Indigenous and Settler Violence during the Gilded Age and Progressive Era
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The absence of Indigenous historical perspectives creates a lacuna in the historiography of the Gilded Age and Progressive Era. For the first eight years of the Journal of the Gilded Age and the Progressive Era, zero articles written about or by Native Americans can be found within its pages. By 2010, however, a roundtable of leading Gilded Age and Progressive Era scholars critically examined the reasons why “Native Americans often slipped out of national consciousness by the Gilded Age and Progressive Era.”¹ By 2015, the Journal offered a special issue on the importance of Indigenous histories during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, a “period of tremendous violence perpetrated on Indigenous communities,” wrote the editors Boyd Cothran and C. Joseph Genetin-Pilawa.² It is the observation of Indigenous histories on the periphery of Gilded Age and Progressive Era that inspires a reevaluation of the historiographical contributions that highlight Indigenous survival through the onslaught of settler colonial violence during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.

The purpose of this microsyllabus seeks to challenge these past historiographical omissions by re-centering works that delve into the inclusion of Indigenous perspectives and experience of settler colonial violence during the Gilded Age and Progressive Era. Ultimately, this microsyllabus helps us unravel two streams of historiographical themes: physical violence and structural violence. Violence does not always have to be physical, but can manifest in different forms: oppression, limiting people’s rights, their access to legal representation, their dehumanization through exclusion and segregation, as well as the production of memory. Both physical and structural violence are consequences of settler colonialism, the living structure of erasure, removal, and eradication of Indigenous nations committed by a settler state. That concept, one that Patrick Wolfe describes as something that “destroys to replace,” was one major tactic used by the United States in the quest of nation building.³ Controversial historiographical debates over the use of terms like genocide and ethnic cleansing demonstrate the scale of physical violence deployed by the U.S. government or white settlements to replace Indigenous communities. Concurrently, policies and practices of structural violence like discriminatory measures, assimilationist practices, legislative restrictions, and the production of Euro-centric histories worked together to further erase and remove Indigenous nations. The Gilded Age and

Progressive Era offers a unique timeframe to observe the evolution of violence and how it became embedded in the societal structure of the United States.

Physical violence, the first theme of the microsyllabus, demonstrates the use and abuse of terminology, that can replicate the violence that many Indigenous peoples continue to experience. Some historians agree that genocide can describe federal and settler-driven policies against Indigenous peoples; or, as Benjamin Madley argues, processes where “individuals kill, kidnap, and otherwise act to destroy a specific group.”⁴ On the contrary, Gary Clayton Anderson argues against the use of genocide, but forwards the use of ethnic cleansing as the best approach to distinguish between what happened to Indigenous communities at the hands of federal authorities and what can be laid at the feet of local, settler culprits throughout the nineteenth century. "Ethnic cleansing," writes Anderson, is a "term reflected of forced dislocation with the intent to take away lands of a particular ethnic, religious, or cultural group."⁵ The "crimes" against Indigenous peoples can in no way, shape, or form "hardly resemble 'planned killing' that went on for months and years" throughout Europe and Asia during the twentieth century. In response to these accusations, historians like Boyd Cothran, Margaret D. Jacobs, and Walter L. Hixson all critically engage Anderson's prose to raise awareness to the words that historians choose to use and their impact on the people they research and encounter within their work. While Jacobs and Hixson argue that other terms – like settler colonialism and colonial genocide—should be used to clarify this degree of violence, Cothran contends that these events' realities get lost in translation when scholars debate such terms. As argued by Cothran, "we forget about the people for whom this is not merely an academic exercise but a horrible, tragic, and traumatic part of their everyday lives." Conversely, Dakota scholar Waziyatawin Angela Cavender Wilson uses genocide and ethnic cleansing to encapsulate how these acts of violence collaborate to form a broader pattern of erasure.⁶

Perhaps one of the most provocative forms of structural violence, the second theme of the microsyllabus, is in the production of history for scholarly and public consumption. During the Gilded Age and Progressive Era in particular, white Americans used their versions of the past to control the treatment of Native Americans as the nation began ushering in new forms of control, surveillance, and exclusion. Boyd Cothran’s article, “Enduring Legacy,” reassesses redemptive violence and problematic recollections of violent encounters between Indigenous and white settlements. David Grua’s work, similarly, addresses the “race war” question that often-pitted

Indigenous groups at odds with “peaceful white settlers” that was “the final victory in the four-hundred-year struggle between civilization and savagery.”\(^7\) Louis Warren’s work on Buffalo Bill and Native myth, as with Michelle Wick Paterson’s essay and Jean M. O’Brien and Lisa Blee’s work on the Massasoit monument, provide additional insight into how settler colonialism and the binary of race produce mythic stories of the past designed to control, demean, and exclude Indigenous peoples from the Gilded Age and Progressive Era. Philip J. Deloria explains ways to break up master and conquest narratives that routinely attempt to leave Indigenous peoples out of American history.\(^8\)

The continuity of violence against Indigenous communities, especially as it transformed from military power to political and environmental violence during the twentieth and twenty-first centuries, offers new opportunities to focus on Indigenous persistence and survival. Notable recent works like Nick Estes’ *Our History Is the Future* showcase the evolution and continuity of violence and settler colonialism in the twenty-first century, specifically how the conflicts of the past shaped contemporary problems in Indigenous communities. The Gilded Age and Progressive Era serves as a rest stop when traveling down the path of white colonial violence. Upon closer analysis, it also provides a place for us to critique that violence and better explore the foundations of the challenges that Indigenous nations face today.

**Genocide/Ethnic Cleansing**


Memory


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