The Why Of It:
On History, Memory, and Presence

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Westward Expansion: A New History
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Why Do We Need A New History of Westward Expansion?

Two radically different views of the history: John Gasts’s *American Progress* (1872) and Lone Dog’s (Yanktonai Nakota) Winter Count, recording the years 1800-1871. One faces West; the other faces East. One writes Native peoples “out of history” and as destined to vanish. The other writes Native people “into history” and as intent on surviving. One assumes an inevitable erasure of Indigenous people devoid of violence; the other tells stories of persistence amidst rupture, chaos, disease, diplomacy, war, violence, and adaptation. One helps us to understand ongoing Indigenous presence; the other does not.
On Settler Memory and Settler Colonialism

• The history that most students encounter continues to be one informed by “settler memory” akin to “American Progress”
  • Where did you learn what you know about American Indians and American Indian history?
  • Where do you think your teachers received their knowledge?
  • On what sources do you think this knowledge rests?

• Why this matters?
  • Knowledge is situated/situational
  • History has a history and is neither “innocent” nor “objective”
    • Not conspiratorial but encultured, contextual, positional, and “emplotted in particular ways”
    • Inseparable from the times and the author/s
    • What we think we know about the past powerfully shapes the present and the future

• What is settler colonialism?
  • Patrick Wolfe
    • a structure rather than an event
    • destroy to replace
    • logic of elimination
The Myths and Expectations of Settler Colonialism Manifested

- James Fenimore Cooper’s *Last of the Mohicans* (1826)
- John Mix Stanley, *Last of Their Race* (1857)
- John Gast’s *American Progress* (1872)
- Buffalo Bill’s Wild West (1883)
- Ivory Soap Advertisement (1884)
- Edward Curtis, “Vanishing Race” (1904)
- Cyrus Dallin, “Appeal to the Great Spirit” (1909)
- James Earle Fraser, “End of the Trail” (1915)
• Frederick Jackson Turner (1861-1932)

• “The Significance of the Frontier in American History” (1893)
  - Professor at Wisconsin and Harvard
  - Frontier, defined as “meeting point between savagery and civilization,” as source of unique “American” character
  - 400 years after Columbus, it had “closed”
  - So, too, had Indian history
The Master Narrative: An Unacknowledged Inheritance

• “... a single story, a narrative of nation building and unending progress that united the diverse participants in the country’s past in a single American ‘experience.’ It was a national success story, celebrating the human triumphs made possible in a society based on the principles of liberty and equality. American history tended to ignore or dismiss people whose experiences and interpretation of the past did not conform to the master narrative.”
  • Colin Calloway, *First Peoples*, 2-3.

• History as a “weapon of conquest.”
  • Paul Chaat Smith and Ann McMullen, NMAI
How To Decolonize The History Of “Westward Expansion?”

- Acknowledge Indigenous land and presence in the present
- Tell Indigenous-centered stories using Native sources and ways of knowing
- Foreground Indigenous creativity, imagination, and survival rather than defeat and disappearance
- Communicate that the “colonial period” is not over
- Refuse to accept a simple “flipping of the script”
What If We Don’t?
On Super Bowl Sunday

• “All that can save you now is your confrontation with your own history …which is not your past, but your present. …[Y]our history has led you to this moment, and you can only begin to change yourself by looking at what you are doing in the name of your history. . . .” James Baldwin, 1968

• Vincent Schilling, “How the Kansas City Chiefs Got Their Name”

• Bruce Barcott, “The Real Story of the 49ers”

• Vincent Schilling, “The Genocide Bowl (or what most people call Super Bowl LIV)”