Considering the Revolution

Indigenous Histories and Memory in Alaska, Hawai'i, and the Indigenous Plateau

Laurie Arnold and *Miki'ala Ayau Pescaia*

Downloaded from http://online.ucpress.edu/tph/article-pdf/43/4/7/483621/tph.2021.43.4.7.pdf by guest on 22 March 2025

"Considering the Revolution: Indigenous Histories and Memory in Alaska, Hawai'i, and the Indigenous Plateau" was the opening public plenary at the 2021 virtual conference of the National Council on Public History (NCPH). The session, sponsored by NCPH and the National Park Service (NPS), initiated what will be a series of five annual scholarly roundtables considering the origins and legacies of the American Revolution, dialogues which will contribute to larger discussions during NPS's commemorations of the Revolution's 250th anniversary about its changing interpretation and its continuing relevance to the American people. These discussions will be used by NPS staff in their interpretive work with the public regardless of their geographic location or primary interpretive focus, by NCPH members as they prepare themselves and their students for the 250th commemorations, and by members of the public as they consider the relevance of the Revolution to their own lives.

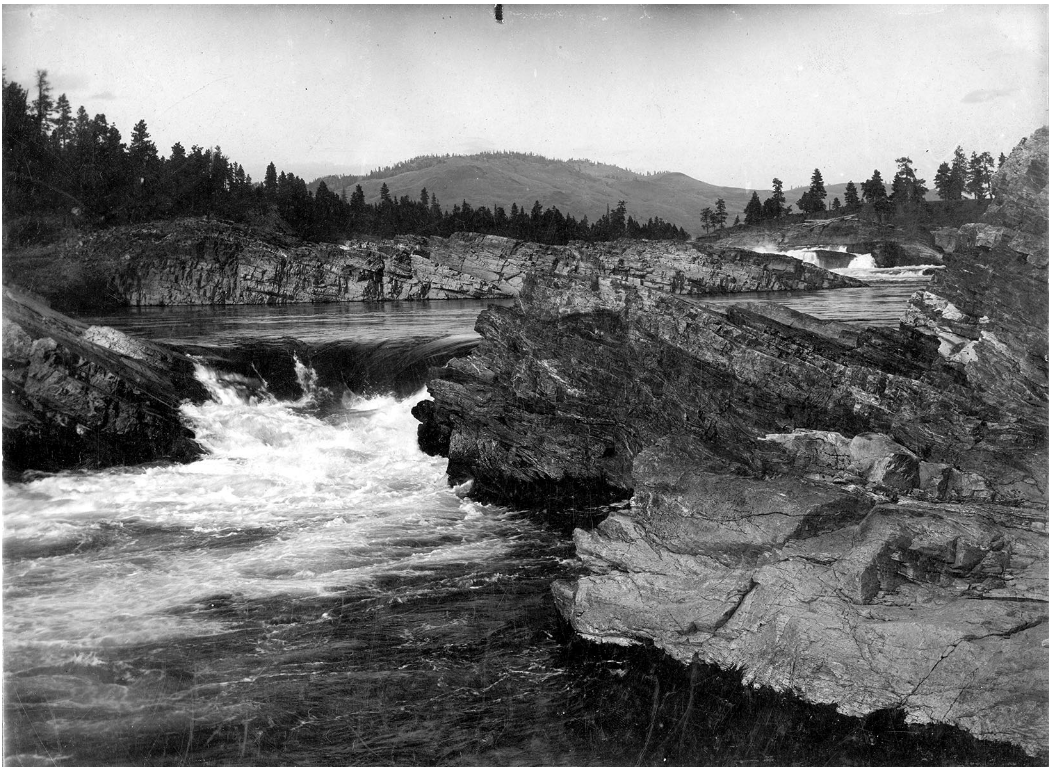
Laurie Arnold (Sinixt), director of Native American Studies and associate professor of history at Gonzaga University, Miki'ala Ayau Pescaia (Native Hawaiian) Chief of Interpretation, Education and Volunteers, Kalaupapa National Historical Park, and Maija Katak Lukin (Inupiat) Alaska Native Tribal Relations Program Manager, Region 11 Alaska, shared stories of their homelands, their communities, and their ancestors, narratives specific to place and spanning temporalities, knowledge built from lifeways and passed through generations. Amy Lonetree (Ho-Chunk), associate professor of history at the University of California, Santa Cruz, demonstrated ways we can employ Indigenous heritage reclamation and decolonizing museum and interpretation practices to amplify Indigenous voices and re-center Indigenous knowledge.

The resonance of these stories was even more heightened that day, March 18, because the session occurred mere hours after Secretary of the Interior Deb

THE PUBLIC HISTORIAN, Vol. 43, No. 4, pp. 7–20 (November 2021). ISSN: 0272-3433, electronic ISSN 1533-8576. © 2021 by The Regents of the University of California and the National Council on Public History. All rights reserved. Please direct all requests for permission to photocopy or reproduce article content through the University of California Press's Reprints and Permissions web page, https://www.ucpress.edu/journals/reprints-permissions. DOI: https://doi.org/10.1525/tph.2021.43.4.7.

Haaland (Laguna Pueblo) was sworn in, becoming the first Native American to serve on a presidential cabinet. NCPH and NPS are institutions determined to broaden the American stories we learn and to expand our comprehension of American history. As Miki'ala Pescaia noted, "We need to revisit history over and over again . . . at NPS, we're continuously trying to shift the narrative and create more space for more voices." The panelists will remember the day they—four Indigenous women—took the virtual stage to initiate a five-year conversation co-hosted by an agency which now answers to an Indigenous woman as a leap forward, one step in a journey begun by others and carried on by those who will come next.

In *West of the Revolution*, historian Claudio Saunt called on readers to broaden their boundaries of "1776" and recognize a vibrant continent beyond the battles waged in the first American colonies. This panel advanced that work. Despite enormous change wrought by colonialism, 250 years is only one long moment in time on Indigenous homelands peopled for millennia. With this in mind, the essay that follows includes place-based narratives from the Indigenous Plateau, Hawai'i, and Alaska. Amy Lonetree's discussion of Indigenous heritage reclamation follows as a separate essay.



Kettle Falls circa 1900. These falls remain but are submerged under the man-made Lake Roosevelt. (Courtesy Washington State Historical Society, catalog ID S1992.27.12)

Downloaded from http://online.ucpress.edu/tph/article-pdf/43/4/7/483621/tph.2021.43.4.7.pdf by guest on 22 March 2025

The Indigenous Plateau

Ten thousand years ago, Creator placed our ancestors by these waters, the Swanetkqha. He charged the four-legged beings with our care, knowing that humans were yet too pitiful to survive on our own. Salmon also volunteered his body to feed us, sustain us, foster us, and with these guides and protectors by our side, we made our homes and grew our families and cared for the lands which cared for us.

Centuries passed. About 9500 years ago, the man who would become known around the world as the Ancient One died and found a resting place along the Swanetkqha where he remained undisturbed until the last decade of the twentieth century. Then he was dislocated by people unknown to him, removed from his river, and suffered years of scientific experiments before he was once again laid to rest in his homelands.

Many stories unfolded and were told and retold in those intervening millennia, and cultures and identities emerged from those narratives, shaping what we recognize today as Plateau lifeways and values. Some aspects will resonate across Indigenous communities, some are distinctly our own. As we think about the 1770s in what is currently the Northeastern United States, I call on us to look west, west, farther west to a place sheltered by mountain ranges, nourished by rivers, and fed by prairies rich with foods that nourished us.

The place we call home is known as the Columbia Plateau. I call it the Indigenous Plateau because it was and remains an Indigenous homeland, and because the man after whom it was named never ventured to it. Rather than erase its own people, we can decolonize that name and restore them. The region sits between the Rocky Mountains and the Cascade Range, spanning a territory from what is currently southern British Columbia, Canada, to northeastern Oregon in the United States. The people of this place speak both Salish and Sahaptian languages, and they have resided on these lands together since Europe was in its Mesolithic epoch. Imagine that for a moment—our ancestors recognized each other then, in ways we recognize each other now.

Plateau peoples were interdependent. They typically lived in small group or village formations, joining other villages sometimes, separating into small groups at others. They practiced the seasonal round, a lifeway built from place-based knowledge of foods, animal migrations, and seasons. They were not nomadic, as scholars and popular culture have previously characterized many Native and Indigenous groups, but practiced an informed cyclical migration that derived meaning from ancestral knowledge passed through generations. Interdependence allowed them to thrive in good years and survive in lean years, while trade and kinship with partners and families across mountains, plains, and rivers connected this place to much of what is now the American West.

The horse arrived on the Plateau in the first decades of the eighteenth century, but human signifiers of change—traders, missionaries, settlers—did not appear for another century. When we think about the 1770s and noise from the guns and the cannons and the men in throes of battle and death fighting the American

Downloaded from http://online.ucpress.edu/tph/article-pdf/43/4/7/483621/tph.2021.43.4.7.pdf by guest on 22 March 2025

Revolution, it is important to contrast that with the quiet and the peace of the Plateau. Aside from the horse, a new four-legged brother, it was a place largely unchanged since the Creator's time. Indigenous communities frequently observe how the time since colonial contact represents the equivalent of a few moments in the span of our histories. Non-Indigenous traders did not arrive on the northern Plateau until 1810, only a few years after Lewis and Clark's expedition took them across the southern Plateau. The United States signed its first treaty with an Indigenous nation in 1778, the Delaware Treaty. The first treaty on the Indigenous Plateau did not come until 1855, and the four northern Plateau reservations were created by Executive Order after the United States ended the practice of treaty-making with Native nations in 1871. The most recent one, the Kalispel Reservation, was not created until 1914, the eve of World War I.

Despite their recency, colonization and settler colonialism have wrought great change on the Plateau. Gone is the silence which pervaded this place until extractive industries moved in. While the outlines of the mountains provide the same ballast, hydroelectric dams have changed the shape and flow of the rivers, perhaps none more than the mighty Swanetkqha. This river begins in British Columbia and flows nearly 1250 miles to the Pacific Ocean. Less than a century ago, it still followed its self-selected channels. Today, fourteen dams mechanize the river, electrifying much of the of the Pacific Northwest and California and irrigating the Columbia River Basin. Grand Coulee Dam, constructed between 1933 and 1942, was built without fish passage, so the salmon who were indigenous to the river's headwaters have not been home in eighty years.

For millennia, Kettle Falls was the most important fishing and trading site on the northern Indigenous Plateau. Thousands of Indigenous People would travel to this site in the summer, reuniting to fish, trade, gamble, and renew or create kinship ties. People remember that in good years, there were so many fish it seemed possible to cross the river on their backs. In lean years, when fewer salmon made their way up the river, people took what they needed to get through the winter but left many more undisturbed so they would return again the next year. They took time to pass down a story of how salmon came to be at Kettle Falls. Coyote, that trickster, was in search of a wife, and he was in a bargaining mood. He began a journey from the ocean, following the Swanetkqha and bringing salmon along with him. When he spied a village that was home to marriageable women, he stopped and built a waterfall which acted as a barrier for salmon migration upstream. Villages were happy to welcome him and the abundant salmon, but Coyote would only leave the waterfall intact if a woman agreed to marry him. Several times he made this request and each time was laughed out of the village. Coyote destroyed the falls in fits of petulance and pique each time, promising that salmon would swim right by those spots instead of pausing, making it difficult for the people to catch salmon. When Coyote created Kettle Falls, he repeated his promises and asked who would marry him in return for his largesse. The people fell silent. Beaver, shy and reserved, stepped forward and accepted his proposal.

Downloaded from http://online.ucpress.edu/tph/article-pdf/43/4/7/483621/tph.2021.43.4.7.pdf by guest on 22 March 2025

Coyote was so happy he made the falls larger and more beautiful for her, with many places for her to stay hidden while she watched the world around her.

The People gathered at the falls and the falls sustained them. For millennia. Until 1941. In 1941, Grand Coulee Dam was nearing completion and the US government told citizens and leaders of the Colville Confederated Tribes that the reservoir created by the dam would soon change the river's flow and its shorelines and would submerge Kettle Falls under the man-made body of water. The reservoir would be 130 miles long and would be named for the president who visited the dam during construction, Franklin D. Roosevelt. In June 1941, the community hosted a Ceremony of Tears to bid farewell not only to the falls, but to the way of life which had sustained countless generations of ancestors. Plateau People dressed in their finest and sang and prayed and feasted in honor of their past and the salmon, and so much more. Once the reservoir was complete, Lake Roosevelt National Recreation Area (LRNRA) opened to visitors.

These days, more than one million people per year visit the Lake Roosevelt section of the Swanetkqha. They come to waterski and camp and revel on houseboats. For these visitors, Coyote and Beaver and Kettle Falls feel as distant as the American Revolution. Or perhaps they are entirely unknown, because the LRNRA materials do practically nothing to acquaint visitors with this place. The NPS describes national parks as "large natural places having a wide variety of attributes, at times including significant historic assets," while recreation areas are characterized as "large reservoirs and emphasize water-based recreation." The Swanetkqha is clearly a place replete with narratives and "historic assets," so minimizing it as a playground misses opportunities to introduce visitors to its vibrant past and dynamic present.

On the LRNRA website (which hasn't been updated since 2015), visitors find the following on the History and Culture tab:

> The mighty Columbia River has drawn people to its waters for over 9,000 years. Plateau peoples thrived on its rich fisheries. Trappers and traders plied its currents and rapids. The last frontier post stood watch on its shores. Grand Coulee Dam transformed the river into Lake Roosevelt. Its salmon lost, the new reservoir helped power the Northwest. Today, its scenery and stories wait for you.[1]

The stories referenced in the site's materials include only those of outsiders, Canadian traders, Jesuit missionaries, and the American military, and the "loss" of salmon is described in the passive voice, as if no one bore responsibility for blocking salmon passage at Grand Coulee Dam. This despite the fact that the Swanetkqha serves as a boundary for both the Colville Indian Reservation and the Spokane Indian Reservation and that the Ancient One knew this river's waters as well as he knew himself, 9500 years ago. Lake Roosevelt submerged the falls, but

1 "Lake Roosevelt," National Park Service website, https://www.nps.gov/laro/learn/historyculture/index.htm, accessed February 14, 2021.

Downloaded from http://online.ucpress.edu/tph/article-pdf/43/4/7/483621/tph.2021.43.4.7.pdf by guest on 22 March 2025

the National Park Service erased Plateau People and our lives and histories when it decided to exclude us from narratives about our own homeland.

The 2011 report *Imperiled Promise: The State of History in the National Park Service*, a joint NPS/Organization of American Historians endeavor, noted many challenges plaguing stronger and more developed historical and cultural content, each of them directly related to underfunding. In addition, the report noted how increasing priorities for natural resource interpretation reduced funding for cultural resource content development. Along the Swanetkqha, as in many Indigenous homelands, culture and nature are inextricably linked. As a solution for improving historical content, the report recommended development of more partnerships, and a greater reliance on volunteer labor.

While I would never recommend an institution rely on free labor in order to achieve its fundamental goals, tribes on the Indigenous Plateau are already deeply familiar with inter-governmental collaboration. Respectful outreach and meaningful planning for reciprocal knowledge sharing could create partnerships in interpretation in service of restoring Plateau Peoples and narratives to what is currently the Lake Roosevelt National Recreation Area. These practices could also serve as models for other collaboration around 250th programming. A former superintendent of the Nez Perce National Historic Park noted that without partnerships there was no park. Inviting Plateau People from the Colville, Spokane, and Kalispel tribes into interpretation of Kettle Falls and the Swanetkqha could enrich relationships NPS professionals and the million-plus visitors develop with this place.[2]

The 2021 NCPH conference theme was "the presence and persistence of stories," and the aim was to explore place through narratives known and less known. Students in the US K-12 system study the past as a series of "important" events, through the lenses of fairly uniform perspectives. The "great men" of the American Revolution is one example of this training; those stories represent a fraction of the history which occurred at that time. This session, however, called on us to broaden the Revolution's boundaries. The 1770s represent an unquestionably significant moment in American history, but its significance was not universal in its time. Multitudes of Indigenous peoples lived beyond the bounds of those conflicts, and for them the date we celebrate each Independence Day was just another day in their lives. 1776 was defining for one region at one moment, and while its impacts obviously rippled across the continent, it is an oversimplification to characterize its importance as universal. The war initiated change, but it would take nearly a century before colonization was firmly established on the Plateau, and even now it is important to understand that a 150-year-old lifestyle is but a moment when compared to millennia of lifeways.

On the Plateau we recognize the presence and persistence of lifeways and People, because the People and this place carry the stories for all time. And in the

2 Anne Mitchell Whisnant, Marla R. Miller, Gary B. Nash, and David Thelen, *Imperiled Promise: The State of History in the National Park Service* (Bloomington: Organization of American Historians, 2011), 79–84.

Downloaded from http://online.ucpress.edu/tph/article-pdf/43/4/7/483621/tph.2021.43.4.7.pdf by guest on 22 March 2025

words of Choctaw author LeAnne Howe, "if worse comes to worst and our people forget where we left our stories, the birds will remember and bring them back to us."[3] Stories survive.

Hawai'i

Between 1776 and 1789 The United States of America was emerging, its boundaries expanding every day. In 1776, the song of life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness slowly made its way across the great Turtle's back, drowning out the voices that had echoed on wind, water, and sweetgrass for a thousand seasons, silencing drums, and plucking feathers to be trampled under foot. Many European countries also searched for more lands to plant flags and sing similarly ambitious songs of their own.

In the middle of Ka Moana Nui Akea, Ka Poli o Kanaloa, or what is called the Pacific Ocean today, lies a group of islands, Hawai'i. These islands are home to kanaka maoli, a people with genealogical ties to the land, the animals, the plants, and to the genesis of the universe itself. Peering into Hawai'i in 1776, one would find a thriving population of easily a million people. Governance, politics, religion were dictated and dependent on their relationship with the world around them. Building upon the history of their ancestors, and with future generations in mind, there was a collective responsibility and accountability to the whole, rather than focus on individual gain. Western scholars evaluate advancements of science, technology, engineering, and math to rank the industrial progress of nations. Kanaka maoli at the time did not receive such recognition for their knowledge and feats. In 1776, kanaka maoli used a thirty-two point star compass to traverse the ocean between land masses, named every wind and rain according to its characteristics, used extensive nomenclature for plants and animals, even designing solar powered clothes dryers. They knew that the earth was round, that the moon got its light from the sun and that the sun was a star, all while so many still believed the earth to be flat.

So in 1776, who else in the world knew Hawai'i existed? Though several ships noted sighting the Hawaiian Islands, none of them actually stopped in, until Captain James Cook in 1778. Arriving under the British flag, Cook was sent to collect samples and data about the plants, animals, geography, culture, language, and people of the Pacific. He had on board journalists, cartographers, and artists who were his media team, trying to document their encounters, and scholars who were supposed to interpret this information. Though kanaka maoli share some cultural similarities with other South Pacific Islanders, there are definitely particular practices that are unique to Hawai'i. Captain Cook's assumptions and misnterpretations of these practices would prove fatal in this initial engagement between Hawai'i and the British.

I want to take this moment to dispell a great myth. Kanaka maoli would often prepare food in underground ovens with heated rocks. A separate, similar looking oven was used strictly to process the body of a high ranking person upon their death,

3 LeAnne Howe, *Choctalking on Other Realities* (San Francisco: Aunt Lute Books, 2013), 38.

Downloaded from http://online.ucpress.edu/tph/article-pdf/43/4/7/483621/tph.2021.43.4.7.pdf by guest on 22 March 2025

removing the flesh until just the bones remained. When Captain Cook was killed, he was afforded the same treatment as any noble chief. His body was afforded all the rituals and respect kanaka maoli believed he deserved. His bones were bundled beautifully, protecting and preserving his mana, his essence, and were returned to the ship so that his people could continue with their funerary protocols and honor him as his culture and religion dictated. Sometimes kanaka maoli chiefs were laid in well protected public places, sometimes buried in secret. The worst desecrating act one could exact on another was to burn or destroy their bones. Their mana, their essence would cease to exist, they were erased from history and nothing of them would remain. The decision to handle Captain Cook in the way they did and to return him to his people was a sign of ultimate respect in the eyes of the kanaka maoli.

However, having never witnessed anything like this before, the crew observed the heated pit that looked a lot like a cooking pit and understandably came to the conclusion that kanaka maoli cooked the Captain and ate him! From this misunderstanding was born the idea that kanaka maoli are savages and cannibals. They are ungodly. This narrative did not account for the sophistication of diplomacy and respect that was being afforded. What was recorded and shared about those incidents in both European and Hawaiian accounts varies greatly. On both sides, witnesses struggled to articulate as best as they could these unprecedented events. The reconciliation of the details between the varied accounts creates room for thoughtful discussion surrounding voice, authority, and who gets to tell local and global histories.

Jump ahead to 1786. Captain Nathaniel Portlock and Captain George Dixon, who were part of Cook's expedition, return to the islands. They meet a chief named Ka'iana on Kaua'i, and remark in their journals of their time with him, taking notes on the political landscape, and Ka'iana's personal relationships, especially with his children. They specifically remarked on the way he played with them and exhibited towards them great care and fondness.

Several months later, chief Ka'iana found himself on the wrong side of a dispute involving his close relatives who were warring for control over the islands. Wanting to escape imminent death, he sent his wife and children into safety, and took passage aboard the ship *Nootka* captained by John Meares hoping to return when the politics had shifted in his favor.

The *Nootka* took him to Macao and eventually Canton, China. As the first chief to have left the islands, he was quite intriguing to people in China who wanted to learn more about him. Those who interacted with him recorded in their journals many stories and details of chief Ka'iana. He stood six foot two, his bronzed body in loincloth, and he donned a feather cape and helmet and carried a spear. Imagine a bustling port town in China and a giant dark skinned man walking down the street! He was gifted two rabbits, animals he had never seen before in his life, and he would spend hours imitating and playing with them, so he could return home to relay descriptions of them with as much detail as possible. He also had to remember and be able to describe the tastes of exotic fruits and spices, the elements of feasts and ceremonies, as well as clothing, art, and music.

Downloaded from http://online.ucpress.edu/tph/article-pdf/43/4/7/483621/tph.2021.43.4.7.pdf by guest on 22 March 2025

Ka'iana also came across something important: gun powder. He focused his attention on learning and understanding munitions, military tactics, trade, commerce, and money. Knowledge of such things would be valuable to use in exchange for his family's safety, as the advice Ka'iana could provide would make the difference between victory and loss.

Ka'iana eventually made his way up through the Pacific Northwest and saw how schooners were built, but more importantly, he observed how important the trade route was, and he began to worry about this whole western world coming for the "riches" of the islands. When he returned to Hawai'i, the politics had definitely shifted. He learned that chief Kahekili, who wanted him dead on his departure, was still holding a bounty out for him so he had no choice but to offer his skills, wisdom, and loyalty to Kahekili's rival, chief Kamehameha, who would eventually become king.

Because Ka'iana was forced to align with different chiefs, the way he is depicted in various Hawaiian narratives varies greatly. The ones who loved him praised him for his wit and integrity, others despised him and portrayed him as a conspirator, traitor, opportunist, and selfish man. Ka'iana is mentioned by many non-Hawaiian sources, each spelling his name phonetically and inconsistently. Several artists

"Tianna a Prince of Atooi" or Ka'iana, lithograph after painting by Spoilum, 1787. In John Meares, *Voyages Made in the Years 1788 and 1789*. (Wikimedia commons)

Downloaded from http://online.ucpress.edu/tph/article-pdf/43/4/7/483621/tph.2021.43.4.7.pdf by guest on 22 March 2025

captured him in portrait. When Captain Meares returned to the islands with Kaʻiana, he wrote of his successful and wonderful visit. Captains Portlock and Dixon also returned right after and they recorded how rude and impolite the Hawaiian people thought Meares to be, and noted the many protocols and rules Meares broke.

Engraved painting of Tyanna (Kaiana) in Canton, lithograph by Joseph Woodcock, 1787. Engraved from painting made in Canton by Chinese artist Spoilum. (Wikimedia commons)

Why is this all important? Scholars have access to all of these accounts and sources—journals, chants, moʻolelo (traditional stories), hula, portraits, ships logs, and more, but what needs constant refinement is the lens and perspective—understanding who was recording these bits of information, and for what purpose and audience. The first impression of the kanaka maoli for the rest of the world was captured in these critical moments. This information would "justify" the coming of the great song of life, liberty and pursuit of happiness and would set events in motion that would nearly eradicate the kanaka maoli completely.

It is through continued dialogue that we can bring a more robust understanding and reconciliation of the accounts of history to inform our actions today. Examining the events of the American Revolution through an Indigenous perspective starts with understanding who Indigenous peoples are. Allowing the interpretation and understanding of history to evolve and grow is necessary as is the inclusion of

Downloaded from http://online.ucpress.edu/tph/article-pdf/43/4/7/483621/tph.2021.43.4.7.pdf by guest on 22 March 2025

Indigenous peoples' voices in the conversation. The dialogue is difficult and uncomfortable, but we each have a responsibility to work towards creating safe spaces, and respecting the history each person is born into—that would be life, liberty and true happiness worth pursuing.

Alaska

Throughout the session, each presenter reinforced that understanding Indigenous people begins with understanding our homelands. Maija Katak Lukin noted that in northwest Alaska today's subsistence practices are the same as 250 years ago or 2500 years ago or 650 generations ago. Communities share knowledge and experience gained through oral traditions, and work is shared as the community fulfills responsibilities to the land and each other. Lukin contrasted this knowledge with extant written sources created by outsiders and noted the inaccuracies and judgments about Inupiat peoples embedded in the Western narratives that scholars, government officials, and visitors still draw up on to learn about Northwest Alaska. She discussed the ongoing harm created by explorer and missionary accounts which characterized Inupiat people as homely or barbaric when Inupiat recognize themselves as beautiful, spiritual, and generous.

Yiiyuk (Ruth Farqhuar Harris) and Argagiaq (Elbert Harris) drying ugruk skins and full seal oil pokes in Sisualigruaq, Alaska, 1952. (Courtesy of the Archives and Special Collections, Consortium Library, University of Alaska Anchorage. Photograph held in the Charles V. Lucier papers)

Downloaded from http://online.ucpress.edu/tph/article-pdf/43/4/7/483621/tph.2021.43.4.7.pdf by guest on 22 March 2025

As with the Indigenous Plateau, geographic distance delayed arrival of outsiders to what is now northwest Alaska. Russian naval officer Otto von Kotzebue arrived in the region in 1816, seeking a water route across the Arctic Ocean. Kotzebue observed the Indigenous peoples of this place from a distance, and his diary descriptions treated them as objects. They were "of middling size," though healthy and robust, and they possessed "frightful appearances." Kotzebue described the Inupiat people he encountered as ugly, dirty, and wanton. For context, Lukin shared a 1906 photo of a Noatak woman and child, taken by Lomen Brothers photographers based in Nome, Alaska, noting that in the ninety years between Kotzebue's visit and the portrait session, Inupiat physical appearance remained generally consistent with their ancestors, as it also does today. She asked the audience to consider what it meant to look at photos of beloved ancestors—to find ourselves in their faces—and know that the first outsider to visit our homes told the world we were ugly. If the oral tradition connects Indigenous people to our past, written narratives by outsiders summarily dismissing us as different harm not only Indigenous people, but everyone who accepts those stories as truth.

Exploration of northwest Alaska continued during the nineteenth century but little changed for Inupiat people until the 1890s brought both colonization and a gold rush. In 1895, Indigenous people and culture were flourishing. By 1897, Christianity and its corollaries arrived in the form of Quaker missionaries Robert and Carrie Samms. The Samms responded to a call for volunteers issued by Quaker officials in Juneau, who were themselves responding to encouragement from Presbyterian minister and missionary Sheldon Jackson, appointed in 1885 as the US General Education Agent in Alaska. Within twenty years of the Samms' arrival, there was not a single person in the area who wasn't Christian. According to the National Park Service publication *Fortune's Distant Shores*, "The legacy of Sheldon Jackson and missionary work in Alaska is a mixed one of both pride and pain for indigenous [sic] people who, in many cases, were forced to abandon their Native belief systems, language, and cultural practices such as dance and art. Today many of the Christian churches from the 19th century endure as integral parts of contemporary village life."[4]

Lukin's assessment of the missionary endeavor offers no such qualification: her family experienced first-hand the destruction of culture and traditions by missionaries. She noted that Sheldon Jackson tasked the Samms with "general uplifting of Native population out of barbarianism and into civilization." He demanded English literacy, cleanliness, and "the total transformation of Native existence." Efforts to suppress Native American languages remains one of Jackson's most prominent legacies.

It is important to recognize that these experiences aren't those of anonymous people from an unknowable past. These are Lukin's family stories from the last

4 Chris Allan, *Fortune's Distant Shores: A History of the Kotzebue Gold Stampede in Alaska's Artic* (Washington, DC: National Park Service, 2019), 57.

Downloaded from http://online.ucpress.edu/tph/article-pdf/43/4/7/483621/tph.2021.43.4.7.pdf by guest on 22 March 2025

century, accounts of pain resulting from great-grandparents being considered "less than," "less smart," or having "less worth" because they did not speak English. Those feelings were passed down alongside the requirement to learn English—her family, like others in their community, speaks English as a second language. And because English doesn't translate well into Inupiaq and vice-versa, cultural relevance is compromised through translation. For example, the stereotype of Inupiat people having many words for snow is more than a droll observation by someone outside the community; comprehending how kinds of snow are distinct can mean the difference between life and death in the northwest Alaska climate.

Lukin observed that almost 100 percent of Alaska history is written by non-Alaskans, but that her history and historical knowledge is from the oral tradition. She had a unique opportunity as the Superintendent of the Western Artic National Parklands—the first Indigenous person in that role—to demonstrate why representation matters.[5] Part of her responsibility was using her voice and amplifying her community's oral history; as she said, "we have it, we know it to be true, and we know not to use Kotzebue and Samms" to describe 650 generations of history. Lukin noted that the journals of Samms and Kotzebue, available through publication or in university library archival collections, can help us understand what outsiders wrote and how their views were formed, but emphasized that the content is incomplete and often incorrect.

Explorers and colonizers arrived in homelands where subsistence lifeways were thriving, and they continue to flourish today. Traditions have adapted to new technologies and new tools, and community members speak English as well as Inupiaq, but ancestors from 1776 would recognize the practices as those inherited and passed down across generations. Inupiat people honor food security as a lived tradition of sharing and protecting resources, a 13,000-year-old lifeway filled with meaning that a century of colonization cannot undo. These narratives predate the United States but they also resonate as American stories of a shared past and a dynamic present.

Miki'ala Ayau Pescaia shared her stories as a Native Hawaiian from Molokai, like generations of her family before her. She noted, "being the first Interpretive Park Ranger and Chief of Interpretation for my park is not just a job but a responsibility to make sure that my people's voice and our perspective is present . . . as the people who were there before and what made that land and that place so special."

As we seek to broaden our boundaries of 1776 and understand more of American history, this panel suggested the National Park Service could focus on place as much as events, on Indigenous people as holders of knowledge rather than invisible witnesses. This reorientation in interpretation is a renovation which embodies reconciliation. More than a call to action, Indigenous-centered interpretation of

5 Shortly after the NCPH session, Maija Katak Lukin accepted a new role in the National Park Service, Alaska Native Tribal Relations Program Manager.

Downloaded from http://online.ucpress.edu/tph/article-pdf/43/4/7/483621/tph.2021.43.4.7.pdf by guest on 22 March 2025

our homelands can become a standard practice, an established praxis, a lifeway. We look forward to learning more stories.

• • • • •

Laurie Arnold is an enrolled citizen of the Sinixt Band of the Colville Confederated Tribes. A publicly engaged scholar, she has collaborated with the Northwest Museum of Arts and Culture, the High Desert Museum, the History Colorado Center, and the National Council on Public History. She has held a Frederick W. Beinecke Senior Research Fellowship at Yale University and an American Council of Learned Societies Fellowship. Her first book, *Bartering with the Bones of Their Dead: The Colville Confederated Tribes and Termination*, was published by the University of Washington Press in 2012.

Miki'ala Pescaia descends from a long line of Hawaiian storytellers, who captured the history of Molokai through chant, dance, and oratory. Fortunate to serve as the first interpretive ranger for Kalaupapa National Historical Park located on her home island, Miki'ala embraces the responsibility to steward the history—eras of fertile lands, hard working residents, cunning chiefs, mythical beasts, powerful deities and in the last 150 years, a quarantine settlement for individuals afflicted with Hansen's disease established by kingdom law. Miki'ala strives to bring together multiple perspectives to broaden and strengthen our collective sense of place.

Downloaded from http://online.ucpress.edu/tph/article-pdf/43/4/7/483621/tph.2021.43.4.7.pdf by guest on 22 March 2025