

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 perpetuated 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

¹Sherry Smith, “Comments: Native Americans and Indian Policy in the Progressive Era,” *Journal of the Gilded Age and Progressive Era* 9 (Oct. 2010): 504.

²Boyd Cothran and C. Joseph Genetin-Pilawa, “Introduction,” *Journal of the Gilded Age and Progressive Era* 14 (October 2015): 503; The forum, “Indigenous Histories of the Gilded Age and Progressive Era,” includes essays by eminent scholars of Native American and Indigenous Studies and of the Gilded Age and Progressive Era. This forum introduces problems in the historiography of the eras and the absence of Indigenous peoples. Works by Boyd Cothran, C. Joseph Genetin-Pilawa, Chantal Norrgard, Cathleen D. Cahill, Malinda Maynor Lowery, John W. Troutman, and Philip J. Deloria shed light onto the interconnectedness between the Gilded Age, the Progressive Era, and Indigenous North America.

³Patrick Wolfe, “Settler Colonialism and the Elimination of the Native,” *Journal of Genocide Research* 8.4 (2006): 388; Jeffrey Ostler, “Locating Settler Colonialism in Early American History,” *William and Mary Quarterly* 76 (July 2019): 447; Rebecca Tinio McKenna, “Igorot Squatters and Indian wars: Towards an Intra-imperial History of Land Dispossession,” *Journal of the Gilded Age and Progressive Era* 18 (Apr. 2019): 222.

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

⁴Benjamin Madley, “California’s Yuki Indians; Defining Genocide in Native American History,” *Western Historical Quarterly* 39 (Autumn 2008): 330.

⁵Gary Clayton Anderson, “The Native Peoples of the American West: Genocide or Ethnic Cleansing,” *Western Historical Quarterly* 47 (Winter 2016): 409.

⁶Boyd Cothran, “Melancholia and the Infinite Debate,” *Western Historical Quarterly* 47 (Winter 2016): 436; Waziyatawin, *What Does Justice Look Like? The Struggle for Liberation in Dakota Homeland* (St. Paul: Living Justice Press, 2006), 116. For additional reading, please consult Chris Mato Nunpa, “Dakota Commemorative March: Thoughts and Reactions,” Special Issue: Empowerment Through Literature, *American Indian Quarterly* 28 (Winter—Spring, 2004): 216-37; Mark Rifkin, “The Silence of Ely S. Parker: The Emancipation Sublime and the Limits of Settler Memory,” *Native American and Indigenous Studies* 1 (Fall 2014): 1-43; Jodi A. Byrd, *The Transit of Empire: Indigenous Critiques of Colonialism* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2011).

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

Gary Clayton Anderson, “The Native Peoples of the American West: Genocide or Ethnic Cleansing,” *Western Historical Quarterly* 47.4 (Winter 2016): 407-34.

Boyd Cothran, “Melancholia and the Infinite Debate,” *Western Historical Quarterly* 47.4 (Winter 2016): 435-38.

Walter L. Hixson, “Policing the Past: Indian Removal and Genocide Studies,” *Western Historical Quarterly* 47.4 (Winter 2016): 439-43.

Margaret D. Jacobs, “Genocide or Ethnic Cleansing? Are These Our Only Choices?,” *Western Historical Quarterly* 47.4 (Winter 2016): 444-48.

Benjamin Madley, “California’s Yuki Indians; Defining Genocide in Native American History,” *Western Historical Quarterly* 39.3 (Autumn 2008): 303-32.

Waziyatawin Angela Wilson, *What Does Justice Look Like? The Struggle for Liberation in the Dakota Homeland* (St. Paul: Living Justice Press, 2006).

⁷David W. Grua, *Surviving Wounded Knee: The Lakotas and the Politics of Memory* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2015), 80.

⁸Philip J. Deloria, “American Master Narratives and the Problem of Indian Citizenship in the Gilded Age and Progressive Era,” *Journal of the Gilded Age and Progressive Era* 14 (Jan. 2015): 11.

Memory

Boyd Cothran, "Enduring Legacy: U.S.-Indigenous Violence and the Making of American Innocence in the Gilded Age," *Journal of the Gilded Age and Progressive Era* 14.4 (Oct. 2015): 562-73.

David W. Grua, *Surviving Wounded Knee: The Lakotas and the Politics of Memory* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2015).

Jean M. O'Brien and Lisa Blee, *Monumental Mobility: The Memory Work of Massasoit* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2019).

Michelle Wick Patterson, "The 'Pencil in the Hand of the Indian': Cross-Cultural Interactions in Natalie Curtis's *The Indians' Book*," *Journal of the Gilded Age and Progressive Era* 9.4 (Oct. 2010): 419-49.

Louis S. Warren, "Buffalo Bill Meets Dracula: William F. Cody, Bram Stoker, and the Frontiers of Racial Decay," *American Historical Review* 107.3 (Oct. 2002): 1124-57.

Philip J. Deloria, "American Master Narratives and the Problem of Indian Citizenship in the Gilded Age and Progressive Era," *Journal of the Gilded Age and Progressive Era* 14.1 (Jan. 2015): 3-12.

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