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## **The Myth of the Vanishing Race: Interpreting Historical Photographs of Native Americans**

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**THE MYTH OF THE VANISHING RACE:  
INTERPRETING HISTORICAL PHOTOGRAPHS  
OF NATIVE AMERICANS**

by

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A project

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If not for the following sites and the permission by the Seattle Art Museum, this project would not have been possible. Their knowledge of the past and present inspired my work to create a curriculum unit for the future. *Native Knowledge 360° Education Initiative* from the National Museum of the American Indian, *Facing History and Ourselves: A Contested History* and *Teaching Tolerance* are frameworks for teaching history that is integral to remediating The Myth of the Vanishing Race. Each site brings a unique perspective for integrating stories and material for the twenty-first-century classroom.

Authors note: Any errors in this paper and project are the author's sole responsibility, Thomas Patrick Albritton.

## Abstract

Much of Indigenous peoples' experience in America has been shaped by white settler colonialism, politics, and imperialism. The master narration and representation for the Indigenous past predominantly have been created by white men (European colonists, historians, and creators of pop culture), resulting in a myth of a vanishing race, the belief of many non-Indigenous people's that Indigenous cultures, customs, and heritage were vanishing or have disappeared. Specifically, the Edward S. Curtis photograph titled "The Vanishing Race—Navaho," ca. 1904 continues to be a significant propagator of misconceptions of a vanishing race or a long-forgotten people, even as those cultures, customs, and heritage were alive then as well as today. These misconceptions have caused lasting harm to Indigenous communities by persistently misrepresenting their history through western pedagogical methods and content. Any remediation process must apply Indigenous methodologies to the analysis of historic Indigenous photographs to decolonize Indigenous American history. This project's methodologies blend Indigenous epistemology with evidence-based and emerging pedagogies to acknowledge what many Indigenous scholars ask of western academia: to be mindful of Indigenous world views and incorporate their theories into scholarly practice, and to responsibly adapt their methods for academia. Using this remediation process, this project expands the pedagogical approach to teaching Indigenous American history by showing high school students and instructors how to identify and fill the missing spaces or lacunae from the past. To remediate American history's long-silenced voices, this project uses perspectives of Indigenous scholars, authors, and the Seattle Art Museum to create the six-part lesson plan *The Myth of the Vanishing Race: Interpreting Historical Photographs of Native Americans*.

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## **Abbreviations**

MAHR—Master of Applied Historical Research

NCPH—National Council on Public History

NITEP—Indigenous Teacher Education Program

NMAI—National Museum of the American Indian

PTA—Parent Teacher Associations

TES-The Times Educational Supplement

## **Project Link**

The Myth of the Vanishing Race: Interpreting Historical Photographs of Native Americans

<https://thomasalbritton3.wixsite.com/vanishrace>

## Terminology

The terms *Native American*, *Indian*, *North American Indian*, *Alaska Native*, and *Aboriginal* are used in this paper and are associated with the many diverse cultures of Indigenous Peoples from the United States. These terms are used interchangeably throughout the project and follow the learning guidelines for appropriate terminology from the National Museum of the American Indian (NMAI).

For more information on Indigenous terminology, please see the Smithsonian Institution, <https://www.edx.org/course/foundations-for-transforming-teaching-and-learning-about-native-americans>.

The term “*America*” references North America. In this project, “*Americans*” refers specifically to the non-Indigenous inhabitants of the United States.

## Introduction

Under the crust of that part of the earth called the United States of America are buried the bones, villages, fields, and sacred objects of the first people of that land—the people who are often called American Indians or Native Americans. Their descendants, also called Indigenous peoples, carry memories and stories of how the United States came to be the nation we know today. It is important to learn and know this history, but many people today lack that knowledge and understanding because of the way America’s story has been taught.

--Roxanne Dunbar-Ortiz,

*An Indigenous Peoples History of the United States: For Young People*<sup>1</sup>

Roxanne Dunbar-Ortiz’s commentary encapsulates the essence of the missing spaces, or lacunae, in American history regarding Native Americans. How America’s story has been taught revolves around historiography or how America’s story has been remembered, written about, and taught. Throughout the European colonization of America, Indigenous peoples have been caricatured in drawings, carvings, and portraits and immortalized in photographs by the white male-dominated society of America. Each medium told stories of a savage people, propagated classical Roman and Greek sculptural style features to signify beauty, or tried to capture the last vestiges of a vanishing race—sometimes all at once.<sup>2</sup> For many non-Indigenous peoples, historical photographs of Indigenous peoples have perpetuated misconceptions of a vanishing race or a long-forgotten people, even as their Indigenous cultures, customs, and heritage endured then as well as today.

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<sup>1</sup> Roxanne Dunbar-Ortiz, *An Indigenous Peoples' History of the United States: For Young People*, Adapted by Jean Mendoza and Debbie Resse (Boston: Beacon Press, 2019), 1.

<sup>2</sup> Paula Richardson Fleming and Judith Luskey, *The North American Indian In Early Photographs* (New York: Harper & Row, Publishers, Inc., 1986), 8.



The question then becomes, why do so many non-Indigenous people continue believing the misconceptions of a vanishing race when Indigenous cultures and heritage persist? To answer the question, the project integrates and draws on the perspectives of Native Americans, historical photographs of Native Americans, and pedagogical frameworks that integrate widely accepted, evidence-based instructional practices to remediate the harm caused by the myth of the vanishing race. These frameworks include integrating emerging social-justice-oriented learning outcomes developed by well-established projects, including *Native Knowledge 360° Education Initiative* from the National Museum of the American Indian, *Facing History and Ourselves: A Contested History*, and *Learning for Justice*.

## Project Overview

*The Myth of the Vanishing Race* project is a series of high school lesson plans meeting Idaho Content and Common Core Standards (see Appendix A). The project expands the typically narrow pedagogical approach using pluralism theory to generate new ideas for mitigating these misconceptions. While applying the theory of pluralism to this project's content and pedagogy, I listen to what the Indigenous scholars ask about understanding their worldview and adopting their theories and methods, that is, incorporating Indigenous cultural knowledge systems into mainstream academia. Using the concept of pluralism as a mitigation factor, the project will bring the Indigenous voice into the mainstream of history and provide a counterbalance to a singular determinative narrative.

The pluralistic approach combines concepts and methodologies of Indigenous peoples with western academic processes to enhance history written through Western ideology's monism. For example, scholar Tânsi Maggie nitisiyihkâson (Margaret Kovach) nitaspiyikasôn

wrote about the importance of “moving beyond the homogeneity of the binaries found within Indigenous-settler relations to construct new, mutual forms of dialogue, research, theory, and action.”<sup>3</sup> Incorporating Indigenous knowledge systems—fills the lacunae of traditional Western pedagogy and transforms the homogeneity of the standard American historical narrative into a more accurate, heterogeneous past. However, Kovach warned, “as long as the academy mirrors a homogeneous reflection of bodies, minds, and methods, our move in this direction is stalled.”<sup>4</sup>

*The Myth of the Vanishing Race* infers the idea of decolonization by describing what I call a symptom of colonization, missing spaces, using the term lacunae to describe missing spaces in history. In assessing decolonization through lacunae, the general practice is in more contemporary terms described as othering, not white, or whose past and present is deemed irrelevant and not worthy of inclusion. Toni Morrison correctly stated in her definition of American history and its whiteness that race is a metaphor for the “construction of Americanness”: not being white is to be the “other.”<sup>5</sup>

By continuing the argument for teaching Native American lacunae in American history, the project remediates the idea of what Ronald Takaki wrote of the Indigenous peoples in American history, that they had been traditionally left out and categorized as savage or the other.<sup>6</sup> Denoting Indigenous peoples as the other is a visceral connotation that is dehumanizing. Maori scholar and author Linda Tuhiwai Smith wrote how Indigenous women are described as a

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<sup>3</sup> Margaret Kovach, *Indigenous Methodologies: Characteristics, Conversations, and Context* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, Incorporated, 2009), 12.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid*, 12.

<sup>5</sup> Toni Morrison, *Playing in the Dark: Whiteness in the Literary Imagination* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1992), 47; Thomas Albritton, *Deconstructing Colonization in American History*, (Boise: project proposal History 501, Lisa Brady, 2019), 3.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid*, 47; 3.

“female Native,” or as Smith quotes Lee Maracle, First Nations Canadian woman “A female horse, a female Native, but everyone else gets to be called a man or a woman.”<sup>7</sup> In the context of decolonization, the lessons in *The Myth of the Vanishing Race* work to create an easily accessible compilation of Indigenous historical data based on historical photographs, western historical records, and Indigenous voices to remediate “The Myth of the Vanishing Race.”

*The Myth of the Vanishing Race* takes elements of the standard American narrative, including familiar documentary photographs, Indigenous and non-Indigenous scholars, current Indigenous artists and authors, and media content. Using historical photographs of Indigenous peoples and their voices, the project shows that while the pictures are a glimpse into the past, we cannot always trust the historical narrative surrounding them or what is inside the frame. Just as students will learn how images can tell the audience more about the photographers than about the subjects themselves, the project also allows students to explore historians’ writing, cultural media, and artifacts to reveal biases and assumptions—and puts these mainstream accounts in dialogue with Indigenous perspectives on that same past. The students’ observations then create a starting point for further discussions of the past and a launchpad to expand the pedagogical approach to Indigenous American history. In short, the project helps people understand the images, material culture, and texts perpetuating the myth of the vanishing race with Indigenous cultural perspectives.

Purposes of “*The Myth of the Vanishing Race: Interpreting Historical Photographs of Native Americans*” are defined in the following four threads:

- Examines the relationship between Native Americans and white photographers, historians of the nineteenth through twenty-first centuries.

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<sup>7</sup> Linda Tuhiwai Smith, *Decolonizing Methodologies: Research and Indigenous Peoples* (London: Zed Books, 1999), 9.

- Introduces the audience to historiography to help them understand how history is remembered, written about, taught, and its legacies in today's world.
- Provides the audience with the skills to critically analyze various primary and secondary sources from the past and present, including photographs, texts, and Indigenous histories.
- Prompt's visitors to reflect on how societies divided themselves based on otherness throughout American history—and the effects of that division.<sup>8</sup>

The addition of the history curriculum *The Myth of the Vanishing Race* is critical to understanding how history is remembered, written about, and taught, and how interpretations may change over time, in line with the political and cultural concerns of that generation—what historians refer to as historiography. The unit enhances the student's approach to critical thinking to understand history and historiography.

Visit the project's home page at <https://thomasalbritton3.wixsite.com/vanishrace> for the best way to learn more about the project.

## **This Project's Scholarly Context**

The *Myth of the Vanishing Race* project has complex origins that draw on historical content, historical practice, and pedagogical research and practice. I drew on three primary domains of knowledge: the standard American history of the U.S. West and its narrators; Indigenous perspectives and their interpretations of their past experience on this history; and emerging or evidence-based practices of instruction.

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<sup>8</sup> Thomas Albritton, "The Myth of the Vanishing Race: Interpreting Historical Photographs of Native Americans," (M.A.H.R. project, 2021), About.

## Historiography: The standard narrative of the American West

In his book, *Custer Died for Your Sins: An Indian Manifesto*, Native American author, historian, and theologian Vine Deloria Jr. expressed what he believes is the American public's mythology of the Indian. Deloria wrote, "The American public feels most comfortable with the mythical Indians of stereotype-land who were always THERE. These Indians are fierce, they wear feathers and grunt. Most of us don't fit this idealized figure since we grunt only when overeating, which is seldom."<sup>9</sup> Deloria, of course, is speaking of the modern Indian and how the public is still captivated by a pervasive myth of the Indian in American history. However, if we think about what Deloria said, then the answer to the question posed a few paragraphs before is clear: the myth of a vanishing race is based on the master narrative emerging from how Indigenous peoples have been written about, remembered, interpreted, and taught about for approximately the past 400 years. While one could call this "history," and it is one form of history, it is only a partial one. Yet, it has been determinative, singular, and foundational to the content and process of history-social studies education.

It is determinative in that Native Americans were defined by the majority of settlers throughout history, from the European colonists to historians and even presidents, as savages, uncivilized, and vanishing or disappearing as a race. It is singular in that white males, and not Indigenous people themselves, determined what was remembered, written about, and taught in each era. For example, upon reaching Florida in 1584, Captain John Smith noted in the margins of *The General Histories of Virginia, New England, and the Summer Isles* that he engaged in a

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<sup>9</sup> Vine Deloria Jr., *Custer Died for Your Sins: An Indian Manifesto* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1969, 1988), 2.

“Conference with a Savage” and “Trade with Savages.”<sup>10</sup> Smith’s margin notes demonstrate a pattern of biases toward Native Americans that continued in the historical record. For example, the photograph “The Vanishing Race—Navaho” by Edward S. Curtis’ 323 years later depicted Navajo Indians riding into the sunset as if they were disappearing. Theodore Roosevelt wrote the foreword for Curtis’ Book *The North American Indian: The Indians of North America and Alaska*, “The Indian as he has hitherto been is on the point of passing away. His life has been lived under conditions thru which our own race past [sic] so many ages ago that not a vestige of the memory remains.”<sup>11</sup> Each influential man described Indians either as savages and uncivilized or as a vanishing or disappearing race.

The perpetuation of this myth of a vanishing race continued in 1930 when anthropologist Franz Boas, who is considered the father of American social-cultural anthropology, posited that Indigenous cultures were disappearing. Boas maintained these cultures needed to be studied before “they were overwhelmed and contaminated by White or Western cultures.”<sup>12</sup> Boas’ use of *contamination* refers to the idea that European cultures were overwhelming the Indigenous cultures with new customs and trade goods, eventually causing complete assimilation to white European cultures and losing their Indigenous lifeways. In so doing, these writers and photographers created volumes of documents that constitute a portfolio of historiographical evidence suggesting interpretation, remembrance, and teaching of eras remained static, singular

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<sup>10</sup> John Smith, *The General Historie of Virginia, New England & the Summer Isles: Together with the True Travels, Adventures and Observations, and A Sea Grammar* (Glasgow: J. Maclehose, 1907), <http://babel.hathitrust.org/cgi/pt?id=uva.x000301612&view=1up&seq=50>, (accessed July 26, 2020), 4-5.

<sup>11</sup> Edward S. Curtis, *The North American Indian The Indians of North America and Alaska*, vol. ed. Frederick Webb Hodge, Edward S. Curtis, pub, 1907. Theodore Roosevelt wrote the foreword for Curtis in 1906 in his first volume of twenty about the North American Indian.

<sup>12</sup> Franz Boas and James Teit, *Coeur D’ Alene, Flathead and Okanogan Indians* (Fairfield: Galleon Press, 1930), i.

in narrative, and determinative. However, the notion of trends, priorities, and perspectives that make up how history is remembered, written about, and taught can be reformed with the addition of missing spaces in American history, the Native American voice.

Using the following definition of historiography, one can see how the history of Native Americans can remain static when the stories in history only have one voice. Each generation determines the exclusion of certain voices through political and cultural concerns that perpetuate generational consequences for the peoples being excluded based on what facts and evidence are available and what is determined relevant by the author.

*Historiography*—the way that historians remember, write about, interpret, and teach specific historical eras and events. This interpretation may change with each generation, in line with that generation’s political and cultural concerns. Historiography is both the writing of history and the study of how history has been written.<sup>13</sup>

But who determines the facts, and what facts are used to write history? Edward H. Carr wrote about the reality of facts. Carr stated, “The facts speak only when the historian calls on them: it is he who decides to which facts to give the floor, and in what order or context.”<sup>14</sup> However, in some sense, the use of fact(s) is pejorative; that is, fact selection can be determined by societal biases, source availability, or a narrow definition of the historian’s word facts.

Facts can emerge from a combination of documents, oral traditions, or an empirical truth that has been observed or experienced. However, fact selection in itself is determined by the

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<sup>13</sup> University of Waterloo, Library, “History Research Guide: Historiography,” <https://subjectguides.uwaterloo.ca/history/historiography>, This citation applies to the last sentence.

<sup>14</sup> Edward Hallett Carr, *What is History?* (New York: Vintage Books, 1961), 9.

researcher's impetus and the availability of materials.<sup>15</sup> In the nineteenth century, documents were, as Carr wrote, "the Ark of the Covenant in the temple of facts."<sup>16</sup> Carr was referencing what he called a "nineteenth-century fetishism" that "facts speak for themselves and that we cannot have too many facts," and the "untiring and unending accumulation of hard facts" was "the foundation of history."<sup>17</sup> In this explanation, Carr's sarcasm drips upon the pages as he notes, "The reverent historian approached them with bowed head and spoke of them in awed tones. If you find it in a document, it is so."<sup>18</sup> Carr correctly argues that while there is an abundance of materials determined to be factual, there are too many facts that may be missing from the record. The historian's responsibility considering the possible missing information is to be cautious with interpretation and acknowledge the incompleteness. The documents and other materials must, as Carr correctly noted, be deciphered.<sup>19</sup>

In deciphering the documents and other materials, the historian must recognize the historical records hold only a fraction of the abundance of facts that may be available; mainly, the tools the white male historian used to decipher the facts are incomplete and defective. The defectiveness arises from the historian's societal experiences. These societal experiences cause them to effectively distort or destroy one history that is messy or, as Ken Burns spoke of one history that "isn't pretty." Burns offers advice to remedy this narrative I call defective; he posits, "Only by teaching and understanding it in all its complexity and contradictions will we make our

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<sup>15</sup> Edward Hallett Carr, *What is History?* (New York: Vintage Books, 1961), 9.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid*, 15.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid*, 15.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid*, 15.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid*, 16.



country better.”<sup>20</sup> Therefore, deciphering documents and the lacunae, the historian will “make our country better.”<sup>21</sup>

Carr explained the phenomena of lacunae using ancient Greece from the fifth century B.C. as an example about lacunae. “Our picture of Greece in the fifth century B.C. is defective not primarily because so many of the bits have been accidentally lost, but because it is, by and large, the picture formed by a tiny group of people in the city of Athens.”<sup>22</sup> Carr’s rationalization is that we only have the Athenian side, not “a Spartan, a Corinthian, or a Theban—not to mention a Persian” or the non-citizens or slaves.<sup>23</sup> And in the case of American history, the public knows about the European version but not the voices of the Native Americans. Therefore, facts are only as the historian presents them.

The historian may omit details from the broader context of the story based on their perspective. There may not be enough information available for the historian to craft a more complete history. However, omitting details that are available but not utilized alters the meaning of documents or facts that may challenge or determine an existing story. In prioritizing facts, Indigenous American history was determined by non-Indigenous peoples whose biases of their time influenced their theories and writings. The past determinative and singular actions have become the cornerstone of what has been and continues to be taught in the American education system. However, American history’s determinative and singular vision does not have to and should not remain intact. Remediation can and should include the voices and vision of Native

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<sup>20</sup> Ken Burns, *Unum* “One Nation Many Stories” PBS.ORG  
<https://www.pbs.org/kenburns/unum>, (accessed September 28, 2020)

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid*, para. 1.

<sup>22</sup> Edward Hallett Carr, *What is History?* (New York: Vintage Books, 1961), 12.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid*, 12.

populations in America to help compile a more complete history of Native American history and America's history. However, the remediation process can only be accomplished using what author and historian John Lewis Gaddis correctly refers to as expanding our horizons.<sup>24</sup>

## **The Indigenous perspective on American history and The Myth of the Vanishing Race**

As a project, *The Myth of the Vanishing Race* centers on why so many people continue to believe the misconception of a vanished or vanishing race. The project disseminates digital copies of published and archival materials and introduces the audience to Indigenous voices and epistemology that decolonizes Indigenous American history. The project recontextualizes previous research; that is, I looked for the lacunae and applied Indigenous methodologies to provide a more complete history of Indigenous peoples in America. It must be noted that while I use Indigenous epistemologies to expand our historical understanding of photographs of Indigenous peoples, Indigenous epistemologies rely on cultural knowledge and stories whose holistic approach I, as a middle-aged white man, can never fully understand.

Margaret Kovach (Plains Cree and Saulteaux ancestry) describes this connection in her book, *Indigenous Methodologies: Characteristics, Conversations, and Context*. The holistic approach of Indigenous peoples to knowledge is all-encompassing and grounded in generational “stories that can never be decontextualized from the teller.”<sup>25</sup> Indigenous knowledge differs for each person through their connections with the storyteller, the earth, and all that is on, below, and

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<sup>24</sup> John Lewis Gaddis, *The Landscape of History: How Historians Map the Past* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), 4.

<sup>25</sup> Margaret Kovach, *Indigenous Methodologies: Characteristics, Conversations, and Context* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, Incorporated, 2009), 94.

above, thereby differentiating their knowledge system from the western traditions of knowledge. It is a life of learned experiences intertwined with their language that informs their knowledge.<sup>26</sup> The non-Indigenous person may ask how does this differ from what I know? My parents taught me what is right and wrong; I learned science and mathematics in school or learned from the infamous institution of hard knocks or church. In history, I learned who, what, when, and where, in what should be called the ultimate standardized history test TMNADT, the memorizing names and dates tests.

While each is a system of knowledge, and one could argue they are all-encompassing, this perspective is a western knowledge perspective, not an Indigenous perspective. Scholar Margaret Kovach explains, “Indigenous knowledges have a fluidity and motion that is manifested in the distinctive structure of tribal languages. They resist the culturally imbued constructs of the English language, and from this perspective, alone Western research and Indigenous inquiry can walk together only so far.”<sup>27</sup> Many Indigenous societies have sayings in their language that do not translate to English and are part of an interpretive way of knowing; it is a personal connection to the past within a language and story structure. Therefore, Indigenous language is a form of knowledge not generally found in western cultures. However, Indigenous languages are not the only form of knowledge but are intertwined with Indigenous stories as foundational cultural forms of knowledge.

Q'um Q'um Xiiem (Jo-Ann Archibald) (Stó:lō, people from the Fraser River Indians or Lower Fraser Salish from the Fraser Valley and lower Fraser Canyon of British Columbia,

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<sup>26</sup> Margaret Kovach, *Indigenous Methodologies: Characteristics, Conversations, and Context* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, Incorporated, 2009), 30.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid*, 20.

Canada) is considered an authoritative voice on Aboriginal (Indigenous) knowledge and story.<sup>28</sup> She was the Associate Dean for Indigenous Education and director of the Indigenous Teacher Education Program (NITEP). She is currently the professor of Education Studies in the Faculty of Education at the University of British Columbia.<sup>29</sup> In a 2001 issue of the *Canadian Journal of Native Education*, Archibald wrote about Aboriginal (Indigenous) knowledge in the *Canadian Journal of Native Education*, published an editorial titled “Sharing aboriginal knowledge and aboriginal ways of knowing,” in which she explains knowledge and stories from the Aboriginal (Indigenous) perspective.

Archibald said that when she thought about the question “What is Aboriginal knowledge and what are Aboriginal ways of knowing?” she reflected upon two elders, one from the Musqueam Nation and the other from the Squamish Nation, who had passed away respectively in 2000 and 2001. She wrote,

I think about how these two Elders ‘lived’ this question. In their elder years, they took on the responsibility of teaching others through example, through their interactions with individuals, leading ceremonies and cultural events, giving public talks, and guiding many community organizations. They both taught me about the importance of understanding and living the cultural values of respect, responsibility, reciprocity, and reverence. Through example, they also taught me

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<sup>28</sup> Mission Museum, Stó:lō “The People of the River,” <https://missionmuseum.com/local-history/stolo>, (accessed March 25, 2021).

<sup>29</sup> The University of British Columbia, Faculty of Education, Dr. Jo-Ann Archibald, BEd '72, <https://educ.ubc.ca/person/jo-ann-archibald/>. (accessed March 25, 2021).

about the importance of developing and using ritual, repetition, and relationships in order to know and live these values and to appreciate Aboriginal knowledge<sup>30</sup>

Ritual, according to Archibald, is a “cultural pattern” emphasizing the importance of environment and story to both emotional and physical healing.<sup>31</sup> Archibald continues, “It is important to recognize the spiritual power of particular places of and the healing nature (physical and emotional) of the environment. I also learned to appreciate how stories engage us as listeners and learners to think deeply and to reflect on our actions and reactions.”<sup>32</sup> Archibald notes that this is pedagogy. She terms it *storywork*—a process-oriented approach where the learner engages in the story to find answers and meaning. The subjective meaning is often not evident until the learner engages in and works through the story process.”<sup>33</sup>

Archibald finishes this statement by writing, “I call this pedagogy *storywork* because the engagement of story, storyteller, and listener created a synergy for making meaning through the story and making one work to obtain meaning and understanding.”<sup>34</sup> *The Myth of the Vanishing Race* utilizes Indigenous knowledge and stories, creating lesson plans to remediate the determinative narrative and moves the history of Native Americans into mainstream academia, adding Indigenous methodologies to the standard western pedagogical approach.

Previously I quoted Margaret Kovach, who talked about the “distinctive structure of tribal languages” and how they “resist culturally imbued constructs of the English language,” and

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<sup>30</sup> Jo-Ann Archibald, "Editorial: Sharing Aboriginal Knowledge and Aboriginal Ways of Knowing" *Canadian Journal of Native Education* 25, no. 1 (2001): 1.

<sup>31</sup> Jo-Ann Archibald, "Editorial: Sharing Aboriginal Knowledge and Aboriginal Ways of Knowing" *Canadian Journal of Native Education* 25, no. 1 (2001): 1

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid*, 1.

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid*, 5.

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid*, 1.

from this “perspective alone Western research and Indigenous inquiry can walk together only so far.”<sup>35</sup> I am referencing this portion again in relationship to Archibald because, as a middle-aged non-Indigenous person, I do not share the cultures of the Indigenous peoples represented in this project. Throughout the project, I have struggled a bit to balance the non-Indigenous perspective with the Indigenous perspective in discerning the sharing of stories and approaches to avoid appropriation and leave open the chance for misinterpretation by instructors and students then continue the misconceptions I am trying to correct. Western and Indigenous pedagogy do not always work together, and in some instances, are in direct tension with one another; blending aspects of both pedagogical approaches and worldviews into *The Myth of the Vanishing Race* thus has been challenging. This, however, is not to say that non-natives cannot understand native perspectives or make their cultures inaccessible, or that there is a singular native perspective; I am simply positing that there is a fine line between speaking for native peoples and seeking to understand the native perspective. However, incorporating both pedagogical approaches into the educational system is crucial to understanding the complexities that are the stories of America.

## **Emerging and evidence-based practices of instruction on Native Americans**

The *Native Knowledge 360° Education Initiative* provides essential information and materials designed to “enlighten and inform teaching about Native America.”<sup>36</sup> This site,

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<sup>35</sup> Margaret Kovach, *Indigenous Methodologies: Characteristics, Conversations, and Context* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, Incorporated, 2009), Margaret Kovach, *Indigenous Methodologies: Characteristics, Conversations, and Context* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, Incorporated, 2009), 30.

<sup>36</sup> National Museum of the American Indian, *Native Knowledge 360° Essential Understandings about American Indians*, Essential Understandings,

developed by the Smithsonian’s National Museum of the American Indian, offers Essential Understandings that are a “framework of concepts based on ten themes for the Social Studies Standards.”<sup>37</sup> These concepts provide information about the “rich and diverse cultures, histories and contemporary lives of Native Peoples.”<sup>38</sup> Drawing on the *Native Knowledge 360° Education Initiative*, my project integrates the correct use of terminology related to Native Americans, and I reviewed their current lesson plans for better understanding. I completed a course (and a certificate of completion) on learning and teaching Native American history to better understand Native American history and create the lesson plan.

*Facing History and Ourselves: A Contested History* offers many case studies to connect students to the idea of choices made in the past to choices they may meet today. The site provides educator resources, professional development videos, webinars, and online courses. I was able to integrate the definition of historiography from their website and the University of Waterloo Library to design the historiography lesson.

*Learning for Justice*, a project of the Southern Poverty Law Center that until recently was called *Teaching Tolerance*, reminded me to be mindful of the diversity in the classroom. The site offers strategies for close and critical reading for students “to analyze, interpret, critique and make connections to texts, and to discover the relevance of their reading within a larger context.”<sup>39</sup> For example, each lesson in the unit asks students to analyze photos or written

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<https://americanindian.si.edu/nk360/pdf/NMAI-Essential-Understandings.pdf>, (accessed January 1, 2021).

<sup>37</sup> National Museum of the American Indian, *Native Knowledge 360° Essential Understandings about American Indians*, “About Native Knowledge.

<sup>38</sup> National Museum of the American Indian, *Native Knowledge 360° Essential Understandings about American Indians*, “About Native Knowledge.

<sup>39</sup> Southern Poverty Law Center, *Learning for Justice*, “About Learning For Justice,” <https://www.learningforjustice.org/about>, (accessed October 2020).

documents, and the Native perspective of how history is remembered, written about, and taught. I connected the past to the present in the Native Perspective section based on these strategies.

## **A review of the pedagogical literature**

My project assembles and restructures the content of this history in documentary evidence to support the argument that Indigenous history has been dominated by white male historians and other academics in early America and is responsible for creating and perpetuating the vanishing race's myth that continues to inflict harm on Indigenous peoples. Evidence suggests that many non-Indigenous peoples continue to believe the myth of a vanishing race because of how instructors and authors have taught, written about, and continue to instruct through a singular, narrow vision. I address these inequities of the current pedagogical approach based on what I have learned while exploring the pedagogical literature.

M.A. Cassidy, the Superintendent of the Lexington City Schools and Fayette County Schools from 1885-1928 wrote, "Teachers of history should not depend upon one text-book. It is a good rule never to read less than two accounts of the same event, and in an event like the Civil war, it is well to let the pupils read about it from books that recite it from both the Northern and Southern standpoint. This provides training in comparison, discrimination, and judgment, thereby accomplishing the main objects of historical study."<sup>40</sup> However, I am not advocating a both sides approach as this would be counterintuitive to the basic premise of my project. I am advocating for the inclusion of diverse, and previously silenced voices to correct a dominant

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<sup>40</sup> M. A. Cassidy, "TEACHING HISTORY," *The Journal of Education* 67, no. 2 (1662) (1908), <http://www.jstor.org/stable/42811226>. (accessed April 2, 2021), 41.



narrative that is deeply flawed. I believe Mr. Cassidy is referencing the homogeneity that Kovach wrote about one hundred years later. However, the standard procedure within historical writing is to present history with many plausible sides and arguments. Because textbooks authors might reference or include excerpts from a variety of primary sources to represent a range of perspectives from the time, they are not presenting arguments that aren't defensible. This is typically done by disappearing Native Americans into lacunae; this is done by referring to Native Americans in the past tense—before the twentieth century and typically does not include their stories. America's typical story of itself, then, is not considered rigorous historical study. If this is not rigorous historical study, then it must be addressed in the pedagogical approach.

Pedagogy, according to TES, The Times Educational Supplement can simply be defined as “the method, and practice, of teaching.”<sup>41</sup> This can include teaching styles, theory, and feedback and assessment.<sup>42</sup> But more often than not, history is taught as names and dates of famous individuals, places, and events. Too often, it is not until after high school that students learn the intricacies woven throughout American history; in many instances, this experience prompts students to ask, “Why didn't I learn that in high school?” My example is historiography and the significant role it plays in how our history books are written. The exciting part of this research was finding Indigenous scholars who are attempting to overcome these inequities of the past pedagogical approaches.

For instance, scholars Linda Tuhiwai Smith and Margaret Kovach each published books addressing Indigenous methodologies. Smith wrote about four important words to the Indigenous experience, imperialism, history, writing and theory. From the Indigenous perspective, Smith

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<sup>41</sup> TES, “What is Pedagogy,” <https://www.tes.com/news/what-is-pedagogy-definition>, (accessed October 2020).

<sup>42</sup> Ibid

says they are problematic. “They are words which tend to provoke a whole array of feelings, attitudes and values. They are words of emotion which draw attention to the thousands of ways in which indigenous languages, knowledges, and cultures have been silenced or misrepresented, ridiculed or condemned in academic and popular discourses.”<sup>43</sup> For me, these words are a guiding principle to learning and teaching Indigenous history. I was able to draw upon these scholars’ explanations of how to use terminology to address Indigenous populations and how to responsibly incorporate their stories on their terms. This is no easy feat as a non-Indigenous person.

Similarly, Margaret Kovach’s book *Indigenous Methodologies: Characteristics, Conversations, and Contexts* was an “exploration of ways in which Indigenous academic researchers have incorporated cultural knowledge into their research methodology.”<sup>44</sup> Kovach intersperses personal experience and critical analysis arguing for new ways of knowing, but in reality, are very old to Indigenous people. Kovach talked with six Indigenous scholars to compile insights into how they wove Indigenous research methodologies into their work. Kovach wrote “The conversations are of significant scholastic value, holding within them the richness of oral culture. Theirs is a knowledge source that I simply could not access through written publications given the orality of our traditions. This needs to be recognized.”<sup>45</sup> Kovach defined cultural knowledge in the scholars research methodology as “broad spectrums of beliefs about knowledge

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<sup>43</sup> Linda Tuhiwai Smith, *Decolonizing Methodologies: Research and Indigenous Peoples* (London: Zed Books, 1999), 21.

<sup>44</sup> Margaret Kovach, *Indigenous Methodologies: Characteristics, Conversations, and Context* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, Incorporated, 2009), 11.

<sup>45</sup> *Ibid*, 15.

stemming from an individual's own cultural group; this could include knowledge from the sacred and ceremonial.”<sup>46</sup>

While reading these books I began to realize how I, as a non-Indigenous person must approach this history: cautiously, respectfully, and in a manner that will not continue to do harm. I must listen to their stories to gain a better understanding of their knowledge and knowledge systems and assume nothing. After all, the dominant story about them has been written by the imperialists who have misrepresented them and is based on western theories and ideologies. Indigenous pedagogy or storywork as Archibald termed it, compromise—their heritage and customs. These are their histories—the knowledge and knowledge systems that have been left out or misrepresented by western academia. But the one theme that was interspersed throughout both books was how Indigenous knowledge and knowledge system are complex from the non-Indigenous perspective and should not be dismissed but should stand side-by-side with western approaches to pedagogy.

Each author was clear that there will always be tension between academia and Indigenous peoples simply because Indigeneity is a lived experience captured in the language that cannot be expressed in western terms. But each author was adamant that the two can co-exist. They each argued that the Indigenous person must guide the non-Indigenous person to have a more harmonious outcome. I would, however, have liked each of them to expand on how the Indigenous peoples could guide non-Indigenous peoples in the theories and methods of Indigenous pedagogies without exhausting Indigenous peoples physically, intellectually, and emotionally.

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<sup>46</sup> Ibid, 14.

While Smith and Kovach's work has been instrumental to *The Myth of the Vanishing Race*, several other pedagogical approaches that were relevant to the project reflected on visual learning and were critical to the final project. For example, the project includes visual literacy instruction as a key approach to 21<sup>st</sup>- century learning skills that "demonstrate the ability to interpret, recognize, appreciate, and understand information presented through visible actions, objects, and symbols, natural or man-made."<sup>47</sup> Visual literacy teaches students how to read the visual world, including photographs, to enhance their understanding of and ability to interpret and comprehend images in a manner comparable to reading and writing. I incorporated these ideas in the Photographs & Visual Literacy lesson in comparing and contrasting photographs without captions and photographs with the original caption.

In support of this visual literacy approach, I obtained site use permission from Seattle Art Museum staff to draw on the exhibit *Double Exposure*. This permission came from Ms. Wendy Saffel, Senior Marketing Manager and Accessibility Team Leader, and Ms. Asia Tail, Cherokee Nation citizen, artist, arts administrator, and member of the *Double Exposure* advisory committee. In learning about my project, Tail also crucially relayed, "that it is better to teach from subject matter that positively affirms Native identities (i.e., Native Art) rather than teach from objects that harm or misrepresent (i.e., Curtis or similar), even if trying to correct for those harms. But people will inevitably keep teaching with Curtis's images, so it is probably good to have some strategies and curricula out there to help that happen in a better way." I also garnered permission to use content from the author of *An Indigenous History of the United States: For*

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<sup>47</sup> Todd Finley, *Edutopia*, "Common Core in Action: Ten Visual Literacy Strategies," February 19, 2014. <https://www.edutopia.org/blog/ccia-10-visual-literacy-strategies-todd-finley>, (accessed January 2021).

*Young People*, Roxanne Dubar-Ortiz. I used the first chapter of the book to emphasize the diverse cultures and technologies of the Indigenous peoples in the lesson “Native America before European contact.” I did this on the advice of Ms. Tail to teach first and foremost from the Indigenous perspective. *The Myth of the Vanishing Race* deliberately merges current pedagogical approaches to address the collective memory and the need to expand the educational vision. One such instructional approach comes from Edutopia; a George Lucas Educational Foundation started in 1984. The foundation focuses on delivering instruction that helps students “effectively apply knowledge, attitudes, and skills necessary to thrive in their studies, careers, and adult life.”<sup>48</sup> Edutopia offers instructional videos for visual think-aloud strategies, worksheets for photo, cartoon, motion picture, map, and poster analysis. The site provides guidance on such pedagogical practices and topics as assessment, integrated studies, project-based learning, social and emotional learning, professional development, technology integration, and much more. Also included under visual literacy strategies are the standards the site and its instructional materials meet. I was able to draw on their worksheets and strategies for the unit.

Thanks in part to Edutopia’s modeling, I was able to identify my project’s alignment with the Common Core State Standards and National Council of Teachers of English Standards which I have included in the appendices. The visual literacy portion of the unit is designed using materials and theories from Edutopia to encourage students not just to see an object, symbol, or photo, but which teach the pupil to think about critically and with pictures to gain a better understanding and appreciation of not only the subject but the person or persons who created the visual. This is an important skill in our world today, as visuals are all around us. They are on our

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<sup>48</sup> Todd Finley, *Edutopia*, “Common Core in Action: Ten Visual Literacy Strategies,” February 19, 2014, “About.”

phones, our tablets, home computers, and even watches; the visual literacy component is crucial to the ability to connect the past to the present. My project connects the past to the present by presenting Curtis's original photos and captions and then introducing the students to the Indigenous perspectives from *Double Exposure* to emphasize how the past still influences Indigenous peoples today. While Edutopia is an excellent pedagogical resource, Native Knowledge 360°, an educational portal offered through the NMAI titled Smithsonian X: 3601.1: Foundations for Teaching and Learning About Native Americans, has been the backbone for understanding the pedagogical approach for this project. *3601.1: Foundations for Teaching and Learning About Native Americans* is a certificate program designed by Indigenous educators and non-Indigenous educators to provide material and background for instructors who may feel uncomfortable teaching Native American history and rectify how Indigenous history is taught. I found the lessons valuable in how they addressed using terminology regarding Native Americans. The program also emphasized that the history of America concerning Indigenous peoples is generally taught exclusively as pre-twentieth-century history, and it pointed out why this narrowed focus is problematic. The site furthered my determination to deliver a unit that included the Native American perspective. It was instrumental in my inclusion of historiography as a lesson plan in the unit. Historiography was the backbone to address how history is remembered, written about, and taught in this unit. I was able to address the idea of including a more complete narrative in the classroom—one that transcended the 19<sup>th</sup> century and directly aimed at the notion that Native Peoples have vanished.

## The public history landscape

The National Council on Public History defines public history as “the many and diverse ways in which history is put to work in the world. In this sense, it is history that is applied to real-world issues.”<sup>49</sup> Elsewhere on the site, NCPH explains, “Although public historians can sometimes be teachers, public history is usually defined as history beyond the walls of the traditional classroom.”<sup>50</sup> NCPH wrote in regards to differentiating public history and “regular” history, “In terms of intellectual approach, the theory and methodology of public history remain firmly in the discipline of history, and all good public history rests on sound scholarship.”<sup>51</sup> Following the NCPH guidelines for scholarship, intellectual approach, and theory and method, I found valuable information and perspective from Indigenous-produced public history projects and exhibitions. But what is especially interesting about the public history projects I have observed is that some of the best Indigenous public histories do not come from history museums but art museums.

The *Double Exposure* exhibit in 2018 at the Seattle Art Museum, for example, used the work of three contemporary Indigenous artists alongside the Curtis photographs to spark “conversations on Native identity, race and resilience, art and culture.”<sup>52</sup> *The Myth of the Vanishing Race* relied on these Native American perspectives of examining Curtis’s legacy using the ideas by *Double Exposure* to work “with a fresh lens, to learn from and contend with

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<sup>49</sup> “About the Field,” National Council on Public History, “How Do We Define Public History?,” <https://ncph.org/what-is-public-history/about-the-field/>, (accessed February 2021).

<sup>50</sup> “About the Field,” National Council on Public History, “How Do We Define Public History?”

<sup>51</sup> Ibid, “How Do We Define Public History?”

<sup>52</sup> Portland Art Museum, “Contemporary Native American Photographers and the Edward S. Curtis Legacy,” <https://portlandartmuseum.org/exhibitions/contemporary-native-photographers/>, (accessed February 6, 2020).

his images, and then to move forward.”<sup>53</sup> My project examines the historiography to understand how written works combined with photographs by Curtis continued a pattern of European cultural construction of what the Native American was and perpetuated the myth of the vanishing race. The importance of *Double Exposure* to the project was to incorporate lacunae into the American history curriculum in a respectful manner. The project, the *Myth of the Vanishing Race*, is guided by the words of “Double Exposure;” “to view [Native artists] contemporary works alongside those of a photographer who believed we were on the brink of extinction is a powerful gesture toward healing, and proves the adaptability, resilience, and strength of Native Peoples past and present.”<sup>54</sup>

The Portland Art Museum opened an exhibition in May 2016 titled “*Contemporary Native American Photographers and the Edward S. Curtis Legacy*” by photographers Zig Jackson, Wendy Red Star, and Will Wilson. The photographers masterfully captured the Curtis photographs' historical complexity by juxtaposing the “non-Native with Native perspectives.”<sup>55</sup> The exhibition was asking the audience to think critically about Native Americans through photography. Similarly, the lessons in *The Myth of the Vanishing Indian* ask the audience to think critically, not only about photographs but how history is remembered, written, about, and taught to enhance their understanding of history and historiography.

For example, Rising Buffalo (aka Zig Jackson, Mandan, Hidatsa, and Arikara) captured the historical complexity of the Curtis photographs by photographing an Indian photographing a

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<sup>53</sup> Seattle Art Museum. "Visions of Indigenous Identity: Double Exposure at SAM." (2018) <http://doubleexposure.site.seattleartmuseum.org/>, (accessed December 2020).

<sup>54</sup> Portland Art Museum, "Contemporary Native American Photographers and the Edward S. Curtis Legacy."

<sup>55</sup> Ibid, "Contemporary Native American Photographers and the Edward S. Curtis Legacy."



tourist who is photographing an Indian “because who is the tourist to have the last word here? A sign stands in front of a skyscraper-filled metropolis, saying: ‘Entering Zig’s Indian Reservation,’ because why does the cityscape have to be the last word in the landscape that’s changed shape and changed hands?”<sup>56</sup> Jackson’s work explores how popular American culture continues “to perpetuate the myth of the “Noble Savage.”<sup>57</sup> While I have found exciting public history venues in art museums, the National Museum of the American Indian in Washington D.C. and New York City captures the essence of both the past and present through its collections and events. The NMAI is a combination of the past and present that exemplifies what public history is. The vision of the NMAI emphasized that through inspiration, education, and empowerment, Native peoples can achieve equity and justice.<sup>58</sup> Their mission statement reads, “In partnership with Native Peoples and their allies, the National Museum of the American Indian fosters a richer shared human experience through a more informed understanding of Native peoples.”<sup>59</sup> For example, one minute, you are exploring pottery, fashion, and items thousands of years old, and the next, you see the exhibit *Our Lives* built on a serpentine-styled wall covered with photographs of Indigenous peoples. The exhibit titled “Now: 21<sup>st</sup> Century” reads “*Our lives* is about who we are today. Native peoples are everywhere in the Americas. We

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<sup>56</sup> Evan Fleischer, *Native American Photographers Respond to Edward Curtis' Images 100 Years Later*, May 6, 2016, opening photograph inscription.

<sup>57</sup> Portland Art Museum, "Contemporary Native American Photographers and the Edward S. Curtis Legacy," <https://portlandartmuseum.org/exhibitions/contemporary-native-photographers/>, (accessed February 6, 2020).

<sup>58</sup> Portland Art Museum, "Contemporary Native American Photographers and the Edward S. Curtis Legacy."

<sup>59</sup> Smithsonian National Museum of the American Indian, *Google Arts & Culture*, (2021), <https://artsandculture.google.com/partner/national-museum-of-the-american-indian>, (accessed 2021).

number in the tens of millions. We speak hundreds of languages. We live in the hemisphere's remotest places and its biggest cities. We are still here.”<sup>60</sup>

The museum is meaningful as it connects the past to the present through lecture series, performances, research, and educational activities. Moreover, the museum's research and storage site in Maryland contains the museum's collections, and it undertakes conservation and repatriation, digital imaging, and contains a research facility.<sup>61</sup> But it is their work in educating the public on the National Mall that has inspired my project to meaningfully connect the past to the present. As a public historian, it is my responsibility to highlight the importance of the past and interweave a meaningful narrative around such items as historical photographs of Native Americans. While names and dates are essential to memorizing the past, making history meaningful is the priori of this project.

## A Meaningful history

In the American education system, we are taught the names of famous people—Christopher Columbus, George Washington, Abraham Lincoln—and the dates 1492, 1776, 1861, and so forth. We learn about the signing of the Declaration of Independence or the so-called discovery of America. I find this disingenuous and narrow-minded, as more people inhabited the Americas during the 1500s than most of Europe.<sup>62</sup> These imply “great individuals” and grand events, or “significant history,” as Harris and Rea termed it. While these names and dates are important, although I would argue teaching our children the story that “in 1492 Columbus sailed

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<sup>60</sup> Ibid

<sup>61</sup> Ibid

<sup>62</sup> Roxanne Dunbar-Ortiz, *An Indigenous Peoples' History of the United States: For Young People*, Adapted by Jean Mendoza and Debbie Resse (Boston: Beacon Press, 2019),

the ocean blue” needs to be completely wiped away from the education system and reformed, as it continues to omit a more complete story of America, which leads to our students continuing to view history as boring and unrelated to current events. During my first semester of graduate school, I was enrolled in a writing course to improve my skill set as a historian. We were tasked with writing a literary journalism article; of course, my subject matter revolved around history. You could find this paper in a journal, not necessarily an academic essay with all the theories and methods but something that the layperson could understand. I say this because sometimes, reading academic history and history books can be relatively dry or just downright boring. My children have even told me this. “History is boring, dad; all we learn are names and dates.”

Moreover, I believe this type of writing and storytelling is a form of public history that can and should be incorporated into the education system. First and foremost, it uses academic discipline for research and analysis, but it conveys the message that is understandable and not dedicated to memorizing names and dates. But I want to share what I wrote at that time as I pondered my children’s statements.

“I realized they were right. When I look back at my early school years, I remember the books filled with names and dates and over three hundred pages in length. The books were two inches thick, as big as a binder, weighed as much as a bowling ball, and looked intimidating. Sure, there was a story there, but the sheer size of the book alone was enough to leave the student with glazed eyes and sore muscles. Unphased by the student’s wide eyes and hunched backs, the teachers quizzed and tested us on names and dates. The teachers never really explained the story of why or how the names and dates were important. The teachers were teaching for a standardized test. Who was the first president of the United States, or in what years did the Civil War take place? Wow, point taken, kids, history does sound boring if it is only taught with

names and dates from a book that looks and feels like a rectangular bowling ball.” As I reflected on these statements by my children, I realized teaching history should not be boring but engaging and relevant to the present.

History, we are taught as historians, asks many questions but generally is less expressive in how history is remembered, written about, and taught until we are an undergraduate or in graduate school. We learn about historiography, but for me and many others, the only time we heard this term was in graduate school. Rarely are we taught about the trends and perspectives about how history is written while attending high school. There is a disconnect between the academic historian and the general public and how we teach our young people. While academic history is the historian’s foundation, it is also incumbent upon the historian to remember the audience is not always versed in academic structure and discipline and generally does not read academic journals. We have to make history meaningful to young people; it must be relevant because history informs the present.

The lesson plan I proposed is meaningful—it shows how past misinformation led to the myth of a vanishing race. My project brings new voices to the story of America. It makes learning history more than names and dates. It provides insight into how history is remembered, written about, and taught. The lesson plan is based on the historian’s academic structures but is readable; it provides new avenues to teach American history. Students can move around the classroom and review one of the original “Photoshopped” pictures from the early twentieth century. But, most importantly, the project introduces students to Native American perspectives on American history. It provides their analysis of Curtis’s photographs and what America looked like before European contact. But it works in a manner that does not imply studying great individuals and grand events as we have seen in history lessons where one must memorize names

and dates for a test. It is a meaningful history, not significant history. Some might say, not *significant* history but *meaningful* history? What does that mean?

In relationship to teaching history, *significant* and *meaningful* require two separate thoughts. I posited earlier about how too many young people view history as boring and generally requires memorization of names and dates. Still, authors Richard Harris and Amanda Rea correctly argue, the term *significant* “implies studying ‘great’ individuals and ‘grand’ events, and the criteria for inclusion in this august body of knowledge is linked to the impact of these people and events.” Doing *meaningful* history, on the other hand, is “helping the pupils understand how history is meaningful so that they can see how the past still matters today.”<sup>63</sup>

*Meaningful* history entails “helping the pupils understand how history is meaningful so that they can see how the past still matters today.”<sup>64</sup> For example, my project examines historical photographs by Edward S. Curtis. However, it uses Indigenous voices to show the impact the pictures still have on their communities, some positive and some negative. It explores the photographs from different perspectives. The lesson asks students to analyze both narratives critically and to understand how Indigenous history still matters today.

Harris and Rea explained that meaningful history “is about how the past touches our own lives. People in the past had to deal with similar issues facing us—how to conduct their lives, how to settle disputes, how to organize their society amongst many—and a recognition of this within the study of the past opens up areas for discussion and provides opportunities for young people to make connections with issues affecting them or society.” I use this idea in the lesson under “Native America Before European Contact,” using excerpts from *An Indigenous History of*

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<sup>63</sup> Richard Harris, and Amanda Rea, “Making History Meaningful: Helping Pupils See Why History Matters,” *Teaching History* 125 no. 12, (December 2006), 28.

<sup>64</sup> *Ibid*, 28.

*the United States for Young People* by Roxanne Dunbar-Ortiz to highlight the advanced industrious societies that were present in pre-contact America. These societies utilized trade among many communities; constructed roads; domesticated corn, beans, and squash; and had diverse governmental systems and infrastructure systems that are still used today (i.e., roadways, irrigation for crops). I also use meaningful history in the lesson titled “Native Americans & Edward S. Curtis” by bringing current Native American perspectives to the forefront to reflect how the past influences people today. (See Appendix C for guidelines for making history meaningful).

The lesson utilizes the Seattle Art Museum’s website for the exhibit *Double Exposure* to emphasize meaningful history by examining how past works by Edward S. Curtis still affect Native American communities today. For Example, the Museum’s website observes that “The images of Curtis continue to affect Indigenous peoples today in positive and negative ways. His records of traditional life are deeply valued by those who use the photographs and accompanying text to reconstruct cultural practices and remember ancestors. However, Curtis’s artworks reflect his personal biases, and he often staged his portraits to reflect the misguided belief that Native peoples were incapable of survival in the modern world and were a vanishing race.”<sup>65</sup> Notice that line two explains that for some Indigenous peoples viewing the photographs has a deep connection to the past through remembrance, the following line talks about personal biases, staged portraits, and misguided beliefs that the Native Americans couldn’t survive, and they were a vanishing race. Personal bias informs historiography, and misguided beliefs like Curtis’s have perpetuated the myth of the vanishing race found in the historical record. *The Myth of the*

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<sup>65</sup> Seattle Art Museum, “Visions of Indigenous Identity: Double Exposure at SAM.”

*Vanishing Race* connects the past to the present and therefore is meaningful history in that it still matters today.

## Final thoughts

According to the NCPH, public historians have disciplinary training in history use the same theory and methods as the ‘academic’ historian; we apply history to the real world. Some are teachers (to which I would argue all are teachers for obvious reasons) who engage and collaborate with community members (PTA) and stakeholders (students, parents, and the educational system, and professional colleagues). Still, somehow public history is generally used outside the walls of the traditional classroom. Yet are these kinds of engagement not what teachers do every day? The point to be made is, the lesson plan is public history as it engages the Indigenous community members for collaboration, who also happen to be stakeholders as they have the most to gain or lose, and I have worked with professional colleagues; to which all these factors meet the criteria of what the NCPH defines as what the public historian does. More importantly, the lessons challenge the students to think critically about the past and how the past influences the present. Moreover, challenging students to think critically, we should not forget the words of Vine Deloria, Jr. on the subject of Native Americans and historical tradition.

Deloria writes,

Easy knowledge about Indians is a historical tradition. After Columbus ‘discovered’ America he brought back news of a great new world which he assumed to be India and, therefore, filled with Indians. Almost at once European folklore devised a complete explanation of the new land and its inhabitants which featured the Fountain of Youth, the Seven Cities of Gold, and other exotic

attractions. The absence of elephants apparently did not tip off the explorers that they weren't in India. By the time they realized their mistake, instant knowledge of Indians was a cherished tradition.<sup>66</sup>

## Appendix A.

**6-12.USH1.1.3.2**-Explain how and why events may be interpreted differently according to the points of view of participants and observers.

**6-12USH1.1.5.1**-Examine the development of diverse cultures in what is now the United States. (<https://www.sde.idaho.gov/academic/shared/social-studies/ICS-Social-Studies.pdf>)

### **KEY IDEAS AND DETAILS:**

**CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RH.11-12-1**-Cite specific textual evidence to support analysis of primary and secondary sources, connecting insights gained from specific details to an understanding of the text as a whole.

**CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RH.11-12-2**-Determine the central ideas or information of a primary or secondary source; provide an accurate summary that makes clear the relationships among the key details and ideas.

### **CRAFT AND STRUCTURE:**

**CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RH.11-12-3**-Evaluate various explanations for actions or events and determine which explanation best accords with textual evidence, acknowledging where the text leaves matters uncertain.

**CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RH.11-12-5**-Analyze in detail how a complex primary source is structured, including how key sentences, paragraphs, and larger portions of the text contribute to the whole.

### **INTEGRATION OF KNOWLEDGE AND IDEAS:**

**CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RH.11-12-7**-Integrate and evaluate sources of information presented in diverse formats and media (e.g., visually, quantitatively, as well as in words) in order to address a question or solve a problem.

**CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RH.11-12-8**-Evaluate an author's premises, claims, and evidence by corroborating or challenging them with other information.

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<sup>66</sup> Vine Deloria, Jr., *Custer Died for Your Sins: An Indian Manifesto*, (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1969,1988), 5-6.

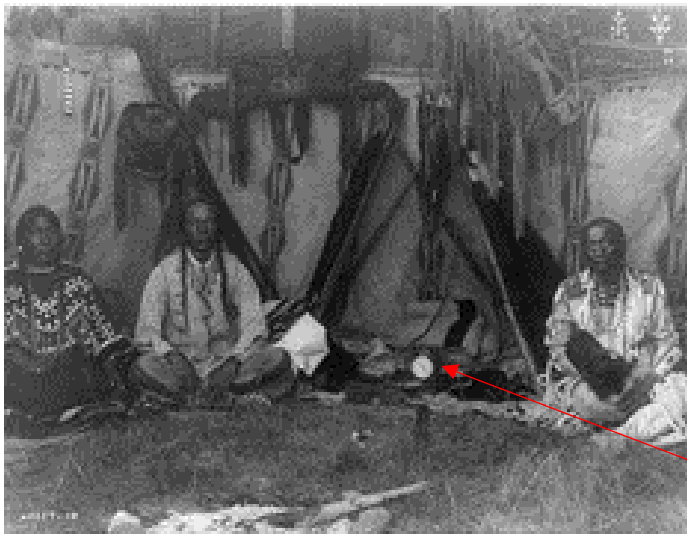


**CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RH.11-12-9**-Integrate information from diverse sources, both primary and secondary, into a coherent understanding of an idea or event, noting discrepancies among sources.

**RANGE OF READING AND LEVEL OF TEXT COMPLEXITY:**

**CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RH.11-12.10**-By the end of grade 12, read and comprehend history/social studies texts in the grades 11-CCR text complexity band independently and proficiently.

Appendix B:



**Clock**

Little Plume (r) and son Yellow Kidney (c) seated on ground inside tipi, with woman. Curtis, Edward S., 1868-1952, photographer, c1910 December 8.

<https://www.loc.gov/item/2002722457/>



**No Clock**

Edward S. Curtis's The North American Indian - portfolio 6 plate no. 188 In a Piegan lodge (northwestern.edu)

## Appendix C:

Meaningful History Guidelines adapted from Richard Harris and Amanda Rea.<sup>67</sup> How to make history meaningful in the classroom:

- Examine reoccurring themes in history to see how people understood and addressed these issues.
- If focusing on individuals produces a narrative around them.
- Use local histories students can relate to.
- use empathy to understand moral dilemmas from the past to elicit a response from students,
- explore cultural topics and life experiences,

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<sup>67</sup> Richard Harris, and Amanda Rea, "Making History Meaningful: Helping Pupils See Why History Matters," *Teaching History* 125 no. 12 (December 2006), 32.

- explore past diverse cultures through their ingenuity, skills, adaptability, and intelligence,
- investigate broader issues for the context of past events for perspective,
- examine how understanding the past is continually changing with societal and generational beliefs,
- connect the past to the present,
- challenge stereotypes from the past that continue today,

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