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# The Road That Got Us Here

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### The Road That Got Us Here

We situate ourselves in the land of the free, to whom was it truly free? The initial reason for coming to the United States was to seek religious sanction but what we've accomplished was taking away the land and homes of the residents before us. Native American land, that was stolen in a self-righteous crusade for wealth, was sectioned off. We know these sections of land as reservations. Native Americans were then forced to live on smaller and smaller pieces of land now considered their own sovereign nation, separate from the American Government. Forced migration, Social Barriers, and the loss of a culture lead us to the romanticism of Native American people

It wasn't until 1934 that reservations began to have their own rights and recognized as a sovereign nation separate from the United States. Anybody who has paid attention in history class is somewhat aware of The Indian Removal Act or have at least heard of the Trail of Tears. To briefly summarize in hopes to give context; In 1830 via the Indian Removal Act, Native Americans were forced to migrate to today's Oklahoma. During this removal many people died from; starvation, disease and exposure to the elements before reaching their destination. If we jump ahead a little over 50 years, we have the Indian Appropriations Act which granted land rights to individual tribal members rather than the tribe as a whole which allowed for the American Government to grant "excess" land to white settlers, shrinking their land even

more. It isn't until 1934 that the United States creates the Reorganization Act that begins to give more rights to the tribe. This act is still active today.

Knowing the amount of laws that it has taken to confine Native Americans to these reservations we may begin to analyze these barriers in regards to social space. Henri Lefebvre presents his argument of "social space" being a social construct in his book *Production of Space*. He quickly presents what we already know to be fairly concrete knowledge; that there is a mental space and a physical space in which we operate. However he argues, "social space" is not solely a part of either of these spaces. Lefebvre lays the foundation for our understanding by explaining, the concept of space overlaps and intersects with one another. This is to say a particular "space" may exist within another "space." The concept of space is not like a black and white, night and day kind of thing, there are many factors when considering a particular space and it's almost infinite amount of intersections/layers. We can compare this to reservation life.

Native Americans were forced to leave their home lands to live on reservations. We can see examine this using Black Elk's reflection recorded by John G. Neihardt in the book *Black Elk Speaks* "The Wasichus had slaughtered all the bison and shut us up in pens. It looked as though we might all starve to death. We could not eat lies, and there was nothing we could do" (Neihardt). Black Elk refers to the reservations as pens as in to keep native Americans in one place. The way this is described is almost jail-like. This is considered both a physical and social barrier. As just discussed through Henri Lefebvre, Social Space is a social construct. If we know this to be so then there must be social barriers. In this case physical barriers are enforcing the social barriers. By shutting native Americans in "pens" we are creating a social barrier known as othering and alienating a race of people.

Due to the confinement of native american tribes and the creation of social barriers, Native American culture began to dwindle. One way we can examine the decline of native american culture is through the policy for Indian Education. The ebook, *Indian Education: Maintaining Tribal Sovereignty Through Native American Culture and Language Preservation*, written by Nizhone Meza, works to familiarize us with this issue. Meza identifies “

During this assimilation period, there were three main priorities that emerged in Indian education:<sup>7</sup> “Those priorities were to teach the Indians to (1) read, write, and speak in English; (2) to encourage individual identity as opposed to tribal identity of Indian children by teaching them how to work and understand the possession of private property; and (3) to teach them Christianity.” (Meza)

The priorities brought to us by the Policy for Indian Education demonstrates the stripping of a culture. Children were forced to give up their heritage, to live a more “civilized” and “educated” life. Some may ask why is there assumption the that Native Americans live uncivilized, uneducated lives? I am willing to argue it is a direct result from the existence of the social and physical barriers previously discussed. Unfamiliarity may not be the entire cause of these stereotypes, however distancing and isolating Native Americans from the general population does not help matters.

Through the Policy for Indian Education we can see the beginning stages of the death of a culture; of language, of customs and of religion. Native American children were being taken from homes and placed in boarding schools. If children were away from their families then they were less likely to fight assimilation or be influenced by their parents (Meza). In these boarding schools they forced Native American children to change their name getting rid of their Indian

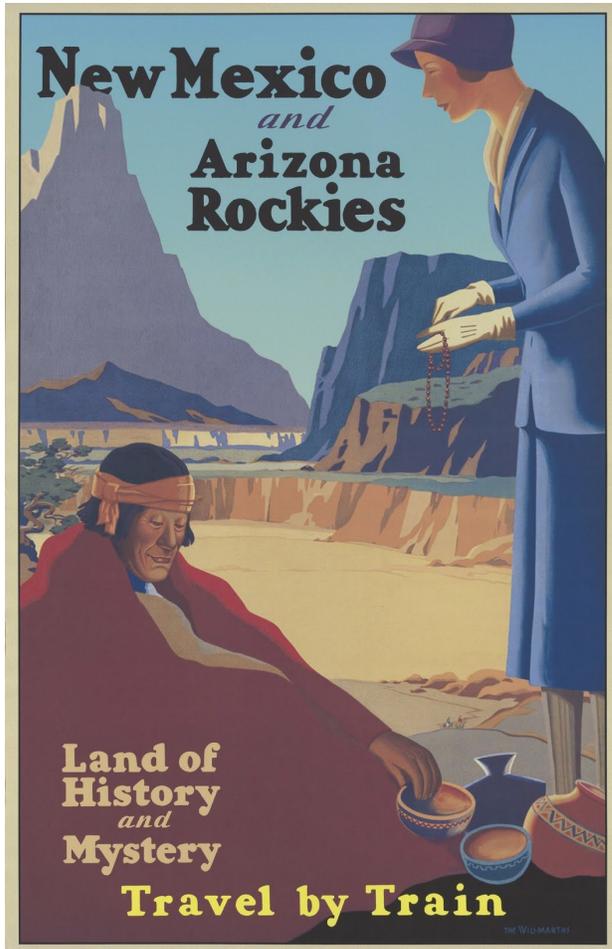
name, They were not aloud to speak in their native tongues and they were forced to cut their hair short (Meza). In all cultures, children are the future. Children carry on the culture for other generations to be a part of. By forcing Native American children to assimilate into mainstream American Culture, the future of the Native American culture(s) is single handedly cut from existence. This stems from the alienation of Native people, by Isolating Native Americans there is an othering that occurs.

Ironically enough, the religion that Native Americans were forced to abandon in their conversion to christianity began to be romanticized around the late 20th century.

“The type of spirituality that arose during this time period is alternatively known as Nature Religion, Neo-paganism, Goddess Spirituality, Human Potential, or the New Age Movement. Being inherently nature-based, each shares essential drives to locate holistic world understanding of the sacred and to replace both secularized and traditionally transcendental frameworks with a viable stewardship of the earth”(Schwarz).

This Neo-Paganist religion is mostly about finding inner peace with one’s self through nature and looking inward for spirituality rather than searching for it through religious studies. People who practice Neo-Paganism incorporate; sacred pipes, prayer arrows, tobacco ties and native american names in their practices, the same as traditional native american religions(Schwarz). Obviously different tribes observed their religion differently but they all for the most part fell in line with traditional paganism. This new form of paganism was/is greatly protested among the Native populations “These American Indians consider the New Agers’ stance to be yet another attempt at colonialist power usurpation over who has the right to interpret, codify, and define

indigenous beliefs” (Schwarz). Religion has become just another way to romanticize Native Americans.



How cool would it be to see a real live Indian?! As you may notice in the picture to the left, The Native Americans soon became a marketing tool for American companies. This advertisement in particular was created by The Union Pacific Railroad in 1925. The White upper middle class woman is receiving a beaded necklace from the Native American man. This advertisement is playing on two major aspects of romanticism. The primary aspect is that all Indians look the same. In many of advertisements similar to this one, Native Americans all appear to look the same way.

For example another familiar advertisement is Land of Lakes butter and Calumet baking powder. All of these advertisements display Native Americans in similar ways; artifacts, Native American clothing, Head dresses, stoic. When creating this advertisement, it was meant to promote travel via the Union Pacific Railway. They did so by telling people if they travel by train they will pass through the “Land of History and Mystery,” they may have the opportunity to see a real live native american. This made it seem similar to a freakshow, as if

Native American people were anything other than human. In response to the isolation of Native Americans they are defamiliarized from the general American population, not only subjecting them to being stereotyped and over generalized, but to also become romanticized.

Advertisements were not the only place where Native American people were becoming romanticized, it was commonly found in literature as well. Emily Post's *By Motor to the Golden Gate* is a prime example of this. The book is about Journalist Emily Post trying to assess if it were possible to comfortably travel across country via automobiles. Post traveled with her cousin and her son as she embarked on her mission in 1915. Along the way she made a point to visit "authentic tourist attractions." Included in *By Motor to the Golden Gate* were lists budgeting her trip along the way, hand drawn maps, photos, as well as reflections of what she saw and experienced first hand.

In Chapter 18 *The City of Recklessness* Emily Post is visiting Colorado Springs and basically says that it is a drain to her energy. She says that Colorado Springs is draining because of their health; What she is referencing is the tuberculosis crisis in that region.(Post). She then goes on to say that the attitude of Colorado Springs is reckless. It is a party town where all they truly care about is having fun; drinking, gambling, flirting etc. She calls the people of Colorado Springs "Anglo-Indians"(Post). You could say that this is one way Emily Post works to romanticize Indians. I interpret the people being referenced here are white, due to the word "Anglo." A common stereotype for Indians is "The Drunk Indian." So in order to further insult these people she calls them "Anglo-Indians" meaning these people are reckless savages that drink too much just like the Indians.

Another moment of Romanticism in *By Motor to the Golden Gate* is in the chapter titled *Our Little Sister of Yesterday*. In this section Emily Post is Visualizing a Pueblo Indian, and describing her in great detail. To a certain reader It can be unclear whether or not the girl is real or imaginary. I am inclined to believe that she is imaginary being that post references her to Don Juan, a nobleman who lived in the late 16th century, obviously way before emily post's time. It is also possible that she is seeing a statue of sorts.

“With Straight black Indian hair, piled high under a lace mantilla, With necklaces of gold and silver and coral and turquoise as big as hen's' eggs, with her modern american barely showing under her Indian blanket of holiest red, her head pillowed against the mountains of the north...”(Post).

As previously discussed in connection with the railroad advertisement, the image of this Pueblo Indian girl is being romanticized. As the chapter progresses from here Post imagines the girl dreaming of her previous life. Through this visual imagination Emily Post paints a picture of a typical female native american woman emphasizing her indianness. The whole premise of romanticism is to idealize, making something out to be better than it really was. In this picture that Emily Post Paints it almost comes off as jealous, wondering what it would have been like to live her life.

Again why does this romanticism occur? Emily Post was writing in 1915 during this time period The Indian Appropriation act was in place otherwise known as the Dawes Act. Although the Act was set into place in the 1880's it wasn't until 1908 when blood quantum analysis was being considered(Ellinghaus). “Nonetheless, the discourse of blood, the idea of authenticity, and the trope of the “real” Indian pervaded the allotment process. The Dawes

Commission relied on blood unquestioningly to decide who was or was not deserving of Indian status.” (Ellinghaus). The blood quantum analysis determined who could be recognized tribes and participate in reservation life. This aided in the romanticism of Native Americans because as long as you had “ The right amount of Indian blood” you were recognized as Native American. This clumps all native Americans together thus contributing to the overgeneralization seen in Emily Post’s Indian girl description and also seen in the Union Pacific Railroad advertisement.

To conclude, the cause Native American Romanticism stems from creating social and physical barriers which separate Native Americans from the general American population. The divide then not only causes the defamiliarization of Native culture leading people to make over generalizations but also contributes to the decline of Native American cultures, as we examined using the Policy for Indian Education. Our laws use blood quantum analysis to further enforce this overgeneralization by clumping all Native Americans together, whereas we know that under the umbrella term Native American culture there are unique subcultures. The romanticism of Native Americans is a chain reaction that began with Prying Native Americans from their homes, taking their children and forcing them to assimilate causing a cultural decline and our laws only assisted in making this happen.

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