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**of International American Studies**

**SACRED SPACES  
In North America**

**edited by  
Lucie Kýrová and Nathaniel R. Racine**



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# SACRED SPACES in North America

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*Review of International American Studies (RIAS)* is the double-blind peer-reviewed, electronic/print-on-demand journal of the International American Studies Association, a worldwide, independent, non-governmental association of American Studies. *RIAS* serves as agora for the global network of international scholars, teachers, and students of America as a hemispheric and global phenomenon. *RIAS* is published by the University of Silesia Press in Katowice twice a year (Fall–Winter and Spring–Summer). *RIAS* is available in the Open Access Gold formula and is financed by the University of Silesia in Katowice, Poland. All topical manuscripts should be directed to the *RIAS* Editors online via submissions website: [www.rias-journal.org](http://www.rias-journal.org). General correspondence and matters concerning the functioning of *RIAS* should be addressed to *RIAS* Editor-in-Chief.

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# THE NEW OPENING

Presidential Address

for the 11th World Congress of the IASA

Katowice, Poland, 7–10 September 2023

In a recent informal debate held at the University of Silesia in Katowice, Dariusz Kubok, an expert in ancient Greek philosophy, has pointed out that the noun “crisis” derives from the Greek word κρίσις, which could be translated as “breakthrough,” “change,” “new opening.”<sup>1</sup> This sense of the word beautifully resonates with the present issue of the *Review of International American Studies*, which not only marks a new chapter in the journal’s 17-years’ history, but also a new leaf in the history of the International American Studies Association. “Sacred Spaces in North America,” conceptualized and edited by Lucie Kýrová and Nathaniel R. Racine, is the first issue published under the auspices of the University of Silesia Press in Katowice, Poland, and, equally importantly, under the supervision of a reorganized largely expanded, and internationalized Editorial Team. At the same time, IASA itself progresses, hand in hand with the evolution of its own *RIAS*.

The radical change that we have recently undergone as an Organization does not only warrant the durability of IASA and its philosophy, but also the stability of the *Review of International American Studies* as its voice. It seems clear that without the prospect of unhindered evolution based on generational succession no organization may last, which in itself calls for measures that would attract scholars of the younger cohort to IASA. Responding to this concern, György Tóth and Jessica Syers proved instrumental

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1. See also Kubok 2021: 27–8, 538.

in calling into existence the IASA Emerging Scholars Fellowship Programme. Wholeheartedly supporting the initiative, the IASA Executive Council declared thus:

We wish to reiterate that in IASA, senior, managerial, and leadership positions are not restricted to established professorship only. Our Organization recognizes that many of our Emerging Scholars, often denied permanent positions at their own universities, have made groundbreaking contributions to the present-day state of knowledge, despite which many of them remain invisible. To help remedy the situation, IASA aims to be the space in which Emerging Scholars can thrive. Gradually, but without delay, younger colleagues with exemplary leadership skills and excellent professional record will assume leadership positions in our Organization: first, shadowing our current leaders, and then taking over their responsibilities. The thus rejuvenated International American Studies Association will certainly be in good hands for decades to come.

With such a goal in view, the IASA proposes to call into existence a cohort of the “IASA Early Career Fellows” for two year appointments, assuming that this title will enhance our younger Colleagues employment prospects, or—if they are already employed—help increase their visibility. This cohort could be offered opportunities for mentoring in areas they desire, and for active engagement with the organization. In addition, they could be the source of planning for events that would serve their particular interests, and potentially, put together webinars as well as other events that would enhance their own and their cohort’s visibility. IASA Early Career fellows could thus highlight their work while building ongoing engagement with the Organization. Monthly online meetings, in shifting time zone calculations, could facilitate getting to know one another within the cohort, as well as energize building cross-national and cross regional connections that are one of the great joys of the in-person Congresses. Many other projects, including podcasts, publications, promotion of special issue ideas developed by the cohort, would then have a chance to develop. (IASA Executive Council 2022: 260–261)

The Emerging Scholars Programme Fellows have almost immediately become involved in the co-creation of mentoring programmes, based on the intellectual resources of the IASA. Shadowing their more senior colleagues and participating in webinars, the Fellows become familiar with the complexity of the practical functioning of an international organization and learn leadership directly from IASA Officers and Executives, but, at the same time, become actively involved in the life of their Organization. Furthermore, they expand their experience of academic publishing, acquiring knowledge

of essential value for the future of the *RIAS*. Initiates in academic publishing share the opinion that without the influx of new ideas and regular funding no Open Access periodical forgoing authorship fees could survive in the context of the contemporary, corporate, model of the academe. The Emerging Scholars Programme warrants much more than mere survival: with the implementation of the Programme, a new vista has opened both for IASA and for the *RIAS*.

Most IASA members realize that since its modest beginnings as an online newsletter of the International American Studies Association the very existence of *RIAS* has depended on the dedication of a small, close-knit group of individuals: scholars responsible for countless academic projects of their own, who would nonetheless invest their time, energy, and—not infrequently—their private funds in transforming the basic idea of making research available to everyone into a cultural practice. Such work is rarely appreciated by the larger academic community. No wonder: when we submit our texts for publication, we simply visit a journal's website, fill out an uncomplicated form with essential metadata, attach an editable document, hope for positive reviews, and once these arrive, introduce minor revisions, and await the publication, which, somehow... *happens*.

In fact, as many of us know only too well, the process involves countless hours of work on the part of Issue Editors (responsible for the concept of the issue, for the CFPs, for the correspondence with Authors and Referees, for the merit-related editing of submitted texts, and, last but not least, for the workflow within the Open Journal System), Publishing Editors (transforming imperfect texts into linguistic, stylistic, and factually reliable gems of academic writing), Copyeditors (spending hours eliminating possible typographic or stylesheet-related errors), Typesetters and Graphic Designers (who transform editable documents into finely arranged galleys), Associate Editors (who plan the work for and collaborate with Issue Editors, guard the quality of the final output, and organize the workflow), the Editors-in-Chief (who must ensure the funding for each subsequent issue, warrant the adherence of each issue to the journal's overall profile, the correspondence of each to the global mission of the Organization, the growth of the international standing

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of the title, and who, not infrequently, put out fires, struggling to minimize delays in the publishing process). Of pivotal importance is the journal's Academic Secretary (navigating the journal through the straits and narrows of constantly changing regulations, system updates, and serving as an intermediary between the bibliometric institutions, the publishing house, the Editorial team, and the Authors. Last but not least, there are the IT wizards and OJS Coordinators, whose work guarantees that the journal meets the COPE standards of ethics, that each article is attributed a DOI number, that the metadata of each issue and each article is harvested by the search engines and that the contents is available to as many content aggregators in the world as possible.

Let us take a trip down the memory lane to celebrate the individual scholars, whose tireless work made the *Review of International American Studies* the ranking periodical that it is today. The "About the Journal" section of the *RIAS* website (here quoted *in extenso*), reminds us that

[t]he idea of the official periodical of IASA was first formed among the participants of a meeting of the IASA Executive Council at the Rothermere American Institute of the University of Oxford, in September 2004. It was during that meeting that Djelal Kadir, IASA Founding President, Barbara Buchenau and Marietta Messmer (then of the Georg-August University) raised the issue of the necessity of launching a newsletter, which would facilitate communications among the IASA members. Yet, it was only in the beginning of 2006, that Michael Boyden (at the time of the University College Ghent, Belgium, now Uppsala University, Sweden) and Paweł Jędrzejko (University of Silesia in Katowice, Poland) submitted a complete proposal to the IASA to launch a periodical, which would cater to the needs of the International American Studies Association to the Organization's Executive Council. In March 2006, the founders were able to present it to Paul Giles, the then IASA President, and Theo D'Haen, then IASA Founding Executive Director, during a seminal meeting at the Catholic University of Leuven in Belgium. As of September 2006, the *Review of International American Studies* officially became the organ of the International American Studies Association, with Michael Boyden as its Editor-in-Chief, Paweł Jędrzejko as the Associate Editor, Tomasz Adamczewski and Wojciech Liber of the Soft for Humans, Inc., as the Journal's IT advisors, Karolina Wojdała as its graphic designer and Michał Derda-Nowakowski of ExMachina Publishers as our DTP specialist. The original *RIAS* Editorial Board consisted of Theo D'haen, Anders Olsson, Liam Kennedy, Sieglinde Lemke, Giorgio Mariani, Ian Tyr-

rell, Helmbrecht Breinig, Rosario Faraudo, the IASA Founding President and ideological forefather of *RIAS*, Djelal Kadir. Soon, the President's decision was ratified by the whole of the Executive Council. As a result, IASA commissioned the design of the *RIAS* CMS System, which was launched at the end of August 2006 by the Soft For Humans, Inc. At the same time, the first call for papers was sent out to the IASA members. In September 2006, the inaugural issue of the *Review of International American Studies* finally saw the light of day.

In 2009, the Editors' Team was strengthened by Cyraina Johnson-Roullier (Notre Dame University, USA), who joined the *Review* as Associate Editor. A year later, after three years of brilliant service, Michael Boyden stepped down, handing the leadership of the Journal to Cyraina Johnson-Roullier. In the same year, Nancy Earle (Memorial University of Newfoundland St. John's, Canada), joined the team as the second Associate Editor.

2010 was a year of a radical transformation of the *Review of International American Studies*. With the Ex-Machina [publishers] changing their profile and [after] the switch from the original CMS to Korora Systems, Paweł Jędrzejko was authorized by the IASA Executive Council to sign a contract with another DTP company, the M-Studio, Inc. The *RIAS* received a brand new graphic design by Hania Traczyk (then of the M-Studio) and implemented strict procedures of double-blind peer-reference for the feature texts submitted.

In 2011, Nancy Earle stepped down from her position as Associate Editor and György "George" Tóth (then of the Charles University of Prague, Czech Republic) joined the Editors' team in her place. The Editors' work was then supported by the expanded Editorial Board, consisting of Amy Kaplan, Maureen Montgomery, Enikő Bollobás, Ulf Hannerz, Sun Youzhong, Jørn Brøndal, Amanda Lagerkvist, Christopher Saunders, Theo D'Haen, Liam Kennedy, Sieglinde Lemke, Ian Tyrell, Helmbrecht Breinig, Rosario Faraudo, Djelal Kadir, Anders Olsson, and Giorgio Mariani. Two years later, the Editor's team expanded [even further] to include Meghan McKinney of the Notre Dame University as Senior Copyeditor.

[...] Beginning with Vol. 7. No. 1 (2014), titled *Oceans Apart: In Search of New Wor(l)ds* (guest-edited by Agnieszka Woźniakowska and Anna Łakowicz-Dopiera), the journal's production was taken over by the University of Silesia Press in Katowice, Poland, which incorporated it in its online distribution and evaluation systems, thus granting the *Review of International American Studies* the much-needed visibility, and warranting its readiness for international evaluation. Distributed via the University of Silesia Press network, the *RIAS* became available through such important institutions as CEEOL (Central and Eastern European Online Library) and BazHum, thus reaching thousands of readers worldwide.

In mid-2016, when Giorgio Mariani's term as President of the International American Studies Association came to its end, the Journal transformed again [...]. Giorgio, who formerly served as guest-editor

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and at times as a peer-referee, joined the team as the *RIAS* Associate Editor, contributing his experience and enthusiasm.

In January 2017, after eight years of dedicated service, Cyraina Johnson-Roullier handed the leadership of the *Review of International American Studies* to Giorgio Mariani, who, supported by [Paweł Jędrzejko György Tóth, and John E. Dean, took the responsibility] [...] for the growth of the *Review of International American Studies* and its continued service to the International American Studies Association and [other] academics specializing in hemispheric and transoceanic American studies world-wide.

In September 2020, the *RIAS* Editorial Team welcomed three new Associate Editors: Dr. Nathaniel R. Racine of the Texas A&M International University, USA, Dr. Lucie Kýrová of the Charles University, Prague, Czech Republic, and Dr. Justin Michael Batting of the RMIT International University Vietnam. The new Associate Editors assumed the duties thus far carried out by Professor John E. Dean and Dr. György Tóth [...].

In March 2023, the Executive Board of the International American Studies Association resolved that the Editors of the *Review of International American Studies* apply to the Publishing College of the University of Silesia in Katowice, Poland, to become the official Publisher of the journal by registering it in the Polish Court. As a result of mutual consent, the Journal would become a title of the University of Silesia Press with full financing of the editorial process, simultaneously retaining intellectual autonomy as the official organ of the International American Studies Association. [Consequently,] the restructuring of the Editorial Team and editorial procedures was implemented, including the expansion of the Editorial Team.

[Also i]n March 2023, professor Giorgio Mariani, the *RIAS* Editor-in-Chief stepped down after eight years of stellar service [...]. [He] was succeeded by two Co-Editors-in-Chief: professor Paweł Jędrzejko (*RIAS* Co-Founding Editor, former Managing Editor) and Dr. Nathaniel R. Racine (former *RIAS* Associate Editor). As a result of the structural transformation, the positions of *RIAS* Managing Editor and Senior Copyeditor were eliminated. The *RIAS* Editorial Team was strengthened by Professor Eugenia Sojka (Academic Secretary of *RIAS*) and two new Associate Editors: Dr. J.D. Schnepf of the University of Groningen and prof. Gabriela Vargas-Cetina (Universidad Autónoma de Yucatán, Mexico). It was further expanded by new nominations: Dr. Anna Maj and Dr. Małgorzata Poks of the University of Silesia, and Dr. Anjali Singh of the Mohanlal Sukhadia University, India [Issue Editors]. (“About the Journal”).

The nutshell history of *RIAS* demonstrates that the present-day status of the journal is a function of the dynamics among dedicated people: of friendships that evolved over the years, of trust that emerged in the process, of the mutual sense of responsibility

for the public face of our Organization whose mission, concerning the future of humankind *in toto*, goes far beyond American Studies. And beyond doubt, those who invested significant parts of their lives in the fostering of cordial relations in IASA and in the world—are our own unsung heroes.

But even the heroes deserve a moment away from permanent crisis: the comfort of the vision of safer future. The structural transformations of *RIAS*, necessary to warrant the journal's compliance with the requirements of the University of Silesia Press, will eventually allow our Editorial Team to enjoy a degree of freedom from pedestrian concerns. Finally, the gnawing uncertainty concerning the journal's year-to-year survival is about to vanish. Henceforth, the *RIAS* Editors will be able to concentrate on the profundity of the journal's merit and its international standing. The transitory period, anticipated to last until the end of December 2023, will allow us to unify the *RIAS* procedures with the routines of the USP, to update the information available on the *RIAS* websites, upgrade the stylesheet, prepare new electronic peer-reference forms (related to the mandatory evaluation of texts other than research articles, such as book reviews, introductory essays, original materials, or interviews), and to work out efficient channels of communication between Issue Editors and Publishing Editors, OJS Coordinators, and Copyeditors, professional employees of the University of Silesia Press. Within the next few months, the new members of the *RIAS* Editorial Team will undergo technical training to quickly gain fluency in the Open Journal System workflow, and their meetings with the Co-Editors-in-Chief will help them understand the mechanisms and time constraints of the document flow. Yet, irrespective of the unquestionably substantial amount of work ahead of us, we will not compromise the journal's quality, continuing to strictly observe the principles of publication ethics, and strive for the constant increase of our journal's visibility in the academe world wide.

Our efforts to date, admittedly, have not gone unnoticed. Today, the *Review of International American Studies* enjoys the status of the "A" Class Journal in Italy and, as of July 17th, 2023, the Polish Ministry of Science and Education has granted the *RIAS* 100 points in parametric evaluation, which places our periodical among

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the highest-ranking journals of arts, humanities, and social sciences in Poland.<sup>2</sup> Such recognition leads to the intensification of international interest in the contents we offer, and, consequently, to the increase of the bibliometric parameters of the texts published in the *RIAS*. It also results in the fact that the number of high quality submissions increases every year, and that IASA's international status as an Organization continues to grow.

These developments, however, carry significant consequences. For several years now we have realized that the management of the *RIAS* must, inevitably, become professional—both in terms of the knowledge of the ins and outs of academic publishing, and in terms of the building of the journal's international standing. Especially now, in the context of our newly formed affiliation with the University of Silesia Press, the bylaws specifying the structure of the *Review of International American Studies*, the principles of nominating its Editors-in-Chief and regulating their succession must be revised to eliminate the peril of the journal's de-professionalization.

Until now, the recruitment of *RIAS* team members has depended almost entirely on the declarations of will and ability to serve. Today, enthusiasm and readiness to commit time must be supplemented by training, which will inevitably affect the mechanisms of succession. Furthermore, because the institutional funding of *RIAS* is contingent on the registration of the journal in the Polish court, by law, one of the *RIAS* Co-Editors-in-Chief must be a Polish citizen. Eventually, regular formal reporting to the Publishing College is now a duty regulated by the bylaws of the University of Silesia Press. In other words, although IASA, represented by the *RIAS* Academic Board as the body exercising the oversight over the journal, remains in control of its intellectual level, program, and compliance with the mission of the Organization, the formal aspects of its functioning must be attended to by professionals.

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2. See: *Komunikat Ministra Edukacji i Nauki z dnia 17 lipca 2023 r. w sprawie wykazu czasopism naukowych i recenzowanych materiałów z konferencji międzynarodowych*, <https://www.gov.pl/web/edukacja-i-nauka/komunikat-ministra-edukacji-i-nauki-z-dnia-17-lipca-2023-r-w-sprawie-wykazu-czasopism-naukowych-i-recenzowanych-materialow-z-konferencji-miedzynarodowych>. Accessed 20 Jul. 2023.

This, however, is only one of many problems that the newly elected IASA Board and Executive Council will have to formally resolve in the course of their term in office. Others will involve the formalization of the fiscal procedures with the Spanish Tax Office, the revision of the Organization's bylaws in compliance with the IASA Registraton Certificate from the Spanish Home Ministry (Ministerio del Interior), and the adaptation of our internal regulations to the reality of the requirements of the Spanish fiscal law. Beyond doubt, the amount of work ahead of us may seem enormous, but an equally massive tasks have already been tackled. Over the past two years, we have created a modern website connected with social media, set up a modern banking account, and guaranteed the financing of the *Review of International American Studies*, which has thereby entered the professional stage of its development. With the COVID pandemic abating, we were able to organize two World Congresses in two years, putting IASA back on schedule in terms of its most widely recognized events. Most importantly, we have the Emerging Scholars' Programme, whose Fellows train for the future. For this, we must be grateful to all of former and present Officers and Members of the Board, Executive Council Members, Congress Organizers, and *RIAS* Editors, whose commitment and passion have been nothing short of exemplary.

IASA, therefore, is no longer "in crisis" in the English sense of the word. Rather, it enjoys "the new opening." Let us make the most of it for the common good.

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*IASA President*  
*RIAS Co-Editor-in-Chief*

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# CONTESTATIONS OVER SACRED SPACES IN NORTH AMERICA

*[...] 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)<sup>1</sup>

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

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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

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).<sup>2</sup> 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.

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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).

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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

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).<sup>3</sup> 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

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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

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.<sup>4</sup> 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.<sup>5</sup> One illustration of this continuous struggle is the contestation over Arizona's San Francisco Peaks by the Navajo, discussed by Seth Shermerhorn

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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 AIRFA 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.

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.<sup>6</sup> 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-

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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.<sup>7</sup>

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

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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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*Sacred Spaces  
In North America*

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# OUR DEATH IS OUR STRONGEST SURVIVING TRADITION

A Guest Essay by the Artist of Our Cover Image

As a self-taught artist I felt I needed to study art formally to be a better artist and to have more skills to express my ideas. In 1986 I enrolled in Kwantlen College in the Vancouver, British Columbia area and began working on a Fine Arts Diploma. I really enjoyed my studies, and I loved art history because it showed me how art evolved and changed and why.

One day, a group of four of us students sat around chatting and the topic of death came up. One of the students had a grandmother who died, and another student knew a student in their high school who was killed in a car crash. Then I started naming people who I knew that have died. I came up with over 20 names and realized that given enough time, I could come up with another 20 names.

Among the three white students, they knew two people who had died, but as for myself, a Native American (in Canada: First Nations), I knew at least forty people. It was then that I came to the realization that they were living a normal life and that my life experience was abnormal.

I work across various styles and media and in some of my art pieces I point out this situation. The artwork included here is an example of this. I painted Yukon Reality to testify to the fact that we as First Nations have an extremely high death rate. In our tradition, after death we begin our journey to the Spirit World. This takes about a year. Once we are buried at our pot-

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latch the grave is covered with a tent. It is a tent because we are travelling to the Spirit World and when we are travelling, we use a tent. After a year travel we enter the Spirit World and the tent is replaced with a fenced area, a 'grave house' or a 'spirit house'. This is more permanent.

Once we are in the Spirit World we can be reborn. Not as an animal, as in some Asian religions where it can be a consequence of a person not having lived a good life, but as humans. We enter the human spirit world and not the animal spirit world. There are exceptions, but that discussion is beyond the scope of this article. As to reincarnation, my great-grandmother, Annie Ned, believed I was a reincarnation of her second husband Ukjese. When I was about 4 or 5 years old she used to watch me and one day she announced that I was in fact Ukjese reborn! She saw in me many of the traits and mannerisms of Ukjese and at that point I was him and had his status. Symbolically, my aunts and uncles became my nieces and nephews and she considered me to be her husband.

Our worldview includes a series of different worlds. We live in this present world here on earth but there is another world beyond the horizon. This is the White Winter World and this is the world where white people came from. Above us is the Sky World. There are holes through the ground of the Sky World and when it is our night, it is their day, and that is why you can see the spots of daylight shining through the little holes at nighttime. White people call these stars. There is an Underwater World and if you are capable of lifting the edge of the water, you can walk down into that world. In reality, it is primarily the deities who can lift the water and not common people. There is an Underground World also, but generally nobody has been there but an old woman holds the pole that keeps the spinning earth steady. We can see that it is we who are spinning, and not the sky spinning as Europeans once believed. And there are the Spirit Worlds for various lifeforms and ours is the Human Spirit World, as animals have their own Spirit World. The Spirit World's day is our night and that is why the spirits come out at night, it is then they are awake. Below is my illustration to the various worlds that we believed in. Later in this paper I will explain more about how we are connected with the Spirit World.

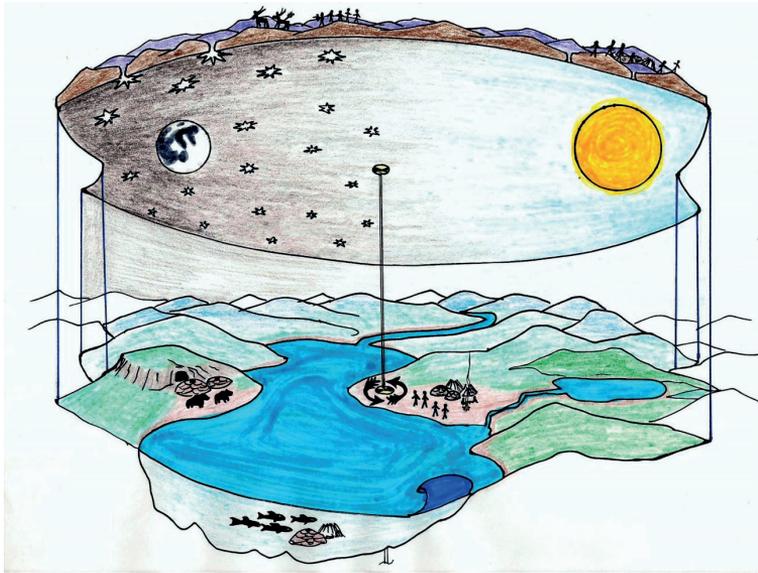


Fig. 1. Yukon First Nations world view showing the various worlds we used to believe in.

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Below is my painting of my great grandmother Annie Ned. She was a member of the Order of Canada, as was her son and my great uncle; Elijah Smith. The Order of Canada is one of Canada's highest honours. It recognizes people across all sectors of society who have made extraordinary and sustained contributions to Canada.



Fig. 2. *Annie Ned*. Acrylic on canvas. 1993. Collection of German actress Luise Deschauer.

Why choose the title “Our Death is Our Strongest Surviving Tradition”? Even before the coming of the white man, our death rate increased. This started with the Tlingit middlemen traders in the very late 1700s and the beginning of the 1800s. They brought Russian trade goods into the Yukon. With this trade they also brought new diseases that they were catching from the Russians that were operating from what later became Alaska.

It is estimated that before contact there were between 7000 and 9000 Yukon First Nations people living in what is now identified as the Yukon. Through contact with the Russians via the Tlingits and subsequently the Hudson’s Bay Company and later Americans (The United States bought Russian America (renamed “Alaska” in 1867) Yukon First Nations experienced a very high death rate. By 1830 it is estimated that there were only 4,700 Yukon First Nations left, by 1900 there were 3300 and by the 1920s there were only 1500 survivors! Given these numbers we would have had a great many potlatches!<sup>1</sup>

The potlatch is a ceremony that we have for special occasions including the death of a person. The population since the 1950s has been increasing and has now reached almost the same level as pre-contact. We are about 7000 Yukon First Nations people strong but there is still a huge death rate as I mentioned at the beginning of this paper. Later, I will describe in more detail how a potlatch is conducted. For myself, who has spent decades researching my people’s art and culture, I have found little interest in our past traditions, and I also describe this situation closer to the end of this paper. But in contrast to that lack of interest for our traditions, is the high death rate and that maintains a continued Potlatch practice and thus that part of our tradition is strong.

Becoming more immune to the white man’s diseases has slowed our death rate but another reason for the population increase is possibly a higher birth rate. During my youth I knew many families with many children. Further, it is not unusual traditionally as well as contemporary, to have children by different partners. My mother had 5 children from 4 different men. This is

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1. See Kenneth S. Coates’ book, *Best Left as Indians* (1984) for a more detailed account in his description of the Yukon First Nations population over the decades.

not a moral issue for Yukon First Nation people. Yet we still have a lower life expectancy than the Canadian average. The 2011 life expectancy for a First Nations man in Canada was 72.5 years versus a non-First Nations man's life expectancy of 81.4 years. But these numbers are misleading as these figures are of death by natural causes. I read once that the life expectancy of a First Nations man in Canada, when all causes of death are included, is only 42 years old! That means I have now lived more than twenty years past my life expectancy. Amazing considering there have been a number of times I have almost been killed.<sup>2</sup>

Aboriginal people in Canada face tremendous social obstacles including a lower education rate, higher unemployment rate, higher crime rate, higher incarceration rate, higher substance abuse rate, higher suicide rate, and so forth. These all contribute to that high death rate.

The mentioned points have been reflective of my own life. While I live a healthy lifestyle and have an education my family and some of my friends live a more destructive lifestyle. When I was 16 years old I was stabbed but did not have a life-altering injury except for the scar to remind me of that night. During that event three other people were stabbed and one of them did not live. The perpetrator spent 14 months in jail and later committed suicide. My mother was once stabbed 42 times by another woman over a bottle of wine that my mother did not want to give to her. My mother survived. Later that same year the woman who did the stabbing was hit and killed by a car. Interestingly, my mother who is still alive has outlived every man she dated or lived with except one. My brother was stabbed and killed. The person who murdered him spent less than two years in jail. I have lost two other brothers, one by disease and the other my father accidentally ran over and my brother was killed. He was two years old. My father later committed suicide. My nephew in 2019 committed suicide and my first cousin died of alcohol abuse in 2021. A huge number of former schoolmates and friends have died of either suicide or other causes as well a number of former girlfriends. These tragedies are so frequent that there is never enough time

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2. For more information, see the health reports from *Statistics Canada* by Jungwee Park (2021) and Michael Tjepkema, et al. (2019).

between them to fully recover. It seems to be a matter of waiting for the next tragedy to hit.

As for the potlatch in this case, it is our way of saying goodbye and sending that person off to the Spirit World, but despite knowing that they are still an entity, and will be reborn, we are still deeply sad at the loss of the living person.

As in western art, that of First Nations artists often reflects society and the images I create are the reflection of the society I am living in. Some deal with our high death rate, some deal with our place in the modern world and the injustices I see and some are my efforts to raise awareness to our almost-lost older art practices. In this painting below titled *Yukon Reality* illustrates our high death rate. The grave houses go off into the distance seemingly to never end. In the grave houses are photographs of my family members, classmates, buddies and former girlfriends who have all died. I write a bit about each person in the space below the photograph. The grave houses are balanced by the beauty of the Yukon wilderness on the left side. While the social situation for Yukon First Nations has changed dramatically, the land remains majestic.

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Fig. 3. *Yukon Reality*. Acrylic and photographs on board. 1999

After the coming of the white man, we may have started getting immune to the new diseases, but with the establishment of the mission schools large parts of our culture was destroyed. Initially we were still living as semi-nomadic hunter gatherers even after the white people established their infrastructure in the Yukon. Once white people established control, starting with the Klondike Gold Rush of 1898, we First Nations people had restricted say over our lives. Until World War II we continued our wilderness lifestyle and were generally outside of the white man's towns and thus their laws. World War II changed all that when the war caused a worldwide drop in fur prices. It now cost money to go trapping and we could no longer afford to purchase those trade items and foods that we have grown accustomed to for the previous four decades. With the military personnel flooding into the Yukon to build roads, airfields and bases to counter the possible Japanese invasion there also came many labour jobs for First Nations people. This caused a transition from the semi-nomadic hunter-gather lifestyle to one of being workers in the communities. Tellingly, during that time First Nations people were only allowed to work as unskilled workers.<sup>3</sup>

There were severe limitations for First Nations people as the communities were segregated and First Nations people had to live outside the white communities. Often towns had a curfew and First Nations people could be in the town during the day and buy items from the stores and work, but by eight o'clock in the evening, First Nations people had to be outside the town limits. The other area of big change was transportation. There were no real roads connecting the communities before World War II but in order to have an inland supply route to Alaska, in case the Japanese Navy cut off the sea supply route, the Alcan (Alaska-Canadian) Highway was built by the United States Army. Besides this road, now called the Alaska Highway, other highways were built: the Haines Road, Aishihik Road, the Canol (Canadian Oil) Road and a number of smaller roads. Along with this came the infrastructure in the form of buildings and numerous airfields.<sup>4</sup>

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3. Besides my own observations, over years of research I have talked to many Elders who told me many stories of their lives.

4. Given the central place of these events in our lives, this history is considered general knowledge and figures in the contemporary Tutchone oral

Before World War II, First Nations people lived in the wilderness and the government had little means of collecting First Nations children for the mission schools. After the new roads and highways were built and with First Nations families moving to villages just outside the white communities to find employment, it became a lot easier to collect First Nations kids. Before World War II there was one mission school in the Yukon. After World War II four new mission schools were built and First Nations children were collected and sent to these schools. Students who attended these mission schools have told many horror stories about abuse. So, the Second World War is a major cultural dividing line. First Nations people before World War II spoke their language and almost all those born after World War II do not, including myself. Besides language loss there was a loss of lifestyle, spirituality, art and laws. Essentially, we lost our culture. The mission school was a multi-generational event. For example, my grandmother attended the Anglican Mission school in the village of Carcross, my mother attended the Baptist Mission school in Whitehorse and by my time the government was taking over operations of the schools from the churches and I attended the government residential school, Yukon Hall in Whitehorse.

Coupled with the loss of our culture was that we were not deemed equal to Canadians or even considered citizens of Canada. In fact, these changes only happened within my lifetime. For example, it was only after I was born (1959) that First Nations people did not need the permission of the Indian Agent to leave the Yukon Territory. The first time we could vote in a Federal election was 1960; the first time we could vote in a Territorial election was 1961. It was also at this time we could start attending public school, earn a degree and gain any sort of higher profession such as a pilot, a policeman, doctor, etc. 1965 was the first time a Yukon First Nation's person could legally enter a bar to sit down and order a beer. Indeed, my mother spent six weeks in jail because she was arrested for being drunk in 1954.

With the loss of our lifestyle and our culture being ripped away, along with being thought of as generally stupid, lazy, dirty and infe-

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tradition. For a more detailed account, however, see Kenneth S. Coates *Better Left as Indians* (1984).

rior, we found ourselves till the present day with many social problems. This dysfunction has translated into a high death rate. Fortunately, we were able to keep practicing the potlatch. While the government made it illegal to conduct certain potlatches, it was hard for the government and church to end the funeral potlatch. However, Christianity did become part of the potlatch in the form of a preacher performing a Christian service as one part of the ceremonies.

There are two moieties, or clans, in the Yukon, the Wolf and the Crow or their equivalents. When a person dies, let's say from the Wolf clan, the Wolf people arrange the potlatch, but they do not do the work involved in the functioning of the potlatch. The Wolf people hire the Crow people to do the work. This work includes hunting, gathering, preparation and serving of the food, digging the grave and building the fence or grave house. The Wolf people decide when and where the potlatch and burial will take place. On the day of the potlatch people gather in the hall or potlatch house and a service is held, often with a Christian minister leading it. After the service the coffin in procession is taken to the grave yard and the person is buried. This procession is often led by a drummer who is singing a goodbye song. Prayers are said and the coffin is lowered into the ground and everybody says their goodbyes.

People return to the Potlatch House after the burial for the meal and the money collection. This is the last meal with the deceased person. One meal is burnt and when it turns to smoke it enters the Spirit World and becomes the meal for the deceased person. At the meal the Wolf people contribute gifts and money to the family and the money is placed in a large bowl. The person who contributes has their name called out and the amount; this is followed by applause. Once all the money is gathered it is counted up and announced to the gathering. The Wolf people use that money to cover the expenses of the potlatch, like the coffin and the rental fee for the hall, if there is one. Any food that was purchased is paid for. The Crow workers are paid for their work. Their name is announced and they go up to receive their pay, often having to do a bit of a dance or jig. This 'dance,' which is the person

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humorously having to 'work' for their money is often applauded cheerfully by the people in the hall. (I have to admit, being a bit shy of my dancing skills, I often dance across the floor to the person giving out money very fast, to the amazement and amusement of the people in the hall.) Once all the Crow workers and expenses are paid, people who travelled from far away are given money to help with their costs. Gifts are also dispensed: blankets, tools, clothing, etc. Once all the money is given out the potlatch bowl is turned upside down to indicate that all the money collected has been paid out. With this system a person can die with no money and yet have a potlatch and a decent funeral and burial. All concerns are handled by their clan.

Below is my work depicting one such precession at the village of Champagne in the Yukon. I did a two minute sketch of the scene and later made the painting from the sketch. I was attending the potlatch of one of my relatives.

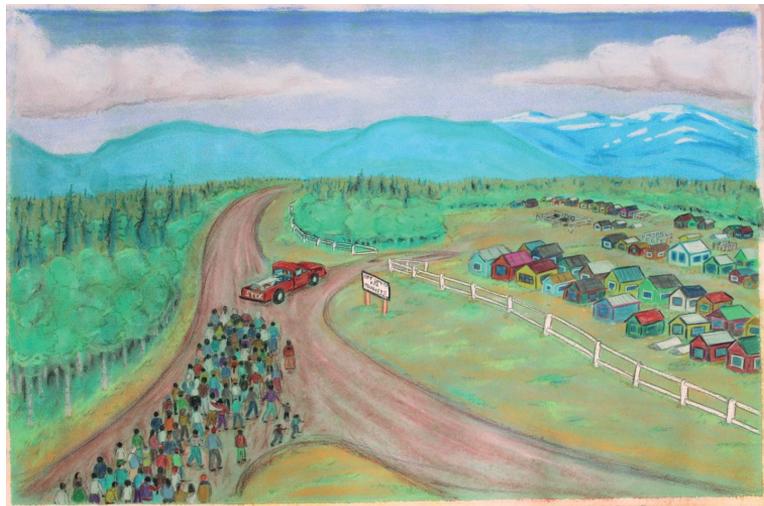


Fig. 4. *Yet Another family Reunion*. Pastel on paper. 2001.

Besides attending potlatches, I have performed some of these roles, as a Wolf for a Wolf potlatch, I have been an organizer, announcer, and a witness to dressing of the body. For the Crow-organized potlatch, I have been a worker such as a grave digger and pall bearer.

Below are a few photographs of my late brother Kevin's potlatch in 2003. First was the meal in the Kwanlin Dun First Nation's Potlatch House, Nàkwät'à Kú, in Whitehorse, Yukon. This was arranged by the Wolf clan. Everybody attended but Crow clan members were hired to do the work.



Fig. 5. The meal in the Kwanlin Dun First Nation's Potlatch House.

Next was the procession to the burial site at Steamboatlanding, about eighty kilometers from Whitehorse. The coffin was carried to the burial site. Note the drummer and Elder in front of the procession.



Fig. 6. The procession to the burial site at Steamboatlanding.

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The next photograph is a year later and this potlatch is called the headstone potlatch. This is when the headstone is placed at the grave. Note the grave house behind the people which is from an earlier burial and two earlier graves of my older brother and stepfather in the front. A fence is planned to be placed around the three graves.



Fig. 6. The head stone potlatch

Traditionally children were not permitted at potlatches because the person who has died may not want to go on the year journey to the Spirit World. They will wait to be reborn. They may try and push the spirit out of a nearby child's body and take over that body. The spirit of a child is not firmly secure in the body until about six years old, or even later. The spirit of the person who is reborn will often remember their previous life and at about 6 years old they are now more in this world and forget their previous life. This is what my grandmother Annie Ned saw in me when I was four or five years old. I was acting like her previous husband. Elders can see these traits of deceased people in young children and like I said sometime the children remember parts of their past life and there are many stories illustrating this. When my daughter was four years old she announced to me: "I died a long time ago!" seemingly remembering a past life.

The journey to the Spirit World takes a year and for that first year a tent is placed over the grave. I am not sure why it takes this long, although it may be related to our human yearly-round, our

own yearly cycle that takes a year to return to where we were before, such as starting the spring at a fish camp and spending the summer there and, as the seasons pass, we depart, spending the fall at hunting camps, the winter at our winter camp and then, in the spring, returning to the fish camp. And thus it is related to our human life style of being born, living, growing old and dying and later starting again being reborn, just like the yearly cycle. The person has things they will need on their journey to the Spirit World, such as extra moccasins, tea pots and cups, blankets, rifles, etc. These are placed in the tent and after the year in the grave house. They may include the person's personal items, such as a young girl's doll or maybe a carved death mask. While many of our past rituals and meanings have been lost, it seems that the mask was made for important people upon their death. I have not learned why, only that it was sometimes done. In older times a button blanket was placed over the coffin. After the one year the person is fully in the Spirit World. The tent is then replaced with either a fence around the grave or a 'grave house'/'spirit house'. Before the coming of white people the items the person needed for their journey to the Spirit World was placed in the tent and later in the fenced area or the grave house but after white people showed up they started stealing the items! So now items are placed in the casket with the deceased person and buried making it impossible for white people to steal any grave items.

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INDIAN GRAVES, WHITEHORSE, YUKON.

Fig. 7. Postcard from Ukjese van Kampen collection

Above is one of the earlier postcards of our grave yards. They were tourist attractions until in the mid to late 1970s, when the Yukon Indian Women's Council began protesting that our cemeteries were not meant for that purpose. This is just one of the examples of how white people thought themselves superior to us and that 'we' belonged to 'them' and as a result could do as they pleased when it concerned us. By 1978, they were no longer listed as tourist attractions.

Once the person is in the Spirit World they can be reborn. We are reborn as humans and not, like in some beliefs, as an animal. Animals go to their animal Spirit World. There are cases where there are cross overs, but that is beyond the scope of this article. We can be reborn as either male or female but we mostly are reborn as our previous sex. We are always reborn into our clan. I will give an example of this to illustrate.

We always follow our mother's clan and since my mother is Wolf clan, I am Wolf clan. As I had mentioned earlier, my great grandmother Annie Ned, named me Ukjese and from that point on I was acknowledged as the former Ukjese by my family. I did not have to take on the role of her husband as that was only symbolic; I was starting life and she was now an Elder. However, she would live for another thirty years, past the age of one hundred! Annie Ned was Crow clan and a Crow can only marry a Wolf. So her former husband Ukjese belonged to the Wolf Clan.

The story deepens. The earlier Ukjese, the one who discovered the fishing camp of Klukshu before the coming of the white man, was also Wolf. Since he discovered Klukshu, Klukshu belonged to the Wolf people and Crow people needed permission from the Wolf people to fish there. This same Ukjese later committed a crime against the Crow people and he had to pay retribution to the Crow people. He handed Klukshu over to the Crow people as payment. So now Klukshu belongs to the Crow people and the Wolf people must have permission from a Crow person to fish there. When I married my Dutch wife, she automatically was designated as a member of the Crow clan; I now have to ask my Dutch wife permission to fish at Klukshu!

The clan system is a major part of our lives. The members of our clan are like family and so if you go to a new area, you will always

have connections there in the form of your clan members. While we lost a great deal of our culture, our clan system and potlatches have survived the transition from our old semi-nomadic hunter-gather lifestyle to life in the twenty-first century.

Not all is bleak. Yukon First Nations are now politically very powerful, and each First Nation that has signed the Land Claims Agreements with the Canadian government has equivalent power to the territorial government. This success has come at the cost of our heritage and culture. In order to survive in the past we had to be highly adaptable to changing situations and Yukon First Nations rapidly and successfully adopted the political, capitalistic and bureaucratic life styles. This type of society puts art and culture on the back burner. Until we return to focusing on our heritage and culture we will have a sense of lost identity. This results in low self-esteem which leads to social problems and high death rate. One of few remnants of our past culture is the remaining potlatch rituals we still have because of the high death rates that have made the continued practice essential. Can there be a balance between the two? I do not know. But I feel that I would lose my artistic self if I became more involved in the politics of the Yukon; therefore I follow a more artistic path and spend a lot of my time in other areas such as Europe and Japan.

This artistic path requires me to have a good understanding of our past traditions and with at least a strong potlatch and dance tradition; I feel I still have something from the old that I can hang on to. I did not need to research these aspects of my culture. The potlatch is a Wolf-Crow event and being part of the ritual from young has given me the knowledge of the Wolf-Crow system and thus an understanding of all the art related to this. The potlatch is also a link to our spiritual beliefs and world views. Again there is a link to the artistic research. So having a knowledge allows me to more fine tune the focus of my research and exploration into the other art forms we did in the past. Even having to attend many potlatches also made me examine why we have so many potlatches, which, as I mentioned, is from our abnormally high death rate. This prompted me to examine this issue and this has also resulted in me producing various series of paintings, photographs and performance art that is making

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statements about my people's social situation. These resulting works of various arts are part of a bigger 'story-telling' approach of the situation of my people.

*Abstract:* In Canada, Yukon First Nations are politically powerful and, when viewed by an outsider, everything appears to be progressing well. But the adoption of the Western political model has a downside. We have generally sacrificed our culture for that political power. The loss of our culture has resulted in many social problems and this essay discusses what has resulted from those problems, specifically our high death rate. Ironically, our death ritual, the Potlatch, is one of the strongest surviving cultural traditions we still exercise, while our languages, laws, art, lifestyle, and spirituality are almost all forgotten.

*Bio:* Dr. Ukjese van Kampen is from the Wolf Clan, Northern Tutchone people in the Yukon Territory in northern Canada. Besides his Native American ancestry he can trace links to his European heritage back to the MacPhail Clan in Scotland and has in-law links to the Netherlands. Dr. van Kampen has a BFA, MA and a PhD from Leiden University in the Netherlands and a second PhD with the University of Lapland in Finland. Dr. van Kampen has long been fascinated with Native Americans and has focused much of his research on Yukon First Nations art, costume, and history and is often lecturing at conferences and universities worldwide on those subjects. He has presented and/or had art exhibitions in Japan, Mexico, United States, the Netherlands, Finland, Poland, Canada and many other locations as well as he is quite involved with universities in the Czech Republic. His most recent writings have been included in *Původní obyvatelé a globalizace* [Indigenous Peoples and Globalization] (Czech Republic: Nakladatelství Pavel Markvart, 2021) and *Kwanlin Dün: DäKwändur Ghà Chàkwadindur—Our Story in Our Words* (Vancouver: Figure 1 Publishing, 2020). Dr. van Kampen is active having art exhibitions, doing performance art, lecturing and curating in Canada, Europe and Japan.

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# RITUAL ROADWAYS AND PLACES OF POWER IN THE CHACO WORLD

(ca. AD 850–1150)

## INTRODUCTION

Around one thousand years ago in what is now the Four Corners region of the US Southwest, the ancestors of Pueblo and Diné (Navajo) people demarcated sacred places in their environment by etching sunbeam-straight, 9-meter-wide roadways into the high desert landscape. Known as Chacoan roads, these monumental avenues have long been of interest to archaeologists studying the so-called Chaco Phenomenon, a period of Indigenous Southwestern history from ca. AD 850–1150 characterized by the regional sharing of monumental architecture and the emergence of institutionalized inequality (Lekson 2006). Southwestern archaeologists have long debated the sociopolitical organization of Chaco Canyon and its world, developing a panoply of models ranging from a Mesoamerican-style *altepetl* city state (Lekson 2015) to a house society (Plog and Heitman 2010) and even newly minted concepts such as “rituality” (Yoffee 2001). Despite the contention over how best to categorize Chaco, most researchers agree that the regional spread of monumental Great Houses and roads and privileged social status of elites were underlain by ritual, ceremony, and cosmology (Judge and Cordell 2006; Plog and Heitman 2010; Sofaer 2007; Stein and Lekson 1992; Van Dyke 2007; Weiner 2015; Yoffee 2001)—in short, the focus of this thematic issue of the *Review of International American Studies: Sacred Spaces in North America*.

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The invocation of such concepts as “ritual” and “sacred” to understand this chapter in the precolonial history of the US Southwest raises the larger issue of what exactly is meant by these terms—especially in light of critiques of the secularist baggage frequently accompanying discussions of ritual and religion in contemporary North American archaeology (Deloria, Jr. 2003; Fowles 2013; Pauketat 2013). If, as most archaeologists agree, Chacoan history is inseparable from issues of ritual, we must develop an understanding of sacred spaces in the Chaco World that is informed by the ontologies of descendant Southwestern Indigenous people in dialogue with anthropological theory. Towards this end, my article engages the question of what constituted a sacred space in the Chaco World through the vantage offered by Chacoan roads, the places they lead, and the entities of land, water, and the sky they engage.

In this paper, I argue that Chacoan roads were constructed to establish connections with places and entities of *power*—a concept derived from the worldviews of Indigenous peoples in the US Southwest and across North America—that were recognized as such through the inherent affordances of particular places on the landscape. I begin with a brief review of the archaeology of Chacoan society and then develop the notion of *power* as a more culturally informed way of conceptualizing the “sacred” in the Indigenous Americas. Next, I present three case studies of recently documented sites located along Chacoan roads, with attention to the powerful qualities of these locales: naturally occurring “roadways” in the form of topographic breaks and parallel rows of rock outcrops, visual alignments between roads and prominent landforms, the pooling of water on exposed desert bedrock, fossilized traces of past watery eras, and the physical remnants of ancestral dwellings. While I argue (following Indigenous theorists) that power was inherently available to Chacoans in the places that roads led, specific human practices were necessary to leverage that potency. As such, in the following discussion I briefly review evidence for practices of ritual racing and making offerings of broken pottery on Chacoan roads. I close by reflecting on the larger point that the sacred powers inherent in the places demarcated by Chacoan roads should be understood as fundamental actors in the story of how and why the unequal, regional-scale society focused on Chaco Canyon developed, a relational

understanding of the world that is still central to Indigenous North American activist movements to protect sacred lands and waters.

#### THE CHACO WORLD AND ITS ROADS

Chaco Canyon is an arid sandstone canyon located in the center of the San Juan Basin of what is now northwestern New Mexico. Between ca. AD 850–1200, Ancestral Four Corners people constructed massive structures known as Great Houses in Chaco and throughout a 100,000 square-kilometer area of the Four Corners region surrounding the Canyon (Fig. 1 & Table 1; Lekson 2006; Kantner and Kintigh 2006). Chaco Canyon and its world are defined by Great Houses, multistoried buildings constructed with core-and-veneer architecture that contain hundreds of rooms and kivas (circular rooms) enclosed within roomblocks. Great Houses are monumental architecture; the thickness of their walls, massive room sizes, towering heights, and their astronomical alignments are built far beyond what is necessary for daily, domestic needs. As such, Great Houses mark the first evidence of widespread monumentality in the Four Corners region. Most Chaco researchers agree that ritual and cosmology played a major role in the design and function of Great Houses (Judge and Cordell 2006; Lekson 2006; Sofaer 2007; Van Dyke 2007).

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Basketmaker III period	AD 500–700
Pueblo I period	AD 700–900
Chaco Era (late Pueblo I through early Pueblo III periods)	AD 850–1150

Table 1. Archaeological time periods referenced in the text.

Along with its monumental architecture, the Chaco Era also marks the first evidence of institutionalized inequality in the Four Corners region. The clearest evidence of Chacoan social inequality comes from burials in Pueblo Bonito accompanied by vast quantities of turquoise and shell, as well as the interment of fourteen members of a matrilineal dynasty in a family crypt over 330

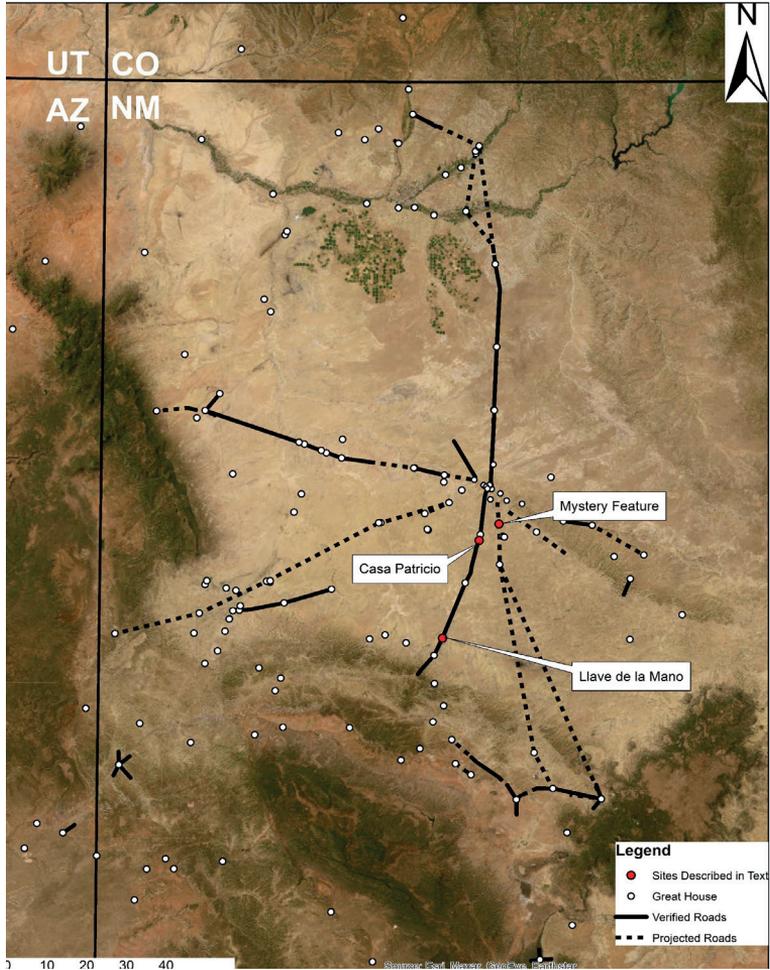


Fig. 1. Map of Chacoan Great Houses and roads in the San Juan Basin, with sites described in the text indicated in red. Note that the distribution of Chacoan Great House and roads extends far beyond the region shown in the map. Map by author.

years (Kennett et al. 2017; Plog and Heitman 2010). In contrast to the monumental Great Houses occupied by elites on the north side of Chaco Canyon, dozens of humble, small residential sites known as Bc sites, or unit pueblos, fill the southern half (Lekson 2006). Skeletal analyses of those interred in Great Houses and small sites revealed that Great House inhabitants were consistently taller and more robust than small house occupants (Akins 1986). The glaring contrast between Great Houses and Bc sites suggests distinct social classes in Chaco Canyon and throughout the Chaco World (Lekson 2015). The privileged social status of Chacoan elites is also underscored by their ability to mobilize labor forces for monumental Great House construction, as well as their control over exchange networks of turquoise, ceramics, high-elevation timbers, and Mesoamerican exotic goods including macaws and cacao (Judge and Cordell 2006; Lekson 2015; Plog and Heitman 2010; Weiner 2015).

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Chacoan Great Houses—along with monumental, 9-meter-wide roadways—are found throughout a 100,000 square-kilometer region surrounding Chaco Canyon. Known as Chaco outliers, there are approximately 150 of these settlements stretching throughout and beyond the San Juan Basin (Fowler and Stein 1992; Kantner and Kintigh 2006). Many Chaco outliers exhibit the same iconic architecture found in the canyon: multistoried Great Houses, often ringed by earthen mounds, with multiple monumental roads and a surrounding community of unit pueblos (Stein and Lekson 1992). The nature of the connection between Chaco Canyon and outliers is poorly understood. Some scholars (e.g., Lekson 2015) argue for a highly integrated regional system, whereas others posit multiple independent communities emulating Chacoan principles (e.g., Kantner and Kintigh 2006).

Monumental roads are a central element defining the Chaco World. Chacoan roads were created by clearing vegetation and topsoil to create 9-meter-wide linear depressed pathways, sometimes lined by berms or low walls, that run in straight trajectories (Marshall 1997; Nials et al. 1987; Roney 1992; Sofaer et al. 1989). Every Great House in Chaco Canyon is associated with at least one monumental avenue, and regional-scale roads up to 57-kilometer-long also emanate from Chaco Canyon to the north, southwest, and west.

Hundreds of shorter roads are also present throughout the 100,000 square-kilometer Chaco World (Roney 1992). The 9-meter width of Chacoan roads far exceeded functional necessity in a culture without pack animals or wheeled vehicles, and the roads' straight trajectories often ignore topographic obstacles (Nials 1983: 6–27), problematizing straightforward associations of roads with efficient travel and the movement of goods. Rather than domestic architecture, most sites along Chacoan roads are shrine-like constructions called *herraduras* (Nials et al. 1987: 13). Some roads connect Great Houses with Great Kivas (circular, semi-subterranean ritual structures), though most lead to *herradura* shrines, prominent features in the landscape, or align to solstice events (Marshall 1997; Roney 1992; Weiner 2023)—all of which might be considered sacred spaces. In the discussion to follow, I present new documentation and interpretation of three Chacoan roads that underscores the relationship of Chacoan monumental avenues to such locales, which I conceptualize throughout this paper as places of *power*.

Chacoan roads are a clear manifestation of the shared “Big Idea” (Stein and Lekson 1992) or “Dream” (Renfrew 2001)—that is, a set of religious beliefs and practices—that many archaeologists identify as centrally implicated in Chaco’s regional influence (Judge and Cordell 2006; Kantner and Kintigh 2006; Plog and Heitman 2010; Sofaer 2007; Van Dyke 2007; Yoffee 2001). The key point is that the Chaco Phenomenon, however we come to define it, was deeply entwined with ritual, and that approaching a fuller understanding of Chaco—and, in a larger sense, histories of the precolonial US Southwest—requires grappling with questions of the sacred, questions that are illuminated by the new documentation of Chacoan roads that I will present below in dialogue with Diné, Pueblo, and other Indigenous North American ontologies.

#### POWER AND “THE SACRED” IN INDIGENOUS NORTH AMERICA

What made (and still makes) the places that Chacoan roads led sacred? Is the concept of “sacred” even applicable in the context of precolonial Indigenous North America? Numerous scholars have asked this question (Deloria, Jr. 2003; Fowles 2013; Nongbri 2013; Pauketat 2013). Here, I propose that “sacred spaces” in the Chaco

World can be better conceptualized through the Indigenous North American concept of *power*, meaning locales, substances, and beings recognized as possessing dense concentrations of efficacious, causal force that can be harnessed and leveraged by humans (Deloria, Jr. 2006; Gunn Allen 1992: 72; Miller 1983; Trafzer 2017; Zedeño 2008). While my discussion draws from the work of Indigenous intellectuals across North America, I focus on examples from the US Southwest given my focus on sacred spaces in Chacoan society.

The concept of sacredness is often considered fundamental to the study of religion and ritual, but, like so many concepts, it is not easily defined and carries the baggage of Western modernity from its scholarly explications in the twentieth century. Early anthropological understandings of the sacred were contrastive, with the term defined through opposition to the everyday. Émile Durkheim, for example, established a paradigmatic, but flawed, vision of the sacred, writing: “The sacred and the profane are always and everywhere conceived by the human intellect as separate genera, as two worlds with nothing in common” (1995: 36). Few, if any, scholars of religion would take such a definition at face value today. Durkheim’s view evinces a segmentation of religion from other realms of society such as politics and economics that Weber identified as a defining aspect of modernity, a view that has remained influential in academic discourse on religion. This disjuncture does not apply in many (or perhaps any) cultural contexts (Barber and Joyce 2017; Fowles 2013; Guthrie 1996; Nongbri 2013), and in fact, the very notion of segmented spheres of society is more representative of an analytical framework than an emic reality.

Many Native peoples of the Americas are apt to remark on the lack of a distinct category of “sacred” (especially as opposed to “profane”) or “religion” in their worldviews (Deloria, Jr. 2003). Instead, to give an example from the US Southwest, “Pueblo philosophy differentiates *the sacred from the sacred*” (Fowles 2013: 102; emphasis in original). This statement points to the fact that many Indigenous North American ontologies past and present recognize the importance of maintaining proper relationships with a diversity of beings, places, and entities beyond the human—rains, water, winds, thunder, landforms, astronomical bodies, spirits—

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as a fundamental responsibility for maintaining life and the balance of the cosmos (Cajete 2000; Deloria, Jr. 2013; Kimmerer 2013; Stonechild 2016; Swenson and Jennings 2018; Wilson 2008). Klara Kelley and Harris Francis explain, for example, that

Navajos, like other Indians, say 'The whole land is sacred.' This statement evokes how soil, moisture, air, and light in human hands become food that in turn become people's flesh and blood. It also evokes the social relations between mortals and the immortal 'Holy People' whose outer forms are landscape features, animals, plants, the atmosphere, and celestial bodies. (1994: 1)

Here, there is no separation between religion and economics (or any other proposed "domain" of society), but rather a world defined by interconnection and relationality grounded in a particular landscape. Thus, recognizing the generative power of elements of the world considered "inanimate" in modernist Western ontologies is the very basis of the practices, philosophies, and architecture conceptualized by non-Native researchers as "religion" (Fowles 2013; Pauketat 2013).

Within these matrices of relationality, however, certain acts, objects, beings, and places are more profoundly implicated in the course of what happens and why—moments, places, utterances, and times of more densely concentrated power, or what might etically be called sacredness or religiosity. Many Native North Americans leverage a concept of *power* to describe what would be considered "ritual/religious" practices and "sacred" spaces/objects from an outsider perspective (Deloria, Jr. 2006; Gunn Allen 1992: 72; Miller 1983; Pauketat 2013; Trafzer 2017; Zedeño 2008; for Andean examples, see Swenson and Jennings 2018). The concept of *Puha* among Numic peoples is a particularly illustrative case in point (Miller 1983), but similar concepts are widely shared throughout the Indigenous Americas. "Almost any tribe can be examined," Vine Deloria, Jr. writes, "and the result will be a bevy of stories about how the people used spiritual powers to live, and these powers are almost always made available to us in a sacred place where time and space do not define the terms of the experience" (2003: xvi-xvii). Paula Gunn Allen further clarifies notions of power from a Laguna Pueblo perspective:

The word *sacred*, like the words *power* and *medicine*, has a very different meaning to tribal people than to members of technological societies [...] [meaning] something that is filled with an intangible but very real power or force, for good or bad [...] Having power means being able to use this extra force without being harmed by it. This is a particular talent that human beings possess to greater or lesser degree, and medicine is a term used for the personal force through which one possesses power. Medicine is powerful in itself, but its power can be used only by certain persons, under certain conditions, and for certain purposes. (Gunn Allen 1992: 72)

Questions about sacred spaces in Indigenous American contexts—including the monumental roads of Chacoan society—are therefore entwined with concepts of power and the ways by which humans can engage it.

Gunn Allen's statement on power underscores that while power is something infused in the landscape, certain *practices* are required for knowledgeable humans to access and leverage it. To give a culturally specific example, the Diné speak of *binahagha'* ("moving about ceremonially") in referring to the ways human beings can engage and harness power (Frisbie 1987: xxiii). Through visiting locales where the power of the Holy People (deities, whose outer forms are landforms, waters, animals, celestial bodies, and other elements) is concentrated and performing specific prayers and other ritual acts, Diné *hataááhii* (ceremonialists) can leverage the Holy People's power towards restoring *hózhó*, a state of balance, beauty, order, and happiness. Similarly, Pueblos speak of "doings" that "are distinguished from other practices by the extent to which they mark and make explicit the mutual entanglement of people, things, and cosmos" (Fowles 2013: 102; emphasis in original). The medicine bundles of Indigenous peoples across North America, and especially among the Great Plains, are another particularly illustrative example of power (Frisbie 1987; Pauketat 2013; Zedeño 2008). Bundles are infused with potency that can be increased, lost, or transferred through different practices and actions; opening a bundle, for example, requires proper knowledge and protocol, as to open a bundle is to unleash its awesome power (Chamberlain 1982: 45; Zedeño 2008: 368). Thus, Diné *binahagha'*, Pueblo doings, and Plains medicine bundle-related practices can justifiably be described as religious or "sacred," but not in the sense of radically set-

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apart practices of modern Western religion. While recognizing the potential semantic pitfalls, I nevertheless employ the term sacred at times throughout this paper in keeping with the theme of this journal's special issue and in recognition of the general reconcilability of Indigenous North American notions of power with a non-Durkheimian concept of the sacred.

The forgoing discussion raises the challenging question of *why* particular places are recognized as loci of power to Indigenous American peoples and, in this specific case, the builders of and travelers along Chacoan roads. Undoubtedly, a wide variety of aspects combine to make a place powerful. Some sacred spaces may be locales where important events occurred in the deep mythic past. Such a place may become materially marked with shrines, architecture, and other evidence of human elaboration at a later time even if there is no physical manifestation of the initial occurrence that brought the locale importance. On the other hand, many Indigenous places of power are recognized as such given the affordances naturally occurring in particular landscapes (Pauketat 2013). By affordances, I mean the inherent, sensory aspects of a particular environment, space, or substance which affectively impact those who experience them and, as such, are implicated in the course of history (Hamilakis 2014; Knappett 2004; Pauketat 2013). Thus, many Native North American places of power are natural features with striking visual, olfactory, tactile, auditory, gustatory, and affective dimensions, such as springs, lakes, mountains, rocks, buttes, caves, waterfalls, and canyons, or locations where specific animals, plants, or minerals are present (Deloria, Jr. 2003; Cajete 1999: 204; Nabokov 2006).

Especially salient sacred places to peoples of the US Southwest are prominent mountains in each of the cardinal directions that define a group's traditional homeland (Matthews 1994: 78-79; Ortiz 1969: 19). Mountains in Southwest offer distinctive biomes that contrast with the sparsely vegetated desert landscapes below and afford characteristic sensory experiences: the songs of different birds, envelopment of towering pine trees and thicker underbrush, the rushing sounds of creeks and streams, lingering snow and ice, and cooler temperatures. Mountain environments are home to animals, plants, and minerals that play a variety of crucial

roles in Diné and Pueblo societies as food, medicine, and for ritual purposes (Anscheutz and Merlan 2007; Kelley and Francis 1994; Parsons 1996: 173; Reichard 1977). Mountains are also the settings of events that unfolded in the deep mythic times of creation, primordial eras that are infused with power (Matthews 1994; Ortiz 1969). Thus, the natural abundance and sensory impacts of mountains, along with the histories of what happened on them in the deep past, mark them as places of power.

But perhaps most importantly in the arid US Southwest, mountains are strongly connected to water—a highly valued and scarce resource crucial to the sustenance of life, and the focus of much Indigenous Southwestern ceremonialism (Ortiz 1969; Parsons 1996: 227–228; Swentzell 1990: 6; Reichard 1977: 609). As in any environment, mountain peaks in the Southwest alter the movement of winds, causing clouds to condense above their summits. Additionally, the headwaters of the rivers that nourish villages in the valleys and basins of the Southwest originate in the mountains. It is clear to see how mountains are rightfully perceived as water-generators and, as such, places of great power. In the section that follows, I present multiple examples of water-related and other striking landscape affordances that were intentionally incorporated along Chacoan roads as, I argue, places of power.

Tangible traces of past eras are another element that afford places sacredness for Indigenous societies in the US Southwest. Gregory Cajete of Santa Clara Pueblo explains that: “Knowing the origins of their people, their place, and the all-important things the place [where they dwell] contains is considered essential orientation for a tribal person. A people’s origin story maps and integrates the key relationships with all aspects of the landscape” (1999: 74–75). Thus, the physical places associated with narratives of creation, ancestors, and the past are among the preeminent sacred places for many Native Americans, and certainly for Pueblo and Diné people (Basso 1996; Kelley and Francis 1994; Nabokov 2006; Ortiz 1969). Among Pueblo people, for example, origin stories describe the migrations of ancestors following emergence in which people stopped for a time at various locations throughout the landscape to learn important lessons. Eventually, when the time was right,

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the founding ancestors of a group arrived at the locations of their current villages, frequently understood as the “center place” (Duwe and Preucel, 2019; Ferguson and Colwell-Chanthapohn 2006; Ortiz 1969). Pueblo and other Indigenous Southwestern peoples visit ancestral villages, which outsiders would call archaeological sites, as sacred places to connect with their ancestors and gain wisdom about how to live properly (Ferguson and Colwell-Chanthapohn 2006). Thus, locations recognized as “ruins” by archaeologists are often valued, or avoided, as places of power by descendants of the inhabitants of the Chaco World.

#### CHACOAN ROADS: THREE CASE STUDIES

In the section that follows, I present three examples of locations along Chacoan roads that I suggest constituted places of power. These places were recognized as sacred, I argue, because they afforded striking relationships between the humans who visited them, water, landforms, and distant eras of the past. The first two examples— Casa Patricio and Llave de la Mano—come from Chaco’s South Road, and the third—Mystery Feature—is located on Chaco’s Southeast Road.

#### THE CHACO SOUTH ROAD: OVERVIEW

The Chaco South Road is one of three regional-scale roads in the Chaco World, connecting Chaco Canyon with the Dutton Plateau, a vertically prominent, laterally extensive landform that defines the southern edge of the San Juan Basin (Figure 1; Nials et al. 1987: 18–19). The road emanates from South Gap, a break in the sandstone mesas that form Chaco Canyon, and extends 57-kilometers southwest across the dry, treeless expanses of the San Juan Basin. It connects three Great Houses, numerous herradura shrines, and other ritual structures and villages that pre-date the Chaco Era before terminating at a shrine, the Ko’ Pavi Herradura. The Ko’ Pavi Herradura at the road’s terminus is positioned to offer a dramatic view of Hosta Butte (Ak’i Dah Nást’ání in Diné bizaad), a soaring butte atop the Dutton Plateau whose trapezoidal profile stands prominently on the southern skyline of the San Juan Basin (Figure 2; Nials et al. 1987, 32–51). Many researchers identify the South Road as a ritual corridor constructed to connect Chaco

Canyon with Hosta Butte, perhaps in cosmographic balance with the 50-kilometer North Road that links Chaco with the striking, multicolored badlands of Kutz Canyon (Marshall 1997; Sofaer et al. 1989; Van Dyke 2007).

There is good evidence that Hosta Butte was considered a place of power in the Chaco Era. Indeed, the very presence of the monumental South Road terminating at a shrine that clearly addresses Hosta Butte speaks to the butte's significance. Rainclouds cluster around the Dutton Plateau and Hosta Butte as elevated landforms defining the edge of a basin, and their heights also offer thick tree strands and habitats for deer, mountain lions, and other animals. Ak'i Dah Nást'ání (Hosta Butte) is a sacred mountain of Diné people who live in the Chaco region today and maintain various degrees of cultural connection with the Chaco Era, including performing ceremonial practices that originated in Chacoan times (Warburton and Begay 2005). In Diné traditional history, following the establishment of the Fifth World (this current one we inhabit), the deities First Man and First Woman created Ak'i Dah Nást'ání, endowing it with the deities Mirage Stone Boy, Carnelian Girl, and Corn Ripener, along with "mirage stone" (banded calcareous aragonite) and male rain (Matthews 1994: 79). Important events in the histories of numerous Diné ceremonies including the Nightway, Blessingway, Red Antway, and Gun Shooter Red Anyway also occurred on the butte (Linford 2000: 218–219).

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Fig. 2. View of Hosta Butte (Ak'i Dah Nást'ání) and the Dutton Plateau as seen from the southern San Juan Basin. Note, this is *not* the view from the Ko' Pavi Herradura at the terminus of the Chaco South Road. Photo by author.

Heading south from Chaco Canyon on the South Road, the first major architectural structure is Casa Patricio (LA 34208), a Great Kiva (circular, semi-subterranean ritual gathering place) dating to ca. AD 800–950 (Figure 3; Nials et al. 1987: 50–51). Casa Patricio is located at the base of a low butte (Corral Gap Butte), which—intriguingly—the South Road passes directly over the top of, running through a narrow break in the caprock (Figure 4). Along the rim of a badlands exposure approximately 150 m south of Casa Patricio is LA 34209, a locus of intensive activity in the Pueblo I and early Pueblo II periods (ca. AD 800–950) that resulted in the deposition of an “abnormally dense sherd scatter” of hundreds of ceramics amidst lithic debris, ground stone, upright slab hearts, burned spalls, and architectural rubble—likely an area of ritual feasting (Figure 5; Stein 1983: 8–14). The construction of the Casa Patricio Great Kiva at the base of Corral Gap Butte, the nearby presence of a feasting area, and the decision of the Chacoan roadbuilders to thread the road directly across the top of the butte suggest this location was long recognized as a place of power, likely even before the South Road was formally constructed—but why?



Fig. 3. Ground view of the Casa Patricio Great Kiva, visible as a circular depression in the center of the image. Corral Gap Butte (over which the Chaco South Road passes) is visible behind the Great Kiva. Photo by author.

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### Casa Patricio and LA 34209

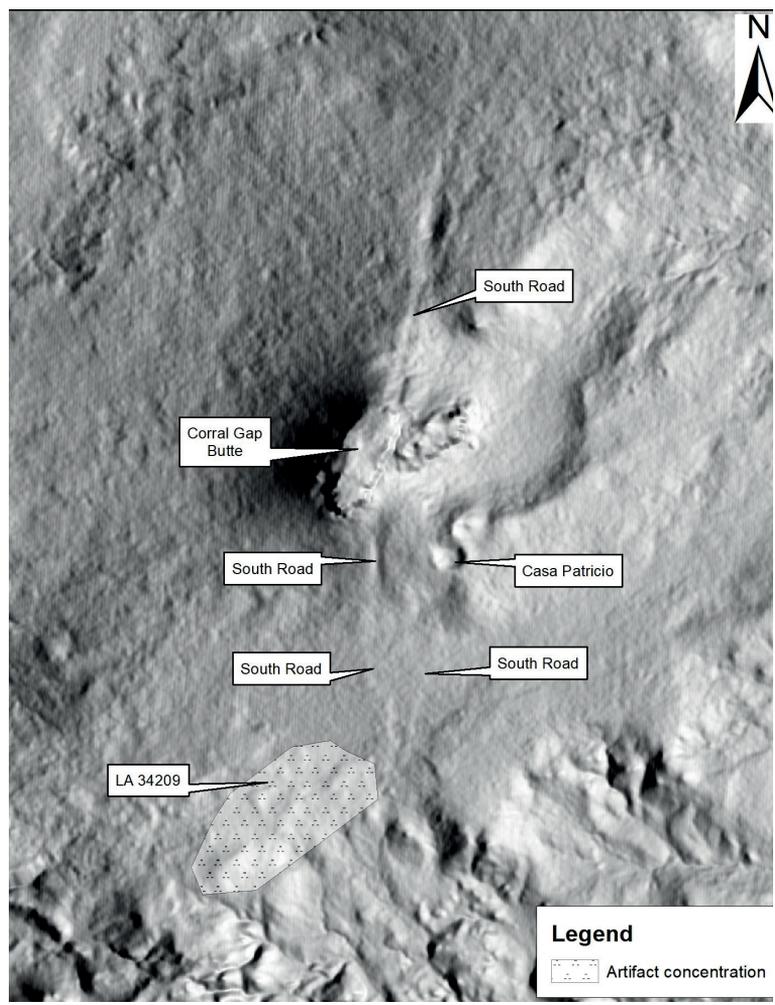


Fig. 4. LiDAR digital elevation model showing the Chaco South Road passing directly over the top of Corral Gap Butte adjacent to Casa Patricio Great Kiva. Map by author.



Fig. 5. Ground view of upright slabs and a dense artifact scatter at LA 34209. Photo by author.

In 2022, I performed an archaeological survey and new mapping of the South Road where it crosses over Corral Gap Butte adjacent to Casa Patricio. My fieldwork revealed that the butte's caprock gap fortuitously frames two highly significant landforms in the San Juan Basin. To the north, the gap perfectly frames Red Mountain (Dził Lichíí' in Diné bizaad), a prominent small mountain just outside the southern walls of Chaco Canyon (Figure 6). One element of Red Mountain that marks it as a place of power are the large quantities of argillite—a stone with a distinctive pale red hue from which the Chacoans crafted hundreds of pendants, effigies, and other ornaments (Mathien 1997: 1120–1207)—that outcrop along its flanks. Additionally, Red Mountain is the setting of foundational events in Diné ceremonial histories of the Eagle Way and Wind Way (Newcomb 1940; Linford 2000: 250). Looking south, the gap frames Hosta Butte (Ak'i Dah Nást'ání)—the ultimate destination of the South Road—as it peeks over the southern horizon (Figure 7). I inspected the gap for modification and found no evidence it had been shaped or enlarged. Thus, the gap appears to be a natural aspect of the mesa's geology—that is, an affordance—that auspiciously offers a natural window framing two sacred landforms.

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Fig. 6. View looking south towards Hosta Butte (Ak'i Dah Nást'ání) framed by the natural caprock gap on Corral Gap Butte over which the Chaco South Road passes. Photo by author.



Fig. 7. View looking north towards Red Mountain (Dził Lichíí') framed by the natural cap-rock gap on Corral Gap Butte over which the Chaco South Road passes. Photo by author.

The decision of the designers of the South Road to thread the road alignment through this gap demonstrates a conscious effort to integrate the road corridor with a hierophantic location, and it ensured that those walking along the road were physically brought into direct, embodied engagement with this sacred nexus of three landforms. It is quite possible that the placement of Casa Patricio (a Great Kiva, and therefore ritual gathering space) at the base of this auspicious butte was also informed by the alignment afforded by the gap. In short, the natural alignment between powerful landforms present on Corral Gap Butte would appear to have determined the South Road corridor in this location.

Chaco Era travelers along the South Road would not only have experienced the alignment of the gap in Corral Gap Butte's caprock

with two sacred landforms, but also would have literally walked through the past. Still today, Casa Patricio—a structure predating the Chaco Era by 50–150 years—is connected to the South Road via a spur road and is highly visible as a deep pit in the earth. Additionally, at LA 34209, pre-Chaco Era ceramics are so dense that the ground surface is virtually paved with sherds (Figure 5). Chaco Era road travelers would therefore have been confronted with highly perceptible traces of the past when moving along the South Road at Casa Patricio.

Multiple lines of evidence support the notion that physical traces of the past—what we would call archaeological sites—were valued by Chacoans as places of power, much as contemporary Pueblo and Diné people look upon ancestral sites as loci with great potency. Numerous roads throughout the Chaco World, known as “time bridges” or “umbilicals through time,” connect to sites that were no longer occupied during the road’s main period of use (Fowler and Stein 1992: 115–119; Van Dyke 2003). Chacoan religious leaders also drew on the power of past eras by basing the design of many Chaco Era ritual objects on Basketmaker III period (AD 500–700) prototypes (Webster et al. 2014). Additionally, Chaco Era Great Kivas and earthworks may have been architectural allusions to the Basketmaker III period that sought to link Chacoan authority with the distant past (Van Dyke 2007). Thus, while the power inherent in Corral Gap Butte’s natural framing of Red Mountain and Hosta Butte was likely what drew the Pueblo I builders of Casa Patricio and LA 34209, the eventual transformation of these sites into “ruins”—tangible traces of the pre-Chacoan past—would have further lent the locale power during the Chaco Era.

#### LLAVE DE LA MANO COMPLEX ON THE SOUTH ROAD

Near the southern terminus of the South Road, 26 km south of Casa Patricio, the road articulates with another place of power that was marked with the construction of an earthen platform and multiple herradura shrines, known as the Llave de la Mano Complex (LA 38109 & 38110) (Figure 8; Nials et al. 1987: 38–39, 176–181). Ceramics on the Llave de la Mano Platform show distinct periods of use in the Basketmaker III period and the Chaco Era, the later range of which I interpret as Chaco Era visitation to a con-

struction built centuries prior. Thus, the Llave de la Mano Platform, like the Casa Patricio Great Kiva, appears to predate the major formalization of the South Road (Weiner 2023 : 248–255). Notably, Llave de la Mano is the last location moving south along the South Road from which Hosta Butte—the South Road’s final destination—is visible. This visual affordance is likely one of the reasons why the Llave de la Mano Complex was constructed where it was. Hosta Butte, as a high point on the Dutton Plateau, is a rain-generator, and as such may have been a place of making offerings for rain (cf. Weiner and Kelley 2021). Furthermore, the summer thunderstorms of the North American monsoon—the primary moisture source for the Chaco World—are carried by south/southwesterly winds that ferry moisture northward from an origin in the Gulf of California (Becker 2021). Thus, it is reasonable to propose that the Chacoans were particularly interested in rains arriving from the south/southwest, and that Hosta Butte, as the prominent high point on the southern horizon of the San Juan Basin, was seen as centrally implicated in the arrival of rains from the south.

Another landscape affordance that appears to have manifested the power of the Llave de la Mano locale is a naturally occurring corridor formed by two parallel rows of circular sandstone outcrops (Figures 8 and 9). The South Road is clearly visible as an excavated linear 9-meter-wide swale as it approaches the Llave de la Mano Complex from both the north and south, yet as the road passes alongside the platform, its corridor merges with the naturally occurring “road” formed by the outcrops. The circular shapes and parallel linear distribution of the outcrops are striking in that they appear to be anthropogenic, but are not (Figure 9). It is conceivable that Chaco Era road travelers interpreted the outcrops as traces of a road constructed in a distant past era, especially since the only structural sites near the Llave de la Mano Complex date to the Basketmaker III period, predating the Chaco Era by multiple centuries (Nials et al. 1987, 38–39; Weiner 2023: 237–262). Regardless, the road’s designers made a clear choice to thread the South Road through the outcrop-framed corridor—much like the decision to pass the road directly over the Corral Gap Butte—presumably in recognition of the power inherent in the naturally occurring road present at the last location from which Hosta Butte is visible to those heading south along the South Road corridor.

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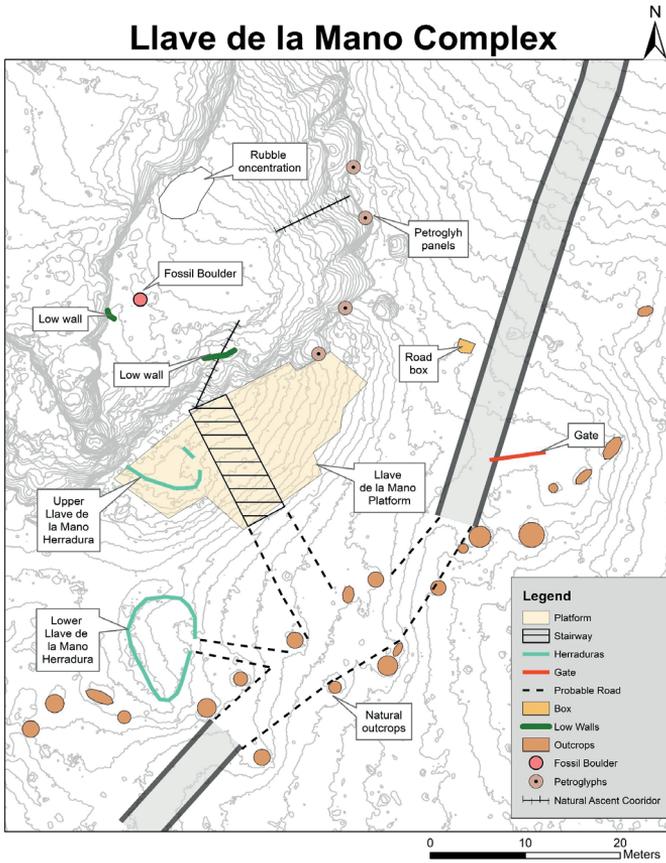


Fig. 8. Site map of the Llave de la Mano Complex. Map by author.



Fig. 9. Example of one of the circular sandstone outcrops that form a natural corridor through which the Chaco South Road passes at the Llave de la Mano Complex. Photo by author.

Short spurs leave the main South Road alignment, passing between the outcrops (Figure 8). One articulates with the Lower Llave de la Mano Herradura shrine, and the other ascends the earthen platform via a staircase, where a second, smaller herradura constructed of purple-hued sandstone is present. The natural outcropping of this visually striking purple sandstone in the vicinity of the Llave de la Mano Complex was likely another element that indexed this locale as a place of power. From the top of the earthen platform, a route continues up the cliffs to a natural terrace above, where a small sandstone boulder is conspicuously situated on the otherwise clear bench (Figures 8 and 10). While ultimately originating from the adjacent cliff face, the boulder has clearly been placed in its current location. This boulder's placement on the bench above the earthen platform suggests it may have been another powerful component of the Llave de la Mano Complex, access to which would have been spatially and visually restricted from those passing along the road corridor below.

This unassuming sandstone boulder, upon closer inspection, is seen to be filled with the fossilized impressions of a distant watery era (Figure 10): fragments of shells and cracked mud patterns lithified from shallow beach deposits of the Western Interior Seaway of the Late Cretaceous and early Paleocene epochs (100.5–66 Ma). The elites of Chaco Canyon's Great Houses acquired hundreds of shells from the Gulf of California and Pacific Coast (Mathien 2003: 129–130), some of which were crafted into jewelry, and fossilized shells were also cached in Great House rooms (Agostini and Notterpek 2020). Shells, whether fossilized or of recent origin, were likely valued by the Chacoan for their associations with water (Weiner 2015: 227–230)—and the presence of fossilized watery traces in the sandstone cliffs adjacent to the Llave de la Mano Complex, like the outcrop-framed corridor and final fleeting view of Hosta Butte, afforded power to the locale. Pueblo and Diné oral histories recall previous worlds of water inhabited by their ancestors prior to their eventual emergence into the present world (Cushing 1966: 13; Matthews 1994: 63–64), and fossils like those of the Llave de la Mano boulder may have connected Chaco Era road travelers with the powers inherent in archaic times.

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Like at Casa Patricio, the presence of numerous traces of the past at Llave de la Mano—whether Basketmaker III period structures or the fossilized traces of ancient seashores—also afforded the South Road power during the Chaco Era.



Fig. 10. Fossilized mud impressions in the sandstone boulder on the embayment bench above the Llave de la Mano platform. Photo by author.

The Llave de la Mano pottery assemblage is composed of mixed Basketmaker III and Chaco Era ceramics, suggesting that later travelers along the road deposited ceramics—likely as a form of offering<sup>1</sup>—at an earlier site. Additionally, various lines of evidence (summarized in Weiner 2023: 237–262) suggest the portion of the road connecting Llave de la Mano and the Kin Ya'a Great House—and perhaps the entire South Road corridor—was first

1. Pottery sherds are nearly ubiquitous across the archaeological landscapes of the US Southwest. While in many cases these ceramic fragments are broken wares discarded in middens, there are also many contexts in which small numbers of ceramic sherds are found in association with religious architecture far removed from living areas or middens (such as Llave de la Mano). Many Southwestern archaeologists identify sherds in the latter contexts as intentionally deposited offerings, often drawing connections with practices of offering ceramic sherds among descendant Pueblo cultures (Ortiz 1969: 54; Toll 2001; Walker and Berryman 2022).

constructed in the Basketmaker III period, then enlarged and formalized over centuries of use. Chaco Era travelers on the South Road may therefore have walked along a centuries' old route, at least along the road's final stretch. To move along this ancient corridor was not only to experience ruptures in time by periodically visiting older structures; the very act of walking on the road itself, in less tangible form, was a continuation of an ongoing, multicentury act of pilgrimage, procession, and prayer. Finally, it is likely that Hosta Butte, the focal point of the South Road, was associated with ancient mythic events by the Chacoans, much as contemporary Diné people recall the mountain's formation and endowment with spiritual powers in the early days of the Fifth World.

#### MYSTERY FEATURE ON THE SOUTHEAST ROAD

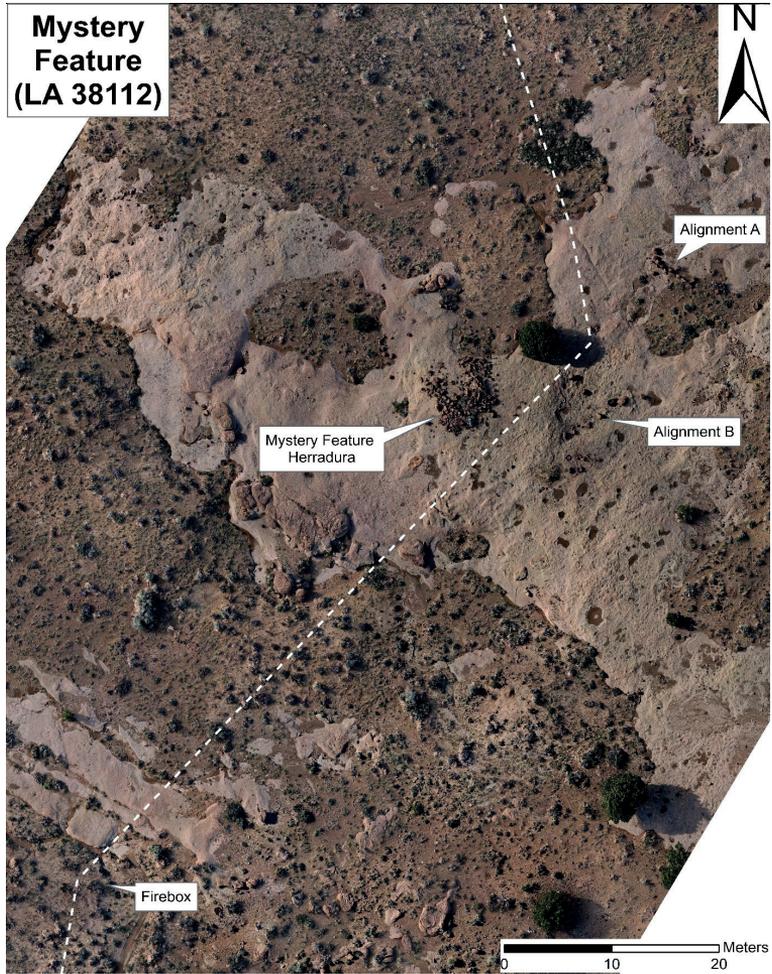
A third example of a place of power along a Chacoan road is the Mystery Feature Complex (LA 38112) located along the Chaco Southeast Road (Nials et al. 1987: 64–65, 187–188; Weiner 2023:423–442). In the 1980s, analysis of aerial photographs revealed a possible roadway emanating southeast from Fajada Gap in Chaco Canyon, known as the Southeast Road (Obenauf 1980). While follow-up ground-truthing surveys failed to identify traces of a constructed roadway along this corridor, archaeologists did encounter a Great House and series of herradura shrines—a feature type highly diagnostic of Chacoan roadways—along the alignment (Nials et al. 1987: 20–21). More recently, LiDAR data has revealed a subtle ground signature consistent with those of known Chacoan roads along the Southeast Road corridor, suggesting it may have been originally formalized as an excavated roadway that has significantly deteriorated over the past millennium (Field 2023).

Approximately 12-kilometers southeast of Fajada Gap and prior to its arrival at the Mystery Feature Complex, the Southeast Road passes through a cluster of Pueblo I (and therefore pre-Chaco Era) households. The presence of pre-Chaco Era constructions along the road alignment, like Casa Patricio and Llave de la Mano, again suggests that Chaco Era road travelers moving along the Southeast Road would have passed through highly perceptible traces of the past in the form of rubble mounds, pottery sherds, and ashy soils. Furthermore, the original Pueblo I people who inhabited these

structures may have been drawn to the locale because of the powerful affordances inherent to the Mystery Feature locale.

The Mystery Feature Complex consists of an herradura and two linear alignments of sandstone blocks situated on a sandstone bedrock exposure, with a firebox located near the southern edge of the exposed bedrock (Figures 11 and 12; Nials et al. 1987: 187–188; Weiner 2023: 423–442). Additional bedrock exposures are present to the north-northwest of Mystery Feature, but they are neither as large nor as flat as the location where Mystery Feature was constructed. The linear alignments of sandstone blocks at the site (labeled “Alignment A” and “Alignment B” in Figure 11) are enigmatic, but may have channeled the movement of ritual processants passing through the Mystery Feature Complex. Fireboxes like the one located at the southern edge of the Mystery Feature Complex are commonly found in association with Chacoan roads and may have been used in rituals of purification, perhaps at night when fire’s heat and light are most salient (Weiner 2023: 758–766).

Two prominent affordances of the Mystery Feature Complex’s setting made it a place of power. First, looking north from the site back towards Chaco Canyon, one is confronted with the striking visual alignment of two landforms—Fajada Butte (Tsé Diyilí in Diné bizaad) and Huerfano Mesa (Dził Ná’oodií in Diné bizaad)—the latter of which appears to sit directly atop Fajada Butte from the vantage of the Mystery Feature Complex (Figure 13). Fajada Butte, home of the famous Sun Dagger petroglyph, is a vertically prominent, isolated sandstone butte located within Chaco Canyon widely recognized as a place of power to the Chacoans (Sofaer 2007; Van Dyke 2007; Weiner and Kelley 2021). Huerfano Mesa is one of the three sacred mountains of the interior of the Diné homeland (along with Ak’i Dah Nást’ání [Hosta Butte]). The mountain is endowed with multitude of powerful associations, substances, and beings, including dark clouds, male rain, “soft goods” (pollens, rugs, hides, and cloth), First Man and First Woman, the Hero Twins, and Goods of Value Boy and Goods of Value Girl (Linford 2000: 219; Matthews 1994: 79). The mesa is also the setting of foundational events in the Diné origin story, as well as the first girl’s puberty ceremony (*kinaaldá*) (Matthews 1994: 106; Reichard 1977: 11).



*Sacred Spaces  
In North America*

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Fig. 11. Drone aerial photograph showing the features at Mystery Feature Complex, with the movement pattern suggested by the arrangement of constructed features marked. Map by author.



Fig. 12. Ground view of the Mystery Feature Herradura. Photo by author.



Fig. 13. View of Huerfano Mesa (Dził Ná'oodiñi) situated directly above Fajada Butte (Tsé Diyili) on the northern horizon as viewed from Mystery Feature. Photo by author.

Second, the bedrock upon which Mystery Feature is constructed offers a powerful affordance related to water: namely, the sandstone exposure contains various natural shallow basins, which, after rain, fill with water (Figures 14 and 15). I visited the site shortly after a heavy July rainfall, and the impression of numerous glimmering pools scattered across the sandstone surface was an unforgettable experience. While the fact water pools in bedrock basins is not particularly noteworthy per se, the sandstone exposure atop which Mystery Feature is constructed is anomalous within the surrounding terrain, suggesting an intentional decision to construct the shrine complex atop this bedrock exposure where rain would pool. It is also noteworthy that the Southeast Road emanates from Fajada Gap in Chaco Canyon, a break in the sandstone mesas forming the south side of the canyon through which northward-moving rainclouds—such as those of the summer monsoon—are funneled and trapped, the result being that more rain falls in the gap and adjacent to Fajada Butte than elsewhere in Chaco (Vivian et al. 2006: 148–149; Weiner and Kelley 2021: 20). Thus, the Southeast Road is also a “road” along which rainclouds arrive to Chaco Canyon, further underscoring the power of a shrine-ornamented bedrock exposure along this corridor where water pools after rain.

#### DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

In the preceding section, I outlined some of the landscape affordances evidenced at prominent locales along Chacoan roads that I suggest were recognized as places of power. At a fundamental level, such locales can be understood as *inherently* powerful or sacred given their pre-given characteristics: specifically, the convergences they afforded between landforms, water, fossils, ruins, and the emotions, memories, and subjectivities of road travelers. Chacoan road designers identified the elements of power naturally present in the landscapes of Casa Patricio, Llave de la Mano, and Mystery Feature and further embellished their preexisting power through the construction of roads, herraduras, a Great Kiva, earthen platform, and other architectural features. In this way, affordances of the natural landscape in tandem with human constructions combined to make certain places powerful/sacred in Chacoan society.

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Figs. 14 and 15. Water pooled in natural basins in the bedrock exposure upon which Mystery Feature is located, ground view (above) and over-view from nearby mesatop (below). Photos by author.

Almost certainly, another crucial element in activating the power of places along Chacoan roads was the performance of specific ritual practices, as evidenced widely throughout the Indigenous Americas: for example, *binahagha* (“moving about ceremonially”) for the Diné, “doings” for Pueblo people, or bundle-related practices on the Great Plains. A combination of archaeological evidence, Diné and Pueblo oral traditions, ethnographic data, and cross-cultural analogies suggest some of the likely ritual practices through which the power of places along Chacoan roads was activated and harnessed by people. Ritual running and processions are two of the best supported Chacoan road-related practices, along with making offerings of intentionally broken ceramic sherds—especially water jars—along roadbeds and at herraduras. I have described the evidence for these Chacoan road-related practices and others in detail elsewhere (Weiner 2023: 691–769) and plan to further explore their significance in future publications.

Considering places of power (in the sense of sacred, generative potency) along Chacoan roads has the potential to shed light on questions about how and why some members of Chacoan society acquired authority and prestige. As reviewed above, many researchers agree that the privileged status of Chacoan elites derived in large part from their “ritual” knowledge and skill (Judge and Cordell 2006; Plog and Heitman 2010; Sofaer 2007; Van Dyke 2007; Yoffee 2001). Assessment of the empirical record of Chacoan Great Houses and roads suggests that such ritualism centered on the power of water and rainfall, the in-dwelling potency of prominent landforms, and associations with distant eras of the past (see Van Dyke 2007 and Weiner 2015 for explorations of other elements of Chacoan religious ideology). The acts of creating roadways and performing rituals at places of power along them were likely seen as necessary for maintaining cosmic balance—most tangibly manifest in the Four Corners as reliable rainfall—and these acts appear to have been coopted by particular members of Chacoan society over time. Indeed, in a review of Native North American leaders from the seventeenth through the early twentieth century, Pauketat noted that “*religious figures were as likely—perhaps more so—to alter the cultural histories of other native peoples or to ‘consolidate’ leadership authority as were*

*more overtly political leaders or war captains*" (2010: 177; emphasis in original). The sacred and the political, both etic categories, were not separate domains in Chacoan society or elsewhere throughout the ancient Americas (Barber and Joyce 2017; Fowles 2013; Pauketat 2013), and the power inherent in sacred places along Chacoan roads therefore *was also* political power.

Finally, the archaeology of Chacoan roads and the places of power they engage underscores the major role of other-than-human actors in how history unfolds: not only in the precolonial Four Corners, but continuing to this day. The rainclouds condensing over Hosta Butte, natural occurrence of a sandstone outcrop roadway at Llave de la Mano, manifestation of distant watery eras as fossils in boulders, and channeling of rain through the break of Fajada Gap became entangled with human agriculture, ritual practices, political machinations, and social life to produce largescale social transformations. While posthumanist approaches in archaeology can, of course, be carried to excesses that obfuscate abuses of power within human societies (see critique in Preucel 2020), it is also crucial to recognize that a cognizance of the agency of other-than-human beings and forces is resonant with ontologies of Indigenous North American peoples (Deloria Jr. 2006; Kimmerer 2013; Wilson 2008).

Furthermore, many contemporary Native American activist efforts are focused on the protection of both "natural" and "cultural" landscapes—without dichotomization of these supposed domains—in the face of energy development and other extractive activities. Prominent recent examples include movements to stop the construction of the Dakota Access Pipeline across ancestral Sioux territories, the intertribal coalition formed to protect Bear's Ears National Monument, and efforts to prevent further oil and gas drilling in the Greater Chaco Landscape. Outsiders and governmental agencies tasked with managing public lands often fail to comprehend the deep significance—that is, the sacredness—of Indigenous North American landscapes threatened by oil drilling, fracking, and other disturbance. Such sacredness derives not from some Durkheimian rupture between the everyday world and a set-apart sphere, but rather a recognition of the intricate interconnection and astonishing power of the natural environment. What I hope

to have shown here through the case study of Chacoan roads is that power, or sacredness, is *inherently in* landscapes, substances, and places—proper relations with which define Indigenous North American identities and ways of being, and improper relations with which must be remedied. The sustenance of such networks of relationality between humans and an interconnected world of causal forces is crucial to the lifeways and spiritual wellbeing of the aboriginal inhabitants of the Americas (Wilson 2008). While not always connected along formally constructed ritual roadways, such places have been—and will remain—sacred.

*Abstract:* This paper considers the topic of sacred spaces in North America through the vantage offered by Chacoan roads, monumental avenues constructed by Ancestral Four Corners people of the US Southwest from ca. AD 850–1200. I begin with a critique of the concept of the “sacred” as applied to the Chacoan past, suggesting instead that the Indigenous North American concept of power (in the sense of potent, generative force infused throughout the environment) offers a more culturally relevant framing. Next, I present three examples of locations along Chacoan roads that I argue were recognized as places of power due to the inherent landscape affordances of these locales. I close by briefly describing some of the practices carried out along Chacoan roads and drawing a connection between the understanding of “sacredness” evidenced through the archaeology of Chacoan roads and contemporary Native American activist efforts to protect landscapes of great power and meaning.

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# REINTERPRETATION OF “SACRED SPACE” AT THE NEWARK EARTHWORKS AND SERPENT MOUND:

Settler Colonialism and Discourses of “Sacred”

Mound building was a significant activity for the original, Indigenous occupants of the eastern portion of North America for at least six centuries. Approximately two millennia ago, the inhabitants of a broad swath of land primarily east of the Mississippi River and extending from the gulf to the Great Lakes, engaged in the construction of conical, enclosure and effigy shaped earthen mounds. The efforts were often combined to create a complex of mounds and are detailed in their individual geometric precision, which often mirror the cyclical astronomical phenomena of the sun and moon. Furthermore, the sites, although often at great distance, are in geometric relationships to one another. The proliferation of mounds with astronomical focus suggests the mound builder cultures privileged these activities; they had purpose and held meaning for the cultures over a considerable length of time. In the present-day state of Ohio there are 2,080 remnants of this activity (*Indigenous Wonders* 2022).

Two sites are the focus of this paper on “sacred space”: the Newark Earthworks and Serpent Mound. Both are short-listed for UNESCO World Heritage status.<sup>1</sup> The construction of these sites are dated nearly six-hundred years apart and credited to two

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1. UNESCO is an acronym for the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization, an agency of the United Nations (UN) aimed at promoting world peace and security through international cooperation in education, arts, sciences and culture.

different cultural groups. Over time they, more than any other mound sites, have been objects of great contestation over interpretation, symbolic meaning, and ownership.

In August of 2010, interest in and visits to the Newark Earthworks increased dramatically and the burgeoning interest was directly related to Glenn Beck, who featured this site and other ancient civilizations in North America on his FOX News Channel television program.<sup>2</sup> The basis of the program, which Beck referred to frequently throughout the broadcast, was a 2009 documentary film, *The Lost Civilizations of North America*. This documentary enjoyed some success, particularly after Beck featured it on his show, dedicating a full hour to its content. As a result of the program, tourism increased at the “prehistoric” sites mentioned, the Newark Earthworks among them.<sup>3</sup> According to one of the film’s producers, there were 37,000 hits on the film’s website in the days immediately following Beck’s program (Smoot 2011). While the documentary is not a blockbuster, it nevertheless continues to generate interest.<sup>4</sup> The film and Beck’s coverage triggered a domino effect that ironically achieved what scholars, public historians, and concerned public citizens could not: wider visibility. Scholars were outraged by the interpretations promoted by Beck and the film, while local tourism development partners were thrilled by the increased traffic to the area. This tension illuminates a number of interesting avenues of query about contestation and reinterpretation, which are examined in more detail later in this paper. But first, I’ll begin with a description and information about world heritage.

The Newark Earthworks are named as such because the small town of Newark, Ohio (located approximately thirty miles east

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2. The program aired on Wednesday, 18 August 2010. While Beck remained involved with the FOX News Channel, his daily program went off the air in the summer of 2011.

3. While I work to avoid the term “prehistoric” due to the term’s implication that there was no history prior to contact, I use it here as it is the language used in the program and documentary.

4. According to data from HypeStat.com, the film’s website receives “about 29 unique visitors and 66 (2.30 per visitor) page views per day.” The DVD is available from a wide range of sources and continues to be a topic of conversation at a variety of social conservative conferences. Likewise, a number of academics continue to critique the film.

of the state capitol of Columbus) grew in, around, and on a complex of mounds that contain both the Great Circle and Octagon earthworks. While nominated as two distinct sites in the UNESCO Ceremonial Earthworks proposal, it is commonly agreed that they were originally parts of one site that encompassed more than four square miles. The Ohio History Connection (OHC)<sup>5</sup> website describes the site as follows: “Built by people of the ancient Hopewell Culture between A.D. 1 to A.D. 400, this architectural wonder of ancient America was part cathedral, part cemetery and part astronomical observatory” (OHC, “Newark Earthworks”). Today, archaeologists identify four distinct cultural eras of mound-building cultures in the Ohio region. The earliest, the Adena, are dated circa 500 BCE–100 BCE; the Hopewell from 100 BCE–400 CE; and the Fort Ancient from 1000 CE–1650 CE. The distinctions are based on increasingly elaborate productions of material culture and lifeway patterns that shifted from horticulture to agriculture. The height of quality material cultural production peaked during the Hopewell era. By the time the Fort Ancient culture emerged at the end of the Hopewell era, efforts had shifted from mound building to agriculture.

The Newark Earthworks are frequently referred to as monumental architecture due to the size, scale, and precision of the earthen construction. Its Great Circle encloses thirty acres of land with one entrance point at the northeastern side demarcated by two parallel earthen walls. The earthen walls rise approximately eight feet tall and immediately inside the circle walls is a moat that is about five feet deep. The diameter of the circle is approximately twelve hundred feet. Less than two miles to the northwest are the Octagon Earthworks, which are composed of a twenty-acre circle attached by parallel walls to a fifty acre octagon. Scholars

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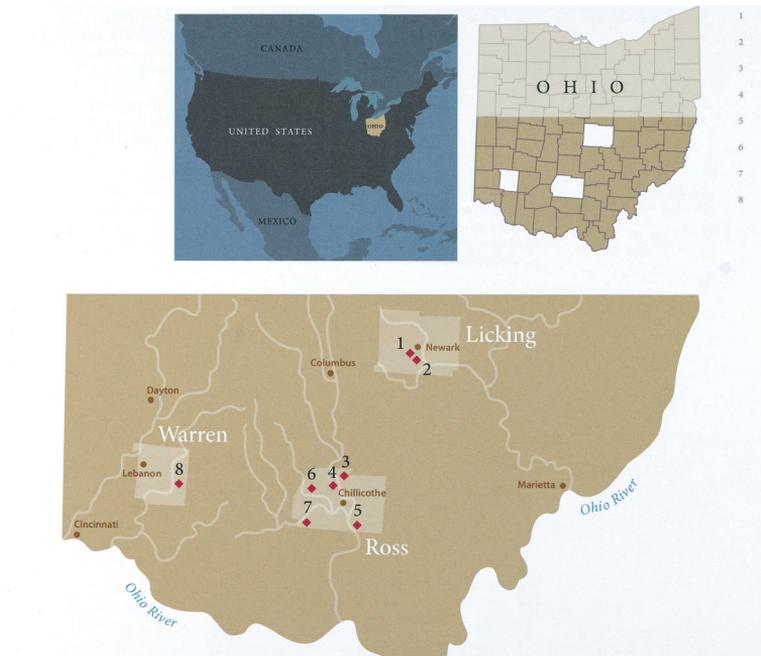
5. The OHC has been organized under a number of different names over the long history since its incorporation in 1885. Originally known as The Ohio State Archaeological and Historical Society and later the Ohio Historical Society (OHS), it is also one of the few state history organizations in the US that is not a branch of the state's government. Rather it is a non-profit organization whose primary contract is with the state. In this essay I generally use the official name of the organization in its historical context.

Ray Hively and Robert Horn persuasively argue that the Octagon served as a lunar observatory for the Indigenous builders and inhabitants of the land. The lunar cycle is much more complex than the three hundred- and sixty-five-day solar cycle. It takes 18.6 years to complete a full rotation of the moon, which involves eight standstill points during its movement. The sightlines from an observation mound at the circle, through the parallel walls, to the furthest angle of the octagon shape aligns with the northernmost rising of the moon as viewed at this location (OHC, “Archaeoastronomy”).

Travel about one hundred and twenty miles to the southwest (approximately 70 miles east of Cincinnati) and you arrive at Serpent Mound. The Fort Ancient culture is credited with the construction of Serpent Mound circa 1070 CE based on radio-carbon evidence. This date is centuries after the construction of the geometric mounds of the Newark Earthworks. However, excavations of burial sites near the location date as far back as the Adena. This suggests the possibility of cultural continuity for at least one millennia. Serpent Mound is considered the most outstanding example of effigy mound building that remains and perhaps the most well-known of the mound sites nominated. Called “serpent” because its shape evokes the image of a large sinuous snake, this effigy mound is approximately twelve-hundred feet (1200) in length. The tail spirals inward and the mouth of the serpent appears to be in the process of eating an egg, an oval shaped mound, the body curves seven times in between the head and tail. While not as impressive in height as the Newark Earthworks, the detail, scale, and precision are similarly impressive. The Serpent Mound also aligns with astronomical phenomena, in this case solar.

The Newark Earthworks have been nominated as part of a larger package referred to as “The Hopewell Ceremonial Earthworks” and Serpent Mound is a stand-alone nomination for UNESCO World Heritage status. In April 2022, The OHC opened a new museum exhibit at their headquarters in Columbus, Ohio. Titled, *Indigenous Wonders of Our World: The Hopewell Ceremonial Earthworks*. The purpose of the new exhibit is to educate the public and draw attention to the grouping of eight sites in anticipation of final approval by UNESCO. OHC staff believe the final vote will

be announced during the next meeting of UNESCO which has been set for September 2023. The road to UNESCO approval has been long and arduous, more than twenty years to date and the many organizations and individuals have invested their efforts in the process. While a number of sites nominated from Ohio are short-listed for UNESCO approval (Serpent Mound among them), stakeholders decided to move the “Hopewell Ceremonial Earthworks” forward first, as UNESCO only approves a small number of sites annually.



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Fig. 1. Hopewell Ceremonial Earthworks (2022: 9)

The sites moving forward as the “Hopewell Ceremonial Earthworks” nomination cover significant geographical distances and include Mound City, Seip Earthworks, Hopewell Mound Group, High Bank Works, Hopeton Earthworks, Great Circle Earthworks, Octagon Earthworks, and Fort Ancient (Figure 1). It is approximately 110 miles between the eastern- and western-most sites (Octagon and Fort Ancient, respectively), and approximately 90 miles between the northern and southern most sites (Octagon Earthworks and Seip Mound respectively). The commonality between the sites, ostensibly the reason for the group nomina-

tion, is that all are geometric mounds (except Fort Ancient). They were all constructed during a cultural era that archaeologists refer to as “Hopewell.” Fort Ancient existed at the end of this era at what was a moment of transition into the contemporary one for Native peoples. Significant amounts of sophisticated artifacts were found at these locations, and there appears to be a ceremonial function associated with the sites. The Hopewell Ceremonial Earthworks do not enjoy name recognition on the local, state, national or international stage; they are relatively unknown. It is remarkable that so many of these extraordinary efforts remain despite the disruptions characteristic of settler colonialism.

Historian Patrick Wolfe argues that territoriality was the primary motive of settler colonialism, a process that destroys in order to replace (2006: 388). This “logic of elimination” operates on two registers: the dispossession of Natives lands and a vast array of assimilationist strategies meant to transform the collective identity of Native to one of individuality. Over time, settler colonialism reaches critical mass, as the settler population outnumbers the original inhabitants who are displaced from their homelands. Legislation and policies lead to forced assimilation on multiple fronts, such as economics and education. Thus, settler colonialism becomes a structure, not an event (2006: 388).

The names of the mound builder sites are one example of the “logic of elimination.” Newark, Hopewell, and Serpent are all names given by the dominant Anglo-American culture and they have no relationship in name to the Indigenous architects and builders. We do not know the name of the people(s) who designed, built, and used this monumental architecture due to the physical elimination of Indigenous people from this land, a process that took several centuries. “The Great Dying” begins in 1492 and lasts until 1650. In spite of never encountering a settler, diseases that decimated the populations were spreading. Huge numbers of surviving Indigenous people sent into exile by settlement in the east moved west into the present-day Ohio area. Continuity of cultural knowledge was ruptured. Yet, the earthworks endure and resist, despite a long and complicated history of dominance.

While the focus of this paper is on what scholars David Chidester and Edward Linenthal identify as the processes that produce

American sacred space: the contemporary ritualization, interpretation and contestation surrounding the symbolic meaning, I begin with a brief overview of contact with settler colonizers that served to eliminate the Native. This historical contextualization serves to demonstrate the impacts of settler colonialism, which severed connections between Indigenous people and this land while simultaneously reinterpreting the sites as distinctly American. This lays a foundation for the web of narratives refashioned and recirculated in today's contestation over World Heritage status and symbolic meaning. Central to these narratives is the ascription of the sites as sacred.

#### AN OVERVIEW OF HISTORICAL CONTEXT

When settlement in this area of Ohio began in earnest, mound building sites were recognized as the result of creative human genius and monumental efforts (note this is a criterion of World Heritage status). Settler colonists could not mentally link these astounding achievements to the local Indigenous inhabitants, who they considered savage, unintelligent, barbaric, lazy creatures (Zeisberger 1910). The local Native populations were in a state of chaos as they sought to deal with continued colonial intrusion into their territory and the influx of Native refugees from eastern Native communities driven west by expansionism in its various formations in the east. For example, the Shawnee who returned to the Ohio area after more than sixty years of exile founded Lower Shawnee Town circa 1730 where the Scioto and Ohio rivers connected. However, the Shawnee were not the sole residents of this town, which also included Delaware, Seneca, and Cayuga refugees, a situation described by historian Stephen Warren as a "shatter zone" (2009). Continued encroachment and resultant treaties drove the Natives further north to Chillicothe and by the time the Treaty of Greenville was signed in 1795 the new boundary of the emergent United States relocated Native peoples to the northern third portion of Ohio. Representatives from twelve tribes signed the treaty, the majority of which were refugees to the area. Only the Shawnee and Miami considered these lands to be their traditional homelands.

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Three decades later, Native peoples were further dispossessed from their homelands as a result of the Indian Removal Act, signed into law in 1830 by President Andrew Jackson. The logic of elimination, a principal force in the settler colonial project, did more than remove Native peoples from their homelands and settle them in faraway Indian territory (present day Kansas and Oklahoma), it ruptured the cultural knowledge and continuity of tribal communities. It is thus not a surprise that more than 160 years later when Chief Glenna Wallace of the Eastern Shawnee Tribe of Oklahoma was in the area at an unrelated event at The Ohio State University (OSU) that she expressed mixed emotions of wonder and anger when she was taken on a tour of the mounds (2016: xi). It was likely that her distant ancestors had built the mounds and she, a descendant, had not even known they existed.

Almost simultaneous with the removal of the last remaining Indigenous people from the area, settler colonists settled in and they recognized the larger and monumental mounds as important and unique. While numerous mounds were razed for colonial interests of settlement and farm production, others were kept relatively intact. The city of Newark, incorporated in 1802 (Ohio became a state in 1803), is a good example of this process. As noted earlier, the entire complex at Newark encompassed four square miles. Low-lying mounds outlined the site, which included the Octagon, the Great Circle, and an ellipse that contained some burial mounds. Over the years the mounds that comprised the outline of the complex gave way to colonial expansion and the ellipse was similarly razed. As a result, the two monumental mounds that remain appear as two distinct sites and their place in a larger complex is erased.

As the last Natives were removed, settlers recognized the significance of the monumental sites and took steps to “preserve” and document them. Throughout the 19th century “scientific” studies, property ownership, and capitalism drove local engagement with the sites. For example, in 1845, Edwin Hamilton Davis teamed up with Ephraim G. Squier to undertake the ambitious task of surveying the hundreds of ancient earthen works in Ohio. The task took two years and in 1848 the documentation of their findings became the first publication of the Smithsonian Institution.

*Ancient Monuments of the Mississippi Valley* offered a scientific documentation of the sites, some of which were later destroyed. They were preceded in this effort by Caleb Atwater, who in 1820 published his illustrations and descriptions of earthworks in *Description of the Antiquities Discovered in the State of Ohio and Other Western States*. The Squier and Davis work was more extensive. In 1853, Licking County purchased the Great Circle portion of the Newark Earthworks for eight thousand dollars. The site was variously used as the site of the Ohio State Fair in 1854, the county fair, training grounds for the 76th Regiment (1861), a site for public performances by traveling troupes such as Buffalo Bill's Wild West show (1884), a public park (1890), and an amusement park (1898). In 1927, the property was deeded to the Ohio Historical Society.

The history of property ownership of the Octagon portion of the Newark Earthworks is more obfuscated. In 1892, a local tax levy to purchase the Octagon was passed. The intention was to increase tourism dollars in the area and to provide a place for the National Guard to train. Every summer from 1893 to 1907, approximately seven thousand guards were trained at the site. Site management fell to a group of local businessmen called the Newark Board of Trade and the deed of the site eventually fell into their hands. At the dawn of the twentieth century, golf became the leisure sport of the well-to-do businessman and in 1910 the very same members of the Newark Board of Trade formed the board of the emergent Licking County Club. The Newark Board of Trade leased the Octagon grounds to the country club in order to undertake the construction of a golf course and club house on the site. It was renamed the Moundbuilders Country Club, and until very recently members of the country club asserted ownership through their promotional materials that referenced our mounds.<sup>6</sup> While the Newark Board of Trade deeded the property to the Ohio Historical Society (OHS) in 1933, included in that package was a commitment to continue the lease to the country club for site usage. This was renewed regularly at the end of each lease.

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6. Until the recent legal battles between OHC and Moundbuilders Country Club, the country club's website used this language. During my last visit to the site the language of ownership implied by "our" has been removed.

However, the last lease, signed in 1997, was for an exceptionally long period of time and is not due to expire until 2078. It is difficult to fathom why OHS made the decision to renew again, at the moment when public awareness of the site was increasing. As movement toward a World Heritage nomination began to build momentum, the occupancy of the Octagon mounds by the country club became an issue threatening to block the World Heritage nomination. Reorganized, with new leadership and new branding under the new name, Ohio History Connection (OHC), and the organization began negotiations with the country club to relinquish their lease. According to an article published by Michaela Sumner in May 2020 in the *Newark Advocate*, the local paper in the area, OHC filed a lawsuit against the country club seeking to buy out the remainder of the country club's lease, exercising eminent domain. The legal battle has been ongoing since 2018 and court rulings have sided with OHC with the caveat that fair reimbursement occurs. At the time of the news article, the most recent offer by OHC was slightly over 1.6 million dollars, but the country club perceives the value as much higher. While it seems that Moundbuilders Country Club has exhausted all of the legal avenues to resist, there is still a golf course on the site and at the time of this writing golfers are still teeing off and memberships to the club are being sold.

Property ownership is a means to the accrual of capital and the investments made for the purchase of the Great Circle and the Octagon were seen as investments toward hailing tourism and tourist dollars, an argument that continues to be forefront in the contemporary moment as the sites are poised for World Heritage status. City leaders and community businesses focus on the nomination for its potential to lure infrastructure investment and tourism dollars from both national and international sources. Yet land has not been the only means for building wealth. The earliest surveyors of the sites uncovered a treasure trove of ancient artifacts, which were collected, cataloged, and sold. The trade and profit from the sale of artifacts found at the sites was not insignificant. Edwin Davis (of the Squier and Davis team) amassed a huge store of artifacts during the survey and excavation of the sites, a collection eventually sold to "William Blackmore for ten thousand dollars. Blackmore then established the Blackmore

Museum in England which displayed the collection. The Blackmore Museum eventually became part of the British Museum. The Squier & Davis Collection can still be seen today at the British Museum” (National Park Service). Even today the sale of artifacts on the black market (as it is illegal) remains brisk and lucrative.

Squire and Davis’ relationship with Frederic Ward Putnam, of Harvard University’s Peabody Museum cemented and began the academic professionalization of the emergent field of American archaeology (National Park Service). Their work also impacted Serpent Mound. Putnam, intrigued by Serpent Mound in particular, led the effort to raise funds to purchase the site. The Peabody Museum acquired the site in 1887 and for the next two years Putnam began an archaeological excavation of the site including “portions of the effigy, the adjacent burial mounds, and parts of the surrounding landscape.” Upon the conclusion of his study, he “carefully restored the mounds.” Serpent Mound was opened to the public as a park and in 1900 ownership transferred to the Ohio State Archaeological and Historical Society (World Heritage).

#### CONTEMPORARY DISCOURSES: THE EARTHWORKS NOMINATIONS

By the late twentieth century, settler colonialism and the project of elimination (removal of the Native) had proved successful in the Ohio region. Native peoples who considered the area their traditional homelands and/or had historical ties to the area had long since been removed to so-called Indian territory. There are no reservations for any federally recognized tribe in the state of Ohio. As such, living Native peoples were (and are) invisible to the public. This made it easier to continue to relegate Native Americans as a people of the past, not the present. The dispossession of Native lands also successfully served to rupture Native cultural memories of and connections to the mounds. The OHC serves as stewards over the sites discussed here.<sup>7</sup>

It was not until the 1980s that dominant perceptions of the mounds began to change due in large part to the research conducted by the aforementioned Hively and Horn. Initially published in 1982,

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7. Note that other sites included in the Hopewell Ceremonial Mounds have other stewards.

their work argued that the Mound Builders' monumental architectural achievements at the Octagon were astronomical observatories that aligned with significant cyclical lunar movements. Originally their work was dismissed by archaeologists. As Brad Lepper, now curator and manager of the OHCs archeology and natural sciences, notes in his blog for OHC, the reception to their theories was chilly to say the least. They told Lepper that they shared their early findings with a senior Ohio archaeologist who was certain "that the Hopewell could not have aligned their earthworks to the complicated lunar cycle, because those people were savages" (Lepper 2013). Hively and Horn have continued their work and persuasively claim not only alignment at specific sites, but repeated complimentary alignments at other sites, some at a great distance. This work meshes well with Lepper's work on a road that he posits led between sites such as the Newark Earthworks and Mound City some seventy miles away. He refers to it as a pilgrimage road. These alignments, the pilgrimage road, evidence of complex funerary functions, and the sheer number of artifacts found at the mound building sites poised for UNESCO World Heritage status comprise the primary pieces of evidence to support the argument that sites such as the Newark Earthworks and Serpent Mound held a ceremonial purpose and were sacred to the original Indigenous builders.

In the early years of the new millennium, a group from OSU started an initiative to generate public awareness of the Newark Earthworks and began outreach to federally recognized tribal governments. The team,<sup>8</sup> housed at the Newark campus of OSU, wrote and received a substantial grant, and in 2006 became the Newark Earthworks Center. They engaged in a wide range of public education and programming to draw attention to the sites. This team remains a key stakeholder in the World Heritage nomination.

As a critical mass of interest built, the process for submitting a nomination to UNESCO began in earnest and it became clear that the concerned academics were not the only ones to posit the mounds as "sacred" sites. I return to the opening vignette about the impact of Glenn Beck's coverage about the Newark Earthworks. On 20 August 2010, two days after Beck's broadcast,

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8. I was a member of this team as a graduate research associate from 2004–2010.

Susan Fryer, the then-Executive Director of the Great Licking County Convention and Visitors Bureau, told *Newark Advocate* reporter Amy Hollon, “Our phones are ringing off the hook.” Fryer further commented that “the talk is good for Newark and [...] she hopes Beck continues to mention the earthworks” (Hollon 2010). While those interested in tourism to Licking County were thrilled with the impact of the broadcast, others, such as Brad Lepper, then Curator of Archaeology at OHS, were less enthusiastic. In the days immediately following the broadcast, chatter on archeological blogs focused on the “pseudoarcheology of Glenn Beck” (Feagans 2010). In December 2010, Lepper and five other academics issued a statement about the documentary that was published in the *Ohio Archaeology Blog*. Each scholar was featured prominently in the film and their inclusion was ironic, to say the least, since none supported the overarching theory advanced in *The Lost Civilizations of North America* and subsequently, on Beck’s program. In a collaborative statement they wrote, “We fear that the context of our general remarks as they currently appear in the film might lead viewers to conclude that our words on these subjects provide support for the film’s claims. That would be a mistake” (Lepper 2010). The group asserted that when they were interviewed, they had no knowledge of the claims promoted by the documentary, and they were asked general questions that were taken out of context during film editing. The scholars strongly implied that the (mis)use of their interviews was a conscious move on the part of the documentary’s producers to mislead the public (Lepper 2010).

Lepper and other experts featured in the documentary continued to speak out about the narrative offered in *The Lost Civilizations of North America*. Beginning in the fall of 2011 *The Committee for Skeptical Inquiry* published three sequential articles in the journal in which the scholars promised to “refute many of the more serious errors of fact and interpretation” (Feder et al. 2011; Lepper et al. 2011; Bolnick et al. 2012). Alice Beck Kehoe, another scholar prominently featured in the documentary, responded in a feature column for *Reports of the National Center for Science Education*. She draws attention to the Mormon affiliations of the film’s producers. Kehoe argues that the purpose of the documentary is to affirm “a Mormon claim that the Lost Tribes of Israel inhabited

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North America” thus verifying the historical narrative of the *Book of Mormon*, which asserts the origin of Native Americans as Hebraic. Kehoe states that the film has a Mormon evangelical purpose that “is apparent at the *Book of Mormon Evidence* website” (2011: 2.1).

Indeed, Kehoe is correct as she points to the Mormon commitments of the documentary’s producers: Rick Stout (Director/ Co-Producer), Steven E. Smoot (Co-Producer/Executive Producer, and Barry McLerran (Co-Producers). And it takes little research to find the producers’ connections to the *Book of Mormon Evidence* website, which is associated with the Foundation for Apologetic Information and Research (FAIR) and self-identifies as Mormon apologetics. On FAIR’s website they define apologetic as literally meaning “in defense of faith” and note they are interested in verifying the historicity and doctrine of the *Book of Mormon*, as well as countering the criticisms of “anti-Mormon authors.” They note that their “enemies have invoked ‘science’ or ‘reason’ to attack faith [and] it may now be necessary that someone respond in the same vein.” In other words, those engaged in Mormon apologetics are interested in using arguments similar to those made against them in order to bring light to what is really at stake, the truth of history as documented in the *Book of Mormon*. The Mormon claim was not new.

In 1860 David Wyrick allegedly discovered a set of artifacts within a group of ancient Indian burial mounds near Newark, Ohio. They have subsequently been referred to as the Newark Holy Stones. The set consists of a number of stones inscribed with ancient Hebraic symbols and are housed at a local museum. The interpretation of the stones has been vehemently challenged by leading archaeologists and numerous articles have been written on the issue. Archaeologists posit they were *forged* to support the theory of monogenism: the theory that all humans come from a single pair of individuals. In 1860 slavery was a subject of heated debate. Anthropology and other scientific disciplines were often used in defense of or in opposition to discussions promoting monogenism and would also be used to oppose slavery and segregation (Bush et al. 2022: 84–85).

The Newark Holy Stones continue to draw many visitors to the Johnson-Humrickhouse Museum where they are on dis-

play. One of the largest interest groups is composed of members of the Church of the Latter-Day Saints. The *Book of Mormon* states that the ten “lost tribes of Israel” relocated to North America to live with the Native Americans. The existence of the Newark Holy Stones seems to give credence to their views. Another significant interest group follows a para-archaeological movement whose premise is that pre-Columbian trans-oceanic travel occurred hundreds of years earlier than what historians and archaeologists accept as true. The leaders in this movement point to similarities between widely different cultures and to artifacts that are “out-of-place,” supposedly proving that people traveled hundreds of years prior to the tenth century when Icelandic Vikings journeyed to Greenland. This theory has been gaining popularity since 2013 when the Newark Holy Stones were featured on the History 2 Channel’s *America Unearthed* (Bush et. al. 2022: 89).

While tour buses full of Mormon apologetics continue to arrive in Newark and at other sites, the mounds have also long been claimed by a wide range of groups that connect the sites to a variety of reasons, such as: they were built on ley (energy) lines or that they were sites of extraterrestrial visitation, among others. This view is prominent among folks associated with Friends of Serpent Mounds (FOSM). Delsey Wilson, Executive Director of the organization, moved to a house her parents built when she was in the sixth grade that was less than a half mile away from the mound. She has lived next to Serpent Mound ever since, and she has been closely involved with events and has followed developments in the scientific study of the site. In an interview with WYSO, a radio station out of Yellow Springs, Ohio, Wilson notes that FOSM helped with the recent study led by archaeologist Bill Romain “Bill Romain’s findings perfectly, I believe, explain Brad’s findings” she says, referring to Brad Lepper (WYSO 2014). Romain and his co-authors believe the site was occupied and reconstructed by the Fort Ancient people, but that its origins are much older.

Wilson says she has no reason not to believe that evidence. She is also not sure how the matter of management and access will ever be fully resolved. She notes that OHC owns the site, and many other people have their hands in it. She continues “Who is the committee or the person or the group who makes decisions?

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Who decides who gets to do research there, and who decides what gets put on the new signs? That really has yet to be established” (WYSO 2014). Wilson, who does not claim Native ancestry, concluded the interview by noting that to her, that is part of Serpent Mound’s beauty: it means different things to different people. A variety of Native American tribes and people of Native American descent visit the mound yearly, and many other non-native people have found meaning in the site as well. “Let me quote my father,” says Wilson. “Any place can be a spiritual place, it’s what we make it. If we go to a place and it moves us in a way, then we call that place a spiritual place. Any place can have that power over a person[...].it just seems that Serpent Mound has affected a lot of people to the point where they find it very moving, very spiritual, and so they come back to it” (WYSO 2014). This notion of a generalized spirituality where difference is glossed over and is in direct tension with the National Historic Preservation Act,<sup>9</sup> which states that in undertakings by federal agencies, “Agency officials shall acknowledge that Indian Tribes[...] possess special expertise in assessing the eligibility of historic properties that may possess religious and cultural significance to them” (36 CFR 800.4 (c)(1)).

FOSM is made up of individuals and organizations that care about and see the value in preserving the Great Serpent Mound Park. It was formed in 2004 by a committee of the Adams County Travel and Visitors Bureau (ACTVB). The ACTVB Committee met with then-Park Manager, Keith Bengtson and other representatives from OHS to consider ways they could help improve upkeep and accessibility to the park. During one meeting it was decided that to show OHS their determination and that people in Adams and the surrounding counties cared about the Serpent Mound Park, by holding a membership drive for OHS. In less than two months the membership drive in Adams County grew from six to over 100 members. The committee succeeded and had OHS’s attention; FOSM was born.

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9. Title 36 of the National Historic Preservation Act serves to set guidelines for identification of historic sites that may have connections to contemporary Native peoples in the U.S. (36 CFR 800.4 (c)(1)) An electronic version of the text can be found at <https://www.ecfr.gov/current/title-36/chapter-VIII/part-800/subpart-B/section-800.4>.

In 2009, OHS contracted with the Arc of Appalachia to manage Serpent Mound and Fort Hill. FOSM is not a volunteer group for either OHC or the Arc, but a non-profit stand-alone organization and support group to Serpent Mound Park and other local Indigenous ancient sites. On their website the group states, “We continue to try and work with these two groups, as well as other groups in our area like the Archeological Conservancy, Heartland Conservancy, the Alternate Universe, and others” (Friends of Serpent Mound).

The Friends of Serpent Mound and its Board originally formed to increase public understanding and knowledge of and to improve the quality of operations at the Serpent Mound State Memorial. Upon not being established as a subordinate organization under the Ohio Historical Society (OHS) the group expanded as an independent organization with the purpose to: “Protect, preserve, and promote Serpent Mound and other Native American sites, while facilitating education and experiences for visitors” (Friends of Serpent Mound). For now, FOSM’s focus and the use of “the site” refers to the Great Serpent Mound Park. However, the new purpose allows FOSM to help in supporting other Ancient Native American sites, either in the local vicinity or further away (Friends of Serpent Mound). During the years that the volunteer Arc of Appalachia group managed the site, FOSM was given full access to develop and manage public programming on the winter and summer solstices. The winter solstice in particular became a popular regional event that drew large numbers of the general public. But as relationships with established federally recognized tribal governments such as the Shawnee became stronger (as a result of the outreach of OHC and NEC), representatives of the tribes took issue with the events due to the lack of discernment on the part of the organizers regarding speakers (so-called experts on Bigfoot) and activities (such as dowsing) that did not reflect Native culture or values (Friends of Serpent Mound).

In 2021, OHC reclaimed oversight and management of the site. One of their first orders of business was to prohibit FOSM from using the site for their public programming. Conveniently for FOSM there was no break to the programming, which is now held right

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next door on Wilson's farm, the Soaring Eagle Retreat.<sup>10</sup> Since reclaiming site management OHC has organized its own programming at Serpent Mound featuring representatives from federally recognized tribes who have a vested interest in the site. Thus, there are competing events next door to each other during the solstices. In the summer of 2022, the events at Serpent Mound included tours of the site and daily lectures from Chief Glenna Wallace of the Eastern Shawnee Tribe of Oklahoma, Chief Ben Barnes of the Shawnee Tribe of Oklahoma, and staff from OHC. At Soaring Eagle Retreat, programming will include a wide variety of topics such as "Bigfoot Investigations in Ohio and Kentucky," "The Lost or Forgotten History of the Eastern North American Continent," numerous performances, such as flute music and crystal singing bowls from musicians that claim Native roots, and workshops on activities such as dowsing.

Another organization fascinated with the mounds calls themselves Unite the Collective. According to their Facebook page, created in 2010, they are an "alternative and holistic health service [...] Light Workers here to assist in the Ascension of Planet Earth." Unite the Collective have active social media accounts in addition to their Facebook page, they are active on Twitter, have a podcast on Spotify, and a YouTube Channel that regularly registers over three thousand views per post. One regular segment on the Facebook site is "Morning Coffee" with Rion deRouen. In a video posted in May 2022, deRouen promised to "teach you to be a supernatural being" with segments about "how to astral project, use your energy hand and activate your dormant DNA" (Big Changes Inbound). One section of videos uploaded on YouTube are from their "missions" the purpose of which is to activate energy portals to assist the ascension of the planet. In 2012 they did just that at the Serpent Mound. It wasn't until the video appeared on YouTube that people became aware of the activity whereby the "light workers" buried organites in the mound. According to Mary Annette Pember, an Ojibwe journalist and frequent contributor to the newspaper

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10. As I finish this article the 2022 summer solstice is upon us and there is significant publicity about this year's competing events at the Serpent Mound for the summer solstice. To get a sense of the programming by FOSM see, <https://www.serpentmound.org/fullschedule/>

*Indian Country Today*, orgonites are objects made of resin, metal and crystals. Purportedly “orgonites draw in negative energy and emit positive energy” (2018). The article traces the invention of orgonites to an Austrian inventor, Wilhelm Reich in the 1930s. They were later declared fraudulent by the FDA in 1954 and Reich was charged, found guilty, and jailed. However, orgonites could be found for purchase in the Serpent Mound gift-shop prior to the return to OHC management in 2021 (Pember 2018).

Similar activities, such as the 1987 Harmonic Convergence, or the 2011 Crystal Skull Festival featuring a Mayan shaman, have occurred. It is not surprising that all of this activity has drawn the attention of evangelical, conservative activists such as the Pass the Salt Ministries. During the winter solstice in 2020, minister Dave Daubenmire led members of the congregation to Serpent Mound to cast the demons out of the site. Believing that the earthworks were constructed by a race of giant fallen angels and human women, they sought to pray the darkness out of the site on the darkest day of the year. Members of the American Indian Movement (AIM) caught wind of the activity and were in the parking lot when the Pass the Salt Ministry arrived. However, the congregation members proceeded to the mounds and prayed. The confrontation was tense and the local sheriff’s department was called in, but no one was arrested. Daubenmire claimed that the group from AIM were the aggressors.

This is not in any way an exhaustive list of examples of the contestation over the legitimate ownership of the sacred symbology of the mounds, a critical process identified by Chidester and Linenthal in the production of American sacred space (1995: 2). What is noticeably absent are Native voices. While there have been many Indigenous visitors to the sites over the last century such as the performers in the Buffalo Wild West Show, the founding members of the Society of American Indians who visited during their first meeting at OSU in 1911, Native peoples relocated to Ohio in the post-WWII era of termination and relocation, to present day Native scholars, it was not until Chief Wallace’s visit to the Newark Earthworks in 2007 that a sustained Native voice began to coalesce. Chief Wallace was already familiar with Serpent Mound, but the Newark Earthworks was a shock to her.

She is decidedly careful with the truth claims she makes about the mounds. A retired college professor and administrator prior to her election as Chief of the Eastern Shawnee Tribe of Oklahoma, she is cautious about stating that her Shawnee ancestors built the mounds. But, she does assert a connection due to the fact that her people lived in the region prior to removal and that the builders were “ancestors of Native Americans” (Wallace 2016: xi). She is one of the strongest Native voices leading the charge for World Heritage status. At the least it would solidify the preservation of this monumental architecture and the narrative of active Native presence. In her early eighties, she drives from Oklahoma to Ohio numerous times a year to speak to various groups about the mounds, and she travels to Washington, DC, and beyond to advocate in the political realm for UNESCO approval. She is an ambassador fulfilling her “commitment—to learn all I could about the Newark Earthworks, to teach others about them, and to preserve them” (2016: xi).

#### AMERICAN SACRED SPACE?

Chidester and Linenthal note that sacred space is a ritual space; “carved out of ordinary environment” (1995: 9). In the case of the Mound Builders, this activity was literal and on an extraordinary scale. The rupture of connection to the history and memory of the origins of creative genius of the architects of the site, a result of settler colonialism, has created fertile ground for continued contestation over the legitimate ownership of the symbols of the sacred and their meaning; a uniquely American experience (Chidester and Linenthal 1995: 2). And while this effort will serve to preserve the sites, it is unlikely to quell the contestation over the meaning of and answer future questions about access to the mounds. Currently OHC, owner of the sites discussed here, works to privilege Native voices in their explanatory historical narrative and consider their input about site management.

The approach to include Native voices is clear in the new museum exhibit discussed earlier. The exhibit is carefully curated to draw attention to the importance of the grouping of the “Hopewell Ceremonial Mounds” nominated for World Heritage as sacred sites, without ever using the term sacred or directly linking them

to a particular contemporary Native tribe. Displays frequently reference general phrases such as “special artifacts,” “release an object’s spiritual power,” “rituals,” and “ceremonies.” And many of the displays offer explanatory remarks from multiple perspectives: the scholarly archaeologists, Native peoples, and staff workers. There are three displays that feature a specifically Native voice including that of Chief Wallace, Shawnee tribal member Eric Wensman, and even renowned Native scholar Vine Deloria, Jr. The Deloria entry serves to legitimize the Native connection, at least in regard to purpose and sacred space:

Much Indian knowledge involved the technique of reproducing the cosmos in miniature [...] this principle enabled the people to correlate their activities with the larger movements of the universe. Whenever possible the larger cosmos was represented and reproduced to provide a context in which ceremonies could occur. Thus, people did not feel alone; they participated in cosmic rhythms. (*Indigenous Wonders*)

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OHC has dramatically improved its outreach to Native tribal nations and inclusion of Native voices, but still falls short. For the Deloria quote, while they do note his tribal affiliation, they don’t cite the source of the quote. Deloria is the most prolific and influential Native scholar of our century, whose seminal works have shifted the landscape of Native intellectual thought. While it is not likely there is a contemporary Native person who does not recognize the name, the same cannot be said about the general public. OHC also has a history of interaction that suggests a lack of discernment about the politics of Native identity and who has a seat at the table. Until the recent past, any person or group that claimed Native heritage, no matter how distant, was treated as having a stake in the contestation over ownership of the symbols of the sacred. That has changed in recent years due both to a change in leadership in the organization and the efforts of Native peoples such as Chief Wallace, Marti Chaatsmith (Comanche/Choctaw), associate director of the NEC, and John Low (Potawatomie) director of NEC, and more recently Chief Barnes (Shawnee Tribe). And while making progress, displays in the exhibit demonstrate there is still room for discernment as OHC blurs the distinction between tribes with historical connections to Ohio and those who identify the area as their traditional homelands. One sign notes:

We recognize that the Ohio History Connection is situated in the original and sacred homeland of the living tribal nations of the Myaamia, the Shawnee, the Delaware, the Wyandotte, the Peoria, the Osage, the Seneca and Cayuga of the Haudenosaunee, the Ojibwe, Odawa, and Potawatomie of the Anishinaabeg, and others.

While the ten tribe nations included in this statement do have historical connections to the Ohio area as a result of settler colonialism, only two lay claims to the area as ancestral homelands.

This is not the only issue facing OHC as the sites are poised for World Heritage status. I suggest that while this inclusion will serve to preserve the mounds, contestation over ownership of the message and access is just beginning. This issue recently came to head over a request to film at Serpent Mound for a new documentary. Journalist Graham Hancock's documentary *Ancient Apocalypse*, was recently released on Netflix in November of 2022, and to popular appeal. For a number of weeks it held the most viewed documentary on the streaming giant. The eight part series looks at global ancient sites and argues that an advanced ancient civilization from the ice age is responsible for the many wonders of the world and the complex knowledge of geometry, astronomy, architecture, among others. Underpinning the argument is a sentiment antagonistic to archaeology, one that claims that his work is being suppressed. Important to this paper is his inclusion of the Serpent Mound, one of the sites he uses as a case study in his argument. Hancock applied for permission to film at Serpent Mound, but OHC refused and he was denied access to the site. Hancock calls the move censorship, OHC claims they would not support a theory that has no basis in fact.

As steward of the sites for the citizens of the state of Ohio, OHC's mission is to carry "out history services for Ohio and its citizens focused on preserving and sharing the state's history" and they note that "[t]he Ohio History Connection is committed to providing our visitors, volunteers and staff an environment free from intimidation, harassment, and discrimination with respect to admission and access to our sites, programs and activities (OHC "About Us").

Finally, returning once again to Chidester and Linenthal, they posit that ownership of the sacred is "intimately entangled in such

‘profane’ enterprises as tourism, economic exchange and development, and intense conflict of contending nationalisms” (1995: 1). Already one of the most common concerns of tribal nations about access restriction has to do with the perceived desecration and defilement of the sacred spaces from the hitting of golf balls, to dancing on the mounds, the insertion of orgonites into the mounds, drug use at the sites, and the list goes on. While defilement can be rectified and cleansed through ritual activities, according to Chidester and Linenthal, the desecration caused by dispossession is another matter.

When World Heritage status is conferred, and I do believe it will be, how will OHC manage all of the concerns of all of the vested constituents? The vast number of constituents who claim a seat at the table regarding “ownership” and a voice regarding the sites is astounding. These include governmental agencies from the local to global, historical societies, Native peoples, academics, golfers, and small pockets of the public. Into this mix we can include those with religious/spiritual claims such as the Mormons, new-agers, fundamentalist Christians, and contemporary Native tribes. Many of these stakeholders have come together to work toward the coveted World Heritage Status. But, if and when it happens, whose story will dominate, who will make decisions, and whose voice(s) will be heard?

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*Abstract:* Moundbuilding was a preoccupation for the original, Indigenous occupants of the eastern portion of North America for at least six centuries. Approximately two millennia ago, the inhabitants of a broad swath of land primarily east of the Mississippi River and extending from the gulf to the Great Lakes, engaged in the production of conical, geometric, and effigy shaped earthen mound constructs. The efforts, from small to monumental, reflect a precision, often reflecting astronomical phenomenon. The proliferation of mounds and astronomical focus suggest the moundbuilder cultures privileged these activities, they had purpose. Today many remnants of these extraordinary efforts remain despite the systems of erasure that are characteristic of settler colonialism. Two such sites are the focus of this paper on “sacred space”: the Newark Earthworks and Serpent Mound. Both sites are short-listed for UNESCO World Heritage status. The Newark Earthworks as part of a larger package referred to as “The Hopewell Ceremonial Earthworks” and Serpent Mound is a stand-alone nomination. The names of the sites are exemplary of the “logic of elimination,” central to settler colonialism in the Americas (Wolfe). Newark, Hopewell, and Serpent all names given by dominant culture with no relation to the Indigenous architects

and builders. They endure and resist, despite a long and complicated history of dominance. While the focus of this paper is on contemporary contestation surrounding the sites, this paper begins with a close description of the sites and offers a brief overview of context. This historical contextualization serves to demonstrate the ramifications of settler colonialism, which ruptured connections between Indigenous people and this land while simultaneously reinterpreting the sites as distinctly American. This lays a foundation for the web of narratives refashioned and recirculated in today's contest over World Heritage status. Central to these narratives is ascribing the label of "sacred" to the sites. The vast number of constituents who claim a seat at the table regarding "ownership" and a voice regarding the sites is astounding. These include governmental agencies from the local to global, historical societies, Native peoples, academics, golfers, and small pockets of the public. Into this mix we can include those with religious/spiritual claims such as the Mormons, new-agers, fundamentalist Christians, and contemporary Native tribes. Many of these stakeholders have come together to work toward the coveted World Heritage Status. But, if and when it happens, whose story will dominate, who will make decisions, which voice will be heard?

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Among Garner's publications: *To Come to a Better Understanding: Medicine Men and Clergy Meetings on the Rosebud Reservation, 1973-1978* (University of Nebraska Press, June 2016); "Community-Driven Research: From Indian Country to Classroom and Back in Replanting Cultures," Chief Ben Barnes and Stephen Warren, editors, (SUNY Press, 2022); "To Come to a Better Understanding: Complicating the Two Worlds Trope" in *Beyond Two Worlds*, Joseph Genetin-Pilawa and James Buss, editors, (SUNY Press, 2014); "Aztec Dance, Transnational Movements: Conquest of a Different Sort," *The Journal of American Folklore*, (Fall 2009); three encyclopedia entries "Black Hills Dispute and Black Hills War," "Shawnee," and "Tecumseh's War," for *Multicultural America: A Multimedia Encyclopedia*, Carlos E. Cortés, editor (SAGE Reference, 2013); and multiple invited book reviews..

*Sacred Spaces  
In North America*

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# CZECH SACRED PLACES IN TEXAS AS THE KEY ELEMENT FOR PRESERVING CZECH IDENTITY

The process of Czech and Moravian immigration to Texas is a well-known phenomenon and parts of it have been already researched. However, there are still themes to be explored and one of them is the church as an immigration actor.<sup>1</sup> The author of this paper agrees with Cuamea Velázquez, that immigration needs to be studied as a complex phenomenon. Felipe Cuamea Velázquez endorses merging social and migration network approaches and, at the same time, addresses the institutional (in this case religious) background (2000: 157–163). Another useful theory is Raymond Breton’s “institutional completeness” which analyses and compares the rate of assimilation into the host country with other nationalities (or spatial differences of one nationality) and in what way they preserved or recreated their ethnocultural identity (1964: 193–205). Based on these theories we can propose a hypothesis that the Czech Texans preserved their identity longer than other Czechs in the Americas and it was heavily influenced by their perception of sacred places. In part because of their religious importance, but also because the places served as sites of cultural heritage and link to their homeland. The research aim here is threefold. First, to explain

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the historical dimension of the religious connection between the Czech and Moravian immigrants in Texas with their native land. Second, to describe the sacred places of the immigrants, how they were built, what role they played in their everyday life, and how they established a bond with their country of origin. Third, what importance did the sacred places of the Czechs and Moravians have in preserving their language and cultural identity?

The conceptual framework of this contribution needs to define a sacred place in the Czech Texan context. Traditionally, the term was and still is used in a principally religious or spiritual sense. Jonathan Z. Smith compares a sacred place to a “focusing lens” thanks to which the objects and rituals gain religious importance (1982: 53–54). Similarly, and more contemporarily, Florin George Calian presents it as a place where the devotee can access God or an area for the affirmation of religious identity (2021: 139). However, this limiting view has been challenged by some scholars, and their definition fits more adequately the Czech Texan case. Sæbjørg Walaker Nordeide emphasizes the cultural role of a sacred place: “Cultural perceptions of sacred landscapes have shaped the ways in which human beings have organized their lives and settlements. Human activity usually takes place in close proximity to areas in the landscape that are ‘set apart’ as sacred” (2013: 4). Other authors do not define sacred places only as religious sites. They could play a symbolic role and support nationalism or patriotism (Ben-Israel 1998: 283). They are also fundamental for ethnic groups, their identity, their inherent system of values, or their cultural heritage (Veikko Anttonen 2013: 13).

This topic has not received proper attention from historians, largely because it requires studying sources on both sides of the Atlantic. Some works touch on the topic of religion among the Czech Texans, but they usually use a descriptive and positivist approach (Naše dějiny 1939), or the authors just use religion as one of many traits of the Czechs (e.g. Machann and Mendl 2001; Stasney 1938; Eckertová 2003; Hannan 1996). This contribution tries to build on their work but as it uses the approach of microhistory, it demands the use of various and fragmented sources. There are several definitions. The author understands it as detective

research that uses a microscope rather than a telescope (Magnússon and Szijártó 2013), focusing on marginalized groups that have not received proper attention from the “big narratives” (Ginzburg et al. 1993: 16).

This article is based on archival material from Austria<sup>2</sup> and the Czech Republic, principally the collections of the religious organizations that supported the immigrants in Texas, such as the Leopoldine Society. The paper also makes use of published contemporary personal memoirs and secondary literature. The content and discourse of these sources will be critically analyzed to answer the research questions and confirm or refute the hypothesis.

#### CREATING THE BOND

Czech<sup>3</sup> immigration to Texas had already begun before 1848 but we know only individuals like Antonín Michal Dignowity, from that era. The mass movement started only after the revolutionary year that abolished the institution of *corvée* and thus allowed the people to move more freely, also abroad. In the 1850s, we notice the first major group of Czechs coming to Texas (Polišenský 1996: 23–30). The migration process was stalled by the American Civil War and the number of Czechs in Texas was 781, in 1870 (Kownslar 2004: 134). However, we can assume that many others declared they came from Austria or were registered as Austrians by the American officials. Czech immigration to Texas flourished after the Civil War and in subsequent decades. The Lone Star State needed manpower, especially for its cotton fields because many of the former slaves moved to the northern states of the Union (Konecny and Machann 1993: 136). The demand for cotton on the world market opened Texas to further immigration and the state government promoted it. Official brochures, advertisements, and pamphlets appeared in Europe to attract migration, and some were even

2. The reference here is to the present Republic of Austria. All the rest are attributed to the Habsburg Empire in the nineteenth century.

3. The term Czechs we use in a contemporary sense to facilitate reading includes Czechs (Bohemians), Moravians, and Czech-speaking Silesians. However, it is essential to note that eighty percent of the Czech Texans originated from Moravia (Dongres 1923: 270).

translated into Czech like the famous *Texas, co cíl do stěhování* (“Texas as an immigrant destination”) (Siemering 1882). Agents of the shipping companies also tried to attract the Czechs to move but most important, according to scholars like František Kutnar were letters from a small group of expatriates already established in Texas. We cannot consider them just as personal or familiar items because they were read publicly on town squares, at social gatherings, or in pubs. They were so popular that some even aroused the suspicion that shipping company agents wrote them by themselves (Kutnar 1964: 22–26). Yet, there was no need to sugarcoat the conditions in Texas after the American Civil War. After the first precarious years (usually five to ten), the vast majority of Czechs could buy their own land, start planting cotton and eventually became wealthier than their compatriots in Europe. The Czech immigrants in Texas present, in their majority, a unique success story, especially when we compare them with Czechs in Russia, Germany, or other rural states in the US (compare with Vaculík 2009). This explains why their numbers grew exponentially until the First World War. In 1932 Henry R. Maresh, the Texan historian of Czech ancestry, estimated the Czech population in the state between 350,000 and 500,000 inhabitants (Maresh and Hudson 1934: XI).

The growing number of Czechs in Texas, and other European immigrants for that matter, presented several challenges for them and local institutions. Religious matters were one of the most pressing, or, to be precise, the lack of them. In 1850, the bishop of Galveston, Jean-Marie Odin, complained that he had only fourteen priests in his whole diocese (which included the territory of New Mexico) (Letter from Gottfried Menzel to Franz Petters 1850: 87). Another problem was the language barrier. Only some parsons spoke basic German and none spoke Czech. Odin decided to visit Europe, seeking help to improve the situation in his diocese. Many of his believers were from Austria so he went to Vienna where he obtained financial aid from the Leopoldine Society (Leopoldinen-Stiftung) (Blieid 1944: 146). Odin’s sojourn in Austria was crucial in establishing religious ties between the immigrants in Texas and their homeland. It is important to note that only the spiritual organizations offered any support to their compatriots in Texas.

The Austrian and, since 1918, the Czechoslovak, governments had little interest in their former citizens and the organizations they established were, like the Czechoslovak Foreign Institute in 1928, for gathering statistical data and information rather than for supporting the migrants (Dubovický 1996: 229–247).

The Czech Texans were predominantly Catholic,<sup>4</sup> they appreciated the support of their organizations, and it was one of the reasons why religion became the amalgam of their society. The Leopoldine Society<sup>5</sup> played an important role in this process. It was established officially in 1829 in Vienna on the model of the Society for the Propagation of the Faith, founded in Lyon, France, in 1822, by Pauline Jaricot. It was never as successful as its French counterpart, but it had a significant impact in Texas (Ústav Leopoldinský 1853: 481–482), also in the promotion of the Americas in Austria thanks to the annual publication of *Berichte* [Reports] *der Leopoldinen-Stiftung im Kaiserthume Oesterreich* (Blied 1944: 20–24). The name referred to the patron saint of Austria, St. Leopold and, in the beginning, the society had three aims: to promote greater Catholic missionary efficiency in America; to participate in the edification of believers for the growth of the Church of Jesus Christ in the world; to be a remembrance to Leopoldine, Archduchess of Austria and late empress of Brazil, who died in America (Kummer 1966: 12). Nevertheless, the goals changed over time, especially when the number of Catholic immigrants from Austria grew in the United States. The society focused their missionary activities on them and limited the former goal of converting the indigenous population to faith.

We can demonstrate the *modus operandi* of the society in Texas in two cases. In 1849, Gottfried Menzel (Bohumír Menzl in some sources) came to Galveston. He was a priest in Nové Město pod Smrkem (Neustadt), who decided to visit Texas for several reasons. First, as a natural scientist, he wanted to explore the state. Second, he served as a guide to some families from Bohemia

4. The discussion on the more accurate estimates of the Catholics, Protestants, and Freethinkers in Texas is present in section three of this article.

5. The full title was *Leopoldinen-Stiftung für das Kaiserreich Österreich zur Unterstützung der amerikanischen Missionen* (Leopoldine Society for the Austrian Empire to support the American Missions) (Thauren 1940: 58).

(Smith 1988: 13). Third, he was tasked by bishop Odin to attend to the German Catholics in Fredericksburg and Neu Braunfels because they did not have a parson who could speak German properly.<sup>6</sup> It is probable that Menzel did not plan to perform missionary work in Texas but was convinced by Odin who took the opportunity and sent him to his parishioners. From his personal collection, we can observe that his passport was valid for just three years<sup>7</sup> and indeed Menzel left the United States in 1851. In one of his reports, he boasted of his work by stating that none of his Catholic parishioners converted to Protestant churches. Similarly, he indicated that hard work, the same cultural and linguistic background, and the creation of sacred places helped the immigrants:

On April 20 [1850], I traveled to Friedrichsburg [Fredericksburg] eighty miles from Braunfels and I spent two months there. The Catholic parish has 40 families and has started to build a church, which will be finished soon. I liked the inhabitants here more: there is a great religious spirit among the Catholics. On Saturday, before the Pentecost, I erected, on a nearby steep hill, an impressive looking cross from a huge oak trunk. This symbol of redemption was also admired by the Protestants. ("Katolická missi" 1851: 1)

Menzel's sojourn in Texas was a brief one but it helped establish a pattern that would be followed in later years. In 1872, Josef Chromčík came to Texas thanks to the support of Leopoldine Society and became a priest in Fayetteville (Kummer 1966: 167). Two years earlier, dozens of parishioners from the Moravian villages of Lichnov and Bordovice decided to leave for Texas. In their letters home they invited Chromčík to come to them (Houšť 1890: 415–416). He indeed came and unlike Menzel stayed until his death in 1910, which is one of the reasons why he is well remembered:

His coming was always welcomed by the Czechs of the area, who gathered in a home or school or other meeting place for divine services. He would hear their confessions, offer Mass, give Communion, officiate at their marriages, baptize their children, visit and anoint their

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6. Státní okresní archiv Liberec, collection Gottfried Menzel NAD 1321, Begleitbrief (accompanying letter) from Bishop of Galveston Jean-Marie Odin, 4 December 1849.

7. Státní okresní archiv Liberec, collection Gottfried Menzel NAD 1321, Reisepass of Gottfried Menzel, 26 April 1849.

sick, and give religious instruction to their children as well as preach to the adults and on occasion bury their dead. (Mořkovský 1979: 78)

His laborious personality, organizational skills, and his overall impact earned him the title of the first Czech Catholic priest in Texas. In 1875, he built a school in Fayetteville where he taught for fifteen years, he constructed a new parsonage there, in 1892 (Habenicht 1910: 88). However, his most important deed was the communication with the Leopoldine Society. Already since 1878, he asked for more Czech priests to come to Texas (“Berichte des hochwürdigen Herrn Joseph Chromcik” 1878: 60), something the society supported in 1887 and 1888 when it covered the travel expenses of Václav Chlapík and Karel Preis, who became parsons in Frelsburg and Ellinger, respectively (Kummer 1966: 169). We also have evidence that he asked for material support for the Fayetteville school and his spiritual activities.<sup>8</sup> Thanks to his efforts, the number of Czech priests in Texas grew. In 1890, there were five of them. By 1920, the quantity rose to 24 (Machann and Mendl 2001: 111).

The Leopoldine Society supported the Czech Texans until its dissolution in 1914, caused by the outbreak of the First World War, as well as Pope Pius X’s 1908 exclusion of the United States from their missionary areas. This decision significantly limited the support and the number of European priests in America. Nevertheless, other Catholic organizations aided the Czechs in Texas. In 1857, the American College of the Immaculate Conception in Louvain was founded by the American bishops to facilitate the training of the priests from Belgium and neighboring states (including Bohemia and Moravia) who were willing to come to the United States. Similarly, in 1871, in the German port of Bremen, the St. Raphael Society was founded. In 1889, it opened its branch in Austria with the same mission to provide material and spiritual assistance to the migrants heading to America (Kummer 1966: 174–175).

Some of these societies were genuinely Bohemian or Moravian. In 1891 the archbishop of Olomouc Cyril Stojan established

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8. Diözesanarchiv der Erzdiözese Wien, collection Leopoldinen-Stiftung Zentraldirektion, box 14, Korrespondenz mit den nordamerikanischen Diözesen, Chromčik to Leopoldinen-Stiftung, June 30, 1885.

Apoštolát sv. Cyrila a Metoděje (Apostolate of St. Cyril and Method). Its principal goal was to unite the different currents of Christianity (Catholic, Protestant, and Orthodox). However, after the First World War, Stojan received a petition from Czech Americans to help them maintain their language and identity by sending priests who could hold sermons in Czech. The archbishop agreed and dispatched catechist Lev Pospíšil and chaplain František Jemelka to Texas in 1922.<sup>9</sup> Their mission was so successful that both repeated it in 1926. On both occasions, they visited Texas and were surprised by the attitude of the Czechs there. Jemelka held a sermon in Hostyn, in April 1923, and was astonished by how many people appeared. He called the gathering a pilgrimage of Wallachian<sup>10</sup> Americans (Jemelka 1923: 1).

The Czech Protestants in Texas did not have the religious institutional support as the Catholics. Their pastors came with them and were assisted by their parishioners. The first one was Josef Arnošt Bergmann who came to Texas from Stroužné in Kladsko, today a region in Poland, in 1850. Some authors called him the “father”<sup>11</sup> of Czech immigration to Texas (Habenicht 1910: 78; Polišenský 1996: 20; Čapek 1920: 49). However, recent studies contest this title because Bergmann left for economic and not religious reasons (Klump and Blaha 1981: 14). Also, he never preached in Czech and associated himself with the Germans. Even the skeptics acknowledge, however, that his letters home, published in *Moravské noviny* influenced immigration from Protestant regions in Bohemia and Moravia (Chroust 2006: 48–64). Inspired by his writings and following his footsteps came other pastors like Jan Zvolánek, Josef Opočenský, and Jindřich Juren. Zvolánek held the first Czech language protestant services and Opočenský organized a Protestant community in Wesley. Juren was invited by the faithful from Wesley and Fayetteville who paid for his

9. Zemský archiv v Opavě, pobočka Olomouc, Apoštolát Cyrila a Metoděje v Olomouci (1876) 1885–1954, NAD 1522, box 4, inventory number 68, Duchovní péče Ústředního Apoštolátu sv. Cyrila a Metoděje v Olomouci o zahraniční krajany, no date or number, p. 2.

10. Jemelka refers to the region of Moravian Wallachia, today the eastern Czech Republic. He claims most visitors to his sermon were from this area.

11. The title should be interpreted in two ways. First, as originator of the migration. Second, the priests are commonly addressed with the title “father”.

ship ticket (Habenicht 1910: 78, 106, 109). The Protestants lacked the macro-organization of the Catholics, and were fragmented at first,<sup>12</sup> but they were able to rely more on the dominant American Protestant education system that prepared the pastors for Czech communities. The author Richard Machalek concluded that the Moravian Brethren in Texas should be called an ethnoreligious group, principally because ethnicity was an essential part of the life of their congregations and their efforts to teach Czech (Machalek 1979: 104). However, the Czech Protestants shared much of their religious beliefs with the Anglo-Americans, which led to quicker assimilation than the Catholics, especially after 1945 (Hannan 1996: 17; Hannan 2004: 242).

#### SACRED PLACES

In the previous section, we described the support that the Czech Texans, especially the Catholics, received from Europe. In many ways they were assisted in America more than back home. However, this was a two-way process, as Czech Texans supported the church as well by building churches, schools, and rectories, donating lots and equipment, financing their priests, and aiding religious endeavors and clubs (Hoskin 1995: 71).

The establishment of sacred places by Czech Texans presents an interesting problem. The literature offers two general examples. First, these could be sites constructed by humans for their religious purposes like temples or churches. Second, they might spring from the natural world such as rivers, mountains, and rocks, and are therefore religiously interpreted by humans. In the case of Czech Texans, we can observe both approaches and even the combination thereof. At first glance, this process would confirm the claim that a holy or sacred place could be situated anywhere and could be sanctified through association with God

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12. Clinton Machann and James Mendl offer an interesting statistic of the number of Czech Protestant congregations in Texas in 1900. They mention one Presbyterian, one Congregationalist, one Methodist, and twelve nonaligned (Moravian Brethren). In 1903, thanks to the effort of Rev. Adolf Chlumský, the Moravian Brethren congregations created a United organization, the Evangelical Union of Bohemian and Moravian Brethren (Machann and Mendl 2001: 121–123).

or with religious values (Ben-Israel 1998: 285). However, we can observe a more careful attitude among the Czechs and Moravians that is best explained by a certain hierarchy that is both temporal and spatial. Hostyn in Texas was one of their first communities and was established on a bluff overlooking the flat countryside that must have resembled a “holy mountain.” Yet, it did not remain deserted: the locals built a church on the top of the bluff that soon became the place of pilgrimages of all the Czech Texans. Therefore, the example of Hostyn also fits the definition offered by Calian: “Buildings concentrate different values, expectations, and social projections of a religious community, and most times the physical place itself where the building is consecrated bears importance of its own” (2021: 139–140). Sometimes the sacred place remained uninhabited, such as the aforementioned mountain cross near Fredericksburg but a quick look at the map of Texas or a drive through the countryside, proves that the majority of the Czech sacred places appeared near their settlements. We can observe similar toponyms as in today Czech Republic. In Texas, we can find Frenstat, Moravia, Frydek, or even fictional names like Novohrad (there has not been such place in the Czech Republic) that are based in the Czech language. Some had churches that served as sacred sites, but others were “sacred” as places of cultural remembrance for the immigrants. Jan Metoděj Halamíček came to Texas as a small child, was married and, in 1885, moved with his family to an arid location between Warrenton and Fayetteville. He rented a store there and thanks to his entrepreneurial spirit he built there a small community around it which he named Roznov after Rožnov pod Radhoštěm, where he was born. The place thrived, and, in 1900, it had around one hundred inhabitants, including the members of his big family. Predominantly Czech, Halamíček organized them in several clubs to preserve their Czech heritage (Fayette County I 1996: 80; Fayette County II 1996: 160–161).

Some of these toponyms, however, have more religious context than others. Vsetin is a small community in Lavaca County and its name refers to the Protestant nature of its inhabitants, who came from Vsetín in Moravia, and whose population had already embraced the Moravian Brethren tradition since the Middle Ages. Veselí could be another example of a Protestant community

in Texas, at least until the locals started to use the anglicized version, Wesley. Similarly, the aforementioned place of pilgrimage at the bluff in Fayette County, which was later renamed Hostyn by the Catholics to commemorate St. Hostýn in Moravia. For more than one hundred years, it was considered the cradle of all Czech Catholic life in Texas. The first wooden church was built here by Czechs in 1856. The new church, Queen of the Holy Rosary, was then built in 1888 and soon became a place of great pilgrimages attended by Catholic Czechs from all over Texas. It was highlighted by many sources as an important sacred place of pilgrimage comparable to Velehrad or Radhošť in Moravia. One of the memorable celebrations (of both American Independence and of Cyril and Methodius) took place on 4 and 5 July 1925. Hostyn was visited by Karel Kašpar, bishop of Hradec Králové, who was later named Archbishop and Cardinal of Prague (*Naše Dějiny* 1939: 239–248).

The church itself was not as illustrious as were the grounds on the hillock overlooking central Texas. The locals built several chapels there which were attributed to Czech and Moravian sacred places or patrons: to the Virgin Mary of St. Hostýn, to St. Wenceslaus, and the wooden replica of the first Hostyn church from 1856 that served as a chapel of the Infant Jesus of Prague. The archbishop and cardinal of Prague Dr. Karel Kašpar himself consecrated a copy of the small statue of Jesus that touched the original in Little Side, Prague (*Naše Dějiny* 1939: 245–256).

Other Czech sacred places in Texas served for remembrance too. The twenty famous “painted churches,” a modern tourist attraction, continue to play an important role for the community today because they were designed to imitate the wooden churches in Moravia. One of the most important is the St. Mary’s Catholic Church, constructed in 1895 in Praha, Texas. Its architecture was inspired by the Gothic style, its plank upper walls and ceiling are painted, and over the altar, we can find the image of the St. Vitus Cathedral in Prague (Machann and Mendl 2001: 137). The local community participated in the construction, Father Louis P. Netardus decorated some walls, and stained-glass windows were donated by local Czechs and even Germans: Michal and Vincenc Okruhlik, Anton Gottschalk, and Anton Schumann,

or Vincenc Novák and Vincenc Doubrava. This suggests that local Germans were acculturated by the Czechs (*Naše Dějiny* 1939: 357). Other parishioners furnished the interior; the altar was brimming with decorations of seeds and bulbs from their homeland. Others donated bells, altars (e.g., the left Pieta altar was gifted by Martin and Rozina Okruhlik), the confessional, vestment case in the sacristy, stations of the cross, or communion rail (Frank Migl) (*History of Assumption* 1995: 19–20).

The sacred places, chapels, or churches were not only used as memorials, but also to participate in important activities that developed the cultural and spiritual heritage the immigrants brought with them from their homeland. We can see how important in this endeavor were the sermons from this recollection of the first preaching of Father Chromčík in Fayetteville:

[...] nevertheless, the people rushed to the poor church of Fayetteville for many miles, because at least there they received compensation for all that they lacked painfully in this foreign country of America, where they knew neither the customs nor the language of the natives,—yes, here in the church they learned about this and that and heard the word of God in their mother tongue and could sing from their throats our great church songs, here they forgot as if they were abroad, here they strengthened mentally, here again, their spirit cheered up and flew into the past—yes, many of our cheerful compatriots confessed with a trembling voice how glad they were that they could go to church here, especially their children! (Houšť, 1890: 420)

Apart from religious activities, the churches served an important community role. The parishioners organized themselves into various associations or clubs for various purposes. We can identify several types of these organizations. First, the religious clubs like St. Joseph in Fayetteville or Cyril and Methodius in Hostyn. They offered their members to study and discuss their faith. Second, the cultural organizations that helped the Czech to preserve their heritage. They could take theatrical (Tyl in Praha)<sup>13</sup> or literary form. Third, sports clubs (not that popular in Texas), such as Katolický Sokol<sup>14</sup> sv. Václav (Catholic Falcon St. Wenceslaus) in Hostyn. Fourth,

13. It was named after Josef Kajetán Tyl (1808–1856), a famous Czech playwright and nationalist. He is also the co-author of Czech national anthem.

14. Sokol (Falcon) was a Czech gymnastics organization founded by Miroslav Tyrš in 1862. The American Czechs had already organized Sokol clubs

the most important so-called “fraternal” organizations offered mutual aid to their members in case of health issues, death, bad harvest, or natural disaster. At first, the Czech Texans joined the network of nationwide organizations like Česko-slovanský podporující spolek (Czech-Slavic Benevolent Association), founded in St. Louis in 1854. Later, the distance from the center in the Midwest became an issue and when the administration was unwilling to reform the association, Czech Texans decided to start their separate organizations such as Slovanská podporující jednota státu Texas (SPJST, Slavonic Benevolent Order of State Texas) in 1897, or Katolická jednota texaská (Czech Catholic Union of Texas) (Machan and Mendl 2001: 95–97). The latter was founded in Hostyn under the influence of Father Josef Cromčík who went even to St. Louis to explain the decision. The first president was Josef Pšenčík (Czech Catholic Union 1989). The Moravian Brethren in Texas also had their benevolent organization since 1905, Podporující spolek Evangelické jednoty česko-moravských bratří (Benevolent Society of the Evangelical Unity of Czech-Moravian Brethren). Under its platform, they started to publish a Czech language newspaper *Bratské listy* (Stasney 1938: 97). These organizations, however, did not serve just one sole purpose. The associations were multifaceted, which means they served other purposes than their primary ones. Furthermore, we know that the Czechs could join two or more organizations depending on their interests.

Finally, the Czech sacred places were used abundantly during the religious festivities like open-air sermons at Hostyn or other festivals reflecting the Christian calendar (Hoskin 1995: 67). During the holy days, the Czechs practiced their customs and thus kept the tradition alive. Specifically, during Easter the boys prepared willow whips decorated with ribbons, they whipped girls’ legs and received decorated eggs (*kraslice*) or—this was more common in Texas—they washed the girls’ faces with a bucket of water to make them prettier. The next day, however, on Easter Monday, the girls could return the favor. During Christmas, other

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in 1865. In the following years, these were growingly becoming Freethinkers’ domain and Catholics were banned from participation. This was the principal reason why they were not that popular in Texas and were founded usually with the distinguishing title: Katolický (Catholic) Sokol.

traditions took place. There existed a superstition that those fasting on Christmas Eve could see a golden pig (*zlaté prasátko*), and money was put under the plate during Christmas dinner, so the next year would be affluent. The families baked the famous cookies (resembling gingerbread) in shapes such as trees, animals, and Christmas trees. Together in households or churches, the Czechs sang the gift songs (*koledy*). Parts of everyday life like funerals or weddings also took place in the churches. The latter took three weeks to prepare because they were intended for the whole Czech local community. The weddings themselves served as a religious festivity (Pazdral 1942: 171-175; Czech Catholic Union 1989).

Culture, traditions, and even cuisine had a deep “spiritual” significance for the Czechs in Texas because they created a bond with their old country. They put together folk bands, one of the most famous was Bača’s, but there were many others. Together with them, the Czech Texans sang their old home folk songs and danced the polka. First at homes, but as the building of log halls, usually near the Catholic and Protestant churches, they relocated themselves there, and Saturdays and Sundays thus became a time for bonding of the communities (Machann and Mendl 2001: 159-161; Dybala and Macik 1980: 239-244). The events were also an opportunity to feast and exchange traditional food like potato pancakes with kraut, kolaches, or smoked sausages (Perutka 2019: 170-173). A relatively new invention, but one that demonstrates the bond between culture and religion, is the Polka Mass, a popular event in Texas held on Saturday or Sunday afternoons (Hannan 2005: 51). They started to appear in the US in the 1970s among ethnic polka cultures, Czechs, Poles, or Germans. Polka Mass has all the elements of a regular Mass, but it is accompanied by a live polka band. There exist two variants. Alteration of the secular polka song’s lyrics to sacred ones; or the words of the liturgy and hymns could be sung to familiar polka tunes (Walser 1992: 183).

#### RELIGION AND CZECH IDENTITY

Already in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, the contemporary authors assessing the Czech American communities noticed two interesting aspects of their identity and cultural heritage. The criterion for them was principally the use of the Czech

language. First, the Czechs in Texas resisted the Americanization more than other communities because of their isolation, self-sufficiency, preservation of the ancestral language—both spoken and written—and the influence of ancestral religion (Hannan 2004: 235–236). Czech Texan journalist Ludvík W. Dongres noted in 1923:

After some years, when they teach children in Bohemia the ethnographic division of the Czechoslovak nation, they will say: 'Bohemians live in the Bohemia, Moravians in Moravia, Slovaks in Slovakia. Once upon a time, American Czechs lived in North America, followed by Czech Americans, and in Texas, Texas Moravians, who disappeared last.' (Dongres 1923: 276)

In some ways, this claim was prophetic because, eventually, even the Czech Texans became Americanized. Today, only a few of them speak the Czech language. On the other hand, many of them still maintain some cultural practices, such as music and cooking. Also, the highest number of Czech compatriots in the world that identify with the old country live in Texas.

Second, the contemporary authors noticed that the Catholics and Protestants were more resistant to the process of Americanization than were the Freethinkers. Famous Czech poet and writer Josef Václav Sládek visited America between 1868 and 1870. He also stayed in some Czech communities in the Northwest and was deeply concerned by their state of assimilation. In one of his feuilletons, accurately called *Ztracené duše* ("Lost Souls"), he even called them the dead branch of the Czech nation (Sládek 1871a: 1). When he visited a Czech religious colony, however, he revised his opinion:

Just as in Bohemia where the warmest Czech consciousness has been preserved in the Protestant regions, so it is in America. Bohemian, Moravian, a Protestant who clings to his tongue with all his heart and soul, tries to keep that language also in the mouths of his children. (Sládek 1871b: 1)

Similarly, in one of his articles, a catechist, Lev Pospíšil, described the differences between Catholic and Freethinkers' quarters in Chicago. He praised the former for preserving Czech identity to at least some extent, even though he was aware that they would also disappear in the American melting pot:

On the streets, older people over the age of 17 speak almost exclusively Czech. The younger ones will greet: ‚Pochválen buď J. K. [Ježíš Kristus],<sup>15</sup> but they continue to chatter in English. They are used to talking in the church and about the religion with the priest in Czech, but elsewhere in English. Thus, Czech remains a kind of ecclesiastical language, and will also remain in churches for a long time and on cemeteries for the longest. Stop it? Barely [...] (Pospíšil 1922: 3)

The observations of the contemporary authors were later confirmed by scholars. Clinton Machann and James W. Mendl recognized the importance of the Catholics and Protestants in preserving the Czech heritage in Texas (2001: 115). The Texan ethnographer and agricultural sociologist of Czech origin Robert L. Skrabanek observed the same pattern in his autobiographical account of growing up in the Czech community of Snook, *We're Czechs*. In the last section, where he reviewed how the town changed fifty years after his Interwar youth, he associated the decline of the Czech language with the changes in the church. Despite the fierce resistance of his father and others from his generation, English became the language of the church services. Hymns, Bible, and catechisms were in English as well. Furthermore, socialization also declined. The service took one hour, and the parishioners left immediately after it. Traditional events like Sunday dinners were abandoned and with them the regular practice of speaking the Czech language (Skrabanek 2005: 228). The scholars, however, omitted the proper explanation of why religion played such an important role in preserving Czech identity, language, and cultural heritage in Texas.<sup>16</sup> Apart from the complex network we have described in two previous sections, we can find three additional reasons.

First, it is the composition of believers and atheists among Czech Texans. Some scholars estimated that when the Czechs left

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15. Praise our lord J. C. [Jesus Christ].

16. Surprisingly, the connection between religion and preserving the identity of the Czech Texans has not received proper attention from scholars. Lida Cope ignores the topic completely (Cope 2003). Eva Eckertová mentions it only briefly (Eckertová 2001: 247–248) or uses the subchapter dedicated to religion as a space for a biography of Josef Chromčík (Eckertová 2003: 105–118). Kevin Hannan was the only author that recognized the connection between religion and identity. However, even he does not analyze the subject in depth (Hannan 1996; Hannan 2004).

Austria, 90 percent claimed to be of the Catholic faith. However, many of them were Protestants already but did not want to be harassed by the Austrian officials.<sup>17</sup> The estimate of the Catholics can be as high as 75 percent (Machann and Mendl 2001: 105, 110). Henry R. Maresh claimed in 1946 that Czech Texans were 70 percent Catholics, 25 percent Protestants, and the remainder liberals or Freethinkers (Maresh 1946: 240). The exact numbers are not as important as is the fact that the Freethought Movement did not have much support in Texas. Its members did not resist Americanization that well because their national organizations, like Sokol, which originated in the 1860s, were not that appealing to the younger generations born in America. However, it had not much of an impact in Texas, given their low numbers. Furthermore, even those who participated in the secular fraternal movement, which had its origins among Freethinkers, were not radicals and cooperated with the other groups instead of fighting them (Machann 1997: 169).

The situation in Texas differed dramatically from the cities like Chicago, St. Louis, or Cleveland. There the number of Freethinkers was much higher, and they started a bitter cultural war with the Catholics. It encompassed heated public debates, invectives in their respective newspapers, and even lawsuits. The scholar Karel D. Bicha points out that Czech anticlericalism was unique compared to other European immigrants in America. The principal reason was the association of the Catholics with the Habsburg monarchy in Austria. The Freethinkers believed (wrongly) that the Catholics were not nationalist enough. Even the big unifying moment between the laic part of the compatriots (Bohemian National Alliance) and the Catholics (Union of Czech Catholics) during the First World War happened at the end of the conflict, in 1918 when their representatives co-signed the Pittsburg Agreement with the future president Tomáš Garrigue Masaryk. The alliance, however, did not last after the war (Bicha 1980: 96–97).

Second, the Czechs in Texas formed isolated communities or rather families. Melinda Hoskin explains in her master's thesis:

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17. Since 1781 Protestantism was tolerated in Austria but only after 1867 was there any genuine freedom of religion. Still, many of the immigrants changed their religion only in the United States.

They were isolated by miles and insulated by a desire to practice their culture, free from the oppression of their homeland. The family unit dominated Czech society, the community enhanced and supported Czech ethnicity, and the Czechs developed unique organizations to maintain a high degree of Czech ethnicity (Hoskin 1995: 78–79).

However, the Czech Texans' isolationism manifested itself also in other areas. One of them was the family marriage policy, especially among Catholics. Young people were encouraged to marry someone within the community. The parents preferred someone of the same faith or at least the same ethnicity. Mixed marriages, even between Czechs and Moravians, were sometimes discouraged.

Another isolationist instrument was the system of national parishes of the Catholic church. The Papacy and church authorities acknowledged that different European ethnic groups have their distinguished versions of Catholicism. In the second half of the nineteenth century, national parishes were established in the United States. Thanks to this policy, the Czechs in Texas could celebrate the liturgy in their native tongue which explains the growing number of Czech priests. In 1918, the Papacy decided not to create new national parishes, but this did not affect the already existing ones. It is noteworthy that adjacent to the parishes were the schools (discussed below), where children also learned in Czech. The statistics confirm their popularity. Czech Catholic school enrollment never declined between 1895 and 1945 (Walch 1994: 142, 148).

The isolationism of the Czech Texans encompassed various areas. In part, it was a product of the abundance of lands in Texas. Unlike the village system of small lots back home that was shaped by centuries, in Texas the farms were far away from each other, separated by vast cotton plantations. It principally affected those who came to Texas as adults. They suffered from loneliness and a lack of social life which led in many cases to negative social pathological phenomena like alcoholism. But, on the other hand, the Czechs in Texas sought a social structure similar to that of their village communities back home, and they discovered it in the church (Hoskin 1995: 71).

Third, the American school system allowed teaching in various languages in the nineteenth century. At least the praxis was predominantly tolerated by local authorities. Only after the First

World War, the states with a strong presence of immigrants started to introduce obligatory teaching in English as part of their assimilation and nation-building agendas (Beykont 2005: 110–111). Thanks to this relaxed system, the Czechs in Texas invited teachers like Josef Mašík who taught the children in Czech, helping to preserve their cultural identity.<sup>18</sup>

However, the situation in Texas, or at least in Fayette County, turned worse in the 1880s. Paradoxically, it was because of the activity of a Czech Catholic, Augustin Haidušek. At first sight, his résumé resembles the ideal American Dream. He came to Texas with his father at a young age, attended English school, joined the Confederate army, studied law, and in 1875 became (probably) the first Czech mayor in the United States in La Grange. Later he was a member of the Texas Congress and county judge of Fayette County. He assumed that his impeccable career was possible only thanks to his English education and acculturation (Johnson 1914: 1838–1840).

When he became the county judge in 1884, he tried to persuade his Czech compatriots to follow in his footsteps. He decided all the schools in Fayette must teach in English and not hire teachers unfit for the task. Haidušek followed the logic that learning English was essential for the Czechs to develop themselves in their new home. He did not want them to abandon completely their cultural heritage, but he wanted them to recognize their civic obligations to the United States. Some Czechs were furious. For example, Josef S. Čada the editor of the newspaper *Slovan* in La Grange started a campaign against him. Another journalist, František Boleslav Zdrůbek, labeled him as a “Czech criminal renegade of Texas” (Jochech 1940: 41–47).

Yet, Haidušek was supported by many Czechs and Moravians in Texas, who considered his policy adequate. After all, they twice re-elected him as judge. To defend his stance, he started to publish his own Czech language newspaper *Svoboda*, where he explained the necessity of English as a school language:

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18. The authors Maresh and Hudson claim that: “It has been authoritatively established that Josef Mašík was the first Czech teacher in the United States” (1934: 172).

We left our homeland with the intention of settling in America forever. We did so of our own free will, no one forced us to do so. [...] it is our sacred duty to become American citizens not only by law but also from the ground up. [...] American citizens must also be useful; but to become such, they need some knowledge—and we do not get that. Every reasonable person will learn that the main condition of the people's government is the education of its citizens. [...] The idea that a person who does not know English can also be a useful American citizen like one who knows English is really ridiculous. (Haidušek 1889: 4)

Haidušek's actions only strengthened the role of the church in education. Both Catholics and Protestants used Czech not only in their services but also in the adjacent schools. These could take form of weekend schools where the Czech language and history were taught (Hoskin 1995: 71), or, as Robert L. Skrabanek describes, they could take the form of a summer camp:

The Czech-Moravian Brethren church organized and maintained a Czech school for over six decades that convened every summer for a period of one month. Although the school was sponsored by this religious group, its teachings were non-denominational and some Catholic children were always in attendance, for the central aim of this school was to perpetuate the Czech language. (Skrabanek 1950: 185)

Skrabanek refers to the famous Hus Memorial School or Husova škola in Czech. According to the sources it was Rev. Adolph Chlumský, who invited a group of talented girls from various congregations to give them Sunday school management. In 1909, the first meeting of the Sunday School Union was held. Five years later, Rev. Hegar and Rev. Barton invited eighteen students and organized an eight-week teachers' training school. This event started a yearly tradition of the Hus Scholl (or Hus Encampment), where the classes were in the Czech language. Even though the location changed over time, it could be labeled as a sacred place of the Czech Texans (Machan and Mendl 2001: 125; Stasney 1938: 90).

The uniqueness of Czech Texas is staggering especially when we compare it to similar Czech communities in the United States. The Czechs in Iowa, for instance, were also a predominantly rural society, and their share of the total population of the state was similar to Texas, but they Americanized more quickly. We can observe this process already in the interwar period. The leading Catholics in Texas wrote in 1939 an astonishing and monumental

(slightly over seven hundred pages) book *Naše Dějiny* in Czech, documenting their principal actors (both personalities and organizations) and their sacred places. By contrast, the Czechs in Iowa did not try to write their history. Surprisingly, even some shorter texts related to anniversaries of their churches appeared in a bilingual form, with English being even dominant (*Památka svěcení* 1926). This occurred not just in the urban areas. The Czech nucleus in rural Iowa and once-proud host to the famous composer, Antonín Dvořák, Spillville, published its 70-year jubilee booklet of their St. Wenceslaus church only in English (*Diamond Jubilee* 1935). Even more surprising is the comparison of Catholic schools. In Texas, they were a platform to preserve the Czech cultural heritage and identity. In Iowa, the largest Czech church community of St. Wenceslaus in Cedar Rapids printed invitations, programs, and other material in English already in 1907 (*Commencement exercises* 1907). The reason behind the Americanization of the Czechs in Iowa is simple. The Catholics there were not an isolated community, they were in contact with Freethinkers and their organizations like Sokol, with their newspapers and this led them to abandon faster their identity and heritage. Also, the community's support for organized religion was more powerful in Texas than in Iowa. Author Kevin Hannan mentions it as one of the most distinguishable traits (2004: 242).

#### CONCLUSIONS

The Czech Texans are a unique ethnic group in the United States of America. Over time they distinguished themselves from other Czech Americans but also from the Bohemians and Moravians that stayed at home. Breton (1964) called this process the creation of a unique identity rather than the preservation of one from their homeland. However, we have to acknowledge that the hypothesis we have established is correct, and the Czech Texans preserved most of their identity and longer than other ethnicities or other Czech Americans. This article has demonstrated that religion played a crucial role in this process through the establishment of sacred places.

The reason is fourfold. First, the universalistic role of the church created a bond between the migrants and its own European/Aus-

trian/Czech institutions. Their organizations were also the only ones that supported the migrants either by direct subsidies or by sending priests to Texas. Second, the established sacred places served indeed a multifaceted role. They were not just religious spaces but also sites of remembrance of their homeland, fundamental for the preservation of their cultural heritage and ethnic identity. The churches and chapels also served as an important amalgam of Czech Texan society supplementing a role of their old village structure that was not otherwise present in the Texas landscape. Third, Czech Texans were numerically the most religious Czech community in the United States, which meant they were not losing their identity because the Freethinkers, who lost the Czech identity more quickly, were almost absent. Fourth, the Czech Texans isolated themselves from other ethnicities in Texas, and religion played an important role in the process. Either as a way of isolation or as a unifying element of the Czech society. The institutionalization of the national parish was crucial because it gave them the opportunity to hold masses in the Czech tongue and establish church schools that taught the language and Czech history to preserve their identity. All these points prove that religion created an interesting network of contacts among Czech Texans, and it helped them to create a unique cultural heritage that shares traits with their homeland, much more than that of any other group of Czech expatriates.

*Sacred Spaces  
In North America*

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*Abstract:* The process of Czech and Moravian immigration to Texas is a well-known phenomenon. Since 1848, tens of thousands decided to cross the ocean to seek a better future in the “Lone Star state.” Although their history is well documented, there are still themes to be explored. Their religious activity and the connection it has created with their metropolis is one of them. The church and its institutions sent priests to America to attend to the immigrants in their mother tongue and helped them preserve their cultural identity. Furthermore, they organized the construction of their sacred places that would remind the parishioners of their home country. One example could be the famous painted churches still present in Texas today. This topic has not received proper attention from historians because it requires studying sources on both sides of the Atlantic. The presented contribution tries to change this unflattering fact using the microhistorical approach. Its aim is threefold. First, explain the historical dimension of the religious connection between the Czech and Moravian immigrants in Texas with their metropolis. Second, describe the sacred places of the immigrants, how they were built, what role they played in their everyday life,

and how they established a bond with their country of origin. Third, what importance did the sacred places of the Czechs and Moravians have in preserving their language and cultural identity? The microhistorical approach demands the use of various and fragmented sources, and this study will be no exception. It will use archive material from Austria and the Czech Republic, principally the funds of the religious organizations that supported the immigrants in Texas, such as the Leopoldine Society. Furthermore, the article will use published contemporary personal recounts and secondary literature. The content of these sources will be critically analysed to answer the research questions and hopefully contribute to the theme of religion and its invaluable role in an immigrant society.

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# MAKING INDIGENOUS RELIGION AT THE SAN FRANCISCO PEAKS:

## Navajo Discourses and Strategies of Familiarization

INTRODUCTION: SACRED SPACE, FAMILIARIZATION,  
AND THE PROBLEM OF AUTHENTICITY

Sacred space is contested space. Indeed, even the category of the ‘sacred’ itself is subject to continued contestation. Whether the “sacred” is conceptualized by scholars as ineffable, inviolable, an inalienable community resource, the opposite of profane, a source of danger, or a source of power, it is uncertain that the category of the “sacred” is productive in application to Native American and Indigenous religious traditions. In light of such disputes, this paper assumes that the sacred is a culturally contingent construction. Because the sacredness of a place is not inherently determined—nor even the “place-ness” of the place itself—it remains “open to unlimited claims and counter-claims to its significance” (Chidester and Linenthal 1995: 18). Consequently, since different constructions of meaning at the site inevitably lead to conflicts between groups, sacred space is inherently “contested space” (Chidester and Linenthal 1995: 15).

With the hope of transcending some of these differences, Native Americans engage in what Mary Louise Pratt has called “autoethnography,” or strategic discourses in which “colonized subjects undertake to represent themselves in ways that *engage with* the colonizer’s own terms[...]in response to or in dialogue with[...]metropolitan representations” (Pratt 1992: 7; emphasis

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in original). Pratt's conception of "autoethnography" may also be used productively in conjunction with Jonathan Z. Smith's (2004) strategies of "familiarization" and "defamiliarization." In the words of Bruce Lincoln, these discursive strategies are employed in the hopes of "evoking previously latent sentiments of affinity or estrangement" (Lincoln 1989: 174). Therefore, when sacred claims are made in public venues and in legal contexts, strategies of "familiarization" and "defamiliarization" are frequently employed, most often through analogy (Michaelsen 1985: 65-68; Mazur 1999: 117-118). Since Native Americans often try to assert the legitimacy of their own religious traditions in relation to the most established religion in the United States, Christianity, many of these discursive strategies employ analogies with explicitly Christian content in order to familiarize their own traditions to non-Native audiences.

Such familiarization in these contexts is necessary, since the premise of any religious freedom case is that what one is talking about is "religion." Of course, defining religion is not a simple matter. Definitions of religion abound among academics, courts, and practitioners themselves. More to the point, any judicial test of what counts as "religious" is problematic: beyond the general difficulty of defining religion, there is always the likelihood that courts will favor the familiar over the strange. For example, because of the framers' articulation of religion in the United States Constitution as a private and individual affair, practitioners of communal and land-based traditions encounter much difficulty in their contemporary efforts to seek the protection and return of sacred lands, the repatriation of human remains and cultural artifacts, and so forth, on the basis of freedom of "religion" (Wenger 2009: 15-16). Nonetheless, if a religious practitioner feels that one's "exercise of religion" is somehow burdened, courts must first be able to determine whether the practice in question is 'religious,' and therefore deserving of protection under the First Amendment or subsequent laws protecting religious freedom (Jenkins 2004: 245).

However, according to Winnifred Fallers Sullivan, most Americans "would recoil at the idea that a federal judge should be deciding in a federal court, for the purposes of secular law, what

does and what does not count as real religion” (Sullivan 2005: 4). While this may be true for most Americans generally, it is perhaps especially true for Native Americans. Winona LaDuke remarks, “[i]n the end there is no absence of irony: the integrity of what is sacred to Native Americans will be determined by the government that has been responsible for doing everything in its power to destroy Native American cultures” (LaDuke 2005: 4). According to anthropologist Dorothea Theodoratus, the task of translating one’s traditions may be particularly difficult for Native Americans, since “any division into ‘religious’ or ‘sacred’ is in reality an exercise which forces Indian concepts into non-Indian ‘categories,’ and distorts the original conceptualization in the process” (Brown 1999: 127; Wenger 2009: 256).

Navajo claims pertaining to the sacredness of the San Francisco Peaks in northern Arizona (as well as those of other Native American tribes), while no doubt profoundly sincere, are necessarily and strategically positioned in relation to the contemporary legal struggles within which they have arisen. This should not suggest that their claims are spurious, invented, or in other words ‘inauthentic.’<sup>1</sup> Greg Johnson asserts that “[f]requently, the specter against which authenticity is measured is what critics might call ‘postured tradition,’ a shorthand means of suggesting that tradition expressed in political contexts is ‘merely political’” (Johnson 2007: 3). To be sure, the discourses that posit the sacredness of the Peaks are fundamentally and simultaneously both religious and political; yet this does not necessarily mean that traditional religious claims made in contemporary political contexts are motivated by purely political considerations. Although these claims are necessarily formulated to persuade others of the incontestable “authenticity” of their claims, I suggest that the degree to which this incontestability is achieved is directly related to an accumulation and accretion of discourse resulting from decades of continuing conflict at the Peaks.<sup>2</sup>

1. I strive to set myself apart from the often-harsh rhetoric of “the invention of tradition” (Hobsbawm and Ranger 1983).

2. I wrote my senior thesis in anthropology at Colorado State University on the San Francisco Peaks case in 2005. Then I wrote my MA thesis in religious studies at the University of Colorado at Boulder on the same

For the purposes of this paper, I have primarily limited my inquiry to the claims of only one of five tribes engaged in the litigation concerning the San Francisco Peaks between 2005 and 2009: the Navajos.<sup>3</sup> Moreover, they are only one of at least thirteen Native American tribes to describe the Peaks as sacred. My limited focus is not intended to suggest that the claims of these other tribes are less important, or especially less “authentic.” Rather, the only compelling reason that I do not provide a full analysis of every tribe’s claims regarding the sacredness of the Peaks is the limitation of space in this project. With these preliminary remarks, I now turn to the Navajo, who are perhaps the most dominant of the various tribes involved in *Navajo Nation v. United States Forest Service*.

#### A BRIEF INTRODUCTION TO NAVAJOS

According to archaeologists, the peoples known today as Navajos arrived in the Southwest sometime between five hundred and one thousand years ago (Brugge 1983: 489). Perhaps they arrived at about the same time that Columbus set sail from Spain.<sup>4</sup> However, there is no consensus and, even within this time frame,

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topic in 2008. The Supreme Court’s decision to not hear the case in 2009 upheld the lower court’s decision against the litigating tribes in *Navajo Nation v. United States Forest Service*. This decision came out when I was living on the Navajo Nation and attending Diné College to study the Navajo language and prepare for a doctoral dissertation in religious studies at Arizona State University that would involve ethnographic field research and interviews in Navajo. The decision significantly contributed to a change in research focus away from the San Francisco Peaks as I began studying O’odham pilgrimages to Magdalena (Schermerhorn 2019).

3. Within the Navajo language, or *Diné Bizaad*, Navajos call themselves Diné. The other litigating tribes are Hopis, Havasupais, Hualapais, and Yavapai-Apaches (Schermerhorn 2008).

4. This data should not be construed to delegitimize Navajo territorial claims relative to non-Native territorial claims. As one anonymous Native American has argued: “We were the first human beings on earth. Whites write that we came from Asia where the blood types are not even like ours. Don’t give us those fairy tales that you tell children and say it is not our land. You always say that we were never here to justify your white ass coming over here. We are the first people on earth, there is no way around that” (Van Otten 1982: 52).

some historians and archeologists suggest that Navajos initially lived east of their current territory, which they did not come to until a later date (Opler 1983: 382). On the other hand, historian Peter Iverson argues that in many of these scholarly and not-so-scholarly stories,

the Diné too often lurch onto the Southwestern stage as nomadic vagabonds [...]. Such scenarios doom the Navajos to second-class citizenship, demote them to newcomers in a new land, and relegate them to the category of upstarts whose eventual ambition becomes arrogance, in stark contrast to sedentary and supposedly always peaceful Puebloan groups. (Iverson 2002: 14)

Following almost predictably from this, the Hopi Cultural Preservation Office surprisingly asserts that Navajos did not migrate to the Southwest until 1700 (Hopi Cultural Preservation Office).<sup>5</sup> Of course, Navajos have their own origin stories, which tell an altogether different kind of story. According to Iverson, for Navajos themselves,

Navajo history does not start in Alaska or Northwestern Canada or along the Rocky Mountains or in the Great Basin [...]. It begins with the sacred mountains [...]. All that may have occurred prior to what happened here is prelude. Prior to this place, there were no Navajos. Without this place, there could be no Diné. (Iverson 2002: 5–6)

Furthermore, it should perhaps be noted that some Navajos have been willing and able to reconcile these competing narratives.<sup>6</sup> Nevertheless, most scholars have continued to privilege the accounts of archaeologists above Navajo traditions of their own

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5. Similarly, in Platt Cline's history of Flagstaff, Arizona, he introduces Navajos as "those latecomers who were probably not in the immediate area at all prior to A.D. 1700" (Cline 1976: 6).

6. For example, Philip Jenkins asserts: "The Navajo believe that the Creator gave them a special territory located between four sacred mountains in the Four Corners region, and that they have always lived within these boundaries. Many Navajos will also happily acknowledge that their ancestors migrated from the northwestern regions of the continent, and arrived within their sacred homeland only during the fifteenth century [...]. That knowledge does not detract from the sacred quality of the four mountains, or suggest that there is anything 'false' about the Navajo religious tradition. In practice, though, 'time immemorial' can span just a few centuries."

origins, assuming that much time and effort has been invested in transforming a land to which other indigenous groups laid prior claim into *Diné Bikéyah* (Nabokov 2002: 141). In doing so, the Navajo, in the words of anthropologist Peter Nabokov,

smother[ed] it with stories. Few American Indian nations have produced such a crowded atlas of place-names and localized narratives. One wonders if a certain insecurity may lie at the root of this tendency to leave no site untitled or unstoried, and whether the impulse to stake spiritual claims becomes stronger when those of historical residency are weaker. (Nabokov 2006: 91)<sup>7</sup>

Indeed, Navajo claims to origins between four sacred mountains are not merely stories; they are also territorial claims that inevitably deny the legitimacy of claims by other indigenous populations who lived in the region prior to Navajo arrival. Historian of religions Karl W. Luckert describes these territorial-claiming stories as Navajo “geographization” mythology in which “[t]he gods traverse, name, and lay claim to stretches of land on behalf of their chosen people” (Luckert 1977: 58). In keeping with this, Navajos such as Wilson Aronilth, Jr. assert “[t]hese sacred mountains were placed here for us” (Aronilth 1992: 31)—that is, *exclusively* for Navajos and not Hopis, non-Natives, or anyone else.<sup>8</sup> Therefore, out of deference to the competing territorial claims of other Native American nations (but not Euro-American settler-colonizers), I cannot unproblematically assert, as other scholars have, that “[t]he mountains are placed there for the Diné; they are to live within these mountains” (Iverson 2002: 7).

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7. In their defense, Karl Luckert argues: “Long-settled cultures tend to suffocate in their own secretions of tradition. They become complacent in what seems to be established; they are therefore no match for newcomers who still believe, in all honesty, that they are in direct touch with the sources of reality—and whose storytellers still dare to explain anything, from trivia to ultimacies and gods.” (Luckert 1977: 4–5)

8. Most explicitly, Sylvia Manygoats argued: “the land they [Hopis] claim now was never theirs. It’s Navajo land. The white people also never lived here” (in Kelley and Francis 1994: 34). Likewise, Floyd Laughter claimed, “all the space between these mountains is Navajoland, is ours” (in Luckert 1977: 50).

As I hope to have begun suggesting, much is at stake in Navajo origin stories. They are in fact claims of authority and authenticity. As such, they can only be successful in inverse relation with other competing claims of various other groups. Although it is fair to say that this is accurate of such claims generally, it is especially the case for such claims made in explicitly legal contexts. Furthermore, courts have become increasingly entangled in claims of authenticity; despite the fact that the Religious Freedom Restoration Act (RFRA) as well as its subsequent amendments does not mandate a “Centrality Standard,” as does the “toothless” American Indian Religious Freedom Act (AIRFA), the specter of “centrality” has haunted the processing of free exercise claims in *Navajo Nation*. In each of the decisions in the case—the Rosenblatt ruling at the district court level, the Fletcher ruling for the appellate court (as well as his dissenting opinion in the *en banc* decision), and the *en banc* decision authored by Judge Bea—even though the authors of these decisions have asserted that they were not guided by the Centrality Standard, they rely on it nonetheless. That these judges might rely on discourses of “centrality,” perhaps without even knowing, suggests that the problem of authenticity lies deeper than most have been willing to recognize. As Justice Scalia argued in *Employment Division of Oregon v. Smith*, “inquiry into ‘severe impact’ [or ‘substantial burden’] is no different from inquiry into centrality” (US Supreme Court 1990: 887). To do so is merely to substitute “for the question ‘How important is X to the religious adherent?’ the question ‘How great [substantial] will be the harm [burden] to the religious adherent if X is taken away?’ There is no material difference” (US Supreme Court 1990: 887). As Scalia noted, this is “akin to the unacceptable ‘business of evaluating the relative merits of differing religious claims’” (US Supreme Court 1990: 887). In other words, when courts evaluate the substantiality of burdens upon practitioners’ free exercise of religion, they inevitably evaluate the authenticity of the practitioners’ claims. Although RFRA has disavowed the Centrality Standard, “centrality” has by no means been abandoned. Establishing the centrality of one’s free exercise claim is still the greatest legal distinction that a litigant

can aspire to with regard to the putative “authenticity” of their religious claims.

Judge Rosenblatt illustrates how the Centrality Standard was operative for Navajo claimants in his summary of their claims:

The Peaks are one of four mountains sacred to the Navajo people. In the Navajo religion, the creation of the Navajo people took place at the Peaks. Accordingly, the Peaks are considered in Navajo culture and religion to be the ‘Mother of the Navajo People,’ their essence and their home. The whole of the Peaks is the holiest of the shrines in the Navajo way of life. (US District Court 2006: 32)

However, for Rosenblatt, the centrality of the San Francisco Peaks as a whole was irrelevant because the development in question did not concern the Peaks as a whole, but only a 777-acre area upon which the Arizona Snowbowl bases its operations.<sup>9</sup> Judge Fletcher also demonstrated the concern with establishing centrality of the Peaks in Navajo claims. Fletcher maintained:

The Peaks are[...] of fundamental importance to the religious beliefs and practices of the Navajo [...].The Navajo creation story revolves around the Peaks [...]. The Peaks are represented in the Navajo medicine bundles found in nearly every Navajo household [...]. The Peaks play a role in every Navajo religious ceremony. (US Court of Appeals 2007: 2848-2849; US Court of Appeals 2008: 10111-10113)

#### MEDICINE BUNDLES, MOUNTAINS, AND METAPHORS

Concerning the Navajo medicine bundles, or *jish*, that represent the Peaks, Judge Fletcher elaborated: “[t]he medicine bundles are composed of stones, shells, herbs, and soil from each of the four sacred mountains” (US Court of Appeals 2007: 2848). Navajo practitioner and keeper of Chief Barboncito’s *jish*, Larry Foster, described the San Francisco Peaks as “our sacred, bundle mountain” (US District Court 2005: 206). Furthermore, Navajo medicine man Norris Nez explained that “[t]he bundle is made up of the mountain[...]it’s like the mountain recreated in the medicine bundle” (US District

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9. “Although the witnesses generally testified that the Peaks were central and indispensable to the Navajo way of life, President Shirley and Mr. Begay provided no evidence that they use the Snowbowl SUP area [Special Use Permit area upon which the Arizona Snowbowl is located] for any religious purpose” (US District Court 2006: 32).

Court 2005: 890–891). Foster described these medicine bundles as “our Bible,” because “the unwritten way of life” for Navajos is said to be “embedded” within them (US District Court 2005: 194–195, 198, 216). Highlighting the importance of these medicine bundles in Navajo healing, Nez maintained that “like the western doctor has his black bag with needles and other medicine, this bundle has in there the things to apply medicine to a patient” (US Court of Appeals 2008: 10112). Significantly, such non-explicitly religious analogies were relatively uncommon in the testimony by practitioners in *Navajo Nation*, at least in juxtaposition with prior claims. After all, the case concerned religious freedom; hence, it made little sense to speak of the Peaks in language that was not explicitly religious, lest their claims be considered as having little if anything to do with religion.

Therefore, analogies of the Peaks without explicitly religious content have been attenuated in *Navajo Nation*, whereas heretofore, such analogies proliferated as strategies of familiarization. One Navajo woman who spoke to writer Douglas Preston, compared medicine bundles to the U.S. Constitution (Preston 1995: 132). Likewise, in the 1970s, Navajo practitioner Floyd Laughter told historian of religions Karl W. Luckert, “these mountains have been set up as our–our constitution. Yes, it is like the very same thing which the White people call their Constitution. For us these four mountains were set up and sanctified for that same purpose” (Luckert 1977: 50).<sup>10</sup> Similar to comparisons between the sacred mountains and medicine bundles (containing elements from the four sacred mountains) and the US Constitution, some Navajos have also compared the Peaks to the US Government. As early as 1941, or perhaps even earlier, a Navajo man explained to an anthropologist “[t]he white people all look to the government like we look to the sacred mountains. You [...] hold out your hands to the government. In accord with that, the government, you live. But we look to our sacred mountains [...]. According to them we live—they are our Washington” (Young and Morgan 1941: 17; McPherson 1992: 19; Lloyd 1995: 27; Preston 1995: 131; Fink 1998: 72). Floyd Laughter restated this analogy to Luckert,

10. Norris Nez also referred to medicine bundles as “our constitution” (US District Court 2005: 890).

asserting “we revere these holy places as they do [revere] their Washington, D.C.” (Luckert 1977). Quite understandably, analogies lacking explicitly religious content such as these have been attenuated in *Navajo Nation*.

Accordingly, unambiguously religious analogies and metaphors have been invoked far more frequently during the current litigation. Take for instance the analogy of land or mountains as Bible: “This land, it’s our bible. Like you have your Bible, all black and white, written down, fresh and new. And we have our bible, old, worn, which is the land and the songs about the land” (Preston 1995: 97; Nabokov 2002: 133). In his testimony before the district court in 2005, Navajo Nation President Joe Shirley, Jr. asserted that “[t]he Bible is what makes a Christian; the mountain is what makes a Navajo” (Indianz.com 2005). In July 2005, during his appeal to the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) in Paris for the protection of the San Francisco Peaks as a World Heritage Site, Shirley claimed:

To the Navajo people, the San Francisco Peaks are as sacred as the Qur’an to Muslims, as sacred as the pages of the Bible to Christians [...]. Desecrating this mountain is like tearing out pages of the scriptures, wading them up and throwing them away. When you desecrate the mountain, you’re doing away with a way of life. It’s not right. It’s sacrilegious. (Norrel 2005: B1)

However, even this metaphor has fallen out of vogue somewhat as a strategy of familiarization in juxtaposition to another unambiguously religious analogy.

Perhaps the most effective analogy that Navajos and other Native Americans have utilized in describing the Peaks as sacred has been the metaphor of mountain as church. This has been a potent strategy of familiarization with many non-Natives, especially those who are inclined to see the sublime in the monumental (Cronon 1996: 73–76). Navajo and Sierra Club environmental justice organizer Robert Toho argued, “Wastewater on the Peaks is like desecrating a cathedral” (Norrel 2005: B1). Indeed, the effort to familiarize the Peaks as a church for non-Native audiences has been so successful that some non-Natives have used the analogy to assert that sacred mountains are more sacred than churches

because they, unlike churches, are not “man made.” For instance, Douglas Preston has written,

judges do not understand that a pristine mountaintop can be just as sacred as the Dome of the Rock is to Muslims, the Western Wall to Jews, or the Church of the Nativity to Christians. Somehow, our laws recognize only man-made structures as being ‘sacred’—a truly strange idea if you think about it. (Preston 1995: 130)

A related metaphor that invokes the permanence of desecration through defecation comes from the Navajo medicine man, Larry Archie, who said, “The Peaks have a lot of religious power when they are undisturbed. But putting wastewater up there would be like turning our shrine into a toilet” (Shaffer 2005). According to one Arizona Snowbowl representative: “there’s been a lot of talk like it’s [that is, making snow with treated sewage effluent is like] pissing in a cathedral or something, which I don’t see, [be] cause the water is as clean, if not cleaner than the stuff coming right out of the sky” (*The Snowbowl Effect* 2005).<sup>11</sup> Nonetheless, the metaphor of mountain as church has not been dismissed by all non-Natives. Many non-Natives have even invoked the metaphor themselves.<sup>12</sup> During the Ninth Circuit Court of Appeals hearing in September 2006, and again in December 2007, Judge William A. Fletcher asked the attorneys representing the Arizona Snowbowl whether they would consider filling baptismal fonts (normally containing holy water) with treated sewage to be a ‘substantial burden’ for the Catholic Church and its practitioners. In both 2006 and 2007, after a long pause to find an acceptable answer to this impossible question, the attorneys replied, “I’m not Catholic.”

Indeed, the metaphor has been so pervasive that, on occasion, it seems to have lost its figurativeness.<sup>13</sup> The day before the *en banc*

11. Whether snow made from reclaimed waste water is in fact cleaner than naturally occurring snow is disputed.

12. During the opposition to further development at the Snowbowl in the 1980s, Frisbie asserted that such development would be “comparable to promoting restaurants in and ski tows through St Peter’s basilica or Westminster Abbey, or as Griffen has said, ‘skating in the Sistine Chapel’” (Frisbie 1987: 300; Griffen 1983).

13. When metaphors acquire this power, the ideologies inherent within them become naturalized “metaphors we live by” (Lakoff and Johnson 1980).

rehearing of *Navajo Nation*, the Save the Peaks Coalition organized a march on 10 December 2007 from All Saints Episcopal Church to the Ninth Circuit Court of Appeals in Pasadena, California. At the church, Klee Benally, the Navajo organizer of the coalition, spoke to the crowd of protesters through a megaphone: “Hopefully today, in some way, shape, or form, the judges that have been randomly selected to hear this case, will not only see a mountain, they’ll also see a church, just like this one here, because that’s how we view this mountain” (Roa 2007). Indeed, at least as he saw it, the court’s decision would rely on whether or not the Peaks would be viewed by non-Native judges as a church. That the Save the Peaks march began at a church and ended at the courthouse where the case would be reheard reiterated this point. The message of the protesters was clear: the Peaks are not merely *like* a church—the San Francisco Peaks *is* a church.

Surely, the metaphor itself has been made to do much work. In his decision ruling in favor of the tribes, Judge Fletcher summarized Navajo practitioner Larry Foster, albeit without attributing the words to him, who “drew an analogy to a church, with the area within the mountains as the part of the church where the people sit, and the Peaks as ‘our altar to the west’” (US Court of Appeals 2007: 2850; US Court of Appeals 2008: 10113). The mountain as church analogy can be made to work for multiple purposes and, on occasion, it has been appropriated to promote the Forest Service’s multiple use policy and recreation on the Peaks:

Our church building [...] is used by a very large number of community groups for meetings, education, and recreation. This can include the sanctuary as well as the fellowship and education areas. We have never felt that welcoming these groups into our space is in any way detrimental to the sacredness of our worship experiences. So what’s the objection? (Kirk and Kirk 2002; Sefiha and Lauderdale 2008: 503)

Clearly, the metaphor can be and has been put to multiple uses and despite the concerted effort of Native Americans and their supporters, the analogy has not been accepted as intuitive. From time to time, the use of the analogy has been defensively protected, as one Navajo man argued, “[j]ust because the Peaks don’t look like a church, that doesn’t mean that it’s not spiritual” (*The Snowbowl Effect* 2005). According to sociologists Ophir Sefiha

and Pat Lauderdale, when the church metaphor has faltered as a strategy of familiarization among non-Natives, efforts have been made to redirect the discussion toward the scientifically verifiable environmental issues at stake in making snow with treated sewage effluent (Sefiha and Lauderdale 2008: 502).

#### NAVAJO SACRED MOUNTAINS

One of the factors that seems to work against Navajo analogies of the San Francisco Peaks as a church is that it is not the only mountain that they consider to be sacred. Indeed, it is a well-known fact that the Navajo have four sacred mountains.<sup>14</sup> Even District Court Judge Paul G. Rosenblatt, who decided against the tribes' claims to protect the Peaks, acknowledged that "[t]he Peaks are one of four mountains sacred to the Navajo people" (US District Court 2006: 32). That the Peaks are "one of [only] four" sacred mountains to the Navajo resonates with many non-Natives and it is widely held that the number four is sacred to many, if not all, Native American tribes (Buckland 1896; O'Bryan 1956: 5, 113; Beck et. al. 1992: 79–80). After all, there are four directions, four seasons, four stages of life, four elements—why not four sacred mountains? (Preston 1995: 132). Also, to non-Native audiences, four sacred mountains may seem like a reasonably small number of sacred mountains—an allowable number.

According to Robert McPherson, "[t]he heart and soul of Navajo beliefs starts with the four sacred mountains," but he then goes on to mention "two other mountains—Governador Knob and Huerfano Mountain [...]. All six mountains are called chieftains, and in each gods reside" (McPherson 1992: 15).<sup>15</sup> Although some Navajos have asserted that they have six sacred mountains in various contexts, notably, this claim has been absent from *Navajo Nation* (Bingham and Bingham 1982: 2–3). Yet in addition to these six sacred mountains, anthropologist Leland Wyman adds that "another internal peak of considerable mythic importance is Peak-on-Range or Hosta Butte" (Wyman 1957: 37). Furthermore, anthropologist

14. This is widely acknowledged (Wyman 1957: 16; Griffin-Pierce 1992: 70–72; Preston 1995: 132; Iverson 2002: 1).

15. According to Frisbie, "variations occur in references to the number of sacred mountains, with four or six being most common" (Frisbie 1987: 431).

Gladys A. Reichard adds to this number, making at least seven sacred Navajo mountains:

Seven or more mountains are mentioned in the myths, but attempts to identify them with actual elevations are more or less futile. One mountain of ritualistic importance lies in each of the cardinal directions forming the mythical boundaries of the Navajo territory. There is agreement about the location of the southern mountain, Mt. Taylor (tsodzil), and the western, Mt. Humphreys [the highest point on the San Francisco Peaks] (doko'oslid). The eastern mountain, sisanádjini (sisnadjini) 'Black-belted-one,' and the northern, dibéntsah, 'Mountain sheep,' are variously identified. Other mountains between these have ceremonial significance. (Reichard 1963: 20)

Therefore, according to Reichard, even the four sacred mountains that are somehow largely agreed upon today by Navajos, academics, and courts were not at all agreed upon in 1950. Regardless of how many other mountains are sacred to the Navajo, there was widespread disagreement concerning which mountains were actually the four sacred mountains corresponding to the cardinal directions encompassing Navajo land. Although the southern and western mountains (the San Francisco Peaks) were largely agreed upon, there was no consensus concerning the eastern and northern mountains.<sup>16</sup> Wyman, writing in 1957, has offered a thorough summary of the complexity of the situation.

Four peaks of outstanding mythological significance are thought of as the cardinal outposts of the Navaho territory [...]. There is general agreement as to the actual location of the southern and western peaks: respectively, Mount Taylor, of the San Mateo Range, in New Mexico, and Mount Humphrey, of the San Francisco Peaks, in Arizona. Big Sheep, mountain of the north, was once placed in the San Juan Mountains of Colorado, but Father Berard Haile's informants thought it might be Hesperus Peak of the La Plata Range [...]. The identity of Black Belted Mountain, the peak of the east is a problem. It has been variously identified as Abiquiu Peak, Pedernal Peak, and Wheeler Peak, but perhaps most often as Pelado Peak, in the Jemez Mountains of New Mexico. Father Berard's informants were convinced that it was Sierra Blanca Peak, at the southern end of the Sangre de Cristo Range, east of Alamosa, Colorado. This mountain actually lies farther north than

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16. The disputed northern and eastern mountains are well-documented (Kluckhohn 1974: 191-193; Zolbrod 1984: 364).

does Hesperus Peak, the mountain of the north, so this identification is suspect. (Wyman 1957: 36–37)<sup>17</sup>

While much of the disagreement concerning which sacred mountains are which might be attributed to divergent localized sacred geographies, this lack of consensus might also be attributed to late Navajo migrations first coming from the north and then from the east before the Navajo occupied the land that is generally held to be Navajo land today (Opler 1983: 382).<sup>18</sup> Since this time, a variety of localized sacred geographies have become universalized and ‘fixed’ in place. Although Navajos themselves may well have driven this progression toward consensus concerning the sacred mountains of the Navajo, it is likely that non-Native scholars have also contributed to the consensus that seems to have emerged regarding the sacred mountains of the Navajo. In 1964, only 10 years after he summarized the general disagreement concerning which Navajo sacred mountains were the ‘true’ sacred mountains, Wyman was content to simplify the aforementioned complexities by identifying Blanca Peak, Mount Taylor, San Francisco Peak, Hesperus Peak, Huerfano Mountain, Gobernador Knob and Hosta Butte as “the actual mountains which are most often equated with the mythological peaks,” deferring to Washington Matthew’s late nineteenth century description of them as “the seven sacred mountains of the present Navaho land” (Wyman 1967: 7, 24; Matthews 1994: 78).

Although many scholars may be content with such simplifications, Sam Gill has noted that depending on the version of the Navajo creation story, the number of sacred mountains may vary “from four to seven or more” (Gill 1983: 502). Indeed,

17. Most writers refer and defer to the Wyman account presented here (Evans-Wentz 1981: 78; Gill 1983: 503; Lindford 2000).

18. Regarding the eastern mountain of the Navajos, Van Valkenburgh asserted the following: “The mountain of the east is most disputed, but what is pertinent is that every identification places it considerably to the east of the present territory assigned to the Navajo. It does not matter much whether the location be in the Jemez Mountains or in the mountains near Taos or east of Alamosa, Colorado. What does matter is that in any case there is no dispute about its indicating that the traditional Navajo country embraced an area much to the east of present Navajo boundaries” (Van Valkenburgh, 1974: 190).

Navajo scholar Wilson Aronilth, Jr. asserts that “[a]ccording to our forefathers’ teachings, there are four sacred mountains, there are six sacred mountains and there are twelve sacred mountains” (Aronilth 1992: 30). However, none of this complexity has been addressed in *Navajo Nation*. Surprisingly, attorneys representing the Forest Service, the Snowbowl, and even Judge Rosenblatt, who ruled against the tribes in the district court, maintained “[t]he Peaks are one of [only] four mountains sacred to the Navajo people” (US District Court 2006: 32).<sup>19</sup> Perhaps the possibility that the Navajo may have twelve or even more sacred mountains is irrelevant to the case, particularly since “[a]ll authorities, Navajo and anthropological, agree completely” that the San Francisco Peaks is the western mountain of the Navajo (Van Valkenburgh 1974: 189). Nonetheless, the silence on this matter in *Navajo Nation* is noteworthy.

#### ARE SOME MOUNTAINS MORE SACRED THAN OTHERS?

Knowing that there may be as many as twelve or even more Navajo sacred mountains, McPherson asks, “But what of those mountains near the Four Corners that are not among the four or six most sacred ones?” Perhaps unsurprisingly, the answer that McPherson offers is implied within the phrasing of his question: “To the people who live near them, they assume an important but subordinate role” (McPherson 1992: 19).<sup>20</sup> However, neither McPherson’s answer, nor even his question, is necessarily intuitive. Both assume that there are degrees of the sacred, or more plainly, that when it comes to sacred places, some are more sacred than others.

To be sure, Navajos and other Native Americans have articulated hierarchical theologies of the sacred, although not always as succinctly. Often, theologies of hierarchized sacredness remain

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19. Likewise, in *Wilson v. Block*, the court found that “the Peaks are one of the four sacred mountains which mark the boundaries of their homeland” (US Court of Appeals 1983: 738).

20. Washington Matthews asserted that “the resident deities of [the sacred mountains] seem to receive more honor than any other place gods, but the presiding genii of other mountains rock and canons [sic] are not neglected by the devout” (Zolbrod 1984: 363).

more implicit by focusing on the inverse: hierarchies of desecration. In his testimony before the district court in *Navajo Nation*, Navajo practitioner Larry Foster noted that while he objected to the current use of the Peaks as a ski area in general, the proposed use of treated sewage in snowmaking at the Peaks would be “far more serious.” He compared the status quo to a scar and the proposed use of treated sewage to a lethal injection.

I can live with a scar as a human being. But if something is injected into my body that is foreign, a foreign object—and reclaimed water, in my opinion, could be water that’s reclaimed through sewage, wastewater, comes from mortuaries, hospitals, there could be disease in the waters—and that would be like injecting me and my mother, my grandmother, the Peaks, with impurities, foreign matter that’s not natural. (US District Court 2005: 205; US Court of Appeals 2007: 2856–2857; US Court of Appeals 2008: 10118)

Although Navajos and other Native Americans have articulated degrees of the sacred in various direct and indirect ways, non-Native academics have also pressed for more sophisticated elaborations regarding degrees of the sacredness of places. The 1970s protests of Navajos, Hopis, other Native Americans, and their non-Native sympathizers against the proposed expansion of the ski resort on the San Francisco Peaks contributed to a public relations catastrophe for the Forest Service. In response to this, the Forest Service commissioned the 1981 study by Walter Vannette and Alison Feary (Kelley and Francis 1994: 143). Within this study, Vannette and Feary attempted to rank Navajo sacred sites according to the frequency to which they were referred. Relying on data from the late 1970s and early 1980s, in the heat of the litigation in which Navajos and Hopis sought to protect the Peaks from further development, it should come as no surprise that their study found that San Francisco Peaks was mentioned the most. “However, in response to the question ‘Are the San Francisco Peaks a place of Holy People more than others,’ only 7 percent of the [Navajo] interviewees said yes” (Kelley and Francis, 1994: 94). Vannette and Feary suggested,

It is likely the nature of these responses reflects a reluctance of Navajo specialists to differentiate too specifically as to significant differences between sacred places, or perhaps due to the omnipresent character

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of the gods, they are somewhat uncertain about how best to answer such a question. (Kelley and Francis 1994: 94)

In addition to these reasons, it might be added that some Navajos may have been weary of the unintended consequences of answering such questions affirmatively for other sacred sites. Since the Forest Service commissioned the study while it was at the same time engaged in the litigation of various sacred lands claims against the Navajo Nation including *Badoni v. Higginson* and *Wilson v. Block*, the intent of this study that was determined to rank Navajo sacred places hierarchically is intrinsically suspect.

It is clear that the primary reason that Vannette and Feary—and by extension, the Forest Service which commissioned their study—were concerned with ranking the sacredness of places was so that they could establish some basis of discerning, by implication, “that with moderation and respect, activities not permissible at the most significant places (e.g., Peaks) may be tolerated and even appropriate at these lesser locations” (Kelley and Francis 1994: 94). Perhaps more than anything else, this illustrates why many Navajos may have been (and for good cause, might still remain) reluctant to rank some places that they describe as sacred to be more sacred than other places they also describe as sacred. Since such rankings might be used as a justification for exploiting certain so-called lesser sacred places, Navajos and other Native Americans have sufficient reason to be wary of attempts to rank sacred places in order of degree. Although it might be very tempting to describe a certain sacred place as more sacred than other sacred places, especially during a struggle to protect a particular sacred place from desecration, such assertions might also be used against tribes in later sacred lands claims.

In another study commissioned by a Northern New Mexico utility, Public Service Company of New Mexico, Charles Carroll suggested that Navajo sacred places might be ranked by whether or not they are mentioned in Navajo origin myths and by how widely known particular places are among Navajos.<sup>21</sup> Significantly,

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21. Without suggesting that there was any difference of importance, J. Lee Correll and Editha L. Watson noted, “[s]ome of the sacred places are known to all Navajos; others are famous only locally. There are few Navajos even

Carroll concluded that “[i]n my opinion, there is no utility in attempting to carry this category of ‘sacredness’ further in degrees of significance” (Kelley and Francis 1994: 95). Furthermore, he acknowledged that such a notion was foreign to Navajos and that “it is a category of primary concern for studies seeking to identify potential impacts upon sites of traditional religious importance” (Kelley and Francis, 1994: 95).<sup>22</sup> Perhaps more to the point, Carroll found that such attempts to rank Navajo sacred places were utterly incoherent because “even a particular site ‘known to only one person [...] would be recognized by ‘all Navajos’ as ‘sacred’” (Kelley and Francis 1994: 95).<sup>23</sup>

Clearly, if in principle all Navajos would recognize a place as sacred, even if only one Navajo person considered the place to be sacred, then there is good cause for Navajos to be reluctant about ranking places according to their purported degrees of sacredness relative to other Navajo places that are described as sacred. Carroll offers a note of caution for those who would pursue such a project: “A hierarchy of Navajo sacred places is probably a dangerous precedent to attempt to establish. But the first few steps are probably relatively uncontroversial” (Kelley and Francis 1994: 95). However, not walking down this path in *Navajo Nation* has been a luxury that Navajos and their legal representatives have perceived to be unaffordable. Instead, Navajos have argued that the sanctity of the Peaks is central to their exercise of religion (US Court of Appeals 2007: 2848–2849; US Court of Appeals 2008: 10111–10113). Judge Fletcher maintained, no doubt at the urging

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today who cannot name the four sacred peaks that bound the traditional Navajo country” (Correll and Watson 1969).

22. If the category of the ‘sacred’ is itself foreign to Navajo thought, then describing anything—especially a place—as being sacred, might also be understood as a familiarization strategy and not necessarily as a timeless theological truth (Schermerhorn 2009).

23. A similarly pluralistic perspective is suggested by Joseph Winter, who suggests “it should be noted that different singers or medicine men know different versions of the stories. All of the versions are equally valid” (Winter 1993: 97; Fink, 1998: 69). Likewise, as anthropologist Maureen Schwarz has noted, “Navajo views on the partial nature of individual knowledge coincide nicely with anthropological views on native consultants and ethnographers as situated subjects in positions to know certain things while being limited from knowing about other things” (Schwarz 1997: 252).

of Navajo litigants and their attorneys, that “[a]lthough the whole reservation is sacred to the Navajo, the mountains are the most sacred part” (US Court of Appeals 2007: 2850; US Court of Appeals 2008: 10113). While this strategy may achieve its desired result of protecting the San Francisco Peaks from a perceived and predicted desecration, it also makes it more difficult to protect Navajo places that are described as sacred that are not mountains, or to be more specific considering the unstated assumptions of the court, those places that Navajos describe as sacred that are not one of the principal four mountains corresponding to the cardinal directions.<sup>24</sup>

Arguing for the greater degree of sacredness for one place—and hence, the greater responsibility of bureaucrats and courts to protect it—can only come at the expense of implying a lesser degree of sacredness for other places—and hence, the lesser responsibility—or more probably, lack of responsibility to protect it.<sup>25</sup> If Navajos and other Native Americans make such assertions, especially in legal contexts, it is likely because they have little other choice. Otherwise, it seems likely that non-Natives would be far less receptive to their concerns. Such assertions should be understood not as timeless theological truths, but rather as historically contingent and strategic claims, necessarily asserted so that non-Natives might take their claims more seriously. Furthermore, if such claims are made, particularly to the detriment of purportedly less sacred places, scholars and courts ought to be sensitive to the circumstances that produced them.

In the 1970s, for instance, Navajo practitioner, Floyd Laugh-  
ter, suggested that Navajo Mountain, which Navajos had only

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24. For example, Rainbow Bridge and Navajo Mountain (Luckert 1977; Bernbaum 1990: 161; Brown 1999: 39–60; Nabokov 2006: 95–104).

25. As Kelley and Francis assert, “[a] focus on places isolated from their landscape contexts also allows preservation bureaucrats to try to assign different levels of significance to each place to justify not preserving certain places” (Kelley and Francis 1994: 98). Similarly, addressing this point by invoking the church metaphor, former Navajo Tribal Chairman Peter McDonald remarked: “You ask us which of the slopes of Doko’oslid is sacred to us, so that you might leave it unscathed by development. I say that no one slope is more sacred than the others. Which of your churches is more sacred than the others? Which stone in the wailing wall is most holy?” (Lubick 1980: 151).

discovered in 1863, was more sacred than even the four sacred mountains that bound Navajo territorial claims.

It was said that this Mountain did not go crazy. You see, these four mountains [...] at some time after they were brought into being, they all went berserk and burned themselves. But this mountain here, Navajo Mountain, did not do this to itself [...]. And it was for this reason that this Mountain became sacred. (Luckert 1977: 72)

It is likely that for Floyd Laughter, Navajo Mountain may very well have been more significant in his own practice of his necessarily localized traditions. I maintain that the existence of diverse localized ritual and mythic traditions, and the absence of any monolithic Navajo tradition in general, should not in any way imply the inauthenticity of either Floyd Laughter's claims about Navajo Mountain or contemporary practitioners claims about the San Francisco Peaks.

In fact, during the bench trial for *Navajo Nation* in 2005, the prevailing notion of a hierarchy of Navajo sacred places was used against Navajos by a Department of Justice attorney defending the Forest Service. The following excerpt comes from the transcript of Navajo medicine man Norris Nez's cross-examination by the government attorney:

Q: The Ch'ool'ii [Gobernador Knob] is quite a distance from the San Francisco Peaks, correct?

A: Yes. It is quite a distance.

Q: Thank you. And you, sir, have described that as the most important of our sacred mountains, correct?

A: Yes.

Q: And the occasion for that was when you took issue with the development of a natural gas well, a potential well, some distance from Ch'ool'ii, correct? [...] The occasion for your comment Mr. Nez, about Ch'ool'ii being the most important mountain was when you were down there protesting the installation of this well, correct?

A: When I said no to drilling for this oil. Is that the occasion?

Q: Yes. That is the occasion which you said Ch'ool'ii is the most important of our sacred mountains, correct?

A: Yes.

Q: Thank you. (US District Court 2005: 900–901)

Clearly, there can be no doubt that claims such as this could only be detrimental to Navajo interests in *Navajo Nation*, or for that matter in any other sacred lands claim. Claims engaging in a discourse of sacredness as something that can be ranked in order of its degrees have a clear potential for backfiring upon one another. And just as Navajo litigants engaged in long-term efforts of protecting the San Francisco Peaks from the threat of desecration would not appreciate having to explain how assertions like this do not contradict their claims about the Peaks in *Navajo Nation*, it may well be in the interest of Navajos to take certain precautions—if it is not already too late—so that the outcome of *Navajo Nation* does not come at the expense of other (not necessarily lesser) Navajo sacred sites.

MOUNTAIN AS PERSON: GENDERED DISCOURSES  
AND WHY A MOUNTAIN CANNOT BE DIVIDED INTO PARTS?

More broadly, Navajos and other Native Americans are caught in the difficult position of employing the foreign category of the sacred in order to simultaneously assert the sacredness of particular places and the sacredness of the entire earth (Kelley and Francis 1994: 98). In their study of Navajo sacred places, Kelley and Francis reported that they and many other researchers were often told “the whole land is sacred” and by implication, the whole planet and perhaps the entire cosmos (Kelley and Francis 1994: 1, 28, 42, 100).<sup>26</sup> In struggling to prevent the Arizona Snowbowl from making snow on the Peaks with treated sewage effluent, non-Natives frequently assert that the Snowbowl’s operations make use of only about one

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26. Leland Wyman asserted that for Navajos, “Animals, plants, mountains, and many natural phenomena are endowed with power. Even the seemingly most insignificant of these are indispensable; all are interdependent, being complementary parts of the whole” (Wyman 1975: 8–9; Kelley and Francis 1994: 92). This sentiment seems to have been reaffirmed in 1987 by Marmie Salt, who claimed that “[e]very inch of ground, and the fauna on it are considered sacred. There are no places that are holier than others” (Kelley and Francis 1994: 28). On the sacredness of the earth in general, see Gill’s *Mother Earth* (1987); for a critique of Gill’s controversial thesis, see Deloria (1998: 75–78).

percent of the entire mountain.<sup>27</sup> In their analysis of three Arizona newspapers, the Flagstaff based *Arizona Daily Sun*, the *Navajo-Hopi Observer*, and the Phoenix based *Arizona Republic*, as well as numerous national daily newspapers, sociologists Ophir Sefiha and Pat Lauderdale found that “over fifty percent (52%) [of the articles in the Newspapers that were surveyed] expressly noted this percentage” (Sefiha and Lauderdale 2008: 501). In his decision against the tribes, Judge Rosenblatt also referred to this percentage and based much of his ruling on it (US District Court, 2006: 23, 28). He concluded that “Although the witnesses generally testified that the Peaks were central and indispensable to the Navajo way of life, President Shirley and Mr. Begay provided no evidence that they use the Snowbowl SUP [Special Use Permit] area [that would be affected by artificial snowmaking] for any religious purpose” (US District Court, 2006: 32). Therefore, since Navajos and other Native Americans could still use approximately ninety-nine percent of the mountain for religious purposes, their free exercise claims had already been reasonably accommodated.

In his criticism of Rosenblatt’s decision, Joe Shirley, Jr., stated that “[t]he district court ruling makes no sense. The entire mountain is a shrine, not just parts of it” (Hardeen 2006). For Shirley, the percentage of the mountain that the Snowbowl used and sprayed treated sewage on was irrelevant. The sanctity of the mountain as a whole was at stake, not merely one percent of it. In the 1980s case of *Wilson v. Block*, which was also ultimately decided against the tribes, a federal judge acknowledged that Navajos “consider the Peaks to be the body of a spiritual being or god, with various

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27. Environmentalist John Dunklee has suggested that developers plan to expand the operations of the ski resort beyond merely one percent of the mountain: “I’ve got to say something about developers. They upset me. I don’t trust them. Don’t you trust them. They say one percent of the Mountain. That’s just a lot of baloney. In the back of their minds they’re after more than one percent of the Mountain. I’ll tell you a story. During the condo fight in which I was heavily involved, we extracted some materials which showed planned ski runs in Antelope Canyon and all over the Mountain. They had already engineered it and had taken aerial photos. I don’t believe what they say now. When they propose one percent of the Mountain, don’t believe it. They want more” (Van Otten 1982: 61).

peaks forming the head, shoulders, and knees of a body reclining and facing to the east, while the trees, plants, rocks, and earth form the skin” (US Court of Appeals 1983: 738). Furthermore, what non-Natives might describe here as anthropomorphism is pervasive among Navajos, since “[i]n the Navajo view of the physical world all phenomena are personified” (Beck et al. 1992: 74).<sup>28</sup> Corroborating this statement, Luckert records Floyd Laughter saying, “these persons are persons as (much as) we [...]. And all of these [mountains] have their own and distinct Holy Person standing within” (Luckert 1977: 50). Anthropologist Maureen Trudelle Schwarz cautions against those who would label this as ‘anthropomorphism’:

Many [non-Native] researchers have assumed that references to physical traits like Earth’s feet or a mountain’s feet, the representation of Diyin Dine’é, “Navajo Holy People,” as rainbows with arms and feet, or attribution of personal characteristics such as stubbornness, fear, loneliness, and understanding to Diyin Dine’é are examples of anthropomorphism—the attribution of human shape or characteristics to supernaturals, animals, or objects. But the assumption is false. The Navajo people with whom I consulted all agreed that they recognize these phenomena to be kin, but they emphatically denied that they consider them to be made in the image of humans. (Schwarz 1997: 10)

Rather, as Harry Walters explained to Schwarz, “In Navajo [...] man is in the image of the Holy People. When we see something like that, it is a Holy Person, it is not a human image” (Schwarz 1997: 11).

According to Luckert, “Navajo mountains are gods; they are not only places at which gods live. The analogy of Jewish, Christian, or Muslim sacred sites is usually misleading [...]. Thus, to be exact, talking about the Navajo Holy People as if they are things or places may in itself be seen as a sacrilegious act” (Nabokov 2006: 93). Luckert further explains:

Navajo Holy People are not “spiritual” beings who transcend their “material” manifestations. They are divine persons who appear as they wish—anthropomorphically or disguised in whichever costumes they prefer to be seen at the time—even clothed in invisibility. All the while,

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28. Moreover, Buck Navajo told Luckert that his chants “start at their (the mountains’) feet, (move up referring to) their legs, and on up their whole bodies” (Luckert 1977: 50).

the momentary size of their appearances does not mean very much. Size and shape are both functions of clothing, and clothes are interchangeable. The actual personage, generally thought of as being anthropomorphic, “stands within” its clothes, or within what we [non-Natives] might prefer to call “natural phenomena.” (Luckert 1977: 42)<sup>29</sup>

However, as Schwarz has already suggested, from at least one Navajo perspective, it is problematic to refer to Navajo Holy People (*Diyin Dine'é*) as anthropomorphic. Furthermore, Luckert errs in invoking the categories of “spiritual,” “divine,” “material,” and “natural.” According to Sam Gill, “[t]he fact that ‘person’ for the Navajo is not restricted to human person is essential to an understanding of Navajo religion” (Gill 1987: 128).<sup>30</sup> For Navajos, there are at least two categories of persons (*Dine'é*): there are the *Nihookáá Dine'é*, or the “earth surface people,” and the *Diyin Dine'é*, commonly translated as “Holy People,” but perhaps more accurately translated as “powerful” or “potentially dangerous people,” following John Farella’s assertion that “*Diyin* contains both *bidziil* and *bahadzid*, ‘power’ and ‘danger’” (Schwarz 1997: 10, 17; Farella 1984: 67). Consequently, at least traditionally, Navajos have not distinguished between the ‘natural,’ ‘cultural,’ and the ‘super-natural’ as Westerners generally do (Schermerhorn 2009).

Additionally, *Diyin Dine'é*, like all persons, are gendered and addressed as kin. Wilson Aronilth, Jr. maintains, “[w]e don’t pray to the sacred mountains: we talk to them. We address them as relatives, just as we say to the earth, Mother Earth, give us your blessings” (Bernbaum 1990: 159). Likewise, Steven Begay asserts that “we talk to them just as we talk to our family members” and that the mountains are treated “like family.”

29. Wilson Aronilth, Jr., adds, “[i]f you ask a person where music is in a violin and he takes it apart, he will find nothing. In the same way, if we excavate and take apart a sacred mountain, we will also find nothing. But with belief we can find the holy person and his power in the mountain” (Bernbaum 1990, 159).

30. In support of his position, Gill cites A. I. Hallowell, “[f]or an especially illuminating discussion of the concept of person as it applies to the Ojibwa” (Gill 1987: 128). A. I. Hallowell, ‘Ojibwa Ontology, Behavior, and World View,’ in *Culture in History: Essays in Honor of Paul Radin*, Stanley Diamond ed., (New York: Columbia University Press, 1960), 18–52; Hallowell’s essay is reprinted in (Tedlock and Tedlock 1975: 139–178).

Further elaborating, Begay states the “San Francisco Peaks sits as a female figure, just as our mother sits for us in our home [...]. We are the children, so we greet the mountain as a mother” (US District Court 2005: 740). According to Gary Witherspoon, the word *shimá*, “my mother” refers to virtually everything that contributes to the sustenance and development of Navajos (Witherspoon 1977: 91–93; Witherspoon 1975: 15–22). Thus, Navajo practitioner, Norris Nez, explains, “we call her Mother. She is holding medicine and things to make us well and healthy. We suckle from her and get well when we consider her our Mother” (US District Court 2005: 894; US Court of Appeals 2007: 2849; US Court of Appeals 2008: 10112–10113). Similarly, Judge Rosenblatt maintained that “the Peaks are considered in Navajo culture and religion to be the ‘Mother of the Navajo People’” (US District Court 2006: 32).<sup>31</sup> Most simply, Klee Benally said “This [mountain] is our mother” (Benally 2008). However, in spite of the pervasiveness of these appeals to the Peaks as mother, many scholars assert that the San Francisco Peaks has been customarily identified as male.<sup>32</sup>

On the other hand, according to Sam Gill, there is a long and venerable tradition of Native Americans employing the metaphor of motherhood as a strategy of familiarization with non-Native audiences.<sup>33</sup> The gendered intercultural discourse, whose origins

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31. Presumably, Foster meant similarly when he asserted “[t]he mountain is the living mountain. It is our grandmother” (US District Court 2005: 215).

32. Apparently, the eastern and western Navajo mountains have traditionally been considered to be male and the southern and northern Navajo mountains have been considered to be female (Luckert 1977: 51; Linford 2000: 128). Alternatively, Witherspoon offers a different interpretation in which the southern and western mountains are female (Witherspoon 1977: 142).

33. According to Gill: “These [earliest] references to the earth are metaphorical, not theological. The Native Americans seek in the metaphor of motherhood some commonality with their oppressors by which to communicate effectively their reluctance to be severed from their lands [...]. Statements about the earth that were metaphorical and political, though contained within a basically religious perspective, were consistently misinterpreted [by non-Natives] as theological. In time (not such a very long time, really), these misinterpretations were appropriated by Native Americans who transformed metaphor into divinity” (Gill 1987: 66). For a recent review of the controversial reception history following this claim, see Laurie Patton’s chapter in *Who Owns Religion?* titled “Mother Earth: The Near Impossibility of a Public” (Patton 2019: 121–143). Looking at Gill’s thesis in the Navajo

may lie in the nineteenth century “cult of true womanhood,” seems to rely on the paired purity and weakness of womanhood that is dependent upon masculine protection. The threat of desecration—at least to non-Native audiences—is perhaps more becoming of femininity than masculinity. In the terms of *Navajo Nation*, the (feminine) sacredness of the Peaks must be protected against desecration (dishonor, rape), lest her dishonor tarnish the (masculine) reputation of her children—Navajos, and perhaps by extension non-Natives and federal courts. If the sanctity of the Peaks is not protected, and its desecration is not prevented, the consequence may be divine retribution upon those who sought the desecration of the Peaks’ sanctity, or perhaps even those who stood by and did nothing.<sup>34</sup>

In *Navajo Nation*, the feminine corporeality familiarizes the duty to protect the sanctity of the Peaks to which some Navajos may feel bound. At the same time, the metaphor of motherhood also defamiliarizes snowmaking by not only categorizing it as desecration, but also as rape. In his testimony during the eleven-day bench trial, Joe Shirley, Jr., proclaimed:

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context in the 1990s, Kelley and Francis concluded the following: “We aren’t so sure that a lot of Indians who refer to ‘Mother Earth’ in their public statements even today actually see the earth as a divinity. Many may still use the phrase as a metaphor (and a veil) for their own particular tribal beliefs. Others, especially those with much formal education, may have trouble believing literally in any kind of earth-inhabiting, humanlike deities, including the immortals of their own particular tribal beliefs. They may think of Mother Earth and the other immortals as metaphors for an all-pervading power. Such people may not have adopted the ‘European-American’ construction, as Gill suggests, so much as shared with ‘European-Americans’ the difficulty of squaring a secularized formal education that emphasizes scientific routes to knowledge with a literal belief in anthropomorphic immortal beings immanent in the land. Figurative language is the way out—its ambiguity allows one to keep two seemingly contradictory frames of reference” (Kelley and Francis 1994: 100).

34. Judge Rosenblatt found that “Certain practitioners believe that the alleged desecration of the Peaks has caused many ills to mankind, including attacks on 9/11/01, the Columbia Shuttle crash, and the increase in natural disasters, such as recent hurricanes, tornados, and the [2004] tsunami” (US District Court 2006: 30).

when you continue to abuse and desecrate my Mother—and this is our Mother, Dook’oosliid, the San Francisco Peaks, Mother to Navajo people. It’s like as a child, I’m standing right here and somebody is coming in and violating and raping my mother and that hurts—that hurts me just watching. (US District Court 2005: 802)

In light of Navajos having conceptualized the Peaks (in their entirety) as a gendered body, it is important to consider the likelihood that Navajo and other Native American conceptualizations of the mountain may be at odds with non-Native conceptualizations of the Peaks. In short, what Navajos and other Native Americans describe as the mountain that is commonly referred to as the San Francisco Peaks may not necessarily be conceptualized in the same manner as non-Natives, despite the fact that both natives and non-Natives may refer to it by the same name. According to Judge Rosenblatt,

Collectively, Humphrey’s Peak (12,633 feet), Agassiz Peak (12,356 feet), Doyle Peak (11,460 feet) and Fremont Peak (11,696 feet) are identified on the USGS maps as the San Francisco Mountain. However, the mountain is more commonly referred to as the San Francisco Peaks and is identified as such herein. (US District Court 2006: 23)

What I am arguing, and what has been suggested by many Navajos and other Native Americans, is that various Native American—and for that matter, even some non-Native—conceptualizations of the San Francisco Peaks do not correspond to the model of the Peaks that is mapped by the United States Geological Survey (USGS), particularly with regard to its boundaries that purportedly set the Peaks apart from surrounding terrain.

My concern here is that simply because various native and non-Native groups may refer to the Peaks using the same name—which is not always the case, since each tribe has at least one name for the Peaks in their own languages—this should not imply that they are talking about the same place. In the fullest sense, as then Navajo Tribal Chairman Peter McDonald asserted in 1978, “A thousand men can look at a mountain and see a thousand different mountains” (Lubick 1980: 133).

Although I have already demonstrated that the Peaks have been conceptualized in a variety of ways, as with the example of a Navajo conceptualization of the mountain as a Navajo Holy Person juxtaposed with an inanimate geological formation, I turn now to the potential spatial implications of Navajo paradigms, particularly with regard to the boundaries (or lack thereof) that purportedly set the mountain apart from the surrounding terrain. What I am critical of is the notion that there are different names for the same place. Rather, different names imply different places that are conceived of in historically and culturally contingent ways. For example, Reichard, as well as many other non-Natives, referred to Mount Humphreys as the Navajos' sacred mountain of the west, not the San Francisco Peaks as a whole (Reichard 1963: 20). Such synecdochic misunderstandings in cross-cultural translation are understandable. Regardless, what non-Natives have named as Mount Humphreys, the highest peak on the San Francisco Mountain, which because of its height is also purportedly regarded by many Navajos as its most sacred part, ought not to be conflated with Navajo conceptualizations of the mountain.<sup>35</sup> By the same token, I have already said the same about the appellation, San Francisco Peaks (or Mountain). According to anthropologist Joann Kealiinohomoku, "[t]he Peaks cannot, in native thought, be divided into areas in which non-Indians can pursue secular activities. The entire place is a sacred living being for the Navajo" (Van Otten 1982: 17-18). But it has yet to be established what, precisely, this entire place is. According to anthropologist Deward Walker, "one of the most difficult factual questions to answer is the geographical extent of sacred sites and spaces" (Walker 1991: 114). I seek to further demonstrate this difficulty regarding the San Francisco Peaks.

Assuming that different names imply different places, Navajos may likely have a variety of conceptions of the mountain as an entity as has already been suggested by gendered Navajo discourses

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35. For example, Foster perhaps promotes this interpretation by mentioning, "[w]e don't go to the top of the mountain" (US District Court 2005: 228).

about the mountain.<sup>36</sup> Navajo practitioner Ernest Nelson asserted that Dook’o’slííd is not the only Navajo name for the mountain:

[D]uring the debates about the San Francisco Peaks (Dook’o’slííd—as to whether a ski village should be built at the lower end of its western slope) [...] only the (plain) name of that mountain was mentioned. Its sacred name is White-Shell-Sitting-tunneled-through (Diichilí yee sidaaí dzilghááłts ‘iil). That is the way the San Francisco Peaks is called. (Luckert 1977: 116)

Similarly, Navajo practitioner Steven Begay asserted,

There are several names. We call San Francisco Peaks Do’ok’oosliid and it has another ritual name that we call Diichilii Dziil [...] Diichilii Dziil is one of the jewels that we regard as sacred. It’s abalone shell. And in Navajo we say that the mountain is decorated with this abalone shell. It’s a garment, just like how we dress every day. And that is its name [...]. It’s called also Dził Nataani. Nataani. It has songs. It has prayers. It is our Mother. (US District Court, 2005: 742)

Returning again to the problem of boundaries, in the aforementioned study of Navajo sacred places in the late 1970s and 1980s by Vannette and Feary that was commissioned by the Forest Service, which found that the notion of hierarchically ranking sacred places was foreign to the Navajo, the forest managers also wanted them to address the issue of boundaries around sacred places. Vannette and Feary found that “boundaries [...] are largely conceptual and physically not well defined” (Kelley and Francis 1994: 94). Kelley and Francis suggest that identifying where various activities that are otherwise permissible become impermissible might uncover some Navajo notions of boundaries around sacred places. According to Kelley and Francis,

[a]ctivities appropriate at sacred places are praying, gathering plants, conducting ceremonies; also gathering food and fuel wood in some places, but not mining, grazing livestock, or building roads in the upper elevations

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36. I should also note that not all names necessarily imply different conceptions of places. Gill, for instance, asserts that Navajo Holy People (diyin dine’é) may be referred to or invoked with “a descriptive name, a proper name, and a title” (Gill 1981: 15).

of sacred places (one example of which, according to Vannette and Feary, is the San Francisco Peaks). (Kelley and Francis 1994: 94)<sup>37</sup>

However, even this attempt to define the boundaries of sacred places is somewhat simplistic. Perhaps the coincidence of restricted behavior in sacred places may serve as a general rule, but desperate times call for desperate measures. After their defeat in *Wilson v. Block*, in a largely successful attempt to forestall further development, the Navajo Nation acquired a grazing lease for most of the land surrounding the Peaks in 1984 (Kelley and Francis 1994: 170). Significantly, this preservation tactic has not been without costs. Judge Rosenblatt cited Navajo cattle grazing on the northern slopes of the Peaks as evidence of alleged Navajo hypocrisy regarding sacred land claims (US District Court 2006: 44).<sup>38</sup>

Regardless of how it is studied, the imposition of boundaries around sacred places in general and around the San Francisco Peaks in particular is fundamentally problematic. According to Pinxten, van Dooren, and Harvey, even the boundaries of the Navajo world

cannot be pointed at in an unambiguous way, and they may be considered to be “fuzzy”: they are unstable, since they may move continuously with expansions of population and/or territory; they are not visibly marked (boundary posts or any such things are absent), but remain at all times within the region defined by the four Sacred Mountains. (Pinxten et al. 1983: 23–24)

Because of this, when Navajos and other Native Americans fight for the protection of the San Francisco Peaks, it is fundamentally unclear what they are fighting for spatially with regard to boundaries, despite the fact that it is readily apparent that they are fighting against a particular activity in a particular area,

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37. Similarly, McPherson asserts that “[t]reating the sacred places on a mountain in sacrilegious ways, including mining, road construction, logging, ranching, and recreation, causes the holy beings to flee and their power to be lost” (McPherson 1992: 17).

38. Other examples of purported Navajo hypocrisy cited by Rosenblatt include mining on Black Mesa, despite the fact that both Navajos and Hopis describe it as sacred. Furthermore, Rosenblatt claimed that “[w]astes from medical clinics on the reservation are disposed in lagoons or on the ground at the Navajo reservation, which is considered sacred” (US District Court 2006: 46).

in an otherwise indeterminate space.<sup>39</sup> In an interview with Luckert, Navajo practitioner Lamar Bedonie claimed that Navajo sacred sites are attached by “roots” (Luckert 1977: 149).<sup>40</sup> Bedonie further asserted that Rainbow Bridge “is attached to Blanca Peak; it is attached to Mount Taylor; San Francisco Peaks it is attached to; La Plata Range is another to which it is attached. This is the way it is [...] it is attached to Navajo Mountain and to Carrizo Mountains, and to some smaller ones” (Luckert 1977: 149). Anthropologist Trudy Griffin-Pierce adds to this that “[n]ot only are these mountains alive individually but they also exist as a single entity [...] Power derives from the wholeness and completeness of the entire group” (Griffin-Pierce 1992: 72). Moreover, according to Norris Nez, the six major mountains of the Navajos are “tied together by the rainbow, that it is like a cord that ties them together. And they communicate, they talk to each other” (US District Court 2005: 892). Similarly, Joe Shirley, Jr., claimed, “These mountains are a part of one another. They’re home to Navajo people. And they’re all related. They see each other. They talk to each other” (US District Court 2005: 800). As I hope to have demonstrated, such conceptualizations of Navajo sacred space clearly do not lend themselves to discrete boundaries or degrees of the sacred.

NAVAJO SACRED CLAIMS, THE “PARADE OF HORRIBLES,”  
AND THE NECESSITY OF COMPROMISE

If on the one hand Navajo conceptualizations of sacred places do not easily lend themselves to discrete boundaries, on the other hand, neither do such conceptualizations lend themselves to legal paradigms within which tribes must operate in order to protect places that they describe as sacred from actions that they perceive as desecration. Thus, compromises must be made so that their sacred land claims might prevail in (at least potentially) hostile courts. After all, there is the ever-present fear among

39. For example, Steven Begay asserted that his conceptualization of the San Francisco Peaks as a whole includes housing on the base of the Peaks (US District Court 2005: 779–780).

40. Similarly, Steven Begay claimed that “the roots [of plants], we say, could go anywhere on the mountain [...] are all [...] connected” (US District Court 2005: 756).

many non-Natives that if tribal claims prevail that it will only be a matter of time before the ever-growing number of hundreds of federally recognized tribes dictate how federal agencies manage millions of acres of public lands, from the Grand Canyon to Mount Rushmore (Draper 2005). Suzan Harjo dubs this the “there-goes-the-neighborhood concern” (Harjo 2005: A3). Sandra Day O’Connor perhaps best immortalizes this sentiment in her 1988 *Lyng v. Northwest Indian Cemetery Protective Association* decision:

No disrespect for these practices is implied when one notes that such beliefs could easily require *de facto* beneficial ownership of some rather spacious tracts of public property [...] Whatever rights the Indians may have [...] those rights do not divest the Government of its right to use what is, after all, *its* land. (US Supreme Court 1988: 453; emphasis in original)

Although O’Connor derisively referred to such slippery slope reasoning to as a “parade of horrors” in her concurring decision in *Smith*, she apparently had no compunctions with the logical fallacy two years earlier (US Supreme Court 1990: 902). This “parade of horrors” has also made numerous prominent appearances in every ruling that has been made against the litigating tribes in *Navajo Nation*. For instance, Rosenblatt sought to expose the unreasonableness of Navajo sacred land claims by observing that,

Within the Navajo Nation’s four cardinal mountains, all of which are located on federal land, there are several thousand sacred sites. For example, the Navajo Plaintiffs consider the entire Colorado River—from the headwaters to Mexico—and the Little Colorado River to be sacred. (US District Court 2006: 45)

Another compromise that Navajos have made so that their sacred land claims might prevail has been relinquishing the possibility of reconsecration after a place that has been described as sacred is perceived to have been desecrated. According to Navajo practitioner Paul Goodman, if given time to themselves desecrated places might become sacred again (Luckert 1977: 141).<sup>41</sup> Similarly,

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41. This particular example pertains to the possibility of reconsecrating places that have been purportedly desecrated by urination and defecation, similar the threat of snowmaking with treated sewage effluent on the San

the possibility of the impossibility of desecration has been abandoned in *Navajo Nation*. In the 1970s Navajo practitioner Ernest Nelson offered prayers to the Peaks invoking the mountain's powers to save itself:

And we said to it (the mountain): "Because of this glorious shiny [White Shell] armor, the things now being plotted against you will not happen—and this, because you yourself will say that it shall be so [...] We have come only to request that you invoke the power which is already within yourself" [...] And this is what I myself said to it (the mountain) [...] And because we did this, things about that Mountain have quieted down somewhat. (Luckert 1977: 116)

Likewise, in 1982, attorney Ben Hufford related the following story:

When I expressed discouragement to some of my medicine men clients and tried to explain to them the difficulties of accomplishing the protection of their beliefs and way of life in the Anglo courts they would say "Don't worry, our job is to do what we can to protect and preserve while we're here. The mountain eventually will take care of itself." (Van Otten 1982: 42)

Instead, Navajos have more often subscribed to a fragile inviolability of the sacred, or what might be called the permanence of desecration, in *Navajo Nation*.<sup>42</sup> Navajo practitioner, Larry Foster claimed, "once water is tainted and if water comes from mortuaries or hospitals, for Navajo there's no words to say that that water can be reclaimed" (US District Court 2005: 220–221; US Court of Appeals 2007: 2856; US Court of Appeals 2008: 10118). Judge Fletcher upheld this notion claiming that "[t]he purity of nature, including the Peaks, plays an important part in Navajo

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Francisco Peaks. A similar argument is also made by Vine Deloria, Jr., in the documentary, *In the Light of Reverence* (2001).

42. Douglas Preston writes: "Timbering, mining, road construction, skiing, rock climbing, and other activities on the four mountains disturb their inner beings. The inner beings might flee, and then the mountain will die. This has already happened, Navajos say, to certain sacred places[...]. When developers wanted to expand the ski area on the San Francisco Peaks, they were surprised at the angry reaction from the Navajo Nation. They could not understand that to the Navajos, putting the Fairfield Snow Bowl on Dook'o'osliid, Light Always Glitters on Top, the Sacred Mountain of the West, threatened the Navajos' very existence as a people" (Preston 1995: 129–130).

beliefs" (US Court of Appeals 2007: 2849; US Court of Appeals 2008: 10113). Following the unfavorable result of *Wilson v. Block*, a Navajo Tribal resolution declared: "The rain and snow will cease to fall; the Navajo people will be unprotected from the forces of destruction; our traditions will die, and Doo-ko-oslid [the San Francisco Peaks] will turn away from us" (Matthaissen 1984: 309).

The problem with the notion of the permanence of desecration is that it stresses the capability of human action to permanently destroy the purported sacredness of a place, while at the same time disregarding the potential for a defiled place to be purified and sanctified. Although such discursive permanence of desecration is no doubt profoundly sincere, it is also strategic. If judges can be persuaded that the desecration of the San Francisco Peaks resulting from artificial snowmaking with treated sewage effluent would be hopelessly permanent, then the whole ordeal and accompanying agonizing grief might be altogether avoided. Perhaps as Chidester and Linenthal argue, "sacred space is perceived as sacred precisely because it is always in danger of desecration" (Chidester and Linenthal 1995: 21). On the one hand, invoking the inviolability of the sacred mobilizes an affect of 'spiritual loss,' to which nostalgia-minded Americans tend to respond. On the other hand, were Navajos and other Native Americans to testify that the defilement of the Peaks was potentially negligible in the long run because they could always be purified or reconsecrated later, then their legal claims would be insupportable. Indeed, were such a dismissive perspective to prevail, or alternatively, if all could agree upon the inviolable sacredness of the Peaks, then there would be no conflict. Alas, the world is not so simple.

#### CONCLUSION

Whatever the ultimate outcome may be for the San Francisco Peaks, it is unlikely that it would bring greater protection to all Native American and Indigenous sacred sites. Such comprehensive protection is not likely to occur any time soon. However, because of this unlikelihood, one can appreciate the need to compromise and sacrifice the claims of some tribes and some sacred places so that at least a few of these sacred places might receive such protection. Furthermore, it is perhaps this need to compromise

that contributes to “[a] belief that while all aspects of nature and culture are potentially sacred, there are certain [...] geographical locations that [...] possess great sacredness” (Walker 1991: 102). In any case, this is a long-term battle and as for time immemorial—whenever that is deemed to have been—the indigenous inhabitants of the Americas are in it for the long haul.

If I have done nothing else, I hope to have told an extended cautionary tale about the dangers of engaging in discourses of “authenticity.” Participating in such discourses, either as an advocate or critic, invariably results in a number of pitfalls and consequences, whether intended or not; few, if any, might be desirable. Moreover, as Johnson asserts, “[w]hat will not suffice is equating ‘constructedness’ with inauthenticity and the latter with deception” (Johnson, 2007: 23). Because I fear that certain audiences may not appreciate these crucial distinctions, it is worthwhile to conclude this article by stressing the importance of abandoning authenticity claims, which I hope to have done throughout this article. In its place, a different approach is required, such as that advocated by Johnson in which,

[O]ne is no longer straining to hear the one “true voice” of tradition but instead must be attuned to a cacophony of voices. And when the “true voice” of tradition is abandoned as the subject of analysis, so too must quests for authenticity also be abandoned. In place of these reifications, one should seek to discern and describe processes of authentication and authorization. (Johnson 2007: 160)

Beyond this, I hope to have shown some of the ways in which Indigenous religion is “made” in contemporary legal settings (Johnson 2011: 170–86). While this article focuses on the making of traditional Navajo religion in the context of a series of legal conflicts over a period of several decades, Indigenous Peoples the world over regularly encounter similarly drawn out conflicts to protect the places that are important to them. Moreover, in this particular context, Navajos have not been the sole “authors” of Navajo religion. Diverse Navajo practitioners have been joined—whether as allies, adversaries, critics, or observers—by politicians, bureaucrats, activists, judges, lawyers, journalists, filmmakers, academics of all stripes, and many others. Even among allies of the Navajo, most have been complicit in co-authoring an “authentic” Navajo religion

that arguably excludes much of the diversity they presumably seek to foster.

Abstract: Navajo claims pertaining to the sacredness of the San Francisco Peaks (as well as those of other Native American tribes), while no doubt profoundly sincere, are necessarily and strategically positioned in relation to the contemporary legal struggles within which they have arisen. However, I cannot stress too heavily that this should not suggest that their claims are spurious, invented, or in other words “inauthentic.” Greg Johnson asserts that “frequently, the specter against which authenticity is measured is what critics might call ‘postured tradition,’ a shorthand means of suggesting that tradition expressed in political contexts is ‘merely political’” (2007: 3). To be sure, the discourses that posit the sacredness of the Peaks are fundamentally and simultaneously both religious and political; yet this does not necessarily mean that traditional religious claims made in contemporary political contexts are motivated by purely political considerations. Although these claims are necessarily formulated to persuade others of the incontestable ‘authenticity’ of their claims, I suggest that the degree to which this incontestability is achieved is directly related to an accumulation and accretion of discourse resulting from nearly four decades of continuing conflict at the Peaks. For the purposes of this article, I have primarily limited my inquiry to the claims of only one of five tribes engaged in the litigation concerning the San Francisco Peaks between 2005 and 2009: the Navajos. Moreover, they are only one of at least thirteen Native American tribes to describe the Peaks as sacred. My limited focus is not intended to suggest that the claims of these other tribes are less important, or especially less ‘authentic.’ Rather, the only compelling reason that I do not provide a full analysis of every tribe’s claims regarding the sacredness of the Peaks is the limitation of space in this project.

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## ONONDAGA LAKE: SACRED SPACE, CONTESTED SPACE

Onondaga Lake in what is now upstate New York is back from the dead. Once declared the most polluted body of water in the United States where fish literally swam out of the lake from lack of oxygen, life is back. Waterfowl, aquatic mammals, fish, and eagles have all returned to the lakeshore. Onondaga Lake is a modest body of water compared to its Finger Lakes neighbors. Onondaga is less than five miles in length, compared to Seneca Lake’s seventy-five miles. It has a maximum depth of sixty-five feet whereas Seneca’s is 615 feet. Its modest appearance belies its historic and cultural significance. Onondaga Lake became the site for the founding of the Haudenosaunee Confederacy under the Great Law of Peace, a form of representational democracy that preceded the creation of the United States’ republic by centuries.<sup>1</sup> At that moment, according to the Onondagas, “the lake became a sacred place, one that must be cared for and respected” (Onondaga Nation, 2023a). It was the place where the Haudenosaunee came to deliberate, negotiate, and create consensus on policies that would affect the internal stability of the Confederacy. It sat at the center of a metaphorical Longhouse that housed the Five Nations.

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1. The Haudenosaunee were commonly referred to as the Iroquois, which is a term of questionable origin used primarily by early European colonists. Haudenosaunee, or People of the Longhouse, is the name they use to refer to themselves. The Onondagas are members of the Haudenosaunee.

It was where the council fire continually burned, and it was watched over by an eagle who kept a wary eye for outside threats. That first threat came in the form of Jesuits bringing the ideas of a Christian God and hegemony, a combination that created the legal justification for Christian empires known as the Doctrine of Discovery, to the shores of Onondaga. It would be followed by the arrival of American troops sent at the order of George Washington during the American Revolution. Soon the Industrial Revolution would take its toll with the extraction of natural resources from the lake and the surrounding area replaced by industrial waste including mercury, arsenic, and benzene. The historical memory of the lake has focused on the Jesuits, and the Onondagas were actively erased from the history of the lake. Over time, however, the Onondagas maintained their own history. They maintained their dedication to the Great Law of Peace. Now, over 350 years after the beginning of that erasure process, the lake is making a comeback and the Onondagas have reestablished a physical presence on the lake. With this, the Great Law of Peace is revived as the Onondagas and their non-Native neighbors engage in a process of deliberation, negotiation, and consensus building about the future of the lake as it affects all, Haudenosaunee or not, who live within the territory of Longhouse, including the eagles who, for the first time in over a century, have returned to Onondaga territory and once again watch over the lake.

Centuries before the arrival of Europeans into what is now upstate New York, the Great Law of Peace was established on “the sacred shores of pristine Onondaga Lake” (Lyons 2021; Onondaga Nation, 2023b).<sup>2</sup> The story of the founding is told through Haudenosaunee oral tradition and recorded in what is known as the Hiawatha wampum belt. According to the oral

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2. There is much debate about the exact date of the establishment of the Great Law of Peace. The Onondaga Nation’s website states it was “over a thousand years ago,” placing the establishment earlier than a more exact date of 31 August 1142 offered by scholars Barabara Mann and Jerry Fields. The date of 1450 is also used as a date for the founding. While the dates vary widely, the Great Law as a form of representational democracy predates the US Constitution by centuries.

tradition, the Indigenous peoples of the area had been at continual war with one another through cycles of revenge killings. This violence moved the Creator to send his messenger, the Peacemaker, to bring peace to the region. The Peacemaker came from the Wendat (Huron Nation) on the northern shore of Lake Ontario and traveled in a canoe he carved from white stone, which would help convince the people of the Creator's message of peace. Starting with the easternmost end of Haudenosaunee territory, the Peacemaker first convinced a woman who had advocated the continuation of violence among the people to accept his message of peace. As the first person to do so, women were given a special position in the Five Nations. As Clan Mothers, women would have the responsibility to advocate for peace and to choose male leaders who had the wisdom and strength to maintain the Great Peace (Shenandoah 1992: 36–42).

With his first convert to what would become the Great Law of Peace, the Peacemaker sought out the most feared leaders to convert them to the Creator's message. He steadily convinced these leaders to give up their violent ways and join together as allies. He explained how a single arrow could be easily broken, but five arrows bundled together, representing the five nations of the Haudenosaunee, were exponentially stronger. Leaders from four of the nations adopted the Creator's Great Law of Peace, but the most fearsome leader of the Onondagas, Tadodaho, held out. Tadodaho was a man filled with such hate and evil that snakes grew from his head and his body was crooked with corruption. Tadodaho refused to hear any talk of peace, and when Hiawatha came to him to speak about peace, Tadodaho killed his family in response. Hiawatha, who would find solace from his pain in the white and purple clam shells that would become wampum beads, joined the Peacemaker in his quest to end the violence among the Five Nations and to convert Tadodaho to the Creator's Great Law.

Joined by the leaders who had accepted the peace, Hiawatha and the Peacemaker traveled across Onondaga Lake to, once again, confront Tadodaho, who tried all his powers of sorcery to stop them. The Creator's message was unstoppable. In exchange for accepting the Great Law of Peace, Tadodaho would be given a revered

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position of presiding over the 50 chiefs of the Grand Council. He would be responsible for maintaining a good mind and making decisions to benefit Haudenosaunee alive as well as those yet to be born. With this, the snakes were combed from his hair and his body became straight. The Peacemaker then uprooted a white pine tree on the shores of Onondaga Lake and the 50 chiefs buried their weapons of war, jealousy, hatred, and anger into the hole where they were washed away. The tree was then replanted as the Tree of Peace and the Peacemaker placed an eagle at the top to watch for and warn the Haudenosaunee of potential dangers (Lyons 2021).

Thus was born the Great Law of Peace of the Haudenosaunee Confederacy upon the shores of Onondaga Lake. This momentous event was recorded through oral tradition and the Hiawatha Belt (see figure 1) which symbolized the connection of the Five Nations with the Onondagas located at the center and represented by the Tree of Peace that stands on the shores of Onondaga Lake.<sup>3</sup> This also serves as a representation of the metaphorical longhouse established at this time. Haudenosaunee means People of the Longhouse. This metaphor would serve as the understanding of the relationship among the Five Nations. They were part of a community with responsibilities to one another, Mohawks were keepers of the Eastern door and Senecas keepers of the western door, in order to maintain the Great Law given to them by the Creator. Moreover, the creation of the Haudenosaunee Confederacy and the Great Law of Peace established the first form of representational democracy in North America, centuries before the creation of the United States. Within this government, the Five Nations agreed to avoid conflict with one another while also allowing each nation, village, and individual

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3. Wampum belts were made out of the purple and white shells of the quahog clams that are found in the North Atlantic. These belts serve as mnemonic devices that record and recall historically significant events of the Haudenosaunee and other Indigenous groups in northeast North America. The Onondagas, located at the center of the confederacy, took on the role of the keepers of the central fire. The belt has subsequently been turned into the flag of the Haudenosaunee Confederacy, an adopted European practice of claiming sovereignty over land (for more information on the use of wampum belts as historical sources see Nabokov 2022: 150-171; Foster 1995: 99-114).

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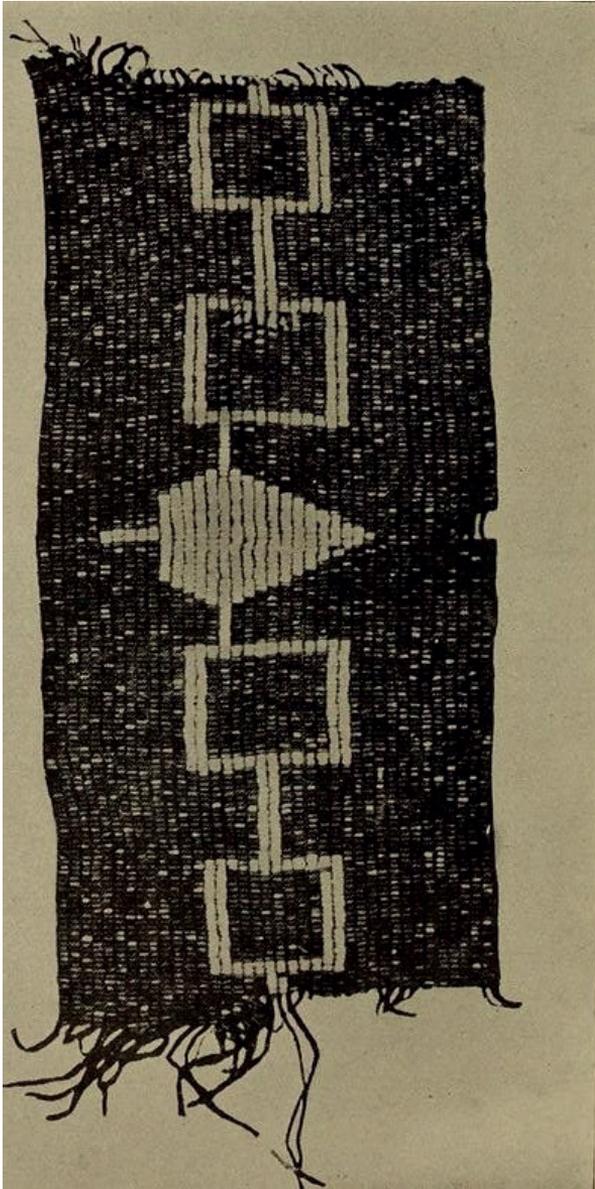


Fig. 1. Image of the Hiawatha Wampum Belt (“Hiawatha Belt”) depicting the creation of the Haudenosaunee Confederacy under the Great Law of Peace. The squares signify four of the members of the Confederacy, from left to right, the Senecas, Cayugas, Oneidas, and Mohawks. At the center stands the Great Tree of Peace planted along the shores of Onondaga Lake and signifies the role of the Onondagas and the Tadodaho as the symbolic center of the Haudenosaunee Longhouse. From *New York at the Jamestown Exposition* (1909). Source: [https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Hiawatha\\_Wampum\\_Belt\\_%281909%29\\_%2814779431751%29.jpg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Hiawatha_Wampum_Belt_%281909%29_%2814779431751%29.jpg) (public domain).

autonomy to make decisions that best served them, as long as those decisions did not disturb the peace maintained within the Confederacy. As stated above, women held positions of authority and responsibility within the Confederacy as well. Whereas men served as the chiefs, Clan Mothers were responsible for choosing those men they believed best suited for the job and had the ability to recall those leaders who failed to maintain “the good mind” (Lyons 1992: 31–33).

Non-native scholars did and often continue to deny the significance of the Great Law of Peace as the first form of representational democracy in North America. For some the problem is that it was not a written document but an oral narrative. For others, the issue was a racist denial that Indigenous peoples had the ability to create such a government. Late twentieth-century Native scholars such as Oren Lyons, John Mohawk, Vine Deloria Jr., and Audrey Shenandoah, to name a few, spoke and wrote about Indigenous sovereignty, practices, and knowledge. Haudenosaunee leaders such as Tom Porter and Jake Thomas gave voice to the ways the Haudenosaunee had worked for centuries to create consensus and maintain the “good mind,” and people began to listen. In 1987, Hawaii Senator Daniel Inouye introduced Senate Concurrent Resolution 76 commemorating and acknowledging the existence of the Great Law and the role of the Haudenosaunee in advising and providing an example to the founding fathers in the creation of the US Constitution. The resolution also called for the US government to continue to recognize Indian treaties and to continue a government-to-government relationship with Indigenous nations (Barreiro 1992: vii–viii; Inouye 1987; Lyons 1992; Mohawk 1992; Porter 1992; Shenandoah 1992; Thomas 1992).

While there is much debate as to whether or to what degree the Haudenosaunee Confederacy had upon the creation of the US government, the significance of the creation of this government cannot be denied. And while people often talk of places associated with the creation and continuation of American democracy as sacred space such as the US Capitol and Gettysburg Battlefield, the same is not typically applied to places associated with Indigenous creations and defense of government, even though those sites of Euro-American democracy are also secular spaces

whereas places such as Onondaga Lake actually hold a spiritual element as well as a political one; the two cannot be separated from the sacredness of Onondaga Lake. Yet, with the arrival of Europeans, the sacred center of the Confederacy has been under attack, and despite the abuse done to the lake, it has withstood the invasion (Gulliford 2000: 69–80).<sup>4</sup>

#### CHRISTIAN EUROPEAN COLONIZATION AND THE DOCTRINE OF DISCOVERY

In 1654, at least two centuries after the establishment of the Great Law of Peace on the shores of Onondaga Lake, the French Jesuit Simon Le Moyne arrived at the sacred center of the Haudenosaunee Confederacy. Thus began the contest over control of the lake, land, and people of Onondaga. The story of New France is often told as two different experiences: a spiritual story of Jesuits collecting souls and a secular story of soldiers, settlers, and fur traders collecting lands and profits. However, as we cannot separate the sacred nature of the creation of the Great Law of Peace from its practical political purpose, we cannot separate European spiritual and secular goals in North America. When Le Moyne arrived he came armed with the full power of the Doctrine of Discovery; the legal right and duty to convert souls to the Catholic faith and to lay claim to any territory not under the control of a Christian power.

The Doctrine of Discovery has origins that date back to the eleventh century and provides the legal basis for Christian powers to expand control over non-Christian territory and peoples. Although initially created as an international law applicable only to Christian, European countries to deal with conflicts in trade and colonization amongst themselves, it soon became a legal mechanism

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4. Here Gulliford identifies “Religious sites identified with oral tradition and origin stories” as being in need of preservation. He mostly mentions sites in the American West as many are still relatively intact and haven’t seen the same level of environmental devastation that Onondaga Lake has experienced. In response to the 06 January 2021 attack on the U.S. Capitol, many news stories and government and civil leaders referred to the Capitol as “sacred” space or ground. On 6 January 2022, President Joe Biden said, “One year ago today, in this sacred space, democracy was attacked” (Oatis et al. 2022).

to dominate non-Christian lands and people. It is important to stress the fact that it was not non-Europeans who were the focus of the Doctrine, it was non-Christians. Eastern Shawnee legal scholar Robert J. Miller points out the use of the Doctrine in the early fifteenth century, well before Columbus, in a conflict between Poland and the Teutonic Knights to control Lithuania, a European, but non-Christian land. The Council of Constance in 1414 decided that non-Christians shared “natural law rights to sovereignty and property as Christians but that the Pope could order invasion to punish violations of natural law or to spread the gospel” (Miller 2006: 13). So while the Vatican recognized non-Christian natural rights, it opened them to the consequences of subjugation at the order of the Pope (Miller 2006: 9–13; Mohawk 1992: 44–52; Muldoon 1977: 109–119; and Newcomb, 2008).

The Doctrine of Discovery would be expanded later in the fifteenth century as Spain and Portugal moved beyond their borders to colonize lands in the Atlantic, Africa, and eventually South and North America. During this period, Christian domination of lands and peoples was based not on a lack of adherence to natural laws by non-Christians, but on Christians’ rights of discovery of non-Christian lands and peoples and on their need and duty to lead them into “civilization,” meaning Christianity. Through a series of papal bulls Christian powers, initially Portugal soon followed by Spain, could,

invade, search out, capture, vanquish, and subdue all Saracens and pagans whatsoever, and other enemies of Christ wheresoever placed, and the kingdoms, dukedoms, principalities, dominions, possessions, and all movable and immovable goods whatsoever held and possessed by them and to reduce their persons to perpetual slavery, and to apply and appropriate to himself and his successors the kingdoms, dukedoms, counties, principalities, dominions, possessions, and goods, and to convert them to his and their use and profit. (Nicholas VI, *The Bull Romanus Pontifex*)

The year after Columbus’s “discovery” of the “infidels” of the Caribbean and their lands, Pope Alexander VI famously divided the New World in two with his *Bull Inter Caetera* that called for Spain to conquer the areas west of the line and Portugal east. The 1494 Treaty of Tordesillas would adjust the line slightly giving Portugal

dominion over what is now Brazil, and this Doctrine was then considered international law (Miller 2006:15; Pagden 1995:47; and Williams 1990: 80).

Other Christian, European powers were not to be left out. The question was how to claim authority over lands and peoples that, according to the *Inter Caetera* and subsequent Treaty of Tordesillas, were reserved for Spain. English legal scholars reasoned that England would not be in violation of the *Inter Caetera* if England laid claim to lands that Spain had not. This left a good part of North America free for the taking in English and French eyes. If no other Christian nation actively occupied a region, any Christian nation could lay claim to the territory and its non-Christian population, as long as that nation physically occupied and possessed that territory. The 1606 Charter of Virginia begins,

JAMES, by the Grace of God, King of England, Scotland, France and Ireland, Defender of the Faith, &c. WHEREAS our loving and well-disposed Subjects, [...] have been humble Suitors unto us, that We would vouchsafe unto them our Licence, to make Habitation, Plantation, and to deduce a colony of sundry of our People into that part of America commonly called VIRGINIA, and other parts and Territories in America, either appertaining unto us, or which are *not now actually possessed by any Christian Prince or People*, situate, lying, and being all along the Sea Coasts, between four and thirty Degrees of Northerly Latitude from the Equinoctial Line, and five and forty Degrees of the same Latitude, and in the main Land between the same four and thirty and five and forty Degrees, and the Islands hereunto adjacent, or within one hundred Miles of the Coast thereof. (The First Charter of Virginia 1606; emphasis added)

While the Charter gave England control over the land and established their possession of Virginia in relation to other Christian countries, there was no mention of Indigenous peoples beyond authorizing the colonists to mint metal coins for the “Ease of Traffick and Bargaining between and amongst them and the Natives there (First Charter of Virginia 1606).” The Protestant English were less concerned with saving souls than their Catholic counterparts, but were still happy to play by legal rules of Christian dominion initially established by the Catholic Church.

France, wanting its own portion of North America, was happy to adopt the English modification to the Doctrine of Discovery. In order to provide proof of discovery, if not outright occupation,

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of land, Christian countries practiced their own forms of, as Patricia Seed termed it, “Ceremonies of Possession.” Planting crosses, burying tablets or coins, hanging signage all served as ways to establish symbolic possession of the lands. From there, Christian nations developed the idea of *terra nullius* (empty land) to further their justification to claims to the land. It allowed for Christian nations to claim land that was not only unclaimed by other Christian nations, but was also not being utilized in a civilized manner, meaning for European style agriculture. Land not under direct cultivation was seen as vacant wilderness and open to the claim and occupation of Christian Europeans. While Le Moyne’s main purpose in traveling to Onondaga may have been to save souls, the Doctrine of Discovery, automatically created the conditions that France, under whose authority and protection he traveled, would lay claim to the territory of the Onondaga peoples, including their sacred site of Onondaga Lake (Miller 2006: 18–21; Seed 1995).

#### SIMON LE MOYNE ARRIVES IN ONONDAGA

It is within the context of the Doctrine of Discovery that Le Moyne arrived in Onondaga in the summer of 1654. Le Moyne was there at the behest of the French government in Quebec with the goal—beyond saving souls—to create an alliance, or at least a peace with the Onondagas, for the benefit of New France. The Jesuits had some success in bringing Mohawk converts into the sphere of influence of New France, and thereby helped bring needed peaceful relations and trade benefits with the nation that occupied the region between New France and New Netherland. Bringing the Onondaga into the French sphere would be a great boon to establishing a greater French presence in the *terra nullius* of the Great Lakes region.

The account of Le Moyne’s time at Onondaga indicates the secular as well as spiritual purposes of his visit; the two goals cannot be separated. Most significant is the account of Le Moyne’s speech to the General Council at Onondaga. Here he had the honor of speaking at the sacred site on the shores of Onondaga Lake where the Great Law of Peace was established. However, he did not necessarily recognize that fact as an adherent to the Doctrine of Discovery, the non-Christian Onondagas were not seen as equal

to the French in religion, government, or land use. Although Le Moyne stood in the sacred space of renewal and consensus building and took on the tone and style of Haudenosaunee diplomatic speech, his message was still one of Christian, European dominance.

He began his speech by stating, “First, I said that Onnontio—Monsieur de Lauson, Governor of New France—was speaking through my mouth, and in his person the Hurons and the Algonquins, as well as the French, since all three Nations had Onnontio for their great Captain” (Le Moyne 1898: 109).<sup>5</sup> With these words, it is clear that Le Moyne was there in the combined role of missionary and sovereign as defined by the Doctrine of Discovery. He also indicated that the French have already gained sovereignty over the Hurons and some Algonquians, both the people and the lands. His account continued and he eventually recorded these words: “At each of my presents they uttered a loud shout of applause from the depths of their chests, in evidence of their delight. I was occupied fully two hours in delivering my entire harangue, which I pronounced in the tone of a Captain,—walking back and forth, as is their custom, like an actor on a stage” (Le Moyne 1898: 111). Le Moyne fully viewed himself as playing a theatrical role delivering his harangue. He spoke in the “tone of a Captain” but did not recognize the significance of the space and institution in which he spoke. His point of view was that of a representative of French sovereign power and his goal was to extend that power over the sacred space of Onondaga Lake.

Le Moyne recorded the response of the Haudenosaunee council thus:

To conclude these Thanksgivings, the Onnontaerrhonnon Captain took the word. ‘Listen, Ondessonk,’ he said to me; ‘Five whole Nations address thee through my mouth; I have in my heart the sentiments of all the Iroquois Nations, and my tongue is faithful to my heart. Thou shalt tell Onnontio four things, which are the gist of all our deliberations in Council.

“It is our wish to acknowledge him of who thou hast told us, who is the master of our lives, and who is unknown to us.

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5. *Onnontio* was the title the Haudenosaunee used to refer to the Governor of France. Likewise, all Governors of New York were called *Corlaer* after a Dutch man who was well known to the Mohawks.

The May-tree for all matters of concern to us is to-day planted at Onnontagé.' He meant that that would be thenceforth the scene of the assemblies and parleys relating to the Peace.

We conjure you to choose a site that will be advantageous to yourselves, on the shores of our great lake, in order to build thereon a French settlement. Place yourselves in the heart of the country, since you are to possess our hearts. Thither we will go to receive instruction, and thence you will be able to spread out in all directions. Show us Paternal care, and we will render you filial obedience.

We are involved in new wars, wherein Onnontio gives us courage; but for him we shall have only thoughts of Peace." (Le Moyne 1898: 117)

While one must question the absolute accuracy of his recollections, we can gain great insight into the significance of this meeting to the Haudenosaunee. Point two refers specifically to the planting of a tree of peace at Onondaga, replicating the establishment of the Great Law Of Peace of the Haudenosaunee at that same place, and reinforcing the significance of the Onondaga Lake as the Longhouse's sacred center. Points three and four require a bit more reading between the lines. Why would the Haudenosaunee invite the French to build a settlement on the "shores of our great lake"? Did they really invite the French "to spread out in all directions" and offer their "filial obedience"? Were they really submitting to the authority of the French under the Doctrine of Discovery? Point four may help us understand the Haudenosaunee response a bit more when they indicate that they are involved in new wars and that they only have thoughts of peace for Onnontio. Instead of approaching this meeting from within the context of the Doctrine of Discovery, the Haudenosaunee were working within their own context of the Great Law of Peace.

As indicated in point four, the Haudenosaunee were at war and were in need of allies and assistance. The French could easily offer that. By bringing the French into the metaphorical Haudenosaunee Longhouse, the council would turn the tables on the French. It would not be the French spreading out in all directions, but it would be the Haudenosaunee "extending the rafters" of the metaphorical Longhouse and thereby expanding their own authority and doing so from their heart of sacred power, the Grand Council

at Onondaga Lake. In a sense, it was the Onondagas colonizing the French (Foster et al. 1984; Parmenter 2010).

The Onondagas were also looking for assistance from the French in the relocation of Wendat (Huron) refugees to Onondaga to be adopted into the Longhouse, thus strengthening the community in the face of population loss from war and disease. The Wendat people were decimated and were no longer able to stand on their own. They are culturally and linguistically connected to the Haudenosaunee and were desired as new members of the Longhouse. It is important to note that the Onondagas were in competition with the Mohawks to acquire these refugees. Some could read this direct competition between the two nations as a sign of the weakening of the Longhouse. However, it must be remembered that the Great Law of Peace was put in place to end violence amongst the Five Nations and to provide a method and a space in which to solve conflict without war. This is just what the Mohawks and Onondagas were doing as both tried to gain much needed population through the adoption of the Wendat refugees. In his work, *The Edge of the Woods: Iroquois, 1534–1701*, Jon Parmenter writes that, “The strength of the League rested on the capacity of its symbolic structure for innovation, enabling Iroquois people to engage novel political circumstances and to shape them for their own benefit” (2010: xlvi). The introduction of Christians under the authority of the Doctrine of Discovery created a novel and dangerous political circumstance to which the Haudenosaunee had to adapt. As the Doctrine of Discovery continued to evolve from its inception in the 11th century to the 21st century, so too did the Great Law of Peace (Leavelle 2002: 913–940; Parmenter 2010: 81–100; Tomlins and Mann 2001: 11).<sup>6</sup>

This moment in 1654 set off the struggle for control over the sacred center of the Haudenosaunee Confederacy. The French did indeed establish a mission on the shores of Onondaga Lake that housed both Jesuits and soldiers, a clear indication that the French were working through the authority and understanding of the Doctrine of Discovery by spreading the gospel and sovereign

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6. For other examples of the use of geographical understanding in the history of both colonial encounters and in American Indian history and culture, see Basso 1996; Dennis 1993; Gulliford 2000: 69–80; Nabokov 2002).

authority of the French empire. This French attempt at establishing their dominance under the Doctrine of Discovery was taken a step further in the spring of 1656 through the promulgation of Jesuit control over the land of the Onondagas. Similar to the wording of the 1606 First Charter of Virginia, the Royal representatives in New France

by the power given to us by the Company of new France [...], we have given and Granted [...], by these presents to the Reverend fathers of the Society of Jesus, The following extent of Territory, To wit: ten Leagues of space in every direction [...]—and where they shall choose to establish themselves in the country of the Upper Iroquois [...], be it in or near the village of Onnondagé [...] which they shall Judge most convenient to Them [...] is to be Possessed by The Said Reverend Jesuit fathers, Their successors and Assigns, in freehold forever, in full right and ownership [...]; together with all The Lakes, rivers, brooks, springs, Islands, Islets, meadows, land, and woods [...] that District shall come under jurisdiction of The Grand Seneschal of new France, or his Lieutenant established in the Circuit of three Rivers. Accordingly, we enjoin the grand Seneschal of new France [...] to put [...] the Society of Jesus in possession of the said Region, by virtue of these presents. [...] This twelfth of April, one thousand six hundred and fifty-six: thus signed, De Lauson. (*Jesuit Relations* XLI 1656: 244–245)

The entire text is crucial in illustrating the role of the Doctrine of Discovery in French attempts to establish control over the heart of the Haudenosaunee Longhouse. We clearly see the connection between spiritual and legal authority in the granting of Onondaga land to the Jesuits, whose authority over souls could be assumed but who needed a formal proclamation of their authority over the lakes, rivers, springs, and other natural features in the face of possible encroachment from Dutch and, later, English colonizers. They did not need to bury lead plates in the ground, the Jesuits had the equivalent of a legal deed to the land as practiced by Christian European powers.<sup>7</sup> The rights to the land could not be in the possession of the Haudenosaunee as they did not put it to proper

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7. Burying metal plates in the ground was one of the several ways different European powers supposedly proved their “discovery” of unclaimed lands. Other practices included planting flags and crosses and, a favorite of the English, taking possession of soil and a stick from the newly claimed lands. The Dutch were a bit more formal as they would create maps as their initial claim of possession. All served the same purpose, which was to show

use according to European standards. The fact that there were valuable salt springs located around the lake gave greater significance to the French Jesuit claim to the land as part of the Doctrine of Discovery. The land was rich in potential souls and potential profits (Le Moyne 1898: 123).

The legal authority of the French government, combined with the Haudenosaunee desire to bring the Wendats into the protection of the Longhouse (and to bring the French if not into the Longhouse, then at least within the Haudenosaunee sphere of influence), the Jesuits established the mission of Sainte Marie, which stood from 1656–1658. According to the Relation written by Father Paul Ragueneau to Father Jacques Renault, Provincial of the Jesuits in France, the small group of Jesuits and soldiers miraculously escaped the growing threat of hostile Natives who planned to enslave or kill the Europeans (Ragueneau 1898: 153–161). While Ragueneau specifically mentions ten soldiers among the residents of the mission along with about fifty other Frenchmen, many modern narratives of the events often leave out the presence of the soldiers in the mission (Eggleston 2009). Onondaga oral traditions, however, clearly recall the presence of the soldiers among the Jesuits. They argue that it was not “hostile Natives” who were the problem, but the hostile French in the form of Jesuit missionaries and soldiers who were working to establish their dominion over Onondaga people and land, including the sacred space of Onondaga Lake, which the French viewed more as a source of wealth than of spiritual significance.

In 1658, tensions between the Onondagas and French remained from the abandonment of the mission until 1701 with the establishment of the Great Peace of Montreal. This peace agreement, finalized in the heart of French colonial authority in Montreal, brought an end to violent conflict between the Haudenosaunee and the French and their Indigenous allies. While the peace culminated in Christian dominated Montreal, the path to that peace traveled through Onondaga as well. It was here that the Haudenosaunee Grand Council convened, debated, and negotiated their stance with the French, especially in light of the growing English

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they were the first Christians to “discover” and, therefore, possess the land (see Seed 1995).

power to the east of the Longhouse. In the end, the Haudenosaunee decided on a stance of relative neutrality with the French and paved the way for the Peace of Montreal in 1701, which ushered in a relatively tranquil period for those who lived and met on the shores of Onondaga Lake, at least until the American Revolution brought more violence to the heart of the Haudenosaunee Longhouse (Havard 2001: 94–97; Richter 1992: 391–393).

#### ENTER THE AMERICANS

While the French and Indian War (1754–1763), known in Europe as the Seven Years' War, had a great impact on the balance of power in North America with the eventual exit of the French, Onondaga itself remained relatively unscathed. Fighting took place in surrounding areas, but not in the heart of the Confederacy. The Confederacy itself was able to maintain an official stance of neutrality in the conflict between the French and English until 1760 when many Haudenosaunee joined the English, who, by then, had an upper hand in the war. After the French and Indian War, there were many Europeans moving into the territory of the Longhouse, primarily in the eastern sections and home of the Mohawks and Oneidas. Many individual Europeans traveled to Onondaga, but significant European settlement had yet to occur.

When the American Revolution broke out in 1775, the Haudenosaunee tried to continue a stance of neutrality between the English and Americans. However, the violence of the Revolution would soon arrive in the Longhouse with devastating consequences. By 1777, stress grew within the Longhouse as many Oneidas and Tuscaroras who lived among a growing number of American settlers opted to join the American cause. This move went against the majority opinion of the Longhouse to remain neutral, but the Oneidas, Tuscaroras, and even some Onondagas decided that throwing in their lot with the Americans, who were their neighbors, would be their best bet to preserve their homelands in the long run. This decision put these members of the Longhouse in direct conflict with the Mohawks who opted to ally with the British, primarily following the lead of chief Joseph Brant and his older sister Molly Brant. Joseph was the protégé of the late Sir William Johnson, the Superintendent of Indian Affairs

in the Northern Colonies, while Molly was Johnson's wife. These relationships granted the Brants great influence with the British government and military that they would retain through the period of the American Revolution, even after they were forced to flee first to Fort Niagara and then resettle in Canada (Calloway 1995: 59–60, 139; Shannon 2008: 185–189; Carson 2001: 47–48, 86–96).<sup>8</sup>

The fact that there were now Haudenosaunee combatants on either side of the war put them in a position where they would face each other in combat. This situation has led some historians to think of the American Revolution as a civil war amongst the Haudenosaunee. However, recent scholarship, especially that from Karim Tiro whose research has revealed that Haudenosaunee were hesitant to face each other in battle and would often abandon the battlefield in order not to wage war against their Confederation and possible clan kin (2011: 49–50). This is not to say that all was peaceful within the Longhouse, but it provides an understanding of the continued strength and commitment to the Great Law of Peace as established at Onondaga Lake. The Peace never required unanimous consensus on all decisions regarding the Haudenosaunee; it did require that peace be maintained within the Longhouse. Individuals were able to choose their own path outside the Longhouse, but when it came time to commit violence against their kin, they, for the most part, held true to the Great Law of Peace (Calloway 1995: 34, 85, 123; Glatthaar and Martin: 2006 ; Shannon 2008: 182–193; Carson 2001: 77–108).

Despite Haudenosaunee's commitment to the Great Law of Peace even on the battlefield, they could not escape the destruction

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8. Molly Brant provides a good example of the influence of Haudenosaunee women in politics as established by the Great Law of Peace. Although most scholars look to her brother Joseph as the larger influence in Mohawk relationships with the English. As the wife of Sir William Johnson, the British Superintendent of Northern Colonies, Molly extended Mohawk kinship ties to William and their children, as all Haudenosaunee children are part of their mother's clan. While Joseph gained entry and influence into the world of the British, Molly was crucial for William to gain influence and entry into the world of the Mohawks. Even after William's death, Molly wielded much influence with the British and served as a leader to her people (for more information on Molly Brant, see Carson 2001; Leavy 2015: 62–85; Feister and Pullis 1996: 295–320).

of the American Revolution. In 1779 General George Washington meticulously planned and ordered an attack on the Haudenosaunee. His hope was to sow division in the Longhouse and get the Oneidas to provide intelligence on the situation at British-held Fort Niagara and to get the Onondagas to capture Joseph Brant (Washington to Clinton 1779; Washington to Schuyler 1779). Neither group was willing to cooperate. Still, under the leadership of General John Sullivan, the American army moved into Haudenosaunee territory and executed a strategy of burning their homes and crops. To inflict maximum damage, Washington was advised to invade the Longhouse from several directions and “at a season when their corn is about half grown” (Greene to Washington 1779). The invasion began in April, and Washington’s first target was the sacred center of the Haudenosaunee at Onondaga. Striking at the sacred center, Washington hoped, would send an important message to the rest of Confederacy. 550 American soldiers invaded Onondaga country; they burned fifty longhouses, killed dozens of non-combatants, took more prisoner, and destroyed all sources of food to starve any left behind (Calloway 1995: 53; Calloway 2018: 247–250; Graymont 1972: 196; Mann 1972: 29–33).

The destruction continued through the Spring and Summer, with dozens of towns burned, non-combatants killed, fields and orchards burned, and livestock destroyed. In October of 1779, Washington wrote to Major General Horatio Gates,

I have the pleasure to inform you that the Army under the command of General Sullivan arrived safe and in perfect health at Wyoming on the 7th after having fully completed the destruction of the whole Country of the six Nations; the Indians of which must be thrown this Winter upon the Magazines of Canada for subsistence, which I imagine will not be a little distressing, as they were unprepared and probably unprovided for such an event. (Washington to Gates 1779)

The Sullivan campaign succeeded in spreading terror and starvation through the Confederacy, and Washington was correct that the refugees who survived the invasion looked to the English at Fort Niagara for their subsistence. The British were not prepared for the thousands of Haudenosaunee who arrived at the fort and many who survived the violence, would not survive the winter. From this, Washington earned the title “Town Destroyer”

from the Haudenosaunee. The sacred center had been attacked and destroyed. The future looked grim (Calloway 2018: 250–259; Fischer 1997: 7; Shannon 2008: 179).

#### THE RISE OF NEW YORK STATE

From the outside, the Haudenosaunee Longhouse seemed to be in shambles and that the sacred center had finally succumbed to the power of a less than just war. Within the Longhouse, the commitment to the Great Law of Peace remained, although by the end of the eighteenth century, it was becoming increasingly clear that Onondaga Lake was destined to become a center of resource extraction as well as the sacred site of the founding of the Confederacy. The sacred fire, of which the Onondaga were given responsibility to look after, was rekindled in Seneca territory, further west, away from the quickly encroaching Americans. Even in viewing the Haudenosaunee as a defeated people, the newly formed United States did not have the power to eradicate the Haudenosaunee completely, so it, along with the State of New York, pursued a strategy of land dispossession with its legal grounding in the Doctrine of Discovery. Even the US-allied Oneida Nation, whose leaders believed their claim to their lands would be more secure after the Revolution if they joined their American neighbors against the British, suffered loss of their lands (Hauptman 1999: 78–79; Blau et al. 1978: 495–496).

Soon after the war's end, the US government began a series of treaty negotiations with Indigenous peoples who found themselves living in the boundaries of the new nation. These treaties were primarily agreements where Native peoples gave up land to the US in exchange for much needed material goods. Since non-Christian Indigenous people did not have sovereign rights over their land according to the Doctrine of Discovery, they were only able to make land agreements with the United States. The US government reinforced their position as the sole authority to treat with Indian nations through the Federal trade and Intercourse Act of 1790, which states, in Section One, "That no person shall be permitted to carry on any trade or intercourse with the Indian tribes, without a license for that purpose under the hand and seal of the superintendent of the department, or of such other per-

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son as the President of the United States shall appoint for that purpose” (US Congress 1790). While the US claimed the authority of the Doctrine of Discovery, it did not have the strength to enforce this against the will of New York State officials who were well aware of the economic potential of the land. Philip Schuyler, the well-known actor in the American Revolution, led the way in establishing New York’s authority of the land by clearly disregarding the Intercourse Act.

Schuyler would negotiate a series of so-called treaties with the Cayuga, his former Oneida allies, and the Onondagas, dispossessing them of thousands of acres of land in violation of federal law. By the 1790s, when the federal government and the State of New York were competing with one another to control land negotiations with the Haudenosaunee, about one hundred Onondaga people (out of an estimated four hundred in the state) were living on Onondaga land. At this point the council fire of the Confederacy was burning in Seneca territory and by 1793 the creation of Military Tracts and several illegal state treaties had reduced the Onondaga Nation to less than twenty-five square miles of land south of the sacred site of Onondaga Lake. In 1795 a Schuyler negotiated treaty with the Onondagas finalized New York State’s ownership of Onondaga Lake, its surrounding lands, and its highly valuable salt deposits. In 1789, the Onondagas had complained to New York Governor Clinton that the settler, Asa Danforth, was illegally building a house on the shore of Onondaga Lake. Along with agricultural land, New York State’s growing capitalist class was deeply involved in speculating in salt as well as land (Galpin 1941: 19–32; Hauptman 1999: 76–80; New York State Legislature 1795: 199–203; Murphy 1949: 304–315; Tustin 1949: 40–46).

The story of Onondaga Lake would now focus on the development of the salt industry and the growing Euro-American population, first in the aptly named town of Salina and then the growing city of Syracuse. But while New York State was dispossessing the Haudenosaunee of their land in an attempt to assert its authority over that of New York and its Indigenous population, the US government was negotiating a treaty with the Haudenosaunee that actually recognized Haudenosaunee, particularly Seneca, sovereignty. Land speculators in the state were running

amok. One of the famous financiers of the Revolutionary War era, Robert Morris, alone had purchased four million acres in western New York with great profits in sight. As stated above, at this point in time, the Onondagas now lived on about twenty-five square miles of land, which is equivalent to approximately 16,000 acres. The US government had to do something to reign in the speculators and their accomplices in the New York government. To do this US Commissioner Timothy Pickering met with the Haudenosaunee in Canandaigua, New York and established what is known as the Pickering or Canandaigua Treaty on 11 November 1794. The treaty gave the US rights to land the Haudenosaunee held in the Ohio Valley and in return the Senecas regained land they had lost in 1784 as part of the Treaty of Stanwix, and it secured their land holdings within New York State. This was not a mere treaty negotiation where Indians gave up land in exchange for quickly exhausted material goods. This was, according to some historians as well as the Haudenosaunee, a treaty among sovereign states, and it was agreed upon by the full Grand Council of the Haudenosaunee Confederacy (Campisi and Starna 1995: 467–490; Oberg 2015; Powless 2000; US and Six Nations 1794).

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The Pickering Treaty was also recorded through the creation of a wampum belt known as the Washington Belt, who actually had it commissioned. The belt is 6 feet long and features thirteen human figures representing the thirteen states linked in unity. At the center are two other people and a house. These two people signify the Haudenosaunee, specifically the Senecas as Keepers of the Western Door and the Mohawks as Keepers of the Eastern Door; they are protecting the Haudenosaunee Longhouse that still stands between them. Within a few years of this historic agreement, land speculators were once again at the doorstep of the Longhouse and its members were forced again to cede land. However, the treaty still stands to this day. Every year there is a meeting between the US State Department and the Haudenosaunee Confederacy to renew the agreement (Onondaga Nation 2010).

By 1800, the sacred site of the Great Law of Peace was now under the control of Euro-Americans who were focused on its potential first for salt, then for transportation, recreation, and eventually

an industrial dumping ground. The nineteenth century saw the United States adopt the full force of the Doctrine of Discovery, which was solidified in the Supreme Court ruling of *Johnson v. M'Intosh* in 1823. Although we can also see how the Louisiana Purchase, where the United States purchased 530-million acres of land from France who had acquired their rights through discovery and negotiations with other European nations, particularly Spain, also showed how the US adopted the Doctrine of Discovery. Even the Lewis and Clark expedition served as a ceremonial claiming of the land as the two men, under the authority of President Jefferson, traveled through the new territory, bestowing gifts on the Indigenous peoples and mapping this new *terra nullius* for future generations of Christian Americans (Miller 2006: 59–98).

Yet it was *Johnson v. M'Intosh* that established the Doctrine of Discovery as the basis for American law as it relates to Indigenous peoples. The case was a land ownership dispute in Illinois. The plaintiffs, Joshua Johnson and Thomas Graham, based their ownership claim of the land through a purchase that originated through a transaction between the Piankeshaw Nation and William Murray, a land speculator in the eighteenth century. The defendant, William McIntosh, purchased his competing claim from the United States government who had acquired it through treaties with the Piankeshaw Nation. Johnson believed he had a rightful claim to the land as he purchased the land from the people who had occupied the land prior to the arrival of Europeans. Chief Justice John Marshall disagreed. He wrote, "Discovery is the foundation of title, in European nations, and this overlooks all proprietary rights in the natives" (Marshall 1823: 567). Marshall traced this authority, now possessed by the United States, back to the founding of the North American colonies. In this legal system, Indian peoples had no right to own land, only to occupy it:

While the different nations of Europe respected governments respected the right of the natives, as occupants, they asserted the ultimate dominion to be in themselves; and claimed and exercised, as a consequence of this ultimate dominion, a power to grant the soil while yet in possession of the natives. These grants have been understood, by all, to convey a title to the grantees, subject only to the Indian right of occupancy. The history of America, from its discovery to the present day, proves, we think, the universal recognition of these principles. (Marshall 1823: 574)

Two years after this ruling, the Erie Canal opened, and it utilized the waters of Onondaga Lake along its course. Sacred claims to the lake would not trump profits or the legal authority of the Doctrine of Discovery. Nevertheless, the Great Law of Peace remained in place.

#### INDUSTRY AND ENVIRONMENTAL DEVASTATION

The story of Onondaga Lake from 1825 to the mid-20th century is not a pretty one. From the beginning Europeans were drawn to the area to control the land and exploit the resources as was their right, as they understood it, through the Doctrine of Discovery. The city of Syracuse grew quickly upon its eastern end, which was dominated by salt production and also was an outlet for the Erie Canal. People and commerce and great wealth passed through the heart of the Longhouse on canal boats. Syracuse became a center of not only commerce but of reform. Women's rights, abolitionism, temperance, and evangelicalism all left their marks, although only one reformer, Matilda Jocelyn Gage, openly advocated for the rights of the Haudenosaunee who lived just outside the city. Gage wrote admiringly about the political and social roles of Haudenosaunee women. This was not a popular stance among her fellow reformers who were not prepared to work to extend the vote to women of color. This may be a significant reason why Gage is not as well known as some of her contemporaries (Gage 1893; Sheriff 1997: 126, 164; Wagner 1998).

By 1917 the Erie Canal no longer flowed through Syracuse. In 1921 the *Syracuse Herald* reported that,

The Erie Canal between Salina and Clinton streets appears to be a favorite gathering place for scum and refuse. The wind sweeps papers, boxes, pieces of wood and other rubbish into this cove and leaves it there. The wind tends to clear the main channel of the canal of such rubbish, but does not affect such secluded places.

Weeds from the bottom of the canal have grown to the surface and add to the general unsightly collection. They gather the other refuse and aid in giving the canal the general appearance of a dumping place. Tuesday morning there was such a heap of rubbish just east of the Salina Street bridge that the railing was crowded with spectators.

The refuse remains—a menace to public health. (*Syracuse Herald* 1921: 11)

The canal would be filled in through Syracuse in 1923, and the city and surrounding industry would refocus their dumping efforts on Onondaga Lake. By the 1920s, the lake along with the canal, already had serious problems with pollution. The commercial fishery in the lake collapsed in 1890 due to pollution and invasive species introduced through the Erie Canal attacked the salmon and whitefish populations. In 1900 ice harvesting on the lake was banned for public health reasons. By 1920 swimming in the lake was banned for the same reasons.

In the twentieth century, the City of Syracuse moved to a municipal water and sewer system. The original system's storm sewers also served for waste removal, most of which ended up in the lake. 1922 saw the introduction of screening and treatment of sewage prior to it entering into the lake, but as indicated above, the damage was done. Despite continual upgrades to the system in the 1930s and 1950s, raw sewage continued to enter the lake. Many people were willing to turn a blind eye to this problem because industries around the lake also used it as a dumping ground (Effler and Hennigan 1996: 4-6; USEPA 2023).

The largest industrial polluter was Solvay Process chemical manufacturing. Solvay Process would eventually be known as Allied Signal and Allied Chemical Co. It is now owned by Honeywell International. Solvay Process exploited the abundant water, salt, and limestone supply in the area to manufacture soda ash and produced significant amounts of sodium, calcium, and chloride pollutants that were dumped directly into the lake. In 1946 Allied Signal began industrial production that resulted in mercury being released into the lake, which would continue until 1986. The US Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) estimated that Allied Signal discharged 75,000-kilograms of mercury into Onondaga Lake between 1946 and 1970, when sport fishing was banned. Although by that point, there were not many fish in the lake left to catch. In addition to mercury, industries discharged arsenic, lead, hexachlorobenzene, phenol, and PCBs into the lake. In 1995, the EPA placed Onondaga Lake on the list of Superfund priority sites (Effler and Hennigan 1996: 4-6; USEPA 2023).

As industry continued to grow along the shores of Onondaga Lake after the filling of the Erie Canal, the French Jesuits returned. In 1933, during the Colonial Revival Period in America, the city of Syracuse claimed the site of the seventeenth-century French mission on Onondaga Lake and decided to reconstruct the mission to memorialize the arrival of the Jesuits to the shores of Onondaga Lake and as a public works project to give work to men during the Great Depression. The reconstructed site, Sainte Marie de Ganentaha, opened later that year. Its main feature was the “French Fort” which was, in reality, an inaccurate reconstruction of a log cabin. The site was more of an ode to the idea of American expansion, in which Native peoples had to be conquered and their lands settled by Christian Europeans, than an attempt to depict the historical encounter between the Jesuits and Onondagas. In fact, for several decades, there was no interpretive material or texts within the site at all. Visitors were left to interpret the site for themselves. In the 1970s, when Onondaga Lake was considered the most polluted body of water in the United States, Sainte Marie hired costumed reenactors, but there was still no formal interpretation. In 1988, the 1933 mission structure was torn down and a new one built based on existing plans for a similar structure in Sainte Marie among the Hurons in Canada. It was reopened as Sainte Marie Among the Iroquois Living History Museum in 1991 but closed its doors in 2011 (Connors 1980; Gadua 2018; Ryan and Stokes-Rees 2017: 27–29).

During this time, the Onondagas, illegally pushed from their sacred site on the lake and represented in Sainte Marie Among the Iroquois as figures of secondary importance, were working to reestablish their presence in the heart of the Longhouse. The environmental degradation of the lake and the surrounding land were at the heart of the 2005 Onondaga Lands Right claim. The opening statement reads:

The Onondaga People wish to bring about a healing between themselves and all others who live in this region that has been the homeland of the Onondaga Nation since the dawn of time. The Nation and its people have a unique spiritual, cultural, and historic relationship with the land, which is embodied in Gayanashagowa, the Great Law of Peace. This

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relationship goes far beyond federal and state legal concepts of ownership, possession or legal rights. The people are one with the land, and consider themselves stewards of it. It is the duty of the Nation's leaders to work for a healing of this land, to protect it, and to pass it on to future generations. The Onondaga Nation brings this action on behalf of its people in the hope that it may hasten the process of reconciliation and bring lasting justice, peace, and respect among all who inhabit the area. (Hill 2014)

Unfortunately, their claim was never heard because it was dismissed by the US Federal Court as too disruptive to the people of New York State. 2005 is also the year that the US Supreme Court ruled on the case of *City of Sherrill v. Oneida Nation of New York*. In this case the Oneida Nation had purchased land on the open market that they had been illegally dispossessed of by the State of New York 200 years earlier. Once they acquired the land, the Oneidas moved to place it under their jurisdiction and remove it from the local tax rolls in the City of Sherrill. The dispute made it to the Supreme Court, which ruled eight-to-one in favor of the City of Sherrill. Justice Ruth Bader Ginsburg wrote the majority opinion and said, "Given the longstanding non-Indian character of the area and its inhabitants, the regulatory authority constantly exercised by New York State and its counties and towns, and the Oneidas' long delay in seeking judicial relief against parties other than the United States, we hold that the tribe cannot unilaterally revive its ancient sovereignty, in whole or in part, over the parcels at issue" and that the court must prevent "the Tribe from rekindling the embers of sovereignty that long ago grew cold" (Ginsburg 2005). The Doctrine of Discovery remained alive and well in the early years of the twenty-first century.

The land around the lake is still owned by Onondaga County, which developed a park and multipurpose trail around most of the lake. In 2011 the Onondaga County Legislature voted to return a thirty-six-acre piece of land, known as Murphy's Island, a highly contaminated piece of land on the eastern end of the lake, to the Onondaga Nation. In 2016, the county reneged on the deal in order to extend the trail further around the lake, in a move that Onondaga Nation lawyer, Joe Heath, declared was "another broken promise" (Coin 2019). Onondaga County, the Onondaga Nation, New York Department of Environmental Conservation, and Honeywell

continue to struggle over the future of the lake and how exactly the contamination from centuries of abuse should be cleaned.

The Onondagas and the rest of the Haudenosaunee continue to live and work in the spirit of the Great Law of Peace and they continue to make inroads in reviving the sacredness of Onondaga Lake. With Sainte Marie Among the Iroquois closed, leaders from the Onondaga Nation, such as Faithkeeper Oren Lyons, Tadadho Sid Hill, Council Chief Jake Edwards, and clan leaders Bettye Lyons and Freida Jacques along with Syracuse University professor of religion, Phil Arnold, created a new plan for the space, which would tell the story, not of European conquest under the Doctrine of Discovery, but of the creation and persistence of the Great Law of Peace. Skä-Noñh, Great Law of Peace Center opened in 2015 on the shores of Onondaga Lake, thus bringing the Peacemaker and the Great Law back to this sacred site. With the collaboration of Indigenous Values Initiative and the Onondaga Nation, The Center has hosted several *Creator's Game* weekends, where Haudenosaunee lacrosse teams play each other in the "Medicine Game." The Indigenous Values Initiative states, "we are dedicated to re-establishing a Haudenosaunee presence back at Onondaga Lake where the game was originally played" (Indigenous Values Initiative 2023).

Jesuits at Le Moyne College in Syracuse have also begun reckoning with their history as not just well-intended soldiers of Christ, but as representatives of an imperial power with the goal to subjugate non-Christian lands and peoples for their own benefit. It will be a long process (Gadua 2018; Lonetree 2012; Ryan and Stokes-Rees 2017: 30–32).

So too does Onondaga Lake still suffer from its years of exploitation at the hands of the City of Syracuse and the industries around the lake. Despite the lake being a haven for beachgoers in the nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries, swimming is no longer allowed. While the population of fish and other aquatic animals has rebounded from their low in the 1970s, it is advised not to eat more than one fish a year caught in the waters of Onondaga Lake. The struggles of the Haudenosaunee to have their sovereignty recognized and their voices heard continues, but so does the progress. In the spring of 2022, for the first time in over

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a hundred years, a pair of breeding eagles have built a nest atop a tree by the Skä-Noñh Center and are raising a pair of eaglets overlooking Onondaga Lake and the Haudenosaunee Longhouse.

*Abstract:* Onondaga Lake, located in what is now Central New York, is the sacred place of the founding of the Haudenosaunee Confederacy. It is where the Peacemaker paddled his stone canoe and established the Great Law of Peace that has stood for centuries. In 1654 Simon Le Moyne, S. J. arrived on the shores of Onondaga Lake. In 1656 the French government, in accordance with the Christian Doctrine of Discovery, granted the Jesuits rights to the lake and the surrounding land, much prized for its abundant salt springs. They built a mission to lay claim to both the land and the souls who occupied it. It is this moment that sets off the contest for control of the lake and the history. The lake remains the sacred center of the Confederacy, which has survived despite attempts to eradicate it. The future of both is dependent on the recognition of its sacred status by those who have seen the lake as a source of profit and power as well as a convenient dumping ground. This is the story of that struggle.

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## INDIGENOUS BURIAL SPACES IN MEDIA: Views of Mi'gmaq Cemeteries as Sites of Horror and the Sacred

*And when the last Red Man shall have perished,  
and the memory of my tribe shall have become  
a myth among the White Men, these shores will  
swarm with the invisible dead of my tribe, and when  
your children's children think themselves alone  
in the field, the store, the shop, upon the highway,  
or in the silence of the pathless woods, they will  
not be alone.*

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The above quote is often dubiously attributed to Chief Si'ahl. Whether or not the nineteenth-century Suquamish and Duamish leader ever actually said these words, their persistent inclusion within his canon is part of an early and ongoing American fascination with Indigenous hauntings. Since Contact, Western consciousness has been fascinated with concept of ghostly Natives tied to haunted burial spaces. This fascination has resulted in one of the horror genre's most enduring settings: the "ancient Indian burial ground." This horror trope persists because of how much cultural work it performs. While not directly acknowledging the inhumanity of the settler colonial project, the cause of so many deaths resulting in the need for post-mortem internments, the ancient Indian burial ground situates Native communities firmly in the past, away from American modernity, and envisions Indigeneity as a malicious presence, capable of causing great harm from some unknown and mystical realm. Mainstream social consciousness permits the loss of Indigenous lives through dehumanizing a cultural Other positioned as evil.

The trope and its generic placement in the gothic and horror genres seems to have origins in Philip Freneau's 1787 poem "The Indian Burying Ground." In the poem, Freneau marks the differences between Anglo and Indigenous spirits in death, comparing the "eternal sleep" of Anglos to the "[a]ctivity, that knows no rest" the speaker observes in the "ancients of these lands" (lines 4, 12, 5). Freneau's basic concept gained widespread acknowledgement in the mid- to late-twentieth century in narratives centered on spectral Natives terrorizing white suburbanites: *The Amityville Horror* book (1977),<sup>1</sup> Stanley Kubrick's *The Shining* (1980),<sup>2</sup> *The New Daughter* (2009), *Kadaicha: Stones of Death* (1988), *Scalps* (1983), *Silent Hill: Revelation* (2012), *Identity* (2003), *Demon Hole* (2017), and the *Pet Sematary* films (1989, 1992, 2019) to name a few. Now a cliché, critics regard the trope as a means of confronting various mainstream anxieties including the genocide of Indigenous people and the concepts of land ownership and development.

Indigenous media makers, however, suggest a differentiated use of the ancient Indian burial ground in many ways. Interestingly, Native and non-Native filmmakers set a similar scene when depicting burial spaces. They are almost always shot from above and filled with fog during the dusk or night. Ominous music plays. Typically, a lone character slowly approaches the space, building on audience fear as the character enters a dangerous space. Although Native and non-Native eyes may perceive Indigenous burial spaces in similar ways, the fear generated by these scenes indicates dissimilar historical memories. Indigenous media makers are not only more specific in their explorations of anti-Native policies that perpetuated genocide and cultural erasure; they examine ongoing trauma that is manifest in spaces sacred to individuals and communities in sustained textual engagements. These more integrated engagements situate these burial spaces within cultural contexts that show their value to the plot's Indigenous community.

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1. The book has many film adaptations; while some include the Indian burial ground trope, others do not.

2. While Stephen King mentions "Indians" several times in his novel *The Shining* (1977), the Indian burial ground trope is not present; Kubrick added it to the plot in a single line.

Differentiated versions of Indigenous subjects are found throughout media depending on the media maker. Non-Indigenous depictions frequently depend on broad strokes and persistence of stereotypes, glossing over the cultural value in the burial space and cutting to the resultant carnage. Even in situations where tribal specificity is called for, few specific and accurate cultural details are employed. For instance, James Fenimore Cooper's *The Last of the Mohicans* (1826) incorporates little actual Mohican culture, depending more on the mainstream stereotype of "lasting"—to borrow Jean O'Brien's term<sup>3</sup>—Indigenous communities, a popular trope at the time of the novel's publication. Indigenous storytellers, however, craft narratives full of cultural details and nuance that lend credibility to themes and characters. Bifurcated levels of specificity lend to the very different readings of Indigenous burial spaces, conceptualizations of histories, and production and confrontation of fear and trauma found in Native and non-Native media. This essay explores two versions of Mi'gmaq burial sites in the mainstream *Pet Sematary* (1989) and the Mi'gmaq *Rhymes for Young Ghouls* (2013) as a means of highlighting the key distinctions in interpreting Indigenous burial spaces as sites of horror or as sacred spaces resultant of the level of plot integration and accurate cultural representation.

*PET SEMATARY* (1989)

While many mainstream interpretations of Indigenous burial spaces rely on vagaries, Stephen King's *Pet Sematary* (1983) takes another approach by frequently setting scenes in the maintained burial ground of a specific Native Nation: the Mi'gmaqs.<sup>4</sup> Even still,

3. O'Brien's 2010 text, *Firsting and Lasting: Writing Indians out of Existence in New England*, posits that Mainstream colonial culture crafted cultural narratives which presented themselves as "first" settlers of the Indigenous lands they built on while suggesting that Indigenous populations were dying out, leaving certain individuals the "last" of their communities. Both ideas were, of course, myths, as Indigenous peoples populated New England well before contact and many lived among the colonial voices that suggested their disappearance.

4. Throughout this paper, I will use this spelling although many spellings of this American Indian/First Nations community are in use. My reason for choosing the spelling "Mi'gmaq" over "Micmac," "Mi'kmaq," "Mi'kmaw,"

the text and its eponymous adaptation directed by Mary Lambert (1989) both miss the opportunity to educate their audiences with concrete cultural elements, either by portraying contemporary land claim issues with sympathy, or by presenting first-person accounts from living Mi'gmaq characters. Although the narrative engages much more closely with the Mi'gmaqs than the average mainstream horror text featuring burial grounds, both the novel and film forms of *Pet Sematary* rely on fear-based stereotypes that damage the image of Indian Country and its people, specifically the Mi'gmaqs through appropriation of burial spaces and replacing a sacred context with one of fear.

Critically, the novel is considered one of King's best works. Of course, these critical remarks do not consider the negative portrayal of the Mi'gmaqs, especially those living in Maine, at a sensitive time of seeking federal recognition and making a joint claim for lost land with other tribes of the Wabanaki Confederacy. The Wabanaki Confederacy joins several Algonquian First Nations and American Indian Nations together to consolidate power and protect their mutual interests, namely land. The four principal members of the Confederacy are the Mi'gmaq, Maliseet, Passamaquoddy, and Penobscot Nations. The latter two groups along with the Houlton Band of Maliseet Indians were recognized in the 1980 Maine Indian Claims Settlement legislation; the Aroostook Band of Mi'gmaqs was recognized as a claimant in 1989 ("Maine Indian Claims Settlement"). King's reliance on stereotypes of Indigenous populations as mystical and relegated to the past (notably through the lack of contemporary Mi'gmaq characters and the continuation of their supposed practices divorced from their worldview by non-Native characters Jud and Louis) is especially damaging due to this timing. Less well received, the film has nonetheless exacerbated the damage done in the original text as a part of the mainstream cultural zeitgeist. Comedy Central's adult cartoon *South Park* has included the ancient Indian burial ground premise in several episodes and included an unmistakably

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or any other is simply that this Nation's government in Canada—the setting of the film *Rhymes for Young Ghouls* representing Mi'gmaq views in this paper—frequently uses this spelling. It also appears in much of the literature surrounding the film.

Maine-accented character obviously based on *Pet Sematary's* Jud Crandall and actor Fred Gwynne's overstressing of the regional accent. The film even gained enough popularity and financial reward to warrant a sequel, also directed by Lambert, released in 1992. Ever since, *Pet Sematary* has been a cult classic, a point discussed in a 2017 documentary about the film, *Unearthed & Untold: The Path to Pet Sematary*. A prequel is currently in the works.

Critical and cultural acceptance aside, both novel and film retain much of the same plot. The narrative opens on the Creed family, Louis (Dale Midkiff) and Rachel (Denise Crosby) along with their children, young Ellie (Blaze Berdahl) and toddler Gage (Miko Hughes), en route from Chicago to rural Ludlow, Maine where Louis has recently accepted a position as a doctor on a small college campus. Upon arriving at their new home, neighbor Jud Crandall warns the Creeds about the dangerous road in front of their house where truck drivers are known to speed. He also takes them through the woods to a burial spot where generations of children have buried their pets, many of whom were victims of the road. He explains that the entire area used to be Mi'gmaq territory and land disputes are still underway in the courts. On his first day on the job, Louis struggles to keep a student, Victor Pascow (Brad Greenquist), alive after being hit by a car. As Victor succumbs to his injuries, Louis believes he hears the young man warn him about the cemetery. He subsequently has a nightmare in which Victor takes him to a natural boundary between the cemetery and the woods, warning Louis against crossing the border. Later, Ellie's cat, Church, is fatally hit by a truck, and Jud tells Louis that there is a way to bring the cat back to life. Behind the burial ground reserved for pets, past a wall of trees and woodland debris, an ancient Mi'gmaq burial ground with secret malevolent powers contains the ability to reanimate corpses buried there. Jud warns that things come back changed, and that "sometimes dead is better." The two men bury the cat who comes back to life but with an eerie presence and a destructive streak. While Ellie adjusts to her cat's unusual behavior, the family settles into a routine in Ludlow until Gage runs into the street and is hit by a speeding truck. After his funeral, Louis steals his son's body and reinters it in the Mi'gmaq space. Gage returns and kills Jud and Rachel. Louis is able to kill his undead

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cat and son, but distraught over the loss of his wife, he gives the Mi'gmaq burial ground one last try. The novel and film both end with Rachel's return and the suggestion that she kills Louis.

#### MI'GMAQ CULTURAL FACTS AND POST-CONTACT HISTORY

The Mi'gmaqs offered no input into King's or Lambert's projects, and it is unknown whether the author or director actively sought out culturally appropriate materials concerning the Mi'gmaqs while researching their projects. Keenly aware of process and writerly concerns, it is likely that King would have mentioned his research methods in an interview or in his book on Horror and his writing process, *Danse Macabre* (1981). Nonetheless, knowing more about the Mi'gmaqs, their cultural beliefs and practices, and the contemporary issues they faced around the release of the novel and film enriches an Indigenous Studies exploration of the *Pet Sematary* story.

The Mi'gmaqs are an Algonquian-speaking people of what is now the northeastern United States and southeastern Canada. Policies on both sides of the border forced the Mi'gmaqs to relocate to reservations, but Mi'gmaq culture can be found in the place names still used in their traditional homelands, for example Tatamagouche, Musquodoboit, Miminegash, and Miscouche (Davis 1991: 43). Aside from asserting the right to self-government, the Mi'gmaqs continue to engage in battles with settler colonial nations for "cultural, economic, social" sovereignties as well as over land rights (Hornborg 2001: 13). Many of their traditional lands are imbued with elements of the sacred. Locally, the hero figure Kluskap previously resided in a cave in Kluskap's Mountain, the point of his future return to earth. In the 1990s, Canadian Mi'gmaqs battled to keep the mountain from becoming the site of a superquarry (13). This is just one example of how Mi'gmaq cosmology effects readings of landscape, rendering it sacred. Differences in views of land between Mi'gmaqs and their colonizers prove problematic both in retention of sacred lands and in keeping lands where ancestors have been buried from being desecrated.

#### MI'GMAQ FUNERARY PRACTICES AND BURIAL GROUNDS

The burial ground in *Pet Sematary* may be no secret among the locals of Ludlow, but the Mi'gmaqs have a recorded history

of selecting secluded locations for their burial grounds. Secrecy of burial spaces is a priority to Mi'gmaqs who "fear some enemy should seek to disturb the bones of their dead" (Lescarbot 1991: 31). Ancestors' remains make burial spaces doubly sacred within Mi'gmaq cosmology, and the living are to protect the land and appease the ancestral spirits connected to it from outside disturbance. Indian Agent William Chearnley wrote an 1854 letter claiming that "desecration of their ancient burial grounds" was "a source of great annoyance" for Mi'gmaqs (1991: 252). Unwanted visitors are kept from disturbing gravesites chosen on "little island[s]" (Alexis 1991: 274) and/or deep in the wilderness. Chearnley's dismissive tone is a singular example in an expansive oeuvre of mainstream attempts to secularize the sacred components of Indigenous worldviews. Horror's Indian burial grounds are another.

Regardless of location, Mi'gmaq funerary practices are quite consistent and usually involve burial. One of the oldest excavation sites of a Mi'gmaq burial ground offers a glimpse into burial practices from at least 3,800 years ago (Davis 1991: 15). In 1971, the Archaeological Survey of Canada uncovered sixty graves representing two periods of time at the Cow Point site in New Brunswick (15). Similar sites have been found throughout Maine. In such sites, a body received either a "primary" or "secondary" burial. Primary burials occur when individuals die in warmer weather close to the burial ground and are marked by the remains being buried quickly after death, usually at the individual's full height and not in a fetal position. Secondary burials occur in colder weather or when a person dies further away from the burial site. Because the ground is frozen or a body must be transported long distances, the remains would be packaged in bundles that require a smaller digging surface or are easier to transport (Davis 1991: 15–16). In either case, the contents of graves were covered in red ochre. When bodies could not be buried for several months, they were well preserved (Ribault 1991: 177; Alexis 1991: 244–245).

In a few cases, practices other than burial have been cited. Among historians and archaeologists studying Mi'gmaq culture, cremation is considered "a unique fashion" of treating bodies (Davis 1991: 18). In these cases, remains were gathered and buried in graves (Davis 1991: 18–19). When cremating bodies, the entirety

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of the body's "flesh and bones were burned white, so that, when touched, they would fall apart" (Ginnish 1991: 153). In at least one case, a body was decorated for burial but was then placed "on its knees between two stakes, with another supporting it under the arms" (de Champlain 1991: 31). In another case, a sky burial was performed at an individual's request; according to legend, the individual then came back to life, sporting obvious physical proof of his death and exposure to the elements. In this curious situation, the individual was regarded as a magician (Rand 1991: 85).<sup>5</sup>

Typical Mi'gmaq practices are not depicted in *Pet Sematary*. It could be said that Mi'gmaq burials have included measures against reanimation; funerals for individuals possessing magical powers demand practices that ensure that the individual will not return to life. In cremations, this is one reason why bodies must be completely brought to the point of disintegration. For burials, stones might be placed on the grave to weigh down the body.<sup>6</sup> The Mi'gmaq cemetery in *Pet Sematary* conversely contains graves carefully covered with stones, a practice that *ensures* a corpse returns to life. Jud insists that Louis, tired from digging Church's grave, add a small cairn atop the burial mound. Not knowing how exactly to go about the ritual, Jud tells him that "it's what [he thinks] that counts" (King 2001:175). Having completed the cairn, Louis reflects that "it looked right, somehow" (2001: 176). This narrative inclusion is either the product of misunderstanding Mi'gmaq practices or—more likely—an invention of King; the piling of rocks over graves seems a broadly mystical thing to do as does the unpracticed instinct that it has been done appropriately. In any other case aside from group suspicion of resurrection, burial grounds were even said to be "for the most part selected in spots *free from rocks*" (Chearnley 1991: 253; emphasis added). Despite the lack of rocks in traditional Mi'gmaq practice, King and Lambert depict an abundance of rocks with which characters make cairns.

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5. It should be noted that cases of atypical burial practices come from non-Native records. Thus, the "eyewitness" accounts are suspect as the writers may be creating a salacious account for readers' amusement rather than documenting an event truthfully.

6. According to a Mi'gmaq worldview, some stones are themselves alive (see Whitehead 1988: 5).

While the extent and focus of King's research into Mi'gmaq practice prior to writing is unknown, if culturally appropriate research was completed, he picked and chose what elements he liked, repurposing sacred practice and images of sacred landscapes to mean something more sinister. Methodology *against* reanimation becomes a *means* of reanimation. If King is using the text to suggest "reciprocal consequences for those colonial characters that participate in the cycle of occluding Indigenous experience from the American consciousness" as Nathan Cleaver believes (2020: 32), he would not be living up to his own purported ideal through either inadequate learning—and thereby disregarding—or failure to honor Indigenous practices in his representation.

The landscape of Mi'gmaq burial grounds may have looked different than they appear in *Pet Sematary*, but they may have also inspired fear among early European settlers; post-Contact reports made by non-Natives claim that Mi'gmaq burial sites were regarded with a certain amount of fearful reverence by Mi'gmaqs. According to these records, once a spot became a place for burial, it was unsuitable for even brief settlement such as an overnight campsite (Piers 1991: 107; Hardy 1991: 214). In some cases, Mi'gmaqs would overcome desire to leave the dead in peace to bring food as gifts to spirits (James 1991: 318). However, these non-Native reporters may have been witnessing reverence for sacred lands and the deceased, not fear; ancestral spirits need undisturbed rest as they may need foodstuffs at times. Given the specific needs of Mi'gmaq ancestral spirits, it seems reasonable that one would not want these spaces unnecessarily invaded. However, the residents of Ludlow in *Pet Sematary* do not seem to understand the desire to leave sacred space un sullied just as they do not understand how or why it functions.

Respect for spirits and remains of the dead lies at the heart of Mi'gmaq "annoyance" over the desecration of their burial sites. In one case dating to the nineteenth century, the location of a burial ground was "desired [by settlers] as a site for a mill yard." When the Mi'gmaqs appealed the construction, a government representative made the claim that it was "expedient and even necessary for [the Mi'gmaqs] to give up their ground to the service of the white man, and that no desecration of the graves of their

ancestors was intended” (*Nova Scotian* 1991: 226–7). The Mi’gmaqs fought for their burial space then as they have continued to battle over lands taken by various countries’ states and provinces since.

Although not exclusively burial grounds, Mi’gmaq peoples on both sides of the US-Canada border have fought for the reincorporation of their traditional lands to their supervision. Specific to *Pet Semetary*, the Maine Indian Land Claims Case would have been known to King at the time of his writing during which the case remained unresolved; since “the Micmac Indians were much in the news [...] headlines [concerning the Maine Indian Claims Settlement] were definitely on King’s mind when he wrote *Pet Semetary*” (Hendrix 2013). As previously mentioned, the case included the Mi’gmaqs as well as other Wabanaki Confederacy Nations filing for the repatriation of land under Maine’s jurisdiction via the Indian Claims Commission which seeks to hear Native Nations’ claims for lands lost through unclear treaty language. The case:

was exceedingly complex and had tremendous social, legal, and economic implications for the State of Maine and its citizens. The claim covered 60% of the State with 350,000 people living in the disputed area. After four years of negotiations, the Maine Indian Claims Settlement Agreement of 1980 was reached. With the tribes receiving \$81.5 million, this was the largest settlement of its kind in the country and the first to include provisions for the reacquisition of land. (Passamaquoddy, par. 1)

Ultimately, a 1794 treaty between the State of Maine and the Passamaquoddy peoples (including the Mi’gmaqs) was determined to be illegal, but due to the land’s current use by non-Native factions, money was given instead of the lands being returned to their Indigenous populations (Passamaquoddy, par. 51). The case included no small amount of scandal, including the Governor’s interference by persuading the “Congressional Delegation to ask Congress to pass legislation that would bar the Passamaquoddy Tribe and Penobscot Indian Nation from continuing in court by retroactively approving the treaties that their claims were based on” (Passamaquoddy, par. 57). A cash settlement was bittersweet for the Passamaquoddy groups involved. On one hand, the case’s outcome upheld the idea of Native sovereignty and rights to their traditional land bases, dodging the European notions of the “Doc-

trine of Discovery” and Conquest usually sustained in land claims; on the other hand, the land itself remains lost to the Mi’gmaqs and their co-plaintiffs, and questions about the monetary value of lands with deep cultural, political, and spiritual significance loom large. In King’s work, Jud is clearly a Maine citizen unwilling to see an Indigenous point of view concerning the lands involved in the case. A place that would be seen as sacred and revered to the land’s original inhabitants becomes a representative for colonists’ views of the Indigenous population: unstable and dangerous.

#### LAMBERT’S VISUAL *PET SEMATARY*

King’s *Pet Sematary* makes literal and figurative ghosts of the Mi’gmaqs who are either dead and buried or absent from the narrative so that they might attend to their court case. Both ghostings recall the vanishing Indian stereotype popularized through texts like *The Last of the Mohicans* in which Native peoples are purported to be heading toward extinction. In *The National Uncanny: Indian Ghosts and American Subjects*, Renée L. Bergland explores the frequency with which Euro-American literatures include Indigenous ghosts. In her conclusion, Bergland confronts *Pet Sematary*:

By creating fantastic Native American demons, *Pet Sematary* makes its readers and viewers forget about Native American people and politics [...] Most Americans remember King’s story. Most have forgotten that the Penobscot and Passamaquoddy tribes won their lands claims. This work of forgetting is accomplished by means of describing an Algonquian ghost so compelling it wipes the reality of living Penobscot and Passamaquoddy people from the nationalist imaginary. (167)

Indeed, “the Micmacs of *Pet Sematary* have no history worth mentioning; their presence is inscribed on the land merely through their potentially devilish rituals and their graves” (Mackenthun 1998: 102). Furthermore, Jud suggests that the evil of the place “may actually have been caused by the Micmacs themselves” (1998: 102). Without a living Mi’gmaq presence in the text, the mystery of Native cultural workings and the original purpose of the burial space takes a backseat to Louis’ familial struggles and interior dilemmas.

A similar focus appears in Lambert's adaptation. She was initially attracted to the *Pet Sematary* project because there is "a *mysticism* in Stephen King's work that [she found] very appealing" (Singer 1998: 168; emphasis added). Critic Mark Browning sees the film as "basically a small-scale family drama with a supernatural element superimposed upon it" (2009: 91). A mainstream audience's view of this superimposition *creates* the "supernatural" element at the heart of the plot; divorced from actual Mi'gmaq customs and cosmology, the burial space is sinister instead of sacred.

Critically, the film received mostly negative reviews. Randy Pitman calls it "tasteless" and "an exceptionally poor adaptation of the effective Stephen King novel," and argues that "the interesting psychological portrait of a family coming to terms with death—which was at the center of King's novel—is completely jettisoned [in the film]" (1989: 116). He concludes his review, "Not recommended" (116). A *Variety* reviewer admits "word of mouth should send the film to the great beyond in a matter of weeks" (1989: 26). However, Philip Strick posits that is "much to the film's advantage [that] visual ambiguity replaces and enriches King's often strident vocabulary" (1989: 342). He goes on to compliment Lambert's directorial vision, saying that "the camera works more wonders than the [narrative]" even though the ultimate product is "frustratingly uneven" and "[suggests] more than it can deliver" (Strick 1989: 342).

Interestingly, official Mi'gmaq newspapers on both sides of the international border offered no direct response to the release of *Pet Sematary*. Tellingly, many cultural critics—both Indigenous and non-Indigenous—have explored the exploitative effects of the film rather than its qualities *as* a film. Kallie Hunchman focuses specifically on the questionable inclusion of the wendigo:<sup>7</sup> "Severing the wendigo from its context allows Western authors to create a literary way of invoking spirituality and magic

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7. The wendigo is an evil figure from Algonquian-speaking East Coast and Great Lakes American Indian and First Nations canons. Associated with hunger, greed, cold/winter, cannibalism, and murder, wendigoes range from being a non-physical spirit to a giant human sometimes with antlers. They can themselves cause violence or possess humans causing them to murder and cannibalize others.

by drawing on [Native stereotypes] created to 'other' Native American communities and create a marketable genre of Native American spirituality" (2020: 102). Without appropriate context, the wendigo becomes "simply a cannibalistic monster" (Hunchman 2020: 103), a one-dimensional figure presiding over an inherently evil landscape. Much more critical attention is given to the narrative as an exemplar of the problematic use of the Indian burial ground trope although the film never uses the phrase outright. Cultural historian Colin Dickey states that "for white people who drove the indigenous population of New England off their lands, it's a comforting counter narrative to be told that the land was so evil that the Wabanaki people didn't want it" (2019). In his book *Ghostland: An American History in Haunted Places*, Dickey troubles the colonial/capitalist "idea of home ownership—the Holy Grail of American middle-class life—[with] the idea that we don't, in fact, own the land we've just bought" (45). Confronting vengeful Indigenous ghosts "and expelling them[...] becomes a way of refighting the Indian Wars of past centuries" (2016: 45). In Dickey's "refighting," contemporary Indigenous presences are made spectral antagonists. This has obvious problems when Native Nations are embroiled in court cases against other governments for rights to land. Indigenous filmmaker Ariel Smith finds artistic flaws in the film's use of the trope. In "This Essay Was Not Built on an Ancient Indian Burial Ground," Smith asserts that *Pet Semetary*—like all narratives that rely on Indigenous burials to explain the supernatural horror—does not center the space in question: "this seemingly imperative story element is treated with little more than a few lines of exposition" (2022). Furthermore, Smith writes:

mainstream cinema's use of this trope engages a paradox by presenting Indigenous peoples as something to hold in fearful reverence but at the same time ignore. These films inform us that those who disturb burial grounds are doing wrong and are guaranteed to be met with gruesome and terrifying consequences, yet they sidestep the chance for a proper critique of our neo-colonial reality. (2022)

In essence, an Indigenous critique of the film matches that of the trope itself: inclusive conversations regarding cultural definitions of the sacred and land ownership do not need to include horror at the expense of colonized populations and their worldviews.

However, the film's use of the Indian burial ground stereotype does not fall far from the novel's precedent. The Indian burial ground's portrayal does not challenge stereotypes that present Native burial spaces as scary rather than sacred. In terms of camera work, the Mi'gmaq burial ground is shot in much the same way as the pet cemetery but grows more visually sinister as the film progresses. Viewers first see the pet cemetery from a high angle shot that makes the concentric circles of the animals' graves apparent in the opening credits. Later, as Pascow dies, he promises Louis, "I'll come to you" (00:19:01–00:19:17). That night, Louis wakes to a loud noise to find Pascow standing at the bedroom's doorway with his head wounds still present. He tells Louis, "We've got places to go[...]I want to help you because you tried to help me" (00:19:47–00:20:44). Although he appears and disappears spectrally through use of dissolving and double exposure, he is not presented spectrally, even clasping Louis on the shoulder, proof of his—at times—tangible presence. Pascow alludes to the fact that Louis is not dreaming and leads him to the pet cemetery. During Pascow's tour of the animal graveyard, he states that the deadfall boundary is not meant to be transgressed as a blue light radiates from between the tree branches. Viewers never see the light's source, but post-burial Church's eyes glow suggesting the light is manifest by an evil presence. Jud's introduction of the Mi'gmaq burial space is presented using the same high angle shot as the animal burial space. White stones form concentric circles that are sporadically interrupted by cairns made of white stone. Lines of tan stone disrupt the circles to form an overlaying design. Nothing seems unreal or supernatural about the space as Louis works to bury Church in the daylight with Jud's company. When Louis returns alone in the night with Gage's body, the scene becomes much more sinister. Fog disrupts Louis' path. He hears animalistic growls and monstrous laughs and sees a human face manifest from a bolder below him and call his name. Once Louis arrives in the burial ground, the camera follows his feet at ground level through the fog, highlighting his act of transgression into forbidden space. More fog enters from screen left as Louis places the last rock on Gage's cairn. At first, the pet cemetery seems like a calm, verdant place for children before Pascow's phosphorescent

warning. Likewise, the Mi'gmaq space is first presented as a quiet normative space before becoming a place of terror in the night.

The film does not interact appropriately with Mi'gmaq story. The text blames the wendigo for souring the land and reanimating corpses with evil spirits. The film has no such nameable scapegoat. Pascow only says, "The ground [...] is sour" (00:22:50–00:22:59), but no agent of souring is named. After Gage's funeral, Jud confesses that he might be responsible for Gage's death by introducing Louis to the secret Mi'gmaq space. The "place," he claims, may have caused Gage's death because "[Jud] introduced [Louis] to the power" (00:59:50–00:59:58). The power's exact nature remains mysterious. During Rachel's rush home from Chicago, Pascow's ghost—unseen by Rachael but visible to viewers—accompanies her, removing barriers along the way and explaining, "It's trying to stop you" (01:14:37–01:14:42). Again, there is no name for this "it." Unlike the text, the film relies on ghosts as the supernatural feature at play. Pascow returns as a ghost throughout the entire film, aiding different characters in different ways. Viewers don't see a depiction of Ellie's dream in which "pax cow" warns her that something terrible is happening in Maine, but she assures her mother that the warning was real and came from "a good ghost" (01:03:37–01:03:52). Trusting her daughter, Rachel leaves and has her own ghostly dream on her flight from Chicago in which her deceased sister Zelda tells her "Gage and I will get you for letting us die" (01:09:48–01:10:14). Clearly both good and bad ghosts appear to people in this world. Interestingly, the worst ghosts of all—the angry Indigenous ghosts—go unseen and unmentioned. Somehow, in a world filled with ghosts, nighttime cemetery tours, little girl's premonitions, and zombies, no one thinks to credit Mi'gmaq ghosts overtly for "the power" of the burial ground. Aside from the sinister burial space itself, the best viewers get in terms of physical Native representation or verbal recognition is a glowing light referred to as "it" and vague wendigo references.

It would be unreasonable to say that either the film or the text does positive cultural work in representing "Indian Country" despite their divergence in how Native subjects are (or are not) presented. Both rely on typical horror representations of non-White, non-Christians while asserting White, Christian beliefs and lifestyles.

Joe Nazzare sees the placement of Native Americans in horror as a philosophically expected phenomenon but problematic:

[T]he “natural supernaturalism” of Native American spirituality seems to accord well with the Romanticism of the horror genre which allows for the infusion/intrusion of the unworldly into the realm of everyday existence. Less positively, the Native American might be seen as just another variable to be plugged into horror’s xenophobic formula: establishing a monstrous Other which must be vanquished to preserve cultural order. (2000: 24)

Indeed, Paula Gunn Allen states that White culture sees “native spiritual life as a curious artifact” (Allen qtd. in Nazzare 2000: 29). While most “monster” stories elicit fear in audiences to be considered generic successes, the protagonists usually overcome the threat by a narrative’s conclusion. *Pet Sematary* is different. Both narrative forms end with the dissolution of the Creed family and suggest that only Ellie survives the family’s brush with Mi’gmaq culture. In this way, the burial ground “wins” over mainstream American culture by attacking its most pure and basic subcomponent: the nuclear family. Nevertheless, “*Pet Sematary* essentially confirms a Christian conception of the universe in which forces of good and evil war for possession of human souls and in which consciousness persists after physical dissolution” (Weinstock 2008: 47). Thus, the evil Native forces might come out victorious, but the thematic drive to affirm Christian worldviews is the conceptual winner in each narrative form. In the novel, Jud compares the cultural canons, establishing a dangerous “us versus them” rhetoric that is felt throughout the text. He also discloses the beliefs of an early-nineteenth century fur trapper who blended “proper” Christian and “pagan” Indigenous spiritual philosophies: he believed that “all Indians, no matter what tribe, belonged to one big tribe—that lost one of Israel the Bible talks about. He said all Indians were hellbound, but that their *magic* worked because they were Christians all the same, in some queer, damned way” (King 1983: 201-202; emphasis added). Jud’s conveyance of this belief displays similar thought to that of the book and film; non-Native eyes judge Natives as a singular group without diversity through a Christian lens and find them spiritually wanting. In a narrative where Natives are not granted autonomous roles, it is no wonder

that both text and film serve to Other and arraign Native peoples and cultures. Even in readings that suggest that King was aware of Mi'gmaq practices that prevent reanimation,<sup>8</sup> the Creed family's use of the Mi'gmaq land to destroy itself points to a disintegration of the sacred value of burial lands to Indigenous peoples in favor of suggesting a lesson to would-be non-Indigenous landowners is highly appropriative.

While it is rare for a text produced for mainstream Americans to mention a specific Native Nation by name, King and Lambert's works use Mi'gmaq land to represent the Nation as aligned with evil powers devoid of sacred practice which demean their contemporary land claims. Incidentally, a prequel is currently in production. Early casting announcements indicate "[I]ndigenous actors taking prominent roles [which] may point to a deeper dive into the legend of the 'Indian burial ground'" by "[e]xploring the mythology" through a Mi'gmaq lens (Vespe 2021). Ideally, this newer work will showcase the burial space as meaningfully valuable to the tribal community and not culturally appropriated to invoke fear.

*RHYMES FOR YOUNG GHOULS* (2013)

Jeff Barnaby's *Rhymes for Young Ghouls* (2013), for which he also wrote the screenplay, edited, and constructed the score, combats stereotypes through his multidimensional female protagonist and suggests a methodology for healing from boarding schools and other historical traumas. However, it paints a bleak picture of twentieth-century "Indian Country" by refusing to shy away from topics like substance abuse among Indigenous populations. *Rhymes for Young Ghouls* also recommends violence as a means of healing from the negative personal/familial and colonial histories that impact the characters living on its fictional Red Crow Mi'gmaq Reservation in Canada. It does this in several key scenes placed in burial spaces, the contents of which demonstrate that community-wide historical trauma concerning boarding school children's deaths—and Indigenous deaths in general—can be confronted through violent actions to varying degrees of success

8. Again, there is no evidence that King was aware of this belief or if he did any culturally-specific research before embarking on the *Pet Semetary* project.

and are justified due to the community's experience of oppression. Furthermore, personal healing can come from fighting stereotypes through self-representation and art activism.

Obviously, Barnaby's goal is not to sugarcoat history or its contemporary ramifications; his films do not avoid graphic content or harsh messages. He has said "his goal is 'to present awful or beautiful things to people and have them deal with it,' the objective, he argues, of any good art" (Barnaby qtd. in Lempert 2014: 171). Thus, Barnaby unapologetically depicts the horrors experienced by residential school children including a truant officer's attempted rape of Aila, the film's main character, and a secret mass grave of children in the woods surrounding the school. These scenes are intensified by Barnaby's use of gothic film conventions, notably muted colors and eerie musical swells, that are absent from his depictions of the community's cemetery where Aila's mother is buried and her ghost appears. Not surprisingly, Barnaby frames the film's terrors within historical contexts; *Rhymes for Young Ghouls* opens with a passage from Canada's Indian Act which gave allowance to truant officers to "[use] as much force as the circumstance requires" (00:01:14–00:01:20) to take children between 5 and 16 into custody, a policy that made an unimaginable amount of child abuse both legal and systematic. Despite its harsh content and glorification of violence, the film has received acclaim, winning the award for the Best Canadian Feature Film at the 2013 Vancouver International Film Festival.

*Rhymes for Young Ghouls* begins in 1969, almost a decade before the body of the plot. Aila's father Joseph (Glen Gould) and mother Anna (Roseanne Supernault) are drinking and doing drugs in Burner's (Brandon Oakes) kitchen. Burner, Joseph's brother, steps outside to tell his young niece Aila and nephew Tyler local legends about the local residential school's ability to turn Mi'gmaq children into zombies. Joseph and Anna prepare to leave. In their drunken confusion, Anna backs up over her son, killing him. The next morning, young Aila wakes up to find that her mother hanged herself and her father is being arrested, having taken blame for Tyler's death. The plot then jumps to 1976. Fifteen-year-old Aila (Devery Jacobs) has built a successful business selling marijuana out of Burner's home. She gets her product from an elder, Ceres (Katherine

Sorby), who acts as Aila's proxy grandmother and cultural teacher. Newly released from prison, Joseph finds his adolescent daughter engaged in this questionable enterprise. Aila's profits go toward bribing the local truant officer, Popper (Mark Anthony Krupa), to allow her and her friends to remain free from St. Dymphna,<sup>9</sup> the local residential boarding school. However, Popper steals this "truancy tax" from one of her friends but demands the tax still be paid. Backed into a corner, Aila and her young crew devise a plan to break into St. Dymphna's and reclaim the money. Anna's ghost offers support during Aila's visits to the Mi'gmaq cemetery. Popper becomes aware of the plan and enrolls Aila in the school. The plan is enacted, nevertheless, and Aila splits the money with her friends intending to run away before Popper can retaliate. Before she can leave, however, Popper finds and intends to rape Aila before her youngest accomplice Jujijj (Shako Mattawa Jacobs) shoots him. Joseph again takes the blame for a crime he did not commit and is arrested. Although free from Popper's sadistic rule, the film ends with the suggestion that more mayhem must be wrought before Aila and her community can rest easy as Jujijj asks her, "What do we do now, boss?" (01:22:22–01:22:24).

*Rhymes for Young Ghouls'* path toward healing is unclear. What *do* they need to do next? Rather than answer this question, the film postulates that violent action will be necessary for Aila and her friends no matter the issues being undertaken. Aila has had to grow up too quickly, but Burner suggests she has chosen her path, imbuing her with an autonomy that does not position her as a victim of trauma. This instead grants her the power to combat—and violently—those who might try to take advantage

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9. Irish-born St. Dymphna performed miraculous cures against mental illness and is known as the patron saint of the insane (Kirsch). Several points from Dymphna's life parallel Aila's story. Aila is fifteen, the age at which Dymphna died. Both young women escaped unwanted sexual advances by a man with institutional power over them, in Dymphna's case, by her own father. Both find small groups of men/boys to fight with them. Finally, both have fathers who confront the death of a beloved wife in unproductive and unhealthy ways. For these commonalities, a place named for St. Dymphna seems an appropriate location for Aila's resistance against an institutional power that plagues her community. However, where Dymphna was martyred, Aila survives.

of her youth, gender, and Indigeneity. Her power gets channeled into violent action, a tactic the movie endorses for reducing trauma and colonization at a community level. Yet, several key scenes also promote art activism as a means of personal healing, combating stereotypes, and invigorating Indigenous storytelling. Aila's art and her choice to draw in the cemetery demonstrate that the film refuses to rely on tired stereotypes like the vanished Indian or the Indian burial ground when modern Native Americans can "paint" themselves.

#### BURIAL SPACES IN *RHYMES FOR YOUNG GHOULS*

*Rhymes for Young Ghouls* depicts two burial spaces, the local Mi'gmaq cemetery and a hidden mass grave of St. Dymphna's victims. Aila is very aware of the cemetery as her mother is buried there, and she visits the spot to speak with her mother, something she apparently has not done for some time before the film's narrative timeframe. Anna chides her daughter for not coming more often, and Aila replies that she doesn't need to come to the cemetery to see her mother (*Rhymes*[...]00:44:45–00:44:51). Indeed, the film landmarks another spot in the woods where Aila watches her younger self and her mother interacting, suggesting that memories of her mother are so prominent that Aila does not need any specific place for commemorating her life. Although she appears on screen with ghoulish, zombie make up, Anna's ghost is not depicted as "spooky." If Anna represents all of Burner's zombies crafted by colonial rule, very little aside from a ghostly pallor separates the Indigenous zombies from the living Mi'gmaq characters. Anna offers Aila motherly advice and listens to her problems. The burial ground, too, is serene as opposed to frightening. The cemetery is in a quiet clearing deep in the woods among birch trees. Several dozen white crosses mark the graves of the community's suicide victims. The undisturbed land is covered in fallen leaves, making it difficult to tell newer graves from older ones. Barnaby avoids standard filmic conventions such as eerie or suspenseful music, fog machines, or nightscapes in scenes set in the burial space. The final product is a sacred place of comfort where Aila can commune directly with her dead mother and briefly escape the chaos of her life; the cemetery provides a respite from colonial patriar-

chy as a sacred Mi'gmaq space not just removed from Popper's power but one where there are no boundaries between the living and the dead, an Indigenous girl and her mother.

The cemetery does appear “spooky” in one of Aila's dreams, however. This dream relies on the cultural capital of the Indian burial ground stereotype by adhering to horror conventions: eerie music, a nightcape, fog, and a zombie struggling out of her grave. In this scene, Anna walks up to Aila, grabs her, and says the Mi'gmaq word for vengeance. Of course, the Indigenous ghosts of mainstream media are violently bent on vengeance in retaliation for unspoken historical crimes against Indigenous communities. However, enough scenes take place in reality rather than in dreams which depict the cemetery as peaceful that the inclusion of this scene should be read more as foreshadowing of Aila's eventual violent assault on St. Dymphna's than justification of a stereotype.

The mass grave in the woods directly opposes the calm tone of the cemetery although both speak to traumas experienced by Natives, the former through the sheer number of residential school victims unaccounted for and the later in its unsaid comment on the number of suicides committed in the small community. Yet, while Aila experiences personal comfort near her mother's grave, she expresses horror at the sight of the mass grave; juxtaposed, the two sites represent Mi'gmaq peace and colonial horror for Aila. In a dreamscape after being thrown into a solitary cell at St. Dymphna's, Aila follows the walking corpse of her younger brother into the woods. A choral arrangement, “O vos Omnes,” plays in the background, exacerbating the unsettling feeling introduced by Tyler's existence in the world of the living. Eventually Tyler points toward a massive hole in the ground. Aila steps forward and covers her mouth with both hands in grief and shock. In a long shot with a high angle, the mass grave that inspired Aila's reaction becomes visible: a large hole filled with the bodies of children (00:59:43–01:00:37). This scene, like Aila's dream encounter with her zombie mother, relies upon mainstream horror conventions—the music, a ghostly presence, the darkness and fog, the display of a character's reaction before its cause, and the camera's distance and angle—and brings to light the tragic history of residential schools not some unspecified act against

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Indigenous populations. The mass grave is a physical manifestation of historical trauma (even though St. Dymphna's is a contemporary terror for the Mi'gmaq community) whereas Anna's burial space represents a more personal tragedy for a girl who lost her mother. In this way, Aila confronts the larger question of the sacred value of life and horrifying consequences of residential schools' colonial project at the secret mass grave and her personal loss at Anna's grave with a more peaceful aesthetic.

Aila takes advantage of the burial ground's physical and emotional serenity, turning it into a place where she can concentrate on her art. In one scene, Aila sits on her mother's gravesite drawing figures in a book (00:48:44–00:49:03). Her mother, the one who helped foster her artistic skills, also materializes during some of these graveside visits. Although Anna appears out of focus with ghoulish makeup, she is clearly not a frightening specter for her daughter, again highlighting the difference between stereotypical and self-represented Indigenous ghosts. The film itself performs an anti-stereotype activist function by its repurposing of Native burial spaces and ghosts much like that attempted by Anna and Aila within the narrative.

Anna's ghost confronts stereotypes in three ways. First, she is not a direct relic of past confrontations between colonizer and colonized, but of a specific family's trauma. Anna figuratively haunts Aila's present as a representative of the eventful night that saw Tyler's death and set Aila and her family on the path that would lead to her situation seven years later. Her drug use and consequent suicide are results of colonial suppression that fuel Aila's own intergenerational trauma, one of the more personal events that pain a girl from an historically traumatized community existing through colonial supervision and violent coercive attempts toward assimilation. Anna does not appear in the nightmares of non-Natives. Rather, she materializes to give her daughter comfort and support, to mitigate the trauma exacerbated by her death. Secondly, she acts to remind the audience of the continued presence of contemporary Native peoples outside of the context of relationships between Natives and non-Natives or colonial governments. Michelle H. Raheja states that in mainstream media:

Indian ghosts [...] are the uncanny, destabilizing sparks that flare up in the tension between vanishing Indian rhetoric and Indigenous resistance and self-representation. Native Americans are rendered harmless and unimportant through dominant discourses that treat Indigenous peoples as spectral entities, when they are treated at all. (2010: 107)

In horror, Native ghosts are a source of harm to non-Natives although they have been reduced to spectral presences that only impact the world through supernatural mayhem. By offering Aila support, Anna shows that dead Indigenous peoples are *positive* influences on the present, on the living and are therefore, in a way, still *active* agents that cannot be ignored. Her tangibility is highlighted by her appearance which is not lent a translucent quality through use of double exposure; she is as “real,”—as physically *present*—as Aila. Third, her art activism continues in Aila who resumes Anna’s work of using her artistic skill to confront stereotypical images.

Clearly, Anna’s presence beyond her death and the peaceful portrayal of the cemetery in which she is buried point to a divorce from standard Horror stereotypes. In mainstream film, both would be a source of terror for non-Native protagonists. In an Indigenous film, however, both offer calm for a Native protagonist. This may cause confusion in applying a generic label to *Rhymes for Young Ghouls*. For different viewers, it might be considered a Native gothic film, a heist movie, a revenge flick, or perhaps some combination of these. The film’s early mention of zombies and later reveal of the mass grave point to a horror film. It is at least this. *Rhymes for Young Ghouls* is a horror film that turns horror clichés on their head; instead of instigating terror through Native ghosts and graves, the fear in the narrative comes from the real presence of the residential school and the sadistic people that operate it. *Rhymes for Young Ghouls* addresses issues that often get relegated to textbooks. These issues are

brought to life by humanizing the victims of institutionalized violence and by giving the film’s characters a sense of agency: the characters depicted in *Rhymes* are not merely passive victims, but individuals with the agency to change the harsh realities of historical and generational trauma. The film’s writer and director [...] [shows] both the horrors as well as the resilience and resistance to them. Barnaby draws from an olio of classic Hollywood tropes and narrative devices, which

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he successfully amalgamates with indigenous storytelling, language, and history, allowing him to connect with Indian and non-Indian audiences. (Leal 2015: 384)

Thus, the film repurposes horror conventions for use in the process of decolonization, the same technique Aila uses in her artwork depicting Native imagery. *Rhymes for Young Ghouls* is a horror film *for* Natives rather than *about* Natives but also does the cultural work of offering violent revenge as means of overcoming oppressive colonial rule and art activism as a way to fight stereotyping. Both concepts hinge on the narrative importance of the film's burial spaces.

#### TRAUMA AND VENGEANCE

The cemetery where Anna is buried is more broadly used by the community than attributed to the boarding school. Viewers never see if the boarding school has its own institutional cemetery or if children merely go missing and are hidden in the mass pit. Thus, Aila's shaken expression can be read in multiple ways. She may feel shocked at the loss of human life that has gone unreported in her community and/or the callous disregard over the deaths of children. She is not completely unaware of the school's impact on her community's youth, as the crimes committed against St. Dymphna's students are casually commented upon throughout the film. These crimes are enough reason to spur her vengeance against the school's employees, but the reveal of the mass grave before she and her friends infiltrate the school credibly justifies their actions.

From the film's beginning, the residential school is portrayed as a known threat to the people living on the Red Crow Mi'gmaq Reserve. Burner tells young Aila and Tyler about the school's ability to turn its residents into zombies. The rest of the film offers tidbits on how this breakdown is accomplished. While laying out their plan to infiltrate St. Dymphna's, Aila's gang goes through the school staff's nightly "routine" which includes "[getting] their grope on" (*Rhymes* 00:42:52–00:42:54). The reference to the sexual abuse that happens at the school appears to be no secret in the community. Means of punishing students are also common knowledge, particularly "the hole," an unfurnished

cell meant for keeping students who misbehave in solitary confinement. However, the school administration seems to be aware of the harsh realities its students face by the way it establishes rules for incoming children, choosing to maintain control through fear. Popper tells a group of boys new to the school:

For you new boys, the rules are simple. You get caught out of your beds, you catch a beating and mend in isolation. You get caught talking to each other, you get beat. You get caught coughing, crying, sneezing, pissing, breathing too fucking loud, you get beat and put in isolation. Now, habitually fuck with these rules, you'll wind up on the hill. Oh, and from here on in, just the Queen's fucking English. Relish it. (*Rhymes* [...] 00:23:42-00:24:32)

It is unclear what is meant by “the hill.” Possibly, Popper is threatening that the children could wind up in the mass grave for an infraction as minor but as powerful as speaking in Mi'gmaq. Obviously, the people have reasonable desire for vengeance over the harms inflicted upon young children that can turn them into literal and figurative “zombies.”

St. Dymphna's regulations create a cruel academic culture, but the school's exterior and legacy provides a ghoulish figure felt throughout the reserve. It “is presented as a gothic-like dungeon that turns the indigenous peoples imprisoned there into zombies [and] is portrayed as towering over the Red Crow Reserve, darkening it in shadows of oppression and trauma” (Boo 2015: 205). For this reason, the entire reserve acts like:

an outdoor prison in which the Mi'gmaq are kept segregated and policed by the Indian Agent Popper with absolute power on the basis of those special laws and regulations [...] and where St. Dymphna's always looms as a violent threat that is empowered by the marriage of the mission of christianization and the policy of assimilation and enacted as subjugation and genocide of the Mi'gmaq. (Boo 2015: 205-206)

The film probes and problematizes the laws that create and protect the residential schools through Popper's explanation of the rules, showing the possible punishments for infractions via “the hole” and the mass grave, and presenting the negative outcomes of residential schools on students and their communities. St. Dymphna's presence as a colonial agent has dulled the Mi'gmaq landscape

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and crafted a reality in which its inhabitants seek solace through substance abuse. The only place where this cruel, oppressive sensation is not felt is the Mi'gmaq cemetery.

*Rhymes for Young Ghouls* does not hide the negative realities faced by modern Indian Country or their ties to residential/boarding schools:

Alcoholism, drug addiction, unemployment, violence and other social problems are portrayed as plaguing the indigenous as they struggle with the trauma of having been physically, mentally, emotionally, and sexually abused at St. Dymphna's and also been constantly bombarded with messages saying they do not matter because they are Indians (Boo 2015: 206).

The people of the Red Crow Reserve try any method available to forget what the school and its assimilative power have done to them as individuals and as a community. Meanwhile, the school building functions as a reminder of the punishments to be wrought for the "crime" of being Indigenous. In this way, St. Dymphna's "serves not only as a source of the soul wound, but also as a continuous perpetrator of the genocidal violence that refuses to allow the soul wound to heal and actually ensures that the soul wound is inherited generation after generation" (Boo 2015: 214). In the film's opening sequence, St. Dymphna's is visible in the distance as Burner tells Aila and Tyler about the zombies that the school produces (00:03:53–00:04:43). He is drunk and high during this exchange, tying his substance abuse to the abuses he suffered as a child at that school. As a victim of the school's violence against its Mi'gmaq student body—reified through the flashback sequence of Popper beating an adolescent Joseph (00:38:23–00:38:36)—his, Joseph's, and Anna's experiences and subsequent coping mechanisms effect Aila as a victim of historical and intergenerational trauma.

Interestingly, the film also uses the school's mission of Christian conversion as a means of critiquing Canada's residential school system and promoting violence as a means of exacting vengeance upon colonizers. After Aila is admitted into the school, her hair is cut short and her clothing ripped from her body by nuns. During this sequence, Popper reads Joseph a passage from the Bible in a voiceover: "Vengeance and retribution are mine. In due time, my enemy's foot will slip, for the day of their calamity is near

and the impending sorrows and ruination are falling fast upon them” (*Rhymes* 00:56:56–00:58:55). Immediately following this sequence, Aila is thrown in “the hole” where Tyler visits her and brings her (with her long hair renewed to her) to the mass grave. The ordering of these sequences promotes the use of Christian ideology of vengeance over one’s enemies against the colonizing enterprise of St. Dymphna’s that killed so many Mi’gmaq children.

The word “vengeance” recalls the dream in which Anna crawls out of her grave and grabs Aila’s hand, demanding vengeance (00:33:34–00:34:16). Her use of her Indigenous language supposes a Mi’gmaq methodology of dealing with St. Dymphna’s deadly impact on the reserve. However, the word choice as later used in Popper’s reading of Deuteronomy 32:35 endorses fighting fire with fire, matching the violence of St. Dymphna’s with violence from the community’s children. Popper, so intent to punish and murder his charges, is punished through being showered in fecal matter collected from reserve’s inhabitants and eventually killed. Deuteronomy 32:35 is a passage in which God explains to an aging Moses that He knows Moses’ people will forsake Him after his death, but He knows they will suffer for it. Considering this context and the film’s obvious dichotomy of Indigenous protagonists and white villains, Anna’s promotion of Mi’gmaq vengeance and her crew’s violent actions are both inevitable and encouraged ways of retaliating against the crimes committed against the school’s living and deceased victims.

#### ART ACTIVISM IN *RHYMES FOR YOUNG GHOULS*

*Rhymes for Young Ghouls* suggests art activism as a means of combating stereotypes, promoting Indigenous female empowerment, and connecting contemporary Indigenous peoples with their cultural pasts. Several key scenes highlight the importance of art and creation to Aila although she never overtly expresses how meaningful she finds artistic endeavors. The film establishes that art allows her to critique mainstreams society’s views toward Indigeneity. Anna’s grave becomes a sacred place where Aila finds peace and can create and find meaning and value in her identity as a female Mi’gmaq artist. The Mi’gmaq burial ground and Anna’s

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sketchbook similarly tie Aila to her familial past and issues of representation and cultural knowledge.

The film most overtly proposes art as an activist method for interrogating stereotypes in a key scene in which young Aila and Anna, wearing the gas mask that Aila dons throughout the film, paint a profile of a figure in full headdress on a piece of wood under cover of darkness. Aila questions this activity. As an explanation, Anna says that the headdress image is powerful and that while a “drawing of an Indian on some piece of wood isn’t a big deal, two Indians drawing it is. To some people, that’s scary. We could get into trouble for it” (*Rhymes* 01:13:41–01:16:10). Throughout the sequence, fifteen-year-old Aila watches in the background, giving a contemporaneity to the scene that she enacts through her continued practice in artistic undertakings near her mother’s grave. Beyond its sacred value to the community, the site’s value increases as a meeting place with her mother and a venue for practicing the activism Anna endorsed.

This exchange contains the most overt insistence of promoting art activism and nod toward the cultural work Barnaby’s film is meant to perform. Indeed, Aila’s questioning “[indicates] that Anna has taught Aila about their tribe’s culture and the importance of cultural specificity and sovereignty” and:

interrogates why Anna seems to be reproducing the homogenizing stereotype of the plains Indian in a headdress, the most common image used as mascots across North America by non-indigenous people when Anna knows better and should be resisting such inaccurate representations instead of participating in the replication, dissemination, and reinforcement of imagery that dehumanizes the indigenous and relegates them to an imagined past. Anna’s answers, “‘Cause there are some people who think it looks powerful,” and that that is “because they’re dumbasses,” indicates that Anna is knowingly utilizing the stereotypical association with the historically and culturally false image of “the White Man’s Indian.” (Boo 2015: 208)

An important lesson on maintaining an Indigenous identity in the face of stereotyping through art echoes Aila’s later choice to fight the violent means of assimilation at St. Dymphna’s through violence of her own. Art is not just a means of fighting the colonial gaze, but also gives Aila a means of connecting with Mi’gmaq culture and her mother. Significantly, she hones her

craft at Anna's graveside, a personal sacred space to practice a meaningful activity.

Aila is a complex young woman, at once quietly introspective and outwardly ferocious. Native media "is highly diverse and can in no way be reduced to mere protest writing alone, [and] the issues of persisting inequalities and the healing from historical trauma remain important topics in" Native media (Thom 2016: 200). Due to the intricacy of trauma and trauma studies, the multiple modalities of coping—even within a singular individual—becomes an understandable phenomenon. The solace Aila finds in drawing by her mother's grave and the power felt by attacking the residential school as the villain behind the mass grave paint her as a multidimensional character. However, only her violent actions are likely to inspire a cathartic release among some of the film's Native audiences who would like to see the institutions that impact(ed) their own communities destroyed. In any event, the content and form of *Rhymes for Young Ghouls* live up to the film's tagline suggestion that "On the Red Crow Rez, growing up means getting even" by acknowledging a history within Indigenous communities that requires personal and communal retribution, perhaps most prominently in its centering on Anna's cemetery and the hidden mass grave.

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#### CONCLUSION

While non-Native films simply relegate Indigeneity to the past as a necessary part of colonial nation building, Indigenous views of burial spaces situate historical trauma in places where past hurts are confronted. Through examining the socio-cultural work of mainstream narratives like *Pet Sematary*, *Poltergeist II*, *Amityville Horror*, and *Identity*, a very clear message concerning the undesirability of Native physical or spiritual presences emerges from the Indian burial ground setting. Second-generation comedic treatments of mainstream Indian burial ground texts like *South Park*, *The Simpsons*, and *Family Guy* rely on audience awareness of horror texts but do nothing to critique their colonial views. However, in Indigenous texts like *Rhymes for Young Ghouls*, *Blood Quantum* (2019), *Imprint* (2007), and *Older Than America* (2008), Indigenous burial spaces and/or ghosts provide a clear message

of survivance and retribution in which characters are reminded of their culture's longevity and their people's ability to protect that culture from violent outside forces. It appears that the lens with which Indigenous burial spaces are viewed can demarcate them as either stereotypes or as sacrosanct, emblems of colonial discomfort or Indigenous resistance.

This dichotomous use of Indian burial grounds is likely to persist in generic ways across cultures. As horror has become a genre used for exposing and confronting social unease, mainstream mediamakers like King and Lambert rely on the genre's stereotypical tropes like ancient Indian burial grounds and cannibalistic tribes to confront (and ideally critique) colonization and genocide. Indigenous filmmakers like Barnaby caution less socially damaging implications of Indigenous figures by holding up a mirror to these tropes and the appropriative and stereotypical work they perform:

Horror cinema elicits a physical and psychological response by forcing the subconscious fears of the audience to the surface. This is why the genre can be such an effective vehicle for uncensored Indigenous expression, pushback and resistance. Horror cinema liberates [...] indigenous filmmakers by allowing [them] to not hold back on or censor [...] gruesome symbolism, [...] unflinchingly unpleasant allegorical representation of the abhorrent, repugnant, violent abomination that is colonization. (Smith 2014)

Barnaby, therefore, practices his own message as an artist working to turn stereotypes into powerful messages of resistance. *Rhymes for Young Ghouls*—like much Indigenous horror—meaningfully repositions the fear wrought from Indigenous burial spaces back onto colonial actions and spaces and replenishes the sacred value of Native spaces missing from stereotypes. The Mi'gmaq gravesite is the only space in the film untouched by colonization; the mass grave at the residential school is the direct result of it. With appropriate cultural contexts and meaningful incorporation into plots, Indigenous filmmakers like Barnaby decolonize Indian burial grounds, returning qualities of the sacred to them through story.

Barnaby and other Indigenous mediamakers are more likely to engage with the narrative value Indian burial grounds bring to their texts. While the quality and quantity of any research done

by King on Mi'gmaq beliefs is unknown, his silence on his research methods when he is otherwise very vocally engaged with writing as art and process is telling. *Pet Sematary's* reductive inclusion of reanimation and circular figures is like that of the burial space: appropriative and misunderstood. They are mere features in a plot that is much more focused on the dissolution of the Creed family by enemy forces beyond their comprehension. The very plot of *Rhymes for Young Ghouls*, however, hinges on the sacred significance of the burial spaces as sites of cultural expression, personal solace, and decolonizing actions. Without the value inherent in the two graves sites, Aila would not be nearly so inspired or equipped to defend her community. More than a glossed over plot element, the film's action becomes interlaced with the burial spaces Aila encounters.

Interestingly, the shots of the burial spaces are aesthetically and compositionally identical across media. Indigenous and mainstream mediamakers have agreed that the landscape of Indian burial grounds has a specific look within the genre despite very different cultural intentions in crafting a cause of horror. However, repositioning the ancient Indian burial ground as an Indigenous contextual space interrogates both the trope and the horror audiences are made to feel. Mainstream film relies on settler colonial myths of a mysterious and evil Indigenous landscape, whereas Indigenous film firmly roots itself in the terra firma of the recorded history of colonial violence. Reflecting on Barnaby's collective work upon his 2022 death, writer Logan Boese states, "[His] movies are Indigenous Horror because they tell stories that cannot be told by any other people. They touch on themes and make commentary unique to the experience of Natives dealing with generations of trauma" (2022). As such, the ancient Indian burial ground of collective cultural imaginations does not appear to be in danger of falling out of use. Rather, the multiple uses it can perform as a vague or specific reference to the history of the colonization of the Western world ensure its persistence. As Chief Si'ahl may or may not have suggested, colonial superpowers will never forget carnage against Indigenous populations. Indigenous filmmakers guarantee that we remember and acknowledge that the land has been made doubly sacred in their deaths.

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*Abstract:* The term “ancient Indian burial ground” holds bifurcated meaning for Indigenous and mainstream populations. What one group may respect as sacred ground where their ancestors rest, another sees the mystical –and frequently evil– site of forces beyond their knowledge influenced by an ethnic Other. This paper explores this dual labeling of North American Indigenous burial sites through media by looking at representations of Mi’gmaq burial gravesites. In director Jeff Barnaby’s 2013 *Rhymes for Young Ghouls*, main character Aila (Devery Jacobs) confronts two burial sites that turn the mainstream stereotype on its head: that of her mother which situates Indigenous burials in a contemporary context and that of a mass grave of children at her residential school which places malintent on settler colonial practices. The film highlights Indigenous ways of coping with these practices including violence, substance abuse, and art. Dissimilarly, *Pet Sematary’s* (1989) plot involves no Mi’gmaq representation but follows non-Indigenous Louis (Dale Midkiff) as he interacts with a stereotypical Indian burial ground imbued with evil, unknown magic that leads to the inevitable downfall of his entire family. Both films interestingly include zombies, and they portray Indigenous burial spaces similarly as shot from above and filled with fog. However, their conclusive statements placing the blame behind the horror are vastly different.

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# AS THE DIGITAL *TEOCALLI* BURNS:

## Mesoamerica as Gamified Space and the Displacement of Sacred Pixels

### INTRODUCTION

My Mexica settlers built their first temple after what felt like ages, placing it alongside a line of trees with the intent of making another of the like butting right up against the first. Soon, a line of temple-pyramids became our wall to the north, fending off the aggressive Rus that lived up there, my peoples' current anachronistic opponent in the digital game arena called *Age of Empires II: Definitive Edition* (Ensemble Studios 2019). This strategy, I had learned, slowed an opponent's advances, regardless of the aesthetics that caused the Mexica city to look like the laughable depiction of Tenochtitlan, c. 1520s, crowded with generic temples from Marvel Studio's *Eternals* (*Eternals* 2021; De Beus 2022: 60). Ignoring historical accuracy to avoid a cultural collapse, I had to be quick. There is an art in learning how to ensconce a place with temples, each one a crude replica of a building real Mexica called a *teocalli* in Nahuatl, the language of the "Aztecs."<sup>1</sup> (Fig. 1)

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1. All Nahuatl terms have been sourced via the *Online Nahuatl Dictionary* (2000).



Fig. 1: Burning Aztec “Castle” 2019; Age of Empires II (2013), Ensemble Game Studios (part of Microsoft Games Studios), US; screen capture by author, Creative Commons BY-SA 3.0 via Ageofempires/fandom.com, 2022.

This autoethnographic description of my last encounter with *Age of Empires II* (hereafter “AoE II”) exposes two points. First, I imagine myself a strategic wizard in empire-building games—surely an untenable argument and easily disregarded. Second, the relationship between player, place attachment, game design, and historical accuracy is continually negotiated in games, with game mechanics and aesthetic liberties often taking precedence over accurate depictions of reality. Expediency seems to outmaneuver my attachment to historical places, people, and objects, or at least spurs the question: What meaningful investments might be made in digitized sacred places from Mesoamerica’s past?

As digital environments or settings, historical or historically-adjacent games intervene upon Mesoamerican places, especially religious architecture. Recently, specialists Sybille Lammes and Stephanie de Smale, through a self-reflective study of micro-interactivity between game objects and players in games (e.g. Sid Meier’s *Civilization IV* 2016), demonstrated the small affordances that allowed for “playful geographies” to take hold in the gamer’s mind. By immersing themselves in the games spatial narrative, the scholars identified hybridity in the ways they felt empowered to play with or to counter the play of a dominant narrative “being

neither one or the other and both at the same time” (Lammes and de Smale 2018: 8). To add to the larger discourse, this essay focuses on the meaning of place. According to geographer Tim Cresswell a ‘sense of place’ is a space with invested meaning that engenders socio-psychological attachment or “a way of seeing, knowing, and understanding the world” (Cresswell 2014: 16–17, 46–61; 2009: 8–10). This has been identified in virtual senses of place, digitally-augmented spaces and designed environments for digital play (Proctor 2019).

The purpose of this article is to explore the relationship between digital gamer place-attachment, sacred structures, and history-based play (Plunkett 2011; Tavinor 2011; Diener and Hagen 2020: 1–2). One relevant question at hand is: what are the lessons learned about the sacred place heritage of Mesoamerica when gamers play out conquest scenarios in game spaces? By studying representations and uses for sacred places and things relevant to the history of Mexico, this essay will highlight how games rearticulate the some of the historiographical concepts relating to Robert Ricard’s “Spiritual Conquest” (Ricard 1966; Klor de Alva 1982; Diener and Hagen 2020; Penix-Tadsen 2013; and Mukherjee 2015). I will examine recreations of Mesoamerican art and architecture, narratives and game mechanics—pinpointing inaccuracies—to reveal some of the (inadvertent) lessons players learn about sacred places in play (Mukherjee 2016; Ford 2016). I will expose how these representations and affordances ring hollow or regurgitate colonial violence against places, reifying for the digital conquistador imperial logics on the micro scale. I reveal how Mesoamerican religious places have remained productive backdrops for conquistador gaming experiences.

My research methods include critical visual and material study and experiential encounters with games and game culture. I anchor this in interdisciplinary work on ethnographic primary sources, archaeological evidence, and engagement with spatial theorists on sacred built environments. This results in shedding more light on colonial agendas in new media that ignore Mesoamerican place-identity (Mukherjee 2016: 15). That said, I also highlight ways that digital games can empower historicity and the study of sacred places, objects, and art. It has been posed that wanton

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destruction and cartographical programming results primarily in negative and harmful takeaways; Dom Ford's important critique of the limiting returns in empire-building mechanics comes to mind (Ford 2016). Lammes and de Smale and others have pushed for hope or at least more entanglements between scholars and games for education (Spring 2015; Kapell and Elliott 2013). On the whole, my interdisciplinary critique on Mesoamerican "placeness" in games calls for more academic interventions in game developer-player negative feedback loops with increased analysis and greater Indigenous collaborations (Wood, 2020; LaPensée and Emmons, 2019; and Penix-Tadsen, 2016).<sup>2</sup>

#### BACKGROUND ON SOURCES AND STRUCTURES:

The relationship between digital games and Mesoamerican Studies reaches back to the earliest US commercial game platforms sold in the 1980s and continues with recent themed games released on the 500-year anniversary of the fall of Tenochtitlan (1521 CE). Over the decades, players have inhabited first-person and up-close third-person roles such as treasure hunters, explorers, adventure-archaeologists, conquistadors and many others that have played through scenarios that allow the player to raid Mesoamerican temples for pleasure. In other experiences, players might hold a further removed "god's-eye view" to control a community of playable figures, which may have complex socio-political roles utilized by the player. Immersive experiences appear to not differ much between first- versus third-person play, though more studies are needed (Denisova and Cairns 2015). In learning outcomes, third- and god's-eye perspectives may mean more chances to study modelling of playable subjects in motion in space and time (Lee 2008; Frago et al. 2019).

One core focus of this essay is the god's-eye, empire-building experiences found in the *Age of Empires* series, (four iterations to date), which has built up an endearing fanbase over thirty years (Sánchez García 2020: 12–15; Holdenried and Trépanier 2013; Dillon 2008). Games Studies have exposed the problems

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2. By definition, "placeness" equates to quality of being a place and includes the phenomenological attachment humans associate to physical, fixed and/or transferable, or imagined location (see "placeness, *n.*" *OED Online* 2023).

with carefree gaming about the past and proposed frameworks to understanding game environments and settings as active agents in immersion (Jenkins and Squire 2002: 65; Wood 2012: 89–93; Kapell and Elliott 2013; Aroni 2018: 13–26; 2022: 55–74). For Aylish Wood, game immersion and modelling have a spatial recursivity because of the reoccurring patterns developing among and interplay between gamer, game machine, developers, and the context of play (Wood 2012: 97–98, 103). The dynamics of social construction in games can be insidious because experiences in virtual military campaigning and colonialism (re)play trauma that never transcends it. The dangers in the modelling learnt means some historical events encountered are experienced as reloadable than the historical dysphoria, or changes, that accompanied and followed real historical violence, following Mattia Thibault’s “semiotics of gaming” (Thibault 2018). He argues that deconstructing places in some games simply allows the player to refresh and replay with little consequence (Thibault 2018: 10–11). In the case of several *Age of Empire* “scenarios,” this means playing out the Spanish conquest against Mesoamerican places with disregard to the dynamic aspects of perseverance of Indigenous peoples and places.

In place-based history studies, the complexities of local interpretations of art and architecture, even under the starkest of conditions of Spanish colonialism, resulted in adaptation and cultural perseverance. From religious place-identity and material culture studies, I draw upon Timothy Carroll’s concept of the “axis of incoherence” as a framing device (Carroll 2017). When we take games more seriously, especially those laced with simulacra of colonial and imperial violence, it is valuable to think of the virtual incoherences and new axial approaches that playable experiences might teach, rather than refreshing an inaccurate “spiritual conquest” narrative. Famously, religious historian Robert Ricard framed the cultural transformation of Mesoamerican religious expression from the top-down, a *tabula-rasa* understanding based in part on the assumed toppling and imposition of churches where temples had been wiped clean (Ricard 1966). For 3D built environments, Carroll’s deconstruction of cultural entanglements in the context of Early Modern Europe helps rethink local interpretations and complexity. Builders tend

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to leave an impression on the architecture and ornamentation they craft, especially in the local context of object construction. A closer ethnographic and positionality study reveals that mutually-misunderstood icons and mixed mediation existed in Mexican case studies (Lockhart 1999: 99; Fitzgerald 2020).

This highlights the importance of context, analogue and digital, and my goal is to further this analysis via gamer constructions inspired by real architecture. In building digital temple-pyramids today, developers and their informed consumers have a significant role in interpreting sacred places. More care in accurate representation, guided by consultantships with source-community descendants, will help to develop needed contextual analysis.

With this framing in mind, I have investigated sacred architectures and art depicted in several titles, including: *Aztec* (1982); *Age of Empires II* (Age of Kings: 1999; The Conquerors: 2000; Gold Edition: 2013; Definitive Edition: 2019); *Age of Empires III* (2005; Definitive Edition: 2020); Amazon Games' *New World* (2021); and *Yaopan: Un Juego de la Conquista* (2021).<sup>3</sup> My case study highlights empire-building play in Mesoamerican places with a focus on the second *Age of Empires*. This is informed by the body of archaeological and ethnographic materials relating to the Nahuas of Mexico (Smith 2008; Kelly 2001; for comparison, see Calnek 1988). I reflect upon architecture relating to Postclassic temple-pyramidal structures referred to hereafter using the Nahuatl term *teocalli* ("temple," "divine house," or "church") and/or the term *huey teocalli* ("great divine house"), seen in the remains of the Templo Mayor in Mexico City. This study is not meant to be a holistic study of Mesoamerican architectures and cultural traditions found in games or archaeology. Rather, I examine this critical instance in games to reveal some ways in which a form of Ricard's spiritual conquest thesis is revitalized for violence in the digital age.

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3. Game versions/editions are as follows: *Aztec*, Paul Stephenson, Datamost for Apple II, 1982; *AoE II* (1999, 2019); *AoE III: Definitive Edition*, Tantalus Media & Forgotten Empires (based of the original by Ensemble Studios, Microsoft Game Studios for Microsoft Windows, PC 2005), 2020; *New World*, Amazon Games Orange County, Amazon Games for Microsoft Windows, PC, 2021; *Yaopan*, Bromio Studios, iPhone version for iOS 10.0, Bromio Studios (2021).

The first digital intervention into Mesoamerica places was the two-dimensional, side-scrolling “swashbuckler” game *Aztec*, published in 1982 by Datamost. Today’s popular tomb-raiding experiences derive from this concept (see Penix-Tadsen 2013). Upon entering *Aztec*, players encounter ancient architecture by stepping down into a labyrinthine cross-section, a mythical “Pyramid of Quetzalcoatl.” The underground temple’s artwork refashions the famed palatial temple of the same name at the southern reach of Teotihuacan, recognizable by the game’s 8-bit replica of a plumed serpent. The developers only minimally based their study of Mesoamerican pyramidal forms on reality. By the 1980s, archaeologists had located natural caverns that housed offerings placed by humans at the grand “Pyramid of the Moon” at Teotihuacan, but *Aztec*’s catacombs and staircase structures—the hollow interior design—were a invention by Datamost and may have mirrored European catacombs or Egyptian archaeological digs. No subterranean multilevel structures with staircases of the game’s vision had been discovered in the Americas at the time.

Inside the temple, *Aztec* players encounter spiders, snakes, jaguars, tentacled alien monsters (extending artistic license into science fiction, apparently), and “Aztec” warriors. The latter are caricatures of Mesoamerican combatants featuring embellished, grotesque, mask-like facial features, little clothing, wild headdresses, and clubs. The Postclassic Mexica-Tenochca (those who are now commonly referred to as “Aztecs”) of Tenochtitlan did claim a heritage connection to the ruins of Teotihuacan, their ‘place’ or ‘way of the divine ones.’ The Mexica had taken objects from the ruins of Teotihuacan in the 1300s, which archaeologist have recovered during excavations at the center of Mexico City. This habit of people to refashion objects from the deeper past within the postclassic is known as archaicizing, the act of attempting to link the Mexica of Tenochtitlan to Teotihuacan culture. But the “Aztecs” had never inhabited the city nor occupied its temples, and the video game developers seemingly sought the cache of “Aztec” notoriety. Regardless, *Aztec*’s players can quickly dispatch the warriors with a variety of tools: machete, pistol, or dynamite. Inventive for its time, the game allowed players to blow apart the game’s walls

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and flooring with that dynamite, too. In this way, the first intervention modelled the domination of both Mesoamerica's people and built forms, actively bombarding architecture by destroying sacred space (Figs. 2-5).



Fig. 2-5: Dynamite in Teotihuacan's catacombs; *Aztec* by Datamost (1982); screen capture by author, January 2023

The tone set by *Aztec* in 1982 regarding Mesoamerican temples (or tombs) continues through the latest iterations of similar gaming experiences. Game Studies literature on studio platformers and action-adventure games such as *Tomb Raider* is one example of the discourse that developed from the understanding of treasure hunting (Penix-Tadsen 2016, 2019; Nae 2022). One significant takeaway from this discourse is that the player embodies and enacts patriarchal colonialism against the environment via its white female protagonist, playable in the Central American-based *Tomb Raider: Shadow of Tomb Raider* (Nae, 2022: 109-111, 115). As playscapes for activities (real or digital), Mesoamerican religious sites have remained a useful backdrop for gaming as conquistadors.

Forty years on, the tones of cultural disregard and objectification seen in *Aztec* recapitulates. Recently, Amazon Games Studio's *New World* offers consumers exquisitely depicted temple spaces and dangerous indigenous people to encounter and destroy. Home to 14.97 million registered and approximately 140,000 concurrent

daily players (ranked fifteenth in MMOs as of February 2023, see *MMO Populations.com*), *New World* is a hi-fidelity, third-person, sword-and-staff experience putting players in the role of explorer and colonizer of a history-adjacent, Early Modern setting. Players are immersed in a 3D environment that musters high quality graphics to render the mythical continent of Aeternum, a fictitious vision of the Americas replete with temple ruins, hordes of enemy native monsters to slaughter, and an exploitable ecology of resources to contest over with their fellow players. In pre-release interviews and current discussion boards, developers were keen to distance the game from comparisons to settler-colonialism (Purchase 2019; Gailoreto 2021; Byrd 2021; Winkie 2021; Campbell 2019; Rowe and Tuck 2017. For typologies of colonialisms, see Ostler and Shoemaker 2019; Shoemaker 2015; Veracini 2010; Wolfe 2006; Klor de Alva 1982).

*New World* is history-based, currently cobbling together a pastiche of heritage markers and narratives from European conquests in the “New World.” Game play consists of combat between three competing factions, all vying for territory in Aeternum. *New World* players compete for resources and explore while establishing new colonies on the world map. They own property, sustain a presence, and recover prizes in *New World*’s updating landscape. Original temple and ruin structures were commonly based on open interior architectural designs and players primarily plunder goods from inert spaces. Changing rapidly since its release in fall 2021, the map has shifted to open new territories and temple structures to plunder. One Mesoamerican-themed temple may be “Malevolence Tower” located in the game’s Endgrove Region, the seat of the native Angry Earth non-player characters of *New World*, as of this writing. According to discussion boards, the game’s temples and the undead occupants of Aeternum were initially based upon Mesoamerican and Andean heritage sites, but a push for a history-out-of-time pastiche has been the recent drive by developers (Thorne 2021a; 2021b). The latest paths have adopted Greco-Roman and Egyptian architectural designs, cultures that are seemingly “safer” to appropriate in this fashion.

By stark contrast, the 2D side-scrolling *Yaopan* (more than 10,000 downloads to date) is academically-minded regarding setting

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and story, creating a “placeness” dependent upon an Indigenous representation of the past (*Yaopan*, Google Play 2023). Bromio, a Mexican independent design studio, and Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México (UNAM) consultants based the game’s educational narrative and artistic style upon close ethnohistoric readings of Tlaxcala’s primary sources. The Tlaxcala are a storied Nahuatl community, known for opposing the Mexica-Tenochca empire, as well as the vital alliance they made with Spanish invaders. This is indicated in the title, *Yaopan*, which is the Nahuatl word translatable to “place of war,” “in the place of the enemy,” or, according to the design team “the birthplace of warfare” (*Online Nahuatl Dictionary* 2000). They chose this Nahuatl turn of phrase to convey the weighty moment for the Tlaxcalteca, as their choice to lead the Nahuatl-Christian assault into the Valley of Mexico (and beyond), also bolstered the military activities of the Spaniards. In diametric contrast to the immersive graphics of *New World*, Bromio’s game designers used pixel art, with the *teocalli* and the *Huey Teocalli* of Tenochtitlan featured throughout game scenes. The imagery mirrors pictorial renderings in the codices. Unintentionally, *Yaopan*’s pixelated presentation evokes *Aztec*’s from 1982, in that players side-scroll to slay “Aztec” defenders.

Rather than being enticed to raid Mesoamerica for loot or to destroy structures, *Yaopan*’s players first confront European invaders in their own city, with scenes feature a palatial ruler’s building (*tecpan*) and a *huey teocalli* (Figs. 6–8). After an alliance is crafted, the Tlaxcaltec player leads the Spanish conquest to the Mexica city of Tenochtitlan. In this fashion, players take on the role of an Indigenous conquistador, learning of the conflicted past, regional ethnic diversity, and ancestral claims to the countryside—albeit in cutesy, colorful pixels. Developers offer two lesser-known historical figures: Calmecahua, a war leader of Tlaxcala, and Tecuelhuetzin, daughter of the Tlaxcaltec ruler. Both are Nahuas and, in either guise, play progresses through key settings, with players acting out the violence and espionage of the conquest. The player reveals the history of these events from the eyes of the Tlaxcalteca as recorded in their pictorial histories and by the famed mestizo historian Diego Muñoz Camargo.



Figs. 6–8: Tlaxcala's Tecuehuetzin Enters Tenochtitlan; *Yaopan* (2021) by Bromio in consultation with UNAM, Mexico; Screen capture by author, spring 2022.

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*Yaopan's* story is tightly packed, and gameplay is inflexible, with takeaways focusing on violence and military history. Its teleology limits the chance to show historical contingency and clearly conveys the message that the Tlaxcala felt (and feel) that they were never conquered. Before making the choice to side with the Spaniards and lead the fight to the Valley of Mexico, players witness Spaniards burning of their city. This acknowledges the asymmetrical power relationships that informed the choices and outcomes of the events. *Yaopan's* sense of place is defined by architecture, though the city's historical architecture is muddled by a series of floating platforms (repeated in nearly all the reaches of the game's campaign). Leaping between platforms becomes a tedious gaming mechanic, and developers may have hoped to impart a sense of environmental constraints to players, although it may likely be inadvertent. Regardless, the Mexica's grand *Huey Teocalli*, a two-temple pyramid, looms in several background scenes, and fighting takes place at its base. Generic temples also make up the backdrop but the *Huey Teocalli* is painted with more accurate colors, based on ethnographic and archaeological findings.

*Yaopan's* developers have anchored the place and architecture in Nahuatl pictorial traditions, inclusive of a heads-up-display consisting of glyphs and icons from the Nahuatl-Mixtec writing

style popular before and after 1519 (Rivera 2021). At best, these minor details help to develop a sense of “authenticity” of place for players in these settings (Relph 2007). At the very least, using traditional symbology based on research seems to strengthen the value of an alternative aesthetic and game philosophy of aesthetics. The game’s style and aesthetics are based on Nahua primary sources, such as the *Fragmento de Lienzo de Tlaxcala* at the Benson Library and archaeological findings (Fig. 9). Bromio’s designers purposefully created distinct settings, according to its developers, to “bring young people, and the general public, closer to this other version of history from Tlaxcala [...] [based on] more than two years [of research that has been] translated, into a video game” (Rivera 2021). When that more authentic *teocalli* structure is set aflame, as is the case in a few stages of the game, the burning temple imagery could even call back to precolonial visual culture that signified conquest in a Nahua-Mixteca style of writing (Anawalt and Berdan, 1992; 1997; Fernández-Armesto 1992). Educators might seek to connect this symbolism with how a burning temple may have resonated with Tlaxcatecs in colonial times, but this is never fully articulated in the game’s script. However, the use of Indigenous sources and academic interventions transforms the presentation of *Yaopan*’s play environment, creating an experience unlike the disconcerting tones of 1980’s *Aztec* or the underwritten colonialism of its contemporary, *Amazon’s New World* (2021).



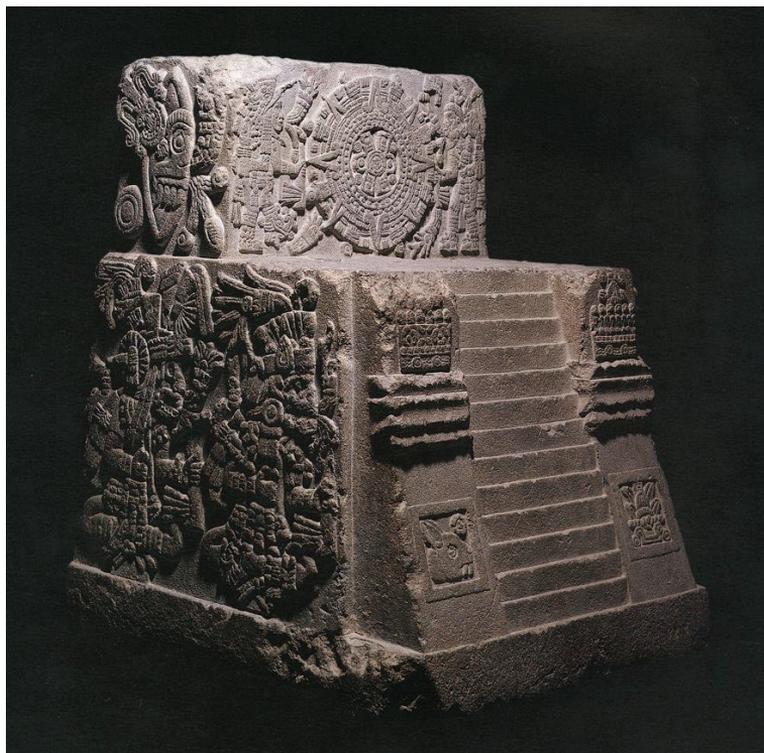
Figure 9 : Fragmento Lienzo de Tlaxcala ; Public domain. Benson Latin American Collection, LLILAS Benson Latin American Studies and Collections, The University of Texas at Austin.

Postclassic Nahuas were prolific in constructing *teocalli* architecture (Motolinía 1985: 174; see also Díaz Balsera 2003). These pyramid structures commonly consisted of repeated patterns of upward slanting slopes and horizontal spans (*talud* and *tablero*, in Spanish, respectively). A single staircase or possibly two in parallel extended up to a flat platform, and these pathways were generally framed by sloping balustrades (or *alfardas* in Spanish). Balustrades could be ornamented, often engraved with commemorative details or iconography of zoo- or anthropomorphic beings. Pyramid walls, especially the faces of horizontal spans, also included decorative engravings or murals. One example of a reconstructed *teocalli* is the temple of Santa Cecilia Acatitlan, a historical site and museum today (see *Museo de la Escultura Mexica* 2013; see also García Ocampo Rivera 2016).

Mesoamerican peoples show some inclination to architectural study, especially temple forms, which includes the thousands of reduced-sized temple models and mural depictions carved in stone, made of clay, or painted throughout the Classic and Postclassic Periods. For instance, the *Teocalli de Guerra Sagrada* (“sacred warfare”) at the Museo Nacional de Antropología in Mexico City (Fig. 10). The *Teocalli de Guerra Sagrada* consists of a large basalt block that Nahuas carved into the likeness of reduced-scale temple model, cut in the round as well as its base (Caso 1927; Graulich and Olivier 2008; Umberger 2010). Believed to have been carved by the Mexica-Tenochca, the object showcases architectural form and ornamentation and may be the clearest symbol of religious-state propaganda of the Postclassic. It represents a straight-backed pyramid with a single staircase leading up to a temple platform. Based on the latest research, it was likely located south of the *Huey Teocalli* of Tenochtitlan, near the Temple of Tezcatlipoca, which stood in the southwest quadrant of the Mexica’s ceremonial precinct (Umberger 1981: 185, 1984: 78–83, 2010: 2–3; Barnes 2016: 237–239). Representative of aspects of the Mexica state and rule, viewers of this particular temple model were subjected to propaganda, as its iconography narrates Aztec rulers acts of sacrifice and religious traditions across its surfaces (Umberger 2010; Barnes 2016: 239–253). By placing reduced-sized models of religious

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architecture next to *teocalli* and *Huey Teocalli*, physicality of craft and this resulting enjambment, or the use by builders of comparative architectural scales set within a single viewable zone of a place, would help to amplify the artwork's agency and "textility" within this ritual space (Ingold 2010).



*Sacred Spaces  
In North America*

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Fig. 10: *Teocalli of Sacred Warfare*; Postclassic (1325-1521); Stone, 920 x 1230 x 1000 cm, Tenochtitlan; Unknown Artist; Instituto Nacional de Antropología e Historia, INAH, Mexico City, Mex.

Popular interpretations in games gravitate towards Mesoamerican temples in both single- or dual-temple topped platform models, but key inspirations include the *Huey Teocalli* of Tenochtitlan (Ciudad de México's *Museo del Templo Mayor* today) and *El Castillo* at Chichen Itza of Postclassic Maya fame. Careless developers tend to impose the latter upon the Nahuas because of the current cultural capital of *El Castillo*, which featured a single stone temple building atop a pyramid with staircases on all four sides. Artwork from Chichen Itza was distinct, but the general patterns

and style mirror the structures of the region and timeframe whence it originated. *El Castillo's* form and style differ dramatically from the center of Tenochtitlan, and the game designers' disregard for these details feeds into the lack of awareness or acceptance of ethnic diversity of Mesoamerican peoples of the past (and present). Notably, the published English translations of the Florentine Codex, inclusive of many of its illuminations by Indigenous authors, have been widely available to enthusiasts of "Aztec" architecture and ritual use of sacred places since at least the 1980s (see Sahagún 1950–1982).

By contrast, the *huey teocalli* structure would have represented a religious and political history distinct and critical to knowing the Mexica-Tenochca (Mundy 2015: 42–61). Pyramids topped with two temples were not an architectural tradition reserved to the Mexica alone, it should be noted (García Ocampo Rivera 2016: 310–325). Other Nahua groups and other ethnic city-states throughout greater Mesoamerica built dual-temple, double-staired pyramids, some long before the Mexica capital had begun to form in 1431 (Umberger and Klien 1993; Smith and Berdan 1992; and Berdan et al. 1996). Well before Ensemble Studios designers for *Age of Empires* had converted art design to code, scholars had been pressing back against the notion of Postclassic architectural exceptionalism of the "Aztecs" (Umberger and Klein 1993). The form's duality appears to have been employed by builders to fuse together at least two grander cosmological narratives (Galindo Trejo 2009). The Texcoca, a longer-lived dynasty of Nahuas dominating the eastern shores of Lake Texcoco, had built their own dual-temple pyramid, as depicted in colonial ethnographies, though seemingly on a less grand scale as the *Huey Teocalli* of Tenochtitlan. When game designers activate the "great temple" model among historical Nahuas, they can impart for gamers some of the shared stylistic features, but care must be taken.

The importance of cultural responsive design in place-based architecture is evidenced with a brief critique of the *Huey Teocalli* model used in *Age of Empires II* (later, I focus on the ethnospatial aspects of the game). *AoE II's* Conquerors Expansion features Montezuma [sic], a narrative campaign comprised of six scenarios set in Mesoamerican places (Reign of Blood, The Triple Alliance,

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Quetzalcoatl, La Noche Triste, The Boiling Lake, and Broken Spears). Designers interject several Maya and other non-Nahua people, linguistic traditions, and material goods during the invasion of the Valley of Mexico for no clear reason. According to a fandom post speaking for Ensemble Studios, “the scenario was designed to showcase the new Mesoamerican civilizations, architecture, unique units, trees, and animals [...] and was not based on any historical military campaign.” It does, however, clearly draw from translated Spanish sources (“Historical Comparison” 2017). Players encounter and attack several Nahua communities, the Tlatelolca, Tepaneca, and Xochimilca. One might assume it was to imply the diversity of Indigenous inhabitants, however, the Tepaneca and Xochimilco groups of Nahua peoples are represented using the general Maya graphics, which confuses matters even more. Wide circulation of popular academic books have attempted to dispel the myth of the blanket term “Indians” countering thoughtless choices (Restall 2004: 44–63; Gibson 1964, 1967).

For the historical Mexica, the duality of their great temple brought together supernatural energies of Huitzilopochtli, the Mexica patron deity with identifiable anthropogenic motivations, and Tlaloc, a primordial deity associated with natural forces old and nearly inhuman. Barbara Mundy, expert on the artwork and urban development of these cultures, compellingly argues that the Templo Mayor structure had an agency in the lives of Nahuas (2015: 31, 60). In function, Huitzilopochtli’s shrine expressed Nahua state aspects of fire, warfare, change, and arrogance—conceived in the Mexica origin stories. Tlaloc’s temple and accompanying reliquary were dedicated to forces of water, fertility, continuity, and humility, linking state and discrete communal needs to older traditions. Mexico’s recent studies have revealed the building’s exterior layer to have been a vibrant carved and painted masterwork, one recursive to the previous layers of exteriors below—thus communing with the past in a unique fashion (López Austin, 2009). As depicted in the Codex Ixtlilxochitl from the mid-sixteenth century, the dual-temple structures left an indelible mark on the psyche of Nahua artists and historians (Fig. 11). The architectural treatment of the painting replicating the religious significance of the two forces at work

in the Nahua cosmos, in this case the *Huey Teocalli* of Texcoco (Codex Ixtlilxochitl c. 1550). In substance, the dual-topped pyramid anchored Mexica and other Nahua communities in new and old architectural traditions and this message is not carried forth in digital arenas. Moreover, denying the presence in Nahua cities related to or antagonistic with the Mexica, as *AoE II* does, codifies the *Huey Teocalli* tradition with one group of Nahuas, blanketing the “Aztecs” with a simplistic art history (Broda 1987).

*AoE II* game developers and artists appear to have not referenced the latest archaeological surveys and reproductions from museum about the architecture for their *Huey Teocalli* “Wonder,” from the Age of Conquest Expansion (2006) to the present. As an aside, players’ scores are boosted when, after advancing to the proper developmental stage, their civilization can spend resources and time to build a civilization-specific Wonder—each based on famed historic buildings. The *Huey Teocalli* is the Wonder available for the playable Aztec civilization. The designer’s temple models do not appear to have referenced archaeological materials closely, nor do they faithfully reflect Indigenous documentation from that period (Fig. 12).

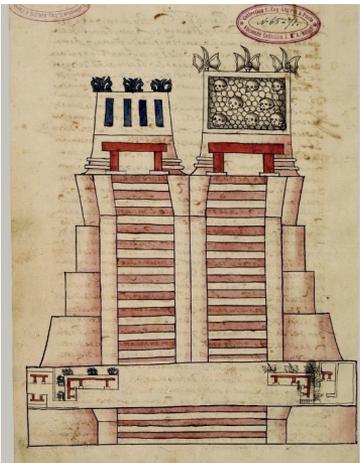


Fig. 11: *The Huey Teocalli of Texcoco* from *Codex Ixtlilxochitl*. 1550, Folio 112v. Bibliothèque nationale de France. Département des Manuscrits. Mexicain 65-71 (<https://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/btv1b84701752.image>).

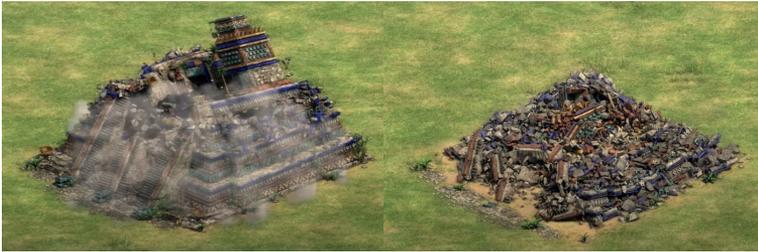


Fig. 12: *The Huey Teocalli Wonder*; *Age of Empires II* Definitive Edition (2019), *Forgotten Empires* (Xbox Game Studios), US; screen capture by author, spring 2022

Beyond the physical remains of the original that were dismantled over years beginning in the early sixteenth century, Nahuatl artists also memorialized the *Huey Teocalli* in early colonial pictorial manuscripts and community records, often including color schema and ornamentation to make it a formidable structure. Post-Conquest accounts, too, reference the military semiotics by noting how Nahuas used the buildings in combat. As described in Book 12 of the Florentine Codex, throughout the Tenochtitlan conflict, battle famously took place on the steps and atop the city's temple pyramids. For instance, when the Spaniards were caught retreating from the city during Noche Triste, July 1520, guards posted atop one *teocalli* alerted the city to their intentions in the middle of a rainstorm (Fitzgerald, 2022). In another episode, Spaniards and Tlaxcaltec invaders broke apart temples from atop at least one *teocalli* to toss its large wooden beams down at Mexica defenders and constructed a catapult atop another during the Siege of Tenochtitlan, 1520–21 (Sahagún 1975: Part 13, 62–65).

Regardless, archaeology in Mexico City has revealed for some time that *Huey Teocalli* were solid, layered structures, with the latest pyramidal exterior built over the top of the previous. The second iteration is on view at the Museo today featuring both temples and an altar devoted to Tlaloc, called a *techcatl* in Nahuatl and otherwise known as a chacmool (López Austin and López Luján 2001; 2009: 440–448). *AoE* designers purposefully and rightfully place a “chacmool” atop their in-game Wonder, but the placement and rendering are inaccurate to the archaeology. The act of destroying the Wonder utilizes a technique repeated throughout animated demolitions. As opponents cut or bombard the digital asset and fires burn across the extent of its surface, *AoE*'s *Huey Teocalli* suddenly collapses in upon itself, crumbling into nothing (Figs. 13–14). Mesoamerican temple-pyramids, in reality, consisted of many solid layers, marvels of engineering, through which their architects tracked generations with each newly-capped exterior. Toppling a temple atop a pyramid was possible, but the buildings were often removed in painstaking handfuls, as described by eye-witness accounts (see several accounts in Motolinía 1905; 1984). The hollow presentation of basic Mesoamerican pyrami-

dal architecture fails history and divests meaning from its most identifiable, authentic Indigenous place (Relph 2007).



Figs. 13-14: *AoE II DE Huey Teocalli Mid-Collapse and in Ruins*; *Age of Empires II Definitive Edition* (2019), *Forgotten Empires* (Xbox Game Studios), US; screen capture by author, spring 2022

On a more minute scale, the *Huey Teocalli* Wonder's details miss an opportunity to add deeper meaning for players (Spring 2015: 215–17). This is witnessed in the ornamentation, in that the asset's *techcatl* is backwards, unpainted, and positioned inaccurately before both temples (Figs. 15–16). This indelicate approach actually mocks Nahua architecture—the real “wonder” being the deep religious-spatial history that the Mexica of Tenochtitlan highlighted with the city's construction techniques. A ‘chacmool’ bust is the oldest statuary good recovered from the first layers of Templo Mayor Stage I, placed specifically in line with the first northern temple in contrast to the south building. As one of the oldest physical anchors for the Mexica in the Valley of Mexico to the region's sacred water and rain deity, Tlaloc, positioning the statue in symmetry with their patron deity meant ontologically ‘placing’ themselves. Historically, when placed before the temples of older deities, alongside the Huitzilopochtli's altar and temple, the *techcatl* had a social agency and interactive quality that supported the psychology of the city-state and community sense of attachment.

In a single act of ethnospatial denial or disregard, *AoE II*'s designers take a careless stance to an essential aspect of place-identity for the Mexica of Tenochtitlan. This act tends to frame the digital space within the gaze of European colonialism, wherein sacred architectural traditions of Mesoamerica are easily collapsible and void of substance. In the words of Patrick Wolfe,

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the indication of settler colonialism is that it “destroys to replace” and in elimination theory the continuous game play of replacement and asymmetrical relationships in games indicates this type of gamer society as complicit (Wolfe 2006: 388). Dawn Spring, too, highlights this design implementation flaw, noting that “gameplay takes precedence over [...] historically based mechanics, historical narrative, and historically accurate aesthetics” in most history games (Spring 2015: 215–216). Players, whether building or breaking this specific historic place, would not be encouraged to care or find meaning in its cultural relevance. Visually, game developers and gamers have had museum exhibitions, academic publications in art history and ethnohistory, and textbooks full of Indigenous depictions to inform their understanding of “Aztec” places.

Calling out the problematics of Western tropes, Beth Dillon argued that colonialist visions proliferated gaming experiences (Dillon 2008). Primarily, Dillon targeted the gaming mechanics, arguing that offering the player tools of empires in the guise of indigenous “fire pits” and medicine men to exact conquests ignored historical politics and modes of expansion in the cultural contexts she studied. Then, in 2020, seeking some form of cultural coherence, the *AoE III: Definitive Edition* design team employed Anthony Brave (a member of the Rosebud Sioux) as a Native consultant and writer working on its updates (Age DE Team 2020). Brave’s guidance in *AoE III* led to real changes in code with sacred architecture modified in the process. Beforehand, players constructed “fire pits” to boost their army’s abilities in combat and achieve the next level in a Western-derived technology tree. For Brave, placing Native figures dancing around a fire pit, when compared to European figures, reified the former as “savages.” The reason for rethinking historical accuracy of art and architecture matters when digital place-building matters. Understanding sense of place in the Mesoamerican context could deepen representations of sensitive cultural heritage.

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Fig. 15: *Mexica Altar (techcatl)* in *AoE II; Age of Empires II* (2013), Ensemble Game Studios (part of Microsoft Games Studios), US; screen capture by author, Creative Commons BY-SA 3.0 via Ageofempires/fandom.com, 2022.



Fig. 16: *Actual Huey Teocalli Altar at Templo Mayor*; Simon Burchell, Creative Commons BY-SA 3.0 via Wikimedia Commons, 2007.

Spatial Studies fuel a continuous debate about what ought to constitute a geographical or conceptual “place” (Relph 1976; 2016; and Lefebvre 1991). Defining “place” versus “space” Michel de Certeau proposed that “place” was “the order (of whatever kind) in accord with which elements are distributed in relationships of coexistence. It thus excludes the possibility of two things being in the same location [place][...] it implies an indication of stability” (de Certeau 1984: 117). Space, by contrast, “exists” because of the “vectors of direction, velocities, and time variables” and is made real when things (entities or objects) move within and through that existence, not dependent on dimensions or shape (de Certeau 1984: 117–21). Space is place put into practice and place is space made more stable, coherent, but also negotiated among occupants (Smith 2008: 71–93, 151–174). Bernadette Flynn’s interpretation of his and other relevant theories push spatial analysis into digital realms (Flynn 2004; Golding 2013; Proctor 2019). Flynn linked New Media with these phenomena, demonstrating the very real perception of experiences had in built places, as felt by gamers of the best and most popular titles of the day (*Half-life*, *Myst III*, and *The Sims*). For Flynn, by recognizing the cultural conditioning of colonialist play environments and aesthetics, we can identify how “entrenched in the fabric of computer-based spatial engagement” they might be (Flynn 2004: 57).

Regarding sacred places, Fran Speed’s study of placemaking homes in on the importance of affect tied to the environment. This implores us to reflect on the intuitions and capacities of spaces in the past, present, and future (Speed 2003: 55–65). Speed drew upon a wealth of literature on agency of objects and built forms to argue that ascribing or imbuing a place with sacred constructs augments how one might experience it. In other words, believing a place to be sacred changes our relationship with it. Seeking to break free from Western constructions of space means delving into Indigenous Studies.

Timothy Carroll’s conception of places that contain or afford multiple “axes of coherence,” following Alfred Gell, inspires further reflection on the incoherent, mutually misunderstood place-identity that might come into being and be sustained over time (Carroll 2017).

This challenges de Certeau's strictures on the exclusivity of defined placeness. Carroll explores the dynamic ways that affectual geographies are informed by the presence of a built environment (Carroll 2017: 167). The coexistence of physical, metaphorical, and affectual "cohering factor" of architecture, sacred or profane, can be revealed as multivalent and non-denominational (Carroll 2017: 168–169). This dynamic approach to the material ecology of a given context coupled with the findings of Speed and Flynn beg for more nuanced digital place creations, especially those with a heritage. This nuanced approach to spatial studies can add to and complicate discourse on a zero-sum reading of colonial cartographies and the serious aspects of historical gaming (Mukherjee 2016: 3–7; Penix-Tadsen 2013: 184–185).

To this regard, Nahua specialists have identified connections between metaphysics and public works with long-lasting linkages to living memory in Mexico (Florescano 1994; Megged and Wood, 2012). Nahuas, among their many sophisticated ethnic neighbors, ascribed to forms of spiritual monism, coupling the philosophy of interconnectedness of the cosmos within their ancestral places and the artworks they crafted, and this is lacking in the digital gaming experience (Laack 2020). Building construction sites were selected because of several reasons, only one of which would have been access to building materials and resources for laborers. This includes the use of sacred sightlines aligning constructions with natural features in the landscape (Tichy 1978; Findeiss et al. 1991; Wake 2014: 130–35; Fitzgerald 2020). Published in 1982—the same year Datamost published the video game *Aztec* for public consumption—David Carrasco's *Quetzalcoatl and the Irony of Empire* convincingly argued that Ur-places persisted in the Mesoamerican zeitgeist (see also Carrasco 1991). Builders called back to the past as well as emphasized natural and supernatural features in the landscape when creating cities. Temple-pyramids could be formed in deeply rooted connections to stories about the land, like a topographical memory matrix (García Garagarza 2012: 193–214; for colonial examples, see Haskett 2005).

Nahua landscapes therefore had a form of agency and buildings were charged with ritual currents when aligning places and structures, and this concept went deeper than surface level.

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James Maffie argues that Mesoamericans “fused [time and space] into a single seamless dimension,” creating a metaphysical concept of “time-place” (Maffie 2013: 182n92, 423–430). Recently, Isabel Laack has explored the animate world of Nahua temples and other material culture to show that sacred places—invisible to the naked eye but felt by practiced communities—roiled and vibrated with a dynamic network of imperceptible filaments. She focused on *malinalli* or “twisted grass” as a metaphor for what lay beneath a *teocalli* (Laack 2019). Archaeologist George McCafferty, for one, explored the psycho-social relationship between one of the longest lived temple constructions (the man-made mountain of Cholula) arguing that metaphorical and material relationships colluded to best situate communities in sacred places (McCafferty 2001: 279–316). The notion of supernatural filaments undergirding ancestral ties to land adds nuance to the destruction of pyramids made mountain-like and the media used to construct and ornament architecture (McCafferty 2001). Invested with shared memories and situated along sightlines, the *teocalli* and *Huey Teocalli* were connected to Nahua cosmology. Following acts of iconoclasm, Nahua and Nahua-Christian builders constructing under Spanish colonialism made choices, some guided by so-called friar-architects and others purposefully to reuse local sacred materials, art forms, and alignments with sightlines. This fostered room for incoherence rather than strict dogmatism (Fitzgerald 2020). Mesoamerican sacred places did not turn to dust or evaporate but informed the architecture to come. This aspect of cultural persistence is left out of digital games and art about Mesoamerican heritage and military histories.

#### AGES OF MAKING, AUGMENTING, AND BREAKING:

As mentioned above, *Age of Empires* is a classic example of an empire-builder or game as an act of colonization and its destructible place assets disassociate players from a meaningful past. Here, I focus on gameplay elements relating to *AoE II*, published in 1999 through the recent updates in 2022's *Definitive Edition*, highlighting the *Conquerors* expansion that introduced American Indigenous campaigns, as well as *AoE III* (2001–2021), but especially since that game's *Chieftains* expansion (2006). For *AoE*

III, 2021 is the game's twentieth anniversary, but also coincides with the five-hundredth anniversary of the fall of Tenochtitlan. This timing seems to have been fashionable, as both *Yaopan* and *New World* were also published on the anniversary. Chockful of new and old civilizations to conquer via imperial methodologies, it seems significant to deconstruct how the games repurpose Mesoamerican sacred places.

Mechanically, players are distanced from the Mesoamerican (and other cultural) landscapes via its basic cartographical design. They play via a third-person perspective, set as heavenly beings gazing down on the game's real-time action. Empire-builders can choose between this Real-Time Strategy (RTS) experience instead of turn-based action (for the latter, series examples include Sid Meier's *Civilization* and *Europa Universalis*). In RTS, actions occur across the game map simultaneously, in "real-time," that differs from a player's ability to freeze time in a turn-based systems. In *AoE*, a running game clock displays the timeline of history, fostering an interest in speed and efficiency—not a player's connection to a digital place—but the story or campaign mode is set to trigger events across the map, and pace is slowed to meet narrative historical markers. The history component varies based on the generation, each featuring a set of "stages" in development to achieve. For instance, *AoE II* frames the ages in four stages occurring over a millennium: Dark Age, Feudal Age, Castle Age, and Imperial Age.

The basic mode of play moves from the player establishing a settlement, extracting resources, growing their population, researching technologies, building and expanding territory, and conquering the other civilizations. The game's play environment changes with the scenario, with historical topography and places reflected in the designs. For instance, the first story mode for *AoE II's Conquerors* expansion introduced players to a recognizable aspect of Tenochtitlan, a sparsely occupied group of islands in a lake connected via causeways to the mainland (Fig. 17). Little care was taken to recreate the actual city of the Mexica and neighboring communities of Lake Texcoco, notably, with only two single-topped temples (*AoE II's* Aztec "Castle" structure) to identify the ceremonial center ("Age of Empires 2: Designer Diary," 1998–99).

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The sacred geographies of Mesoamerica are only one of many historical settings affected by colonial legacies, with campaigns stretching the globe deserving of scholarly critiques.

As gaming experiences, empire-builders have been challenged by scholars for some time (Carpenter 2021; Ford 2016; Chapman 2013). Notably, *AoE* designers do not intend to make educational games. Nonetheless, digital games can be an educational tool, much like other popular media about the past, and educators can rely on these digital materials to help students and researchers reconcile their innovative interpretations about history. The temporal focus of *AoE II Conquerors* ranges from the Early Middle Age (c. 500 CE) to the Renaissance (c. 1600 CE)—a timeframe of more than 1000 years.

A decade ago, Joshua Holdenried and Nicolas Trépanier aligned representations of the cultural biography of *AoE II*'s Aztecs against Nahua history. They highlighted the crucial learning outcomes of playing empire-builders as "Aztecs" (or Spaniards) is the game's efficient manner of imparting what they call "cultural understandings" of Nahua and Iberian senses of "dominance" in warfare (Holdenried and Trépanier 2013: 108, 116). Their case made coherent with a focus on expansionism and little else, the authors add harmful nuance by tracking their reading of the Aztec "tribe" as warring and single-minded hegemonies, seeking sacrificial victims and little else (Holdenried and Trépanier, 2013). These strawmen are pinned in history gaming as diametrically opposed in war with European others. To "win" in *AoE II Conquerors* is to have a sense of dominance that resonated with historic Aztec empires, according to the authors (Holdenried and Trépanier 2013: 115–116).

*AoE III* plays through global settler-colonialism from the 1450s through the 1880s CE. Beth Dillon's 2008 article remains essential reading to understand how *The Warchiefs* expansion feeds off the non-Indigenous "drive to conquer space and time in the gameplay" (Dillon 2008: 136). Additionally, alternative communities of open-source game designers (i.e., 0 AD) —based on *AoE* series models —have taken a grassroots approach to furthering serious games of the sort. But empire-building remains intact. Dillon found the packaging of Western aesthetics to be signifiers for a system of signification bent on framing Indigenous peoples as Western

empires (Dillon 2008: 142). *AoE* games are also unique history-based gaming in that endearing and vociferous communities of player-designers access the software itself to develop modifications to replace original game storylines and new artwork.



Fig. 17: *AoE II* Game Map of Tenochtitlan; *Age of Empires II* Definitive Edition (2013), Ensemble Game Studios (part of Microsoft Games Studios), US. Screen capture by Jeanioz, Creative Commons BY-SA 3.0 via Ageofempires/fandom.com, 2018.

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The “chess pieces” are martialled forth at the player’s discretion, utilizing extracted resources (namely: food, wood, and gold) from civilization reserves to call forth new agents (laborers, merchant class, military, religious and political elite units). They then put laborers and remaining resources to work in the construction of buildings and walls; one element of strategy in *AoE* gaming relates to the control of access points to the map’s resources. Crafting buildings and researching new technologies allows the player to advance to the next temporal stage, unlocking new digital assets to put in place. In this regard, the architectural traditions gamers encounter in *AoE* gaming are the significant components to success. Encouraging the study of archaeological and ethnographic materials, essentially touching primary evidence to the gamer’s fingertips, can engender learning and some psychological attachment to virtual past.

Within the game, *AoE II* and *AoE III* players become invested because of the game’s ludic and narrative qualities that are based around buildings. The “Aztec Civilization” remains the most prominently featured Indigenous American group across the two titles.

Mesoamerican and South American groups featured are inextricably entangled in the history of Spanish imperialism and colonialism from the designers' perspective because game play scenarios focus on the encounter as playable history. The Aztecs are known in gamer circles as being an "infantry and monk" civilization type, good for quick attacks early on, meaning players gravitate to this civilization with the intent of playing military units on foot. *AoE III* keeps their "Aztecs" minimalist with little architecture and even less technological complexity. Given that horses were not present in the precolonial Americas, players are denied the ability to construct stables or to train horsemen, although horses were readily desired and soon adopted by Nahuas following their introduction by the Spanish (Rodríguez-Alegría 2010; Valesey 2019). Structurally, the "Aztecs" are stymied, outmaneuvered, and conquerable, a completed conquest that cuts off Nahua identity and places with *AoE II*'s crumbling buildings. In its early years, *AoE III* had a lackluster response from players on online discussion forums because of the limited fort-like buildings that the "Aztecs" could muster.

Regarding digital assets that reflect sacred spaces in the Mesoamerican context, the available artwork and functions of Indigenous art and architectural history confounds player attachment in a meaningful way. Depending on the *AoE* series and updates, players will combine political, economic, religious, and military structures to birth hand-to-hand, ranged, and priestly attacker and defender units. The act of making or razing buildings intervenes on the way players control their sense of place. *AoE* games offer a basic set of structures to all civilizations, fictively setting European wind-powered mills under the purview of Mesoamerican peoples, for instance, and otherwise disregarding historical accuracy. Thus, Nahuas can quickly come to develop multi-storied towers and arched gating that was never in use before colonization and replacing innovative Indigenous structures such as multi-chambered housing, aqueducts, intricately composed walled courtyards, public restrooms, steam baths, zoos, greenspaces, and floating gardens (Wagner et al. 2013). They must not have horses and stables but ocean-bound seacraft with grand sails become a feasibility in *AoE*. These contradictions in how architecture and archaeology are applied in *AoE* games chooses expediency

over meaning. Instead of encouraging players to employ a diversity of empire-building tools (barring horses)—again, crucial to game mechanics and land claims—designers instead focus on Western political and social systems. Finding the opportunities in ascribing bloodthirsty dominance upon strawmen hegemonies reifies the dominant paradigm. What might result from *AoE* designers or player-artist experts consulting with descendant community members, ethnographic materials, and meaningful archaeology?

#### DIALOGIC ICONOCLASMS FOR A DIGITAL-SPIRITUAL AGE:

In 1519, the first true example of Nahua-Spanish sacred architectural iconoclasm occurred in Cholollan, near the site of the Church of Saint Gabriel the Archangel in San Pedro Cholula today (Navarrete 2021). Spaniards described the Chololtec city as the “Rome” or “Mecca” of Mesoamerica because of its multitude of *teocalli* and, by October 2019, the city had become the first target for the new alliance between the Tlaxcalteca and the Spaniards. Game developers do not depict the scene in *Yaapan* (2021).

In a notoriously dastardly tactic, the Tlaxcalteca and Spaniards shocked the city’s rulers and unarmed defenders by launching a surprise attack at the ceremonial center of Cholollan, near the base of the temple for their local deity, the *Teocalli Quetzalcoatl* (McCafferty 2000; Lockhart 1993: 90. See also, Castro Morales and García Moll 1972: 210–211; Peterson and Green 1987: 210–211; and McCafferty, 2000: 353). Known as the 1519 Massacre of Cholula, perhaps three- to six-thousand unarmed Chololtec citizens died in the violence. The Spaniards are said to have entered the courtyard on horseback, using their lances to slaughter “as many as they could[...] it is believed that the friendly Tlaxcalans killed many more.” (Lockhart 1993: 91; Sahagún 1975: Part 13, 29–10).

At the height of the assault, the Chololteca had drawn back to the single-temple *Teocalli Quetzalcoatl* to make their last stand. The invaders set fire to the *teocalli*’s wooden and textile fixtures, flames eating at the sacred matter atop the temple-pyramid, but the structure and its people are believed to have held out for two days more. At the end, the defenders are said to have ripped out the building’s bricks to unleash the sacred forces the community believed were contained inside. The forces consisted of divine

water mixed with the sacrificial blood of ages believed to be trapped inside the *teocalli*, which would gush forth from the temple to thwart the invaders (Díaz del Castillo 2008: 135). According to Muñoz Camargo, the Tlaxcaltec historian, when the temple burned or broke apart instead, it proved the Chololteca had kept “all falsity and lies” and hence “were not able to escape nor find shelter with their angry gods, nor entertain the Spaniards for peace” (Muñoz Camargo 2013: 188–189). According to the Florentine Codex, “the greater part of [Chololteca] died in despair, by killing themselves” by throwing themselves from the top of the temple platform. The building remained present for years beyond the massacre. Its stones were dismantled by locals and used to build the first Christian convents, as was a common practice of the sixteenth century (Gutiérrez 2012).

The harsh memory of the 1519 massacre lives on but recognition usually fails to connect people with historic buildings. During the five-hundred-year celebration of *Todos santos/Día de Muertos* in 2019 that took place near the Ex-Convento de San Gabriel Arcángel Cholula, descendants commemorated the memory of those lost to the “slaughter” and Spanish violence. Services took place in the convent’s courtyard at the historic site of the 1519 massacre and the state of Puebla decreed October 18 as the official day of reflection (Gob. Del Estado de Puebla, 2019). But commemoration stopped at the memory of the lives lost. No official attempt was made by attendees to commemorate the *Teocalli Quetzalcoatl* that once stood at the site or framed the way Chololtecs lived their lives in the “Rome” of Mesoamerica. Stones that had held the sacred heritage of the Indigenous past now support today’s Christian convent and its world-class library. The commemorations did not think to honour the Postclassic *teocalli* that had been burned nor recreate it as a digital place. As an integral component that shaped the past, how might better approaches to Indigenous sacred architecture help to inform the complexities of commemoration?

Digital games based on local historic buildings and the colonial past could help to reimagine memory, teaching us the loss in meaning when digital structures are razed (Sepinwall 2023; personal correspondence). Players could be set in the fulcrum of cultural transformation, playing through the destruction of a *teocalli* and, to make the connection with cultural persistence and survivance, take part in the process of constructing new built forms with pieces from the past. Given a set of Indigenous perspectives from the past, based on Nahuatl primary sources, and living traditions from descendants, players might begin to make deeper philosophical connections. Educators could use this envisioned teaching-via-play approach to confront the traumatic past. The presentation format would encourage digressions into incoherence theory, perseverance studies, and Indigenous philosophies of matter and architecture. In the least, history gaming could be better centered on Nahua voices to diversify gamer experiences for the present. Digital games can take the lead in tackling other elements of Mexico's colonial legacies, too (Wood, 2020). Playing through iconoclasm might help game culture realize some aspects of how ritualized places remain in surprising ways (Aguilar-Moreno 2013; Gutiérrez 2012; Wake 2010, 2014).

Throughout this essay I have demonstrated the importance of place-identity against the backdrop of iconoclasm, real and digital. From the earliest encounters in *Aztec* (1982) to Amazon's mythologized online *New World*, the art and cultural heritage of the Americas continues to be consumed by developers and players with selective accuracy of places in mind. Whether violently blowing apart 2D temples or being immersed in their plundering, both versions keep Mesoamerican sacred spaces confined to a single colonial frame of reference. Even still, history-based gaming plays at accuracy to entice gamers, offering authentic Aztec temples to be burnt to nothingness with European colonialism in the *Age of Empires* series. By letting players wipe the digital slate clean, these experiences ignore the more interesting ways that people persisted, persevered, and reconstructed sacred places. In *Age of Empires* circles, this seems more and more likely. As explained above, the AoE series designers can create degrees of better repre-

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sentation, reacting to academic critique and pursuing cultural responsiveness and inclusive design (Dillon 2008, Age DE Team 2020). This is most evident in Anthony Brave's contributions as co-designer and consultant. Notably, gaming spaces such as *Yaopan* (2021) pull the player into a different perspective on Indigenous visions of the so-called Spanish Conquest. More consultantships with Nahua descendant community members will help, as seen in the argument above, but scholars, too, must better engage in design narratology. A crucial component in future commercial-academic enterprises ought to be the integration and amplification of the voices and concerns of descendants of source communities in digital gaming (LaPensée 2016).

The four decades separating *Aztec* (1982) and *New World* (2021) exposes the narrow vision of gamer encounters with sacred places "based" on Mesoamerica's colonial history. Leaps in graphical interfaces, aside, settings are hollow and meant to be plundered. Returning to *Yaopan* (2021)—a scholarly game meant to rethink the past—players play through scenes from the sixteenth-century *Lienzo de Tlaxcala*, owning Indigenous agency and heritage by recreating accurate artwork and stories at times. The player's greatest foe in *Yaopan*, frustratingly, is the precariously placed spikey cacti that crop up throughout the Mesoamerican settings. Playing out the conquest of Mexica places as a Nahua warrior woman or man, players learn about the complexities of relationships between "Indigenous conquistadors" and the Spaniards at the same time they leap pixelated spines and slash into Mexica Eagle Warriors. The more accurately painted *Huey Teocalli* sits quietly in the background, burning at times, but never collapsing. Avoiding cactus pricks, players do not leap too far from the same takeaways of *New World*, *Age of Empires*, and *Aztecs* as they leave Tenochtitlan's dramatic skyline behind and scroll off to digitally conquer elsewhere.

Deeper collaborations with Indigenous heritage groups and scholars can help to decenter the current flows of capital and pedagogy to benefit communities in need or transform the types of experiences in digital gaming. As play focuses on burning down, plundering or collapsing sacred temples, developers and scholars miss the chance to teach the complexities of place-identity, eth-

nogenesis and ways historical communities navigated colonialism by refashioning local history in built environments.



Figs. 18–19: 2D Places for Killing “Aztecs” in Bromio’s *Yaopan* (2021) and Datamost’s *Aztec* (1982); screen captures by author, 2022–2023.

Recently, Dawn Spring alerted scholars to the limiting returns of games designed with narrow questions in mind and expediency in outputs (2015: 217–18). How can we teach more of the living heritage of sacred places when developers ask the same conquest questions of gamers? Furthering Souvik Mukherjee’s point, meaningful engagement helps players “(re)frame” and break the “rules of the colonial game” by centering on alternative art histories and Indigenous architectures of places “always already” significant, just never the crux of the commercial game (Mukherjee 2016: 14). More accurate representations of historical places and people start with Indigenous-first or collaborative programming, exemplified by games such as *Honour Water*, whose Anishinaabe-derived methodology (“the good way of living”) approach illuminates how best to teach Indigenous and other players about precious resources

(LaPensée et al. 2018: 124–27). Additionally, the proof-of-concept game “The Burden on Our Back” (in development), by scholar Joshua Wood, is described as a Nahua-centered experience to conceptualize “space of (re)mediation” for living Nahua communities based on the legacies of colonialism and neo-colonialism (Wood 2020). Teaching with games is vital to an Indigenous sacred future (see curricular interventions of another variety in LaPensée 2019). But it also informs non-Native futures, and industry experts should not shy away from cross-cultural exchanges, nor should Indigenous designers, digital artists, and gamers shy from entanglements in the use of Indigenous heritage objects, structures and sites in gaming (LaPensée 2019: 80). Rather, playing with the places and architecture of the past via reactive and sensitive designs may also help communities reclaim their digital heritage, rather than others extending or exacerbating negative representations of a hollow past.

*Abstract:* Intricately concocted temples—seemingly historically accurate down to the pixel-flash across the gamer’s screen, as the player-conquistador re-creates the downfall of the so-called “Aztec Empire,” circa 1521, a keyboard at hand instead of a cutlass. Playing the Spanish Conquest has never been easier or more exciting for the victor. Today’s recreational sundering of Indigenous-American sacred spaces and cultural monuments repeats disturbing patterns in colonialism and cultural imperialism from the Early Modern past (Carpenter 2021; Ford 2016; Mukherjee 2017). What are the lessons gamers learn by reducing digitized Mesoamerican temples, such as the grand teocalli of Tenochtitlan, to rubble? This article explores sacred landscapes, archaeology, and art relating to acts of conquest and sixteenth-century Spanish invasion of Mesoamerica. This study of Mesoamerican sacred environments supports my interpretation that careless approaches to early-modern contexts and virtual geographies created by game designers reduce the presence of Mesoamerican place-identity. I highlight empire-building games based on historical events and situate gaming experiences, old and new, as interventions in sacred architecture. The study draws in ethnospatial considerations of settings and ornamentation to furthering the recent Game Studies critiques on cartographies, narratologies, and play mechanics, here focusing on the geo-spiritual components of playing out aspects of Mesoamerica’s encounters with Spanish military and cultural conflict (Lammes et al. 2018). I reveal the importance of place attachment, ethnohistory, and archaeology in making more meaningful experiences and argue that current art history-adjacent gaming agendas create fun and profit at the expense of iconic structures of Mexico’s heritage, such as the Postclassic single- and double-topped teocalli (temple-pyramids). The final thoughts call for increased inter-

ventions from scholars upon developer-player negative feedback loops that repurpose inaccurate mythos from historiography of the “Spiritual Conquest” paradigm.

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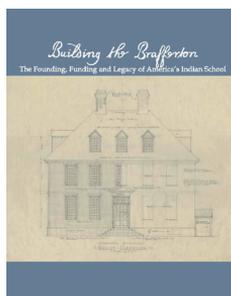
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## ***BUILDING THE BRAFFERTON: THE FOUNDING, FUNDING, AND LEGACY OF AMERICA'S INDIAN SCHOOL***

edited by Danielle Moretti-Langholtz and Buck Woodard  
(A Book Review)



During my years in Williamsburg, Virginia, the Brafferton School sat on the periphery of my mental landscape. As a construction history scholar, the visual symmetry of the College of William and Mary's historic campus piqued my interest. The Wren Building serves as the focal point of the campus, flanked by the Brafferton to the south and the President's House to the north. The careful siting

and scaling of these flanking buildings makes them appear of equal size, though the Brafferton is substantially larger. As an archaeologist at the Colonial Williamsburg Foundation, my colleagues excavated around and within the building in preparation for its second restoration as I cataloged the artifacts in the lab. Despite these connections to the Brafferton's history, my primary knowledge of the school was a ghost story I heard at some time and in some place now long forgotten: A boy, of unnoted tribal heritage, had been sent to the Brafferton as a pupil. Confined and constrained within the building, he snuck out in the middle of each night to run through the woods that surrounded the College. His outings were discovered, the windows of his room nailed shut, and the door locked at night. The boy subsequently died of a broken heart, away from his people

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and the woods that brought him solace. His ghost, so they say, can still be seen running across campus, seeking the woods.

*Building the Brafferton* is the culmination of collaboration among archaeologists, architectural historians, tribal members, curators, and students to restore the history of the Brafferton School. The interdisciplinary approach is an effective one, tracing social, cultural, and economic networks through the flow of cash and goods from the rural English countryside, through London as the metropole, and into the colonial capital of Virginia—but also from the wilds of the Virginia woods and the indigenous cultivation fields back through Williamsburg and to London in the form of pelts, furs, and tobacco. The authors also trace the flow of social capital through political, religious, cultural, and familial connections, creating a picture of colonial Virginia that is richly detailed and treats every individual discussed as an active agent in these networks, seeking benefits for both themselves as individuals and the networks they represent.

To make this process of reconstructing history a manageable one, the book is divided into three sections: the founding, the funding, and the legacy. “The Founding” focuses on the formation and role of English educational and religious doctrinal goals as an adjunct to colonialism. By necessity, this section focuses heavily on the Reverend James Blair, who leveraged his connections to Anglican leadership and Virginia’s leading families to secure a place for himself as an arbiter of education in a growing capitalist world system. Juxtaposed against the machinations of Blair is the political precarity of the Virginia Indian tribes that had been drawn into the same growing capitalist world system. Tributary relationships formed the core of the political bonds that colonists entered into with Virginia Indian tribes, creating hierarchical relationships of power that allowed the subordinated party to retain control of its own internal affairs. The Virginia Indian tribes that sent young men to the Brafferton were therefore using education to further their own political agendas, providing members of their tribes with the opportunity to become cross-culturally literate and relying on the potential future security that such literacy could bring.

“Funding” comprises the second section with a focus on the multiple income streams that commingled to support both the Brafferton School and the College of William and Mary. Though named for Brafferton Manor, the estate of the school’s English benefactor Robert Boyle, much of the schools’ funding depended on the loss of indigenous sovereignty and theft of indigenous resources. Taxes on exported tobacco, skins, and furs provided one funding stream, while at the same time destroying traditional indigenous subsistence activities and fostering a growing indigenous reliance on European manufactured goods and debt. The opening of the “College Lands,” two 10,000-acre plantations meant to provide agricultural products and income to the College, was predicated on the removal of those lands from indigenous control. Therefore, even as Brafferton students became versed in the ways and manners of their colonizers’ society, culture, and politics, the facility that allowed them to do so was maintained and operated at the cost of their own peoples.

The two strongest contributions to this section are Buck Woodward’s “Students of the Brafferton Indian School” and Ashley Atkin Spivey’s “Making Pottery and Constructing Community at Pamunkey During the Brafferton Era.” Woodward offers biographies of seven of the approximately 125 indigenous pupils who attended the Brafferton School between 1702 and 1778, highlighting the roles these individuals filled in both their home cultures and in the colonist cultures they occupied. Though brief, these biographies offer the reader rich, three-dimensional portraits of these men and the choices they made as they navigated political turmoil, religious tensions, and personal choices. Spivey’s essay brings women into the conversation through colonoware, low-fired, locally produced, hand-built earthenware that dates from the 17th to the 19th centuries in the eastern United States. Pamunkey women produced the ubiquitous pottery for home use and eventually for the market economy. While the production of colonoware for public consumption was necessary for the tribe’s economic survival, the Pamunkey view the process of pottery making as an expression of their relationship to landscapes which they have inhabited for centuries and physical manifestations of their identity. Pamunkey ceramics function as extensions

of the women who made them, creating an enduring connection to the community, even when the object itself resides outside it.

The third section, “Legacy,” examines the significance of the Brafferton to the post-colonial history of the College of William and Mary and to contemporary indigenous communities. Much of its focus rests on the twentieth-century restoration of the building as part of the first stages of the restoration of Williamsburg, Virginia, to its colonial appearance. Mark Kostro and Alexandra Martin explore the presence of knapped glass tools recovered during Brafferton School excavations, and the active materialization of indigenous identity through mnemonic practices that create and maintain community bonds. Danielle Moretti-Langholtz’s “The Brafferton Indian School: In Memory and Legacy” examines how the Brafferton became coded in space and memory: the erasure of the centrality of indigenous peoples to the College of William and Mary’s founding finances, how the Brafferton was connected to structures of power and wealth, and how the American Revolution and post-revolutionary period reframed indigenous and Anglo-American relationships to enable westward expansion. Taken collectively, this volume reconstructs the history of the Brafferton School by acknowledging those historical ruptures and constructing new memory bridges to address what has been forgotten and overlooked in the past two centuries.

*Building the Brafferton* undertakes the herculean tasks of recovering a forgotten history and centering the indigenous experiences of a colonial place and power structure. Moreover, it succeeds at these tasks remarkably well, recognizing the conflicting choices that historical actors made in the hopes of securing the best outcome for themselves or for their people, whether indigenous or colonizer. The editors recognize modern indigenous voices as well, including authors and scholars of Virginia Indian heritage among the contributors and recognizing the contributions of the Brafferton Legacy Group, which is made up of members of tribes known to have sent scholars to the Brafferton School.

The acknowledgement of modern indigenous experiences, however, is the one area in which the text is lacking. There are several references to the place the Brafferton School occupies in the histories of these Virginia Indian tribes, but no direct voice from among

those tribes to provide the reader insight to what that place is. Given that *Building the Brafferton* grew from an exhibit presented at the Muscarelle Museum of Art at the College of William and Mary and several events took place during the excavation and restoration of the Brafferton and during the exhibit, it seems likely that this knowledge was shared through venues other than a printed text. For example, the exhibit included pieces by Pamunkey, Eastern Band of Cherokee, Wyandot, and Nottoway artists, each of which reflects on the ways in which the histories of colonizers and their institutions are intertwined with those of indigenous peoples. To a reader who could not attend the events or see the exhibit, this offers an intriguing glimpse of how modern indigenous communities might recollect places like the Brafferton, but leaves the feeling that that much more to the subject than is captured on the page. In the larger context of the book, this seems like a moment of potential historical rupture, where something worth being preserved stands at the risk of being lost. That very possibility, however, underscores Moretti-Lanholtz's observation that memory is constructed and reconstructed by the processes of forgetting and remembering, and we continue to be active participants in those processes.

Those processes of forgetting reduced the experiences of the Brafferton scholars to the ghost of a indigenous boy, running to the woods. Those processes of remembering have put names, faces, families, and lives to the Brafferton scholars, rendering Robert Scholar, Thomas Step, Charles Murphy, John Montour, John Nettles, Robert Mush, and Henry Bawbee as ghosts no more.

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*Sacred Spaces  
In North America*

RIAS VOL. 16, SPRING-SUMMER Nº 1/2023



## **LACROSSE—IT'S A WAY OF LIFE**

dir. Lívía Šavelková, Tomáš Petrůň and Milan Durňak

## **GLOBAL LACROSSE VILLAGE/**

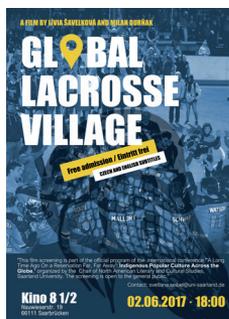
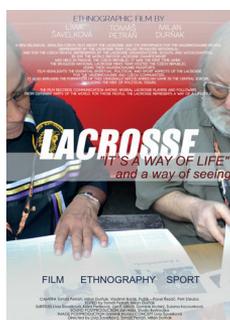
## **LAKROSOVÁ VESNICE**

dir. Lívía Šavelková and Milan Durňak

## **ON THE SHORE/NA BŘEHU**

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(Film Reviews)



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Lacrosse, which is originally a game played by the Haudenosaunee (or Iroquois League) has been popular mostly in Canada and the United States; however, it has also spread globally. These three documentaries portray the sport both in the Czech Republic and on an international arena. Produced in both Czech and English, all three films provide translations through subtitles. The first two documentaries, *Lacrosse—It's a Way of Life* and *Global Lacrosse Village* focus on international lacrosse events held in the Czech Republic (in 2011 and 2015), while *On the Shore* follows the Czech national lacrosse team to the 2019 World Indoor Lacrosse Championship (WILC) in British Columbia, Canada. As such, although they center on different

cultural and political aspects of the transnational encounters that take place during the tournaments, they also provide a chronicle of the Czech lacrosse community that spans almost a decade. They may thus be seen as three parts of a documentary series.

*Lacrosse—It's a Way of Life* documents the 2011 World Indoor Lacrosse Championship which was held in Prague, Czechia. Although international lacrosse tournaments had taken place in Czechia before, this was the first time that the Iroquois Nationals lacrosse men's team visited the country. As lacrosse originated in their culture, the presence of the Iroquois Nationals at the tournament meant a great deal to the Czech lacrosse community. The film focuses on this cross-cultural encounter, the different preconceptions that the two groups had of each other as Native Americans and Eastern Europeans (or "exotic others," see Šavelková 2017) and on the connections built and understandings created during the course of the Championship. From my perspective, this is the most captivating aspect of the film. The documentary also attempts to explain the meaning of lacrosse to the two groups. For the Haudenosaunee (which comprise the Onondaga, Mohawk, Seneca, Oneida, Cayuga and Tuscarora Nations) the game is a gift from the Creator, a medicine, and thus holds deep spiritual value. For the Czech community, lacrosse has its roots in the scouting and woodcrafting organizations of the late 1970s. The scouts and woodcrafters read about it in the limited sources available to them under Communist censorship, and were drawn to it as a Native American game. They made their own wooden lacrosse sticks and created a Czech version of the game, only later switching to the international rules of box lacrosse. As such, lacrosse for the Czechs may be seen in a way as a form of escapism from the Communist reality of the time. This stands in contrast to how the game was appropriated by settler societies in Canada and the US. There are more political issues touched upon in the documentary, including the fact that the Iroquois Nationals team were able to enter the Czech Republic on their Haudenosaunee passports, which is an assertion of their sovereignty. Šavelková (2017) has also written about the process of cross-cultural filmmaking based on this documentary and the different ethical dilemmas and editing choices the creators were faced with, offering an engaging insight

for scholars interested in visual anthropology and the representation of Indigenous Peoples in Europe, particularly in the Eastern European context.

*Global Lacrosse Village* takes its viewers to the Czech town of Radotín, where the Aleš Hřebeský Memorial (AHM), which is considered the most prestigious box-lacrosse event in Europe, has been taking place annually since 1994 to commemorate a local lacrosse player who died tragically the year before. In 2001, the tournament hosted international participants for the first time and has been growing in number and rank ever since, welcoming teams not just from the US, Canada, and Haudenosaunee lands, but also countries such as Turkey, Scotland, and Finland. It has become a truly global event, hence, the title of the film. The documentary tells the story of the development of lacrosse in the Czech Republic and the growing popularity of the sport which has made the Czech team the box-lacrosse leader in Europe and a strong competitor against teams from North America. It also depicts the unique character of the tournament in Radotín, with various participants emphasizing its communality, camaraderie, friendships made, and attractions organized, such as the roasting of a pig in the evening. The various international participants also talk about the development of lacrosse in their home countries, which to my surprise, has largely become popular thanks to its portrayal in the 1999 movie *American Pie*. Last, the movie shows how lacrosse has developed into a truly transnational sport, with various Haudenosaunee and non-Indigenous US and Canadian players and coaches supporting and working for different teams around the world. The film is accompanied by a book written by Šavelková in Czech, titled *Stvořitelova hra na cestě světem: Identita Irokézů v procesu revitalizace a globalizace* [The Creator's game on its way throughout the world], which provides a more thorough historical context of the Haudenosaunee game (and its stick and ball game equivalents in other Indigenous communities in North America), as well as a broader analysis of the phenomenon of the globalization of lacrosse.

The last documentary created by Šavelková and Durňak, *On the Shore*, shows an up-close portrait of the Czech national lacrosse team during the World Indoor Lacrosse Championships

in Langley, British Columbia in 2019. The filmmakers follow the day-to-day lives of the team over the course of three weeks, documenting the impact of the matches on the team's mental and physical health. The film also shows the generational change within the team, with members who are both middle-aged and very young representing the country, and the formation of a collective identity of the group. Interestingly, three Canadian and US players of Czech origin are also included in the national team. Furthermore, it points to the fact that the American and Canadian teams are part of national leagues, which provide funding for the players and coaches, whereas European teams are not, and therefore rely purely on the volunteer engagement and work of players, coaches and organizers. Of these three films, this one focuses on the game itself and the emotions accompanying it the most. It is also the most intimate portrait of the three.

From an anthropological or trans-cultural studies perspective, perhaps the first two documentaries are the most interesting ones, as they focus more on the cultural encounters that took place between the Haudenosaunee and Czech lacrosse players in Prague, and between players from the various international teams at the tournament in Radotín, as well as showcasing the growing popularity of the sport worldwide. Perhaps though, the fact that *On the Shore* does not focus on these issues as much, at least partially reflects the fact that both the Czech lacrosse players, as well as the movies' creators themselves were no longer as preoccupied with these issues themselves, after almost a decade since the first championship in Prague, and playing in (and witnessing) international lacrosse tournaments. Instead, they centered more on the team, its struggles, and the intergenerational shift within it, as the sport itself has been present in the Czech Republic for a few decades now.

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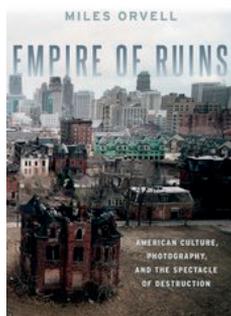
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# **EMPIRE OF RUINS: AMERICAN CULTURE, PHOTOGRAPHY, AND THE SPECTACLE OF DESTRUCTION**

by Miles Orvell  
(A Book Review)



In his stellar *Empire of Ruins: American Culture, Photography, and the Spectacle of Destruction* (2021), Miles Orvell invites his readers on a striking exploratory journey, deep through “ruin time” and squarely into “ruin space,” in visual and literary representations. His aim is to understand nothing less than what ruins are and what cultural history thinks of them.

Found in urban environments, apocalyptic landscapes, and scenes of war and nuclear waste, they symbolize both the passage of time and “how we look at ruins” (ix). As “spectacles of destruction” (1), according to Orvell, their meaning is determined by the cultural beliefs and ideologies prevalent at a specific moment in time. Written against the backdrop of the contemporary fascination with aesthetic ruination, in everyday life as well as cultural studies (as it is captured in the handle “ruin porn”), Orvell presents his readers with an equally careful and compelling study of ruination as a condition of modern life. Thereby, he never shies away from questioning the ethics and moral responses that must accompany any study of ruins whose photogeneity frequently belies their disastrous causes and debilitating effects. Orvell puts it rather succinctly when he writes, “in ruins begin responsibilities” (x). This is especially

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true when it comes to the “destructive sublime,” which he discovers in modern ruin photography and “in which the spectacle of ruin and waste is foremost and is often the consequence of technology” (14).

Fittingly, Orvell’s study is constructed in the form of a triptych, mirroring Thomas Cole’s epic five-part series of paintings about the rise and fall of great empires Orvell derives the title of his study from: *The Course of Empire*. Cole’s third installment of the Capitol modeled on the symbolism of classical Roman architecture—*The Consummation of Empire*, that is “an Empire at the crest of its fortunes” (209)—is preceded by two paintings that depict the rise of civilization and succeeded by two that take ruins in decline as their subject. Orvell’s tripartite structure reveals his desire for formal coherence, as well as the possibilities for juxtaposition that this form offers, both in terms of times and media. Not incidentally, Orvell’s photographic examples are often composites that tell a story either within one or multiple frames, such as in Camilo José Vergara’s time-lapse chronophotographs of industrial ruins that Orvell reads as “a way to see the larger forces of global economies that are altering urban ecology and space [...] depicting the history of the late twentieth century as a process of abandonment without new growth, death without transfiguration” (87).

Tracing the various conceptualizations of ruins more or less chronologically, Orvell begins his journey in “Part I: The Romance of Ruins” from the nineteenth century on, which considered ruins as visible remnants of a glorious past (modeled on ancient Athens and Rome in particular), and hinted at an equally promising future. “Part II: Modern Times” then moves deftly through the twentieth century, marked by ruins indicting the present; whereas in “Part III: The World in Ruins,” Orvell lets the twentieth century slide into the twenty-first, where ruins are read as a symptom of a future that is difficult to both take in and visualize. His succinct preface puts this trajectory in a nutshell: “My purpose is to explain a pattern that has been largely concealed in previous discussions of ruins—the progression from a nineteenth-century quest for ancient ruins as a sign of cultural prestige to the twentieth century’s acceptance of contemporary ruins as a necessary concomitant

of progress, to the twenty-first-century realization that we have created a world of ruin that is all but inescapable" (x).

Ruins, according to Orvell, are not only buildings and cities that have fallen into disrepair through the force of time, often ending up overgrown and thus repossessed by nature, but also the polluted landscapes of toxic waste that humans are responsible for. Yet Orvell's work distinguishes itself by not stopping at charting "the course of empire" (216) in a cohesive but never too neat chronicle of various forms of ruination. Creatively looking backward and forward in history, considering time as "ruin time" itself, he rather offers retrospections as well as projections to trace larger conceptual lines while at the same time complicating them throughout. Hereby, his most important medium is photography, which, like ruins, mirrored the past in the nineteenth century and moves towards depicting the present in the twenty-first, in the way it captures immediacy. At the same time, Orvell keeps juxtaposing the analysis of photographic images with readings of architecture, material culture, fiction, installation art, and film, letting all those media illuminate each other and proving himself, like in his past books (including *The Death and Life of Main Street: Small Towns in American Memory, Space, and Community* from 2014, or his now classic *The Real Thing: Imitation and Authenticity in American Culture, 1880-1940* from 1989), a superb reader of the exchanges and counterpoints in the rich cultural history of intermedial interrelations.

Over the course of his eight chapters, Orvell pieces together more and less familiar narratives of cultural history (such as the ruination in the wake of 9/11 vs. the mound ruins of the "Mound Builders," a prehistoric civilization in North America), often within the same chapter: juxtaposing, for instance, mushroom cloud photographs with lesser-known images of bomb craters left in the Southwestern desert by underground testing. The evidence he draws on to advance his clear-cut argumentation is wide-ranging and compelling without fail. "Part I: The Romance of Ruins" develops a theory of ruins as part of a past that demonstrates the futility of human construction, "inflected with a nostalgia for the utopian possibility that the veiled past represents" (17). Accordingly, Chapter 1, "In Search of History," transports the reader

to the nineteenth-century quest for ruins in Europe and the Americas, drawing upon both the Mayan and Aztec cultures in Mexico as well as the American Mound Cultures, whose perceived authenticity was utilized to “confer authority on American culture” (17). Driven by the idea of a “romance of ruins” (40), Orvell argues, the discovery of the Mayan and Mound remains demonstrates “how deep the need for ruins has been for two hundred years” (42). Chapter 2, “Pueblo Utopias,” builds on the romantic—and romanticized—longing for ruins in America by turning to the stone remains of pueblo civilizations in the Southwest. In photographs of the Cliff Dwellers’ ruins by the likes of William Henry Jackson and Laura Gilpin, complemented by the literature of Southwestern modernist writers such as Willa Cather, the Southwest serves as “strong ground for a declaration of cultural independence from Europe based on the unique legacy of North America’s Native Americans”—willfully providing, as Orvell points out, “a sanitized romantic past that was free from the recent history of Indian wars” (49).

“Part II: Modern Times” theorizes the ruins of modernity, in the wake of World War I and II, as human-made and immediate symbols of the twentieth century. Given the “colossal production of waste” (74) and the state of collapse always present in the face of nuclear threat, modern ruins inhere “the accepted condition of contemporary civilization” (73). Chapter 3, “Things Fall Apart,” examines documentary photography of urban disintegration set in Detroit, Philadelphia, and elsewhere in a heavily industrialized America to that end. Photographs by Vincent D. Feldman, Andrew Moore, and Camilo José Vergara show buildings and scenes whose decay and vacancy is already priced into their construction, up to a point where they “memorializ[e] the process of mass production itself, with its outmoded factories and models of efficiency, now obsolete” (80) and come to stand as symbols not of a failed but rather an overly successful capitalism. Chapter 4, “Creative Destruction and Urban Space,” takes into view demolition photography, wherein the intentional tearing down of iconic buildings such as Penn Station in New York City and the implosion of an urban neighborhood like the Pruitt-Igoe housing project in St. Louis is televised for a live audience and thereby become “domesticated

for popular consumption and naturalized as an essential element of progress" (103). Consequently, an artist like Gordon Matta-Clark cuts holes in existing buildings to create new vistas. The ruins left by the 2001 terrorist attacks on the Twin Towers, captured through 9/11 narrative photography by individual photographers and amateur collectives alike, lies at the heart of Chapter 5, "Destroying Modernity: The World Trade Center." Photographs by James Nachtwey and Joel Meyerowitz, Orvell concedes here, simultaneously bear witness and invite voyeurism in the long-standing conundrum between aesthetics and ethics that necessarily creates distance between the viewers and what they are looking at, making "a demand on us to resist that spectacle" (144).

In "Part III: The World in Ruins," Orvell develops his third theory of ruins out of Walter Benjamin's "angel of history," who has his face turned towards the past while being propelled into the future. Now, in the latter half of the twentieth and into the twenty-first century, ruins "represent the conditions of humanity more generally and are part of the future as well as our past and present" (18). Considering ruins as representative of one endless catastrophe, Chapter 6, "Atomic War and the Destructive Sublime," analyzes atomic bomb photography and nuclear landscapes as well as their aftermaths in the popular imagination (Hollywood films like *On the Beach* and *Planet of the Apes*), which are in fact those media that have familiarized us with the kind of apocalyptic scenes that defy understanding in the first place. Chapter 7, "Framing the Post-modern Wasteland," focuses on industrial landscape and toxic waste photography by David T. Hanson and Edward Burtynsky to show the "terrifying sublime" (183) that is the land's beauty, dread, and vulnerability in a globalized context. Consequently, Chapter 8, "Picturing Climate Change: 'It's the Apocalypse,'" moves to climate change photography and popular films that document the ongoing destruction of the ecosphere and try to envision post-apocalyptic life in a landscape of future ruins. In the Conclusion, "Looking Back on Tomorrow: The Course of Empire," Orvell lets Benjamin's angel spin both forward and backward, finally collapsing the historical timeline of ruination by thinking about present ruins in the wake of weather extremes as they stand at the base of cli-fi disaster movies, looking simultaneously to the past and into the future,

especially in moments of revolutionary change. Inserting our contemporary moment within a historical sequence of such revolutionary changes, Orvell writes: “Our own moment, as we enter the third decade of the twenty-first century, compels us to assess our time as a moment of revolutionary change, when the sustainability of our cities, the viability of our landscapes, and the future of the planet itself are all at stake, as we contemplate the effects of the long twentieth-century romance with technology and global capitalism” (20)—ultimately providing us with both his rationale for writing *Empire of Ruins* and the ethical stakes in which his inquiry is grounded.

Overall, I have rarely come across a scholarly monograph that is as lucidly written and generous to its reader as Orvell’s work. In its elegant prose, it is a sheer pleasure to follow along the arguments he advances, while never receding from complex answers. What also makes the volume such a joy to peruse is his openness to engage in a conversation that reaches far beyond the book, by asking himself questions that he then explicitly asks his reader to ponder. Always intriguing, they are surely open-ended enough to become material for further studies on, more specifically, the representation of ruins, and, more generally, the documentary vs. the aesthetic modes and the mediation of disaster. Orvell’s book speaks to the veritable interest in ruins, wastelands, and apocalyptic scenarios that has evolved in our age of global wars and turmoil, and continues to increase with the progression of global warming and climate change. The book should speak to all scholars interested in such equally prescient and pressing matter, to scholars of cultural history, eco-criticism, and photography—really anyone interested in the medium and practice of photography, this “chronicler of the dream of America [that] produces the visual record of its reality” (216) and “chief means by which Americans saw the force of time and change in the material culture that surrounded their lives—and that remains so to the present day” (ix), as well as its interrelated media. For “images of Hurricanes Katrina and Sandy, of wildfires sweeping over vast areas of the West, of irreversibly melting glaciers, of landscapes devastated by toxic waste, have registered not only as pictures of the present but as images of the future, and they don’t bode well for America—or for planet

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Earth” (216), as Orvell so insightfully concludes in one of his signature planetary moves.

Orvell would not be Orvell though if he did not provide a cautiously optimistic outlook, wondering whether ruins might not also, like in the past, provide an incentive for restoration: “The question is whether we can still retrieve the materials, along with the necessary wisdom, to start again” (216). I, for one, am confident that scholars—and the general interested public, for the book is admirable in its public appeal as well—will feel stimulated to take up Orvell’s materials and arguments in order to continue to begin anew, despite and especially in the face of the impending disasters that might yet lie ahead. While his style is smooth, Orvell is well aware that his is not—and should not be—the final word on all matters relating to ruin, spectacle, and disaster. Rather, it is his welcoming invitation to scholarly discussion that proposes to take his arguments further into an as of yet unknown future, build on them, and revise them according to changing meanings of catastrophic events, the progressive stages of ruination of our planet, and the persistent conundrum of ruins as a “space between beauty and—given the subject matter—the unsettling dread of destruction” (13). Because, for Orvell, both creative and political potential can be found in the kind of aesthetic detachment that is often employed when we observe scenes of destruction.

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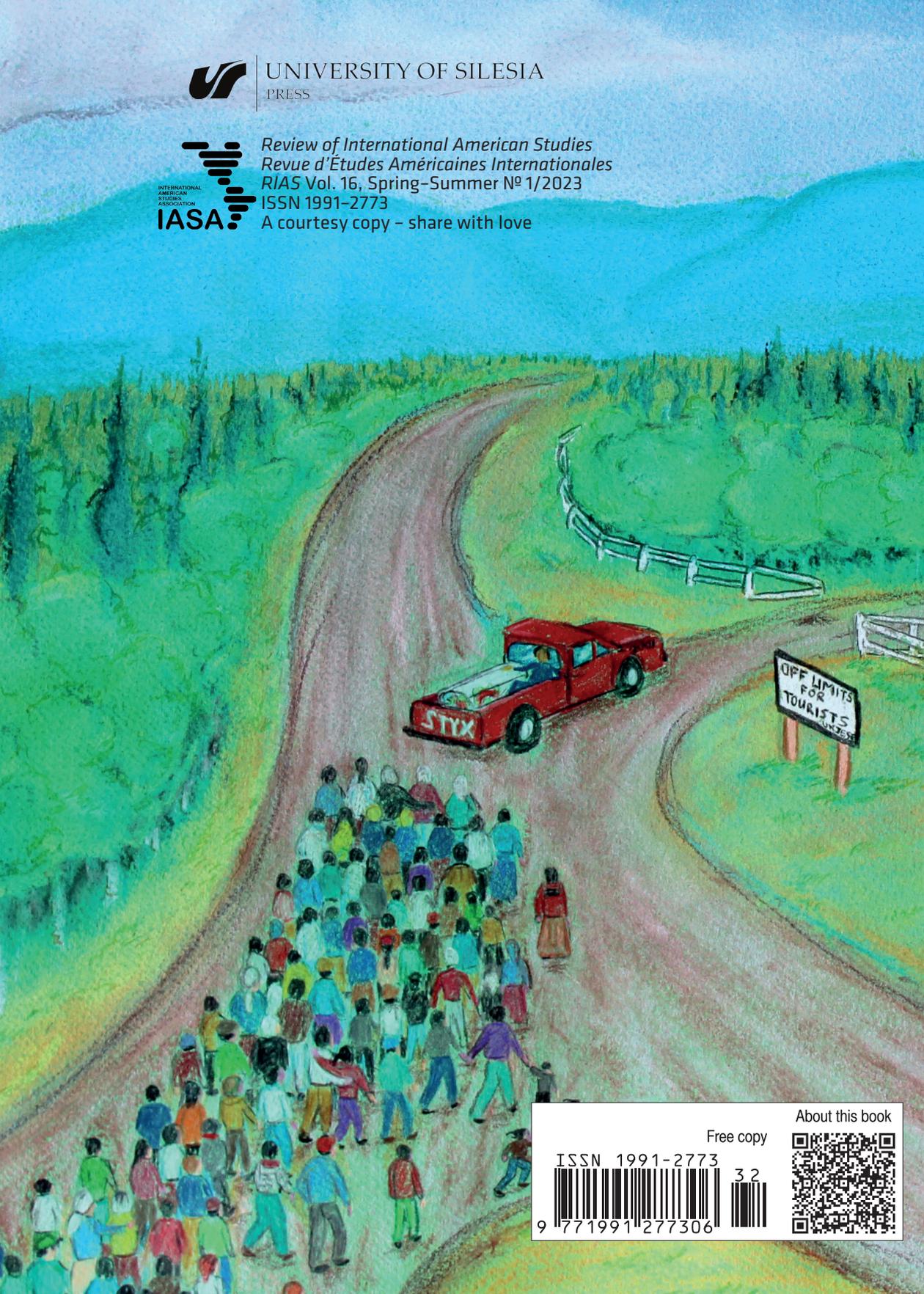




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