

2018 Presidential Address: The Trouble with “America”

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Abstract. This address reflects upon the ethical responsibility of ethnohistorians to consider the ongoing impact of historical depictions of indigenous peoples, in text and image, and our handling of those depictions. The essay draws in particular upon the historical mistreatment and misrepresentation of indigenous women, using Pocahontas and Malinche as examples of distorted icons, referencing the hidden history of the sixteenth-century trade in indigenous sex slaves in the Caribbean and Mesoamerica, and arguing that the *Armed Freedom* statue atop the US Capitol Building is an allegorical icon of the highly problematic, deeply rooted, gendered, and ethnoracialized construction of “America.”

Keywords. ethnohistory, indigenous women, slavery, Freedom Statue, Malinche

Too many people have forgotten the truth that . . . our ancestors trounced an empire, tamed a continent, and triumphed over the worst evils in history . . . We are not going to apologize for America.

—US President Trump, commencement speech to graduating class of US Naval Academy¹

Indian Country has a long, complicated, and often conflicted relationship with the United States. We are viewing today’s headlines through different lenses, including genocide and intergenerational trauma. We are saddened as we are reminded of the many injustices that we experienced, together with this nation’s lack of accountability for its moral failings.

—Kirk Francis, President, United South and Eastern Tribes²

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We all sense that in this political disaster, we're seeing a glimpse into a cultural abyss.

—*New York Times* column on the Kavanaugh hearings³

They Call Her Pocahontas

During the inauguration of President Barack Obama in 2013, US Senator Charles Schumer began his remarks by pointing toward the top of the Capitol Building and proclaiming, “Behold the Statue of Freedom!” (fig. 1). The senator suggested that the monument was, at the time of its construction in 1863, an inspiring “symbol of unity and democracy to the whole world”—and that it remains as such today (Miller 2007; Miller 2013: 16). The statue has been variously named and misnamed over the last century and a half, with one of the most persistent monikers being Pocahontas. Just a few years after Obama’s second inauguration the presidential candidate who was to succeed him in the White House began to use “Pocahontas” as a nickname to deride Senator Elizabeth Warren, on the grounds that her failure to document her claim to Cherokee ancestry proved that she was, generally speaking, a fraud.

The insult has been, and will surely continue to be, repeated. Last November (2017), it was again used during an event honoring a delegation of World War II Code Talkers, when the President of the United States told a pair of Navajo elders, “You’re very, very special people. You were here long before any of us were here. Although we have a representative in Congress who they say was here a long time ago. They call her Pocahontas. But you know what. I like you. Because you are special.” The ceremony took place in front of the White House’s portrait of Andrew Jackson, no doubt known to the Navajo honorees—but perhaps not to Jackson’s successor—as the US President who signed the 1830 Indian Removal Act.⁴

An Unfortunate Historical Legacy

It is hardly necessary to explain to this audience the many layers of condescension, ignorance, racism, and sexism that underpin such words. Nor is it worth focusing our attention on the person who uttered them. As Navajo Nation President Russell Begaye noted in response to the November 2017 comments made in the White House, “In this day and age, all tribal nations still battle insensitive references to our people. The prejudice that Native American people face is an unfortunate historical legacy” (Tillett 2017). But the fact that such a combination of visual and verbal imagery is permissible,



Figure 1. The statue of *Armed Freedom* atop the dome of the US Capitol building, Washington, DC. Photograph courtesy of the Architect of the Capitol.

that a Jackson successor can casually and without repercussions echo in gestures and phrases the violence that was done to indigenous peoples for centuries past, should concern us—specifically as ethnohistorians meeting in a valley where indigenous civilization has survived such violence of word and deed for half a millennium.

For it is all too easy to forget, especially for those of us who work on distant centuries such as the sixteenth, that there are innumerable threads of historical consequence that link the people and places and events that we study with the world around us—from Washington, DC, to Oaxaca, Mexico. In their proposal for “an Ethical Code in Ethnohistory,” Russell Barber and Frances Berdan (1998: 313) suggested two decades ago that ethnohistorians often assumed that “ethnohistory studies long-dead people and therefore has no important ethical considerations.”

That is certainly the popular assumption, viewed from the presentist perspective. That is, Americans and Mexicans today often fail to see the deep historical reasons why terms like “Pocahontas,” “Redskins,” and *malinchista* are problematic—as shown in *More Than A Word*, a recent documentary on Native American sports mascots.⁵ In the public imagination, Pocahontas, Malinche, and feathered headdress-wearing chiefs tend to be seen as “long-dead people” or even as semi-fictional. It may be obvious that academics, especially the members of this Society, know better; and yet echoes of Barber and Berdan’s implied ethical disconnect between ethnohistory and the ethno-present can be heard at multiple political and cultural levels, including academic ones. I have recently attempted to persuade audiences at talks on both sides of the Atlantic that a dramatic rethinking of the distant histories of the Aztecs and their encounter with Spanish invaders is ethically important—because it has implications for how indigenous Mexicans and other native peoples are seen today (Restall 2017).⁶ I have found that it is scholars, rather than non-academics, who are most likely to be skeptical of what they perceive as an overly polemical or rhetorical argument. And yet, as the extraordinary long-term archaeological project in the heart of Mexico City annually uncovers new evidence to help us better understand Aztec life and culture, it is images of human skulls that are bounced around the world. No matter how skillfully scholars interpret such evidence to create sophisticated readings of the Aztec past, the popular image of their civilization remains a caricature of bloodthirsty and superstitious savagery—their “cannibalistic brutality”—that would have resonated with the conquistadors and other early modern Europeans.⁷ Of course it would: they invented it! (Restall 2018: 73–148).

A persistent theme of presidential addresses to our Society over the past twenty years has been that we are all—North Americanists and Latin

Americanists—working hard to shift paradigms, to turn ethnohistory into an “ethno-ethnohistory” rather than “*our* history of ethnic groups” (Fogelson 1974; Darnell 2011; Burkhart 2016), but that we can do better; congratulatory tones have been consistently tempered with rallying cries.⁸ A decade ago, Colin Calloway (2011: 201), in his presidential address to us, quoted Herbert Bolton, from his 1932 presidential address to the American Historical Association, lamenting the way in which indigenous peoples’ inclusion (or exclusion) from the teaching of history had created “a nation of chauvinists.” Bolton “thought it was ‘time for a change.’ Seventy-six years later it’s still time for a change,” reiterated Calloway. Eighty-six years later, it *still* is, and perhaps always *should* be; that is, this is not an issue that has been resolved, or one to be resolved and then forgotten, any more than the 2007 *United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples* was an end-point solution (UN 2008). Rather, that Declaration is a motor that should propel a continually running debate; and the whole nexus of related issues—from the ethics of ethnohistorical practice to indigenous peoples’ rights—should always be at the forefront of ethnohistorical considerations.

Barber and Berdan proposed three ethical categories. One pertained to codes of behavior *among* ethnohistorians (such sadly perennial issues as prejudice and plagiarism). The other two treated the interaction between ethnohistorians and two outside groups: first, the present-day descendants of distant ethnohistorical subjects; and second, the general public, whose attitudes toward contemporary indigenous communities *can* be *negatively* impacted by representations of the past that are colonialist or sensationalist or just plain wrong (Barber and Berdan 1998: 314–17).

It is hardly surprising that the US President can “reduce the over 500 tribes in the United States to caricature” (in the words of one Native American politician),⁹ considering that the US Capitol itself presents caricatures of native peoples to visitors and supports one as its very crown. But the statue atop the Capitol’s dome is not Pocahontas, or even an indigenous woman; her official name is *Armed Freedom* and she inspires all humanity as a “symbol of unity and democracy.” Or does she? Might she, in fact, be someone else, an allegory of something else, a symbol of an ethnohistorical phenomenon that evokes with an undying urgency Barber and Berdan’s ethical imperatives and the calls to arms of our Society’s past presidents? I suggest that if we view the statue in the context of the hemispheric history that we all study, she is revealed not as a symbol of freedom or democracy, but as an icon of the gendered and ethnoracialized construction of “America”—that is, all the Americas; and that contrary to the

aims of her creators, her sword and shield call ethnohistorians to battle that very notion of “America” that she embodies.

Uncle Sam’s Wife

Albert Ports was a scaffolding rigger who first met the sixteen-and-a-half-foot statue at the top of the Capitol building in the closing years of the nineteenth century (fig. 2). Climbing up to give the bronze lady a bath, he would repeat the process countless times across the decades of his adult life. The intimacy of the experience put ideas in Ports’s head. Year after year he yearned to place his own mustachioed lips on the statue’s oversized bronze lips. Yet he resisted. After all, they were both married, and not to each other; for the statue’s popular name, the one Ports himself used to refer to her, was “Uncle Sam’s Wife.” Then, in 1923, Ports surrendered to lustful impulse, and delivered the kiss of which he had dreamed for so long. But guilt consumed him. When, four years later, while scrubbing Uncle Sam’s Wife’s face, he fell from the scaffolding to the balcony below, breaking an arm and a leg, Ports was convinced the cause was her indignation over his adulterous liberties. Only after confessing the entire story to a Washington, DC newspaper in 1931 did Ports sense that, by admitting his sin before the whole city, absolution was finally at hand.¹⁰

Behind the comedy of Ports’s guilt over committing adultery with “Uncle Sam’s Wife” lies a more complex and disturbing history. That history ultimately stretches back to the 1490s and encompasses all the Americas. But my starting point here is the statue’s highest point—its feathered headdress. The original 1855 design of the statue, modeled in plaster in Rome by American sculptor Thomas Crawford, featured a liberty cap. The overseer of the construction project at the US Capitol was the Secretary of War, Jefferson Davis. A veteran of the US invasion of Mexico, and soon to become president of the Confederacy, Davis vetoed the cap as “inappropriate” because it “originated as the badge of the freed slave; but why should not Armed Liberty, her conflict over, her cause triumphant, wear a helmet with visor up?” Crawford declined to redesign his sculpture in such a militaristic fashion, instead giving her an eagle’s head crown, complete with a topknot of feathers—“a bold arrangement of feathers suggested by the costume of Indian tribes” (in Crawford’s words, repeated in some form or another in official descriptions up to the present).¹¹

Davis did not object to the feathers. After all, their displacement of the liberty cap reflected two freedom-related battles that he saw as “over” and “triumphant”: that of Afro-descended slaves, who were to remain unfree; and that of native peoples, who had been removed, subjugated, and their



Figure 2. Albert Ports with two unidentified assistants cleaning the head of *Armed Freedom* in 1931. Photograph courtesy of the Architect of the Capitol.

resources appropriated—like the feathers on the head of *Armed Freedom*. The use of feathers as a shorthand to convey “Indianness” made sense to Euro-Americans in the nineteenth century because it had functioned as such since Columbus had returned in 1493 from his first transatlantic voyage. Within a year, a mural in one of the Italian palaces of the Borgias featured American “Indians” as naked save for feathered headdresses, an icon long used to represent the Middle Eastern or “Oriental” Other and quickly applied to the New World Other. As Iberians discovered that indigenous cultures from the Mexica to the Tupí created dazzling feather works, the stereotype deepened (fig. 3). It became ubiquitous, from cartouches on early modern maps to the portraits of Moctezuma that accompanied European accounts of the Mexica emperor’s downfall—a tradition that can be found today in such forms as the icon for the Moctezuma station of the Mexico City metro system (Boone 2017; Hajovsky 2009; Restall 2018).

There was, of course, a cruel irony to the Euro-American icon for Indianness being placed atop the US Capitol in the middle of a century that



Figure 3. A feathered Moctezuma (“Muteczuma, Last King of the Mexicans”), as depicted in *America* (English version by John Ogilby, 1670; Dutch by Arnoldus Montanus, 1671). Reproduced courtesy of the John Carter Brown Library, Brown University.

was catastrophic for native peoples throughout the hemisphere. In 1800, more than half of the territory of the Americas was still in the hands of independent indigenous polities or groups; by 1900, almost none of it was. In the former Iberian colonies, indigenous communities were deprived of communal lands and local self-rule, while new nation-states exploited native peoples with new levels of brutality and racist justification—or eliminated them with a genocidal intent that is only now being fully addressed (Madley 2016). Yet, as Louis Warren has contended with respect to the Ghost Dance, the indigenous response to the cataclysmic late-nineteenth century was “no last gasp of Indian resistance,” but rather the dawn of a new “Indian nationalism,” a “truly pan-Indian politics,” and “a means to persist as Indians while surviving conquest”—an argument that might similarly be applied to other regions of the Americas, such as southern Mexico, Guatemala, and parts of the Andes, where native peoples endured the long nineteenth-century’s “poverty of progress” (Warren 2017: 9–10).¹²

Yet if visitors to the Capitol in the late-nineteenth century saw *Armed Freedom* as indicative of long-resolved racial issues, as Davis would have wished, that illusion was reinforced repeatedly at the building’s entrance and inside it. Of the roughly one thousand works of art that have adorned the Capitol building, some fifty (or 7 percent) depict Native Americans. Some of those items portray specific individuals both from Latin America and North America, but most representations are of generic “Indians.”¹³ Seven percent is a misleadingly low number, as depictions of indigenous peoples are concentrated on the eastern front of the building and in the Rotunda, the focal point of tours to the building throughout its existence. As a 1912 guide noted: “The fortunes of the American Indians furnish a theme which constantly recurs throughout the decorations of the Capitol,” which reveal “what the coming of the new race was to mean for the old.”¹⁴ Such depictions of “Indians” fall into two main categories: either they display indigenous men engaging in acts of violence against Europeans or Euro-Americans; or they show indigenous men and women calmly welcoming the invaders and settlers in ways that are either openly accepting of their permanent presence, or passively acquiescent.¹⁵ Beginning in 1844 and 1853, the same duality was presented to all visitors as they climbed the east front, in the stark and controversial form of Luigi Persico’s *Discovery of America* (fig. 4) and Horatio Greenough’s *Rescue*. Blatantly racist to twenty-first century eyes, the pieces were denounced from the very start, yet survived everything from indignation by visiting tribal chiefs in 1855 to House resolutions in 1939 and 1941 calling for their removal or destruction, finally going into permanent storage in 1958.¹⁶



Figure 4. Luigi Persico's *Discovery of America* (shown at the east front of the Capitol prior to its 1958 removal). Photograph courtesy of the Architect of the Capitol.



Figure 5. John Gadsby Chapman, *Baptism of Pocahontas* (1839), in the Rotunda of the US Capitol. Photograph courtesy of the Architect of the Capitol.

Note the gendered representation by Persico and Greenough of the two categories of “Indian”—the aggressive male, the passive female—thereby evoking the gendered perspective on European conquest and colonization in the Americas so prevalent by this time. Although these two sculptures are no longer on view, the gendered imaging of the triumph of civilization over barbarism remains prevalent today inside the Rotunda. I suspect that modern visitors instinctively grasp that the violent “Indian” is a figure from the distant past—historical, elusive, harmless, possibly even fictional—while the passive “Indian” is the more accessible, closer to the present, more suitable as a character in, say, a Disney movie.¹⁷ And indeed, the passive “Indian” is most obviously represented by Pocahontas, who appears three times in the Rotunda (most obviously in John Chapman’s *Baptism of Pocahontas*; fig. 5). In all cases, she plays a clear role as the intercessor, the antidote to the violent “Indian” (including her own relatives), “foremost in the train of wandering children of the forest” (in Chapman’s own words) “snatched from the fangs of barbarous idolatry, to become lambs”; or, in the phrases of a modern art historian, she is turned into “a highly Anglicized demure maiden . . . diminished both in the painting and in life, just as her fellow Indians would soon be.”¹⁸

Among the awkwardly posed male relatives of Pocahontas in Chapman's painting, only her sister is caught in the light and properly rendered. Yet her highly passive pose—on the ground, scantily clad, and almost topless—ties her to the larger depiction of indigenous women in the Capitol, where they are likewise passive, prone, half-naked, loosely sexualized.¹⁹ The ethnopornographic leitmotif in these paintings is characteristic of the Romanticism of the early nineteenth century; this is the era when half-naked Nahua women are added to images of the 1519 meeting between Moctezuma and Cortés. This was also the time—late-eighteenth to late-nineteenth century—when the subject of European conquest in general, and the so-called Conquest of Mexico in particular, became immensely popular in Europe and North America. Events and protagonists were appropriated and reimagined as a theme for epic poetry, painting, opera, novels, children's books, and works of history—heavily filtered through contemporary prejudices and often with contemporary events in mind, from Napoleon's invasion of Spain to the US invasion of Mexico.²⁰ The European defeat of Native America (the "taming of a continent") was seen not only as a great metaphor for the triumph of civilization over barbarism, but as an encounter and victory that was fundamentally gendered—with a romance as the inevitable, irresistible core metaphor of the story.²¹

Good Indian Women

Contact and conquest as romance might have an element of historical veracity, as with Pocahontas and John Rolfe, or be invented, as with Malinche and Hernando Cortés, or be generalized. But whatever form the metaphor took, it resonated on both sides of the Atlantic because it drew upon two conceptual traditions that dated back to the sixteenth century. One was the use of sculpted female figures as allegories, typically of abstract qualities such as Wisdom or Justice; the practice was rooted even earlier, in the Ancient Mediterranean, but saw resurgence in the late Renaissance (in response to European colonial expansion) and again in the age of Neoclassicism.

The other dated to the era of Columbus and Vespucci (fig. 6), when the indigenous peoples of the Caribbean were placed into the two categories mentioned a moment ago: the noble savages, innocent and childlike, who accepted—even embraced—Christian civilization; and the bloodthirsty barbarians who resisted, and were labeled "Caribs" after the accusation that they were all cannibals. Across the Americas, for the next three centuries, those two categories were reinforced by Spanish and Portuguese law regarding the enslavement of "Indians": those who toiled away peacefully



Figure 6. Vespucci and “America” (by Galle, after Stradanus, 1575). Reproduced courtesy of the John Carter Brown Library, Brown University.

as Christianized colonial subjects could not be enslaved; those who resisted such subjugation in any way could be branded and sold—or slaughtered. The two conceptual traditions soon merged in the early modern centuries, as the category of the passive “good Indian” became gendered as female and “America” became predominantly represented as allegorically female (fig. 7). Rayna Green (1975: 702), in her now-classic 1975 essay on what she called “the Pocahontas perplex,” dated the emergence of “the Indian Queen . . . as the sole representation for the Americas” to the 1570s, with the allegorical tradition becoming more complex and contradictory over successive centuries.

Regardless of whether the metaphor claimed historicity or abstraction, it masked a brutal reality that has remained marginal to how contact and the centuries after it have been represented. Consider the way in which indigenous women experienced contact with European men in the two centuries after 1492. We have become too accustomed to seeing that era as one of imperial expansion, of conquest and colonization—phrases that evoke images of military encounters and church building, of statecraft and cultural accommodations, of an ethnohistory of “long-dead people.” But



Figure 7. Frontispiece, with book title, to John Ogilby's *America* (1670). Reproduced courtesy of the John Carter Brown Library, Brown University.

hundreds of thousands of women from Calusa, Maya, Mixtec, Muisca, Nahua, Taíno, Tocabaga, and other indigenous communities were grabbed on shores, dragged from homes, or simply presented to their Spanish, Portuguese, or English captors (fig. 8).²² Colonial Spanish laws often reveal not what was done in compliance with the law, but what had been done so widely that a legal attempt was made—usually in vain—to stop it; such was the disturbing context behind a 1534 royal edict that indigenous slaves should be at least 14 years old (van Deusen 2015: 132). For the majority of enslaved indigenous women who appear in the imperial Spanish historical records testified that they were taken from their homes and sold when they were children or young girls.

Accurate numbers of enslaved indigenous children are impossible to obtain for the very reason why their stories have been absent from the historical record: their captivity was almost always illegal; they were always removed from their home communities (often taken thousands of miles away); and as children they had no legal recourse and few ways to remember their origins. The very nature of their bondage was (in one historian's words) “an erasure of the past” (Owensby 2008: 24–25).²³ What better mission could there be for ethnohistorians than to unerase that past, especially when we consider the implications of the enslavement of indigenous women in their pre-teens or early teens? To describe such a phenomenon as an international trade in underage sex slaves may sound anachronistic—as, arguably, is the use of “genocide” to describe the deliberate destruction of indigenous communities in centuries before the term was invented—but carping over terminology runs the risk of impeding the mission to unerase the past.

That mission requires us to recover the history of the sexual slave trade in indigenous girls in multiple ways, both placing it macro-contexts and pursuing it through micro-studies. By micro-studies, I mean the work that ethnohistorians have been doing to uncover individual stories—such as that of *la india* Isabel (“Isabel, the Indian woman”), who testified in the Spanish port-city of Cádiz in 1554, when she was about thirty years old, that she was taken from her home village in Mexico

and brought to Spain by way of Veracruz and Havana when I was about fifteen years old, still a child, a young girl . . . and the boatswain sold me to another boatswain and then to a ship captain who was Portuguese and we docked in Lisbon, where I was sold to a Portuguese slave merchant who brought me to Cádiz²⁴

Imagine the sheer terror experienced by Isabel and thousands of other girls taken by force from their homes, shipped around the Americas or



Figure 8. Cortés receiving Malintzin (Malinche) “with other female Slaves as a present,” from *A World Displayed* (first published in London in the 1760s). Reproduced courtesy of the John Carter Brown Library, Brown University.

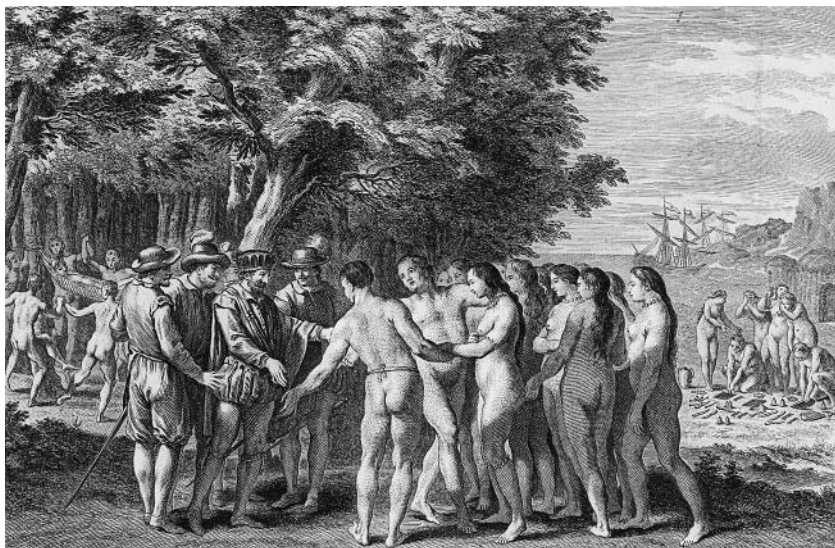


Figure 9. “Marina and other women given to Cortez,” from Abbé Prévost, *Histoire Générale des Voyages* (first published in Paris in 1754). Reproduced courtesy of the John Carter Brown Library, Brown University.

across the Atlantic Ocean, distributed among Spanish men whose sensibilities had been made dull by years of combat and slave raiding. Most the captives were younger than fifteen, more typically twelve years old, as was Malintzin or Malinche (fig. 9). Some, like Malinche and her fellow captives, were bartered by *caciques* (as Spaniards called the noblemen who ruled indigenous communities) to secure goods, temporary peace, or the departure of the invaders—a trade consistently depicted in early modern accounts and prints as a happy affair.

Our task, then, is to see through that distortion and try to grasp the trauma of being marched off to serve as a caretaker and forced companion, as a sexual object in military camps, at sea, and in distant settlements and cities. To paraphrase Nancy van Deusen, enslaved indigenous women were just as much a part of the Atlantic world economy and its mobile society as were European men (van Deusen 2012: 14).²⁵ This was a multilayered international system of deception that condemned children to years of abuse leading to an adulthood of slavery.

The pattern was set in the Caribbean and circum-Caribbean in the 1490s and early decades of the sixteenth century. There is archival (and

archaeological) evidence of numerous Spaniards marrying Taíno or other indigenous women and having children with them, but such examples are the seemingly consensual tip of an iceberg of nonconsensual examples. For every Spaniard whom we know left a Taíno wife behind in Cuba as the invasion of Mexico began, hundreds must have been left behind in the islands as involuntary concubines and rape victims. Such patterns continued on the mainland, in Mexico and the Americas to the north and south, as it was elemental to the European male expectation of contact, conquest, and settlement (Restall 2018:304–11).

Conquistador accounts frequently make passing mention of the acquisition of “good Indian women” or “pretty Indian girls”—*buenas indias* or *hermosas y buenas indias*. The references range from a comment that one Spanish sailor impregnated various indigenous women during the war, to half a dozen descriptions of Spanish quarrels over *buenas indias*; most comments, however, simply note that “we took some women and girls.” The frequent mention of how these captive women looked reveals why they were hunted: on one sortie in Mexico led by Gonzalo de Sandoval, the Chalca and Tlaxcalteca did most of the fighting, because “our soldiers . . . were chiefly occupied in hunting for a pretty Indian girl [*una buena india*] or getting some loot”; they returned with “some fine pieces of Indian women” (*pieza*—“piece” or “catch”—was a hunting and slaving term, referring to an acquisition of high or full value). On another occasion, a Spanish company surprised a family “in their house and took three Indian men and two girls, pretty for *indias*, and an old woman”; on another, a small group of conquistadors attacked a hamlet and “we seized thirty chickens and a local kind of melon . . . and three women; and so we had a great Easter.” Battle spoils frequently included “many *indias* and children”; at times they took so many girls, Bernal Díaz described the haul as a *montón* (“a pile”).²⁶

After the slaughter, sacking, and enslaving in the Mexican cities of Tepeaca and Tetzoco, there were complaints that the night before the formal dividing up and branding of captives, the Spanish captains stole for themselves “the best Indian women” and “the good pieces”; on other occasions, “in the night the captains took from the pile the good and pretty *indias* that had been put aside for branding.” After that, Díaz claimed, the conquistadors hid “the good *indias*” they had grabbed in camp or among the Tlaxcalteca, claiming they were servants, so the captains would not take them for themselves—to keep or to brand and sell. Some of these girls, admitted Díaz, remained with their conquistador captives for several months—long enough for it to be known throughout the company “who treated well the Indian women and servants he had, and who treated his

badly.” The women who had been most abused, come auction time, tended “to suddenly disappear and never be seen again.”²⁷

Indigenous sources had further hints as to the scale and impact of the trade in indigenous girls in Mexico. The Codex Aubin noted that in 1520, at the height of the Aztec-Spanish War, “the prostitutes who were supposed to be daughters of Moctezuma died. The Christians said, ‘Let women be brought, your daughters.’” In other words, in Mexica community memory, Spanish demands for sex slaves turned Aztec girls into concubines and perverted the purpose of diplomatic marriage alliances. In the violence of the invasion, even royal women were assaulted and murdered. As the annalist reminds his Nahua readers, the ultimate victims were *mochpochuan*, “your daughters.”²⁸ Other early colonial indigenous sources comment on conquistador greed, using their quest for wealth and for indigenous young women as metaphors for each other: “On every street the Spaniards took things from people by force;” when they found “the women they looked everywhere, in their vaginas, up their skirts.”²⁹

We can sometimes also read Spanish sources to view indigenous reactions to the slave trade. For example, during the Cortés-led expedition to Honduras, the leaders of a town that had been attacked, seeing “their women taken,” sent envoys with “small bits of gold jewelry” to “beg Cortés” to return the captives. He agreed, if they would deliver food; when they did as asked, and Cortés decided to keep three of the women anyway, “all the Indians of that town” attacked the camp “with darts, and stones, and arrows,” injuring a dozen Spaniards “as well as Cortés himself, in the face” — a detail added by Bernal Díaz, one suspects, because it seemed just deserts.³⁰

These examples are a miniscule percentage of the numerous scraps of evidence from across North and Latin America, but what they all tend to lack — what we must fill in with our imaginations, as best we can — is the horror of the experience for captive teenage girls. At the fall of Tenochtitlan, “some women escaped” from being seized and made sex slaves by “putting mud on their faces and dressing in rags.”³¹ But Malinche had no such option: just 12 years old, she had to survive as best she could, even if that meant giving birth to her rapist’s child when she was 14, and then seeing that child taken from her and sent to Spain, while she was married off to a man chosen for her by her rapist. That this story was rewritten as a romance in the nineteenth century, and her role then judged as being traitorous in the twentieth century, surely only adds to the indignity and violence that she endured in her short life. Seeing through the mythologized Malinche to the enslaved girl of the 1520s helps us to rescue from the erased past the other nineteen girls transferred to conquistadors, as well as the thousands of

others “given” or taken, the “piles” of captured girls—consigned to a fate of sexual slavery, dragged across the country as the war developed, passed among the unintelligible invaders to satisfy their bodily needs as the violence mounted.

The paucity of information on such girls and women, combined with the sheer volume of victims, makes it all the more crucial for us to remember those individuals as we can, and to try to imagine what this war and its aftermath was for them—even if all we know is that in 1539 a fifteen-year-old indigenous girl was taken from her home in Mexico, to be passed between Spanish and Portuguese men on a transatlantic voyage of unimaginable terror; or that in 1549, María Xocoto was a forty-one-year-old slave in a Cuernavacan sugar mill, that she apparently looked her age, and that she was forced into sexual servitude when she was twelve years old, as Spanish-indigenous forces swept her hometown, killing or enslaving her family (Martínez 1992: 401).

A Controlling Metaphor

These histories and their indigenous women protagonists matter because they help us to see more fully the grim realities of the Aztec-Spanish War. But more than that, they matter because they suggest different ways to view the entire enterprise of European colonization in the Americas. They matter because their history is a global one, going beyond making native peoples “fit” into national histories (to paraphrase Calloway 2011: 201), and instead placing ethnohistory and its subjects at the center of the macro-contexts mentioned earlier—from Atlantic world history to all the national histories of the Americas to the phenomenon of the estimated 5–10 million sex slaves in the world today (ILO 2012). They matter because “Malinche” and “Pocahontas” can still be wielded as insults, even at the level of presidential and national politics.

They also matter because of the gendered way in which “America” was represented for centuries, helping us to see through the deception of those female allegories. Bountiful, regal “America” figures may seem innocuous, but they disguise disturbing histories as much as do those happy depictions of Malinche and other indigenous women delivered into sexual slavery—or paintings of Pocahontas redeemed by her acceptance of “civilization.” Furthermore, the notion that Native America is female, that indigeneity is best represented as a woman—young, fertile, desirable, welcoming—persists. A 2001 public monument features a sculpted woman, virtually naked, arms out, variously referred to as the Monument to “la Herencia

Indígena” (Indigenous Heritage), “Nuestra Herencia Taína” (our Taíno heritage), “la Mujer Indígena” (Indigenous Woman), or simply “la India” (the Indian Woman). The statue happens to be in Caguas, Puerto Rico, but I suggest it would not seem out of place in much of the Americas.³²

How people respond to statues like this, or to the Capitol’s *Armed Freedom*, depends on the cultural framework that they bring with them, the ideas about similar images that they have already acquired, and their grasp of the historical events that they believe are thereby referenced (this is an overly simplified summary of reception theory and reception history).³³ The statue’s prominent location and its iconography then reinforce those ideas. For the past century and a half, according to newspaper stories and surveys, the *Armed Freedom* statue has been called many names in addition to “Uncle Sam’s Wife”: “Miss Liberty,” “Miss Freedom,” “the Lonely Lady,” “Miss America,” “the Goddess of Liberty,” “the seven-ton Goddess,” and so on.³⁴ Washington politicians and reporters have often disdainfully referenced the statue’s headdress: “At close range it more resembles a dead eagle”; and the “silly headdress looks more like a chicken than an eagle.” “Freedom’s an Indian with a kind of cross-eyed look, a very campy headdress, and heavy robes with cha-cha balls for trim.”³⁵ A 1939 *Washington Post* article stated that tourists most commonly took the statue to be Pocahontas, as well as “a replica of the Statue of Liberty, Miss America, and various other things.”³⁶ The *Post* stated in 1945 that “most people speak of ‘that Indian on the dome’” (Goodykoontz 1945: 218). In 1961, a reporter for *This Week* magazine polled locals and tourists walking in the Capitol vicinity, asking them the identity of the final statue. None called her “Freedom,” with the top three guesses being Sitting Bull, Hiawatha, and—the most popular—Pocahontas.³⁷

Indigenous, female, and “America,” the Capitol’s statue is widely and correctly perceived as the female allegory of Native America, *America la India*, the hemisphere in ethno-gendered form, a “good Indian woman.” The ultimate iconic representation of “America” *must* be a passive female, because without her the aggressive male is incomplete—without her, he cannot ritually express his dominance, whether the context is the Spanish Conquest and the ethnohistory of the Americas, or the present-day gendered political theatre of the very building on which the statue stands.³⁸ Long ago, Rayna Green (1975: 703) called “the Pocahontas perplex . . . a controlling metaphor in the American experience.” As a manifestation of Pocahontas-as-America, the statue is the heir to that phenomenon, a controlling metaphor against which we all, as ethnohistorians of the Americas, must battle. She has a sword; we have words.

Notes

Delivered in the Teatro Macedonio Alcalá, Oaxaca, Mexico, on October 12, 2018, at the annual meeting of the American Society for Ethnohistory. The delivered version began with the following statement: I am not a scholar of feminist discourse or gender theory. Neither am I an art historian, nor an ethnohistorian of North America, nor an expert on many of the topics upon which I will touch this evening. But I am, surely like all of you in this room, a feminist and an ethnohistorian; and it seemed to me that, in the current political climate, and considering where our Society is meeting this year, I could not in good conscience present you with a personal reflection on my career or a narrow slice of my own research. I thank you, therefore, in advance, for generously bearing with me.

I am grateful to those colleagues who generously read earlier versions of this essay, especially Traci Ardren, Kathryn Sampeck, and Linda Williams; and to Rayna Green, Katya Miller, Joseph Genetin-Pilawa, and all who shared thoughts on the 12 October version.

Brett Kavanaugh was sworn in as Supreme Court Justice on October 6, 2018. On October 15, Elizabeth Warren released a DNA test to support her claims to Cherokee ancestry. On November 6, Ho-Chunk Nation member Sharice Davids (Kansas) and Laguna Pueblo member Debra Haaland (New Mexico) became the first Native American women to be elected to Congress.

- 1 www.newsweek.com/donald-trump-tame-continent-america-945121?amp=1, May 2008.
- 2 Kirk Francis, posting of July 3, 2018 on Indianz.com.
- 3 Douthat, “An Age Divided by Sex,” September 2018.
- 4 Numerous online reports; for example, “Trump makes ‘Pocahontas’ remark, referring to Sen. Warren, at Navajo code talkers event,” at cbsnews.com (27 November 2017); see note 1 above for full link. The version of this essay delivered in Oaxaca included a presentation of 32 images, only a quarter of which could be included here, but many can easily be found online—including stills and video clips of the Navajo code talkers in the White House.
- 5 *More Than A Word* (Media Education Foundation, 2017) was directed by Standing Rock Sioux brothers John and Kenn Little.
- 6 Talks given 2015–2018 in connection with Restall, *When Montezuma Met Cortés*.
- 7 Numerous reports from Mexican, US, and UK newspapers can be found online, typically posted in the summer when new finds from the archaeological project are released to the media; for example, the quoted phrase is from the opening paragraph of a 4 July 2017 *Washington Post* report (Wootson 2017). During the Oaxaca address, in addition to showing a skull photograph from the *Post* report, I also showed the cover to the best-seller, *Horrible Histories: Angry Aztecs*—easily found online but see Restall (2018: 85) and color gallery.
- 8 The Society’s presidential addresses are almost all published, as this one is, in subsequent issues of its journal (see, e.g., Darnell 2011; Fogelson 1974; Burkhart 2016).
- 9 Quote by Martin, who was elected to the Madison (Wisconsin) Common Council in 2017 and is a Ho-Chunk tribal member, from her post.

- 10 “Climbed to Top of Capitol’s Dome to Kiss,” newspaper clipping with incomplete citation, 26 July 1931, in Archive of the Office of the Curator of the Capitol (hereafter AOC), Drawer 11/1 (Works of Art: Statues: Freedom: General) (hereafter WA:S:F:G; note that the documents in this and all AOC folders are not numbered in any way). Parts of this section of the address were drawn from “Kissing *Freedom*, Stealing from Columbus,” a presentation I made to the US Capitol Historical Society (USCHS); I am grateful to Chuck diGiacomantonio and the USCHS for that support, as well as to Architect of the Capitol Michele Cohen, and also to Jennifer Blancato, Tiziano Antognozzi, and Elise Friedland for their contributions to my AOC project.
- 11 The very first of Crawford’s designs placed a laurel wreath on the statue’s head; the liberty cap was on the second version (AOC, “The Statue of Freedom,” 2013 MS in Drawer 11/1 [WA:S:F:G]). Also see Miller 2007, Cooke 1961.
- 12 The last phrase is a reference to the classic by Burns (1980).
- 13 That estimate includes items lost or stolen, destroyed in fires, or transferred to other buildings. Depending on how one counts an object (are the Columbus Doors one object, or nine, or dozens, for example?), there have been roughly seven hundred for the past century. Of these, about forty depict non-US individuals (i.e., figures from the European and early Latin American past, such as the Columbus brothers, Cortés and other conquistadors, and the Dominican friar Bartolomé de Las Casas). That is less than 6 percent—but almost half of those comprise or include Columbus. Summary drawn from my “field” notes, August–September 2017, but also see Genetin-Pilawa 2014, 2015. (A book of the same title, *The Indians’ Capital City*, is to be published by University of North Carolina Press).
- 14 The full quote is: “The fortunes of the American Indians furnish a theme which constantly recurs throughout the decorations of the Capitol. The marbles and bronzes of the rotunda portico are suggestive of the first contact of the white race with the red. The marble group in the pediment of the Senate portico is significant of what the coming of the new race was to mean for the old” (Henderson 1912: 312).
- 15 Trollope captured this duality as early as the 1830s, as well as its intended impact on visitors; her comment on early “Indian” portraits could apply to the succeeding century of representations of “Indians”: they “have but two sorts of expression; the one is that of very noble and warlike daring, the other of a gentle and naive simplicity, that has no mixture of folly in it, but which is inexpressibly engaging, and more touching, perhaps” (Trollope 1969: 171–73). Because the bifurcation of “Indians” into two stereotypes is so deep-rooted and widespread, it has a sizeable literature; two starting points are Restall (2003: chap. 6); and Jentz (2018: chaps. 1–2 on the myths of “the Noble Savage” and “the Ignoble Savage”).
- 16 Although damaged (badly so, in the case of *Rescue*), both pieces are in storage at the Smithsonian Museum in Washington, DC (personal communication, Michelle Cohen, Curator of the Capitol, September 2017); I find persuasive the argument by Alfred J. Andrea and Andrew Holt that while “their removal in 1958 was justified,” “racist works of art and propaganda, such as these statues, must be part of the public record” and displayed in a museum (in Jentz 2018: xiii). Images of Horatio Greenough’s *Rescue* (shown during the Oaxaca address

- but not included here) are easily found online, but also see Fryd (2001: 89–105), and Genetin-Pilawa (2015).
- 17 I refer, of course, to the 1995 Walt Disney Feature Animation film, *Pocahontas*, which won two Academy Awards and took in some \$350 million at the box office.
 - 18 The art historian: Bedford (2009: 143). Also see Fryd (2001: 19–51); Genetin-Pilawa (2014). William Carlos Williams's (1986: 257) "It Is a Living Coral" comments on the "Baptism of Poca- / hontas // with a little card / hanging // under it to tell / the persons // in the picture," with "little card" a reference to how the history of Indian submission and destruction is so often reduced and minimized in the larger narrative of American history.
 - 19 The most intriguing figure in the Chapman painting is the small child peering out from the lap of Pocahontas's sister, made poignant by the knowledge that early in the painting process Chapman lost two children (a young son, after an illness of a few days, and two weeks later, a prematurely-born baby daughter); AOC, Drawer 6/4 (P:R:BP:C); Bedford 2009: 144.
 - 20 Restall 2018, esp. chaps. 2, 7, and Epilogue.
 - 21 The two paintings shown at this point in the Oaxaca address were taken from a series of early-nineteenth century lithographs made in Paris by Nicolas-Eustache Maurin, depicting the "Conquest of Mexico" with a mixture of historical and fictional characters (as was common in opera and other media drawing upon this topic during the Romantic era); one of them, showing a merciful Cortés and an adoring, pale Aztec princess, titled "Clémence de Fernand-Cortés," is included in Restall 2018 color gallery (also see 70, 247–48, 290, 352).
 - 22 My "hundreds of thousands" figure echoes Van Deusen (2012: 13); also see Reséndez 2016.
 - 23 Quoted by Van Deusen (2015: 65).
 - 24 Testimony in the Archivo General de Indias, Justicia 1164, n.1, r.1, but I here follow the translation by van Deusen (2015: 64).
 - 25 I was led to this passage by Cave 208: 173.
 - 26 The quotes are my translations from Díaz (1632, 2: chaps. 140, 142, 144, 146, 162, 175, 178, 184); but also see Díaz (1908–16, 4: 25, 50, 51, 67, 69, 90, 265), Díaz (1908–16, 5: 12, 38, 41, 42, 66–67); and Díaz (2005, 1: 407, 422, 433, 434, 448, 561, 639, 655, 657, 658, 675).
 - 27 Díaz (1632, 2: chaps. 143, 146); Díaz (1908–16, 4: 54–55, 90); Díaz (2005, 1: 424–25, 448).
 - 28 *Codex Aubin*, f.42v (using the translation in Lockhart 1993: 274–75).
 - 29 *Florentine Codex*, 11: 248–49; *Annals of Tlatelolco* in Lockhart (1993: 268–69).
 - 30 Díaz (1632, 2: chap. 180); Díaz (1908–16, 5: 51–52); Díaz (2005, 1: 664).
 - 31 *Annals of Tlatelolco* in Lockhart (1993: 268–69).
 - 32 Images and references to the monument's name can be found on such sites as visitacaguas.com and caguas.gov, which also lead to details on the sibling monuments to the region's European and African heritages (the latter titled *Ritmo [Rhythm]*).
 - 33 See, for example, Holub 1984, and Thompson 1993.
 - 34 Newspaper reports also used "the Capitol Lady" and "the Capitol Goddess": "Goddess" names listed in *The National Capitol* (1902), 64 (cutting in AOC,

- Drawer 11/1, WA:S:F:G); others in numerous newspaper reports, for example, “To Wash the Goddess,” newspaper unknown, 17 June 1903; another in *The Painters Magazine*, September 1913, 692; cuttings in AOC, Drawer 11/1 (WA: S:F:G); Carberry 1959: B6; reports in the *Washington Herald*, 12 April 1931, and in the *Star*, 5 June 1931; “‘Capitol Lady’ Gets Dirty Look” in the *Times-Herald*, 23 July 1943. On occasion, across the decades, she has been called the “Statue of Liberty”; the earliest such identification I found of her as the “Statue of Liberty” was in a 1907 article on “Cleaning the Goddess” in an unidentified magazine in AOC, Drawer 11/1 (WA:S:F:G; and “the ‘Goddess’” in the same source); the name is then common throughout the century. Also see Miller 2007: 28.
- 35 Carberry 1959: B6; Sherrill 1989: G2 (who quoted Senator Patrick Leahy saying that he was not bothered by the vague identity of the “funny-looking statue,” remarking, “At least it’s done with; if it were being made today, it’d take Congress twenty-five years to decide who should be up there”); Sherrill 1989: G1–G2.
 - 36 “Goddess of Freedom to Get a Soapless Beauty Treatment”; the three most common misidentifications were repeated, in that order, in “Cleansed ‘Woman’ Looks on Congress.”
 - 37 As summarized by Cooke 1961: 1, 7. The complete list (in reverse order of popularity) was Dolly Madison, Betsy Ross, Amerigo Vespucci, Columbus, Queen Isabella of Spain, Hernando Cortés, Balboa, Miles Standish, John Paul Jones, Paul Revere, a Roman senator, Susan B. Anthony, Joan of Arc, Sitting Bull, Hiawatha, and Pocahontas. I put the same question to visitors outside the Capitol at regular intervals, August–November 2017, polling a total of 43 people (a third of them during the 21 August solar eclipse; i.e., too few and anecdotal to be more than a note): “Pocahontas” was by far the most common response.
 - 38 See, for example, Sarah Shneiderman, “Real-Time Rituals of Elite Male Privilege #Kavanaugh.”

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