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NATIVE AMERICAN HISTORY, COMPARATIVE GENOCIDE AND THE HOLOCAUST: HISTORIOGRAPHY, DEBATE AND CRITICAL ANALYSIS

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NATIVE AMERICAN HISTORY, COMPARATIVE GENOCIDE AND THE HOLOCAUST:
HISTORIOGRAPHY, DEBATE AND CRITICAL ANALYSIS

By

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A Thesis

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The Graduate College at the University of Nebraska
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Major: History

Under the Supervision of Professor John R. Wunder

Lincoln, Nebraska

May, 2006

NATIVE AMERICAN HISTORY, COMPARATIVE GENOCIDE AND THE HOLOCAUST:
HISTORIOGRAPHY, DEBATE AND CRITICAL ANALYSIS

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University of Nebraska, 2006

Adviser: John R. Wunder

This study explores the complex issues surrounding comparative genocide studies and how Native American history relates to this field. Historical contexts for Native American historiography, particularly the scholarship of Vine Deloria, Jr., are examined. In addition, the manifestation of some problematic trends in the field is detailed through the mordant debate between scholars of native America and the Jewish Holocaust. Arguments over Holocaust uniqueness and how the depopulation of Native America should be classified typifies how certain aspects of comparative genocide studies have a propensity for subjectively motivated and biased methodology. Finally, a case study using the historiography of the 1864 Sand Creek Massacre of Cheyennes and Araphahoes in southeastern Colorado by the Colorado Militia helps illustrate the difficulties in producing objective research on such morally-charged historical events. By examining these issues, the historiography of Native American genocide studies are both chronicled and critiqued.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

How this thesis came to be deserves some explanation before proper thanks can be made. All things are better understood in their proper historical context.

My interest in history began in the 8th grade as my social studies class studied the Jewish Holocaust. From that point, my intellectual interests strayed significantly. With absolutely no intention of becoming a student of American history, my interest was peaked during my undergraduate coursework by the topic of the Sand Creek Massacre. Though somewhat begrudgingly at first, I found the history of the American West and Native America an increasingly intriguing avenue for my academic foci. As my graduate coursework simultaneously drew my attention to Native American history and the Holocaust, the present topic of inquiry seemed a perfect fit. As the Holocaust and Sand Creek Massacre were the topics that shaped my initial interest in history and subsequent focus on the American West, this thesis seems to have been long in the making. With this in mind, there are many people who deserve my thanks.

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On an individual note, I would also like to thank the many friends I have made among the history graduate students. Although many have tried to bribe or extort their names into these acknowledgments, in hopes of maintaining my integrity and dignity, a simply thank you to all will have to suffice.

Last, I offer my deepest gratitude to my family. First, thanks to my parents for forcing me to take my education seriously as I was growing up. Though not always welcomed at the time, their constant prodding and encouragement benefited me more than they realize. Second, I would like to thank my sister for her relentless teasing as we grew up, and later, for offering me a place to stay and a lasting source of friendship. Third, I thank my extended family for their continual support and my in-laws for allowing me to steal away their daughter and take her away from home to Nebraska. Most of all, I thank my wife, Julianne. Thank you for your support, confidence, constant source of distraction and repose, and most of all your love. Any accomplishments that come out of my life would prove so very meaningless without you as a part of them.

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AN INTRODUCTION TO GENOCIDE STUDIES AND COMPARATIVE COMMENTARY

Tragedy is an inescapable undertone in North American history. The word inescapable is appropriate because it is truly impossible to ignore or disregard the inherent sorrow and loss that accompanies so many historical events in the continent's past. For every step forward of Euro-American gain and triumph, there was a mirrored reaction of regress and loss by the indigenous inhabitants of North America. America's history of cultural achievements and geographic expansion must be tempered by the constant reminder of the often unseen or outright ignored costs it exacted upon Native Americans. This dichotomy is inescapable.

Euro-American contact led to the near-absolute decimation of indigenous populations, a disastrous alteration of culture and a permanent change to their physical world. For most individual Natives, this change came in the form of death; for others, disease; and for those who survived, the imposition of a foreign culture, will and identity. To speak in such terms can be dangerous as it often relegates Native populations to the status of mere objects that were acted upon, constricting them in a straightjacket of victimization, offering them no voice and denying them agency within their own history. Historian Patricia Limerick has warned against histories that portray "Indian as victims, passive people who stood frozen in place as a great wave of white expansion crashed down on them and left them broken and shattered."¹ However, even with this consideration in mind, one cannot escape the overarching misfortune which befell Native

¹ Patricia Limerick, *Something in the Soil: Legacies and Reckonings in the New West* (New York: W.W. Norton and Company, 2000), 61.

America. Any fair study of the American West must acknowledge and understand both sides of this dichotomy: the triumphant and the tragic.

There are various worthy reasons for studying Native American history. Rectifying inaccuracies of past accounts, building awareness of one's ancestors, or simply increasing and disseminating knowledge are important. With these motives acknowledged, one with a more global perspective and very urgent agenda remains: comparative genocide studies. Nearly everywhere in world history there are examples of atrocities, massacres, and genocides that merit careful study and understanding inasmuch that like events may be prevented in the future. As explained by historian Israel Charny, this field of study seeks to "demonstrate that man's genocidal destructiveness can be seen as a process to be studied, charted, and managed correctively." He continued, "If ever we are to curtail holocausts of human life, we must understand the cancers we are fighting."² American West history clearly contains many examples of the destructive tendencies of human nature that typify the cancers of which Charny speaks.

As a field, genocide studies includes scholarship from nearly all corners of the globe and from diverse eras of history. The events in American West and Native American history represent only a small, yet promising portion of this field of study. A peculiarity of genocide studies is the controversy over what academic research should

² Israel Charny, *How Can We Commit the Unthinkable? Genocide: The Human Cancer* (Boulder, Colorado: Westview Press, 1982), 5. Jack Porter suggested an extensive array of sociological lessons which may be learned from the study of genocide as well. He includes "the process of war and colonialism, the experience of death and extreme deprivation, the meaning of survival and resistance and the very nature of society itself," as tangential subjects that may profit from the study of genocide. See Jack Nusan Porter, "Introduction: What is Genocide? Notes Toward a Definition," in Jack Nusan Porter, ed., *Genocide and Human Rights: A Global Anthology* (Washington D.C.: University Press of America, 1982), 4.

even be classified within in the field. Though the term *genocide* is a creation of the twentieth century, its historical occurrence is not. First used by Polish Jurist Raphael Lemkin in 1944, genocide was defined as “a coordinated plan of different actions aiming at the destruction of essential foundations of the life of national groups, with the aim of annihilating the groups themselves.”³ This definition was later adopted in modified form by the United Nations in 1948. Written in direct response to the Jewish Holocaust of World War II, Lemkin’s definition of genocide as a concept seems innocuous enough. However, in the decades to follow, various scholars have presented other historical and even contemporary examples of genocide and a fierce debate over the very definition of genocide has surfaced. Was the Holocaust the only true genocide? Should a comparative field of genocide studies even exist? Should all potential examples of genocide simply be labeled as mass murder and analyzed as such? The very field is based on a complex set of such debates and these discussions pervade nearly all the field’s literature.

DEFINING GENOCIDE

The result has been the need for most works in the field to include introductory remarks on their definition of genocide. Definitions have ranged from the ultra-inclusive which give attention to a wide variety of historical events as genocide to the highly exclusive which narrow the field to singular examples of genocide. While a more detailed analysis of the definitions debate between scholars of Native American history and the Holocaust will be included elsewhere, a sampling of some proposed definitions here will help present the field of genocide studies as a whole. More detailed

³ Raphael Lemkin, *Axis Rule in Occupied Europe* (Washington, D.C.: Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 1944), 79.

explanations of the arguments behind these definitions will likewise be discussed elsewhere. Some of the most exclusive definitions of genocide have been presented by scholars who advocate the uniqueness of the Holocaust. Steven Katz defined genocide as “the actualization of intent, however successfully carried out, to murder in its totality any national, ethnic, racial, religious, political, social, gender or economic group, as these groups are defined by the perpetrator, by whatever means.”⁴ This definition, hinging upon the concept of genocidal *intent* to annihilate an entire group completely and the physical enactment of such intent largely marginalizes many examples that other scholars present as possible genocides. According to Katz, tyranny, cruelty and even wholesale mass murder, regardless of how many millions suffer or are killed, are not necessarily tantamount to genocide.⁵

At the other extreme, some have used the term genocide to describe everything from birth control and abortion to race-mixing and slavery.⁶ Some scholars of Native American history have claimed that the sheer number of deaths, whether caused by direct murder, disease or other secondary causes of colonialism, equates genocide.⁷ Clearly,

⁴ Steven T. Katz, *Volume 1: The Holocaust in Historical Context* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1994), 131.

⁵ See *Ibid.*, 135-36.

⁶ See Jack Nusan Porter, “Introduction: What is Genocide? Notes Toward a Definition,” 10-11. Porter here cites numerous examples of the misuse of the term genocide.

⁷ See Lenore A. Stiffarm and Phil Lane Jr., “Demography of Native North America: A Question of American Indian Survival,” in M. Annette Jaimes, ed., *The State of Native America: Genocide, Colonization and Resistance* (Boston: South End Press, 1992); and David E. Stannard, “Uniqueness as Denial: The Politics of Genocide Scholarship,” in Alan S. Rosenbaum, ed., *Is the Holocaust Unique?: Perspectives on Comparative Genocide* (Boulder, Colorado: Westview Press, 1996).

these examples represent dissatisfaction with the narrow definitions of genocide as presented by Katz. In an attempt to bridge the gap between those who use genocide too liberally and those who deny its applicability to but a few historical examples, some scholars have attempted to offer a more complex and nuanced definition of the term. Roger Smith suggested a five-part division of genocide; retributive genocide, institutional genocide, utilitarian genocide, monopolistic genocide and ideological genocide.⁸ By thus dividing the concept of genocide into different types based on the perpetrator's motive, Smith effectively appeases both sides of the spectrum; exclusivists can focus in on their particular brand of genocide while inclusionists have a broader spectrum of genocidal categories in which to best analyze their otherwise marginalized examples. Various groups in history have been singled out for extermination, but for very different reasons. This more departmentalized definition broadens both Raphael Lemkin's definition and the codified definition of the United Nations, yet offers the possibility for its integrity to be maintained when applied to different types of genocide.⁹

⁸ Roger Smith, "Human Destructiveness and Politics: The Twentieth Century as an Age of Genocide," in Isidor Wallimann and Michael Dobkowski, eds., *Genocide and the Modern Age: Etiology and Case Studies of Mass Death* (Westport: Greenwood Press, 1987), 24-27. Frank Chalk, Kurt Jonassohn and others suggest that by thus differentiating types of genocide by the motives of the perpetrator is worth consideration. They explained, "The victims of modern genocides are usually selected according to who they are, whereas those of earlier genocides were generally chosen because of where they were or what they had." Chalk and Jonassohn follow similar lines when offering their typologies of genocide. They divide genocide into four categories based on the perpetrator's motive: to eliminate a real or potential threat, to spread terror among real or potential enemies, to acquire economic wealth and to implement a belief, a theory or an ideology. See Frank Chalk and Kurt Jonassohn, *The History and Sociology of Genocide: Analyses and Case Studies* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1990), 22, 29.

⁹ The United Nations' 1948 Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide as "acts committed with intent to destroy, in whole or in part, a

William D. Rubenstein suggested another categorized view of genocide, but based his upon chronological distinctions rather than perpetrator's motive. His five chronologies are Genocides in Pre-Literate Societies; Genocides in the Age of Empires and Religions, c.500 BC-1492; Colonial Genocides, 1492-1914; Genocides in the Age of Totalitarianism 1914-79; Contemporary "Ethnic Cleansing" and Genocides, 1945-date.¹⁰ Like Roger Smith, Frank Chalk and Kurt Jonassohn, Rubenstein attempts to delineate recognizable divisions between different kinds of genocide. By using chronological organization, Rubenstein invites scholars to consider genocides in the context of peculiarities particular to their era. This methodology may lead toward a better comparative understanding of historical genocides as well as how genocide has evolved and taken different shapes and forms over the centuries.

Rubenstein opened his study by postulating "Mass murder is probably as old as the human race, but only in the twentieth century has it become so significant a part of the world scene as to become an issue of world-wide importance or, indeed, to have been given a name."¹¹ Holocaust uniqueness advocates or other exclusionist scholars may cry foul, insisting that comparative genocide research simply cannot, or should not be done, but the suggestions of Rubenstein and others propose a more liberal, though carefully

national, ethnical, racial or religious group." See *Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide*, 78 U.N.T.S. 277, Article 2.

¹⁰ See William D. Rubenstein, *Genocide: A History* (New York: Pearson Longman, 2004), 6. Some might object with the Eurocentric nature of Rubenstein's classifications. In particular, his "Colonial Genocides" category shifts focus directly to a Eurocentric view of the 1492-1914 period.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 1.

defined, definition of genocide that will allow for such comparative work.¹² The judiciously constructed frameworks provided by said authors may allow for different forms of genocide to be analyzed and compared without devaluing or cheapening the field as a whole. For instance, according to these theoretical frameworks, the Holocaust may not fit into the same category of genocide as the depopulation of Native America, but this does not necessarily preclude any comparative analysis. Such discussion must simply be termed and qualified carefully. In fact, the moderating definitions provided by Smith, Chalk, Jonassohn and Rubenstein should, if nothing else, provide a more insightful view into genocide – whether as a reoccurring phenomenon or a singular concept.

NATIVE AMERICAN HISTORY AND COMPARATIVE GENOCIDE

Regardless of whether the depopulation of America's autochthonous peoples is officially defined as genocide, mass murder, casualties of war or simply the unfortunate consequence of post-Columbian contact, careful study of such events can prove to be of great benefit. The fact remains that millions of Native Americans found death in European contact and the cataclysmic events which followed merit evaluation. The value to be gained from understanding this history extends not only to Native American groups in understanding their regional, cultural or ethnic history, but in helping the world understand its own. Events within recent world history attest that better understanding of

¹² See Chalk and Jonassohn, *The History and Sociology of Genocide*; Israel W. Charny, ed., *Towards the Understanding and Prevention of Genocide: Proceedings of the International Conference on the Holocaust and Genocide* (Boulder, Colorado: Westview Press, 1984); Rubenstein, *Genocide: A History*; and Wallimann and Dobkowski, eds., *Genocide and the Modern Age: Etiology and Case Studies of Mass Death*.

genocide is direly needed. Speaking of contemporary issues for indigenous peoples, anthropologists Robert Hitchcock and Tara Twedt observed, “In the twentieth century dozens of indigenous peoples have been victims of physical and cultural genocide. The lack of teeth behind the rhetorical commitment to protection of indigenous peoples’ rights has been, and continues to be, a tremendous problem.”¹³ The history of indigenous murder in American history perhaps stands paramount in such applicability. Genocide studies in North America remain as a largely untapped wealth of knowledge and understanding; and if objectively analyzed and studied in conjunction with other examples of genocide, mass murder and depopulation, the tragic history of Native America may proffer insight with global application.

The academic field of possible genocide studies in North America has long been in need of more serious investigation. For nearly all of the United States’ existence, its history has been painted in tones of progress and triumph and the disastrous story of indigenous suffering and depopulation proves highly incongruous with this tradition. Even works of seminal importance, such as Frederick Jackson Turner’s “The Significance of the Frontier in American History,” simply ignored the existence of indigenous populations. Generally speaking, in the past centuries of American historiography, the realities of Native American depopulation have been largely glossed over. The influential advocate of the New Western history, Patricia Nelson Limerick, rightly deduced that “traditional frontier history flattened out Indians, rendering them

¹³ Robert K. Hitchcock and Tara M. Twedt, “Physical and Cultural Genocide of Various Indigenous Peoples,” in William S. Parsons, Samuel Totten and Israel W. Charny, eds., *Genocide in the Twentieth Century: Critical Essays and Eyewitness Accounts* (New York: Garland Publishing, Inc., 1995), 505.

insignificant before and after conquest.”¹⁴ Furthermore, in many of the cases where Indians were discussed, the shared guilt for the violent events in Native American history have been born primarily by Natives. Albeit belatedly nascent and somewhat undeveloped as an established field of academic research, recent years have witnessed an increased awareness in the need to achieve a more balanced interpretation in this domain. While this increase in interest has produced many valuable works, some scholars have swung the pendulum of historical perspective excessively far in the opposite direction, vilifying all Euro-Americans and exonerating Native Americans of any guilt. This shift in outlook has produced many works that are as biased and inaccurate as the previously hagiographic and one-sided accounts they were attempting to revise. Such efforts to expand this field of study have produced some insightful works, but the mode in which some of this new research has been conducted has often been unfruitful, if not detrimental.

To a large extent, genocide studies in the American West have been too fraught with controversy, argument and overt bias to accomplish the lofty goals proposed by Israel Charny. The polemics, politics and unbalanced methodologies that plague this field detract from ascertaining significant and lasting historical understanding. In place of trying to comprehend why these tragic events occurred and how to prevent them in the future, some American West genocide studies more closely resemble varied forms of competitive martyrdom, suffering and victimization, or outright political rhetoric.¹⁵

¹⁴ Patrician Nelson Limerick, *The Legacy of Conquest: The Unbroken Past of the American West* (New York: W. W. Norton & Co Ltd.), 214.

¹⁵ These problems are present not only in the study of genocide in North America, but in the genocide studies field as a whole. Throughout the field, different groups seem

This trend is troubling on various levels. First, it clouds objective historical analysis. Studies that attempt to paint history as a simple dichotomy of villains and victims fail to grapple with the difficult complexities that characterize cross-cultural economic, political and military relations. Second, it represents an attempt to use history for self-serving ends. While the von Rankean ideal of objective history is arguably unattainable in its purest sense, scholarship that aims as vindication or other self-serving goals is unable to make any claim to the objectivity that the sensitive and complex issues of genocide studies necessitate. Finally, it creates unnecessary tension within a field whose comparative nature already fosters friction and is greatly tainted and devalued by bitter animosity and competition. Politically fueled research and literature do hold an important place in the scholarship of Native American history and contemporary Native American issues, but they may not offer the objective analysis requisite for any fair comparative study of genocide.

Not surprisingly, the problem of less than objective research plagues the entire field of genocide studies, not just that of Native American studies. Various scholars jockey to assert the historical importance of their group's genocide, which in and of its self poses no threat to the field's vast body of literature. However, when such scholarship pits itself against other historical events, attempting to prove itself somehow quantitatively or qualitatively superior, the tone of the scholarly discussion and debate loses much of its potential value. The inherent worth of comparing historical examples of genocide should be emphatically defended, but the manner in which it is undertaken must be structured cautiously. The underlying assumption of this study is that the goal of

to be competing through their scholarship to prove whose loss was greater; who suffered the greater evil. See Alan S. Rosenbaum, "Introduction," in Rosenbaum, 2, 4.

comparative genocide studies should be to further the understanding of past events in order to prevent their reoccurrence in the future. While not claiming any moral superiority to other fields of historical inquiry, such a purpose does at least outline an agenda with far-reaching and desperately applicable knowledge for the present and future state of the world. There is so much to be gained from the study of past genocides that to desecrate it by occupying the historical community with politics or competition instead of objective inquiry is a tragedy in and of itself.

GOALS AND AIMS

Therefore, this brief study aims both to highlight certain concerns in Native American historiography and offer suggestions for new avenues and perspectives for future research in the field of comparative genocide. Chapter Two will broadly examine the historiography and current state of genocide studies in North America. This task will detail both the problems themselves and their origins. By first understanding what motivated the problematic trends within the historiography, it will be possible to place such literature in its proper (and useful) place, as well as direct future inquiry down more fruitful paths. Chapter Three will outline how such trends have manifested themselves in the form of a largely unproductive debate and argument between some scholars of Native American history and those of the Jewish Holocaust. As revisionist trends in Native American history have featured numerous proclamations that the depopulation of the Americas should be considered as genocide, certain Holocaust historians and especially advocates of Holocaust uniqueness have attacked such claims. The result has been a caustic debate of polemics and diatribes that embody the concern of where blatantly non-objective research can lead. Finally, Chapter Four will incorporate conclusions of the

previous two chapters with primary research to suggest the ways in which future analysis should place its focus. In particular, it will utilize the example of the Sand Creek Massacre of 1864 and how it has often been chronicled and portrayed.

The present study is not so much an exercise of criticism and debunking, but rather a qualification of past work and a plea for more objective scholarship as well as a proposal for how such research should be conducted. Assertions made herein about problems in the field of genocide studies should not be misconstrued as outright dismissals of past research or refutations of what insight they offer. Most all historical research has its place and can be used to gain greater insight into past events. However, this does not mean that it is well suited for the aforementioned goals of studying comparative genocide with particular reference to American history. Likewise, it should not be misunderstood that the discussion of opposing groups of scholars represents an attempt to vindicate either side or place any sort of qualitative judgment about the importance of the historical events which they examine. Rather, it is an assessment of how well past scholarship meets the criteria of specific goals. In order to better glean significant and universally applicable understanding from the tragic events in Native American history and the possible genocides that occurred therein, there are several changes in perspective that must be taken. This study sets forth to bring such perspectives to light.

II

NATIVE AMERICAN ACTIVISM AND THE ROOTS OF NATIVE AMERICAN GENOCIDE STUDIES

This chapter seeks an understanding of the state of Native American genocide studies. In the history of Native America, there are many examples of massacres, wars, depopulation of indigenous peoples, aggressive imposition of Christianity and Euro-American culture, and proactive destruction of Native religion and culture that some scholars cite as physical and cultural genocide. Given the complex nature of the politics and definitions of genocide, as already introduced, it is important to understand the contemporary issues from which these Native American interpretations of genocide have emerged. To do so, this chapter offers first a contextualization of the broader social activist movements of the late 1960s from which much of the scholarship emerged. As much of the present study represents an exercise in analytical historiography, such contextualization helps categorize variances in the field and assigns a proper value. The primary problem in Native American genocide studies is that the intellectual value of activist scholarship does not necessarily easily transfer to the field of genocide studies. It is a fallacy to assume that the directives and methodology of one field can or should be directly imposed on another. Hence, by understanding the roots of recent Native American studies, the apparent problems in more current scholarship will, if nothing else, be more properly understood in the context of the traditions upon which they are built.

The temptation for some has been to deny any academic or historical value to such literature, but doing so fails to understand the important social trends they represent. To dismiss such historical scholarship as nothing more than political rhetoric is to deny Natives a voice in their own history. Furthermore, this dismissive attitude fails to

recognize that the legacies of Native American history have brutally real effects upon indigenous day-to-day life and extends far beyond the mere realm of political posturing. This said, the purpose of discussing activist literature is not to prove its universal worth, but to argue that though important in its own right, its methodology may be ineffective and even deleterious for the aims of comparative genocide studies.

In the late 1960's, amidst a myriad of other social and civil rights movements, the American public witnessed one of the first manifestations of a large-scale Native American activist movement. Throughout the years to come, this movement would take on many shapes and foci.¹ Some of the primary struggles dealt with issues of political autonomy, religious freedom, control over self-image, and traditional Indian land rights. Perhaps unique to other social uprisings of its time, the written word strongly influenced and determined the direction of Native American activism as much as physical actions taken by different groups. The historical literature that emerged represented an attempt by Native American scholars to revise what they viewed as one-sided, biased, pro-Anglo histories of their past. This historical analysis was aimed not only at reestablishing control over their own past, but also at providing justification for contemporary political, social, economic or religious reform. It should be no surprise that rhetoric took an understandably political and impassioned tone. Now nearly forty years detached from the movement's inception, the historiography on the subject includes not only those influential activist manifestos, but also a great deal of subsequent historical analysis in a

¹ Such terminology as "Native American activist movement" or "Native American activism" refers to such phenomenon in the broadest and most general sense; not to specific groups or people unless cited.

growing field of Native American history. The influence of those early seminal works has affected both the content and tone of the history that has followed.

Perhaps the most influential of the early Native American activist writers was Vine Deloria, Jr. Born a Standing Rock Sioux, Deloria's first major publication in 1969, *Custer Died for Your Sins*, sent shockwaves through the Native and non-Native communities and established an ideological framework of topics and themes that can be traced throughout the subsequent years of the movement.² As some of the titles and subtitles of his books suggest, *We Talk You Listen*, *An Indian Manifesto*, *An Indian Declaration of Independence*, Deloria's writings vigorously voice this frustration and call for reform.³ The range of reform extends far beyond the matters of treaty making, the ins and outs of political sovereignty and self-governance to include issues of religious, community and social autonomy. Though few in number, Deloria's work did have some scholarly precedents upon which to build.

Before Vine Deloria started writing in the late 1960's, a small group of authors had already offered alternative analyses of Native American history that turned away from the traditional Euro-American perspectives. Helen Hunt Jackson's 1881 exposé *A Century of Dishonor* was among the first major works to do so. Her analysis of United States Indian policy with various major tribes told a tale of both good intentions and repeated failure. Her documentation of deceit, dishonesty and murder that ran counter to

² Vine Deloria, Jr., *Custer Died for Your Sins: An Indian Manifesto* (London: The Macmillan Company, 1969).

³ See Vine Deloria, Jr., *We Talk You Listen* (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1970); Deloria, *Custer Died for You Sins*; and Vine Deloria, Jr., *Behind the Trail of Broken Treaties: An Indian Declaration of Independence* (New York: Delacorte Press, 1974).

mainstream scholarship and appealed to the American people to demand that Congress correct past wrongs.⁴ One reviewer of the book wrote, “It compels sympathy and attention even from minds which hate the subject and are weary of it . . . It is sure to find a large sale, and will be valued and referred to for a long time to come.”⁵ Although correct about the book’s lasting significance, this reviewer was mistaken on the issue of sales. In large, Jackson was disappointed by the apathetic response to her call for change. Vine Deloria specifically makes mention of *A Century of Dishonor* as a work that proved an inspiration for “a generation of reformers.” However, according to Deloria, mere inspiration is insufficient for the rigors of serious social reform. Reformers also need a “philosophical understanding of what reform might require.” Otherwise, results would be ultimately disappointing.⁶ Jackson’s subsequent endeavor, a fictional account entitled *Ramona*, used emotion to draw sympathy for the Native American’s plight and awareness of the “nation’s record of cruelties and perjuries.”⁷ Though it was not quite the *Uncle*

⁴ Helen Hunt Jackson, *A Century of Dishonor* (Minneapolis: Ross and Haines Inc., 1881; reprint, 1964), 30 (page citations refer to the reprint).

⁵ Valerie Sherer Mathes, ed., *The Indian Reform Letters of Helen Hunt Jackson, 1879-1885* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1998), 127.

⁶ Vine Deloria, Jr. and David E. Wilkins, “Racial and Ethnic Studies, Political Science, and Midwifery” *Wicazo Sa Review* 14 (Autumn 1999), 70. Reviews of *A Century of Dishonor* varied in their analysis of the book. Most praised Jackson’s effort, but were unsure of the effect it would have. Jackson’s own husband was dubious, stating that it would not “clutch the average reader.” See Valerie Sherer Mathes, ed., *The Indian Reform Letters of Helen Hunt Jackson, 1879-1885* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1998), 16.

⁷ Jackson, *A Century of Dishonor*, 31. See Helen Hunt Jackson, *Ramona: A Story* (Boston: Roberts Brothers, 1884; reprint, Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1900).

Tom's Cabin of Indian literature that Jackson had hoped for, it did cement her views and influence for decades to follow.⁸

In the interceding eighty years before the 1960's, activists saw little serious scholarship follow Jackson's lead. In 1964 Ralph Andrist published *The Long Death: The Last Days of the Plains Indians* and reopened the perspective laid forth in the 1880's by Jackson. One reviewer noted that the book "might well have been dedicated to Helen Hunt Jackson," as it "recounts the plight of the western Indians from the traditional late nineteenth century humanitarian point of view."⁹ When compared to the accounts that *The Long Death* challenged, it certainly does ring reminiscent of Jackson's objectives and tone. The last words of Andrist's account provided a stirring example of the manner in which the story is told. He concludes, "Indians have gone down many paths to defeat, along many ways filled with pain and heartbreak, but none so much so as this long, last trail."¹⁰ Of this work, *Bury My Heart at Wounded Knee* author Dee Brown wrote, "Ralph Andrist was one of the first historians of the American Indian wars to perceive that their story should be told facing eastward toward the invading Europeans rather than westward toward the defending tribes. In this way he comes closer to an Indian viewpoint."¹¹ Even with the activism of Jackson and the new perspective forwarded by Andrist, the activist

⁸ Ibid., 159.

⁹ Robert G. Athearn, review of *The Long Death: The Last Days of the Plains Indians*, by Ralph Andrist, *The Journal of American History* 52, (September 1965):379.

¹⁰ Ralph K. Andrist, *The Long Death: The Last Days of the Plains Indians*, (New York: Collier Books, 1964), 354.

¹¹ Dee Brown, "Introduction," in Ralph Andrist, *The Long Death: The Last Days of the Plains Indians*, (New York: Collier Books, 1964), ix.

writings of the late 1960's had very little supporting literature upon which to build. However, the centuries of obvious injustice provided more than enough documents and accounts for these authors to use in their treatises.

Besides Helen Hunt Jackson, Ralph Andrist and a few others, Vine Deloria was treading fairly virgin soil when he sat down to write *Custer Died for Your Sins*.¹² However, in many ways he followed very closely in their footsteps. From Helen Hunt Jackson, Deloria inherited a tradition of using historical analysis as justification for contemporary reform and from Andrist a poignant writing style that relied upon an emotive vocabulary and imagery. In these ways, Deloria followed his historical precedents closely, but the ramifications and impact of his early works did not. Where Jackson's *Century of Dishonor* had failed to mobilize large scale reform movements, Vine Deloria's *Custer Died for Your Sins* excelled. According to Deloria, the genesis of his prolific writing career came with the public interest sparked by Stan Steiner's 1967 book, *The New Indians*. Steiner's survey of the evolving Native American political scene told of the growing phenomenon of "Red Power."¹³ Already active in the growing Native

¹² Other authors that offer some alternative perspective, but don't go as far as Jackson or Andrist include William T. Hagan, Ruth Underhill and Wendell Oswalt. In the same year as *Custer Died for Your Sins* was published, a number of other works emerged that followed closely in Andrist tradition. Although written too late to be of significant influence to Deloria's first book, they do represent a larger trend of shifting perspectives of which Deloria was a part. See Georgiana C. Nammack, *Fraud, Politics, and the Dispossession of the Indians: The Iroquois Land Frontier in the Colonial Period* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1969); S. M. Barrett, ed., *Geronimo's Story of his Life* (New York: Garrett Press, Inc., 1969). For review and discussion of these and other texts see Murray L. Wax, "The White Man's Burdensome 'Business': A Review Essay on the Change and Constancy of Literature on the American Indians" *Social Problems*. 16 (Summer 1968): 106-113; and William T. Hagan, "On Writing the History of the American Indian" *Journal of Interdisciplinary History* 2 (Summer 1971): 149-154.

American reform movement, Deloria was soon approached by the Macmillian Company to write a “militant book by an Indian.”¹⁴ With this commission, Deloria voiced widespread frustration of historical and contemporary Indian issues. Major foci of Deloria’s early writings include tribal political autonomy, religious freedom and control over self-image. In general terms, he advocated various distinct, yet interrelated aspects of Native self-determination. Most importantly, his writing does offer an invaluable insight into the frustration and concerns that years of oppression created within the Native American community. By understanding the issues addressed by Deloria and how he used historical analysis for political ramifications, important correlations can be established with the trends seen in Native American genocide studies.

One of the most “shocking” demands that Deloria and others voiced was for political autonomy. In the concluding thoughts of his 1974 *Behind the Trail of Broken Treaties*, Deloria cited Andrew Jackson’s Attorney-General William Wirt as saying that “Indians are independent to the purpose of treating, their independence is, to that purpose, as absolute as that of any other nation.”¹⁵ Obviously, Wirt’s recommendation was not followed in the decades to come. The legalist Felix Cohen concluded that “the treaties with Indian tribes are of the same dignity as treaties with foreign nations is a view which

¹³ See Stan Steiner, *The New Indians* (New York: Harper and Row, 1967). As one reviewer commented, the chapter titles alone were enough to raise eyebrows. They included “Red Power,” “Warpath on the Reservations,” and “Uncle Tomahawks and Hidden Colonialists.” See Bruce Cox, “Johnson’s Review of the New Indians: A Comment,” in *American Anthropologist* 72 (February 1970): 208.

¹⁴ Vineta Colby, ed., *World Authors, 1979-1980* (New York: The H.W. Wilson Company, 1985), 173.

¹⁵ Deloria, *Behind the Trail of Broken Treaties*, 263.

has been repeatedly confirmed by the federal courts and never successfully challenged.”¹⁶

The implication was that Indians should be viewed as sovereign nations. In Deloria’s view, this perspective on the Indians’ relationship with the federal government somehow needed to be reinstated. “We would strongly recommend that the United States reinstitute treaty making with Indian tribes,” he concluded.¹⁷ These demands place current federal policy makers in a difficult situation. Their predicament was well explained by Fremont J. Lyden and Lyman H. Letgers:

By making an original choice to treat native resident as a sovereign entity (or entities), European colonizers based their steady territorial encroachments on a juridical fiction, one that was then not understood. Since that time Indians have come to be recognized as American citizens, and some, who are members of Indian tribes, are considered members of dependent sovereign states as well . . . The problem we have inherited as a society dates from the decision that treaty relationships were preferable to a rule of conquest. Because these treaties were so easy to manipulate, it was not until some of the Indian signatories began to demand fulfillment that the American people were forced to recognize how unfairly Native Americans have been treated in the historical development of the country.¹⁸

As Lyden and Letgers illustrate, the situation is equally complex for the United States government and Native Americans themselves. Thus placed in a historically complex and poorly understood situation of simultaneously being citizens of their own tribes and the United States, neither Native Americans nor the United States has successfully grappled with how to proceed. Various attempts have been made by United States policy makers to solve the problem created by this odd history, but none have succeeded.

¹⁶ Felix Cohen, *Handbook of Federal Indian Law* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1971), 31.

¹⁷ Deloria, *Behind the Trail of Broken Treaties*, 262.

¹⁸ Fremont J. Lyden and Lyman H. Letgers eds., *Native Americans and Public Policy* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1992), 3.

Propositions for solving the United States' "Indian Problem" have included extermination, assimilation, isolation, severalty programs and termination of tribal status. Even before the tumultuous reforms of the twentieth century, Helen Hunt Jackson warned: "To assume that it would be easy, or by any one sudden stroke of legislative policy possible, to undo the mischief and hurt of the long past, set the Indian policy of the country right for the future, and make the Indians safe and happy, is the blunder of a hasty and uninformed judgment."¹⁹ Six years after she published *A Century of Dishonor*, the Dawes Severalty Act attempted to move Native Americans towards Euro-American agricultural life by dividing reservations into separate allotments of private ownership.²⁰ Whereas Theodore Roosevelt viewed the act as a "mighty pulverizing engine to break up the tribal mass," Senator Henry Teller denounced the Dawes Act as "a bill to despoil the Indians of their lands and to make them vagabonds on the face of the earth."²¹ The end result left Native Americans with two-thirds of their reservations lands gone as surplus allotments were sold to American settlers.²²

Termination proved an even more destructive legislative devise. Extending from 1954 to 1972, this program terminated the tribal status of over 100 separate tribes. Vine Deloria wrote that this policy's façade as a plan "to offer the Indian people full

¹⁹ Jackson, *A Century of Dishonor*, 340.

²⁰ For details on the Act see D. S. Otis, *The Dawes Act and the Allotment of Indian Lands* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1973), 1-12.

²¹ James D. Richardson, ed., *Compilation of the Messages and Papers of the Presidents, Supplemental Volume 2: Theodore Roosevelt* (New York, Bureau of National Literature, 1897-1917), Vol. 15, 6672. See also Francis Prucha, ed., *Americanizing the American Indian* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1973), 137.

²² See Vine Deloria Jr., *American Indian Policy in the Twentieth Century* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1985), 43.

citizenship rights” or “guise of removing economically successful tribes from the BIA’s protective yoke” needed to be penetrated to see it for what it truly was.²³ He viewed it as a simple matter of the United States attempting to both wash its hands clean of Indian affairs and to cut government expenditures.²⁴ The objections that many tribes had with Termination were both political and economic. Alvin M. Josephy, Jr. and others cite the tragic example of the Menominee tribe of Wisconsin, who after unwillingly succumbing to the policy were nearly bankrupted by the process.²⁵ The inability for many tribes to resist Termination sent two clear messages to tribal governments: their right to self-government and ability to stand up to the federal government were severely limited.²⁶ This affront to tribal sovereignty in the 1950’s met serious resistance and fueled much of

²³ Deloria, *Custer Died for Your Sins*, 75. This appears in his chapter, “The Disastrous Policy of Termination” – his negative view is apparent. See also Gary C. Anders, “Social and Economic Consequences of Federal Indian Policy: A Case Study of the Alaska Natives,” in Robert N. Wells, Jr., ed., *Native American Resurgence and Renewal: a Reader and Bibliography* (London: The Scarecrow Press, Inc., 1994), 57.

²⁴ Deloria, *Custer Died for Your Sins*, 74.

²⁵ See Alvin M. Josephy, Jr., *The Indian Heritage of America* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, Inc., 1968), 354. Vine Deloria offers financial statistics that illustrate the Menominee’s prudent and sound financial planning prior to Termination and the subsequent financial disaster that it brought. See Deloria, *Custer Died for Your Sins*, 65-72. Patricia Limerick reported that Termination turned the Menominee from “a moderately prosperous reservation into the poorest county in Wisconsin.” See Limerick, *The Legacy of Conquest*, 210. For more information on the termination and restoration of the Menominees, see Nicholas C. Peroff, *Menominee Drums: Tribal Termination and Restoration 1954-1974* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1982). For a more general and comprehensive history of the Menominees, see Patricia K. Ourada, *The Menominee Indians: A History* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1979).

²⁶ One author commented that the Termination program exacted “incalculable damage . . . not only to those nations that were actually terminated, but to the willingness of most remaining native governments to challenge federal authority.” See Rebecca L. Robbins, “Self-DeTermination and Subordination: The Past. Present. And Future of American Indian Governance,” in M. Annette Jaimes, ed., *The State of Native America: Genocide, Colonization, and Resistance* (Boston: South End Press, 1992), 100.

the frustration which boiled over in the late 1960's.²⁷ Reflecting on the rise of Native political activism, and its links to these frustrating political developments, Stephen Cornell ruminated that there had always been politics *about* Indians, but seldom true *Indian* politics.²⁸ Native American leaders in the 1960's wanted to take control of their tribal affairs, and with these historical conflicts in mind, the content and rhetoric about political autonomy which stands as the centerpiece of the Native American activist literature should come as no surprise.

Post-Termination politics have proved no less inflammatory. With the question of limits to tribal autonomy, political activists have engaged in conflicts ranging from fishing and hunting rights to variations on themes of tribal authority on reservation lands and beyond. The question of limits to different tribes' legal jurisdiction on their own reservations has been central to many of these conflicts. Addressing this issue, Robert Wells noted that legal jurisdiction on Indian reservations is a "key attribute" of the powers promised to tribal governments by treaty.²⁹ Not only is legal jurisdiction over reservation affairs one of the most visible aspects of tribal sovereignty but it is ideologically at the root of the activist movement. In recent years, the question of tribal authority over non-Indians who live on reservations has generated considerable conflict

²⁷ Leonard Peltier of the AIM-FBI standoff at Wounded Knee fame described the options that terminated Indians faced as a choice "between urban slums and starving to death on the reservations." At least in his case, a direct correlation can be made between Termination and the anger of the activist movement. See Peter Matthiessen, *In the Spirit of Crazy Horse* (New York: Penguin Books, 1992), 47.

²⁸ Stephen Cornell, *The Return of the Native: American Indian Political Resurgence* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998,) 6.

²⁹ Robert N. Wells, Jr., *Native American Resurgence and Renewal: a Reader and Bibliography* (London: The Scarecrow Press, Inc., 1994), 72.

and received focused attention by Native activists. The post-Dawes Severalty Act reservations emerged as patchworks of Indian and American landowners. As the non-Indian populations and land holdings on reservations grew, the limits of tribal authority over non-Indians and their lands became the cause of serious contention. Prominent Native American lawyer Curtis Berkey sees the trend of non-Indians' attempts to circumvent tribal authority by appealing to federal courts as a troublesome phenomenon that may lead to "an unprecedented erosion of Indian rights to self-government."³⁰ Addressing key legal battles, Berkey highlights the extreme inconstancy and contradictory nature of such court cases. Echoing Vine Deloria's call for change, Berkey states, "There should be a critical reexamination of the assumption that the federal government has supreme and practically unlimited powers over Indian nations."³¹ The federal court's inability to express a consistent pattern of decision on such issues has led many Indians to advocate the need for serious change.

Aside from activist pushes for greater political sovereignty has been the call for cultural independence and religious freedom. Vine Deloria saw the symbiotic roles of Christianity and land acquisition (from Columbus through to the reservation era) as a great threat to the current health of Native communities. Seeing the history of Christianity and the Indian as one of sterile and foreign religious ideas being manipulatively asserted over a deeply engrained and culturally vital Native religious tradition, Deloria cites this as a fundamental cause for concern. Although coming from a

³⁰ Curtis Berkey, "Indian Nations Under Legal Assault: New Restrictions on Native American Sovereignty: Are They Constitutional? Are They Moral?" in Robert N. Wells, Jr., ed., *Native American Resurgence and Renewal: a Reader and Bibliography*, (London: The Scarecrow Press, 1994), 74.

³¹ *Ibid.*, 85.

strong Christian background and education himself, Deloria's manifesto calls for a separation from the historically oppressive Christian tradition.³² The reasons he cites are many. First, Christianity's attempt to "explain, define and control deity" was utterly foreign to Native theology and ultimately detrimental to Native cultural identity and community cohesion.³³ Second, as Christian missionary activities were often part and parcel of federal Indian policy, the Native "conversion" was often more of a political consideration or simply a survival technique. Conversion was, according to Deloria, "the path of least resistance."³⁴ Third, present Native resurgence necessitates a departure from the "impotence and irrelevancy of the Christian message."³⁵ Deloria does not all together reject the doctrines of Christianity, but he asserts that its message must be fully *native-ized* and separated from the Euro-American tradition. Some form a truly "Native religion," whether utilizing Christian ideas or not, is presented as the only salvation for Indian communities.³⁶

One of the most prominent issues has been the rise of the Native American Church. As activists have sought to reestablish political autonomy, this movement

³² Deloria, *Custer Died for Your Sins*, 112. Deloria's grandfather had been a Christian missionary on the Standing Rock Reservation, father was a prominent Episcopalian minister on the Pine Ridge Reservation and Deloria himself earned a B.D. (Bachelor of Divinity) degree from Augustana Lutheran School of Theology in Rock Island, Illinois in 1963. Hence, his outspoken views on Christianity run somewhat counter to his strong Christian upbringing.

³³ Ibid., 103. See also Robert S. Michaelsen, "'We Also Have a Religion'. The Free Exercise of Religion among Native Americans," *American Indian Quarterly* 7 (Summer 1983): 111-142.

³⁴ Deloria, *Custer Died for You Sins*, 109.

³⁵ Ibid., 112.

³⁶ Ibid., 119.

represents a similar assertion of religious and cultural autonomy. Several laws stand as guideposts through the history of Native American religious resurgence. One of the first was the 1978 American Indian Religious Freedom Act (AIRFA).³⁷ It may seem odd that legislation was required to ensure Indians' First Amendment right to freedom of religion, but many forget that Native religion has been criminalized in various ways over the past century.³⁸ Vernon Masayesva wrote, "The American Indian Religious Freedom Act – AIRFA – has been called the law with no teeth. Sadly, this is true."³⁹ No penalties for denying religious freedom were provided in the act. Though an important step towards Native religious freedom had been made, the controversy over Native American rights to freely exercise their religion did not end in 1978.⁴⁰ Subsequent conflicts have caused such rights to be redefined by the 1990 Native American Graves Protection and Repatriation Act (NAGRPA) and the 1994 Native American Free Exercise of Religion Act (NAFERA).⁴¹ Clearly, Native American religious freedom has been a complex and continually evolving issue. As activist groups have brought forth different claims and

³⁷ American Indian Religious Freedom Act of 1978, Pub. Law No. 95-341, 92 Stat. 469.

³⁸ Lee Irwin, "Freedom, Law and Prophecy: A Brief History of Native American Religious Resistance." *American Indian Quarterly* 21 (Winter 1997): 35.

³⁹ Vernon Masayesva, "Epilogue," in Christopher Vecsey, ed., *Handbook of American Indian Religious Freedom* (New York: Crossroad, 1991), 134.

⁴⁰ For a good discussion of why AIRFA was not sufficient and required amendment and clarification see Robert S. Michaelsen, "Law and the Limits of Liberty," in Christopher Vecsey, ed., *Handbook of American Indian Religious Freedom* (New York: Crossroad, 1991), 119.

⁴¹ Native American Graves Protection and Repatriation Act of 1990, Pub. Law No. 101-601, 104 Stat. 3048; Native American Free Exercise of Religion Act of 1994, Pub. Law No.103-344, 108 Stat. 3125.

complaints, the need for clarification to the limits of their religious rights has been persistent.

The intersection of history and contemporary indigenous political discussion is well displayed in the Native push for greater religious freedom that prompted the passage of NAGPRA in 1990. NAGPRA represented an attempt to provide legal support for Indian tribes to demand the return of Native remains and religious objects from non-tribal organizations, institutions and individuals. Jace Weaver estimated that by the late 1980s, museums, federal agencies and private collectors possessed between 350,000 to 2.5 million Indian remains.⁴² Walter R. Echo-Hawk and Roger C. Echo-Hawk voiced the following explanation for why this is a violation of their First Amendment rights:

When non-Indian institutions possess Indian sacred objects and living gods and when they control the disposition of the dead, they become little more than quasi-church facilities imposed upon Indian communities, regulating the “free” exercise of religion for dispossessed Indian worshippers. First Amendment religious freedoms are clearly controlled from the pulpit of science when museums elevate scientific curiosity over Indian religious belief in the treatment of the dead.⁴³

These two have effectively linked their right to freely exercise their religion to the location of their ancestors’ remains. It is not surprising that this process of repatriation and reburial has faced significant opposition from museums, universities and private individuals alike. One such controversy peaked at the discovery of a 9,000 year old skeleton on the banks of the Columbia River near Kennewick, Washington. Scientific investigation proclaimed that the skeleton was Caucasoid, but the Umatilla Confederated

⁴² Jace Weaver, “Indian Presence with no Indians Present,” *Wicazo Sa Review* 12 (Autumn 1997): 14.

⁴³ Walter R. Echo-Hawk and Roger C. Echo-Hawk, “Repatriation, Reburial, and Religious Rights,” in Christopher Vescey, ed., *Handbook of American Indian Religious Freedom*, (New York: Crossroad, 1991), 64.

Tribe insisted it was their ancestor and filed a claim under NAGRPA that scientific inquiry cease.⁴⁴ The ensuing controversy argued whether or not the tribe could claim the Kennewick Man, or Ancient One, as their ancestor. According to scientific analysis of the skeleton's facial features, he was clearly not Indian and rather of Caucasoid ancestry. The conflict pitted scientific theories of America's indigenous chronology and Native religious beliefs of their origin.⁴⁵ This represents another facet of Native attempts to assert sovereign control over aspects of their lives. Much like the push for political sovereignty, the control over religious and cultural rights, whether in the form of the Native American Church and Peyoteism or Repatriation, these events follow closely in the footsteps of Vine Deloria's 1969 call for action.

One final influential message of Vine Deloria's early works was the demand for indigenous control over their self-image. In *Custer Died for Our Sins*, he proclaimed, ". . . we do not need to be classified as semi-white and have programs and policies made to bleach us further. We need a new policy by Congress acknowledging our right to live in peace free from arbitrary harassment. We need the public at large to drop the myths in which it has clothed us for so long . . . What we need is a cultural leave-us-alone agreement in spirit and in fact."⁴⁶ In essence, Deloria wanted Native Americans to take control over their self-image. He wrote further:

"Indianness" has been defined by whites for many years. Always they have been outside observers looking into Indian society from a self-made pedestal of preconceived ideas coupled with an innate superior attitude

⁴⁴ Weaver, 17.

⁴⁵ Kathleen S. Fine-Dare, *Grave Injustice: The American Indian Repatriation Movement and NAGPRA* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2002), 150.

⁴⁶ Deloria, *Custer Died for Your Sins*, 27.

toward those different from themselves. Many times anthropologists and sociologists have acted as if we couldn't do anything if they didn't first understand it and approve of it. Those days are also gone.⁴⁷

For too long, Native American self-perception had been influenced and even based on the observations of cultural outsiders. According to Deloria, these sentiments were visible in the Native American protests against the misportrayal of Indians as sports mascots and the exploitation of Native religions.⁴⁸ All of these subjects point to a general brooding within the Native American community – an unrest and frustration with having their self-image and cultural identity ascribed to them by others.⁴⁹ While commenting on Native American education reform, Robert Wells terms this broader phenomenon as *Cultural Self-Determination*.⁵⁰ While tightly interwoven with the aforementioned demands for political and religious autonomy, the issue of cultural self-determination affects many Indians on a much more individual and personal level. For this reason, it has been the cause of great concern to Native communities.

The ramifications that these concerns with Native American cultural self-determination have upon academic fields are manifold. First, it sets Native scholars up against centuries of Anglo-based scholarship. Inéz Talamantez wrote that Native American scholars owed commitment to their own communities and that their

⁴⁷ Ibid., 265.

⁴⁸ See Eva Marie Garroutte, *Real Indians: Identity and Survival of Native America* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003); Marijo Moore, ed., *Genocide of the Mind: New Native American Writing* (New York: Thunder's Mouth Press, 2003); and Philip J. Deloria, *Playing Indian* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1998).

⁴⁹ The problem, Deloria asserted, is that Indians had “started looking to anthropologists for their sense of identity.” See Deloria, *Custer Died for Your Sins*, 82.

⁵⁰ Wells, 87.

“intellectual posture of resistance” against past accounts placed them “distinctly at odds with the bulk of white scholarship.”⁵¹ This oppositional posturing has resulted in a general deconstruction of traditional narratives by many Native authors, including Vine Deloria.⁵² Deloria has tackled topics from the land bridge theory and evolution to general critiques of western scientific epistemology.⁵³ As these authors have attempted to alter the perspective from which Native American studies are conducted, a call for intellectual decolonization of Native minds intellectually has resulted.⁵⁴

⁵¹ Inés Talamantez, “Transforming American Conceptions about Native America: Vine Deloria, Jr., Critic and Coyote,” in Richard A. Grounds, George E. Tinker, and David E. Wilkins, eds., *Native Voices: American Indian Identity and Resistance* (Lawrence: University of Kansas Press, 2003), 275-276. Talamantez complains that there are three inherited consequences from extra-cultural perspectives on native societies. First, anthropologists studied “Native Americans as a phenomenon of the past.” Second, historians had yet failed to write a satisfactory account of how Native Americans shaped the progress of American history. And third, too many scholars believe they understand “Native American culture, histories, oral tradition and contemporary literature better than Native Americans themselves.” See Talamantez, 274-275.

⁵² Speaking of the controversies over Native education and intellectual discourse, Lee Irwin described a trend of Native voices “deconstructing the monological discourses of western science and empirical rationality.” However, to better educate Native populations and contribute to the reconstruction of Native world views, Irwin advocated the need to both “listen with humility to the various ways native people construct their spiritual worlds,” and acquire “a skillful use and knowledge of non-native theoretical perspectives.” See Lee Irwin, “Response: American Indian Religious Traditions and the Academic Study of Religion” *Journal of American Academy of Religion* 66 (Winter 1998): 889, 892.

⁵³ In particular, refer to Vine Deloria, Jr., *God is Red: A Native View of Religion*, 30th Anniversary Edition (Golden, Colorado: Fulcrum Publishing, 2003); Vine Deloria, Jr., *Evolution, Creationism, and Other Modern Myths: A Critical Inquiry* (Golden, Colorado: Fulcrum Publishing, 2004); Vine Deloria, Jr., *Exploring the Indigenous World View* (Bellevue: Washington: Radio Bookstore Press, 2003); and *Red Earth, White Lies: Native Americans and the Myth of Scientific Fact* (New York: Scribner, 1995).

⁵⁴ See Michelene E. Pesantubbee, “Religious Studies on the Margins: Decolonizing our Minds,” in Richard A. Grounds, George E. Tinker, and David E.

Deloria's response to this is clear: Native Americans must stop looking outwards, and start looking inwards for not only their sense of identity, but for political autonomy and spiritual understanding in the world where they live. This warning embodies the whole of the Indian activist movement. It has been a reaction against a long history of Native Americans being forced (or by their own volition in some cases) to look outside of themselves and their communities for their well being. When this outward looking perspective brought little to no lasting benefits to the Indian world, Native America decided to fight back, reject much of what has been thrust upon them, and look inward to decide their future. Over the past few decades, as scholars have explored Native American history, they have reacted in similar ways to the Anglo-based perspective of past historical accounts. It is at this point that some lines must be drawn as to the usefulness of the methodology and tradition that Deloria represents. While he played a valuable role in articulating the frustrations that Native Americans felt about their past and present conditions, to apply his methodology and perspective on objective comparative genocide scholarship is problematic.

TRENDS IN NATIVE AMERICAN GENOCIDE STUDIES

The prolific writing of Deloria and those that have followed analyzed historical events for the purpose of advocating contemporary political and cultural change. In theory, this is the same goal that has herein been proposed for studying possible genocide in American history. Both use the study of the past to bring change in the present world. However, genocide studies' goal to better understand genocide as a phenomenon in order

Wilkins, eds., *Native Voices: American Indian Identity and Resistance* (Lawrence: University of Kansas Press, 2003), 221.

to prevent its future reoccurrence is fundamentally different from Deloria's goal of using historical analysis to prove ongoing injustices to Native Americans and to justify changing fundamental tribal relationships with the United States government. When authors such as Ward Churchill admit that their historical research is fueled by "unequivocally political" motives and declare no more than an "abstract allegiance" to academic issues, there is cause for concern.⁵⁵ Granted, Churchill perhaps represents the far extreme, but the phenomenon of politically-based research is widespread. One manifestation of this is how many indigenous authors list their tribal affiliation in their publications.⁵⁶ Their tribal membership adds political and cultural weight to their views.⁵⁷ Thankfully, these authors are willing to be forward about their acknowledged

⁵⁵ Ward Churchill, *A Little Matter of Genocide* (San Francisco: City Lights Books, 1997), 11.

⁵⁶ This is not to discredit authors that list their tribal affiliations, because there is nothing inherently wrong with doing so. If nothing else, it notifies the reader of the author's indigenous perspective. But, it also alerts the reader to possible cultural, religious or otherwise personal ties the author has to the subject. For a few examples see Eva Marie Garroutte, *Real Indians: Identity and the Survival of Native America*; M. Annette Jaimes, ed., *The State of Native America: Genocide, Colonization and Resistance* (Boston: South End Press, 1992); Fremont J. Lyden and Lyman H. Legters, eds., *Native Americans and Public*; MariJo Moore, ed., *Genocide of the Mind: New Native American Writing*; and John Yewell, Chris Dodge and Jan DeSirey, eds., *Confronting Columbus* (London: McFarland & Company, Inc., Publishers, 1992).

⁵⁷ A telling example of this is the controversy over Ward Churchill's supposed Creek/Cherokee Métiz tribal affiliation. In light of some highly controversial comments he made after 9/11, the American Indian Movement purposefully distanced itself from Churchill and called his Native status into question. Their press release read, "The American Indian Movement Grand Governing Council representing the National and International leadership of the American Indian Movement once again is vehemently and emphatically repudiating and condemning the outrageous statements made by academic literary and Indian fraud Ward Churchill in relationship to the 9-11 tragedy in New York City that claimed thousands of innocent people's lives . . . Ward Churchill has been masquerading as an Indian for years behind his dark glasses and beaded headband. He waves around an honorary membership card that at one time was issued to anyone by the

bias. There is no problem with writing from a political standpoint, but it must be acknowledged and analyzed to determine its usefulness for genocide studies. The historical information may be useful, but the possible lack of objectivity in the analysis may not.

Objectivity is a concern for genocide studies because of its acute necessity in comparative research. In his review of Marc Bloch's theorizing on the subject, William Sewell explained that comparative methodology, by design, should reduce our personal biases by forcing us to confront alternative views.⁵⁸ The underlying assumption is that our comparative analysis is objective enough to consider alternate views. If authors are unwilling to devote fair attention to opposing views and explanations of historical events, then what use is there in searching for greater historical insight by attempting to compare events in the first place? This does not imply that Holocaust historians must devote significant time to the issue of Holocaust Denial or that African-American scholars should include lengthy discussions of white supremacy groups in everything they write. However, it does suggest that in analyzing historical events, they should discuss a wide spectrum of primary source evidence; including alternate views that may run counter to their arguments. If nothing else, this open and frank discussion will strengthen their argument as they demonstrate why the alternate explanations are false. In this manner,

Keetoowah Tribe of Oklahoma. Former President Bill Clinton and many others received these cards, but these cards do not qualify the holder a member of any tribe. He has deceitfully and treacherously fooled innocent and naïve Indian community members in Denver, Colorado, as well as many other people worldwide. Churchill does not represent, nor does he speak on behalf of the American Indian Movement." Press release may be found at <http://www.aimovement.org/moipr/churchill05.html>; Internet; accessed 23 February 2006.

⁵⁸ See William H. Sewell, Jr. "Marc Bloch and the Logic of Comparative History," *History and Theory* 6 (1967): 218.

the reader is less likely to feel like the proverbial wool is being pulled over their eyes, and all interested parties will gain a more informed understanding of the subject.

In the case of Native American history, there are copious amounts of primary and secondary documents that present Native Americans not as the victims, but as the villains in the American West.⁵⁹ Many of these studies represent the opposite extreme of non-objective scholarship. Historians sympathetic to the Native American experience are not required to give credence to these dissident views, but they should not fall into the same trap of writing one-sided history. Regardless of what side of the spectrum a study falls, it should give fair treatment to alternate explanations, whether in the form of primary or secondary documents. This at least displays a semblance of attempted objectivity; whereas outright disregard to such contradictory evidence does not. For this reason, the ethnic, religious, political, and otherwise personal investment inherent in Native American activist literature may preclude the objectivity needed for comparative genocide studies. The disconcerting outcome is literature whose focus is not on historical insight, but on proving one side right or wrong. This devolution of historical research is especially difficult to escape when dealing with genocide – a historical phenomenon when it is nearly impossible to not assign historical blame.

In the study of possible genocidal events, historical characters are bound to be labeled as victims and perpetrators. In the example of the Jewish Holocaust, it is fairly

⁵⁹ One such study that will be discussed in Chapter 4 is J.P. Dunn, Jr.'s *Massacre of the Mountains*. In this work, first published in 1886, Dunn presents a history of the nineteenth Indian Wars from a staunch perspective of defending the United States' actions. Not only does his narrative paint the Indians in villainous tones, but it ignores any documents that suggest United States wrong doing. See J.P. Dunn Jr., *Massacre of the Mountains: A History of the Indian Wars of the Far West, 1815-1875* (New York: Capricorn Books, 1969).

clear who committed murder and who was the victim thereof, but the history of white-Indian violence is more complex. Not only does the history of their interactions span centuries, involve innumerable disparate groups and individuals, and occur on widely different geographical zones, but within its incomprehensible complexity includes examples of atrocities committed by both sides. The aforementioned methodology of discussing only one side of the documentary evidence does not include the balanced analysis of events necessary to more holistically understand *how* these atrocities happened, and more importantly, ascertain *why*. It may be difficult to understand how and why contentious cross-cultural interactions escalate into genocide if the author is too focused on condemning or exonerating the involved parties. To some degree, the prejudices that *all* historians have in reference to the victims and perpetrators of genocide must be suppressed in order to analyze objectively how and why it happened. Anyone can view the effects of genocide and make retrospective accusations, but the careful, objective historian can do much more – he can help explain how and why it happened.

One trend that some current Native American genocide researchers have inherited from the activist literature is a writing style characterized by overt bias. While this topic has already been discussed in brief terms, it merits further analysis. In his discussion of Euro-Indian examples of conflict in colonial North America, James Axtell spent considerable time ruminating over the difficulties in passing moral judgment on historical events. First, Axtell admitted that all historical writing involves bias. “Our everyday language,” he contended, “is morally loaded; there is no neutral vocabulary for historians that is not either ‘aesthetically void or technically esoteric.’ Any historian who employs nouns, verbs, adjectives, and adverbs to tell his story and puts them together in calculated

patterns will unavoidably express ‘personal judgments about his subject.’”⁶⁰ Ultimately, it is impossible to escape our own personal biases and prejudices in writing. However, this does not mean that the attempt for objectivity should not be made.⁶¹ Historians must acknowledge the ubiquitous bias that no author can escape, thus helping to highlight an important weakness of which historians must be acutely aware.

The transformation that overt bias exacts upon history was well described by anthropologist Bruce Trigger. He suggested that “such biases may simply add harmless colour to a dry story, but they can [also] turn historical study into a dangerous piece of propaganda.”⁶² Robert Athearn made such a complaint of Ralph Andrist’s *The Long Death*, stating, “It is alright for an author to have a point of view, but in this case it is waved in the reader’s face at every turn.”⁶³ To some degree, Athearn is correct. From the book’s inflammatory title, *The Long Death*, to his choice of chapter titles such as “Massacre in Minnesota,” “Nits Make Lice,” or “Ten Million Dead Buffalo,” Andrist makes no excuse for his perspective. With his usual candor, Ward Churchill mused that his study *A Little Matter of Genocide* would not be well received in the academic

⁶⁰ James Axtell, *After Columbus: Essays in Ethnohistory of Colonial North America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1988), 18.

⁶¹ Historian Stanley Fish mused that the death of objectivity relieved him of the obligation to be right, and only demanded that he be interesting. This is precisely what historians must avoid. See Stanley Fish, *Is There a Text in This Class?* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1980), 180.

⁶² James Axtell, *After Columbus: Essays in Ethnohistory of Colonial North America*, 18.

⁶³ Athearn, 379.

community due to its extreme posturing.⁶⁴ Upon reviewing the work, Kurt Jonassohn excused the author of such misdeeds, advising, “The reader should not be distracted by errors and interpretations that seem to weaken the overall argument, an argument that is far too important to be dismissed on such grounds.”⁶⁵ While Churchill’s study synthesizes an impressive amount of information, covers a wide variety of topics and boasts extensive footnotes and bibliographic information, the overtly biased tone in which it is written *is* distracting. Regardless of Jonassohn’s exoneration of Churchill from academic responsibility, the work is too obviously biased to be taken at face value. Even if it turned out that Churchill’s work was the paragon of objective *research*, its non-objective tone greatly hinders its academic gravity.

As heirs either of the Native American or Euro-American legacies of said events, authors’ personal feelings or attachment to the subject are difficult to escape. Conducting objective research is difficult as it is, and such difficulties are only exacerbated by cultural ties to historical characters. These considerations led James Axtell to theorize further on the very role of historians in retelling the past. He declares, “The serious historian may not wrap himself in judicial robes and pass sentence on high; he is too involved in both the prosecution and the defense . . . the [historian’s] goal is not to punish or rehabilitate historical malefactors – who are mortally incorrigible – but to set the record straight for future appeals to precedent.”⁶⁶ Emphasis should be duly placed upon

⁶⁴ See Churchill, *A Little Matter of Genocide*, 11.

⁶⁵ Kurt Jonassohn, review of *A Little Matter of Genocide: Holocaust and Denial in the Americas, 1492 to the Present*, by Ward Churchill, *The American Historical Review* 104 (June 1999): 867.

⁶⁶ Axtell, *After Columbus*, 20.

his usage of the term “*serious* historian,” for as the historiography shows, it does not take an incredible amount of skill to scrutinize the historical record and point fingers.

However, to research and present a balanced portrayal of past events in such a manner as to be useful for comparative research or to be gleaned for insight into how to form future government policy is much more difficult. It takes the most serious and objectivity-committed historian to make any balanced sense of the complex and violent interactions between Native American and Euro-American groups. Hence, Axtell’s proposed goal of making sense of the past for the sake of future reference is consistent with the ideals for genocide studies suggested by Israel Charny and others.

The overt bias that characterizes many studies is most apparent by the tone in which some authors present their analysis. In the early activist writings of the late 1960’s and 1970’s, much of the literature was imbued with a sarcasm and mordant wit that made no attempt to speak in neutral terms. A selection from Deloria’s *Custer Died for Your Sins* provides a good example. In shifting from his narrative of nineteenth century injustices to those of the twentieth century, Deloria mused, “People often feel guilty about their ancestors killing all those Indians years ago. But they shouldn’t feel guilty about the distant past. Just the last two decades have seen a more devious but hardly less successful war waged against Indian communities.”⁶⁷ This sarcasm-laden introduction to what he terms “the disastrous policy of Termination” sets a clear tone for the subsequent chapter.⁶⁸ He could not be accused of trying to hide his bias, but neither is he proposing

⁶⁷ Deloria, *Custer Died for Your Sins*, 54.

⁶⁸ Note that the policy was originally termed “Liquidation,” but was changed to Termination in the post-World War II era as the Holocaust began to take a more prominent role in American memory. Though the name changed, the policy remained

to curb it by offering a more balanced analysis. The subsequent years of politically fueled historical research have employed similar sarcastic irony to frame their agenda.⁶⁹ Granted, the goal of such literature is vastly different than the proposed aims of American genocide studies, but they merit mention nonetheless. The blatantly biased tone in which some authors write creates an impediment by immediately polarizing the audience into defensive and offensive positions. In so doing, the useful historical facts can be severely tainted by the inherent conflict that the book embodies. By nature, such presentation both precludes the possibility for a balanced portrayal of historical events and hinders the objective reading of said text.

Much as Helen Hunt Jackson's *Ramona* used "emotion as a force for social change," recent studies in Native American history have done the same.⁷⁰ Evelyn Hu-DeHart, former Director of the Center for Studies of Ethnicity and Race in America at the University of Colorado at Boulder, suggested that the tone of such literature is "designed to yank us out of our normal complacency so that we may begin to confront and question the all too many assumptions we have simply accepted about the original people of this continent."⁷¹ Her deduction is telling. There is no argument that this is precisely what

consistent. See John Wunder, review of, *Termination Revisited: American Indians on the Trail to Self-Determination, 1933–1953*, by Kenneth R. Philp; and *The National Congress of American Indians: The Founding Years*, by Thomas W. Cowger, *The American Historical Review* 106 (April 2001): 600.

⁶⁹ See Dee Brown, *Bury my Heart at Wounded Knee* (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston), xvii, 445; Churchill, *A Little Matter of Genocide*, 11.

⁷⁰ Millen Ellis, "Recommended: Helen Hunt Jackson," *The English Journal* 71 (Dec. 1982): 55.

many authors are attempting to do. However, the question remains if this tactic is the most productive way to hasten a greater questioning and understanding of Native people's past. Introducing a volume of such writing, Hu-DeHart admitted that the essays would be "morally disturbing and intellectually disruptive," and they were intended as such.⁷² M. Annette Jaimes' introduction for the volume sets a tone for the rest of the volume as she makes various comparisons between the United States and Hitler's SS and *einsatzgruppen* and includes the citation of Lord Jeffrey Amherst's distribution of blankets infected with small pox.⁷³

From this volume's onset, the content and tone is aimed at shocking the reader. Of all the historical significance a piece of research may have, its shock value is certainly not among the most important aspects for historical insight. It may serve political purposes quite proficiently, but it cannot extend far into the realm of academic scholarship. In the case of *The State of Native America*, it proves a fascinating glimpse into the political issue that contemporary Native Americans face. However, its overt political motives and purposefully shocking tone run somewhat counter to the objectivity-minded. Clear and well-founded historical understanding will not emerge from simply being shocked and bothered by a particular topic. Instead, it comes from

⁷¹ Evelyn Hu-DeHart, "Preface: The State of Native America," in M. Annette Jaimes, ed., *The State of Native America: Genocide, Colonization and Resistance* (Boston: South End Press, 1992), x.

⁷² *Ibid.*, x.

⁷³ See M. Annette Jaimes, "Introduction: Sand Creek, The Morning After," in M. Annette Jaimes, ed., *The State of Native America: Genocide, Colonization and Resistance* (Boston: South End Press, 1992), 1-12. Other essays in the volume by Ward Churchill, Winona LaDuke, Vine Deloria Jr., Jim Vander Wall, Tom Holm and Wendy Rose follow in similar tones. While not inherently invalid in their factual content, the manner in which they are written represent an aggressive and vocal Native community.

articulate, thorough and well-balanced analysis, discussion and presentation. This does not mean that authors should not express their opinions, even strongly stated ones, but that such opinions must be presented and couched within an analytical framework that objectively considers opposing points of view and alternative arguments. This methodology will foster scholarship more useful for further comparative study.

Another troublesome characteristic present in some scholarship is the tendency to speak in broad generalizations and oversimplified dichotomies, damaging historical understanding of both the individual and the group in their complex interactions with one another. On the group level, complex historical processes and events cannot be broken down into simple binaries of whites versus Indians. Patricia Limerick wrote “Only in rare circumstances were the affairs we call ‘white-Indian wars’ only matters of whites against Indians. More often, Indians took part on both sides, tribe against tribe or faction against faction, and whites sometimes played surprisingly peripheral roles in the working out of relationships between and among Indian groups.”⁷⁴ Yet, some scholars do break down historical conflicts into such simple terms. Robert Burnette, another early advocate of reform in Native American policy, displayed such simplified analysis in his 1971 book, *Tortured Americans*. To provide a historical background for his arguments on contemporary affairs, Burnette offered a brief survey of the past four-hundred years of Euro-Indian relations. The brevity of his analysis was not the problem, but rather the terms in which he labels and divides historical figures. Early Europeans were personified by Cotton Mather and labeled as “bloodthirsty missionaries” whereas Native Americans

⁷⁴ Patricia Limerick, *Something in the Soil: Legacies and Reckonings in the New West* (New York: W.W. Norton and Company, 2000), 33-34.

are grouped together and referred to collectively as “The Indian.”⁷⁵ Not only is his usage of Mather (one of the most extreme examples of inflammatory rhetoric he could have chosen) to represent the whole of the Pilgrim community troublesome, but the further division of the entire American population into two simple groups, the Indians and the White man, is grossly oversimplified. To conclude cursorily, “The Indian, who was not interested in the white man’s [religion] . . . to the unsophisticated red man, such [ideas] were an absurdity,” is poor historical analysis.⁷⁶ Granted, Burnette was not a trained scholar, but a tribal leader involved in government, but this does not exculpate him completely from standards of the historical field to which he was contributing. Broad generalizations erase the historical intricacies of individual and group interaction. It not only dismisses the complexity of relations between not only various groups of Native Americans and Europeans, but of relations between individuals as well.

In her seminal treatise on the nature of American West development, *The Legacy of Conquest*, Patricia Limerick offered further insight into the problems inherent in too readily grouping individuals into large generalized groups, and categorizing those groups along simplified lines. Limerick observed, “When Anglo-Americans look . . . into an Indian reservation, they are more likely to see stereotypes than recognizable individuals or particular groups; the same distortions of vision no doubt works the other way too. The unitary character known as ‘the white man’ has never existed, nor has ‘the Indian.’

⁷⁵ Robert Burnette, *Tortured Americans* (Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1971), 12.

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, 12.

Yet the phrases receive constant use, as if they carried necessary meaning.”⁷⁷ All historians of white-Indian interaction and conflict, regardless of how they interpret the past, would do well to strike these unitary platitudes from their lexis. The stereotypes, caricatures and generalizations that plagued the contemporary thought of decades past should not find footing in the lexicon of modern historical analysis. Studies that speak in such simple terms of “the Indian” and “the white man” are bound by their own limited scope to misrepresent historical events and figures.

These represent only a few legacies that modern Native American studies have inherited from Native American activist literature. These problems begin to exact more gravity when their deleterious effects extend beyond the bounds of their chosen topics. As peoples across the world grapple to understand and cope with tragedies in their own histories, many look to other examples of possible genocide for insight. By making comparisons with like events across the globe and from different eras, these historians seek to further understanding not only of their own history, but of the nature of genocide itself. When surveying modern history, the depopulation of America’s autochthonous peoples offers an unparalleled variety of comparative examples. Not only are the numbers involved staggering, but the diversity of situations, events and other such nuances in historical context that valuable comparisons and contrasts can be found for nearly any interested comparative historian. Unfortunately, most world historians are not experts on Native American history, and rely largely upon the literature being produced

⁷⁷ Limerick, *The Legacy of Conquest*, 349. Vine Deloria wrote, “‘Indianness’ never existed except in the mind of the beholder.” See Deloria, *Custer Died for Your Sins*, 265.

internally by this specific field. Hopefully an increase in objective studies within the field of Native American history will provide more material for comparative genocide studies historians to utilize.

CHAPTER III

THE DEBATE OVER COMPARATIVE GENOCIDE

It is entirely natural to care the most deeply about one's self and one's own people, and to care more intently for some people with whom one feels a more immediate kinship, but ultimately the challenge of human development, both for the benefit of individual mental health and happiness and for the benefit of humanity, is for more people to care about *all* human life.¹

- Israel W. Charny

For years there has been an often caustic debate among historians as to the singularity or uniqueness of the Jewish Holocaust of World War II. Historians involved in this debate include not only those studying the Holocaust and Jewish history, but academics from nearly all fields of world history. Examples of possible genocide can be found in the histories of diverse peoples worldwide, and consequently, historians of widely different specialties are deeply interested in comparative genocide studies. A central question in such comparative research is whether or not the Holocaust should be treated as paradigmatic and viewed on a level of its own. Many Holocaust historians have argued in the affirmative, asserting that the Holocaust has no equal comparison.

For those studying (or victims of) other genocidal events, such exclusionist views can be both troublesome and offensive. From these opposing groups has emerged a debate over the definition of genocide and which historical events qualify under such definitions. Unfortunately, much of this debate has been fueled, clouded and ultimately

¹ Israel Charny, "Which Genocide Matters More?: Learning to Care about Humanity," in *Genocide in the Twentieth Century: Critical Essays and Eyewitness Accounts*, ed. Samuel Totten, William S. Parsons and Israel W. Charny (New York: Garland Publishing, Inc., 1995), 542.

devalued by either polemical diatribes against competing views or defensive self-serving studies that more resemble competitive martyrdom and suffering than objective scholarly inquiry.² The comparative field between the Jewish Holocaust and the decimation of Native American populations in North America has particularly suffered as the aforementioned problems in Native American history lend to the descent into fiercely polemical works.³ Within this particular debate, there are both valuable studies that are sufficiently objective and insightful and those that represent academic and moral problems, demanding investigation and critique.⁴ Hence, the scope of this historiographic survey is to chronicle, sort through and critique these many problems, biases and opinions. This objective ultimately seeks a better understanding of the

² See Alan S. Rosenbaum, "Introduction," in Alan S. Rosenbaum, ed., *Is the Holocaust Unique? Perspectives on Comparative Genocide* (Boulder, Colorado: Westview Press, 1996), 2, 4.

³ Due to the overwhelming amount of scholarship and literature in the field of comparative genocide, it will not be possible to explore all of the cases of genocide, nor all of the arguments posited about them. Some good introductory glimpses into a more comprehensive study of genocide include the following. First and foremost see Israel Charny, *Encyclopedia of Genocide* (Santa Barbara, Calif.: ABC-CLIO, 1999). Other good studies include Samuel Totten, Wiliam S. Parsons and Israel Charny, ed., *Genocide in the Twentieth Century: Critical Essays and Eyewitness Accounts* (New York: Garland Publishing, Inc., 1995); Robert Gellately and Ben Kiernan, ed., *The Specter of Genocide: Mass Murder in Historical Perspective* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2003); and William D. Rubenstein, *Genocide: A History* (New York: Pearson Longman, 2004).

⁴ This is not to imply that the entire comparative genocide field is engrossed in a problematic and spiteful debate. Indeed, much of the field is not engaged in any sort of argumentative debate at all. Alongside many of the flawed and biased studies debating the uniqueness of the Holocaust and other genocides are numerous valuable studies that will be referenced throughout this study as examples of good scholarship within the field. Also, it should not be assumed that the practice of comparing genocides will inevitably lead to malicious debates. Comparative genocide studies can be fruitful, objective and insightful if undertaken correctly. This study hopes to point examples of good scholarship along with the problematic.

comparative genocide debate itself and to suggest new directions for this field of study to take.

BACKGROUND

Given the volatile nature of some of this field's historiography, a more detailed explanation of purpose, methodology and scope is important before proceeding. No attempt will be made to prove any one side of the debate right or wrong, place a quantitative or qualitative comparative value upon the genocides discussed, or settle ongoing arguments over the uniqueness of historical events. As stated by the historian Israel Charny, "Each configuration of historical, political, military, societal, and psychological processes that define a given genocidal process is inherently unique."⁵ By acknowledging and accepting such universal claim to uniqueness and not attempting to advocate the superiority or greater importance of any genocide, much can be learned from this ongoing debate.

In the case of the Native American – Jewish Holocaust comparison, the debate has been especially prolific and poignant; and in so being, it makes for an effective and fruitful historiographic analysis. Likewise, this particular debate has taken on a markedly personal tone. Elazar Barkan explained that the usage of the label genocide holds a "sacred quality that both sides want to preserve," and "thus, the controversy is how to employ it."⁶ In some examples, personal and political motives can be plainly read

⁵ Israel Charny, "Forward," in *Is the Holocaust Unique? Perspectives on Comparative Genocide*, ed. Alan S. Rosenbaum (Boulder, Colorado: Westview Press, 1996), xi.

⁶ Elazar Barkan, "Genocides of Indigenous Peoples: Rhetoric of Human Rights," in Robert Gellately and Ben Kiernan, eds., *The Specter of Genocide: Mass Murder in*

between the lines of the scholarship within the Native American – Holocaust debate, and it is these non-academic motives that give the debate its distinctly acrid tone and flavor.

At the heart of the debate is the very definition of the term genocide itself. The question of definition has also been central for much of the scholarship within the entire field of comparative genocide studies. The word, coined by the Polish jurist Raphael Lemkin in his post-World War II treatise *Axis Rule in Occupied Europe*, was defined as “a coordinated plan of different actions aiming at the destruction of essential foundations of the life of national groups, with the aim of annihilating the groups themselves.”⁷ As previously discussed, this term was later codified by the United Nations’ 1948 Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide as “acts committed with intent to destroy, in whole or in part, a national, ethnical, racial or religious group.”⁸

Historians on both sides of the debate generally base their individual definition around these originals, but they still disagree on its application and specific implications

Historical Perspective (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 121. This explains why some scholars of Native American history make note in their writings of their own indigenous heritage, stating their tribe or nation. In a short biography section in the appendix of *The State of Native America: Genocide, Colonization and Resistance*, all of the authors list their tribe. The intended implication being that this gives added credence to their writings. Some even use other Native historian’s tribal allegiance as pretext for criticism. See Lenore A. Stiffarm and Phil Lane, Jr., “Demography of Native North America: A Question of American Indian Survival,” in M. Annette Jaimes, ed., *The State of Native America: Genocide, Colonization and Resistance*, (Boston: South End Press, 1992), 26.

⁷ Raphael Lemkin, *Axis Rule in Occupied Europe* (Washington, D.C.: Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 1944), 79.

⁸ *Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide*, 78 U.N.T.S. 277, Article 2.

to a surprising degree. Many assert that genocide hinges upon intent, or the “actualization of intent,” as explained by Steven Katz.⁹ On the other hand, historians of the Native American experience have accused Holocaust historians like Katz of purposefully defining genocide in terms that more closely fit the Holocaust and exclude other examples. Said one enraged author, “They began with conclusions, peered through their facts, and came back in a circle to the same conclusions.”¹⁰

However, the definition of genocide used in some Native American studies has often been crafted with equal manipulation in order to best describe what occurred in North America. Namely, these definitions often seem more pliable and inclusive. For example, the agricultural and religious changes brought by the Catholic mission system in California, and subsequent population decline have been defined as genocide.¹¹ According to others, the very removal of Indians from their ancestral lands represents a form of cultural genocide.¹² As the examples of Native American genocide cover a broad range of circumstances over a period of several centuries, the criteria for defining genocide has followed similarly broad and flexibly applicable terms. Leo Kuper

⁹ Steven T. Katz, *The Holocaust in Historical Context, Volume 1: The Holocaust and Mass Death before the Modern Age* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1994), 131.

¹⁰ Ward Churchill, *A Little Matter of Genocide* (San Francisco, City Lights Books, 1997), 49. See also David E. Stannard, “Uniqueness as Denial: The Politics of Genocide Scholarship,” in *Is the Holocaust Unique?: Perspectives on Comparative Genocide*, ed. Alan S. Rosenbaum (Boulder, Colorado: Westview Press, 1996), 190.

¹¹ Jeannette Henry Costo, “The Sword and the Cross: The Missions of California,” in Rupert Costo and Jeannette Henry Costo, eds., *The Missions of California: A Legacy of Genocide* (San Francisco: Indian Historian Press, 1987), 58-9.

¹² See Andrea Smith, *Conquest: Sexual Violence and American Indian Genocide* (Cambridge: South End Press, 2005), 122.

correctly observed that many of these definitions are partially motivated by “ethnocentric preoccupations,” thus producing an “ethnocentric emphasis on the unique suffering of one’s own group as the target of total annihilatory intent.”¹³ Each side has defined genocide in the way that will best suit their needs, validate their research and even downplay that of others. This exploitative use and manipulation of the concept of genocide has fueled the heated and caustic attacks between such historians.

This phenomenon is perhaps best illustrated in Alan S. Rosenbaum’s volume, *Is the Holocaust Unique?* All seeking to answer the title’s question, historians of the Jewish Holocaust, the Romani (Gypsy) Holocaust, the Atlantic Slave Trade, the Armenian Genocide, Stalinist Russia, and Native America debate the various aspects of genocide’s definition and its applicability. One reviewer quoted on the paperback’s back cover pondered: “Does the argument for the Holocaust’s ‘uniqueness’ accurately focus attention on something new in history, or does it engender forgetfulness of other genocides and a sordid competition for ‘highest victim’ status?”¹⁴ While not all of the chapters in this volume represent attacks on other examples of genocide, some certainly do. Direct accusations, which will be cited in this chapter, on other historians and on the historical validity of another group’s suffering dominate this volume’s text. If nothing else, it demonstrates that debates over definition have the ability, if not a propensity, to turn polemical in nature. The ongoing debate between Holocaust historians and those of Native America over these issues substantiate this claim.

¹³ Leo Kuper, “Theoretical Issues Relating to Genocide: Uses and Abuses,” in George J. Andreopoulos, ed., *Genocide: Conceptual and Historical Dimensions* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1994), 31.

¹⁴ Edward T. Linenthal as cited in Alan S. Rosenbaum, *Is the Holocaust Unique?*

Historian Israel Charny rightfully finds this focus of debate troubling. Calling this phenomenon *definitionalism*, he fears that such arguments will relegate the reality of “human tragedy and infamy . . . to a secondary position [that is] no longer genuinely experienced.”¹⁵ As Charny and others have suggested elsewhere, the focus of genocide studies should be to understand why genocide occurs, how to predict it and to help prevent it from happening again in the future.¹⁶ However, some scholars have suggested that a firm definition of genocide is imperative in order to attain these goals.¹⁷ Frank Chalk and Kurt Jonassohn prefaced their case studies of genocide thus:

. . . a precise definition is of crucial importance in clarifying which events are being studied and what they have in common. A great many horrible events befall humanity: from wars and massacres to epidemics, famines, and natural disasters. However, neither our understanding of them nor our exploration of possible means of prediction and prevention will be facilitated by lumping them all together.¹⁸

These views are persuasive. To understand *what* is being examined – especially when conducting comparative research – requires clarity of definition. However, scholars must be careful not to devote so much focus to this issue at the cost the actual

¹⁵ Charny, “Forward,” xi.

¹⁶ See Israel W. Charny ed., *Toward the Understanding and Prevention of Genocide: Proceedings of the International Conference on the Holocaust and Genocide* (Boulder, Colorado: Westview Press, 1984); Israel Charny, *How Can we Commit the Unthinkable?* (Boulder, Colorado: Westview Press, 1982); and Jacob Katz, “Was the Holocaust Predictable?” in *The Holocaust as Historical Experience*, ed. Yehuda Bauer and Nathan Rotenstreich (New York: Holmes and Meier Publishers, Inc., 1981), 23-42.

¹⁷ See Samuel Totten, William S. Parson, and Robert K. Hitchcock, “Confronting Genocide and Ethnocide of Indigenous Peoples: An Interdisciplinary Approach to Definition, Intervention, Prevention, and Advocacy,” in *International Human Rights and Indigenous Peoples*, C. Patrick Morris and Robert K. Hitchcock, eds. (unpublished manuscript), 58.

¹⁸ Frank Chalk and Kurt Jonassohn, *The History and Sociology of Genocide: Analyses and Case Studies* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1990), 4.

historical analysis of the event – especially when such discussions can often turn argumentative and polemical in nature. The most troubling kind of these arguments over definitions are those that are driven by an attempt to assert one historical event as worse than another. This difference in emphasis changes the focus of the discussion away from finding a useful definitional foundation for comparative research, and delves down paths of polemics and propaganda. The more selfless goals advocated by Charny are thence marginalized. Definitions of genocide are necessary for comparative research, but they must be formulated objectively and for unbiased motives.¹⁹

William D. Rubenstein defines genocide as “the deliberate killing of most or all members of a collective group for the mere fact of being members of that group.”²⁰ Although some scholars will no doubt find problems with such a simplified definition, given the obvious sensitivity of the subject, the current discussion of the ongoing comparative genocide debate may require simplicity.²¹ Otherwise, it will not be possible to move beyond definitions and rise above polemics. Though a loose definition of genocide might be applied in analyzing the historiography on the subject, such liberal terminology must not be extended too far, as James Axtell warns:

¹⁹ For a fair overview of the definitionalism debate see *Ibid.*, 8-40.

²⁰ Rubenstein, *Genocide*, 2. Rubenstein here admits that “to virtually every word in this definition scholars and historians have taken exception, often furious exception.”

²¹ Israel Charny offers an excellent commentary on the need for, and problems in formulating a universally acceptable definition for genocide. Charny cites a number of pressures upon the definition process that prove problematic. He includes pressures to exclude events as genocide as to not generate legal responsibility to the perpetrating parties, pressures to exclude events for purposes of realpolitik, pressures to make mass murders as “important” as others, blatant denials of mass murder. These pressures make the task of defining genocide very difficult. See Israel Charny, “Towards a Generic Definition of Genocide,” in *Genocide: Conceptual and Historical Dimensions*, George J. Andreopoulos, ed. (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1994), 64-94.

Most of the words we use in history and everyday speech are like mental depth charges. When heard or read they quickly sink into our consciousness and explode, sending off cognitive shrapnel in all directions. On the surface they may look harmless enough, or resemble something equally benign. But as they descend and detonate, their resonant power is unleashed, showering our understanding with fragments of accumulated meaning and association. It therefore behooves us to use words – not just the moral-*sounding* ones but *all* of them – with extreme care and precision because they are powerful instruments of judgment, capable of maiming heedless handlers.²²

Among such terms that must be used carefully here, *genocide* stands supreme.

Hence, its usage must be supported by serious and judicious reasoning. “If we include every form of war, massacre, or terrorism under genocide,” writes Frank Chalk, “then what is it that we are studying?”²³ By agreeing on a basic – though not overly liberal – definition of genocide, historians may circumvent these fruitless arguments and instead work together towards greater understanding.

THE HOLOCAUST UNIQUENESS ARGUMENT

At the root of such arguments over definition stands the trend of numerous Holocaust historians who have forwarded the claim that the Holocaust is unique. Starting in 1974, A. Roy Eckardt offered a complex explanation for Holocaust singularity that entailed three levels of uniqueness. First was the *ordinary uniqueness* that all historic events can claim.²⁴ As Yehuda Bauer agreed, “Once an event has happened, it can

²² James Axtell, *Beyond 1492: Encounters in Colonial North America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1992), 260.

²³ Frank Chalk, “Redefining Genocide,” in *Genocide: Conceptual and Historical Dimensions*, George Andreopoulos, ed. (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1994), 60.

happen again, not in the precisely same form, but in one of an infinite number of variations.”²⁵ In this sense, all events in history are unique. The second level of uniqueness described by Eckardt was *unique uniqueness*. Events that reached this level were watershed, “epoch-making” events that held decisive importance for human history.²⁶ The Holocaust, he explained elsewhere, was *uniquely unique* because it was “*metanoia*, the climactic turning-around of the entire world.”²⁷ These first two levels, however, were not what set the Holocaust apart. The Holocaust, according to Eckardt, reached a third level, *transcending uniqueness*, in which the “quality of difference raises itself to a level of absoluteness.”²⁸ In Eckardt’s view, the Holocaust was not generically unique as all historical events are, and not even unique due to its “epoch-making” qualities. The Holocaust was unique on a transcendent, absolute level at which it stood alone.

Adding to Eckardt’s ideas of Holocaust uniqueness, the historian Yehuda Bauer introduced a different angle in his book *The Holocaust in Historical Perspective*. Published in 1978, Bauer attempted to make a distinction between genocide (as defined by Raphael Lemkin), and the Holocaust. “Clearly,” he acknowledged, “what was

²⁴ A. Roy Eckardt, “The Holocaust and the Enigma of Uniqueness: A Philosophical Effort at Practical Clarification,” *Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* 450 (July 1980): 166.

²⁵ Yehuda Bauer, *The Holocaust in Historical Perspective* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1978), 37.

²⁶ Eckardt, “The Holocaust and the Enigma of Uniqueness: A Philosophical Effort at Practical Clarification,” 167.

²⁷ A. Roy Eckardt, “Is the Holocaust Unique?” *Worldview* (September 1974): 35.

²⁸ Eckardt, “The Holocaust and the Enigma of Uniqueness: A Philosophical Effort at Practical Clarification,” 168.

happening to quite a number of people in Nazi Europe was genocide [T]he difference between that and the Holocaust lies in the difference between forcible, even murderous, denationalization, and wholesale, total murder of every one of the members of a community The only group that was destined for wholesale murder was the Jews.”²⁹ More recently, Bauer further explained that the Holocaust should also be set apart from other genocides due to its extreme nature. He defined it as “extreme” because of the “ideological, global and total character of the genocide of the Jews The extremeness of the Holocaust is what makes it unprecedented.”³⁰ Bauer did not contend that the Holocaust was the only genocide, but he does elevate it above all other genocides.³¹ It is this supposed Holocaust superiority that has sparked such sharp debate.³²

Assertions that the Holocaust’s uniqueness renders any such comparisons between the Holocaust and other supposed genocides irrelevant have been even more

²⁹ Bauer, *The Holocaust in Historical Perspective*, 35, 36.

³⁰ Yehuda Bauer, *Rethinking the Holocaust* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2001), 50.

³¹ Thankfully, Bauer does not digress into claiming that the Holocaust is different because the Jews suffered more. He states, “The suffering of victims of this genocide was in no sense greater than the suffering of victims of other genocides – there is no gradation of suffering.” *Ibid.*, 50.

³² The debate over Holocaust uniqueness is related to the broader controversy over the historicization of National Socialism. For insight into this related discussion, see Martin Broszat, “A Plea for the Historicization of National Socialism,” in Peter Baldwin, ed., *Reworking the Past: Hitler, the Holocaust, and the Historians’ Debate*, (Boston: Beacon Press, 1990), 77-87; Saul Friedländer, “Some Reflections on the Historicization of National Socialism,” in *ibid.*, 99; Martin Broszat and Saul Friedlander, “A Controversy about the Historicization of National Socialism,” *New German Critique* 44 (Spring 1988): 85-126; and Edward Alexander, *The Holocaust and the War of Ideas* (New Brunswick: Transaction Publishers, 1994), 211-217.

inflammatory. In a quasi-side note within her 1993 book *Denying the Holocaust*, Deborah Lipstadt accused historians who compare the Holocaust with the Armenian genocide of 1915, Stalin's gulags, the United States' actions in Vietnam, the Soviet occupation of Afghanistan or Pol Pot's murderous regime as engaging in "historical distortion."³³ Some have even condemned any comparisons with the Holocaust as "blasphemous."³⁴ According to Lipstadt, these attempts to show that the Germans acted "in good company" were "invalid historical comparisons," and "not analogous to the Holocaust."³⁵ Like Bauer, Lipstadt's contention was not based on gradations of suffering, or even numbers of victims, but rather that no comparisons between the Holocaust and other events were valid.³⁶ And, although her arguments were more

³³ Deborah E. Lipstadt, *Denying the Holocaust: The Growing Assault on Truth and Memory* (New York: The Free Press, 1993), 211, 213.

³⁴ See Peter Novik, *The Holocaust in American Life* (New York: Houghton Mifflin, 1999), 200. According to Jack Porter, editor of a volume comparing genocide, many authors in the volume were hesitant to contribute because the comparing of *their* genocide with others may cheapen their uniqueness. See Jack Nusan Porter, "Preface," in Jack Nusan Porter, ed., *Genocide and Human Rights: A Global Anthology* (Washington D.C.: University Press of America, Inc., 1982), iv. A good source on the general trends in American Holocaust studies and the politics of comparison is Katherine Bischooping and Andrea Kalmin, "Public Opinion about Comparisons to the Holocaust," *Public Opinion Quarterly* 63 (Winter 1999): 485-507. For an insightful discussion of the specific politics involved with America's seeming preoccupation with Holocaust studies and eagerness to memorialize it, but reluctance to give similar treatment to crimes in American history, see Lilian Friedberg, "Dare to Compare: Americanizing the Holocaust," *American Indian Quarterly* 24 (Summer 2000): 353-380. Norman Finklestein sees the presence of the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum as "particularly incongruous in the absence of a museum commemorating crimes in the course of American history." See Norman Finklestein, *The Holocaust Industry: Reflections on the Exploitation of Jewish Suffering* (New York: Verso, 2003), 72.

³⁵ Lipstadt, 213.

³⁶ She stated, "This is not a matter of comparative pain or competitive suffering." It is misguided to attempt to gauge which group endured more. For the victims in all

motivated and impassioned by her attempt to denounce Holocaust deniers, the effect, that of setting the Holocaust apart in a historical realm of its own is the same.

Whereas Eckardt, Bauer and Lipstadt simply proclaimed the Holocaust as a unique example of genocides, Steven Katz has asserted that the Holocaust is the only genocide in human history. This view, a far more exclusionist one than in previously discussed authors, claims that many of the events commonly used in comparison with the Holocaust should not even be considered genocide. This is an extreme stance that neither Eckardt, Bauer nor Lipstadt has taken. After discussing his definition of genocide in *The Holocaust in Historical Context*,³⁷ Katz made the following statement:

Employing this definition we can begin to recognize that Assyrian, Babylonian, Persian, Hellenistic, Roman and Crusader policy was cruel, but not every cruelty is genocide. That Hun, Muslim, Mughan, Imperial Japanese, Mongol and conquistador behavior was tyrannical, but not every tyranny is genocide. That slavery – ancient, Caribbean, and American – is an abomination, but not every abomination is genocide That the exploitation of the weak by the strong is immoral and unconscionable, but not every immoral or unconscionable act is genocidal. That oblitative aerial bombardment may be barbaric, but not every barbarism is genocide. That the forced emigration of a million Russians to Siberia in the nineteenth century was political oppression involving murderous intent, as was the later repetition of such migration under Stalin, but not even all murderous intent is genocide. That the mass Russian emigration between 1917 and 1922 as a result of the German invasion, the Russian Revolution, and the great famine that affected up to 15 million souls is horror untold, but not every national tragedy is genocide.³⁸

these tragedies the oppressors' motives were and remain irrelevant. Nor is this a matter of a head count of victims or a question of whose loss was larger. In fact, Stalin killed more people than did the Nazis. But that is not the issue." Ibid., 213.

³⁷ Katz defines genocide as "the actualization of intent, however successfully carried out, to murder in its totality any national, ethnic, racial, religious, political, social, gender or economic group, as these groups are defined by the perpetrator, by whatever means." See Katz, *The Holocaust in Historical Context*, 131.

³⁸ Ibid., 135-36.

Virtually all the historical events usually accepted as genocides are diminished to mere tragedies by Katz. Such exclusionist definitions have enraged scholars of Native American history. It implies, argue some, that exclusionist Holocaust historians view the mass murder of non-Jewish ethnic or national groups as not historically important or as serious as the Holocaust.³⁹ Native Americans, who numbers-wise lost far more of their population, have seen attempts to set the Jewish Holocaust at an incomparable level as an affront to the crimes committed against their Indian ancestors.

HISTORIANS OF NATIVE AMERICA REACT

In 1992, as the quincentennial commemoration of Christopher Columbus's discovery of the Americas drew to a close, the exclusionist ideas of Katz and others came to an intersection with a dramatic increase in Native American scholarship. Much of this influx of Native American history represented an opposition to the celebration of what they viewed as the start of the near-complete destruction of indigenous peoples. Studies with titles like *The Conquest of Paradise*; *Confronting Columbus*; *The State of Native America: Genocide, Colonization and Resistance*; and *American Holocaust* started to appear and attack the conventional or traditional ways in which American history was told. These studies attacked Columbus as a proto-Nazi, worthy of comparison with Heinrich Himmler, and complicitly responsible for the deaths of tens of millions of

³⁹ See Pierre Papazian, "A 'Unique Uniqueness?'" *Midstream* 30 (April 1984):14-18. In this article he states, "To claim that the Holocaust was unique can only imply that attempts to annihilate other national or cultural groups are not to be considered genocide, thus diminishing the gravity and moral implications of any genocide anywhere, and time. It also implies that the Jews have a monopoly on genocide, that no matter what misfortune befalls another people, it cannot be as serious or even in the same category as the Holocaust." For an interesting response to Papazian's article, see George Kren and Leon H. Rappoport, "Was the Holocaust Unique? Responses to Pierre Papazian," *Midstream* 30 (April 1984): 22.

Native Americans following his arrival.⁴⁰ The American Indian Movement released statements agreeing with this view. In one press release entitled, “Indigenous People's Opposition to Celebration and Glorification of Colonial Pirate Christopher Columbus,” they wrote, “To our Italian American friends, and others we say that to celebrate the legacy of this murderer is an affront to all Indian peoples, and others who truly understand this history. It would be the same as if German people would celebrate and glorify Adolf Hitler and the rise of fascism, and the Nazi holocaust by holding parades through the Jewish communities of America and throughout the world.”⁴¹ These dissenting voices have aimed to show that a great genocide had been committed on the American continent, and hence, from the Native American point of view, Columbus Day was no occasion for celebration. However, the quincentennial celebrations were only the spark that ignited a debate already well-kindled with contention over the aforementioned issue of Holocaust uniqueness.

⁴⁰ See Ward Churchill, “*Deconstructing the Columbus Myth*,” in *Confronting Columbus*, ed. John Yewell, Chris Dodge and Jan DeSirey (Jefferson, North Carolina: McFarland and Company, Inc., Publishers, 1992) 153-156. He here states, “In the end, all practical distinctions between Columbus and Himmler...evaporate upon close inspection.” Other comparisons between Columbus and Nazism, both direct and indirect, are made in this same volume by other authors as well. See pages 6, 117 and 126-127. Elsewhere Churchill states that comparisons of Columbus and Hitler perhaps unfair since Columbus was never the head of state. However, Churchill argues, “comparisons of him to Nazi SS leader Heinrich Himmler, rather than Hitler, are therefore more accurate and appropriate,” and the similarities between the two “bear more than casual resemblance. See Ward Churchill, *Indians Are Us?* (Monroe, Maine: Common Courage Press, 1994), 29-30. David Stannard makes Nazi comparisons as well. See David Stannard, *The Politics of Genocide Scholarship*, 166.

⁴¹ This press release was on 10 October 2005 and can be accessed at the American Indian Movement Website; available from <http://www.aimovement.org/moipr/columbus05.html>; Internet; accessed 13 February 2006.

New revisionist scholarship of Native America examined the consequences of the European conquest in the New World and what they termed to be subsequent genocides. Some of the advocates of Holocaust uniqueness and singularity came under immediate attack. The author of *American Holocaust: Columbus and the Conquest of the New World*, David Stannard, agreed that the Holocaust was an “abominably unique event,” but he also recognized a host of other genocides as unique events. He saw no harm in claiming uniqueness of historical events, but found great fault in doing so at the cost of diminishing the true extent of other groups’ suffering.⁴²

In defense of Holocaust singularity, Steven Katz argued that claiming uniqueness does not advance “a moral claim” that diminishes “the misfortunes that befall other peoples.”⁴³ Later Katz explained:

In arguing for the uniqueness of the Holocaust, I am *not* making a *moral* claim, in other words, that the Holocaust was more evil than...the Armenians in World War I, the devastation of the Native American communities over the centuries, the decimation of Ukraine by Stalin, the treatment of the Gypsies during World War II, and the enslavement and mass death of black Africans during the enterprise of New World slavery. I know no method or technique that would allow one to weigh up, to quantify and compare, such massive evil and suffering, and I therefore avoid altogether this sort of counterproductive argument about what one might describe as comparative suffering.⁴⁴

Katz did not want to prove the Holocaust any worse or more evil than other genocides. He simply wanted to show how it was different than anything that had ever happened before. In direct rebuttal to accusations by Pierre Papazian, Katz asserted further that

⁴² David Stannard, *American Holocaust* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1992), 151-152.

⁴³ Katz, *The Holocaust in Historical Context*, 33n.

⁴⁴ Steven T. Katz, “The Uniqueness of the Holocaust: The Historical Dimension,” in Alan S. Rosenbaum, ed., *Is the Holocaust Unique?*, 19.

equating uniqueness with levels of moral evil is pure error.⁴⁵ Stannard and others disagreed however, viewing claims of Holocaust incomparability as intrinsically tied to assigning levels of moral evil. To these historians, any claim to Holocaust singularity was an affront to the decimation of the autochthonous American Indian populations and to victims of all genocides.

To articulate their opposition to Holocaust singularity, some offended parties have paradoxically equated uniqueness with Holocaust denial. David Stannard wrote of Holocaust exclusionists in 1996, “Their manufactured claims of uniqueness for their own people are, after all, synonymous with dismissal and denial of the experience of others.”⁴⁶ Ward Churchill echoed similar accusations a year later stating, “Proponents of uniqueness have engaged in holocaust denial on the grand scale, not only with respect to the Armenians, Ukrainians, and Cambodians, but as regards scores of other instances of genocide, both historical and contemporary.”⁴⁷ For Stannard and Churchill, uniqueness intrinsically implied some qualitative moral comparison that made other genocides less important and hence, was a form of Holocaust denial; not denial of the Jewish Holocaust, but denial of all the other genocides have occurred. The impetus for this argument is again the issue of definition. What constitutes Holocaust and genocide for Katz differed from that of scholars of Native American history; therefore, Katz did not view his unique Holocaust as diminishing the importance of other events, whereas researchers of those other events did.

⁴⁵ See Katz, *The Holocaust in Historical Context*, 33n; and Papazian, 14-18.

⁴⁶ David E. Stannard, “Uniqueness as Denial: The Politics of Genocide Scholarship,” 199.

⁴⁷ Churchill, *A Little Matter of Genocide*, 36.

CHALLENGING HISTORICAL SCHOLARSHIP

Moving beyond philosophical topics of definitions and comparability, the most heated part of the debate has comprised direct attacks on historical scholarship. The most inflammatory remarks have come in the form of directly condemning the interpretation of historical evidence and the arguments each side was using. Within the areas of numbers and intent, Katz and his Native American history counterparts have fought much of their debate.⁴⁸ Also, it is by these two criteria that historians on both sides of the debate have argued whether or not Native American depopulation was genocide at all. Through these points of historical rather than philosophical contention, the historian's underlying assumptions, prejudices and beliefs about the nature of the events in Native North America and in Nazi Germany and occupied Europe become apparent, and the character of the debate presents itself more fully.

A question relating to numbers has evolved around arguments over which types of deaths should be counted as genocide and whether the numbers of victims alone proves genocide has occurred. While Native American demography represents an entire field of historical debate in and of itself, it has played a significant role in the debate among genocide scholars. In 1987, Russell Thornton published an in-depth study of Native American depopulation entitled *American Indian Holocaust and Survival: A Population History Since 1492*. This book offered a statistical analysis of New World depopulation. Thornton reported that indigenous pre-contact North American population estimates of

⁴⁸ Katz, "The Uniqueness of the Holocaust: the Historical Dimension," 20-27. For an excellent overview of the entire debate, but especially the subjects of numbers and intent see Guenter Lewy, "Were American Indians the Victims of Genocide?" *Commentary* (September 2004): 55-63. (<http://hnn.us/articles/7302.html>)

the last century have ranged from 900,000 to 18 million, but the 18 million population estimate, proposed by Anthropologist Henry Dobyns in his 1983 study *Their Numbers Become Thinned*, was far too large.⁴⁹ For various reasons, Thornton proposed a 5+ million estimate as more accurate,⁵⁰ a number some historians find troublingly low.⁵¹ Kirkpatrick Sale's 1992 publication, *The Conquest of Paradise*, asserted that the best working number for pre-contact population should be closer to 15 million.⁵² According to Sale's estimates, the total population decline in North America from 1492 to 1900 was between 95 and 99 percent.⁵³ Regardless of what pre-contact population estimate is accepted (excluding the excessively low estimates of 900,000), the overall decline of indigenous populations in North America was tremendous. Within the Native American – Jewish Holocaust debate, the fact that this occurred has not been a point of contention.

⁴⁹ Russell Thornton, *American Indian Holocaust and Survival: A Population History Since 1492* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1987), 25-26. See also Henry Dobyns, *Their Numbers Become Thinned: Native American Population Dynamics in Eastern North America* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1983).

⁵⁰ Thornton's reasoning attempted to be somewhat more reasonable than previous studies. As some estimates were based on the maximum possible populations, he wrote, "It may be assumed American Indians existed in somewhat less than the maximum possible numbers before European arrival." Thornton, 32.

⁵¹ Even within the Native American community, the debate over numbers is contentious. Upset by Thornton's 5+ million estimate, historians Lenore A. Stiffarm and Phil Lane, Jr., ferociously attacked his number and credibility in a 1992 article. Chronicling the different estimates given, they wrote, "This time the establishment response came from Russell Thornton, a somewhat confused Cherokee demographer at the University of Minnesota (now at the University of California - Berkeley) who appears to have glimpsed an opportunity to acquire 'academic credibility' through adding the weight of his 'native voice' to the chorus of 'respectable scholars' insistently low-counting native population." See Stiffarm and Lane, 26.

⁵² Kirkpatrick Sale, *The Conquest of Paradise: Christopher Columbus and the Columbian Legacy* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1990), 315.

⁵³ Stiffarm and Lane, 37.

However, how this depopulation unfolded, how the process compares with the Holocaust, and whether or not it constitutes genocide have been widely contested.

One such implication, proposed by Leonore A. Stiffarm and Phil Lane, Jr., is that the numbers alone equate genocide. Referring to Kirkpatrick Sale's population estimates, they stated, "The record speaks for itself. No further commentary."⁵⁴ For them, numbers alone end the debate altogether as to whether genocide occurred. With 95 – 99% of the population dying, that meant genocide. Steven Katz, the staunch Holocaust exclusionist, agreed that the Native American depopulation was a "near unimaginable demographic collapse,"⁵⁵ and, he continued, "Contrasted solely on statistical grounds, the collapse of the Native American population, both absolutely and proportionally, surpasses the destruction of European Jewry."⁵⁶

However, validating these drastic statistics does not end the debate. For Katz, the issue is not worthy of argument – numbers simply did not matter at all.⁵⁷ Nevertheless, as Native American scholars have used statistics to support their claims for genocide, Katz and others have directly addressed the question of whether numbers of victims is an important factor in qualifying events as a genocide or Holocaust. Along with Katz, other advocates of Holocaust uniqueness have rebutted the Native American claim to genocide by virtue of numbers killed. Their central argument against scholars of Native American history has been that disease was the primary cause of those deaths, not intentional

⁵⁴ Ibid., 36.

⁵⁵ Katz, *The Holocaust in Historical Context*, 66.

⁵⁶ Ibid., 91, 119.

⁵⁷ See Ibid., 67-100.

murder.⁵⁸ According to Katz, these deaths cannot be counted as genocide due to the lack of intent; it was an “*unintended* tragedy” resulting from European contact.⁵⁹

In response, David Stannard’s attack took two forms. First, he has proposed that there is no firm evidence supporting exactly how many indigenous deaths were caused by disease. He labeled such claims as “undocumented assertions” with no “basis of solid evidence” and “nothing more than a scholarly article of faith.”⁶⁰ Furthermore, beyond claiming that no one can officially determine the number of disease-related deaths, Stannard is of the belief that such deaths should be officially counted as genocide, regardless of their number. He argued that Jewish deaths from disease, some 1.6 million within the concentration camps and 800,000 outside the camps, were counted as genocide, and therefore Native American deaths by disease should be also counted.⁶¹

⁵⁸ Ibid., 91; Katz, “*The Uniqueness of the Holocaust: the Historical Dimension*,” 21; Omer Bartov, “Seeking the Roots of Modern Genocide: On the Macro- and Microhistory of Massmurder,” in *The Specter of Genocide: Mass Murder in Historical Perspective*, ed. Robert Gellately and Ben Kiernan (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 75. It cannot be denied that many of the deaths in North America were due to disease, primarily smallpox.

⁵⁹ Katz, *The Holocaust in Historical Context*, 20 (emphasis in original). James Axtell offers an excellent discussion of some of the problems in using the term genocide to describe the killing of all Indians.

⁶⁰ Stannard, “Uniqueness as Denial: The Politics of Genocide Scholarship,” 173.

⁶¹ Ibid., 178. Suzanne Austin Alchon’s offers a fresh new perspective on the role of disease in Native North America that deserves attention. She contends that New World epidemics are not incongruous with millennia of epidemics in the Old World. She states, “mortality owing to virgin soil epidemics of smallpox, measles, and plague was no higher in the Americas than it had been in Europe, Asia, and Africa when those same diseases first appeared there.” In all, her study attempts to dispel the “widely held notion of New World exceptionalism,” the romanticized view of pre-contact Native America and to correct the recent overemphasis on the “long-term impact of disease” and to redirect foci to other legacies of European colonialism. See Suzanne Austin Alchon, *A*

Unfortunately, this disregards the complex differences between the concentration camp system and the centuries of death by disease in the New World.

Although the logic, statistics, and conclusions to all of these arguments over numbers and their meanings are at times dubious, they are valuable in understanding the debate. The two opposing sides have used the same issue of numbers to prove completely opposing views. Holocaust historians, who have fewer victims, have claimed that numbers don't matter, whereas scholars of Native American history, who have lost greater numbers, asserted that numbers are vital and significant in defining genocide. This pattern of each side focusing on what best serves proving their point runs throughout the debate. As both sides have debated the question of numbers, using the topic for themselves and against each other, the issue of intent has also been equally debated and utilized.

Indeed, intent has been *the key issue* that most advocates of Holocaust uniqueness have used in claiming that Native American depopulation was not genocide. It has been the focus of much debate partially because by current international law, intent is a crucial factor in prosecuting war crimes like genocide.⁶² By current international legal standards, genocide requires intent, so historians have retrospectively placed a contemporary importance on intent in classifying historic events as genocide. Native American historians Stiffarm and Lane claimed that intent worked towards their advantage in this debate because they saw various examples of official United States government policy

Pest in the Land: New World Epidemics in a Global Perspective (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 2003), 2-5.

⁶² Robert Gellately and Ben Kiernan, "The Study of Mass Murder and Genocide," in Robert Gellately and Ben Kiernan, eds., *The Specter of Genocide: Mass Murder in Historical Perspective* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 14.

that called for genocide. Their reasoning highlighted events of the mid-to-late nineteenth-century, like the Navajo internment at Bosque Redondo and massacres at Blue River, Bear River, Sand Creek, Washita River, Sappa Creek, Camp Robinson, and Wounded Knee.⁶³ David Stannard and others have offered lists of examples that included quotations from governors of colonial Virginia and nineteenth-century California expressing the need to kill *all* the Natives.⁶⁴ In prefacing her account of the 1875 Sappa Creek fight with the Cheyenne, Mari Sandoz described the “general policy” of the United States on the Great Plains as “extermination.”⁶⁵ Other commonly cited examples of genocidal events include the one-sided conflicts at Sand Creek, Wounded Knee and the Washita River. These examples, Axtell argues, must be tempered

⁶³ Stiffarm and Lane, 34.

⁶⁴ Stannard, *American Holocaust*, 107, 142-145. The Virginia House of Burgesses voted in 1711 in favor of a £20,000 war bill “for extirpating all Indians without distinction of Friends or Enemy.” See James Axtell, *The European and the Indian: Essays in the Ethnohistory of Colonial North America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1981), 314. For a good treatment of the nineteenth-century events in northern California examples, see Lynwood Carranco and Estle Beard, *Genocide and Vendetta: The Round Valley Wars of Northern California* (Norman: University of Oklahoma, 1981). For another perspective on the situation on in California, see Jack Norton, “The Path of Genocide: From El Camino Real to the Gold Mines of the North,” Costo, eds., 111-129. Laurence M. Hauptman suggested that “genocide” can only be used in very limited instances – such as during the Pequot War in the seventeenth-century and the tribes of northern California during the Gold Rush. See Laurence M. Hauptman, *Tribes and Tribulations: Misconceptions About American Indians and Their Histories* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1995), 5. James Axtell agrees with these examples. Steven Katz and Michael Freeman have likewise bantered back and forth over the Pequot question. Their discussion very much embodies the larger debate as a whole. See Steven T. Katz, “The Pequot War Reconsidered,” *New England Quarterly* 64 (June 1991): 206-224; Michael Freeman, “Puritans and Pequots: The Question of Genocide,” *New England Quarterly* 68 (June 1995): 278-293; Steven T. Katz, “Pequots and the Question of Genocide: A Reply to Michael Freeman,” *New England Quarterly* 68 (December 1995): 641-649.

⁶⁵ Mari Sandoz, *Cheyenne Autumn* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1953), 83.

somewhat by delineating between specific genocidal events or massacres and wholesale government-sanctioned extermination.⁶⁶

Many argue that these specific events typify the broader direction of United States Indian policy. Though not rife with constant organized attempts for genocide, United States Indian policy was slowly pushing for the extinction of Native peoples, both physically and culturally. Comparisons to Nazi Germany have been used by some to highlight similarities in general policy and genocidal intent. Annette Jaimes has compared the United States policy of westward expansion, Manifest Destiny, and progress to the Nazi ideology of lebensraum. In both cases, Jaimes argued, the political philosophy and policy required the removal and even extermination of the people inhabiting those regions.⁶⁷ Indeed, a similarity is apparent. Both governments wanted to expand into already populated regions and viewed cohabitation with the current residents as problematic or ideologically undesirable. However, superficial similarity in circumstance does not compulsorily translate into shared genocidal intent. Jaimes explained further that the only reason that there was any difference in the numbers directly killed by government policy was because “The machinery of death available to the Chivingtons, Sheridans, and Custers on North America’s Great Plains simply left

⁶⁶ See Axtell, *Beyond 1492: Encounters in Colonial North America*, 260-266. While these examples all represent the attempt to prove genocide by intent, some authors have implied that conscious intent is not requisite for genocide. George Tinker wrote, “The Christian missionaries – of all denominations working among American Indian nations – were partners in genocide. Unwittingly no doubt, and always with the best intentions, nevertheless the missionaries were guilty of complicity in the devastation of Indian cultures and tribal social structures – complicity in the devastating impoverishment and death of the people to whom they preached.” The results, not intent, of their actions proved genocide. See George E. Tinker, *Missionary Conquest: the Gospel and Native American Cultural Genocide* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1993), 4.

⁶⁷ Jaimes, 3.

them incapable of engaging in slaughter at the same pace as the Nazis, no matter how hard they tried.”⁶⁸ For some, the genocidal intent of the U.S. government and Nazi Germany were the same, and the difference in numbers was simply a product of circumstance and available technology.

Despite Native American history scholars’ lack of substantial examples of intent, some have even used intent offensively to imply that the Holocaust itself displayed no evidence of intent. Going a step beyond his previous claims of genocidal intent in the United States, David Stannard lashed out specifically against Steven Katz and Yehuda Bauer:

But finally, there is the most elementary question that must be asked of those who claim that the keystone argument in favor of Jewish uniqueness resides in the Nazi determination to kill all Jews everywhere: Is the very assertion regarding Nazi intent *itself* true? The answer is no.⁶⁹

In essence, Stannard is taking the Holocaust historians’ attacks against Native American history and turning it back on them. Ward Churchill agreed that the Nazis never intended to kill all the Jews.⁷⁰ According to both Stannard and others, the matter of intent was the only issue the Holocaust historians had left to prove Holocaust uniqueness.⁷¹ But, in their view, there was not even sufficient evidence to prove Nazi intent to commit a complete genocide.

⁶⁸ Ibid., 6. Stiffarm and Lane claim in their article, “by the mid-19th century, U.S. policymakers and military commanders were stating – openly, frequently and in plain English-that their objective was no less than the “complete extermination” of any native people who resisted being dispossessed of their lands, subordinated to federal authority, and assimilated into the colonizing culture.” See Stiffarm and Lane, 34.

⁶⁹ Stannard, “Uniqueness as Denial: The Politics of Genocide Scholarship,” 185.

⁷⁰ See also Churchill, *A Little Matter of Genocide*, 33-35.

⁷¹ Stannard, “Uniqueness as Denial: The Politics of Genocide Scholarship,” 183.

As a rebuttal to these claims that there was genocidal intent in North America and not in Nazi Germany, Steven Katz has offered numerous examples that prove the contrary. He wrote that “the U.S. government *never* undertook a general campaign, never articulated a comprehensive policy, aimed at the wholesale eradication of the Indian.”⁷² James Clifton wrote similarly, “In over two hundred years it has existed as a nation, no U.S. administration from George Washington to Ronald Reagan has ever approved, tolerated, or abetted a policy aimed at the deliberate systematic extermination of Indians.”⁷³ Other points offered by Katz against Native American genocide include that the United States offered chances for assimilation; that when the United States military could have annihilated entire tribes, it did not; and that most Native American deaths were caused by disease, not intentional murder.⁷⁴ In short, the United States government never declared in an imperative statement that “no Indians can live.”⁷⁵ Agreeing with Katz, Yehuda Bauer explained that only Nazi Germany enacted a policy of total extermination and gave several examples of Nazi intent to commit genocide.⁷⁶ Since Holocaust historians like Katz and Bauer use intent as one of their central pillars for arguing Holocaust uniqueness, they have been quick to deny its application in the Native American case, and firm in proving its existence in Nazi Germany.

⁷² Katz, *The Holocaust in Historical Context*, 21.

⁷³ James Clifton, “Alternate Identities and Cultural Frontiers,” in James A. Clifton, ed., *Being and Becoming Indian: Biographical Studies of North American Frontiers* (Chicago: Dorsey Press, 1989), 6.

⁷⁴ Katz, “*The Uniqueness of the Holocaust: the Historical Dimension*,” 21, 25, 28.

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, 25; Katz, *The Holocaust in Historical Context*, 580.

⁷⁶ Bauer, *The Holocaust in Historical Perspective*, 38.

WHY THE DEBATE?

The back-and-forth nature of the Native American – Holocaust dialogue is painfully clear. The reason for why the debate has been so polemical is also apparent. Each study has been based on presupposed conclusions, prejudices and biases. David Stannard's article in *Is the Holocaust Unique?* was based entirely on the premise that Native American depopulation and the Jewish Holocaust were worthy of a completely equal comparison, whereas Steven Katz's article in the same volume was framed on the assumption that the Holocaust was incomparable. Hence, their conclusions are understandably contradictory, even if they used much of the same evidence. Ward Churchill even admitted his bias, stating in the introduction of one book, "Although I readily admit to bearing an abstract allegiance to them, I am not prompted by primarily academic concerns To put it plainly, my goals are unequivocally political."⁷⁷ While Churchill has been perhaps alone in admitting his bias motives, he has joined together with other scholars in not being willing to lay aside such biases in order to take an objective look at the evidence.⁷⁸ Instead, those involved in the debate write polemical diatribes that do little in advancing the knowledge of the historical community. Such overt biases have caused each side to ignore evidence that does not fit within their predetermined rubric, highlighting only evidence that specifically support their theses,

⁷⁷ Churchill, *A Little Matter of Genocide*, 11.

⁷⁸ One reviewer of David Stannard's *American Holocaust*, "Stannard's book...does not pretend to be objective. Topics are highly selective, generalizations too sweeping...an impressive array of data is collected and arranged to prove the point, rather than to bring out the whole picture." See Yasuhide Kawashima, review of *American Holocaust: The Conquest of the New World*, by David E. Stannard, *The Western Historical Quarterly* 25, no. 4 (Winter 1994): 525-526.

and often taking evidence completely out of context. Though all historians employ certain degrees of selectivity for sources, some level of fairness should be employed in showing opposing views as well. Little historical understanding of lasting value comes from one-sided and manipulated scholarship.

As many of the problems within the debate have already made themselves apparent, the consequences thereof deserve attention. Namely, their flagrant biases have led them down some dangerous roads; namely, contradictory or faulty logic, misrepresentation in research and outright dishonesty. On the side of Holocaust historians, a good example of contradictory or faulty logic is found in Steven Katz's discussion of statistics. In one instance, Katz said that numbers or quantity of deaths would not prove the uniqueness of the Holocaust.⁷⁹ Nevertheless, in trying to prove the difference between Native American events and the Holocaust, Katz relied heavily upon numbers, statistics and quantity as his evidence. Faulty logic on the Native American side of the debate can be found in the earlier cited Native American proofs of genocidal intent in the Americas. The statements used to prove genocidal intent were made about specific tribes in specific places and at specific times, not about all of North America's autochthonous population as a whole. However, the numbers used in conjunction with these proofs of intent span across centuries and refer to the entire North American continent. These two evidences refer to two very different phenomena, and hence produce a logical gap when used together.⁸⁰ Both sides of the debate, overly eager to prove their theses, have overlooked important flaws in their arguments and logic. Again,

⁷⁹ Katz, *The Holocaust in Historical Context*, 67.

⁸⁰ Katz, "The Uniqueness of the Holocaust: the Historical Dimension," 20.

this is a result of their narrow-minded bias and zeal to prove their points correct and the other side's wrong.

More troublesome than faulty logic have been the examples of outright dishonesty present within the debate. In his contribution to *Is the Holocaust Unique?*, David Stannard misquoted journalists Charles Krauthammer and Christopher Hitchens.⁸¹ Stannard reported that in Krauthammer's article he attacks "anyone who dared express regret over the killing of millions of innocent people and the destruction of entire ancient cultures in the Americas," when in fact Krauthammer makes no mention of "killing millions of innocent people."⁸² Stannard also claimed that Krauthammer believed that any level of destruction and mass murder was "justified," because the European society of liberty was better than the communal Inca society. In actuality, Krauthammer said that European society was better than the totalitarian structure of Inca society, but he specifically makes the condition that "That belief does not justify the cruelty of the conquest."⁸³

⁸¹ Elazer Barkan points out another interesting methodological problem in the work of David Stannard. In attempting to boost his evidence, Stannard uses the highest death estimates possible. In doing this, Stannard includes both deaths by disease and murder; intentional and unintentional. Barkan explains, "Presumably, his aim is to claim the total numbers of deaths, regardless of causes, as the evil of colonialism. Yet, lumping everything together increases the number of the claimed victims, but diminishes the moral poignancy of the claim." Delineating between intentional and accidental deaths would have reduced Stannard's numbers, but would have helped him prove his thesis more effectively. Although this is at the same time an example of the polemical attacks historians make upon one another, it does illustrate a methodological problem in the scholarship. See Barkan, 121-122.

⁸² See David Stannard, "Uniqueness as Denial: The Politics of Genocide Scholarship," 165-166; C. Krauthammer, "Hail Columbus, Dead White Male." *Time*, 27 May 1991, 74.

⁸³ *Ibid.*, 74.

Of Christopher Hitchens, Stannard wrote, “To Hitchens, anyone who refused to join him in celebrating with ‘great vim and gusto’ the annihilation of the native peoples of the Americas was (in his words) self-hating, ridiculous, ignorant and sinister.”⁸⁴ In actuality, Hitchens celebrated with “great vim and gusto,” the “nearly boundless epoch of opportunity and innovation” brought with the establishment of the United States, not the annihilation of Native peoples. Also, Stannard’s claim of Hitchens’ “own words,” of *self-hating, ridiculous, ignorant* and *sinister* are grossly misrepresented. Yes, those words (or a variation of them) are used in Hitchens’s article, but not even all in the same sentence (or paragraph) and definitely not in the context insinuated by Stannard. Finally, Stannard claims that Hitchens says that “such violence is worth glorying.”⁸⁵ This is not true. Nowhere in Hitchens’ article does he advocate glorifying the violence perpetrated against Native Americans or anyone for that matter. This particular historian’s zeal to prove his point ultimately compromised the integrity of his study.

In the historiography of the Sand Creek Massacre, which will be discussed in some length in the following chapter, Ward Churchill exhibited similar dishonesty in his complete misquotation of Colonel or Reverend John M. Chivington concerning the massacre. Supposedly using two quotations from Stan Hoig’s *The Sand Creek Massacre*, Churchill took one completely out of context and simply lied about the other. He stated that Chivington instructed his troops on the way to Sand Creek to “use any means under God’s heaven to kill [the] Indians and be sure to ‘kill and scalp all, little and big.’” The first half of this statement, cited as coming from p. 142 of Hoig’s book, actually comes

⁸⁴ Christopher Hitchens, “Minority Report,” *The Nation* 19 October 1992, 12.

⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, 12.

from the night before the attack, and is a part of a private conversation. It refers to what Chivington believed was his right to kill Indians. It was not an instruction given to a body of troops. The second part of the statement, Chivington's infamous statement "kill and scalp all, little and big," does not even appear on p. 147 of Hoig's book as Churchill claimed.⁸⁶ Churchill simply lied. Furthermore, the infamous statement to which this is a part, "kill and scalp all, little and big. Nits make lice," was not made by Chivington on the eve of the attack on Sand Creek and was not an order given to troops. This infamous statement comes from S. E. Browne's recollection of a speech Chivington had made some months earlier.⁸⁷ Not only were these quotations miscited, they were also taken completely out of context.

Dishonesty was also reported in 1996 on the part of Holocaust historians when the editor of *Is the Holocaust Unique?*, Alan S. Rosenbaum, purportedly sent advance copies of all the volume's articles to only one historian, Steven Katz, to review before submitting his article. The revelation of this unfair advantage upset many of Katz's opponents because he was then able to revise his article to combat what he knew others wrote in theirs, an advantage that none of the other contributors had.⁸⁸ The problem with such lack of academic integrity is that it ultimately devalues the scholarship. Nothing discredits scholarship more and destroys a field of knowledge than historians trying to

⁸⁶ See Ward Churchill, *A Little Matter of Genocide*, 232.

⁸⁷ Congress, Senate, "The Chivington Massacre," 39th Cong., 2nd sess. Senate Report 156, pg. 71.

⁸⁸ See Christopher Shea, "Debating the Uniqueness of the Holocaust," *Chronicle of Higher Education*, 31 May 1996, A6-8; and Churchill, *A Little Matter of Genocide*, 65.

build an argument dishonestly. If this field of comparative genocide is to produce anything of lasting value, historians must write objective and *honest* history.

CONCLUSION

Comparative genocide clearly is a complicated field of study. The religious, ethnic and cultural ties that many scholars have to the events they are studying only exacerbate the already inherent difficulties in any form of balanced comparative research. Proclamations of Holocaust uniqueness and incomparability have further complicated and intensified the discussion between genocide historians. With the specific historical debate between Holocaust historians and those of Native America as an example, certain issues arise from this intensified discussion. The reactions to exclusionist genocide definitions by Native America historians are representative to reactions within the entire field of comparative genocide studies. The ensuing debate over points of historical analysis and interpretation between the involved parties is likewise representative of trends that can be found throughout the field. Though many balanced, non-polemical studies are being produced, the trends herein detailed are nonetheless omnipresent. And, even if they do not completely dominate the field, their resolution or elimination would do well in helping this field of study attain new levels of historical insight and understanding.

CHAPTER IV

A CASE STUDY IN NATIVE AMERICAN GENOCIDE: THE SAND CREEK MASSACRE CONTROVERSY AND HISTORIOGRAPHY

The historiography of the 1864 Sand Creek Massacre provides a particularly insightful case study on some of the difficulties present in some studies on Native American genocide and comparative genocide studies in general. The event's historiography is somewhat unique due to the long-standing controversy surrounding the event and its extreme interpretations. Whereas some historical debates emerge largely from the secondary and tertiary literature, the controversy surrounding the Sand Creek Massacre dominates and largely comprises the whole of the primary sources.

Shortly after the massacre of Black Kettle's Cheyenne encampment by Colonel John M. Chivington's Third Cavalry that occurred on November 29, 1864, the public's reaction polarized. Soon after, the killings became the subject of official inquiry by the United States Department of War and the United States Congress. Comprised of men's testimonies either justifying or condemning the events and those involved, the official reports from these heated and controversial hearings represent the majority of primary documents available to historians. Hence, the first words written on the subject were part of an open debate as to whether the events at Sand Creek were a *battle* or *massacre*.¹ Given the historiography's divisive foundations, it comes as no surprise that it has been

¹ It should be pointed out from the onset that the very usage of the term *massacre* to describe the event makes some prejudgment on the event. Some authors refer to it as a *battle* or *fight* instead of a *massacre*. The usage of the term *massacre* in this study represents a reflection of modern historiography as the majority of the historiography refers to the event as the *Sand Creek Massacre* or *Chivington Massacre* and this study will do likewise.

described as “one our most controversial Indian conflicts.”² The inescapable bias in these condemning or exculpating sources can be traced directly into the secondary literature analyzing the events.

While not suggesting that the historiography of this event is representative of the field as a whole, its diversity highlights many of the concerns already addressed in this study. Though some may debate the exact details of what occurred and how many Indians were killed, the Sand Creek Massacre is an indisputably tragic event. Even primary documents that conflict on many points agree that significant numbers of unarmed women, children, men, and the elderly were killed and their bodies mutilated. The inquisitive genocide historian will view this event with one urgent question to be answered: Why did this happen? Unfortunately, not all Sand Creek histories have sought to answer this imperative question.

Thus, in order to understand the historiographic contexts, a general outline of the events surrounding the Sand Creek Massacre, and the ensuing controversies are necessary before delving into how different historians have actually analyzed the event. The key figures that must be understood are John M. Chivington and the Colorado Third Cavalry, John Evans, Edward Wynkoop, and Black Kettle. While there are many other important people and groups involved in the event, these represent a select few who played integral roles in the event and who will provide a firm historical context for the event.

² Stan Hoig, *The Sand Creek Massacre*, 1st ed. (Norman: The University of Oklahoma Press, 1961), vii. Even this statement shows some bias on the subject. Hoig’s terming of the event as *conflict* could be questioned by some because it implies some degree of Cheyenne resistance – an issue contested by some.

John M. Chivington, colonel and leader of the Colorado Third Cavalry, the primary military unit at the Sand Creek Massacre, was originally a Methodist minister by trade. Arriving in Denver from Omaha in 1860, Chivington was appointed as Presiding Elder of the Rocky Mountain District of the Methodist Church.³ With the inception of the Civil War soon after, Chivington offered his services as a regimental chaplain for the Colorado volunteers, but was instead appointed as Major of the regiment.⁴ He served in this capacity, fighting the confederate threats in the area until 1862 when he was appointed Commander of the Military District of Colorado. As the southern potential for invasion subsided in the region, this left Native uprisings as Chivington's primary concern. In August of 1864, a new volunteer unit, the Colorado Third Cavalry was raised with Colonel Chivington as its leader. Their term of service was to last 100 days, and they were given the express mission to quell any Indian hostilities in the region.⁵ The unit more closely represented a local militia than a United States Cavalry unit, and it was largely untrained in terms of military maneuvers and discipline. By late November, the unit's term of service was nearly up, and they had yet to have seen any battle. This earned them the moniker "The Bloodless Third," and they were eager to see action when they arrived at Fort Lyon.

Overseeing all of these activities, John Evans had served as Colorado's territorial governor since the fall of 1862. Originally trained in medicine, Evans had become involved in politics while supporting Lincoln's 1860 campaign and was first offered the

³ Reginald S. Craig, *The Fighting Parson: The Biography of Colonel John M. Chivington* (Los Angeles: Westernlore Press, 1959), 46.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 66.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 163.

governorship of Washington and then the position in Colorado.⁶ Seeking to resolve the escalating conflict with Plains tribes, Evans soon issued a series of proclamations that authorized the destruction of all “hostile Indians.”⁷ The objective of these proclamations was to separate the Natives into two discernable groups which would be dealt with accordingly. It was under these circumstances that John Chivington’s Third Cavalry was organized and charged with the duty of dealing with those Indians still at war. Reporting regularly to the Commissioner of Indian Affairs and the United States War Department, Evans had political motives for wanting to end the hostilities in his territory quickly.

Under these circumstances in the late fall of 1864, a camp of Cheyennes, led by Chief Black Kettle, approached Major Edward Wynkoop at Fort Lyon and sued for peace. Wynkoop was not a career military man, but had risen in rank during the confederate struggles with neighboring Texas. When John Chivington was promoted to Colonel, Wynkoop was moved up to the position of Major and given control over sections of the Union flanks stationed to protect against southern attack, and placed in command of Fort Lyon.⁸ When approached by Chief Black Kettle, Wynkoop instructed them to camp temporarily on the nearby Sand Creek where they would be protected and provided provisions.⁹ Wynkoop took Cheyenne Chief Black Kettle and Arapaho Chief White Antelope to Denver to present their case to Governor Evans. As will be discussed

⁶ Hoig, 20n.

⁷ Ibid., 69.

⁸ Ibid., 82-83n.

⁹ Though sympathetic to Black Kettle in this case, Wynkoop had previously been actively engaged in destroying the Indians still at war. However, after the violent summer of 1864, Wynkoop seems to have been more ready to accept peaceful terms. See Ibid., 90.

later, Evans was less than eager to accept peaceful terms from these Chiefs who were well-known as having some of their younger tribal members involved in violence during months and years past. They were sent back to Sand Creek. Soon after, Wynkoop was replaced by Major Scott Anthony, who displayed a less reconciliatory attitude with the Natives. When John Chivington and his bloodless Third Cavalry arrived unannounced at Fort Lyon on November 27, 1864, they quickly started preparations to attack the encampment at Sand Creek. On the morning of November 29, Chivington's Cavalry attacked Black Kettle's sleeping encampment for most of the morning and early afternoon. Within the milieu of battle, many women and children were killed and their bodies mutilated.

The apparent injustice of the event was not lost on contemporaries or subsequent historians. However, the complex events that led up to and help explain the massacre have often been marginalized by authors trying to either condemn Chivington and the Third Cavalry for their actions or to absolve them of any guilt. One difficulty in examining the event is the biased nature of the very primary documents themselves. The majority of the sources available to historians are part of a series of congressional hearings and investigations on the matter. Taking place from 1865-1867, the reports of these hearings contain the testimonies of all the military leadership involved in the massacre, as well as numerous eyewitness account from others present – military, civilian and Indian. Given the severity of the accusations and investigation at hand, the testimonies at these hearings all reflect the individual's vested interests in either condemning or justifying the event. Some eyewitnesses and soldiers strove to clear their own names by condemning what occurred or pinning guilt on others, while others

described a series of events that largely excused their own, and their colleagues' wrongdoings – if any were admitted at all.¹⁰ Contemporary statements made after the fact by Governor Evans and Colonel Chivington concerning the massacre also reflect attempts to justify the attack on Black Kettle's encampment. The Sand Creek Massacre's primary sources, by nature, are acutely biased.

This tendency in the primary sources has led to a general uncertainty about the total number of Indians present at Sand Creek, the number of warriors present, the number who were killed, and precisely how the confrontation itself unfolded. It is difficult for historians to ascertain which of the many conflicting testimonies should be deemed as more reputable than the others. However, regardless of the many inconsistencies in the testimonial accounts, certain facts can be established. The massacre did occur. Women, children and the elderly were killed and many bodies were mutilated. To start a debate over these facts is reminiscent of phenomena such as Holocaust denial, and the events existence should not engulf the historical dialogue. Nevertheless, this has occurred. All of the uncertainty, self-serving prejudice and biased opinions present in the primary documents have provided ample ammunition for modern scholars to focus their studies on debating these subjects. Likewise, it offers more than enough evidence to support desires to vilify Chivington and emphasize the innocence of the Indian victims or to exonerate Chivington and prove that his actions were warranted.

¹⁰ For a collection of primary documents including the reports submitted by the Secretary of War and the Senate concerning the massacre see John M. Carroll, ed., *The Sand Creek Massacre: A Documented History* (New York: Sol Lewis, 1973). Most of the congressional documents cited in this survey can be found in this volume, but they will be cited herein separately as legislative documents.

These motives and biases were present in the primary documents, and are now present in the historical analysis as well.

The most efficient way to examine how the Sand Creek Massacre has been treated historically is to follow a thematic framework. By choosing key themes for discussion, and presenting the related opposing perspectives, both the wide differences in opinion and wide variety of uses of primary documents will be made clear. Lt. Colonel William R. Dunn, Jr.'s, *I Stand by Sand Creek* provides an excellent set of topics which can be used to map this historiographic analysis. Written with the express purpose of clearing Chivington's name, Dunn's publication represents one extreme of the interpretive spectrum. In his introduction, Dunn sets forth five issues, or questions, which he believed had been historically mistreated. His five questions were listed as follows:

1. Were the Cheyenne and Arapaho Indians camped at Sand Creek hostiles or friendlies?
2. Were these Indians under protection of the United States Government?
3. Was the fight at Sand Creek a massacre or a battle?
4. Were excessively large numbers of women and children killed at Sand Creek?
5. Did Colonel Chivington permit the scalping and mutilation of the Indian dead?¹¹

To answer these five questions, Dunn provided four primary sources in their entirety and then made his own succinct conclusions. The documents he included, the testimony of Private Irving Howbert, the testimony of Colonel Chivington himself, a selection from his namesake, J.P. Dunn, Jr.'s, *Massacre of the Mountains*, and a defensive letter written by Gov. John Evans, all represent the most exculpatory and apologetic primary sources for Chivington's case. Hence, using these four highly biased

¹¹ William R. Dunn, *I Stand by Sand Creek: a Defense of John M. Chivington and the Third Colorado Cavalry* (Ft. Collins, Colorado: The Old Army Press, 1985), viii.

documents as his *only* evidence, William R. Dunn was able to easily conclude that the Indians encamped at Sand Creek were *definitely* hostiles, they were *not* under the protection of the United States Government, the fight at Sand Creek was a *battle* and not a massacre, extensively large numbers of women and children were *not* killed at Sand Creek, and Colonel Chivington did *not* permit scalping and mutilation of the dead.¹² While not offering a balanced analysis of any lasting value, Dunn's five questions do provide a useful roadmap for the discussion to follow. The opinions of those defending Chivington will come first, followed by those condemning him. This thematic comparison will lay bare not only the conflicting historical analyses but the conflicting primary sources upon which they rely. The historiography of the Sand Creek Massacre illustrates how historians using two conflicting sets of documents can come to diametrically opposed conclusions.

WERE CHEYENNES AND ARAPAHOS CAMPED AT SAND CREEK AT PEACE OR WAR?

According to William R. Dunn, Indian actions attacking settlers spring and summer of 1864 and earlier proved that those at Sand Creek were at war.¹³ Agreeing, Reginald Craig's biography of John Chivington, *The Fighting Parson*, and J.P. Dunn, Jr.'s, *Massacre of the Mountains* went to extensive lengths to illustrate the years of Indian violence that led up to Sand Creek.¹⁴ J.P. Dunn went as far to say that Cheyennes never denied that they were hostile. The evidence he cited, however, was more an exhibition of

¹² See *Ibid.*, 143-147.

¹³ *Ibid.*, 143-4.

¹⁴ See J.P. Dunn, *Massacre of the Mountains: A History of the Indian Wars of the Far West, 1815-1875* (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1886), 344; and Craig, 145-65.

Cheyennes claiming that they *were not* hostile. In the meeting between Black Kettle, the Arapaho chief White Antelope, Governor Evans and others described by Dunn, the Cheyennes went to great lengths to claim minimal guilt. They explained that the Comanches, Kiowas and Sioux had committed most of the attacks, whereas they had always been hoping for peace.¹⁵ Nevertheless, J.P. Dunn used this conversation to show that Black Kettle was admitting to a hostile status.

Opposing this depiction, though not denying Cheyenne involvement in the violence on the Plains, some authors have sought to at least qualify their actions. In her history on the Cheyenne, Mari Sandoz explained that the Cheyennes “had tried to keep peaceful,” but were repeatedly driven by starvation to join with Comanches, Kiowas and Sioux in their campaigns.¹⁶ Others have stressed that the Cheyenne involvement included only a small number of young warriors who were out of Black Kettle’s control.¹⁷ Hence, Indians camped at Sand Creek represented a peaceful band and should not be linked with Indian actions during the previous months and years.

The motives behind the violent activities of both Native Americans and Chivington’s Third Cavalry are another important issue which relates to the status of Black Kettle’s band at Sand Creek. By painting a detailed picture of the Indians’ misdeeds on the Plains, some authors have presented the attack on Black Kettle’s camp

¹⁵ J.P. Dunn, 345-46.

¹⁶ Mari Sandoz, *Cheyenne Autumn* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1953), 4.

¹⁷ See Duane Shultz, *Month of the Freezing Moon* (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1990), 76. J.P. Dunn disagreed, stating that the Dog Soldiers were an integrated part of tribal government. This made Black Kettle responsible for their actions. See J.P. Dunn, 361.

as a necessary, though regrettable, retaliation. In a chapter entitled “Terror on the Plains,” Reginald Craig depicted Native Americans as eager to commit atrocities and the U.S. Army reluctant to retaliate. The very motive behind the attack, according to Craig, was not to punish Indians as others suggest, but to “teach them” a lesson that they could no longer fight in the summer and ask for peace in the winter.¹⁸ Likewise, Chivington’s eagerness to attack was ascribed to the fact that the Colorado militia’s term of enlistment would soon expire, and not that they were ashamed of their failure to have yet to engage any Indians, as was their charge. Craig specifically cited Chivington as being “appalled at the outbreak of full scale war.”¹⁹ Beyond presenting Chivington as peace-loving, Craig also made attempts to portray the Plains Indians as the opposite. He explained the cause of Indian aggression in the following fashion:

The savagery of the enemy with whom [Chivington] had to contend is almost incomprehensible to those whose knowledge of Indians is limited to present day civilized descendants of former raiders. Contrary to the portrayal often encountered in our literature, the American Indian of those days was not, in effect, a white man with a darker skin and rude customs arising only from his lack of educational advantages. Further, his mental processes, ideals and reactions to circumstances were not those of a white man. The plain fact was that the aboriginal Indians were cruel savages, or at best in some tribes, semi-savages . . . Although the savages sometimes had specific grievances which led them to attack the white man, the frequent outbreaks of war on the western plains were occasioned by the fact that warfare was the natural way of life for the plains Indians . . . The truth was that these Indians enjoyed savage torture and killing, and would inflict suffering and massacre on members of other tribes, as well as whites, entirely without provocation.²⁰

¹⁸ Craig, 178.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 155.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 155-56. Similar reasoning can be found in Irving Howbert’s defense of Sand Creek. See Irving Howbert, *Indians of the Pike’s Peak Region* (Glorieta, New Mexico: The Rio Grande Press, Inc., 1970), 180-186.

In order to strengthen his defense of Chivington, Craig not only portrayed him as a man reluctant to use violence, but described Plains Indians as wanton *savages*, a term which Craig used throughout his study in reference to Native Americans. Colonel Chivington, Governor Evans and others usually condemned by historians were here depicted in the best possible terms of civilization versus savagery. This portrayal implied that all Native Americans were hostile at heart, regardless of their superficial petitions for peace.

Taking an opposite stance, historians seeking to condemn Chivington and Evans have found plenty of sources that portray them as eager to use violence prior to November 1864, the implication being that they would attack Indians regardless of the encampment's hostile or friendly status. One of the most infamous statements accredited to Chivington displays his acutely vengeful attitude towards Indians. S. E. Browne, a Colorado resident and attorney, questioned at the congressional hearings on the event, stated that Colonel Chivington had publicly announced in August or September of 1864 that his policy was to "kill and scalp all, little and big; that nits made lice."²¹ Browne's recollection painted Chivington in a very different light than Craig had done. In *Bury My Heart at Wounded Knee*, Dee Brown related how Colonel Chivington and Major Anthony conversed about their desire to form an expedition against the Indians, and cited Chivington as talking about "collecting scalps" and "wading in gore" to which Anthony heartily agreed.²² Though Brown takes these statements somewhat out of context, even

²¹ Congress, Senate, "The Chivington Massacre," 39th Cong., 2nd sess. Senate Report 156, p. 71.

²² Dee Brown, *Bury My Heart at Wounded Knee* (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1970), 86.

their proper context contradicts the peace-seeking Chivington as described by Craig.²³ Ralph Andrist suggested a similar zeal on the part of Chivington, implying that he was just waiting for a “good atrocity to stir people up” so he could have an excuse to retaliate.²⁴ Thom Hatch in his biography of Chief Black Kettle and Duane Schultz in *Month of the Freezing Moon* followed suit in emphasizing comments that suggested that Chivington was anticipating and hoping for a bloody massacre.²⁵ By presenting Chivington and army officers in this way, the question of whether the Indians were on war or peace status is somewhat disarmed.

WERE THE INDIANS AT SAND CREEK UNDER PROTECTION OF THE UNITED STATES GOVERNMENT?

In answering this question, “No, they were not,” William R. Dunn took obvious direction from his predecessor, J.P. Dunn.²⁶ *Massacre of the Mountains* presented the idea that Black Kettle’s camp had received no authorized promise of protection from either Governor John Evans or Colonel John Chivington who commanded the region’s

²³ Two of the statements cited by Brown come from the testimony of Mr. J. M. Combs. In his testimony he related a conversation between himself and Colonel Chivington to which Maj. Anthony was not present. Brown’s juxtaposition of these statements with Anthony’s “waiting for a good chance to pitch into them,” a statement taken from a different set of hearings, is misleading. It takes elements from two different testimonies and refers to different conversations. See Congress, Senate, “Sand Creek Massacre,” *Report of the Secretary of War*, 39th Cong., 2nd sess., 1867, S. Doc. 26, p. 25, 117.

²⁴ Ralph K. Andrist, *The Long Death* (New York: Macmillan Publishing Company, 1964), 79.

²⁵ See Thom Hatch, *Black Kettle: The Cheyenne Chief Who Sought Peace But Found War* (Hoboken, New Jersey: John Wiley and Sons, Inc., 2004), 147, and Schultz, 85-96.

²⁶ William R. Dunn, 144.

troops.²⁷ Dunn argued that promises made by Wynkoop and possibly Anthony were done so without proper jurisdiction.

Cheyennes had met, however, with Governor Evans, and they had requested peace. This fact has often been used as proof in favor of Black Kettle's case. Reginald Craig interestingly addressed this topic and turned the evidence against Black Kettle. The very title of Craig's chapter, "The Raiders Offer a Truce," reinforces his emphasis on the previous Indian atrocities by terming them "raiders" and presents them in terms of *offering* a truce, rather than *asking* for peace. In his analysis, Craig suggested that Indian desires for peace were less than sincere. He concluded, "They wanted to go into winter quarters where they could enjoy the fruits of war without danger of attack by the troops, which they had heard were gathering for that purpose."²⁸ Furthermore, Craig asserted that Major Wynkoop was misled in his desire to protect the Indians because he failed to understand this insincerity.²⁹ Of Wynkoop's replacement, Major Anthony, Craig states that Black Kettle and his other leaders in the Native camp were well aware that he would likely attack when reinforcements arrived. This implied that the Indians lack of serious resistance at Sand Creek was not due to their inability to do so, but to their lack of preparation, and hence was their own fault.³⁰

Dee Brown saw the issues differently. His work, *Bury My Heart at Wounded Knee*, was among the first of the new, and more apologetic, Indian history that sought to

²⁷ J.P. Dunn, 350.

²⁸ Craig, 168.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, 169.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, 176.

view the past century's events in the American West from a Native perspective. In this vein, his analysis explained that Black Kettle's camp was under government protection. Not only had they sent most of their warriors off to hunt buffalo, Brown related, but the encampment was so confident of "absolute safety, [that] they kept no night watch except of the pony herd which was corralled below the creek."³¹ Their believed state of security was further substantiated as Brown cited the testimony of Edmond Guerrier, the mixed-blood son-in-law of Robert Bent who was encamped at Sand Creek on the morning of the attack. Of that morning he remembered, "I heard, at first, some squaws outside say there were a lot of buffalo coming into camp."³² By his sources, Brown painted a scene of the encampment being completely unaware or incredulous of the possibility for an attack. By carefully selecting from among the disparate sources, both Brown and Craig were able to come to well documented, but opposite conclusions.

J.P. Dunn's early treatise suggested that Black Kettle's encampment knew all too well the danger they were in and should have been better prepared. He cited Governor Evans's warning to Black Kettle that the Cheyennes could not make peace with him, but only with the region's military commanders. Evans directed Black Kettle and White Antelope to find the nearest military commander (Maj. Wynkoop) and to seek peace from him, but J.P. Dunn claimed that this was no assurance of protection.³³

In contrast, Ralph Andrist portrayed this same discussion in a very different light. He wrote:

³¹ Brown, 87.

³² Ibid., 87-88. For Guerrier's testimony see Congress, Senate, "The Chivington Massacre," 39th Cong., 2nd sess. Senate Report 156, pp. 65-66.

³³ J.P. Dunn, 350.

As a matter of fact, Governor Evans had been so interested in proceeding with the war against the Indians that the arrival of Wynkoop with the peace-minded chiefs had been a severe embarrassment. . . . [H]e was suddenly and desperately faced with the possibility that the Indians would turn docile and eager to be friendly. It would, to put it in the most simple terms, leave him looking like a fool. . . . At the close of the council he had expressed his displeasure with Major Wynkoop for bringing the chiefs to Denver: “What shall I do with the third regiment if I make peace?” he asked. They were, he said, “raised to kill Indians and they must kill Indians.”³⁴

J.P. Dunn’s omission of this portion of the conversation, and Andrist’s omission of the sections included by J.P. Dunn should come as no surprise. The text of the council, in its entirety, showed a much more balanced context than either of these authors cared to emphasize. One side of the record suggested that Black Kettle was well aware that they were under no protection and the other portrays Governor Evans as reluctant to offer peace under any conditions.

Most authors point to the testimony of Major Wynkoop as evidence that Black Kettle’s encampment was under government protection. Thom Hatch was quick to point out that after the conference with Governor Evans, both Major Wynkoop and then Major Anthony made Black Kettle’s band “assurances of safety.”³⁵ The line of questioning from the commission and Colonel Chivington’s cross-examination of Major Wynkoop went as follows:

By the COMMISSION:

Question: Did you, in council with the Indians, after being relieved of the command of Fort Lyon, advise the Indians to depend upon the assurances given them by Major Anthony?

³⁴ Andrist, 87.

³⁵ Hatch, 142.

By E. WYNKOOP

Answer: In the council held with the Indians by Major Anthony I was present, and requested Major Anthony to allow me to say a few words to the chiefs, which he granted. I then told them how I was situated, having been relieved from the command by Major Anthony, and that I was no longer in authority, but that Major Anthony, who was now in command, would treat them the same as I had done, until something definite could be heard from proper quarters in regard to them, and advised them to rely upon what he told them; that he was a good chief.

By J.M. CHIVINGTON

Question: You say that you told the Indians to rely upon what Major Anthony told them. Did Major Anthony hear you tell the Indians this, and did he consent to the assurances you gave the Indians in regard to his treatment of the Indians?

By E. WYNKOOP

Answer: Major Anthony was present when I told them, but I don't remember of his making any remarks on the subject, although I had at different times heard him give them assurances of safety.³⁶

For those arguing against the views of J.P. and William R. Dunn, this seems the most damning evidence. Not only had Major Wynkoop promised protection (a widely accepted fact), but by Chivington's own questions, he seems to have accepted this as well. Furthermore, Wynkoop indicated that Major Anthony had also promised Black Kettle protection. This example highlights the predicament that historians face in interpreting the Sand Creek Massacre; much of the documentary record consisted of testimonies in which it is one man's word against another's. Hence, within the primary sources, historians can find evidence to support both sides, and they are left to their own judgment to choose between them. Unfortunately, some authors have relied solely upon the testimonies that support their view and disregarded the rest of the evidence.

³⁶ Congress, Senate, "Sand Creek Massacre," *Report of the Secretary of War*, 39th Cong., 2nd sess., 1867, S. Doc. 26, p.102-3.

WERE THE EVENTS AT SAND CREEK A MASSACRE OR A BATTLE?

To answer this question, William R. Dunn emphasized the preparedness of Black Kettle's encampment. They had dug rifle pits and, according to Dunn, were only caught by surprise due to Chivington's secretive operations.³⁷ Yet, Dunn provided no other evidence to support his conclusion that the events at Sand Creek were a battle and not a massacre. No discussion of the conflict itself was offered.

Most others in the debate provided more evidence to support their claims. Reginald Craig cited examples of hand-to-hand combat, and instead of describing an Indian flight from battle, he terms it an organized retreat and simple extension of battle to predetermined defensive strongholds.³⁸ He even cited examples of Black Kettle himself engaging in the battle.³⁹

To emphasize Black Kettle's pacifistic desires, others feature accounts describing the Cheyenne chief holding aloft an American flag he received from President Abraham Lincoln in hopes of convincing the approaching troops to not fire.⁴⁰ Not only does this paint a scene of cruel irony and betrayal, but it suggests that Black Kettle's band was not

³⁷ See William R. Dunn, 146. The testimonies of Lieutenant Cramer and soldier Amos Miksch tell otherwise. Surveying the battleground after the event, Cramer stated that there were no rifle pits. See Congress, Senate, "The Chivington Massacre," 39th Cong., 2nd sess. Senate Report 156, p. 74. Amos Miksch recalled, "[T]here were no rifle-pits except what the Indians dug into the sand bank after we commenced firing. I saw them digging out sand with their hands while firing was going on; the water came into the trenches they dug in this manner." See Congress, Senate, "The Chivington Massacre," 39th Cong., 2nd sess. Senate Report 156, p. 75.

³⁸ Craig, 194.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, 194.

⁴⁰ See Andrist, 89; Hatch, 147; Shultz, 134. William R. Dunn flat out denied that any flags were flown by Black Kettle. Though he provided one source as evidence, he ignored the numerous sources which attest the opposite. See William R. Dunn, 145.

wanting to battle. The very vocabulary that many authors use to describe Sand Creek suggests a very different story. Peter Matthiessen described November 29, 1864, as “the *slaughter . . . an unsuspecting* Cheyenne camp by an armed *mob* of Colorado irregulars.”⁴¹ Thom Hatch described it as an interruption of a tranquil scene of unsuspecting Indians, all incredulous that the approaching soldiers could possibly be planning on attacking them.⁴² The description provided by Duane Shultz reads similarly: a genuinely confused Indian encampment betrayed and being cut down by the bullets of a “primate, unrestrained, crude, barbaric” mob.⁴³

As with all other aspects of Sand Creek, these authors’ analyses are based on conflicting sets of primary documents. The views that Dunn, Craig, Matthiessen, Hatch and Schultz presented of the conflict itself are all represented in the primary documents. Many describe Sand Creek as a battle and others a massacre. Some give high estimates for the number of warriors present at the battle, and others use low estimates. Craig emphasized large numbers of Indian warriors present in Black Kettle’s camp, and he concluded there was Indian resistance during the battle. Documents to back such an interpretation were cited by Craig. Captain L. Wilson’s testimony asserted that “The Indians returned out first fire almost instantaneously,” and suggested that some Indians were in fact making tactical maneuvers in plans of a counter-offensive.⁴⁴

⁴¹ Peter Matthiessen, *In the Spirit of Crazy Horse* (New York: Penguin Books, 1980), 6. Emphasis added.

⁴² Hatch, 146-48.

⁴³ See Shultz, 134-135, 137.

⁴⁴ Congress, Senate, “The Chivington Massacre,” 39th Cong., 2nd sess. Senate Report 156, p. 67.

However, other authors also had documents that told of outright slaughter of largely unarmed and confused Indians. For example, the testimony of John Smith, a half-Cheyenne who acted as an interpreter for the camp, related little in terms of organized resistance. When asked if any defensive formations were made to oppose the attack, Smith replied, “No sir; they just flocked in a promiscuous herd, men women, and children together.”⁴⁵ Testimonies can be found to support either side, and if authors use only one side of the testimonial evidence, ignoring the half that contradicts their thesis, they can confidently present their evidence. Regardless to whether or not the Cheyennes were prepared or offered serious resistance, they were still slaughtered. For this reason, the term *massacre* has been largely accepted as the norm.

WERE EXCESSIVELY LARGE NUMBERS OF WOMEN AND CHILDREN KILLED AT SAND CREEK?

Of all the aspects of the Sand Creek Massacre, the report that large numbers of women and children were killed proved among the most inflammatory. William R. Dunn attempted to disarm this accusation by quoting Acting Battalion Adjutant Stephen Decatur who testified, “I counted 450 warriors (dead), and do not think there were any more women and children killed than would have been killed in attacking a village of whites of the same number.”⁴⁶ Dunn offered no other evidence. The testimony of Decatur also mentioned that any women killed were likely shot due to the fact that they were in the pits fighting alongside men.

⁴⁵ Ibid., 41.

⁴⁶ William R. Dunn, 146.

Craig echoed this explanation reporting that “Several squaws were shot while fighting beside the men, using spears, bows and arrows and muskets with as much dexterity as the warriors; and several children were struck by stray bullets.”⁴⁷ In this description, the killing of women was justified by portraying them as just as dangerous as the men, and the death of children is simply written off as accidental. Craig included in his footnotes numerous testimonies that reported a low number of women and children killed, but he almost entirely ignored the testimonies that offered high estimates. He was therefore able to conclude, “From all the circumstances, it appears that probably not over one-fourth of the dead were women, most of whom were killed fighting the troops, and that there were few children killed and most of them by accident.”⁴⁸

Beyond making this conclusion, Craig added the testimony of Robert Bent that “noncombatants had every opportunity to escape.”⁴⁹ To this, the opposing authors have offered numerous testimonies to the contrary. Duane Shultz cited testimonies that told of women surrendering and begging for mercy but being shot nonetheless, a six-year-old girl being shot while holding a white flag, and a five-year-old girl being shot as she tried to hide in the sand.⁵⁰ David Stannard related another soldier’s testimony in the prologue of *American Holocaust* that told of a three-year-old child being shot for sport.⁵¹ Ward

⁴⁷ Craig, 194.

⁴⁸ Ibid., 195.

⁴⁹ Ibid., 195.

⁵⁰ Shultz, 138. For Robert Bent’s complete testimony see Congress, Senate, “The Chivington Massacre,” 39th Cong., 2nd sess. Senate Report 156, pp. 95-96.

⁵¹ David Stannard, *American Holocaust: The Conquest of the New World* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1992), xi. Major Anthony recalled the following: “There

Churchill's description of the Sand Creek Massacre also featured the testimonies of Bent, John Smith and others – all suggesting that noncombatants were given anything but a chance to escape.⁵² Even some of the completely helpless and those attempting to surrender were shot. Shultz offered various other examples that all assert the same facts.

One such testimony, that of James P. Beckwith, was cited by Dee Brown to counter views like that of Reginald Craig.⁵³ Beckwith, the son of a wealthy Englishman and an African-American slave, who served as a guide for the cavalry, made statements that asserted the slaughter of women and children not only occurred, but was intended. Beckwith testified that Chivington had instructed the troops, "I don't tell you to kill all ages and sex, but look back on the plains of the Platte, where your mothers, fathers, brothers, sisters have been slain, and their blood saturating the sands on the Platte."⁵⁴ His statement insinuated a possible planned retribution. Further, Beckwith testified that among those killed "There were all sexes, warriors, women, and children, and all ages, from one week old up to eighty years," and that "about two-thirds" of those killed were

was one little child, probably three years old I saw one man get off his horse, at a distance of about seventy-five yards, and draw up his rifle and fire – he missed the child. Another man came up and said, "Let me try the son of a bitch; I can hit him." He got down off his horse, kneeled down and fired at the little child, but he missed him. A third man came up and made a similar remark, and fired, and the little fellow dropped." See Congress, House of Representatives, "Massacre of the Cheyenne Indians", *Report on the Conduct of War*, 38th Cong., 2nd sess., 1865, p. 27.

⁵² Ward Churchill, *A Little Matter of Genocide* (San Francisco: City Lights Books, 1997), 228-234. For these testimonies, see Congress, Senate, "The Chivington Massacre," 39th Cong., 2nd sess. Senate Report 156, pp. 41, 53, 95-96.

⁵³ James P. Beckwith is also known in many sources as James P. *Beckwourth*. As the congressional record being cited refers to him as Beckwith, that spelling will be used.

⁵⁴ Congress, Senate, "Sand Creek Massacre," *Report of the Secretary of War*, 39th Cong., 2nd sess., 1867, S. Doc. 26, p. 68.

women and children.⁵⁵ Beckwith even told of John Smith's son, Jack, being shot from behind after the battle was long over while exiting a lodge.⁵⁶ Clearly, there are ample testimonies for authors on both sides make opposing claims. However, to claim that no unarmed women or children were killed at all proves little more than denial. The primary documents disagree on many facts, but the killing of numerous unarmed Cheyennes is irrefutable. Although Craig, J.P. Dunn and William R. Dunn attempt to justify some of these facts and simply deny others, the historical record is clear on some of these broader issues, even if small details have become muddled.

DID CHIVINGTON PERMIT THE SCALPING AND MUTILATION OF THE INDIAN DEAD?

William R. Dunn stated, "There were some Indian scalps taken, and probably some mutilation of the Indian dead, but certainly this was done without Colonel Chivington's knowledge or approval."⁵⁷ This statement brings forth two important issues: first, were bodies scalped and mutilated, and second, if so, was Colonel Chivington aware? Reginald Craig either outright denied such mutilations, quickly discrediting the sources that describe such events, or justified them by saying that it was common frontier belief that scalping and mutilation was the only way truly to strike fear into the hearts of Indians.⁵⁸ Also, he argued that the overwhelming spirit of vengeance

⁵⁵ Ibid., 70.

⁵⁶ Ibid., 71.

⁵⁷ William R. Dunn, 146.

⁵⁸ J.P. Dunn forwarded the following observations on this concept: "Scalping and mutilation also strike terror to the Indian heart. Their religious belief is that the spirit in the next world has the same injuries that were inflicted on the body here That the Sand Creek affair inspired them with terror is beyond question." See J.P. Dunn, 356-57.

felt by Colorado citizens for Indian attacks on settlers explained away their guilt.⁵⁹ In either case, Craig vehemently defended these actions by emphasizing documents that support his thesis and quickly discarded those that did not. Dunn cited Irving Howbert's testimony (one of the most defensive of the Third Cavalry's actions) as justifying any such misdeeds in light of the horrors of the Indian depredations from the previous summer. Although not personally seeing anyone in the act of scalping Indian bodies, when faced with the fact that it had occurred, Howbert reasoned:

They had probably been scalped by some of the reckless persons referred to, or possibly by some of the many men in the regiment whose relatives or friends had been killed and brutally mutilated by the savages during the preceding summer. I am not apologizing for the acts of these people, but every fair-minded person must admit that there may have been extenuating circumstances connected with the offense, and no one unfamiliar with the horrors of savage warfare can appreciate the feelings of those who have suffered from their attacks.⁶⁰

If any soldiers actually did scalp or mutilate Indian bodies, it was due to the psychological trauma they had suffered themselves, claimed Howbert and Dunn. Of the numerous firsthand accounts and testimonies that condemned the Third Cavalry's

⁵⁹ Craig, 216-217. Craig follows closely J.P. Dunn's reasoning. J.P. Dunn wrote, "There is a certain amount of justice in the theory of meting to a man in his own measure, and the people of Colorado had old scores to pay in the accounts of murder, robbery, and rape." He continued to detail some depredations committed by Plains Indians. He concluded, "The people of Colorado did want revenge, and these men, who had been cooped up all summer in towns and blockhouses, whose crops were ruined, whose stock had been run off, whose houses had been burned, who had been eating bread made of forty-five-dollar flour, who had buried the mutilated bodies of their neighbors, in helpless wrath, who had heard stories of the women captives – these men marched to Sand Creek, with the fire of vengeance in their hearts, and quenched it in blood." According to Dunn, this explained why Indian bodies were mutilated at Sand Creek, and by the tone of his reasoning, somewhat exculpated the guilty parties. See J.P. Dunn, 357-60.

⁶⁰ Howbert, *The Indians of the Pike's Peak Region*, 178; William R. Dunn, 146-147.

actions, Craig was largely silent. Even though there was ample documentary evidence to oppose his claims, Craig highlighted only those that bolstered his thesis.

Even the most apologetic secondary literature admits that some scalping and mutilation of bodies occurred. Accounts that condemn the Third Cavalry largely focus upon mutilation to characterize the event as a whole. The accounts of Shultz, Hatch, Andrist and others all feature excerpts from testimonies that tell of live captives and those already dead being scalped and otherwise mutilated. These testimonies include depictions of women being raped and then shot, Indians wandering blindly around the battlefield with their scalps missing, men's and women's genitals being cut out and placed decoratively on their horse's bridles or taken to be used as tobacco pouches, women's breasts being cut off and worn as caps, fingers being cut off to attain the jewelry, and many Indian women killing themselves and their children to escape a more brutal death.⁶¹ Duane Shultz reported that the "orgy of murder and mutilation" was so tiring that many soldiers had to lie down and rest before continuing.⁶²

While the testimonies that provided these horrific scenes assert that such depredations did occur, Chivington's involvement is another issue entirely. The testimony cited by both Duane Shultz and Dee Brown to prove that Chivington was aware comes from Lieutenant James Connor. He testified, "[A]ccording to the best of my knowledge and belief these atrocities that were committed were with the knowledge of J. M. Chivington, and I do not know of his taking any measures to prevent them."⁶³

⁶¹ See Churchill, 233; Hatch, 159-66; and Shultz, 138-9.

⁶² *Ibid.*, 139.

As opposing authors cite Connor to condemn Chivington or Howbert to exonerate him, it is difficult to draw a certain conclusion. As with so many aspects of the Sand Creek Massacre, the historian is left to decide which testimonies to give credence.

HOW TO DEAL WITH BIASED PRIMARY SOURCES

By taking William R. Dunn's five questions and illustrating how different authors have answered these issues, a few concerns become painfully clear. There is no question that the primary documents on the Sand Creek Massacre are inherently biased themselves. Furthermore, the secondary literature on the subject has exhibited similar bias. In analyzing this historiography, a question remains – with such biased primary documents, is it possible to write an objective account? The purpose of this review is to assert an emphatic yes, it is possible. The key lies in the act of selecting sources. If a fair selection of sources from both sides of the debate is included in historical analysis, whatever conclusions that the authors arrives at will be much better supported. Objective methodology does not mean that the author cannot form a strong opinion or make firm conclusions, but objectivity means that they will be well supported with a fair selection of documentary evidence. In the case of the aforementioned authors, most have cited exclusively from one half of the historical record, and disregarded the other. Whether or not their interpretation is correct or incorrect is not under examination, but their failure to support their conclusions begins with an unobjective sampling of sources.

⁶³ See Brown, 90; and Shultz, 139. For Connor's testimony see Congress, Senate, "The Chivington Massacre," 39th Cong., 2nd sess. Senate Report 156, p. 53. Major Anthony also reported that the single instance of mutilation that he observed was done while Colonel Chivington was standing by his side. See Congress, House of Representatives, "Massacre of the Cheyenne Indians", *Report on the Conduct of War*, 38th Cong., 2nd sess., 1865, p. 27.

Reginald Craig's biography of John Chivington provides a telling example. Making an admission of bias somewhat reminiscent of the aforementioned admitted political bias of Ward Churchill, Craig acknowledged that he wrote his study with the explicit purpose of clearing Chivington's name from the harm caused by "one-sided congressional and military investigations and unfair depictions in the popular media."⁶⁴ Significant attention had been paid to Chivington's involvement at Sand Creek, but little in-depth research had been conducted on the rest of his life. The proposition of balancing out the historical presentation of Chivington is justified; however, Craig's analysis did more than balance the scales. He slanted his historical analysis to the opposite extreme as much as the "unfair depictions" with which he disagreed. The sources upon which Craig relied for his narration of the events surrounding Sand Creek come mostly from Colonel Chivington himself and subordinates like Irving Howbert whose accounts portray the military in a good light.⁶⁵ Though Craig presented his case with an impressive amount of primary document material as support, they represent only one-half of the historical record. The studies by J.P. Dunn and William R. Dunn represent similar one-sided source selections. The resulting narratives while striking tell only a portion of the story.

⁶⁴ Craig, 11.

⁶⁵ For the testimony of Major Anthony see Congress, House of Representatives, "Massacre of the Cheyenne Indians", *Report on the Conduct of War*, 38th Cong., 2nd sess., 1865, 22-35. For the testimony of Colonel Chivington see Congress, House of Representatives, "Massacre of the Cheyenne Indians", *Report on the Conduct of War*, 38th Cong., 2nd sess., 1865, pp.101-108. For the testimony of Lt. Cramer see in, "Sand Creek Massacre," *Report of the Secretary of War*, 39th Cong., 2nd sess., 1867, S. Doc. 26, p. 47. For more on Irving Howbert's account of Sand Creek see Irving Howbert, *Memories of a Lifetime in the Pike's Peak Region* (New York: G.P. Putnam's Sons, 1925), 115-162; and Howbert, *The Indians of the Pike's Peak Region*, 93-186.

The opposite portrayal has been equally biased in the sources chosen as evidence. Ward Churchill offered a brief description of the Sand Creek Massacre in *A Little Matter of Genocide*, but fills most of his brief account with lengthy quotes from Robert Bent, John Smith and others that give the gruesome details of women and children being brutally killed and their bodies mutilated.⁶⁶ Likewise, Churchill emphasizes the supposed incendiary comments of Chivington that highlight his bloodlust and desire to kill Indians. No attention is paid to the significant testimonies of others who deny such occurrences. While historians are not obliged to devote serious attention to those who outright deny that events occurred, like Holocaust historians and Holocaust deniers, Sand Creek historiography is somewhat different. Unlike the case of Holocaust denial, where authors simply deny that the Holocaust occurred, no historians (or contemporary sources) outright deny that Indians were killed at Sand Creek. There is no complete denial.

However, both primary and secondary literature has expressed doubt about the details and nature of the killing at Sand Creek. Hence, historians should at least acknowledge the controversy over the event, rather than simply ignore that such a controversy exists. Much like those who argue in defense of Colonel Chivington, those who write against him offer only the documents that support their view, and they either completely exclude or cursorily discredit those who do not. Though authors are not obligated to agree with the testimonies that run contrary to their interpretation, a discussion of why the author is discounting those sources would strengthen their

⁶⁶ Churchill, 228-234. For the testimony of Robert Bent see Congress, Senate, "The Chivington Massacre," 39th Cong., 2nd sess. Senate Report 156, pp. 95-96. For the testimony of Lt. James D. Connor see Congress, Senate, "The Chivington Massacre," 39th Cong., 2nd sess. Senate Report 156, p. 53. For the testimony of John S. Smith see Congress, Senate, "The Chivington Massacre," 39th Cong., 2nd sess. Senate Report 156, p. 41.

conclusions. The biased approach of these and like studies devalue them in garnering useful conclusions of how the Sand Creek Massacre, a potentially insightful topic of study, fits into the wider backdrop of genocide in the world.

THE SAND CREEK MASSACRE AND NATIVE AMERICAN GENOCIDE STUDIES

From the defenses of Colonel Chivington and the accounts that condemn his actions, certain conclusions have been drawn about the significance of such events on the history of the American West. Conclusions made by some about the Sand Creek Massacre fall again into the category of polemics and unbalanced reasoning. Citing statements made by Ward Churchill about the Sand Creek Massacre, M. Annette Jaimes drew a conclusion that epitomizes the troublesome end result of biased research. First, after Churchill's statement that all of the Colorado Third Cavalry, like the Nazi SS, was a "criminal organization, formed solely for criminal purposes and composed of criminal individuals," Jaimes concluded that the Sand Creek Massacre and other like events typify American West history.⁶⁷ Instead of viewing them as anomalies in America's westward expansion, Jaimes saw them as representing the whole of the region's history. Her and Churchill's claim that Sand Creek is the "normative expression" of American civilization is striking.

While this view represents an extreme interpretation of the historiographic record, it does highlight a significant concern. Historiographies that are dominated by biased literature can lead to extreme conclusions. Making such broad generalizations about all of the American West or all of American history is a flawed proposition. There is no

⁶⁷ M. Annette Jaimes ed., *The State of Native America: Genocide, Colonization and Resistance* (Boston: South End Press, 1992), 3. See also, M. Annette Jaimes, 5.

argument that the Sand Creek Massacre, Wounded Knee Massacre, Sappa Creek Fight, Bear Creek Massacre and Washita River Massacre represent pivotal points in the history of the West, but to suggest that they represent America as a whole is troublesome. True, the military's actions do represent the nation; the United States must take responsibility for its military's actions, and citizens must take responsibility for their representative government. This said, what does the widespread public outcry against the massacre mean? Also, what significance do the military and congressional inquiries represent? Obviously, neither the American public nor the governing bodies which represent them were eager to stand by Sand Creek. If Sand Creek did indeed represent the desires of all Americans and government policy, then why was there widespread public outcry against the event? Also, the extensive military and congressional inquiries into the event, not insignificant occurrences, imply that the government did not approve of the event either. Much as one-sided accounts of the Sand Creek Massacre disregard large portions of the historical record, to assert that these violent events typify American history disregards much of American history and contemporary civilian and government reactions to the massacre.

Aimed to explicitly tell the Native American side of history, these types of studies are evidence of a general phenomenon that is emerging in reaction to past scholarship that primarily portrayed the Euro-American perspective of the history of the American West. Indeed, the former Eurocentric scholarship has been in dire need of revision, but some scholars have swung the pendulum of equally biased ethnocentricity to the opposite extreme. A reviewer of Stannard's *American Holocaust*, Samuel R. Cook of the University of Arizona, claimed that it is "necessary to counterbalance the

ethnocentricities of past historical works on Natives.”⁶⁸ However, the claim that works such as Stannard’s accomplish this goal stands on a precarious and ultimately hypocritical foundation. To right the wrongs of past ethnocentric scholarship by writing new ethnocentric scholarship is academically irresponsible. The cliché adage of two wrongs not making a right has never rung clearer. As evidenced by William R. Dunn’s 1985 publication, and Reginald Craig’s 1959 study, both of which explicitly sought to swing the pendulum of historical interpretation in the opposite direction, a struggle has emerged in which each side seeks to balance the historiography through unbalanced and non-objective methodologies.

The incessant vilification or single-minded defense of Euro-Americans or Native Americans by some historians detracts from the historical significance of possible genocide in American West history and ultimately discredits some historians as serious scholars. To suggest that events like the Sand Creek Massacre typify Indian – American relations, or to stubbornly justify such events without admitting any American wrongdoing, is to place oneself largely outside the realm of objective scholarship. Were atrocities committed against Native Americans in centuries past? Yes, they were. Did Native Americans also commit similar depredations against whites? Yes, they did. Likewise, some Euro-Americans and Native American historical figures are probably worthy of being vilified. But what conclusions should be drawn from these realities?

⁶⁸ Samuel R. Cook, review of *American Holocaust: Columbus and the Conquest of the New World*, by David E. Stannard, *American Indian Quarterly* 19 (1996): 241.

CONCLUSION

The Sand Creek Massacre can provide important information for comparative genocide historians. Regardless of whether historians wish to term this as a genocidal massacre or not, there is a wealth of knowledge to be garnered on how cross-cultural conflict can escalate into explosive outbreaks of violence - even massacre. The historiography of the Sand Creek Massacre unfortunately is an excellent example of true historical understanding being lost amidst the continuous caustic battle among historians. Scholarship might focus less upon simply assigning labels of villain and victim, and more on the misunderstandings, prejudice, and hostility between two disparate peoples, and how they led to tragedy. For example, the general confusion surrounding the Sand Creek Massacre, the events leading to it and all parties involved, attest to the serious miscommunications and misunderstanding between Americans and Native Americans. The previously cited report of the meeting of Governor Evans, Major Wynkoop, Chiefs Black Kettle and White Antelope, and others in September of 1864, two months prior to the massacre, reveals a scene of complete misunderstanding, miscommunication and misinformation among the parties involved.⁶⁹

While this does not explain away the obvious elements of rancor and revenge exhibited by Evans and others, it does at least foster a more complex explanation for events surrounding Sand Creek than monocausal reasoning requisite for simply assigning guilt. Understanding what caused such confusion, acrimony and friction among these groups, and how that led to a series of violent events, including the Sand Creek Massacre,

⁶⁹ See "Report of Council with Cheyenne and Arapahoe Chiefs and Warriors, Brought to Denver by Major Wynkoop," in *The Sand Creek Massacre: a Documented History*, iv-vii.

would be a more productive avenue of research. While there are numerous examples of contemporary violent outbreaks, none of them devolved into wholesale butchery – in quantity or quality – as did the Sand Creek Massacre. The historian’s task therefore evolves from determining whether Sand Creek was a tragic massacre or justified battle, to answering how and why the events of November 29, 1864, unfolded differently than contemporaneous events in such catastrophic fashion? This is a question which, for comparative genocide historians, may offer insight of dramatic weight. By the authors herein examined, the polemics and politics are causing some of these weighty and significant questions to remain under-explored. With few exceptions, the resulting historiography is a confusing, confrontational body of scholarship that makes comparative genocide research much more difficult.

More careful analyses of the Sand Creek Massacre may indeed provide some useful parallels for genocide studies. Not without fault, one of the best steps in this direction is provided by Stan Hoig’s *The Sand Creek Massacre*, published in 1961. Though largely left out of this historiographic survey, Hoig’s history of the massacre can serve as a helpful conclusion. If asked to place Hoig’s book on one side of the historiographic debate, the title alone suggests an interpretation. But unlike the other studies herein discussed, his interpretation is supported by a fair selection of documents from both sides of the historical record. While not wanting to hold *The Sand Creek Massacre* up on a pedestal as the ultimate paragon of objective research, Hoig does exhibit a much greater degree of objective methodology that comparative genocide studies so urgently demands.

First, Hoig's contextualization of the Sand Creek Massacre shows the faults and merits of both the Native Americans and whites. In his initial six chapters, Hoig retold the series of bloody conflicts that led to the escalation of tensions which resulted in the massacre on November 29, 1864. To accomplish this task, Hoig selected a wide range of documents including newspapers, personal correspondence, government reports and secondary analyses that reflected both sides of the conflicts. For example, in laying out the situation of Indian affairs in 1863, Hoig was careful to detail Cheyenne, Ute, Comanche, Kiowa, Sioux, Caddoe, and Arapaho offensives along with the attempts by various United States military units to suppress these Native attacks. While describing the events themselves, his documentation explained the motives and reasoning behind each group's actions as well. In some cases, his analysis admitted that Indians started conflicts and in other examples pinned the responsibility upon whites.⁷⁰ In stark contrast to other accounts which displayed an eagerness to assign blame solely upon one side or the other, Hoig displayed a more careful analysis which did not excuse either side for their aggression, but assigned guilt and innocence much more judiciously.

This more careful analysis continued as Hoig followed the history through to the Sand Creek Massacre. Whereas other texts showed a bias in the choice of sources they relied upon, Hoig offered a fair selection of testimonies from both sides of the debate. He cited the testimonies of Irving Howbert, John Smith, Colonel John Chivington, Jim Beckwith, Major Scott Anthony, Major Hal Sayr, Major Edward Wyncoop and many others. For example, to relate the death of the prisoner Jack Smith, Hoig was careful to

⁷⁰ See Hoig, 23, 41, 51.

offer testimonies that described is as an accident and those that said it was murder.⁷¹

Though Hoig comes down on the side for murder, he first offered the evidence supporting the counterargument. As an appendix, Hoig also included a balanced selection of testimonies that highlighted key points that both incriminated and excused the actions at Sand Creek. In all, his documentation of the massacre, though indeed judging it as a condemnable massacre, was judicious and careful in offering a more balanced context for the event. Unlike the other accounts herein described, *The Sand Creek Massacre* provided a more balanced selection of sources, a more fair presentation of different sides of the conflict, and a more unbiased context for the event. The result proves much more valuable for comparative research.

⁷¹ See *Ibid.*, 155-58.

AFTERWORD

Given the breadth of scope represented in this study, some synoptic conclusions are necessary. As indicated at the onset, the goal of this work was to chronicle and critique portions of Native American historiography, analyze the impetuses for certain trends within the historiography, and offer suggestions for future direction in the field. An assessment of how these goals have been accomplished will help provide a brief foundation for a few concluding observations.

In order to understand why some studies in Native American history exhibit an unobjective tone, one must look to the historiography's roots. By tracing recent Native American historiography back to the political activism that emerged in the late 1960's, valuable observations are apparent. The current field of Native American historical research has direct ties to a highly politicized atmosphere of previous scholarship and commentary on past and contemporary events. As the state of political affairs in Native America has continued to be a source of frustration and contention, it has been difficult for academic studies into Native American history to divorce themselves from contemporary political events. The important perspective afforded by this observation is to see what importance and value such scholarship has. It would prove imprudent to dismiss cursorily the value of portions of Native American historiography due to the seemingly biased motives of the authors. The ways in which Native American history is written provides a fascinating view into the state of current affairs as much as into the past events being studied. For this reason, the entire historiography, balanced and unbalanced portions alike, does offer valuable insight and historical understanding.

With these considerations in mind, the next important distinction to be made is that the value of this literature does not necessarily fit the needs of all related fields of study. In particular, the field of comparative genocide requires very specific criteria for research to be useful. As Native American history contains countless examples of depopulation, massacres and other events that may be compared with genocide in world history, the production of balanced and objective research would be of great value. However, some of the aforementioned trends in the historiography have prevented insightful comparative research from being done. As evidenced by the caustic debate between some historians of Native America and the Jewish Holocaust, the overtly biased nature and unbalanced methodologies exhibited by some authors have been anything but productive. While historical dialogue between historians occurred, little insight of lasting value emerged from these debates. Trends that did not immediately devalue research within Native American history prove to be problematic in comparative genocide studies.

Finally, a case study in the historiography of the Sand Creek Massacre of 1864 provides a poignant example of the difficulties in studying Native American genocide. The chroniclers of this event have produced antithetical and polarized histories. In particular, the primary documents on the Sand Creek Massacre are among the most biased and difficult to navigate objectively. The usage of the Massacre's history here as a case study is especially insightful as these inherent difficulties in studying the event have brought out the extremes in the historiographic trends. The inescapable bias that all authors exhibit can be seriously exacerbated by highly biased, emotional and controversial primary source material. Though the Sand Creek Massacre is an extreme example of such controversy, it is not a complete anomaly. Native American history, and

the whole of inter-cultural relations in the American West for that matter, encompasses biased primary and secondary literature. While not inherently destructive to the expansion of historical understanding, biased studies prove less useful for comparative genocide studies. When the subject of comparative study presents clear distinctions of victims and perpetrators, as is often the case with genocidal events, the need for carefully constructed objectivity is all the more necessary. The acknowledgment of these difficulties in Native American history is imperative for fostering a useful body of knowledge for comparative genocide studies.

Simple acknowledgement of these issues, however, will in no way resolve or even alleviate the tensions and disagreements within the historical community. If comparative genocide history can indeed be written using Native America as an example, a careful construction of objectives and methodology must be set forth. While not claiming that a definitive end-all answer exists, some insightful observations and questions have been presented by certain genocide historians. They may serve as a ponderous conclusion without glossing over or trivializing the complexity of the issues at hand.

With the trends in Native American history and comparative genocide studies that have been highlighted, the first question stands: is this field of study worth further development? In the introduction to his book, *Is the Holocaust Unique?* Alan S. Rosenbaum wrote, “. . . [H]istory does not speak for itself because it is dead and silent and, in and of itself, teaches us nothing . . .”¹ Within the Native American experience,

¹ Alan S. Rosenbaum, *Is the Holocaust Unique? Perspectives on Comparative Genocide* (Boulder, Colorado: Westview Press, 1996), 3. The historian Sidney Mead was reported to have opened many of his classes by saying, “Historians are gods who reach into the chaos of the past and bring order.” Though Mead may have waxing somewhat grandiose in his statement, it does hold some value. The historian professes to have tools

there are many lessons to be learned and warnings to be understood. They must be sought out and explained by historians. Hence, the answer to the question of whether this comparative field of study is worth serious scholarship is a resounding, “Yes!” The next question, obviously, is how? If some of the scholarship up to the present has been flawed, what direction can be offered for the future? For this, Rosenbaum and others have offered some relevant and valuable suggestions.

In the same book cited above, Rosenbaum made the following statement that may serve as a foundational guideline for future research. Rosenbaum explained that there is no problem with claiming that the Holocaust was unique as long as it did not “in any manner diminish or still the certain moral authority that must be accorded to other groups whose members have also been forced to endure unspeakable atrocities during their history.”² This is an essential principle that must be applied to all fields of comparative genocide studies. Much can be learned by comparing different historical events, but making them compete for some abstract notion of prestige or significance can only be detrimental. This should not be misconstrued as an attempt to cursorily reconcile individuals that seriously disagree on points of historical interpretation. Debate, discussion and peer review stand at the foot of modern historical tradition, and it is often through the process of such disagreement that new insights are made. However, in the hope of gleaning some applicable understanding of how past genocides have occurred, such debate and disagreement should not completely overshadow these goals.

that can glean valuable understanding from an otherwise dark past. From David Whittaker, interviewed by author, 27 October 2004. This quotation was taken from Marvin Hill, a colleague of Dr. Whittaker’s who attended lectures of Dr. Mead’s at the University of Chicago.

² Ibid., 3.

Israel Charny offered a perspective that may help lead scholarship in a new direction. Stating that he was “stunned” and “upset” by the articles in Alan S. Rosenbaum’s aforementioned volume, and the general trends in the field of comparative genocide that they characterized, Charny sought to direct readers through what he saw as troubling scholarship with a list of questions. These questions, meant to be kept in mind while reviewing some of the very studies already herein examined, serve as an excellent conclusion to this critique:

- Does the author convey a genuine and unstinting concern with the tragedy and immortality of each and every genocide to which he refers in his comparative analysis?
- Does the author appear more concerned with perpetuating his own people’s memory of their genocide than with a concern for all human life?
- Does the author appear more involved with his own ideas and scholarship than with battling the evil of genocide?
- Does the author use all-or-none thinking and black-and-white argumentation to create diametrically opposed differences between different cases of genocide to the point where deaths in the one instance are claimed to be more terrible than in others?
- Does the author use post hoc fallacious reasoning?³

As he implied, the historical study of genocide should be driven by and rendered with a concern for human life and tragedy: a concern that should exhibit neither bounds nor bias. There is not a finite amount of historical suffering, and debates that focus on proving which historical groups suffered more largely miss the goals proposed by Charny.

Comparative studies of Native American history, the Holocaust and other historical examples of mass murder and genocide have the potential to produce valuable historical insight. There is no question as to whether or not this dialogue should be

³ Israel W. Charny, “Forward,” in Rosenbaum, xi.

taking place. However, in debating these issues, some have attempted to undermine one another's work by attacking the importance of their "supposed opponent's" historical events. This is truly unfortunate. Within the realm of Native American history, some trends of political bias and unbalanced methodology have proved to be obstacles, but they are not insurmountable. The history of Native America contains stories of tragic events and provides lessons to be learned and warnings to be analyzed. Hopefully, trends that have heretofore proved obstructive to the process of comparative genocide research may be better understood and overcome. Though not a simple task by any means, the possible result is well worth consideration and further discussion.

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