

Truth and Lies: The Native American Narrative

The objective of this exhibit is twofold: the initial aim was to dispel colonial conceptions of who a Native American person is. Unfortunately, this was not always feasible, as the Indigenous perspective does not receive the same visibility in archival materials; instead, the dominant colonial depiction has often manipulated individuals' perceptions of Native Americans. This became the basis for the second goal of the exhibit, which is to expose the invasive practices employed by settler/occupier populations to create these inaccurate portrayals. Natives were viewed through a colonial gaze, in which their misrepresentation advanced the position of non-Native groups. Colonizers would exploit tribal communities and commodify their cultures in order to invent these negative depictions, as demonstrated through some of the featured materials.

The solution to this problem is the juxtaposition or coupling of contradictory items together, allowing for the false accounts to be revealed. Throughout the exhibit, Indigenous peoples challenge colonial methods and practices meant to harm their communities. Whether through written responses or tangible actions, these counteractive measures also underscore Native perseverance and resilience.

This exhibit was curated by Sydnie Ziegler '22, Edward Connery Lathem '51 Special Collections Fellow. The poster was designed by Samantha Milnes, Collection Management Assistant at Rauner Special Collections Library.

Case 1

Theodor de Bry. *Collectio navigationum in Indiam occidentalem*. Francoforti ad Moenvm: Typis Ioannis Wecheli, svmtibus vero Theodor de Bry, 1590.

([Val H801.B84C](#) v.1)

Theodor de Bry's elaborate engravings were sourced from illustrations by colonist John White, one of the individuals who attempted to establish Roanoke Colony in "Virginia." While White had limited interactions with Native communities in the region (one prominent encounter being violent), de Bry never traveled to America. This complicates the story behind de Bry's reproductions, as certain details were either not as pronounced in White's work or fabricated by de Bry entirely. For example, he invoked stylistic elements that are more consistent with Greco-Roman art, thus engaging the "noble savage" trope in a way White did not. Likewise, it is

unknown which details produced by White are representative of a community and its traditions or rather his interpretation of what he saw. These circumstances make it impossible to decipher between which images in de Bry's engravings may contain a semblance of accuracy versus those that are imagined and spreading misinformation about Indigenous peoples.

John Eliot. *Mamusse wunneetupanatamwe Up-Biblum God naneeswe Nukkone Testament kah wonk Wusku Testament.* Cambridge Mass: Printeuoop nashpe Samuel Green, 1685.

[\(Rare BS345.A2 E4 1663\)](#)

The first bible printed in America, which was completely translated into the Algonquian language. The text was designed to Christianize Native American communities in the present-day Massachusetts area, who were the first contacts of European settlers. It has since become a symbol for paradox, as it lost its intended purpose of "civilizing" Native peoples and has since facilitated in language revitalization projects, thus maintaining Indigenous cultures.

John Sergeant. *A letter from the Revd Mr. Sergeant of Stockbridge, to Dr. Colman of Boston: containing Mr. Sergeant's proposal of a more effectual method for the education of Indian children...* Boston: Printed by Rogers and Fowle, for D. Henchman, 1743.

[\(Rare E97.S48 1743\)](#)

John Sergeant voices his aspirations to educate Native youth, specifically Mohicans (Mahicans), in hopes of making them into a "civil and industrious people." According to Rev. Sergeant, this would be possible after introducing Natives to the English language, perhaps in a formal school built in town. While some would adopt Sergeant's sermons, many would continue to follow traditional teachings or integrate these components into newer beliefs. This creates an interesting narrative when paired with the Eliot Bible, as both men had the same goal, attempted to accomplish it in very disparate ways, but neither were able to convert communities at the level they desired.

Daniel Simon. *Daniel Simon, letter, to Eleazar Wheelock, 1771 September.* Hanover, NH: Trustees of Dartmouth College, 1771.

[\(MS-1310, 771540:24\)](#)

Simon expresses concern over his inability to focus on his studies at Dartmouth College. This was not due to a lack of effort or intellectual capacity, but rather his time spent completing manual labor on behalf of Wheelock and the College. This arrangement was made so that Simon would be able to “pay his way.” Simon informs Wheelock that if he is not allowed more time to focus on his studies, he will leave Dartmouth and go elsewhere. Ultimately, Simon would stay and become the first Native individual to graduate from the College.

This interaction is different from other encounters documented in the Colonial Period; often, such conversations were recorded from the settler perspective, creating an absence of Indigenous voices. This letter disrupts that dynamic, as Simon –using his education in the English language– raises his displeasure with his treatment.

**Red Jacket. *Indian speech: delivered before a gentlemen missionary...* Boston: Nathaniel Coverly, printer, Milk-St. Boston, 1805.
([Broadside 805940](#))**

Saguyawhathath (Sagoyewatha), also known as Red Jacket, addresses concerns pertaining to colonial settlement and the imposition of religion. The speech was delivered before members of the Haudenosaunee (Iroquois) Confederacy and Rev. Mr. Cram, the missionary who requested the gathering on the grounds of proselytization. Red Jacket was quick to remind Reverend Cram that colonists “found friends, not enemies” in Natives upon their arrival, and that the pity shown by Indigenous peoples would later be to their detriment. Most notably, Red Jacket denounced other organized faiths, stating “if there is but one religion, why do you white people differ so much about it”. This text is emblematic of Indigenous resistance, and contradicts the pervasive notion of this era that Natives would be eager to give up their traditional practices.

Case 2

**Edward S. Curtis. *The North American Indian: being a series of volumes picturing and describing the Indians of the United States and Alaska.* Seattle, Wash.: E. S. Curtis; Cambridge, USA, The University Press, 1907-1930.
([Rare E77.C982 1907](#) v.6)**

Edward Curtis' photographs were initially celebrated for their ability to capture Indigenous life "before the race vanished forever." However, it was later discovered that Curtis manufactured his images, posing individuals how he saw fit and asking them to wear articles of clothing that were not customary to their communities. This emphasizes the issue with settler conceptions of Native cultures and depictions.

In one of his most infamous alterations, Curtis removed a clock from a staged portrait. The original *In Piegan Lodge* depicts two Blackfeet individuals, Little Plume and his son Yellow Kidney, sitting with a pipe, tobacco, the clock, and more. It is unknown who selected these items for the picture. Later adaptations of the image feature a basket where the clock once was; to create this idealized, romanticized, and antiquated version of Indigenous peoples that Curtis was notorious for, he manipulated his photographic plate to remove the clock, falsifying every subsequent print that was produced. Rauner has the edited image.

Thomas L. McKenney, et al. *History of the Indian tribes of North America: with biographical sketches and anecdotes of the principal chiefs*. Philadelphia: J. T. Bowen, 1848.

([Rare E77.M1305](#) v.1)

The drawings in this book were completed by Charles Bird King and commissioned by Thomas McKenney. McKenney oversaw the Bureau of Indian Affairs (or the "Indian Office" as he called it) from 1824 to 1830. As part of his work, McKenney requested meetings with tribal leaders from the eastern United States so that portraits could be drawn and entered into archives. At this time, the BIA fell under the jurisdiction of the War Department, which is indicative of how the United States viewed Native relations.

This illustration of Sequoyah, a prominent Cherokee leader and visionary, was completed in 1828 during Sequoyah's trip to Washington, D.C. He was visiting the U.S. capital to advocate for his community during a highly contentious period for eastern tribes. Sequoyah, also known as George Guess, is best known for his creation of the Cherokee Syllabary, which would later be used to print the Cherokee Phoenix –the first newspaper published by Native Americans in the United States. Members of the community used these two facets to articulate their positions for or against removal prior to the Trail of Tears. Both the Syllabary and Phoenix exist today.

Cherokee Nation, Oklahoma. *Constitution and laws of the Cherokee nation: Published by authority of the National council.* St. Louis: R. & T. A. Ennis, printers, 1875.

[\(Rare E99.C5 C47 1875\)](#)

This iteration was created following the forced removal and subsequent division of the Cherokees. Both the Eastern and Western Cherokees signed the document, with Sequoyah representing the West as George Guess. The original Cherokee constitution was ratified in 1827, predating the Indian Removal Act that would later threaten the tribe's integrity. The Cherokee Constitution was modeled on that of the United States Constitution, exemplifying the community's transition into modernity while also asserting their self-governance. However, such advancements were still not viewed as significant enough to combat forced removal from their ancestral lands. Despite the atrocities committed against the Cherokees, the production of this document continues to signify their status as a unified, sovereign nation.

George Catlin. *The manners, customs, and condition of the North American Indians.* London: George Catlin, 1841.

[\(Rare E77.C4 v.1\)](#)

From 1832 to 1839, George Catlin traveled west of the Mississippi River; for European populations that had settled on the east coast of the U.S., there was minimal information available to them about what existed "on the frontier." Catlin's expedition provided a new and varied perspective of this region, as he met with numerous Native communities to conduct landscape and portrait drawings. Like most works from this period, Catlin's art embedded the themes of imperialist nostalgia and colonization with an objective similar to Curtis' photographs.

But Catlin received much disapproval from his peers, as he was outspoken about the negative impacts colonization was having on tribal communities. Nonetheless, Catlin still felt entitled to invade Native territories to complete his project, which precipitated conflict amongst some groups. In the present, it is difficult to reconcile his ideologies and his actions, especially as it is unknown if Catlin sought input from different tribal leaders about their portrayal in the images.

Theodore Frelinghuysen. *Speech of Mr. Frelinghuysen, of New Jersey, delivered in the Senate of the United States... on the bill for an exchange of lands with the Indians residing in any of the states or territories, and for their removal west of the Mississippi.* Washington: Office of the National Journal, 1830.

[\(Jeremiah Smith Pamphlet Collection, v. 24:15\)](#)

Frelinghuysen represented New Jersey in the United States Senate from 1829 to 1835. However, Frelinghuysen was not highly regarded by his peers, as he was in staunch opposition to the Indian Removal Act touted by President Andrew Jackson. Frelinghuysen delivered a six-hour long speech against the Act in April 1830, highlighting the consequences it would have for Indigenous peoples. The Act was eventually signed into law on May 28th, 1830.

Case 3

Thomas L. McKenney, et al. *History of the Indian tribes of North America: with biographical sketches and anecdotes of the principal chiefs.* Philadelphia: J. T. Bowen, 1848.

[\(Rare E77.M1305 v.2\)](#)

Thayendanegea, also known as Joseph Brant, was a decorated Mohawk warrior who helped navigate his community through the Seven Year's War and American Revolution. Brant received a European education from a young age and was criticized for his willingness to "conform" to a more colonial lifestyle. However, Brant would later utilize these connections –particularly those with the British– in an effort to protect the Haudenosaunee (Iroquois) when colonial powers encroached on ancestral lands. When the British failed to protect Brant and his community, he helped organize the Northwest Confederacy, a coalition of tribal communities who fought against removal.

Joseph Brant. *The Book of common prayer: and administration of the sacraments, and other rites and ceremonies.* London: Printed by C. Buckton, 1787.

[\(Val RCR C4746bb\)](#)

A copy of gospel verses translated into the Mohawk language by Joseph Brant. This work was completed under the direction of missionaries from the Society for

the Propagation of the Gospel in Foreign Parts. Brant, who was one of Eleazar Wheelock's students at Moor's Indian Charity School, had previously completed translation work and was fond of its ability to introduce his community to different ways of life. While Brant would later take the Anglican faith, he remained loyal to traditional and ceremonial practices of the Mohawk. Although not everyone agreed with his decisions, his stance on and acceptance of ways that differed from his tribe's combatted colonial stereotypes that Natives were adamant in "their ways."

**Simon Pokagon. *The red man's rebuke*. Hartford, Mich: C. H. Engle, 1893.
([Presses E58p](#))**

Distributed at the 1893 World's Columbian Exposition, this birch bark booklet by Potawatomi Chief Simon Pokagon articulates the frustrations of Indigenous peoples since colonization. Acting as an advocate on behalf of Native Americans everywhere, Pokagon refers to original settlers as "parasites" and "pests" who disrupted Indigenous ways of life. Pokagon's statement is especially poignant when considering the successful U.S. efforts to remove various Potawatomi groups in the decades prior to the World's Fair, which showcased Indigenous materials in an anthropological way.

**Storm Horse. S. D. Marvin, *The Blue Cloud Quarterly*, 1988.
([Rare PS509 .I5 B59](#) v. 34 no. 4)**

The Blue Cloud Quarterly was a novel concept with the purpose of promoting Native poetry. In this volume, author Storm Horse (Clifford Bernie, Jr.) discusses topics such as family relations and difficulties faced by Native peoples after removal. Such material was pertinent to communities outside of South Dakota, where the Blue Cloud originated, allowing the publication to garner pan-Indian support. Its date of issuing (1988) is also indicative of writings produced during the "Native renaissance" period, in which authors were empowered to share their perspectives and raise awareness for the unique cultures of Indigenous peoples.