



Remaking American Indian histories : recognizing their voices, stories, lives  
by Miranda MF Buckmaster

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts in History  
Montana State University

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Abstract:

Mainstream histories often do not include detailed and effective narrations about the lives and experiences of American Indian women in North America from the era of contact to the twenty-first century. This thesis critiques historical methodologies that ignore American Indians, their histories, and their roles in the evolution of North American societies. The body of the text focuses on historiography and methodology. It also offers solutions historians and other scholars may consider when writing American Indian histories, including the use of interdisciplinary methods and ethical research of American Indian oral traditions. This thesis is concluded with a brief study of popular culture to illustrate how applying alternative methodologies to mainstream scholarship could help scholars to create more inclusive historical texts.

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A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment  
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Bozeman, Montana

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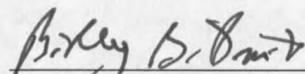
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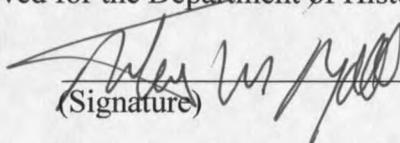
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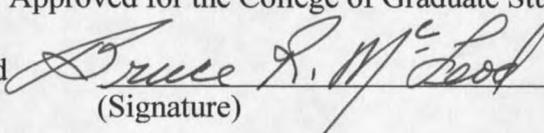
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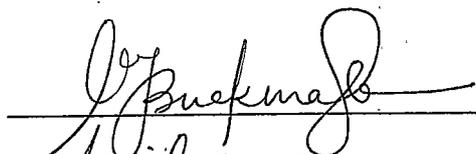
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## TABLE OF CONTENTS

1. HIDDEN LIVES: WRITING THE HISTORIES OF AMERICAN INDIANS .....	1
2. THE WESTERN INTELLECTUAL HERITAGE AND ITS FORBIDDEN LANDSCAPE .....	8
3. COMPLICATING THE HISTORIAN'S METHODOLOGIES.....	26
4. SHIFTING BODIES: ORAL TRADITIONS AND WESTERN KNOWLEDGE.....	48
5. RESHAPING THE LANDSCAPE: ETHICS AND INTELLECTUAL LOCALE IN RESEARCHING WITH ORAL TRADITIONS.....	69
6. RESISTING MANIFEST DESTINY IN WRITING AMERICAN INDIAN WOMEN'S HISTORIES .....	87
7. SURVIVANCE.....	115
8. BIBLIOGRAPHY .....	118

Abstract

Mainstream histories often do not include detailed and effective narrations about the lives and experiences of American Indian women in North America from the era of contact to the twenty-first century. This thesis critiques historical methodologies that ignore American Indians, their histories, and their roles in the evolution of North American societies. The body of the text focuses on historiography and methodology. It also offers solutions historians and other scholars may consider when writing American Indian histories, including the use of interdisciplinary methods and ethical research of American Indian oral traditions. This thesis is concluded with a brief study of popular culture to illustrate how applying alternative methodologies to mainstream scholarship could help scholars to create more inclusive historical texts.

## CHAPTER ONE

## HIDDEN LIVES: WRITING THE HISTORIES OF AMERICAN INDIANS

*The American Indian has been written about by hundreds of authors of white blood or possibly by an Indian of mixed blood who has spent the greater part of his life away from a reservation. These are not in a position to write accurately about the struggles and disappointments of the Indian...No one is able to understand the Indian race like an Indian.*

~CHIEF STANDING BEAR in *My People the Sioux*

The idea for this essay originated from the study of several contemporary histories of Early America and several articles about the influence of Christianity in American Indian women's lives in the colonial era. Reading these studies underlined the absence of American Indian women in the metahistories of North America and the United States. In fact, those readings demonstrated that American Indians, women and men, were largely unaccounted for in most mainstream histories. Where did these people go? How did their lives change after contact? What roles did they play in nation-building? According to the portrayals of some twentieth-century historians, Europeans peacefully settled a practically uninhabited continent, and Native communities obligingly stepped back from the scene to let the newcomers improve upon and overcome the wilderness with European civilization.

The questions above served as a catalyst for envisioning a project that would be characterized by a "thicker" retelling of American Indian women's experiences in North American societies. Initially, it was proposed that this thesis would encompass a brief

review of the historiography of American Indian studies followed by a brief discussion of alternative methodologies for studying American Indian women. The bulk of the project would analyze and rewrite histories of Northern-Plains women using the previously suggested methodology. Instead, this thesis is engulfed, almost entirely, in a critique of methodology. Upon further investigation, the problems in existing scholarship about Natives turned out to be more deeply engrained in Western intellectual heritages and more widely spread throughout historical scholarship than was originally imagined. The author's initial misconception (or ignorance) of the subject directly reflects the problems of history writing that this thesis illuminates and confronts. The overarching difficulty is twofold. First, how can scholars become aware of their intellectual locations and the influences of their own cultures on their thinking and how might that impede their work? Second, after recognizing and acknowledging their locations, how can they contend with that impediment? Western society has been overwhelmingly effective in hiding the histories of the "Other."

This thesis critiques Western historical methodologies and their treatment of American Indian histories, then provides more efficient and comprehensive techniques that scholars can use to answer their own questions about those histories as well as larger histories of North America. It examines hegemonic tools that have veiled American Indian histories in scholarship written by Western-trained historians. It focuses on European and Euro-American ideologies (specifically those that are linked to racism and gender biases) that have been used in contact zones to eradicate, or at least attempt to control, indigenous populations. The analysis demonstrates how these same ideologies

have infiltrated the writing of history, making the discipline itself a contact zone, and how the activities in that contact zone have detrimentally affected contemporary perceptions of American Indians and especially American Indian women in scholarship.

This thesis emphasizes the role of two separate knowledges that intermingle in the contact zone of United States history: Western knowledge and Native knowledge. Native knowledge includes oral literatures, Native histories, ceremony and spiritual beliefs. It also includes bodies of information and intellectual methodologies that have developed over centuries in conjunction with and resistance to Euro-American culture and science. For instance, this thesis offers examples of how Native scholars such as Paula Gunn Allen and LeAnne Howe have maintained their own perceptions of humanity, environment, and culture when they approach and create historical scholarship. Discussing Natives and their perspectives of American Indian histories and North American histories can alter the activities in the contact zone so that marginalized people can be more influential in the construction of mainstream histories. Native knowledge inhabits the contact zone as fully as Western knowledge yet its role in North American histories is largely unknown. This thesis creates a platform from which scholars can recognize and challenge hegemonic constructions of history.

Chapter one will begin the analysis by introducing the theory of Western intellectual heritages, reviewing the rise of Western science and Western knowledge, and assessing its impact on Western history. It will describe how notions of "classification" and "progress" have formed the basis of Eurocentrism and imperialism and how those

ideologies are reflected in metahistories. It will discuss how the rise of Western science has led historians to value written historical sources over oral sources and how this valuing of knowledge perpetuates colonial acts in twenty-first century scholarship. The chapter will utilize gender as an analytical tool to explain how Eurocentrism and progress have worked to subvert the importance of women, especially non-Anglo-Saxon women, in the histories of North America, and how valuing oral sources provides resistance to that marginalization.

Chapter two will address the issue of finding available source material to study American Indian women's experiences. Studying women through the analytical framework of gender alone is insufficient, and this section will show why historians must complicate their work by including race and class in their analysis to better understand women's experiences within their particular communities. The chapter will introduce the idea of moral geographies to explain how differently Europeans and/or Euro-Americans, and American Indians perceived their environments and cultures. This will explain why written sources alone cannot provide the information historians need to write thicker accounts of women's histories. The chapter will end with a brief review of the work of some "New Indian history" scholars, point out some of their theories' strengths and weaknesses, and suggest where scholars can go from their proposed foundations.

Venturing from the "New Indian history," scholars can begin to explore how the conventional tools of race, class, and gender can be strengthened in American Indian studies by asking how Natives would write their histories. Chapter three approaches this question by arguing that Natives themselves need to be recognized as an integral part of

the historical process. Native knowledge and oral sources must be used in any analysis of American Indian women. This chapter will compare the differences between Western and Native bodies of knowledge and record-keeping. It will define the differences between oral histories and oral traditions and illuminate some of the limitations of Western methodologies in studying oral traditions. Overall, the chapter will convey the immensity of Native knowledge and oral traditions and it will challenge the notion that oral sources are less valuable than written material.

Although oral traditions seemingly offer scholars unlimited resources to study American Indian women, this actually is not the case. There are many ethical considerations scholars must heed when studying cultures other than their own. For instance, not all Native knowledge is accessible, to be collected and publicly displayed by Western, or even Native scholars. This is the subject of chapter four: the careful treatment of Native knowledge. This section will begin by critiquing ethnographic practices and delineating some of the dangers about which scholars need to be aware so that colonial practices are not perpetuated in their scholarship. It will offer some methods scholars can use to critique their own studies and resulting scholarship in order that American Indian women's histories receive the meticulous and conscientious analysis and documentation they deserve.

Finally, chapter five will contextualize this study by offering a historical example of a contact zone where American Indians and Euro-Americans converged to retell the story of the American West. Buffalo Bill Cody's Wild West Show was a form of nineteenth-century entertainment that modeled the ideals of the United States and the

dominant culture in its retelling of the nation's struggle to conquer the continent. It created the hegemonic culture's metahistory of the American West and the activities that took place in that contact zone. At the same time, the show was its own contact zone, where Euro-Americans, American Indians, and others negotiated relationships within the confines of popular imagery. This contact zone within a contact zone illustrates the assumptions Euro-Americans made about their own histories according to the ideologies that saturated the show's messages about what it meant to be an "American" in the nineteenth century. The Wild West show was centered on larger nationalistic, dominant class ideologies, specifically Manifest Destiny. That idea has become part of the larger Western intellectual heritage in which scholars find themselves draped. The displays in the show misrepresented American Indian women and limited Native agency in portraying their own cultures, and this chapter will examine the parallels between this pervasive form of popular culture and the contact zone of writing history.

This thesis attempts to explain why American Indian women have been hidden in North American metahistories. It also attempts to offer some solutions for the inherent problems of Western methodologies—to pare down the weaker components and rebuild with more complicated analytical frameworks, interdisciplinary approaches, ethical conscientiousness, and Native knowledge and theory. Although this project is less about American Indians and American Indian women than it originally set out to be, it tackles the foundational work of methodological critique and reflexivity that must occur before a useful and contributive historical study about American Indian women can be written. It is regrettable that the document's relatively small amount of available space and limited

time frame do not allow a second part to be written, one that would target a historical study using the proposed methodological techniques. Therefore, the reader should consider this thesis to be a launch pad for further study as opposed to a terminal undertaking. In other words, this critique fails to produce the historical examination envisioned within its discussion, yet it provides a methodological cornerstone. It is grounded by asking questions about American Indian women and their histories and experiences, and by observing popular representations of women, and asking how these things continue to affect the writing of history.

## CHAPTER TWO

THE WESTERN INTELLECTUAL HERITAGE AND ITS FORBIDDEN  
LANDSCAPE

*There is a Natoas bundle opened up and on display in the Museum of the Plains Indian, a government-owned institution located in Browning, Montana, on the reservation of our Blackfoot relatives. One year we traveled to that reservation with Mrs. Rides-at-the-Door ...She was shocked when we brought her to the museum and showed her the opened bundle. To her that bundle represented the sacred life to which she has been devoted, for the sake of her people...She nearly cried when she said: 'Do these museum people have no respect for anything?'*

~BEVERLY HUNGRY WOLF (Blackfoot) in *The Ways of My Grandmothers*

Too often, historians have written the histories of American Indians, and American Indian women in particular, by seeking a firm, linear path, shouldered by "authenticated" evidence.<sup>1</sup> In other words, historians have mainly collected and used information that has been transmitted onto paper in a given time period. Historians have considered these written materials to be legitimate primary resources for academic studies, to the exclusion of many other available historical resources. A piece of evidence that is a seemingly unchanging and immovable artifact, which only upon examination is subjected to the scholar's interpretation, is the historian's primary source of choice. Archives, libraries, and museums around the world are stacked with these kinds of artifacts, or flagstones, from which historians and other academics can leap, to and fro, in an attempt to pave the

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<sup>1</sup> This thesis will use the term "American Indian" and "Native" interchangeably as opposed to "Native American" or simply "Indian" according to a statement made by the author Sherman Alexie (Spokane/Coeur d'Alene) on an episode of 60 Minutes (July 2001). He stated that anyone could be a Native American if they were born in the United States, but only specific individuals, those claiming a pre-colonial cultural and genetic heritage, can be called American Indian. The redundancy of the two terms, and other terminology in the text, is intentional and supportive of the main argument.

way to an accurate and inclusive account of North American history. To these limited resources historians have applied their analyses of race, class, *or* gender, which necessarily determined which way the academic path turned. Therefore, this sort of road building, which lacked a complete set of workable tools, mandated which people's histories have been included in North American metahistories. Those metahistories exclude, and continue to exclude, Native women. This omission (in whole or in part) of the lives of American Indian women has occurred even in revisionist North American histories. Yet, as this thesis will demonstrate, certain historians are searching out new methodologies for writing thicker North American histories.

Why American Indian women's histories have been glossed over can be detected historiographically, by reviewing the role of history in wider Western systems of knowledge that include all mainstream intellectual disciplines.<sup>2</sup> The ways in which Western academics think of the world, and the creation and structure of Western systems of knowledge, are linked to what we may call a "Western intellectual heritage." Intellectual heritage, in terms of Western scholarship, is comprised of the methodological and ideological structures that encompass the educations, past and present, of Western scholars. Many of the methods and ideologies, as we shall see, are crucial tools in any historical investigation, and like the Western tools scientists use in their experimentation, intellectual scholars would no longer be able to make sense of the past or continue to work towards an inclusive retelling of humanity's story without them. Yet, this

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<sup>2</sup> This thesis will use the term "Western" to define the cultural and intellectual tendencies that have been attributed to Europeans and European descendants in all parts of the world. Although this generic terminology is limiting and risks perpetuating a potentially harmful binary (Western versus non-Western) it is used in this scholarship for the sake of clarity.

intellectual heritage also includes the devaluing ideological legacies of “progress” and Eurocentrism that impede the historian’s search for new ways to understand American Indians and their culture within a national framework. Like scientists, historians and other intellectuals must continue to struggle against hegemonic manipulations of Western methods and knowledge. To understand how the intellectual heritage both subverts and supports the search for American Indian histories, the origination and rise of Western knowledge and its notions of progress and Eurocentrism must be reviewed.

In the United States, and within Western culture as a whole, the discipline of history, its intellectual heritage and its methodologies, originated in the rise of what historians Joyce Appleby, Lynn Hunt, and Margaret Jacob have termed, the heroic model of science, because it “made scientific geniuses into cultural heroes.”<sup>3</sup> Some of these cultural heroes are Galilei Galileo, Sir Isaac Newton, and Charles Darwin. These scientists introduced new ways of explaining the order and mechanics of the earth, therefore changing people’s perceptions of the world. Valuing reason over all other human faculties, eighteenth century Newtonian science was a revolution in thought, which extracted the “natural” from the “superstitious” and made the “true,” “rational” world knowable through scientific experimentation and observation. Appleby and her colleagues wrote, “The heroic model equated science with reason: disinterested, impartial, and, if followed closely, a guarantee of progress in this world.”<sup>4</sup> These tenets and the organization of the Western model are consequential cornerstones in the development of intellectual heritages.

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<sup>3</sup> Joyce Appleby, Lynn Hunt, and Margaret Jacob, *Telling the Truth About History* (New York and London: W.W. Norton and Company, 1994), 15.

<sup>4</sup> Appleby, Hunt, and Jacob, 15.

The roots of Western organizations of knowledge can be found in the strategies of observation, collecting specimens, and record-keeping for students of natural history in eighteenth-century Europe. Mary Louise Pratt argued that these European strategies for knowledge-making are critical components of Eurocentrism that can be linked to two events in Europe that occurred in 1735. Carl Linnaeus's *Systema Naturae* (The System of Nature) was published in that year, and the international La Condamine expedition for scientific exploration began.<sup>5</sup> Each of these events played a large role in modeling science heroically as well as setting the footings for Western notions of progress and Eurocentric behavior.

The state-sponsored La Condamine expedition "marks the onset of an era of scientific travel and interior exploration that in turn suggests shifts in Europe's conception of itself and its global relations."<sup>6</sup> The La Condamine expedition was organized to settle the dispute between Cartesian geography and Newtonian theories about the shape of the earth by sending teams to Lapland and South America. Although the question was answered before members of the mission returned to Europe, the trip signifies a shift in scientific inquiry. Europeans were applying theories to field work on a global scale, which led them to, among many other things, create new maps and discover new sea routes, and inscribe developing collective notions of Eurocentrism, and the superiority of Anglo-Saxons. A new system of classification worked hand-in-hand with the growing number of scientific expeditions.

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<sup>5</sup> Mary Louise Pratt, *Imperial Eyes: Travel Writing and Transculturation* (London: Routledge, 1992), 15.

<sup>6</sup> Pratt, 24.

Carl Linnaeus was a Swedish naturalist who developed a system of sexual classification for botanical specimens in the early eighteenth century. During some of his early work he traveled to "Lapland," Europe's most northern region, where he was inspired by the richness of the land and the admirable life-ways of the Sami people. While there "He...observed the areas natural resources, but was sad when he realized they were not utilized to their full advantage."<sup>7</sup> Linnaeus's work began amongst a rash of nationalist and scientific expeditions, which were supported by several European nations, to observe and record every species or natural event contained in the knowable world. Linnaeus and others then hoped to use that knowledge to "discover" what they thought were the best ways to utilize the world's natural resources, and therefore, set the world on a linear trajectory of ever-increasing progress.<sup>8</sup> Scientific expeditions were the first of many steps European nations took to position themselves as world managers, so to speak, who had self-appointed authority to decide what manner of living was preferable for all people. Expeditions enabled Europeans to discover and organize new knowledge.

Linnaeus's classificatory system was one among many in use during the eighteenth century in which the vast amount of knowledge collected throughout the world could be organized. Those systems "created the task of locating every species on the planet, extracting it from its particular, arbitrary surroundings...and placing it in its appropriate spot in the system...with its new written, secular European name."<sup>9</sup> Already existing indigenous knowledge, like plant names and their medicinal uses, were

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<sup>7</sup> Sverker Sörlin, "Ordering the World for Europe: Science as Intelligence and Information as Seen from the Northern Periphery," in *Nature and Empire: Science and the Colonial Enterprise*, Osiris, vol.15, ed. Roy MacLeod (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2001), 57.

<sup>8</sup> Sörlin, 56.

<sup>9</sup> Pratt, 31.

decontextualized, and given new meaning (names and uses) by Westerners, for Westerners. These appropriations of indigenous knowledge and material were justified in the Western mind by an overarching and growing trend in which Europeans believed that all valuable ideas and characteristics originated with European people. New organizational systems for accumulated knowledge and communications (collected specimens, written observations) about exploratory expeditions encouraged eighteenth-century Europeans to reshape their perceptions of the knowable world, and they continued to find ways to enforce and maintain Eurocentric ideologies.

While Europeans “discovered” and “archived” a new world, by exploring regions like North America where previously little was known by Westerners they necessarily re-discovered themselves as the global dominant culture within the progressive and seemingly limitless potential of the notions of the Enlightenment. Yet, as the Atlantic slave trade system among the African, American, and European continents illustrates, racism, too, was justified by Eurocentric ideologies and was unfortunately integrated with the new intellectual movement. Thus, Europeans did not limit their collections to the already problematic appropriations of artifacts and non-human organisms, but included among the specimens to be gathered, observed, and sometimes relocated were American Indians. American Indians sometimes traveled to Europe to be displayed as primitive peoples, like so many scientific artifacts. They were subjected the Europeans’ categorizing and decontextualizing schemes of progress, which further perpetuated Eurocentrism.

Inscriptions of Eurocentrism transferred easily to the North American colonies, and later to the United States where the dominant Anglo-Saxon culture needed to enforce notions of its racist and gendered hegemony to maintain overt institutions like slavery and to continue its massive conquest of, and settlement within, American Indian land. The intellectual side of Anglo-Saxon hegemony can be contextualized in the close inspection of what historical sources have been and are valued and used by Western scholars to write North American and American Indian histories. The training of Western historians is founded upon the previously outlined assumptions of progress and Eurocentrism that arose from the eighteenth-century expansion of Newtonian science and Linnaean classification. And like the fences erected in colonial New England, so too has a Western intellectual heritage constructed a concrete wall between Western/(valued) knowledge and non-Western/(devalued) American Indian knowledge. Yet, to the benefit of many cultures, including Western ones, the walls containing so-called valued knowledge are being eroded.

In recent years, historical methodology has been influenced by post-modernist thinkers whose "primary goal has been to challenge convictions about the objectivity of knowledge and the stability of language."<sup>10</sup> By exposing the subjectivity of knowledge and language so effectively as to change historical methods, the weaknesses of the scientific model's heroics seem more what like Appleby and her colleagues have called the "clay feet of science."<sup>11</sup> Gender bias and racism interlaced with Western knowledge has tainted the Western intellectual heritage and now scholars of all cultural backgrounds

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<sup>10</sup> Appleby, Hunt, and Jacob, 201.

<sup>11</sup> Appleby, Hunt, and Jacob, 160.

are challenging the heritage. They are reconstructing narratives that draw in previously marginalized groups of people such as American Indians. Although scholars are composing revisionist narratives that deconstruct the hegemonically manipulated underpinnings of a Western intellectual heritage, the problem of the availability of resources and the biases of written records in this new kind of reconstruction remains. Before the twentieth century, white upper and middle class citizens, missionaries and church officials, and the employees of government agencies most often created primary written historical sources in the United States. The experiences of American Indians have been teased out of these documents. Sometimes the resulting scholarship has been supplemented by the works of academics in other disciplines, such as anthropology. Yet anthropology, and other humanities disciplines originate from the same intellectual heritage as history, and therefore they face the same problems of knowledge creation and discovery in Western systems. Scholars working within these systems must not only sift out the hidden histories, but also the Eurocentric notions that weaken Western scholastic methods. In terms of American Indian histories, this can only be accomplished by the valuing of Native systems of knowledge and methods of study. Western perceptions of scholarship must expand to reformulate the definition of authenticated evidence to include the knowledge of Natives as shared on their own terms.

Historians of all cultural backgrounds are confronted with the same Eurocentric biases in source material, whether written documentation, material culture, or ethnography. Because of the way resources have been handled in the past, twenty-first century scholars are also plagued by terminal forms of the organization of knowledge that

perpetuate the devaluing of non-Western historical sources like oral traditions. Patricia Nelson Limerick wrote, "When academic territories were parceled out in the early twentieth century, anthropology got the tellers of tales and history got the keepers of written records."<sup>12</sup> Not only are the people scholars study subjected to this parceling out, but the chasm between the disciplines of history and anthropology and their preferences for either written sources, material culture, or ethnography, further hinders the historian's potential usage of oral tradition and other forms of American Indian histories. For now, it is important to note the parallels between the tragedy of European settlers carving up already inhabited lands in North America and the more abstract, yet no less potent, territorial divisions that have been staked between intellectual disciplines and their respective methodologies. Both these phenomena were influenced by the ideologies of Eurocentrism and the notion of progress.

To make this argument concerning the problems of source material more accessible, an example of a potential case study will illustrate the difficulties inherent to a Western intellectual heritage. If a historian were to write an account of a late nineteenth century Native Lakota woman's experiences only whispers could be found in written sources of the woman's experiences. They would be inaudible to the scholar if she or he relied solely on primary written and/or material historical sources, because those sources would not address the cultural aspects of American Indian life. In generalized terms, the scholar's project is to reconstruct the woman's cultural world within the framework of U.S. federal policy which determined the potential relocation of her community and its

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<sup>12</sup> Patricia Nelson Limerick, *The Legacy of Conquest: The Unbroken Past of the American West* (New York and London: W.W. Norton and Company, 1987), 35.

coerced assimilation into a nation whose dominate culture claimed membership in western European cultural and genetic heritages. This would be a precarious project for any twenty-first century scholar, no matter his or her background, since more than a hundred years separates the scholar from the subject. Yet, Western methodologies alone cannot flesh out this particular woman's story—nor should they. Since this woman's experiences included the actions of people from two different worlds, a co-opting of these two cultures' knowledges and methods are required to write this particular history.

To reroute the study and sever the pathways that perpetuate Western biases toward tangible evidence, written or material, the scholar must ask how the woman's cultural group recorded its own acknowledgment of past events and how the people in that group ascribed importance to those events. The answers, in part, can be found by investing academic value in oral tradition as a historical source. Native oral traditions are various forms of the continuous and repetitive storytelling of events that almost, if not all, American Indians have used for centuries to track the history of their people, including their origins of existence and important components of their culture. This form of shared knowledge among Native peoples in North America transmits the knowledge and experiences of ancestors and living community members from one generation to the next. Oral tradition differs from ethnography and oral history (a topic which will be discussed in detail in chapter three) in that oral tradition is a more encompassing and complex form of communication and record-keeping. Angela Cavender Wilson (Dakota) stated, "the

definition of oral history is contained within that of the oral tradition.”<sup>13</sup> Without including oral tradition as an imperative historical source, historians cannot recreate the lives and experiences of American Indians and American Indian women, much less write a larger, more inclusive history of North America.

Before oral tradition can become a valued resource to write American Indian *women's* histories, the gender biases of past and present North American histories must be reviewed. Because the intellectual heritage of Western knowledge influences the writing of history, women's history has been largely ignored until the latter half of the twentieth century. Women from subordinate cultures, such as American Indian women, have suffered the devaluing of their own histories even more so because a combination of sexist and racist ideologies within the dominant culture have mandated the ways in which history has been written until recent decades. For instance, Beverly Hungry Wolf wrote, “There are books that tell about horse stealing, buffalo hunting, and war raiding. But the reader would have to assume that Indian women lived boring lives of drudgery, and that their minds were empty of stories and anecdotes.”<sup>14</sup> Although the scholarship is now catching up by offering better representations of European women's histories, it is still behind in Native women's histories. The reasons for this can be partially explained by reviewing European gender expectations and European women's status as reflected in North America.

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<sup>13</sup> Angela Cavender Wilson, “Power of the Spoken Word: Native Oral Traditions in American Indian History,” in *Rethinking American Indian History*, ed. Donald L. Fixico (Albuquerque, New Mexico: University of New Mexico Press, 1997), 103.

<sup>14</sup> Beverly Hungry Wolf, *The Ways of My Grandmothers* (New York: William Morrow and Company, 1982), 16.

European women during the Enlightenment were relegated to the private world of the home, which would be later known, in the Victorian Age, as the domestic sphere. European men's roles were fulfilled in the public arena and therefore males dominated the European business of exploring, colonizing, and eventually settling and governing the North American continent. Women's roles in North America, with a few exceptions, mirrored those of their Old World contemporaries and the public and private spheres of men and women maintained their rigid boundaries. Traditional European gender roles were transposed, by Westerners, onto Native cultures, and whites in North America mistakenly understood American Indian women's status as paralleling European and Euro-American women's gender status. However, the status of American Indian women was much more complex, and varied from Native culture to culture. For example, Navajo and Cherokee women held positions of respect within their communities, but perhaps the most well known variance from Western gender role constructions was the matrilineal societies of the Iroquois Nations, or the Hodenosaunee, in which women controlled land use and food stores, influenced government and intertribal diplomacy and warfare, and performed as religious and spiritual leaders. Laura Wittstock, a Hodenosaunee (Seneca) woman, explained some long-standing gender expectations among the Seneca,

There was cooperation, diversification of roles... There was a certain toughness in the women, who had a tremendous amount of power. Women selected the chiefs, and were consulted in political matters. Women elders were considered special people, with visionary powers. The most knowledgeable about our history and traditions were called 'faithkeepers' and taught the young. Men and women were equals.<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>15</sup> Katz, Jane, *Messengers of the Wind: Native American Women Tell Their Life Stories* (New York: Ballantine Books, 1995), 111-112.

Using oral traditions as a historical resource combined with oral histories would clearly demonstrate women's roles in Native cultures, and, when combined with gender and race analyses, oral sources would subvert the sexist and racist components of the Western intellectual heritage by revealing American Indian women's roles among their particular Native groups.

New generations of scholars in various disciplines have begun to value histories and knowledge of non-Western subordinate cultures by answering the call of postmodernism and sharing its skepticism concerning the nature of how academic texts are produced. The scholars are able to do this while still maintaining the scholastic strengths of Western knowledge, such as the utilization of varied analytical tools, and the flexibilities of both making inquiries and drawing conclusions. Karen Ordahl Kupperman has written an interpretation of how American Indians (specifically those tribes who participated in early interactions with Europeans in pre-colonial North America) and Europeans may have envisioned one another when their two cultures began to meet on a regular basis in the late fifteenth century. Kupperman argued that as Europeans and Indians "observed each other, they thought in novel ways about their own identities...[they] were engaged in finding the appropriate self-definitions."<sup>16</sup> As the pre-colonial era eventually became the colonial era, Europeans emerged as the dominant culture in North America and their notions of the American Indians' "appropriate self-definitions" took on racial and gendered connotations. In colonial North America and the United States, Europeans and Euro-Americans perceived race dualistically; there was a

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<sup>16</sup> Karen Ordahl Kupperman, *Indians and English: Facing Off in Early America* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 2000), 4.

superior race (Anglo-Saxon) and in opposition to that superiority there was a multitude of inferior races (American Indian, African, Chinese, etc.). To complicate matters, Anglo-Saxon superiority informed the ideals of femininity and it was seen as having only two possible connotations (good or bad). This notion came to be reflected in genetically determined skin color and constructions of culture and good femininity was linked to “civilization,” while bad femininity was linked to “savagery.” American Indian women were most often only seen as occupying the bad/savage half of the female binary. Although the identities of all North American women changed over the centuries, more often than not, Western women more easily embodied prevailing notions of good/civilized womanhood. Native women were consistently compared to the Western model, if only to inform Anglo-Saxon women and American Indian women of their respective hegemonic statuses in the European colonies, and later, in the United States. The projection of European ideals of womanhood onto Native women also contributed to the erosion of their status within Native groups. The shifting identity of the savage/bad Native woman is undeniable in early Euro-American iconography that finds its way into colonial promotional material and other literature that was produced in the pre-colonial and colonial eras for European audiences.<sup>17</sup>

Later forms of Euro-American popular culture that portray Indian women, such as dime novels, Wild West shows, and World’s Fairs, perpetuated the feminine binary and became stages from which the dominant culture informed members of both the dominant and subordinate groups of a particular time period’s racial and gendered status quo,

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<sup>17</sup> See Kupperman, pp. 41-76 for a discussion on representations of American Indians produced by Europeans and the campaigns to generate support for American colonialism, from which the images originated.

further masking the experiences of American Indian women. The representations of Native women were not only displays for which women of all ethnicities could compare themselves, but they also became displays to bolster male dominance, Anglo-Saxon superiority, and nationalistic ideologies—all of which were integrated with the Western intellectual heritage.<sup>18</sup> Chapter five will expand this argument and demonstrate how the ideologies of Eurocentrism and progress as embodied in Manifest Destiny were major components in popular culture and history writing. Subsequently, this thesis will discuss stereotypical interpretations of American Indians in Wild West shows and World's Fairs have permeated the Western intellectual heritage and taken root in contemporary histories about American Indians and the American West.

Scholars of popular culture, such as Shari M. Huhndorf, have shown in their work that popular culture is mutable. Although much of it results in written evidence, artwork, and film, for example, which share the same static characteristics as written documents, the point at which that evidence was produced is illusive and, again, subject to the interpretations of the scholar. The uses of popular culture (if it is assumed that the dominant culture used its mediums, among other communications, to inform its audiences of the status quo) are attempts to control the ways in which people are thinking and making meanings within their societies. For instance, working class audience members at World's Fairs, Stuart Hall would argue, were not "cultural dopes" but rather, like modern audiences, "they are perfectly capable of recognizing the way the realities of working-class life is reorganized, reconstructed, and reshaped by the way they are

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<sup>18</sup> This thesis is concerned with analyzing forms of Euro-American popular culture, as opposed to American Indian forms or European forms. Any reference to popular culture, unless otherwise noted, should therefore be assumed to mean various forms of display produced by and for Euro-Americans.

represented.”<sup>19</sup> Working class audiences who experienced the nationalistic displays of World’s Fairs were aware of social organization in the United States and its singular and overlapping hierarchies of race, gender, and class. Therefore, they were knowledgeable participants viewing the representations of various ethnicities of men and women from all over the globe—not humans with blank slates for minds upon which the dominant culture could imprint its prescriptions for society.<sup>20</sup> Therefore, what the scholar is actually interpreting about popular culture is how it *may* have influenced its audience. How viewers of World’s Fairs were internalizing and appropriating or rejecting the racial and gendered ideologies presented in the displays can only be theorized. Of the millions of viewers of World’s Fairs, relatively few left records of their reactions.<sup>21</sup>

The spectacles of American Indians in popular culture throughout the centuries and congruent representations in contemporary histories cannot be effectively analyzed without merging Native knowledge, such as oral tradition, and Western methodologies, such as interpreting written sources. Avoiding or misunderstanding the ways in which American Indian women think of themselves and their surroundings and the ways in which they relay their knowledge and histories only obfuscates the study of American Indian women. American Indian women’s voices, perspectives, and oral histories not only resist their representations in popular culture but are necessary for the deconstruction of stereotypes.

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<sup>19</sup> Stuart Hall, “Notes on Deconstructing ‘the Popular,’” in *Cultural Theory and Popular Culture: A Reader*, ed. John Storey, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (Athens: The University of Georgia Press, 1998), 447.

<sup>20</sup> Hall, 447.

<sup>21</sup> See, Robert Rydell, *All the World’s a Fair: Visions of Empire at American International Expositions, 1876-1916* (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 1984) for a discussion on the hegemonic functions of World’s Fairs’ displays.

Breaking from the constraints of written and material historical evidence and utilizing oral traditions and other forms of previously de-valued knowledge will allow American Indian women's histories to be seen in Native terms rather than in terms of Western-trained historians' imagined representations of Native women in primary texts, some of which are influenced by various forms of popular culture. Oral traditions will show that Native women were and are historical agents in the construction of North American histories and national identities. However, many historians have not yet acknowledged their own agency in the valuing of primary resources—in other words, they have not recognized, or at least have not been responsible for, their influences on which forms of knowledge will be studied, and which will be ignored. This is part of the Western intellectual legacy, which “discovers,” “collects,” and “categorizes” pieces of the knowable world. The particular specimens collected have not yet included American Indian oral traditions, perhaps because the inclusion potentially threatens the very foundations of the Western intellectual heritage. American Indians still inhabit the subordinate position of liminality and marginalization in North America. Yet, this is changing and American indigenous knowledge is slowly being valued in its own right to concomitantly occupy a new intellectual niche along with decolonized parts of Western systems of knowledge.

Considering the historical evidence, its biases, its omissions, and its intellectual heritage, historians who have been trained in strictly Western methods have reference points that are more unstable than they are perhaps willing to admit. Historians and other scholars of all ethnicities and backgrounds who have critiqued their methodologies have

benefited from viewing their particular intellectual heritages as ongoing processes of the creation and dissemination of knowledge. They will have recognized that, as historical agents themselves, they control the hegemony of Western systems of knowledge by contributing to, and/or taking away from the systems' methodological structures. This means that the trail to valuing oral tradition, and Native knowledge as a viable historical and anthropological resource is open to travel. Historians can apply some of their already firmly grounded analytical categories (race, class, gender) in combination with interdisciplinary approaches (anthropology, American studies, and cultural studies) to oral traditions to conscientiously challenge, strengthen, and rebuild their own intellectual heritages. To re-envision the lives and experiences of American Indian women and their contributions to a North American identity, histories must be written to include a retelling in American Indian terms, according to Native treatments of knowledge.

## CHAPTER THREE

## COMPLICATING THE HISTORIAN'S METHODOLOGIES

*Numerous feminist scholars have expressed concern over the propensity of writers to ignore the heterogeneity among women, particularly women of color. American Indian women are especially multifaceted, and with few exceptions this aspect is overlooked.*

~DEVON A. MIHESUAH (Choctaw) in *Commonalty of Difference*

History's greatest strength is its ability to transform and retell the narratives of humanity's past; its malleability in the hands of its crafters lends to a complexity of shape that is both daunting and inspiring. In a sense, historians are creators, and like the North American landscape, the stories they retell shape a more abstract kind of geography in which their subjects find themselves atop mountains, or unseen in dark canyons. The makers of history are also many other things: storytellers, investigators, adventurers, teachers, actors, artists, workers, politicians, diplomats, entrepreneurs, and conquerors. Yet, most importantly, the makers of history are also listeners. Unfortunately, this is a skill many historians have forgotten or not yet developed. Some historians have become too dependent on primary and secondary written sources and therefore they have been unaware of or have possibly ignored alternative research sources such as the oral literatures of Native America. Perhaps the absence of oral tradition in the Western scholar's repertoire is the greatest reason American Indian histories are hidden and marginalized. American Indian women's histories are further marginalized because historians typically approach women's histories with only a gendered analysis, rather

than layering their studies by analyzing race or socio-economics along with gender.

There are two major hurdles then in retelling the North American story: including non-Western forms of knowledge, and finding new combinations of Western analyses.

No matter the analytical tools, the sculpting of history is the reiteration, and perhaps perpetuation, of a production of interactions between participants and actors in what Diana Taylor has called "public spectacle." She wrote, "Public spectacle is a locus and mechanism of communal identity through collective imaginings that constitute 'nation' as 'an imagined political community.'"<sup>22</sup> Public spectacle, whether in the form of colonialism, nationalistic display, or commodity, is an informative tool that concomitantly illustrates and provokes, negotiates and quells. It is a meeting between groups of people with varying status in mainstream society, who, consciously or not, are drawing boundaries within, around, and outside of imagined regions that are politically sanctioned.

In North America, those imagined regions are directly linked to the land in the form of private and state ownership, and federal and local jurisdiction, which are delineated by geographical survey and cartography. However, the instability of the boundaries is apparent in the use of public spectacles that seek to reinforce highly gendered and Eurocentric notions of nationhood, against the threat of subversive borders that arise from cultural disparities. Manifest Destiny is a product of Euro-American ideas of land and how they imagined it should be managed and whether it was being improved. "Americans" were bound by the duty of Manifest Destiny in the nineteenth century and

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<sup>22</sup> Diana Taylor, *Disappearing Acts: Spectacles of Gender and Nationalism in Argentina's "Dirty War"* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 1997), ix.

later. This thesis will show how those same ideas of ownership and progress influence history writing which is itself a public spectacle and political act.

Americans and the Other participated in public spectacles. The term "American" is contested, and has been used to describe the inhabitants of the United States. The term has multiple meanings, many of which have been determined by public spectacles of colonialism and nationalism. The origin of the word "America" is embedded in histories of the European conquest of the continents that were named after the Italian explorer, Amerigo Vespucci. When American Indians and Europeans related in what Mary Louise Pratt has called the "contact zone" or "social spaces where disparate cultures meet, clash, and grapple with each other, often in highly asymmetrical relations of domination and subordination," they searched for ways to define each other and new ways to define themselves.<sup>23</sup> The first "Americans" became "Indians" and the early Europeans (Anglo-Saxons specifically) in North America eventually became "Americans," as they colonized North America and founded their nation, or "imagined political community."

In that nation, the United States, the term "American" came to be widely used among Westerners as a nationalistic tool to describe the dominant culture and its ideals of womanhood and manhood. The term's exclusivity and rigidity can be interpreted as a sort of trophy from the dominant culture's victories within contact zones where exploitation and hegemonic displays occurred. As text, the word "American" signified the cultural, intellectual, and racial superiority of white persons of northern European and Protestant descent from the American Revolution up to and through the nineteenth century.

American Indians, African Americans, Chinese immigrants, and other non-Western

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<sup>23</sup> Pratt, 4.

ethnicities in the nineteenth century, were either excluded from or degraded in “American” representations and public spectacles in forms of popular culture, like Wild West shows that supported Western hegemony.

Within displays that attempted to define what it meant to be American a very gendered language was emerging as Europeans began exploring and colonizing North America. As the colonies, and later, the United States grew, so too did the gendered language colonizers used to illustrate the agendas of the dominant class. From the shifting imagery of colonial iconography, in which America was represented as a Native woman, to the twentieth century representations of the “good native woman” in Hollywood films, the dominant class’s use of public spectacle has negatively influenced the historian’s understanding of American Indian women’s histories, and perhaps vice-versa. Not only have Western historians been trained to rely too heavily on primary sources that are valued in Western methodologies, but they have also had to trudge through the muck of Western hegemony in order to find the histories of Native women.

The gendered language of the colonizers can easily be detected in popular culture that highlights Europeans’ and Euro-Americans’ overarching notions of land use. The “frontier” and European expansion toward the Pacific Ocean was a favorite theme in dime novels, Wild West Shows, and World’s Fairs. The geography and governance of the western territories of the United States was one of the most contested issues that appeared in these nineteenth century nationalistic displays in which people of different cultures acted and participated in order to construct representations of Euro-Americans and Euro-American accomplishments. These spectacles sought to inscribe and enforce, among

other things, what would eventually become federal and state boundaries in the American West. They also sought to bolster the battle lines of Euro-American hegemony.<sup>24</sup>

The establishment of the borders appeared to be an innocent act of practicality in the organization and administration of the nation. However, the federal boundaries in the American West/(contact zone) were not limited to divisions between political nations and sovereign states, but they were in effect hundreds of lines of containment that would efficaciously rid Euro-Americans of one problematic ethnicity in particular—the American Indian. As early as the sixteenth century, American Indians were forced out of their ancestral territories; their own political and cultural communities and intertribal socio-economic ties, for the most part, were unacknowledged by Europeans and Euro-Americans in contact zones. In 1830, the Indian Removal Act demonstrated the Westerners' cultural, political, and socio-economic advantages over American Indians, and federal troops began forcibly relocating tribes who had previously lived east of the Mississippi river to reservations in western territories. The reservations were meant to open more areas for white settlement as well as to cap the cultural, political, and economic activities of American Indians by segregating them from the Euro-American population. U.S. politicians and other officials used the geographical administration of land to manipulate, and sometimes annihilate the Natives' own forms of territorial and cultural organization.

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<sup>24</sup> See, Sam W. Haynes and Christopher Morris, *Manifest Destiny and Empire: American Antebellum Expansionism* (Arlington: Texas A&M University Press, 1997), for an excellent anthology of essays that examine Manifest Destiny and "American" identities in various specific contexts.

However, federal administration failed to manage what Michael Shapiro has called “moral geographies.”<sup>25</sup> In her own work with popular culture, Melani McAlister applied Shapiro’s theory of moral geographies and described them as:

cultural and political practices that work together to mark not only states but also regions, cultural groupings, and ethnic or racial territories. Moral geographies shape human understandings of the world ethically and politically as well as cognitively; they consist of ‘a set of silent ethical assertions’ that mark connection and separation. Different moral geographies can coexist and even compete; each represents a different type of imaginative affiliation linked to certain ideas about significant places.<sup>26</sup>

Moral geographies can also be used to help group members understand sacred issues, gender role expectations, and links to past generations, as associated with the land and its inhabitants. Native communities such as the Laguna Pueblo, Navajo, and Western Apache maintain oral traditions that center on geographical features of their ancestral homelands.

Other groups of American Indians maintained their moral geographies despite being removed from their pre-colonial territories by reinvesting their knowledge of the world and their own histories in new territories and connecting stories that originated from certain places within their old homes, both spatially and metaphorically, to their new homes on reservations. It is precisely the perpetuation of American Indians’ moral geographies, which necessitated the informative public spectacles of nationalism and Americanism in popular culture and history writing in order to reinforce the imagined borders of reservations and forced Indian relocation. Even in this study, for example, the

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<sup>25</sup> Michael Shapiro, “Moral Geographies and the Ethics of Post-Sovereignty,” *Public Culture; Bulletin of the Project for Transnational Cultural Studies* 6, no.3 (1994): 479-502.

<sup>26</sup> Melani McAlister, *Epic Encounters: Culture, Media, and U.S. Interests in the Middle East, 1945-2000* (Berkeley, Los Angeles, and London: University of California Press, 2001), 4.

tensions between moral geographies and U.S. political cartography are played out in consideration of tribal notions of territory and their conflicts with federal, state, and local boundaries; moral geographies ignore the federal boundaries (and legislation) separating the U.S. from Mexico and Canada.

For twenty-first century scholars studying North America, moral geographies provide a welcome addition to more traditional methods of viewing the regional layout of ethnicity and culture across the continent, past and present, as well as clarifying how that layout came to be so arranged. Moral geographies call for a transformation in the form of narratives concerning the American West that will direct the listeners of history to hidden and often denied associations between cultural, political, and socio-economic interests. These interests stand independently of metahistories that have heretofore been exclusive of American Indian participation in the creation of the United States. Moral geographies also defy Western systems of knowledge and the intellectual heritage in which Western scholars are entangled to include oral histories and other forms of previously devalued knowledge. The fleshing out of history's production of inclusive narratives rests solely on records of the past, which form the footpath of American Indian experiences within and outside of the spectacles of American nationalism.

However, seemingly insurmountable obstacles (Eurocentrism, the model of heroic science, and Linnaean classifications of knowledge) litter the path where remnants of the past can be gathered. This is especially evident in the patching together of American Indian women's experiences from the pre-colonial era through the nineteenth century. Only in recent decades has women's history found a stable position in academic

scholarship. Writing women into history and recognizing their participation in the creation of North American societies, from the sixteenth century to the twenty-first century, is crucial to our understanding of the people who have inhabited North America as well as to the evolution of the United States. Yet, traditional frameworks for the compilations of early North American histories that define women's actions in the colonies and the U.S. in terms of race or gender are problematic because they do not expose the complexity of women's experiences. Women's stories must be examined through moral geographies that focus on combinations of race, gender, and socio-economics, in order to encapsulate the significance of American Indian women's cultures within the United States. Moral geographies will allow the complexities of women's histories to be seen. A review of the solutions some New Indian History scholars have suggested concerning American Indian history and American Indian women's history will allow us to extract useful methods from the writings of women's history and then combine those tactics with new tools in order to unearth the histories of American Indian women.

Many American Indian histories include the lives and work of women using only gender analyses in their writing. This is one reason American Indian women have been lost in studies of the North American colonies and the early United States. Previous studies, in which gender analysis was used exclusively have also added to the liminality of American Indian subjects. Gender analysis is helpful in finding the autonomous ways in which women participated in history by identifying "a female culture and consciousness divorced from male points of reference [that] have explored hitherto

































































































































































































