high mortality rates among the Northern Tutchone, caused first by European diseases and later by social problems stemming from the impact of settler colonialism—the loss of traditional lifeways, culture, and identity. As traditional practices of the Northern Tutchone had changed or were forgotten over time, funeral practices became the strongest surviving tradition, due to the continuous high mortality rates. This reality is also reflected in some of van Kampen's art.

Robert Weiner and Sandra Garner discuss pre-colonial places of power revered by ancestral Indigenous peoples and their connections to Native Americans and the issues surrounding sacred

sites today. In "Ritual Roadways and Place of Power in the Chaco World," Weiner examines roadways built by Ancestral Four Corner people to connect recognized places of power in Chaco Canyon and the builders' understanding of the connections between humans and these places. He critiques the Western concept of "sacredness" and reframes it in Indigenous terms of "power," a force derived directly from the environment. Applying the Indigenous framework, the author demonstrates the importance of not only the monumental architecture, but the activities that took place on them, such as ritual running and processions, that likely served to maintain cosmic balance. Weiner argues that this Chacoan understanding of places of power and human connections to them is still central to today's Native American activism to protect "natural" and "cultural" landscapes threatened by commercial and industrial development.

Garner's article, "Reinterpretation of 'Sacred Space' at The Newark Earthworks and Serpent Mound," focuses on ancient sites of power located in modern-day Ohio, examining their history, connections to contemporary Native Americans, and the contested claims of ownership by multiple groups. Garner analyzes the impact of colonial dominance that severed any direct connections of contemporary Native Americans to these sites and shows that despite the settler-colonial process of destruction and replacement, these sites continue to be deeply meaningful to Native peoples today. She notes that the names themselves are a legacy of colonialism, which brought new reinterpretations and multiple layers of meaning ascribed by the Euro-American dominant culture to them. As the Mound and Earthworks are currently short-listed for the UNESCO World Heritage status, the various factions claiming ownership are working together. But, Garner asks, can this fragile coalition last upon achieving that status? And, whose voices will be heard?

Lukáš Perutka's article "Czech Sacred Places in Texas as the Key Element for Preserving Czech Identity," examines the creation of new layers of meaning through the interpretation of the landscape by European settlers in the nineteenth century. His article serves as an important reminder that, while the violent history of colonization in the Americas cannot be ignored, it is important

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to note the many immigrant populations who saw different possibilities in the landscapes of the continent. Perutka focuses on Czech immigration to Texas in the mid-nineteenth century and the manner in which they synthesized their interpretation of the landscape with their own worldview and customs, their religious institutions playing a significant role in the establishment of their communities and creating their own "sacred spaces" on the Southern Plains. No contemporary understanding of that or any other region would be complete without such considerations. Central Texas has long been seen as a unique culture region and Perutka's article explores this immigrant history while also interpreting and synthesizing important primary texts not readily available in English. The Czech population and their descendents are one of many cultures that overlap and form an important component of Central Texas, an area that geographer D. W. Meinig once identified as a place where "the full range of intercultural tensions which are so important a part of Texas life" (1969: 123) are on full display. By focusing on the Czech diaspora, Perutka's article emphasizes these historical layers and networks of complexity.

Returning to the contestation over land and the definition of the "sacred" between European and Indigenous populations, the subsequent two articles provide different disciplinary approaches to this issue, drawing attention to distinct historical circumstances, both colonial and modern, as well as the legal frameworks that have re-shaped and often destroyed landscapes of great meaning to Indigenous peoples in places as distant from one another as Arizona and New York State. Seth Schermerhorn's article, "Making Indigenous Religion at the San Francisco Peaks," offers a detailed presentation of the decades-long controversy over the San Francisco Peaks of Northern Arizona, illustrating the complexities of the US legal system and the difficulties of codifying the "sacredness" of a landscape. Focusing on the litigation by the Navajo (one of five tribes engaged in these ongoing disputes), Schermerhorn points to the tangled discourse over the very meaning of "sacred" as it is defined and understood by two very different cultural worldviews. In this context, the political and the religious necessarily overlap. This leads to the contestation of the authenticity of claims of "sacredness" when made on political grounds.

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It is through the persistence and perseverance of Native American peoples to preserve and protect these places along the same lines and for the same reasons as articulated in Deloria's observation.

Holly Anne Rine's article, "Onondaga Lake as Sacred Space and Contested Space," provides a detailed history of Onondaga Lake in New York State. However shallow the lake may be (sixty-three feet, or nineteen meters), it contains a deep history. It is sacred for its role as the symbolic and geographical center of the establishment of the Haudenosaunee Confederacy and its Great Law of Peace. The ways in which the "sacred" resonates with both the religious beliefs and the political organization of a society are illustrated once again. Rine writes that, when Onondaga Lake came to be the center of colonial and revolutionary conflict in the region, the long history of environmental degradation of the lake began. The twentieth century only exacerbated those issues, although it has begun to recover in recent years and what Rine offers is a sense of optimism that the lake's role as a place of peace at the center of a society might be slowly returning.

The final two articles focus on the representation of sacred spaces in visual media. Jennifer Stern's article, "Indigenous Burial Spaces in Media," finds roots in the continued popularity of Indigenous culture in works of gothic and of horror. Stern focuses on Stephen King's *Pet Sematary* (1983) and the well-known 1989 film of the same name. By identifying the key characteristics of the "ancient Indian burial ground" at its center, Stern explores the ways such places contain a "bifurcated meaning" for Indigenous and mainstream populations in North America. As Stern shows, the use of a Mi'gmaq burial site in *Pet Sematary* can be juxtaposed with the mass grave of children at a residential school central to *Rhymes for Young Ghouls* (2013), an independent Canadian film directed by Jeff Barnaby.[6] In the former, non-Indigenous characters confront the latent, unknown evil of a quasi-mystical burial site. In the latter, this presence is transferred to a place where horrific events actually occurred. Anyone who follows current events in Canada will recognize a similarly uncomfortable proxim-

6. Recently deceased, Jeff Barnaby was himself Mi'gmaq. Although there are various alternative spellings of "Mig'maq," we have here followed the spelling used by Stern in her article, which she explains in a footnote.

ity between life and art in the recent Amazon series, *Three Pines* (2022), which reimagines Louise Penny's series of mystery novels to confront the legacy of colonialism and mistreatment of First Nations in Canada in the context of that country's residential school system. Stern's article demonstrates how these representations have long been a part of the cultural conversation, echoing across the contemporary film, informing our present lived experiences as seen in the newspapers and across media on an almost daily basis.[7]

The representation and misrepresentation of sacred spaces and their associated imagery is also the subject of Joshua Jacob Fitzgerald's article, "As the Digital *Teocalli* Burns," which takes the reader to ancient Mesoamerica via the digital age. As Fitzgerald discusses, ancient ruins have become almost ubiquitous in certain interactive gaming environments, and Mesoamerican pyramids—at once both civic and religious structures—have provided inspiration for game designers since the early 1980s, with varying degrees of detail in terms of both pixelation and cultural accuracy. Despite some forty years of technological development, Fitzgerald writes, many of those games continue to use such settings as playscapes in which gamers can, essentially, entertain themselves by reenacting one of the most violent and destructive periods of colonial history in the Americas with little concern for historical accuracy. As Fitzgerald notes, the use of historical fictions and cultural stereotypes persists, repeating the patterns seen in the past—although recent game designs have begun to challenge and confront these same issues. Given the worldwide popularity of these games, such narratives cannot be ignored, as the factual and fictitious and exploitative aspects cannot always be so easily discerned, leading to inaccuracy in the popular interpretation and understanding of the history of colonization in the Americas.

There are many other ways of thematically grouping these articles. Their arrangement here is but one suggestion. The many

7. The journalistic coverage of residential schools across Canada has recently gained international accolades, as Connie Walker and her collaborators at Gimlet Media were awarded the Pulitzer Prize for best audio journalism, as well as a Peabody Award. Their podcast, "Stolen: Surviving St. Michael's," tells the story of Walker's father's experiences at a residential school in Saskatchewan (Warick 2023).

disciplinary approaches invite such consideration and so too does the vast continental geography that this issue contains—from the Southwest to the Middle West, from Texas and Mexico to upstate New York, northern New England and eastern Canada. Nevertheless, it is bound by the contours of North America. For that reason, we hope that these articles become catalysts for continued discussion on these topics and themes in the study of "sacred spaces" across the entire hemisphere, including Central America, South America, and the Caribbean.

Such a comparative, hemispheric approach would undoubtedly add breadth and depth to the range of ideas presented in this issue. Central to all these articles is a sense of place—the interaction between human society and the landscape with which this introduction began. Expanding the geographic considerations would similarly open other moments in the historical timeline, whether in terms of the ancient, Indigenous cultures, in terms of the different eras of colonial encounter, or in terms of migration and immigration within the Americas themselves. Tracing such patterns across history will inevitably help to better inform our society today, pointing not only to the "shrines and sacred sites discerned by the occupying people"—whoever they may be or might have been at any given time—while also drawing our attention to those few places "at which the highest spirits dwell."

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Příčiny a kontext volebního vítězství Donalda Trumpa [*American First: The Reasons and Context of the Election Victory of Donald Trump*] (2020).

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