

# Notes from the Underground

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## The Historical Underground

### Erasure: Silencing Indigenous Voices and Perspectives

By: Greg Kosci, Faculty

A few weeks ago, retail outlet The Gap began advertising a t-shirt with the saying “MANIFEST DESTINY,” and the designer tweeted “MANIFEST DESTINY: SURVIVAL OF THE FITTEST.” Since this is Native American History Month, I think it is incumbent upon historians to deal with the realities of our past in stark and uncompromising terms. When historians tiptoe around atrocities from the past, they create an intellectual space for some to justify or ignore those actions.

The process of dealing with the past and our nation’s less than admirable moments is something that takes a long time. For example, only in the last six decades have professional historians and the public started to seriously address issues such as slavery and racism in our past. As a consequence, society today dictates that racial stereotypes and epithets of African Americans be excluded from public discourse

and popular imagery. However, we continue to live in a country that has so thoroughly marginalized Indian voices and Indian history that it seemed perfectly reasonable to The Gap’s designer (and their executives) that this shirt would be acceptable. A quick glance at some professional sports teams’ names and mascots demonstrates this point well: the Washington Redskins and the Cleveland Indians’ Chief Wahoo are just two examples that have drawn sustained criticism from Natives to no effect. How can this be? While racism and racial profiling certainly exists, no one would ever consider naming a professional team “The Negroes,” or “The Blackfaces.” So, are we just calling for political correctness?

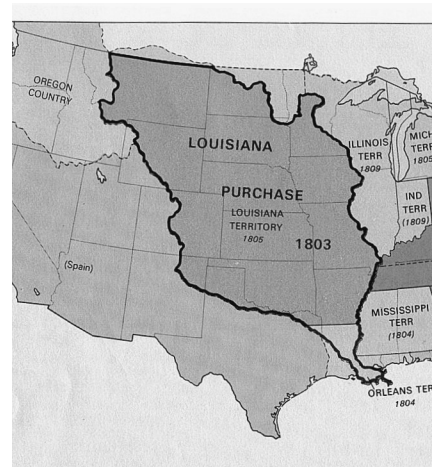
We live in a state that has rejected “political correctness” for Indians. In fact, many people in our nation seem to equate cultural sensitivity and historical awareness with “weakness” and a “lack of patriotism.” These gendered and nationalistic rejections of historical realities seem to equate historical awareness and sensitivity with *femininity* and *treason*. Throughout human history, as civilizations became more complex and patriarchal, people became infatuated with possessing “manliness,” which is why these negative connections have had such a powerful effect in blunting curiosity and awareness. We must be strong enough and secure enough in our identities to reject this notion that awareness emasculates us. We must also realize that criticizing your country does not mean one is unpatriotic. If we all simply supported our government without ever questioning it, we would probably still have the institution of slavery and Native Americans, Africans, and Asians would never have become U.S. citizens.

Rampant anti-intellectualism must be exposed for its ultimate political intent: a denial of our violent history. By minimizing America’s past

sins, erasing Native voices by saying that all the Indians were already dead from disease, Americans are able to ignore the horror and reality of the Native experience. If Native experiences are removed from our collective memory, then it becomes easier to believe that God destined Euro-Americans to settle and populate this “empty” land. Why else would he have killed off all the Indians before Americans got here? Oftentimes this psychological process is subtle and unconscious. Think about the last map that you saw that showed the Louisiana Purchase (see below). Were the names of all the Indian nations that controlled the trans-Mississippi West included on that map? Probably not. Most of these maps depict a massive empty territory that was just waiting to be surveyed and inevitably turned into American states. Thus, by erasing Natives’ presence and invoking God and Manifest Destiny to justify taking the continent, America is absolved of all past misdeeds. More importantly, when the difficult narratives about Indian Removal in the Jacksonian Era, California’s genocidal policies toward Indians, and the U.S. government’s cultural genocide in Indian boarding schools are papered over, the few

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*Voices from the Past: White Cloud**By: Caleb Hinojos, Student*

***“Only after the last tree has been cut, only after the last river has been poisoned, only after the last fish has been caught, will they find that money cannot be eaten”***

This is a powerful quotation from an even more powerful song. I first heard this in 2009. Lamb of God had just released their fifth studio album, *Wrath*, and these were some of the lyrics on the track titled *Reclamation*. The words have come to mind often since I heard that song for the first time. Their profound quality inspired me to look at who originally said this. Though I was not able to find a definitive answer, I did find a poster that attributed the quotation to an Ioway Chief named White Cloud.

White Cloud, also known as Mahaskah, was the chief of the Ioway (or Báxoje) tribe in the region of present-day Iowa. He became chief at a young age due to his father's assassination by the Sioux. His tribe headed a retaliatory raid on the Sioux, but since he was young at the time he decided not to exploit his role as chief, choosing instead to go as a common brave and earn leadership and combat experience while building credibility with his tribe. During his fighting years, he led more than 15 campaigns against other tribes without recording a loss. While he was honing his leadership skills, European immigrants were also establishing settlements in the tribe's area. As their numbers grew, it became evident that the land was unable to support both groups of people. The white people destroyed the land through the practices of cattle-grazing, farming, and deforestation. The Ioway tribe saw that it was necessary to develop relations with these settlers, so they began to hunt and trade animal furs in an effort to survive. This combination of activities caused a great reduction in the density of animals on Ioway land. Since they depended greatly on buffalo and deer to survive, this depletion of game led to hunger and lack of items necessary for survival. In order to remedy the situation, the Natives conducted raiding parties to obtain food and other materials. This cycle of events would lead to high tensions between Natives and settlers.

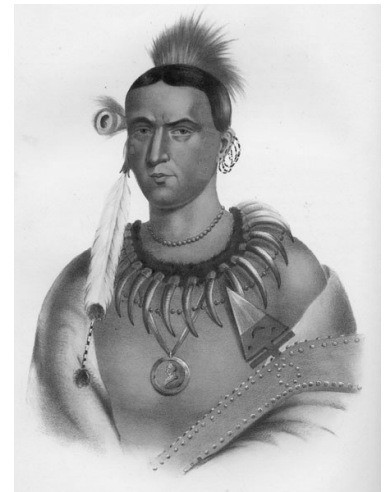
In 1824, White Cloud went to Washington to hold peace talks with President Monroe. It was

during this meeting that White Cloud deemed it necessary to work with the white man, for he realized that the United States government had forced its way into the life of his people in such a way that left them no way out. In effect, they would have to conform to the rules that the white man imposed. The outcome of White Cloud's effort to negotiate with the United States was that the Ioway tribe would stay where they were, hand over rights to their northern territory, and learn how to cultivate the land with tools given to them by the government. They were also to be paid \$500 a year for the next decade and were not to engage in acts of aggression against other tribes of the area. However, this peace time would come to an end in 1833 when one of the Ioway chief's sons was murdered by members of the Omaha tribe. This action was met with opposition and a war party, evidence that the old ways that had prevailed for centuries had not simply been erased by a white man's treaty. It should be stated, however, that this war party was not sanctioned by White Cloud, and he did not partake in the traditional celebrations, which followed the act of retaliation.

After hearing about the breach of contract by the tribe, the government imprisoned White Cloud and his rebels; White Cloud himself helped officials track down the violators. Even though he did not commit any crime, he still surrendered because he felt it necessary to follow the treaty so as to set a good example for his tribe. While in prison, one of his fellow tribesmen told him, "Inca, (father,) if ever I get out of this place alive, I will kill you. A brave man should never be deprived of his liberty and confined as I am. You should have shot me at the village." Regrettably, this promise would eventually come to pass. In 1834, after gaining his freedom, White Cloud was murdered by his former prison mates.

It is sad that a man who had the wisdom to see the need for cooperation and peace was killed because of his belief in duty to his tribe and to a government that was displacing his people from their land and their ways; nonetheless, this is a fact of history. It would be easy to dismiss White Cloud as having sold out to the interests of money and power with little thought that within a few short years it would mean the end of a way of life that had changed little over centuries. But before we make such a judgment, we should consider again the

quotation with which we began. Certainly these words, if they are indeed his, were a prophecy of sorts. He may have known and felt that there was a grave risk of losing everything. Perhaps he knew better than anyone that there was to be a bad end to the matter. Nevertheless, he did what he felt he must do to realistically confront a threat about which other tribes had less insight and for which they were completely unprepared. His wisdom rang true, and still does today. His words also bring to mind the crossroads at which the American Empire stands in the modern world, as we still seek to sell our goods around the world, make profits, and influence other cultures. We seek peace, and we seek to convince other countries to lay down their arms, sign treaties, and peacefully coexist. However, if we are to follow our own suggestions, then we will be in full opposition. We as people, especially Americans, are too proud to ever say that our wars to establish peace (and spread our economic and cultural influence) are not working, or that maybe we are the problem. While our economic empire may feed us, the question of whether or not it truly feeds our souls is another question altogether. In so many ways, White Cloud and his words of wisdom still ring true.



**Charles Bird King, *White Cloud*, Etching after 1824 oil on canvas. This portrait depicts White Cloud before he adopted Euro-American culture.**

## Thanksgiving

By: Jose Guzman, Student

Thanksgiving is just around the corner, which means family, an overwhelming amount of food, and football wrapped together in one day. This celebration is amongst our oldest, but it wasn't a national holiday until 1863 when President Lincoln announced it as such while giving a speech following a victory in the Civil War. People have forgotten the meaning and origin of Thanksgiving, which embodies the cooperation of Native Americans and the Pilgrims who momentarily worked together and insured the colonists' survival.

The first successful English settlement was Jamestown in 1607. Once people got word of the colony's success, hordes of Englishmen and women left home for new opportunities. Some came from Plymouth, England in the autumn of 1620 on a ship called the *Mayflower*. Onboard were 102 passengers, and they were known as Pilgrims. They knew they were in for a dangerous ride across the ocean, but were unaware of the dangers on land. After traveling for about sixty days, they accidentally missed their intended destination, the Hudson River, and decided to stay where they landed, Plymouth Harbor, in New England. The passengers were out of European jurisdiction and decided to create their own laws for the sole benefit of the Colony. This agreement later became known as the *Mayflower Compact*.

Plymouth was almost completely empty, ex-

cept for the wildlife. A portion of the Natives who had been living there had already died from diseases brought over by an earlier group of English explorers in 1614. The Pilgrims took what supplies they could to build shelters for the winter, but the weather was harsh and many suffered from exposure, disease, and starvation. Half of the passengers died in the first winter. The survivors were tired, hungry, and at the point of giving up. The Pilgrims, being extremely religious, prayed to God for help. In March they were surprised by meeting an English speaking Native American man named Squanto. He was previously captured by an earlier group of English explorers in 1614 who taught him English and sold him as a slave in Spain. Squanto escaped slavery by getting on a merchant ship traveling to America. He was horrified at what he saw, for most of his tribe was dead! He found a few surviving natives and started rebuilding their civilization, and eventually met the colonists. Squanto became the translator and instructor for the colony. He and his people taught the colonists how to work the land, plant corn, stockpile for the winter, and how to use local resources. Thanks to Squanto, the colony was able to survive, which aided in the eventual treaty between Squanto's people and the colonists that lasted fifty years. As a show of gratitude, the colonists had a dinner with the natives during their first autumn harvest in 1621. The colonists brought wildfowl (known as turkey)

and some of their harvest, while the natives brought deer and other foods. The colonists gave thanks to the natives and God for the aid they received.

Native Americans are entangled in American history and have received the raw end of the stick in most of their encounters with Americans; but if we only focus on the negatives between these meetings, then Thanksgiving will only be known as a day of giving thanks for triumphs over losses. The true meaning of Thanksgiving is in the name itself, so we should give thanks for what we have and help the less fortunate as the natives helped the Pilgrims. Next time you see a donation box, stop and remember how much good that can be done by helping.



## Erasure, continued

narratives that continue to be told about Indians are those that celebrate cooperation between Americans and Indians. These stories of cooperation are rarely told to contribute to our understanding of Indians, but, rather, they are about making the colonizer feel better about trying to uplift so-called lesser peoples who were "doomed to extinction" because of disease. Instead of trying to constantly make ourselves feel better, which we already do a good job of, we should acknowledge this turbulent past and to do our best to include Native perspectives in our historical narratives.

By acknowledging this unsettling past, one can still be proud of their country, because this country's greatest characteristic is its ability to change and bestow freedom on different races and classes of peoples. We have overcome slavery and Jim Crow, granted workers the right to join unions, and gave an entire genera-

tion an opportunity at higher education with the G.I. Bill. These amazing accomplishments are just as surely part of our past as are all our misdeeds. Blind and unthinking patriotism is not patriotism at all; such passions are simply used by those in power as a political ploy to garner support for their policies. Instead, we should try to foster a conscious nationalism, and when we tell stories of cooperation, we should carefully examine motivations of all sides in those interactions and try to foster a more well-rounded and accurate picture of the past.

One retort that every historian hears from students and the public alike is that "these things happened in the past, dwelling on them will do no one any good, and we need to move on." The problem with this statement is that our past is very much what defines us. Think about yourself and the defining

moments in your life. Would you like it if someone told you that some of those moments are not important, or that they never happened at all? Therefore, this is not about political correctness so much as simply acknowledging Native Americans' basic humanness, their right to be heard, have their perspective told, and have their life ways respected. Who knows, one day, in order to save the very planet we live on, we may need Native perspectives to guide us to the knowledge that money cannot be eaten.





# Notes from the Underground

Volume 2, Issue 4 — January 2012

"HISTORY IS OUR WEAPON OF CHOICE"



Join Us: Fridays 1pm/ESEE 1224

Contact: Bradley.borougerdi@tccd.edu



## Letter from the Editors

Dear Readers,

It has been a long time coming but we made it ... we are proud to present to you our first anniversary issue of *Notes from the Underground*. Over the course of this adventurous year, The Historical Underground has seen shifts in leadership, changes in organizational structure, and the addition of new sponsors, but one thing has remained constant ... that is every month you can count on a new and informative issue of *Notes from the Underground*. We want to personally thank everyone who has ever written an article, edited an article, or simply picked up a copy of the newsletter to check out the hard work that students and faculty of the Southeast campus are capable of producing. Thank you very much, we are incredibly grateful for your support.

November is Native American Heritage Month and we have dedicated every article of this issue to shine light on the significance and impact of Native American culture and history, as it is essential to understanding the story of America. This issue delves into the standardized story of Thanksgiving, the conscious negligence of Native American culture, and the struggle of being in the path of American territorial expansion. Outside the newsletter but in the same theme of thought, Kallie and Greg Kosc will be making a presentation in recognition of Native American Heritage Month on November 15, 2012 in the North Ballroom.

As editors of this publication, we are responsible for ensuring that the historical content and grammar of every issue is of the highest standard. As conscious human beings, when faced with an obvious fault, we must acknowledge and address the issue to ensure that it does not happen again. With all that being said, we would like to take this time to acknowledge the absence of Matthew Shaw's name for his book review on *The Purity Myth* in October's issue of *Notes from the Underground*. It was a solid piece of work and we're absolutely thankful for his contributions. Thank you for taking the time to read our newsletter, and if you are interested in joining The Historical Underground, we meet every Friday from 1-2 p.m. in Room 1224.

~ Bradley J. Borougerdi, Greg Kosc, & Eric Salas

