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4. Wakara's Skull

Settler Religion, Settler Science, and the (Re-)creation of the American West[1]

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Abstract

In 1872, the skull of Wakara (c. 1815–1855), the infamous Ute horse thief and slave trader, was stolen from his gravesite in Utah's Pahvant Mountains. I argue that what happened to Wakara's skull reveals how settler religion and settler science combined to form the dominant creation story of the American West. I recount three, interrelated creation stories of America. I also tell a fourth story about Wakara, a founding father of the American West whom few scholars of the West have heard of. The theft of Wakara's skull relates to why Wakara has been purposefully left out of the dominant creation story of the West. Yet Wakara's story, and the stories of his lineal, tribal, and spiritual descendants, also reveal that, instead of the linear

[1] Parts of this essay are drawn from my forthcoming book tentatively titled *Wakara's America*, under contract with Basic Books.

creation story of settler conquest and Indian removal, the West is being re-created constantly through cycles of displacement and diaspora as well as resistance, resilience, and return.

Keywords: Wakara, Utes, Wampanoag, Rematriation, Settler Colonialism

Introduction: The Pig, Late-Summer, 1874

Kanosh starred down into the empty tombs. Anger and sorrow welled up in the aged Pahvant Ute leader's chest. It was mid-August 1874. Earlier that day, Kanosh, the Latter-day Saints' favorite Ute ally, and five of Kanosh's acquaintances, rode their horses up Walker's Canyon in the Pahvant Mountains of Central Utah. Their destination was the massive, sandstone talus field that the locals call the "Pig"—from a distance it resembles a rooting pig on its side. The Pig sits above what was in the 1870s Kanosh's homestead and village, and which a century later became the federally recognized Kanosh Paiute Indian Reservation.[2]

The Pig was, and still is, a massive Ute cemetery. It was, and still is, archeologists estimate, home to more than 100 graves. But on August 16, 1874, as Reuben McBride, who helped oversee the Mormon colonization of the region, wrote to his superiors 140 miles north in Salt Lake City, the cemetery was no longer the final resting place of two of Kanosh's most beloved relations. Instead, McBride, along with Kanosh, and two Pahvant Utes named Scarrow and Hungatah, found that "the body of Shot, Kanosh's brother and Stambo, Kanosh's son, are entirely gone. Stolen. Kanosh hardly knows how to express his indignation" (Reuben McBride to D. B. Huntington, August 18, 1874, BYP CR 1234).

Before that day, it seemed like Kanosh had done well for himself by throwing his lot in with the Latter-day Saints who first colonized the Utes' lands three decades before. To be sure, the Latter-day Saints were pushed west by anti-Mormon persecution at the hands of the American government and the American people. But the promise of greater contact with large Native American populations uncorrupted by what the Latter-day Saints viewed as the misguided messages of other Christian missionaries in the East also pulled them west. Native Americans were crucial to the Mormon millennial vision. Their foundational text, the Book of Mormon, taught that Native Americans were degraded descendants of the Lost Tribes of Israel oblivious to their true lineage. Early Mormon prophecies mandated the Latter-day Saints to convert the "Lamanites" (the Book of Mormon name for America's Indigenous peoples)

[2] In this essay, when referring to the "Utes," I refer to the people colloquially known as the "Northern Utes," whose reservation is the Uintah and Ouray Reservation and whose official name is "the Ute Indians of Utah." There are two other federally recognized Ute tribes, the Ute Mountain Tribe whose reservation is headquartered at Towaoc, Colorado, and the Southern Ute Tribe, whose reservation is headquartered at Ignacio, Colorado. Also, in this essay, when referring to the "Latter-day Saints," I am referring to the people colloquially known as the "Mormons," the largest branch of the Mormon religious movement headquartered in Salt Lake City. I also use "Mormon" as an adjective. Though the Kanosh Paiute Indian Reservation is federally recognized as "Paiute," many of its citizens descend from Ute, Paiute, Navajo (*Diné*), and other Great Basin Native peoples. In consultation with Ute and Paiute elders, this essay includes descriptions of Wakara's gravesite. The location of the site is well known due, in part, to a set of historical placards in Fillmore, Utah, which identify the location. Following best practices in Indigenous scholarship (and following the direct wishes of Ute and Paiute elders and Wakara's descendants), this essay does not contain images of Native skeletal remains, nor any funerary objects.

to their brand of the Christian gospel, and together create a conventual people who would build a New Jerusalem in the New World to await Christ's imminent return.

When they first arrived in Utah, the Latter-day Saints expected that the eastern Great Basin's Native Americans would quickly—and in great numbers—accept the Mormon gospel. Even though they had abandoned the faith of their forefathers millennia before, the Book of Mormon promised that the Lamanites would recognize the restored gospel when they heard it preached. Yet twenty-five years after Brigham Young led the Latter-day Saints to their Zion in the Intermountain West, the Mormon prophet declared that the mission to convert Native Americans had mostly failed. Yet Young made it clear that the fault for the Natives' sometimes apathy, sometimes antipathy to the Mormon settlers, lay not with Latter-day Saints, even though they had usurped and destroyed the Natives' lands and resources and captured and enslaved many Native women and children. Instead, by rejecting the Mormon gospel most Native Americans of the Intermountain West had proven themselves too savage to be saved. "There is a curse on these aborigines of our country," Young explained to his faithful gathered in the recently completed Tabernacle in Temple Square in 1871, three years before Kanosh's visit to the Pig. "[They] are so wild that you cannot tame them." Drawing from one of the Book of Mormon's most infamous passages of supposed racial denigration (1 Nephi 12:22–23), Young declared that no one could lift the "curse" upon the Native Americans, which left them in a "dark and benighted and loathsome condition"—a condition that they earned "when they turned away [from God] and became wicked" (1871, 86–87).

As such, by the 1870s, the Latter-day Saints had made Native American removal, not conversion and conciliation, the main aim of Mormon-Native relations. With the help of the U.S. federal government, then engaged in the Indian Wars of the 1870s in the Great Plains and the American West, the Latter-day Saints had been successful in this aim. They had driven most of Utah's Native peoples—especially Kanosh's Utes who had been the region's largest and strongest tribal group before Mormon settlement of the Great Basin—off their lands. To do so, the Mormons used a lethal combination of violence, disease, environmental degradation, and deceitful treaties. Most notable for its deceit was the 1865 Spanish Fork treaty, which promised the Utes cash, food, and governmental support if they abandoned their land claims in the more verdant valleys of central Utah and moved to what would become the Uintah and Ouray Reservation located in the more arid, rocky, and desolate northeastern Utah. During the Spanish Fork treaty negotiations Brigham Young persuaded the leading Utes, including Kanosh himself, to affix their "Xs" to the lengthy document that contained the treaty's promises. The treaties promises were never kept. But the Utes were still forced—sometimes at gunpoint—to leave the lands of their forefathers.[3]

[3] There is a vast literature on the Mormons' theological views of and relationships with Native Americans in nineteenth-century Utah. See among many others, Cuch (2000), Mauss (2003), Mueller (2017), Reeve (2015), and Rensink and Hafen (2019). The Latter-day Saints are a "strange"—as Brigham famously described the Mormons—and explicitly American type of settler colonialists. Their foundational text, the Book of Mormon, declared that the New World, not the Old World, the center of the Christian drama, both in the past, present, and future. As Elise Boxer (2019) has argued, the Book of Mormon is itself a settler colonial text. The ancestors of the main figures in the Book of Mormon were ancient Israelites, sent into the wilderness on an errand by God to escape religious persecution. In the New World, they formed new societies and built cities, which they did by displacing Indigenous Americans who were there before them

In the early 1870s, Kanosh's village, a mixed tribal Paiute and Ute community of some 150 souls, stood in sharp contrast to the fate of most of Kanosh's fellow Utes. Kanosh cut his hair in the Mormon style. He was baptized into the Mormon faith. He became a private landowner and farmer. And in the Mormon fashion of the era, Kanosh even married several plural wives. His association with Mormonism and the Mormon way of life helped Kanosh remain on his homelands. There, he and his people carved out a modest slice of sovereignty in post-settler colonial Utah that imagined no place for Native Americans outside of sequestration on reservations (see Lyman 2009).

To be sure, Kanosh's losses on the Pig were personal and painful. But the stealing of Shot and Stambo's remains were incidental. McBride and Kanosh himself recognized that the grave robbers had not come to the Pahvant Mountains hunting Kanosh's relatives. They were after the remains of Wakara ((c. 1815–1855) often anglicized as "Walker"), the infamous Ute horse thief, Indian slave trader, cavalry leader, and defender of Native American sovereignty. The grave robbers got what they came for. "The once, sacred . . . burying ground of the great Chief Walker," wrote McBride, had been "desecrated." In Wakara's grave, which since his sudden and mysterious passing in 1855 had contained not only Wakara, but also five other individuals, McBride reported that they had "found but fragments remaining of the should be quiet sleepers" (McBride to D. B. Huntington, August 18, 1874, BYP CR 1234).

A postscript in his letter indicated that for McBride and the rest of Kanosh's party what happened to Wakara's remains was still a "mystery." Yet, in the American West of the 1870s, what happened to Wakara's remains—in particular, to his skull—should not have been a mystery. Or at least, it should not have been much of a surprise. Instead, the stealing of Wakara's skull reveals how settler religion and settler science combined to help create the American West.

To flesh out this history of how this American West came to be, in this essay we tell three interrelated creation stories about America and the diverse peoples who have claimed American lands as their own. We also tell a fourth, unfolding story about Wakara, a founding father of the American West who even most scholars of the West have never heard of. The stealing of Wakara's skull relates to why Wakara has been purposefully forgotten from the dominant creation story of the American West, a creation story that, we suggest here, is perhaps more myth than history. And a dangerous myth at that.

And yet Wakara's story—including, but not limited to his skull—demonstrates that the creation of the American West is not a straight line, a unidirectional march across time and space. The creation story of the West is more cyclical than lineal, constantly being re-created anew. Despite centuries-long efforts to eliminate them from the American West, I discuss how Wakara's Utes have recreated themselves as Utes both on and offer their reservation. I show, among others, how a key facet of such re-creation is the efforts to "rematriate" native fish species to the waterways of the Great Basin. These fish were once key figures in the Wakara's band of Timpangos Utes' foodways, but which settlers eliminated from the fishes' homewaters just as they eliminated the Utes from their homelands. I end with a discussion about how rematriation, instead of repatriation, is perhaps the more practical, legal, and ethical conceptual

framework to restore Wakara's remains to their resting place, and in doing so begin the restoration of Wakara's descendants to their homelands.[4]

Three Creation Stories

The first creation story is about bones. How bones, the bones of ancestors, to be precise, lay claim to lands for the sake of the ancestors' living descendants. The storytellers of this story say that, at the beginning of time, the Creator God (*Senawahv*; sena-wav) declared that the lands of Utah, and the animals and plants of the land, as well as the land's water and air, belong to nobody in particular, and to everybody at once. But the storytellers also say that *Senawahv* entrusted these lands to the *People* (the *Nuche*, or Utes). To ensure that they would "work for all they receive," *Senawahv* told Coyote, his younger brother, that the Utes would be the caretakers of the land. It would be the Utes' responsibility to safeguard the land, so that there would always be plenty of fish and deer, berries, roots, and water to share among the Utes. These resources were to be shared even with newcomers to the land, as long as newcomers respected the special relationship between the Utes and the land. After all, *Senawahv* created the Utes and the land. And when the Utes died, they were to be buried in this land, as both the people and their land were the Utes' ancestors (Duncan and Uintah-Ouray Ute Tribe 1974, 7; Conetah 1982, 2; see also "Visions of Arapine," February 4, 1855 [BYP]; "Walker's Interview with Martenas" [Jacob H. Holeman Papers]).

The second creation story is also about bones. It's story about how bones—of the Utes ancestors' and those of other Indigenous peoples of what became known as the Americas—were torn from their graves. This grave robbing was used to justify the removal of the ancestors' living descendants from the land in order to make way for newcomers, and to create America itself.

This story, as told by the Catholic pope in Rome starting in 1493, was that God declared that newcomers from Christian European nations who "discovered" lands could take these lands as their own. That is, as long as that land had not already been "discovered" by other Christian nations. And the Europeans took these lands with violence and deceit, disease, and slavery. They often did so on behalf of religion, or namely a religious institution, the Catholic Church. The *Requerimiento* of 1513, which the Spanish conquistadors read upon their arrival on the shores of "discovered" lands throughout North and Central Americas, informed the lands' inhabitants that the King and Queen of Spain were henceforth the rulers of these lands. And the lands' Indigenous people were henceforth "vassals" to the Spanish Crown. As such, they were required to acknowledge the superiority of the crown and the crown's church, "The Holy Catholic Faith." But if the Indigenous people refused, "we shall powerfully enter into your country, and shall make war against you in all ways and manners that we can," the *Requerimiento* declared. And "we shall take you and your wives and your children, and shall make slaves of them . . . and we shall take away your goods and shall do you all the mischief

[4] Though the concept has expanded in scope, in 1995 Steven Newcomb (*Shawnee/Lenape*) first described "rematriation" related to repatriation of Native remains as the work "restor[ing] a living culture to its rightful place on Mother Earth." I thank Elizabeth Nagengast-Stevens PhD, Curator of Collections and Principal Investigator Archaeologist at the Fremont Indian State Museum, for introducing the concept of "rematriation" to me.

and damage that we can" (López 1513). Whether Indigenous peoples accepted the dictates of the *Requerimiento* or not, the conquistadors followed through on their threats. They plundered their lands and possessions. They slaughtered many of the living, and enslaved others. They also refused to let the living's deceased ancestors rest (see Newcomb 2008, 32–36; Seed 1995, 77–80). In search of gold and silver, Spanish conquistadors dug up graves, leaving "skulls and bones . . . scattered all over the ground," reported archeologists centuries later (see Zárate and Cohen 1968, 52; Uhle 1991, 95).

To the north, in the creation of what they would call New England, English settlers conducted themselves in similar ways towards both living and dead Indigenous peoples. This, despite their claims that in order to "save" and civilize the New World's Indigenous inhabitants, they were bringing to the New World a purified church of Christ, and not the "Whore of Babylon," the Catholic Church (and its redheaded stepsister, the Church of England). In fact, one of the founding acts of the Pilgrims at Plymouth Plantation was Indian grave robbing. In December 1620, less than a month after they dropped anchor off the coast of the peninsula they named "Cape Cod," two settlers went in search of Indians. They were looking for the Wampanoags with whom, according to what in the nineteen-century became the most popular creation story of America, they would share a great Thanksgiving feast to which, according to the myth, both Settler and Native contributed. (In reality, that first winter, the Wampanoags saved the settlers from starvation—a decision that 400 years later many Wampanoags regret). The settlers followed a path that they hoped would lead them to a Wampanoag village where they could procure some food. Or if that failed, they hoped to find a cache of "Indian wheat" and corn, like the one that they had unearthed the day before. "It was God's good providence," the starving settlers explained, "that we found this corn, for else we know not how we should have done" (Heath 1986, 26; see, Hedgpeth 2021).

The settlers failed to find more Wampanoag food to steal. The also failed to find any living Wampanoags. But they did find dead ones. As they continued their search, the settlers came across "a place like a grave." They were impressed by the grave's size and sophisticated design—long and deep, "and covered with boards." But even after they realized it did not contain the food they were after, the settlers "resolved to dig it up." Their dig revealed even more elaborate construction. "We found, first a mat, and under that a fair bow, and there another mat, and under that a board about three quarters long, finely carved and painted, with three tines, or broaches, on the top, like a crown." The grave was also filled with fine crafted "trinkets," "bowls, trays, [and] dishes."

As they proceeded in their dig, the settlers found "two bundles, the one bigger, the other less." They tore into the first bundle. Inside, they found the bones of a man who had died recently enough that his skull "had fine yellow hair still on it, and some of the flesh unconsumed." They then ripped open the second bundle, where they found "the bones and head of a little child." The body of this clearly beloved child had been carefully encircled with "bracelets of fine white beads." The settlers claimed that they "covered the corpses again." Still, they didn't leave empty handed. "We brought sundry of the prettiest things away with us." The hungry settlers continued to dig. But apparently God's providence failed them, as they "found no more corn, nor any thing else but graves" (Heath 1986, 27–28).

More than three centuries after a pope first green lit the Spanish crown's seizure of American lands, lives, and property by invoking God's providence—a sentiment echoed by the Spanish's colonizing rivals, the English—this second American creation story was retold. This time in 1823, the U.S. Supreme Court in Washington D.C., found that the "Discovery Doctrine" had been transferred from the European Christian colonial empires to the Christian and imperious United States. In *Johnson v. M'Intoch*, Chief Justice John Marshall explained the unanimous finding of the court: because they were "heathens," the Indians merely occupied the lands of the New World, not owned them. And like the "potentates of the old world," the prelates and presidents of the United States told themselves (and the Indians) that the Indians should be willing—even grateful—to exchange their "unlimited independence" and sovereignty for the gifts of "civilization and Christianity." Associate Justice Joseph Story later explained the ruling this way: because they were not Christians, but "infidels, heathens, and savages," the "Indians were not allowed to possess the prerogatives belonging to absolute, sovereign and independent nations." According to Story, the evidence for their savagery was how the Indians used—or failed to use—the land. "The territory over which they wandered, and which they used for their temporary and fugitive purposes, was, in respect to Christians, deemed, as if it were inhabited only by brute animals" (1851, 8–9). This is why unearthing Native American remains was such an important, and insidious, project of the American colonial enterprise. Care for the dead—so that they could, one day rise again at the millennium—signified for many of the creators of the American nation the height of civilization. Proper treatment of the bodies of the deceased separated the savage "brute" from the Christian. Removal of the evidence of Native Americans' care for their dead erased evidence of the "civilized" Native Americans and thus their claims to the American lands.[5]

In the decades during and after the birth of the United States as a nation, the creation story of removal of Indian bones to make way for Americans changed. And herein a third creation emerged, one that moves from religion to science—notably the science of archaeology. Thomas Jefferson, the great polymath, author of the Declaration of Independence and the Jefferson Bible, founder of the University of Virginia, and father to many of his own enslaved people, was also an Indian grave robber. As he wrote in his *Notes on the State of Virginia* (1787), in the "neighbourhood" of Monticello, Jefferson located and excavated Indian burial mounds, which he described as vast "repositories of the dead." Jefferson estimated that one mound he dug up might be the resting place of "thousands of skeletons." The future third president of the United States also speculated about how the mound got its start. When the "aboriginal Indians" as he called them, "settled in a town, the first person who died was placed erect, and earth put around him, to cover and support him; that, when another dies, a narrow passage was dug to the first, the second reclined against him, and the cover of earth replaced, and so on" (1787, 103–7).

[5] In his essay on the vital importance of repatriation of Native Hawaiian remains to reassert legally and culturally Hawaiians' claims to their own lands, Edward Halealoha Ayau cites the famous axiom most often attributed to Lord Gladstone, "Show me the manner in which a nation cares for its dead and I will measure with mathematical exactness, the tender mercy of its people, their respect for the law of the land and their loyalty to high ideals" (1992, 215).

Jefferson was careful to point out that these mounds were not ancient repositories of long-gone civilizations, as others had speculated about burial mounds. Instead, Jefferson had personally observed the mound's provenance. "About thirty years ago," Jefferson wrote, "a party" of Indians—scholars later identified them as members of the Monacan Nation—was passing "through the part of the country where [the mound was located]." These Indians "went through the woods directly to it, without any instructions or enquiry." Jefferson implies that no directions were needed. Just as the Ute Kanosh planned to do on the Pig in Utah, the Monacans knew where and who was buried at their community's cemetery. Jefferson then observed the Monacans gather at the grave "some time, with expressions which were constructed to be those of sorrow." After their solemn visit, the party "returned to the high road, which they had left about half a dozen miles to pay this visit, and perused their journey" (1787, 106). Here without realizing it, Jefferson echoes *Senawahv* and Coyote's description of the relationship between Indigenous Americans and their lands: The people (both living and dead) and the lands make each other through their relationship with each other.

Still, like the conquistadors and the pilgrims before him, Jefferson did not leave the ancestors where they were buried. Instead, he took their remains back to Monticello or sent them away to museums. Jefferson hinted that he did so for scholarly reasons. He wanted to preserve "Aboriginal" Virginia's patrimony. Jefferson wrote that nearby mounds that he had not excavated, were recently "cleared of their trees and put under cultivation, are much reduced in their height, and spread in width, by the plough, and will probably disappear in time" (1787, 107). But what Jefferson suggested was well-intentioned acts of preservation, so that the Monacan remains would not fall victim to the English-cum-American plough, others would call acts of ghastly plunder. Jefferson displayed some of the skeletal fruits of his diggings as trophies at his plantation home. And those he sent to museums were used to validate Jefferson's views on the genetic supremacy of white settlers.

For a long time because of these excavations, to the list of Jefferson's progenies (the nation, public universities, a multi-racial family, which through the groundbreaking work of Annett Gordon Reed, has been reconstituted), Jefferson was also considered the founding father of American archeology. More recently, some have questioned this creation story, because, as Edward R. Adams (*Choctaw*) (2021) has observed, "archeology, much like any other science, implies observance of objective fact and adherence to scientific truth." But I argue that Jefferson deserves such progenal acclaim (or epithet). Scholars from Vine Deloria (1997) and Roxanne Dunbar-Ortiz (2015) to Anne Fabian (2010), Ronald Hatzenbuehler (2011), Samuel Redman (2016), David Hurst Thomas (2001), and Terence Keel (2018) have observed, science, and especially archeology and anthropology, like theologies of Christian supremacy before them, are ideologies. To create the American nation, these ideologies were developed and then deployed not to serve objective truth, but instead to serve the agenda of white settler American supremacy and Native American displacement.

In the nineteenth century, this third story of removing Indian bones as part of a race-based scientific ideology became less incidental and more causal. Removal of Native American bones provided the explicit justification for the removal of living Native Americans. For this project, American archeological interest in Native American remains narrowed to the skulls. And not just skulls of the long buried, but also recently deceased. During the so-called second Seminole War, which the U.S. government waged to remove the last Native American nation

who resisted removal west of the Mississippi, a doctor was often around to care for the (white) wounded soldiers. But those doctors did double duty as headhunters. They collected the (dead) Seminoles' heads as souvenirs and objects of study. In the most infamous case, Dr. Frederick Weedon decapitated the head of the Seminole leader Osceola, who had been under his care while he was a prisoner of war near Charleston, SC (see Wickman 199, 144–53).

Removing Native Americans from the American landscape by massacring the living and digging up the skulls of the dead continued in the second half of the century. During the so-called Indian Wars of the 1870s waged on the Great Plains and in the Rocky Mountains, ethnologists were dispatched with army brigades to collect samples of flora and fauna for display in museums back east. East Coast Americans sought to participate in the conquest of the West by visiting the growing number of Natural History Museums springing up in cities like Boston, New York, and Philadelphia, and of course in Washington, D. C. at the Smithsonian's own Museum of Natural History. And Indian remains, especially Indian skulls, became key fixtures in the natural history displays of the American West. The crania were also used to determine what the scientists, like the popes, Kings and Queens, conquistadors, and pilgrims, Supreme Court justices and U.S. presidents before them, already knew; that the Indian mind was incapable of containing civilization and self-government. The so-called "evidence" of this incapacity for civilization was the vastly smaller skull volume of Indian skulls compared to Caucasian skulls, which scientists measured through, among other techniques, poring led shot into the crania.[6]

In the twentieth century, archeologists, then accredited with PhDs from research universities that also housed massive collections of Native American remains, saw themselves not as grave robbers. Instead, in continuity with Jefferson, they claimed to be the stewards and caretakers of Native American history. The Indian Wars had killed large numbers of Native Americans. Most of the remaining Native Americans were forced onto reservations; their children were forced to attend boarding schools "to kill the Indian" within them "and save the man," as Richard Henry Pratt, the founder of the Carlisle Indian Industrial School, infamously described the governing ideology of the boarding school movement. The real Indians, twentieth-century archeologists claimed, were the dead and buried ones. For example, in 1971, archeologists led a student group on a six-week excavation of an Indian village in southwestern Minnesota. The group was confused and angered when living and breathing Native Americans, notably members of the American Indian Movement (AIM), showed up to stop the dig. AIM members took shovels away from the students, buried the trenches the students had dug, and burned their excavation notes. AIM's actions left at least one student in tears. Other would-be archeologists declared that they had lost respect for Native Americans because they had destroyed the group's work and disrespected their preservation efforts. "None of the whites could understand that they were not helping living Indians preserve their culture by digging up the remains of a village that had existed in the 1500s," wrote Vine Deloria about the incident. "The general attitude [of the archeologists and the students] was that they were the true spiritual descendants of the original Indians and that the contemporary Indians

[6] To be clear, crania volume has nothing to do with relative intelligence in humans. Even setting this aside, the idea of comparing sample crania from a uniform Indian race to compare with a uniform Caucasian race is completely specious (Wade 2021).

were foreigners who had no right to complain about their activities" (2003, 10–11; see Colwell-Chanthaphonh 2009).

During this period, Native Americans who objected to the study and public display of the skeletal remains of their ancestors waged public campaigns of protests, picketing, and political lobbying. Such efforts resulted in some of the first repatriation of Native American human remains. And in 1989, such efforts led to the passage of Native American Graves Protection and Repatriation Act (NAGPRA). Still, the angered response from the Minnesota excavators, as well as from many curators of natural history museums, state and national park administrators, and university-based archeologists suggested that for many white Americans, "they only Indians worth preserving were dead ones," as Vine Deloria (2003, 11) concluded, flipping Pratt's infamous phrase on its head.

As such, the second and third stories—how settler religion and settler science combined to create an America in which living Native Americans were first vanquished then vanished—won out in Americans' collective historical memory. And from that memory emerges the most dangerous myth of American Manifest Destiny: that it succeeded. That settlers were successful at eradicating Native peoples from the American landscape to the point that living and breathing Native Americans' experiences are treated as not having any real stake in contemporary American life. That Native lives do not matter.

By studying Native America as a part of American *history*, and not as a part of America today, even some the most celebrated recent historical studies on Native Americans' contributions to the creation of America have contributed to this dangerous myth. As Delphine Red Shirt (*Ogalala Lakota*) (2019) wrote in her review of Pekka Hämäläinen's much-lauded *Lakota America* (2019), he "forgets that we [Lakota] are still alive and well," and thus forgot to engage with Lakota about their own history. "The danger of this type of writing," Red Shirt continues, "is our (Lakota, Pueblo, Comanche) silence" in what have become the dominant creation narratives about Native peoples and their place within American society. Yet, the Lakotas, like the Utes, and hundreds of other Native American Nations, are not gone. "We are still here!" is perhaps the most common refrain in Indian Country.

Wakara: A Forgotten Creation Story of the American West

The case of the great Ute leader Wakara highlights these two truths about the creation stories of America, and in particular, the creation stories of what we call the American West. The first truth is that Native Americans like Wakara contributed to the creation of the West as we know it today. The second truth is that the removal of Wakara's skull demonstrates that Wakara have been purposefully forgotten. The dominant creation story of the American West—that the West was won by fearless cowboys and cavalries and tamed by intrepid pioneers—has no place for a figure like Wakara who both helped create the American West as a settler colonial project *and* defended sovereignty of Native American people's control over their lands.

Before connecting the story of Wakara's skull to the other stories of the skulls that I have already highlighted, let me briefly introduce Wakara. I argue that Wakara should be counted among the other central creators the American Southwest, including Junipero Serra, the founder of the California Catholic missions and Brigham Young, the founder of the Mormons' Zion in

Utah (and Wakara's sometimes partner and sometimes rival for control over Utah's Great Basin). During the 1840s, Wakara and his pan-tribal cavalry of horse thieves and slave traders dominated the 700-mile crescent of commerce known as the Old Spanish Trail. From the Spanish (and later Mexican) outposts of Santa Fe and Abiquiú in modern-day New Mexico, the trail curved around the impassible canyons of the Colorado River towards Wakara's homelands in central Utah. It then sloped southwest, traversing Paiute territory in southwestern Utah. It cut across the Nevada desert and ended at the missions-turned-*ranchos* near the California coast. Along the trail, then the most important overland route of the American Southwest, in exchange for safe passage Wakara and his men exacted tribute from traveling trade and expeditions. Wakara also assisted famed explorers including John C. Frémont with their map-making projects, helping to shape the nation's geographical and political understanding of the region. Through his raiding and trading in horses and enslaved Indians, most notably Utah's Paiutes, Wakara supplied Spanish, Mexicans, and Anglo-Americans from Santa Fe to San Bernardino with the human labor and horsepower needed to complete their settler colonial projects.

In the late-1840s, Wakara also became one of the most influential forces in the colonization of the West. Shortly after the Latter-day Saints first arrived in the Great Basin in 1847, Wakara, the consummate entrepreneur, struck a bargain with Brigham Young: in exchange for Mormon cattle and guns and promises to buy his horses and enslaved Indians, Wakara personally oversaw the establishment of the first Mormon settlements outside the Salt Lake Valley, first in Manti in central Utah and later in southern Utah along the Old Spanish Trail. Wakara was even baptized into the faith and ordained a Mormon elder. Yet his participation in the Mormons' colonialization of Utah was not borne out of religious fealty. To the contrary, Wakara used the Mormons' systems of colonialism, commerce, and even religious conversion to expand his own empire. He directed the Mormons to build settlements on the lands of his Ute rivals, whom the Mormons then displaced or massacred, allowing Wakara to consolidate power within the tribe. These settlements also lined Wakara's pockets, becoming new nodes on his network of markets for his Indian captives and stolen horses.

Yet by 1853, Wakara also became one of the West's greatest defenders of Native sovereignty. He supported, and sometimes led, a Ute uprising against the Mormons after they tried to usurp his slave trade and after they moved onto his Timpanogos band's sacred fishing grounds around Utah Lake in what is today Provo. On the grassy plains surrounding what was then called *Timp-panodze-pah-ree* (Timpanogos Lake), for at least five hundred years Wakara's Utes gathered annually during spawning season for their fish festival when they inaugurated the spring by dancing the Bear Dance, feasted on fish, conducted politics, married couples, and planned summer bison hunting. Yet starting in the early 1850s, the Mormons' irrigation ditches and fence posts damaged the rivers and creeks on these lands and made it all-but impossible for the Utes to hold their fish festivals. In response, raids organized or at least condoned by Wakara forced hundreds of settlers to abandon their fields and farms and take shelter in Mormon forts. Brigham Young was forced to sue for peace. At a peace parley in May 1854 at Wakara's camp in central Utah, Young agreed to Wakara's demands that he buy more Indian slaves, supply Wakara with more Mormon cattle, and cease further encroachment into Wakara's territory along the Old Spanish Trail (on Wakara's relationship with the

Mormons, see Walker 2002; Bagley 2019, 211–344; Farmer 2008, 15–104; Mueller 2017, 153–211; Christy 1979).

Six months after the conclusion of this period of conflict (dubbed the "Walker War"), Wakara died suddenly on January 29, 1855. By then Wakara had become such a fixture in the ongoing contest for control of the nascent American West that newspapers in big cities and in small towns—from the *Baltimore Sun* and *the Pittsburgh Gazette* to the *Swanton Journal* (VT) and *Yorkville Inquirer* (SC)—reported his demise. The likely cause of death was a communicable disease that the Mormons brought west. Rumors that Brigham Young poisoned him, perhaps lacing a gift of tobacco he sent the Ute leader, abounded then and today (see Bagley 2019, 297–344). Wakara's burial reminded non-Utes in the area of those of the pharaohs of ancient Egypt. In what was the largest (and deadliest) Ute burial ceremony of its kind—befitting Wakara's stature as the "King of the Mountains"—a dozen of Wakara's favorite horses, two of his wives, and two enslaved Paiutes were ritually killed and buried alongside the departed leader in his mountainside stone tomb in what would become known as "the Pig" above Kanosh's homestead. Another enslaved Paiute boy was buried up to his neck outside the tomb, so that scavenging animals would feast on him instead of Wakara and his death party. The boy died a few days later.

Wakara did not stay buried long. In late-summer 1872—two years before Kanosh's visit to the Pig—at the behest of the U.S. Army then fighting Indian Wars in the Rocky Mountains, an ethnologist named Henry C. Yarrow dug up Wakara and the remains of the five other ancestors buried with him. Yarrow was hunting for skulls. Discarding the rest of the bones, Yarrow boxed up the crania he found at Wakara's burial site, as he did with dozens of other skulls that he had collected throughout the Great Basin. He then shipped them back to Washington, D.C. for study at the Army's medical museum. The volume of these crania was found to be much smaller than Caucasian brains, lending supposed scientific evidence to Native American genocide on the battlefield as well as Native American sequester to the purposefully underfunded reservations, including the Utes' own Unitah and Ouray Reservation. The hope was that remaining Utes would soon die off, like any other mal-adapted species. The removal of Wakara's skull was thus one event in what Patrick Wolfe has now famously described as the "structure" of settler colonial system. The purpose was to "eliminate" Native Americans and "replace" them with settler colonialists in both the landscape of the American West and the history books as the protagonists in the creation stories of how the West came to be (Wolfe 2006; see Hollinger, Dudar, and Luze 2020).

In twentieth century, Wakara became a fixture in western lore literature. In this genre, Wakara was cast as the archetypal Indian antagonist, savage, ruthless, and backstabbing. By besting Wakara, the settlers demonstrated their cultural superiority and God's providential favor. Yet beyond appearances in these narratives, which are more myth than history, Wakara has largely been erased from the creation stories of the American West (see Gottfredson 1919, 35, 43–54, 83; Bailey 1940, 34–35; Bailey 1954, 29–45; Sonne 1962, 22–43; Nelson 1990).

Still, while the memory of Wakara's complicated life and legacy has mostly died off, in the century and a half that Wakara's remains were stolen from his gravesite, Wakara's lineal, tribal, and spiritual descendants have not. To be sure, there is no discounting the trauma that the Ute people have endured; the deepest trauma stemming from the displacement of the

People—the *Nuche*—from the people's lands. Echoing *Senawahv*, as the Ute historian and defender of Native sovereignty in his own right Forrest Cuch has on numerous occasions, "Utes are only Utes when they are on Ute lands, when they are able to care for these lands, and the lands care for them." Still, the 1865 treaty at Spanish Fork, which led to the removal of the Utes from these lands, was the beginning, not the end of the Utes' trauma. As the great Northern Ute historians and elders Clifford Duncan and Fred Contenah have detailed in their magisterial narratives of tribal history, for the last 150 years, through an unholy host of acts, all three branches of the federal government, along with partners at the state and local level, have systematically perpetuated the goal of eliminating the Ute people and Ute way of life from the American West. To name just a few of these acts, they are: the purposeful underfunding of health and educational resources on the Ute reservation; forced assimilation efforts most notably the kidnapping of Ute children as part of the Indian boarding school program; theft of communal land holdings through land allotment policies; theft of water and other natural resources from the reservation lands; termination of the Utes as citizens of sovereign Native nations through the imposition of arbitrary blood quantum policies (Duncan 2000; Conetah 1982; see Metcalf 2002; Lewis 1994, 3–70).

(Re-)Creations of the American West

Despite the efforts of settlers and the settlers' state, the Utes are still here. And like their ancestor Wakara, the Utes are *here*—in America—as fully American *and* fully Native. Wakara's descendants on the Uintah and Ouray Reservation participate in perhaps the most defining of (settler) American industries: fossil fuel extraction. The Ute Indian Tribe runs some the largest and most profitable oil and gas companies of any tribal nation in the U.S. Tens of thousands of barrels of "Uinta Basin Black Wax Crude" are pulled from the ground each week. Like many Native American communities, the Utes see themselves as true American patriots. And from the muddy trenches in Belgium during World War I to the deserts of Afghanistan and Iraq, the Utes have sent hundreds of young Ute men and women to fight and die in American wars. At every Powwow, Bear Dance, and other community-wide gathering, veterans of these wars lead the opening processional. They march into the dance grounds in Fort Duchesne, where the reservation's offices are located, carrying the American flags, and the flags of all the Armed Services, as well as the ceremonial eagle feather. The most prominent structure on the reservation is a monument honoring Ute veterans. Built with granite stone in sweeping columns, the monument is laid out in a huge medicine wheel. On the columns, names of veterans are listed alphabetically for each service branch. The Utes "did their DUTY," the monument's main plaque reads, "even in times when they were not considered citizens of the country . . . They served without hesitation and with distinction because they understood the need to defend one's own land, and they understood fundamental concepts of fighting for life, liberty, property, and the pursuit of happiness."

On the Uintah and Ouray Reservation, Wakara's descendants have also created new ways of being Native, or more specifically being *Nuche*. They have done so by creating bonds with the lands of the Uintah Basin, and with the plants and animals who also live there. Fort Duchesne's dance grounds, where the Northern Utes host the Bear Dance to inaugurate spring and conduct Powwows in early July to celebrate the height of summer and America's birthday, have become their new sacred center. In the mountains to the north, tribal members hunt

plentiful elk and deer. After a kill, "hunters make offerings in gratitude for animals who have given their lives to feed the people," Forrest Cuch recently wrote in his book that combines Christian and Ute theologies. "And the gathering of wild foods or herbs is accompanied by prayers and tobacco offerings" (Cuch and Carney 2021, 21; see Jones 2019). On the Basin's plains the Tribe raises a large bison herd, whose meat is distributed to tribal members.

Of particular interest, in the foothills of the Uintah mountains, the Tribe has also opened its own fish hatchery. The Tribe is raising fish to stock the many lakes and ponds on the reservation and to reintroduce native fish species to the Utes' ancestral waterways and fisheries, which have been destroyed due to the settlers' extractive farming, ranching, and mining practices. The restoration of endemic (native) fish to the waters in which they once swam and from which Wakara's Utes fed themselves can be seen as part of the broader rematriation movement. Rematriation aims to invert the structure of settler colonialism that has systematically alientated Native peoples from their identities, their cultures, their lands, and even their bodies by eliminating settler colonial ideologies of race (white supremacy), religion (patriarchal Christian hegemony), and misguided science, and replaces them with Indigenous epistemologies. Such epistemologies reject western notions of history as lineal progress for notions of history as relational, special, and cyclical. In the past decade, rematriation has mostly been associated with the return of sacred seeds to the Indigenous lands where they once flourished and fed humans and other animals. In what Shiloh Maples (*Ojibwe* and *Odawa*) calls "relation foodways" (instead of western terms like "food systems"), Indigenous seedkeepers—almost exclusively women—share with each other sacred seeds. They also teach each other how to plant, care for, and consume the fruits of these seeds. Likewise, Ute and other Great Basin Native peoples, along with partners in Utah's major universities, see the restoration of fish on and off the reservation lands as rematriation: the beginning of the cycle homecoming for animals, plants, and humans, and marking the end of a long season of diaspora (Valeriote 2021; Gray 2022).

Universities—long home to structures that maligned Native Americans' ways of knowing and being—increasingly recognize that engaging with Indigenous knowledge systems like seed and fish restoration projects pays dividends beyond diversity and inclusion efforts. In fact, engaging in such knowledge systems, which emphasize human integration into, not dominion over, ecosystems, are proving existential. After all, Anglo-American notions of progress—settlers moving to the West, where they displaced native plant, animal, and human populations in order to make the deserts "bloom as a rose," as the Mormons famously described their efforts in Utah—have failed both Native and Settler Americans. Such progress has left the Salt Lake Valley on the verge of a climate apocalypse. Due to the explosion of population along the Wasatch Front, and the rising temperatures brought about by climate change, the Great Salt Lake is increasingly not a lake at all, but a massive salt bed. Scientists predict that, unless mitigation efforts are enacted, within a decade the Salt Lake Valley, now home to 1.2 million people, will become unlivable. Windstorms will whip up lethal clouds of toxins, produced by the region's extensive mining and contained in the increasingly exposed lakebed. These toxins will then be inhaled by residents from Ogden in the north to Provo in the south (Flavelle and Tarnowski 2022).

The desertification of the Great Salt Lake—which some have called an impending "environmental nuclear bomb"—has understandably garnered the world's attention. Yet at

the southern end of the Salt Lake Valley, a three-decade long effort to restore Utah Lake—the ancestral homewaters of the fish that defined Wakara's band of fish eating Timpanogos Utes shows that a different future is possible. And this future, in some ways, is a return to the past.

Utah Lake was once the most verdant, well-watered, and fecund ecosystem in the Great Basin, and the sacred center of Wakara's Utes. The region was so rich with water and wildlife that when they visited the area (and likely met Wakara's grandfather) in 1776, the Franciscan explorers Dominguez and Escalante predicted that it could house the largest settlement of New Spain, even larger than Mexico City. Of course, it was the Latter-day Saints, not the Spanish, who with Young's famed vanguard company settled in Utah on July 24, 1847, a date now commemorated annually in Utah as "Pioneer Day." By the end of the century, the Mormons' specific brand of Manifest Destiny—that the pioneers made the "desert bloom as a rose"—purposefully forgot what attracted them to the region: the abundant fresh water, the game, the trees, the fish, and Wakara's Timpanogos whom they hoped to convert. At a Pioneer Day celebration in 1890, the son of pioneer and church apostle Franklin D. Richards, Franklin S. Richards declared that before July 24, 1847, for all intents and purposes Utah was a lifeless, formless *tabula rasa*. "Forty-three years ago today, this beautiful valley, which now teems with fertility and life, was a scene of utter desolation," Richards explained before a crowd of several hundred. "No sign of human life, except the Indian savage, was to be found in all the dreary waste extending hundreds of miles in every direction" (1890, 3).

Yet the opposite was true. Before they established their farms, the early Mormon settlers not only fed themselves on the abundance of native plant and animal life. In the summer of 1855, when their farms failed, the bountiful fish at Utah Lake, which had sustained Wakara's Timpanogos band for generations, saved the exploding number of settlers from starvation. An unprecedented drought and swarms of Rocky Mountain locusts decimated the Mormons' crops. The crop failure was so severe that farmers became fishermen. They squatted along what had been the Timpanogos River, but was then rechristened the Provo River. At some points, the settlers fished day and night, dragging the nets to catch fish by the barrel full. The fish were then preserved in salt and distributed to feed the settlements up and down the Wasatch fronts, including the workers toiling on the construction of the Temple in Salt Lake City. Were it not for Wakara's fisheries, which his band had carefully managed for hundreds of years, it is very likely that the Mormon settlers would have starved to death (Farmer 2008, 88–89).

When Richards gave his Pioneer Day speech in 1890, the Latter-day Saints' scientific efforts to reshape the land and its flora and fauna so that it would resemble the New England agrarian villages in which many of the settlers were reared had succeeded. But in the process, they had also destroyed the Great Basin's most fecund fishery. Ironically, in 1872, the same summer Henry C. Yarrow dug up Wakara's grave, he also studied Utah Lake's fishery. Like the padres Dominguez and Escalante almost exactly a century before, Yarrow was particularly captivated with the Bonneville Trout. Yarrow was also impressed with all the rich and diverse fish species endemic to the lake. However, he warned that the Mormons were fishing too much. And that if they didn't change their ways, Yarrow predicted that the choicest species, like the Bonneville, would "become extinct after a few years." Yarrow was right. By the early twentieth century, the lake was rendered turbid and murky, prone to massive and dangerous

algae blooms, and habitable only for the most robust of invasive species like carp, which the settlers introduced to the lake in the late 1900s to replace species that they had fished out. Wastewater from farming, mining, and steel mills also drastically altered the biochemistry of the lake. Of the thirteen native fish species in Utah Lake before Mormon settlement, only the June Sucker survived (Farmer 2008, 119–26).

And a good thing it did. The June Sucker was one of the most cherished fish of Wakara's Utes, likely because they knew that it is what scientists today call an "indicator species." The health of the June Suck population indicates the overall health of the lake. In the 1980s, an estimated 1,000 suckers were still in the Lake. Soon after, a coalition of university-based scientists, including from the Mormons' flagship institution of higher education, Brigham Young University (BYU), local landowners, politicians, environmental activists, in consultation with Native Americans formed what would eventually be called the "June Sucker Recovery Implementation Program." Through trial and error, this coalition has worked to increase the health of the June Sucker population by implementing local knowledge systems, many based on Indigenous knowledge and experiences. As Ben Abbott, a professor ecosystem ecology at BYU, has told me, a healthy June Sucker population supports a series of other species, most notably mollusks that filter the water to promote the health of other plants and animals in the water and on the land. A healthier and larger June Sucker population, which in 2021 moved from "endangered" to "threatened" on the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Survey, has led to the return of more migratory birds, waterbirds, and birds of prey. Abbott explains that instead of forcing nature to bend to humans' will, as his own Mormon settler ancestors did, the June Sucker Recovery Implementation Program "works with nature"—and the specific nature of Utah Lake—as Wakara's Utes learned to do over centuries. According to Mary Murdock Meyer, the Chief Executive of the Timpanogos Nation, who claims to be a direct descendent of Aropeen, Wakara's brother, the result is that "the lake is healing itself."[7]

To be sure, it's happening in fits and starts (Dillingham 2022). But such collaborations at Utah Lake, as well as the recently announced plans to co-manage Bears Ears National Monument by the Bureau of Land Management, the U.S. Forest Service, and five of the tribes who consider Bears Ears sacred, including the Ute Tribe of Utah, demonstrate that religious, racial, and scientific ideologies of what America is and to whom America belongs—ideologies that long excluded Native Americans as innately incompatible with the American way of life—are undergoing re-creations (Toastie 2022).

Conclusion: Rematriating Wakara's Skull

I started this essay by exploring the connection between Wakara's land and Wakara's people and the efforts waged by Americans and the American settler state to break these

[7] The Timpanogos Nation is not recognized as a tribe at the federal or state level. Many of its members are descendants of "mixed blood" Northern Utes whose tribal memberships were terminated in the 1950s as part of the broader governmental effort to force Native Americans to abandon their Native identities, assimilate into broader American culture, and also give up their claims to ancestral and reservation lands. Meyer also claims that the Timpanogos were not Utes, but were a band of the Shoshone. She has sued, unsuccessfully, to win hunting and fishing rights on the Uintah and Ouray Reservation for Timpanogos tribal members (Welling 2005; see Metcalf 2002).

connections. And I will end by discussing efforts to restore this connection by returning Wakara and his people to their lands.

Lost for more than a century, a set of remains was discovered in the early 2000s in the Smithsonian's collection that fit descriptions of Wakara's burial. Recently, I assisted the Smithsonian and the Paiute and Ute tribes of Utah in the completion of a cultural affiliation study that connected the remains to Wakara, making them eligible for repatriation. Yet the multiple tribal claims on the remains, the ethical questions about reburying victims of slavery and slaughter with the man responsible for both, and the fact that the burial site now sits on U.S. Forest Service land accessible to the public, make this case of repatriation one of the most complex in the Smithsonian's history. Despite these complexities, in our consultations with Wakara's lineal and spiritual descendants, including tribal elders of the Ute Indian Tribe and elders of the Kanosh band of Paiutes, notably Rick and Rena Pikyavit whom I have consulted about the project, and whose reservation sits just a few miles from "the Pig," it is clear that they want Wakara returned.

And yet, repatriating his remains both practically, legally, and ethically is not sufficient. Practically, reburying the remains in the Pig without changing the ownership of the lands upon which the burial grounds sit places the remains in jeopardy of another round of grave robbing. Legally, repatriation of Wakara's remains is currently impossible since repatriation, as the former Executive Director of the Indigenous Law Institute Steven Newcomb has written, "involves return of prisoners of war to their home country." The Pig is no longer located in Wakara's home country; it sits on land that is, as Newcomb puts it, "being 'held captive' by the United States" (1995). Ethically, transferring possession of Wakara's skull from the Smithsonian to Wakara's lineal, tribal, and spiritual descendants does nothing to address the trauma of turning an ancestor into an artifact, whose removal was meant to break that very bond between *Nuche* and the land that *Senawahv* bound together in the Utes' creation story.

Since repatriation is insufficient, one approach is to consider rematriation of Wakara's skull. Again, borrowing from Steven Newcomb (1995), such work would "restore a people to a spiritual way of life, in sacred relationship with their ancestral lands, without external interference." When and if Wakara is reburied on the Pig, the Pig could be restored to the stewardship of the Kanosh Band of Paiutes, perhaps co-managed with the Ute Tribe of Utah. Co-management could also break the colonial-built walls within and between tribes. Before and for some time after the arrival of settlers, who brought to Utah fixed ideas about race and ethnicity, tribal identities were fluid among the Numic peoples, including the Utes and Pauites. Individuals and families often changed their associations with tribal bands and even moved between tribes (see Smoak 2008, 19–21). Case in point is Kanosh, the founding father of the Kanosh band, who created a joint Ute and Paiute community in the 1860s and 1870s. He also refused to move to what is today the Ute Tribe's Uinta and Ouray reservation so he could maintain connection to the lands of his forefathers, especially the places where his forefathers were buried. Kanosh said as much at the Spanish Fork Treaty in 1865. The Utes "did not want to sell their land and go away . . . They wanted to live around the graves of their fathers" (see Larson 1974, 361–81; Bagley 2019, 486–501; Duncan 2000, 189–94).

Kanosh cut his hair. He became a farmer. He married multiple wives. He was baptized a Latter-day Saint. The Mormon settlers saw Kanosh's actions as capitulating to Mormon

cultural dominance and recognizing his true nature as a "Lamanite," not as an "Indian." Vine Deloria's son Phil Deloria famously described how white Americans—from the Boston Tea Party and Boys and Girls Scout Camps to Grateful Dead concerts—have "played Indian" in their efforts to establish a specific American national identity. Of course, Indians can play too. I might interpret Kanosh as playing Mormon, so that he could maintain a foothold on the land that defined him and his people, and so that he could protect the ancestors buried on the Pig.[8]

Rematriating Wakara's skull could serve not only to re-create the bonds between ancestors and their lands for the Utes and the Paiutes. Perhaps such work could begin the existential process for all people who call America home of re-creating our relationship with the land. So that we understand ourselves as sacred stewards, not extractive owners, of the lands that give us all life. So that in seven generations, when we are all ancestors, our descendants can proclaim, "we are still here."[9]

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[8] Ironically, adopting Christianity allowed a few (though not all) Native Americans to remain on their ancestral lands, to preserve their language, and to avoid becoming targets for cultural and embodied genocide (Silverman 2007; McNally 2000).

[9] Robin Wall Kimmerer describes the most generous and constructive model of "becoming Indigenous to a place," including or even especially for people from Settler backgrounds. "Becoming indigenous to a place means living as if your children's future matter, to take care of the land as if our lives, both material and spiritual, depended on it" (2013, 9, see also, 205–15).

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