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## The Use of Native American Literature for Teaching Native American History

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THE USE OF NATIVE AMERICAN LITERATURE FOR TEACHING NATIVE  
AMERICAN HISTORY

An Honors Thesis

Presented to

the Department of History  
of the University of New Orleans

In Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree of  
Bachelor of Arts, with University Honors  
and Honors in History

by

Charles DeMocker

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## Abstract

White historians, schools, and writers have produced works that teach inaccurate and biased subjects that surround Native American history and culture. While most of this inaccurate and racist writing comes from the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, Indigenous authors, both past and present, have written works that have the potential to give more historically accurate and thorough representations of their people and culture. This thesis examines three novels written by Indigenous authors to argue for using Native American fiction to correct misrepresentation of Native culture by white writers. In contrast to both novels and histories written by white people, Native American fiction can give a more accurate picture of U.S. history. This may look like a contradiction--using fiction to teach fact--but Native American novels are often correcting "historical facts" written by white historians that are actually fictions or at the very least biased points of view.

## Introduction

Whereas recently some organizations, like the Smithsonian Institute, have made sincere efforts to revise outdated depictions of Native Americans, most students in the United States continue to receive inadequate and inaccurate information about Indigenous people, often from their history textbooks. These textbooks have offered the barest minimum amount of information like "re-enacting the first Thanksgiving, building a California Spanish mission out of sugar cubes or memorizing a flashcard about the Trail of Tears just ahead of the AP U.S. History Test."<sup>1</sup> However, textbooks are only one part of the problem; literature featuring Native Americans often contributes to the issue. Even though Native American people and their history have been featured in many famous works of literature, such as Laura Ingalls Wilder's *Little House on The Prairie*, the vast majority of their depictions are very Eurocentric and stereotypical. The stories most students read have been told from white people's perspectives, ignoring much indigenous history and culture or, even worse, offering inaccurate and damaging information about Native people.

Literature written specifically by Native American authors can be used to give white people not only a better understanding of Indigenous history and culture but also a more thorough and varied one. The tendency in both history and literature by white authors has been to represent the European colonial perspective, which includes focusing on Native interactions with colonizers, as though no Native American history had existed

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<sup>1</sup> Anna Diamond, "Inside a New Effort to Change What Schools Teach About Native American History," *Smithsonianmag.com*, Smithsonian Institute, 18 Sept. 2019, <https://www.smithsonianmag.com/smithsonian-institution/inside-new-effort-change-what-schools-teach-about-native-american-history-180973166/>.

prior to the arrival of white people: "Unknown or forgotten are the many accomplishments and contributions of the Indian before, during and after the arrival of the white man."<sup>2</sup> In addition, the history of indigenous people after the complete colonization of the North American continent is frequently glossed over as if there are no Native Americans left except "reservation Indians" who, rather than being active participants in their societies, are merely "remnants of a once proud people."<sup>3</sup> And of course readers encounter the usual stereotypes of savage war parties attacking peaceful pioneers on their way west, apparently for no reason. All these tendencies keep Native Americans from being portrayed accurately, thoroughly, and sympathetically.

The purpose of this thesis is to look at how literature by Native American authors can be used to correct misperceptions about Native American history and experience. It will begin with the depiction of Native Americans and their interactions with white settlers in Laura Ingalls Wilder's *Little House on the Prairie*. This source can be used to show how white perceptions are limited and prejudiced against Native people in white-authored texts. Wilder's books have been very popular for many decades and are taught in schools; they are thus good examples of the problems of stereotypical depictions of indigenous people and limited (or slanted) white perception of historical events.

After analyzing *Little House on the Prairie*, three novels written specifically by Native American authors, which include *Waterlily* by Ella Cora Deloria, *American Indian*

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<sup>2</sup> Georgianna Lincoln, "Lack of True American Indian History in Textbooks," in *Authentic Alaska: Voices of Its Native Writers*, eds. Susan B. Andrew and John Creed (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1998), 91-95, [http://www.alaskool.org/native\\_ed/articles/g\\_lincoln.htm](http://www.alaskool.org/native_ed/articles/g_lincoln.htm).

<sup>3</sup> Jesus Garcia, "Native Americans in U.S. History Textbooks: From Bloody Savages to Heroic Chiefs," *Journal of American Indian Education* 17, no. 1 (1978): 15.

*Stories* by Zitkala-Sa, and *The Plague of Doves* by Louise Erdrich, will show an aspect or moment in history through a Native perspective. *Waterlily* is entirely fictional while *American Indian Stories* and *The Plague of Doves* are fictionalizations based on real events and people. These works will be used in chronological order with the time periods that each one is set in from the beginning of the nineteenth century to the late twentieth century, from *Waterlily* to *American Indian Stories* to *The Plague of Doves*. Finally, the paper will show what historians, both white and Indigenous, have written about the topic of Native American history as well as how schools and classrooms are handling this topic today.

### **Little House on the Prairie**

For decades, Laura Ingalls Wilder's "*Little House*" books, which present a fictionalized depiction of the author's early life, have been read and adored by many people. One review from Kirkus in 1935, the year *Little House on the Prairie* was published, is very praiseworthy by calling it "a first rate tale."<sup>4</sup> The *Little House* books have been bestsellers worldwide with over sixty million copies being sold.<sup>5</sup> In addition, the books have been used as teaching devices for children in schools. One teacher even talks about how she has been reading this book to her classes on the first day of school everyday for the past decade of her teaching career. She praises the series for being

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<sup>4</sup> "Little House on the Prairie," Kirkus Reviews, Sept. 19, 1935, <https://www.kirkusreviews.com/book-reviews/laura-ingalls-wilder/little-house-on-the-prairie/>.

<sup>5</sup> Amy Lifson, "Reading Laura Ingalls Wilder is Not the Same When You're a Parent," National Endowment for the Humanities, National Endowment for the Humanities, <https://www.neh.gov/humanities/2014/julyaugust/feature/reading-laura-ingalls-wilder-not-the-same-when-youre-parent>.

simple and very descriptive. And in addition, the Internet is full of teaching aids--workbooks, quizzes, projects and even recipes--related to the series.<sup>6</sup> However in recent years, the books, especially *Little House on the Prairie*, have come under fire by critics and some schools have even removed them because of the misrepresentation of Native Americans and their history. One example includes the American Library Association dropping Laura Ingalls Wilder's name from its children's literature award while calling out her work for its "dated cultural attitudes towards Indigenous people and people of color."<sup>7</sup> A review of the racism and historical inaccuracies of *Little House on the Prairie* illustrates the problems with the book.

There are several instances of racism towards Native Americans throughout *Little House on The Prairie*. For example in the beginning of the book, during dinner, Laura and her mother, Ma, get into a discussion about Native Americans where the latter makes her racist feelings about them very clear: "Laura chewed and swallowed, and she said, 'I want to see a papoose.' 'Mercy on us!' Ma said. 'Whatever makes you want to see Indians? We will see enough of them. More than we want to, I wouldn't wonder.'"<sup>8</sup> Even though Ma does not outright say that she hates Indians, her disdain for them, like saying that there are too many of them while also being alarmed by her daughter's desire to see

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<sup>6</sup> "The Little House Books," Little House on the Prairie, Friendly Family Productions, LLC, accessed December 23, 2021, <https://littlehouseontheprairie.com/about-us/little-house-on-the-prairie-books/>.

<sup>7</sup> Marva Hinton, "Little House, Big Problem: What to Do with 'Classic Books' That Are Also Racist," *School Library Journal*, May 28, 2020, <https://www.slj.com/?detailStory=Little-House-Big-Problem-Little-House-Big-Problem-What-To-Do-with-Classic-Books-That-Are-Also-Racist>.

<sup>8</sup> Laura Ingalls Wilder, *Little House on the Prairie* (New York: HarperCollins Publisher, 1935), 46.



them, is very evident. Another example is when Pa, Laura's father, recounts the time he saw Indians as a child: "He had see Indians when he was a boy in New York State, but Laura never had. She knew they were wild men with red skins, and their hatchets were called tomahawks."<sup>9</sup> The words that Pa uses, like "wild" and "red skins" to describe Native Americans, are clear examples of Ingalls' stereotypical depiction of them.

A very prominent example of Wilder's outdated writing depicts Mrs. Scott, a neighbor of the Ingalls family and the wife of one of Pa's friends Mr. Scott, coming over for a visit. When talking to Ma and the girls, she makes a lot of racist and insensitive remarks about Native Americans:

She said she hoped to goodness they would have no trouble with Indians. Mr. Scott had heard rumors of trouble. She said, "Land knows, they'd never do anything with this country themselves. All they do is roam around over it like wild animals. Treaties or no treaties, the land belongs to the folks that'll farm it. That's only common sense and justice." She did not know why the government made treaties with Indians. The only good Indian was a dead Indian.<sup>10</sup>

Just by reading this passage, the audience can see how Eurocentric Mrs. Scott's remarks and characterizations for Native Americans are. For one thing, Native people had to roam around America, before it was settled by the Europeans, because that was the traditional way for them to hunt and survive. The phrase "Treaties or no treaties" is also very problematic because of the American government's long history of breaking them in regards to the rights of Native people. It can very much suggest that white people's law can be broken if white people find it useful to do so. This is something that Native Americans have always complained about frequently. Finally, there is something to be

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<sup>9</sup> Wilder, 56.

<sup>10</sup> Wilder, 211.

said within the passage which is "the only good Indian was a dead Indian." This can position Native people as not really being human or really a part of God's creation of humankind. Environmental historian, William Cronon, further breaks this concept down by presenting the English perception of Native Americans and their practice of hunting: "The English used this Indian reliance on hunting not only to condemn Indian men as lazy savages but to deny that Indians had a rightful claim to the land they hunted."<sup>11</sup> The statement also violates the commandment about not killing people which can further present white people's will to break their own laws as they see fit.

While it is important to point out the biased writing and descriptions of Native Americans in Wilder's work, it is also important to analyze the different kinds of racism displayed in it, with Ma and Pa as examples. While Ma has outright admitted her feelings for Native Americans throughout the entire book--"I just don't like them."<sup>12</sup>--Pa displays a different attitude towards the Osage where he thinks of them as noble savages. While he is wary of them at first, he eventually comes to respect them. This can be demonstrated, near the end of the book, when a Native American man named Soldat du Chêne saves the Ingalls family from being massacred by the other Osage tribe. Pa recounts: "'That's one good Indian!' Pa said. No matter what Mr. Scott said, Pa did not believe that the only good Indian was a dead Indian."<sup>13</sup> While Pa's attitude towards the Osage seems more tolerant compared to Ma's biased feelings for them, it is just another form of racism that romanticizes Native Americans as primitive and not civilized and complex like white

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<sup>11</sup> William Cronon, *Changes in the Land: Indians, Colonists, and the Ecology of New England* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1983), 53.

<sup>12</sup> Wilder, 46.

<sup>13</sup> Wilder, 301.

people. This attitude may not be hateful towards Native Americans, but it still does not see them as full, complete people and nations. Had this Osage not saved the Ingalls family, Pa would not have personally thanked him.

Before building the house on the prairie, Pa gets word that the land is good for settlers to move in: "Pa had word from a man in Washington that the Indian Territory would be open to settlement soon. It might already be open to settlement."<sup>14</sup> However at the end of the book, Mr. Scott tells Pa that the American government is sending soldiers to kick him and his family off of the land. In response, Pa says:

I'll not stay here to be taken away by the soldiers like an outlaw! If some blasted politicians in Washington hadn't sent out word it would be all right to settle here, I'd never been three miles over the line into Indian Territory. But I'll not wait for the soldiers to take us out. We're going now!<sup>15</sup>

While the text states the land that the Ingalls family moved to was good for settling in, sources prove that they were squatting on Indian Territory illegally. Linsenmayer states that the family was illegally and intentionally squatting on Osage land where she makes it very clear in her article that the chances of them settling onto the Osage Diminished Reserve unknowingly were pretty slim.<sup>16</sup>

The Ingalls were not the only people squatting on the land. Throughout the late nineteenth century, many squatters settled on the land that was reserved for the Osage. Even though this practice was illegal, the Osage had come to accept that the increase of settlers moving in was inevitable:

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<sup>14</sup> Wilder, 47.

<sup>15</sup> Wilder, 316.

<sup>16</sup> Penny T. Linsenmayer, "Kansas Settlers on the Osage Diminished Reserve: A Study of Laura Ingalls Wilder's Little House on the Prairie," *Kansas History*, vol. 24, no. 3 (Autumn 2001): 169.

Within a few years intruding settlers were creeping onto the reserve lands in increasing numbers. Although many, if not most, of the Osages recognized that it was inevitable they would cede this land and remove permanently to Indian Territory, they also were not pleased at being prematurely pushed off their land by encroaching settlers.<sup>17</sup>

In fact, the Ingalls family arrived right when tensions between the two parties were very strained.<sup>18</sup> The strain that the Ingalls family feels between the white settlers and the native population resulted from a series of treaties that the U.S. government failed to hold up: "A series of treaties and agreements from 1865 to 1870 moved the Osages from the land their 1825 treaty had promised them in perpetuity off to Oklahoma, where the government promised to protect them from persistent settlers like the Ingallses."<sup>19</sup> The threat the Native Americans seem to pose to the "peaceful" white settlers needs to be considered in the context of the U.S. government's failure to live up to its obligations to the tribes and the tribal leaders' increasing frustration with white invaders taking their land, which is context that Ingalls does not give.

Even though *Little House on the Prairie* has been praised, especially by "feminist critics, as a humane and feminist alternative to the myth of 'regeneration through violence' of the masculine frontier of Zane Grey and the Wild West,"<sup>20</sup> the book has been criticized for its characters' racial attitudes. Heldrich highlights Ma's discrimination towards the Osage people: "Few critics would argue about Ma's attitude toward the Indians, an attitude clearly shaped by her predisposed racism that has signified the

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<sup>17</sup> Linsenmayer, 169.

<sup>18</sup> Linsenmayer, 169.

<sup>19</sup> Frances W. Kaye, "Little Squatter On The Osage Diminished Reserve: Reading Laura Ingalls Wilder's Kansas Indians," *Great Plains Quarterly* 20, no. 2 (2000): 125.

<sup>20</sup> Kaye, 123.

Indians as inhumane and threatening; Ma's feelings remain constant throughout the book."<sup>21</sup> Kaye reports that some of the critics are of Osage descent themselves. One of these critics, Michael Dorris, recounts feeling impossible to keep reading the book to his daughters. Dennis McAuliffe Jr., whose Osage grandmother was murdered in 1925, aggressively calls the Ingalls family "Trespassers, intruders, and violators of the nation's law." He also presents his annoyance in how nobody else has noticed or called out this biased writing.<sup>22</sup>

In the *Washington Post*, Caroline Fraser suggests the book can actually be damaging: "The novel has racist elements, and its portrayal of Indians has consequences when read uncritically and approvingly in schools."<sup>23</sup> These "consequences" apply not just to offering students an inaccurate historical picture but to actual damage that can be done to non-white children who read the book: "the novelist Junot Díaz sharply criticized the book world, saying that as an immigrant child he despaired over books like 'Little House on the Prairie.' He admonished publishers to resist 'white supremacy's cruelest enchantment: that whiteness is at the heart of absolutely everything.'"<sup>24</sup> Finally NPR notes "her work included many stereotypical and reductive depictions of Native Americans and people of color" and is "inconsistent with ALSC's [Association for Library Service to Children] core values of inclusiveness, integrity and respect, and

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<sup>21</sup> Philip Heldrich, "'Going to Indian Territory': Attitudes Toward Native Americans in 'Little House on the PRAIRIE.'" *Great Plains Quarterly*, 20, no. 2 (2000): 101.

<sup>22</sup> Kaye, 125.

<sup>23</sup> Caroline Fraser, "Yes, 'Little House on the Prairie' is racially insensitive -- but we should still read it," *The Washington Post*, March 13, 2018.

<sup>24</sup> Fraser.

responsiveness."<sup>25</sup> Even though *Little House on the Prairie* is still being read in schools today, the fact that Wilder has become a controversial figure appears to indicate that audiences are beginning to question what they are reading.

Although Wilder's writing confirms her biased views of Native Americans, critics have agreed that she "was a person of her time and place."<sup>26</sup> However, it was not just her Eurocentric views that influenced her writing, but also her political viewpoint, specifically her objection to the New Deal. The New Deal was a series of programs, which included work projects and reformations, started by President Franklin D. Roosevelt to help get people out of the Great Depression. Due to her conservative views combined with Roosevelt being a member of the Democratic Party, Wilder was against this program, as was her daughter, Rose "whose conservative politics led her to despise the New Deal and the Democratic Party."<sup>27</sup> Wilder strongly focuses on this concept in *Little House on the Prairie* where she elaborates on the myth of Rugged Individualism, which contrasts with the Native American practice of kinship and reliance on community. Professors Julie Tharp and Jeff Kleiman further describe the *Little House* series as "a consistently flawed description of American life that professes historical accuracy."<sup>28</sup> While *Little House on the Prairie* goes to great lengths to present the self-reliant pioneer trope, the Ingalls family, ironically, are seen with having lots of friends who help them

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<sup>25</sup> Kat Chow, Little House On The Controversy: Laura Ingalls Wilder's Name Removed From Book Award." 25 June, 2018 <https://www.npr.org/2018/06/25/623184440/little-house-on-the-controversy-laura-ingalls-wilders-name-removed-from-book-awa>.

<sup>26</sup> Kaye, 123.

<sup>27</sup> Julie Tharp and Jeff Kleiman, "'Little House on the Prairie' and the Myth of Self-Reliance," *Transformations: The Journal of Inclusive Scholarship and Pedagogy* 11, no. 1 (2000): 55.

<sup>28</sup> Tharp, 55.

during their time on the prairie which include Mr. and Mrs. Scott, Mr. Edwards who helps finish the house after Ma is injured, and Mr. French. All this reveals the contradictions in Wilder's views suggests that she is using her depictions of "primitive" Native Americans in a racist way to argue for white cultural supremacy.

Even though *Little House on the Prairie* has been loved by readers for many years, the recent backlash from modern critics over its misrepresentation of Native Americans, as well as some schools removing it from their libraries, has made audiences question its value and the messages it teaches. However, Wilder's work should still be read and studied because it gives teachers the opportunity to point out its errors and guide readers to a correct understanding of what really happened. In addition, although what Wilder wrote was biased and often simply wrong, that does not mean that literature about Native Americans cannot be useful. In the best case, literature written specifically by Native American authors can be used to give the audience an introduction to Indigenous American history from a Native American perspective.

### *Waterlily*

*Waterlily* is a novel by Sioux novelist Ella Cara Deloria that was written in the 1940s but was not published until 1988. The book follows the life of a young Sioux woman named Waterlily, as well as her mother Blue Bird, in the early nineteenth century on the Great Plains. The story begins with Blue Bird giving birth to Waterlily who she names as she is currently being surrounded by water lilies. Waterlily eventually grows in a young woman and learns the structure of kinship within her tribe. The story ends with her becoming a mother and staying with her family, thus fully embracing Native kinship.

Even though white people had lived in North America for some time, they had not fully colonized the continent yet and they are only referenced a few times throughout the novel. The fact that Europeans have not yet interfered with the Sioux people's lives is something Deloria wished to depict while portraying Native life: "By setting the novel in the early nineteenth century, before the wholesale invasion of whites into Dakota territory, Deloria was able to offer a 'realistic' historical picture of the Dakota without having to succumb to the requisite 'tragic' ending."<sup>29</sup> This can be an interesting reversal of how Native people have been treated in much of mainstream American history textbooks where the white people mostly get the spotlight and indigenous people are in the background: "Absent from curriculum material, the American Indian ceases to be a part of American history."<sup>30</sup> Deloria's narrative can function as a corrective to this warped version of history by centering the Native American experience and illustrating that indigenous people had full and functioning societies before European interference. Furthermore, Deloria's novel shows the multifaceted roles of indigenous women who are often left out of American history as well as kinship structures that differed from European ideas of family.

*Waterlily* is set in the nineteenth century. At that time, white people had already been living in North America for over two hundred years. However, the area where the story takes place has not been settled by white people yet. This means the colonizers have not directly interfered with the Native people's way of life aside from a few minor

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<sup>29</sup> Maria Eugenia Cotera, "'All My Relatives Are Noble': Recovering the Feminine in Ella Cara Deloria's 'Waterlily,'" *American Indian Quarterly* 28, no. 1/2 (2004): 65.

<sup>30</sup> Garcia, 15.



references throughout the book. One example includes Rainbow, Blue Bird's husband, describing an encounter with them, whom he refers to as "Long Knives," to Blue Bird as well as describing them as people:

“What kind of people are the Long Knives, really? The only one I ever saw at close range I did not like. It was at Two Packs’ winter camp up north where I was staying. He showed up one day hungry and ragged.” He turned to Blue Bird, “I have told you of this before,” then back to his companion, “The man was all hair. And his eyes were the color of clear ice, blue and cold. His hair was yellow as a sunflower on his head and over the lower half of his face. He undressed before everyone and you could see that his arms and neck and chest to the navel were black with hair, matted, ugly! That was as far as he was exposed. No one doubted his whole body was just as hairy.”<sup>31</sup>

The descriptions that Rainbow gives for the white settlers such as ugly, hairy and ragged can show another interesting reversal because of how the Europeans saw Native Americans when coming to the New World, a negative stereotype that persists even today.

The novel is valuable for how pre-contact Native life is presented to the audience. In the beginning for example, the area that the tribe originally lived in has become uninhabitable. Therefore, the magistrates decide to move out in search of new resources: "Whenever one site wore out and became unsanitary, or whenever it was time to go elsewhere to hunt deer or to gather the fruits in season, the magistrates whose duty it was to think and plan for the people ordered this move."<sup>32</sup> While this passage shows what Teton people have done in order to survive amidst dwindling resources, including their seasonal migration and nomadic lifestyle, it also shows the elders' responsibility in caring for the wellbeing and survival of the tribe.

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<sup>31</sup> Ella Cora Deloria, *Waterlily* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1988), 101-102.

<sup>32</sup> Deloria, 3.

The passage can also testify to the difference of the Native communal life compared to the white myth of rugged individualism that was presented in *Little House on the Prairie* given the fact that it is a decision enacted by the elders to move. Not only does this show their care for their immediate families but also for the entire tribe:

The four magistrates who always led the moving camp walked with the Peace Pipe extended continuously before them in propitiation of the Great Spirit. It was they who set the pace, always bearing in mind the aged and the infirm, the women with burdens on their backs and the short-legged children who trudged along beside them. As for the men, they were out on scout duty. All able-bodied men and all responsible boys were on horseback, convoying the column.<sup>33</sup>

What is also often overlooked in textbooks is how indigenous tribes changed over time; Native Americans are often presented as somehow timeless and unchanging, but the interference of the United States government caused the Teton people to change their society, due to them not being able to track buffalo anymore, in order to survive whether it was out hunting buffalo or being on their reserves.<sup>34</sup> *Waterlily* depicts the Teton people before they were forced to settle on the reserves and provides a valuable depiction of their pre-reservation society.

Another example of communal practice is depicted in *Waterlily* in the form of possible marriage: "Perhaps he was not that bad after all, and perhaps he would soon do the honorable thing—marry the girl openly, with tribal approval."<sup>35</sup> The fact that the honorable way of marrying a girl in front of an entire tribe whose communal approval is shown to be important can further support the Native practice of kinship. However an

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<sup>33</sup> Deloria, 4.

<sup>34</sup> Esther S. Goldfrank, "Historic Change and Social Character: a Study of the Teton Dakota," *American Anthropologist* 45, no. 1 (1943): 67.

<sup>35</sup> Deloria, 13.

unhappy example of Native life is shown when a war party destroys the Teton camp where Blue Bird lives: "It was unbelievable that in the short time since Blue Bird and her grand-mother had left it, any enemy war party had raided their camp."<sup>36</sup> Even though Native Americans have always been at odds with Europeans ever since colonization, this passage shows that tribes could be just as capable at inflicting violence on one another as white people, as well as further indicating that Native tribes had been doing this for many years. Even though white people would eventually take more land across the United States and in the process disrupt Native life, *Waterlily* does succeed in giving the audience a glimpse of Native American life, both good and bad, before colonization.

Ever since the arrival of the Europeans, the white perspective for Native American women has been sexualized and offensive. Examples of this include Halloween costumes, stereotypes, and sex symbols, thus taking a form of cultural appropriation. While non-Indigenous people do not see this as a big deal, this practice has negatively affected the Indigenous community which unfortunately continues today.<sup>37</sup> In fact, this narrow mindset has led to violence towards Native women in the Americas as Ramirez states: "Violence against Indian women continues today throughout the Americas. There is a high incidence of such violence in Indian communities throughout the United States

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<sup>36</sup> Deloria, 10.

<sup>37</sup> Neegahnii Madeline Chakasim, "Sexualization of Indigenous women through cultural appropriation and media," (The Indigenous Foundation, 2021), <https://www.theindigenousfoundation.org/articles?author=60db4842c420a939947d2b7d>.

and in countries such as Guatemala."<sup>38</sup> However, there have been attempts on representing Native women with more recognition for their roles in society which could be shown in an exhibit which the goal was to deconstruct the colonial view and give the audience a better view of Native life: "The power of colonial images and tales that influence reality must be underscored. To heal from this very harmful legacy, we constantly need to tell histories, images, and stories of Indian women that offer positive alternatives to degrading colonial representations"<sup>39</sup> and Deloria's work can be used to further present this idea.

*Waterlily* suggests that Native women had many roles to play in their tribes, such as leaders, healers, warriors, and storytellers. According to Cotera's work, this is something that the American government tried to erase while planning to replace it with the nuclear family model.<sup>40</sup> Cotera also explains that Deloria wished to use women as a way to better approach the topic of tribal survival: "Deloria's choice to focus on women in *Waterlily* was a consummately political one and that it represented (for its time) a fundamentally new approach to the project of tribal survival."<sup>41</sup> An example within the text is shown when a social cousin of Blue Bird, who at this point has given birth to Waterlily takes charge in setting up a new camp for the tribe:

By now the sun hung low. Blue Bird walked quietly alongside the line as if looking for her people, until a woman who was a social cousin noticed what had happened and took charge of her. After sending her family on, she turned her packhorse out of the line and settled the mother and child on the travois seat

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<sup>38</sup> Renya Ramirez, "Healing, Violence, and Native American Women." *Social Justice*, 31, no. 4 (2004): 105.

<sup>39</sup> Ramirez, 112-113.

<sup>40</sup> Cotera, 63.

<sup>41</sup> Cotera, 54.

behind and began leading the horse at an even slower walk so that its delicate burden should not be jolted by hidden bumps and stubble.<sup>42</sup>

Although *Waterlily* does further expand on what Native women's roles truly were compared to what white people have always thought, there are some instances in the book that show them having more limits than men with marriage being one example: "It was only natural for girls to be courted and to marry."<sup>43</sup> Another example is the fact that "Unmarried young women did not witness births,"<sup>44</sup> as this role was limited to married women only. This specific example further backs up the fact that marriage is the one of the highest honors a Native girl can achieve. However while Native women may have had roles, which were similar to those of European women, within their tribes, this did not make them any less equal to the men of the tribe. One example is Blue Bird and her grandmother attending a feast: "From time to time the wives and mothers of hunters brought them meat, and at the next several feasts they were invited as special guests."<sup>45</sup> This shows that unlike western women who were treated as being inferior to men, Native women, who had some jobs similar to white women like cooking and watching children, were treated as full members of their tribes, even as honored guests. Although the Eurocentric perspective towards Native women is both inaccurate and flawed, *Waterlily* does its job of not only correcting what white people have always thought of Native women but also further presenting and expanding their roles in Indigenous society and culture.

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<sup>42</sup> Deloria, 6.

<sup>43</sup> Deloria, 143.

<sup>44</sup> Deloria, 5.

<sup>45</sup> Deloria, 11.

A previous passage from *Waterlily* presents the theme of kinship that the Sioux have within their tribe, a theme that is very prevalent throughout the book. It also combats the idea of rugged individualism emphasized by authors such as Laura Ingalls Wilder as Kelsey explains: "Waterlily is determined in every way by the function of kinship, and Deloria fashions it as such by way of exploring all of the manifestations of kinship in order to instruct her readership as part of a decolonizing agenda."<sup>46</sup> Cotera further breaks this theme down by talking about how it can be used as an interpretation by the audience for the Native cultural restoration that the American government tried to dispose of and attempting to replace it with. In fact, Deloria wished to use the character of Waterlily to reintroduce the importance of kinship to Dakota people who were misplaced from American teachings of "proper" behavior by:

Drawing the reader into the internal workings of Waterlily's consciousness as she develops from a young girl who sometimes chafes against the strictures of kinship obligations into a mature young woman who eventually comes to understand the importance of these rules of behavior to the peaceful coexistence of the *tiyospaye*.<sup>47</sup>

One prominent example of kinship shown in *Waterlily* is the Teton group that Blue Bird is with comes across another tribe at a camp circle. Even though these are two different groups, the magistrates decide to welcome them and take them in as one of their own:

The people were their kind and spoke their dialect, so they knew they had found refuge. On learning of their plight and their recent tragedy, the magistrates sent the crier out from the council tipi to announce their arrival and rally the people to

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<sup>46</sup> Penelope Myrtle Kelsey, *Tribal Theory in Native American Literature*, (University of Nebraska Press, 2008), 91.

<sup>47</sup> Cotera, 55.

their aid. The response was quick. Someone gave the newcomers a tipi to live in, while public-spirited collectors carried around the circle a great bull hide into which contributions were placed. Women came running out of their tipis to add their gifts, such items as clothing and food. And thus all in a day Blue Bird and her grandmother were equipped to start life anew.<sup>48</sup>

As seen in this passage, the kinship demonstrated here greatly contrasts with Wilder's work in the sense that Native people clearly rely on each other for support and comfort. With Wilder, she and only her closet family relied on each other with little to no support from her extended family, some of whom she never sees again after leaving the little house in the woods. Deloria not only makes the kinship presented here very clear but she also combats the white perspective of Native tradition.

Even though Native Americans have been on the American continent for thousands of years, white people have mainly focused its history on themselves and their own lifestyles and achievements. However, *Waterlily* can show all audiences a non-European perspective that can give them a different side of American history. While there is nothing that can be done to fix what white people have done and written about history, perhaps the audience getting glimpses of histories that can add to the narrative and show a bigger picture will give them a broader scope of the past.

### *American Indian Day Stories*

*American Indian Stories* is a collection of stories by Sioux writer, Zitkala-Sa, also known as Gertrude Bonin. Like Laura Ingalls Wilder's novel, *Little House on The Prairie*, Zitkala-Sa's work is a fictionalized account of her own life and childhood that details her school life which involved a lot of abuse at the hands of the white caretakers

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<sup>48</sup> Deloria, 10-11.

and teachers. Other stories show her getting a job as a teacher, coming to peace with her roots after visiting her elderly mother and communicating with the Great Spirit. She also presents a few other tales surrounding her grandparents and a Sioux boy.

This book can offer a historical corrective to Wilder's limited white perspective on Native American life in the late nineteenth century. It can also show the ill effects that colonization's attempt to "civilize" indigenous populations has had on Native people with the use of the boarding schools, as one example. The mission of religiously governed missionary schools was to assimilate Native children into the white population. Zitkala-Sa attended one of them as a child after leaving her mother at the reservation:

For the Quaker-run White's Manual Labor Institute, a boarding school in Wabash, Indiana. Thus began a course of education meant to instill the values of 'civilization' and Christianity, and sever the tribal and familial bonds that supposedly held Natives back from the benefits of the modern world.<sup>49</sup>

The physical and psychological abuses she and her fellow classmates experienced during her time attending the school can also show the audience a narrative of white American colonization through the eyes of a Native person. Finally, her work can be used to contradict the assumption that Native culture is dying or fading out of existence by showing that while struggling to survive, it has not assimilated into mainstream white society.

The goal of the Indian boarding schools was for Native children to become part of mainstream society of the United States of America, which meant embracing white

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<sup>49</sup> Taduesz Lewandowski, "Changing Scholarly Interpretations of Gertrude Bonnin (Zitkala-Ša)." *Journal of the Spanish Association of Anglo-American Studies*, 41, no. 1 (2019): 34.



customs and values. In fact, Miss Marianna Burgess, who worked at the Carlisle Indian Industrial School in Pennsylvania, was responsible for creating "the Man-on-the-band-stand, a 'constructed persona' that critiqued Native ways and cajoled Carlisle students to adhere to white standards, in one of the school's many publications chronicling student life on campus, the *Indian Helper*."<sup>50</sup> The fact that the title of the newspaper is called "Indian Helper" can very much suggest that the Native children are in need of help. Even though the white writer believes that she is assisting them, the true fact is that she is both belittling and harming them because not only is she manipulating them into being a part of the white society, but she is also taking part of stripping the children of their culture and identities.

The founder of the Carlisle Indian Industrial School, Brigadier General Richard Henry Pratt, had a famous statement that summed up the white attitude towards Native education: "Pratt's motto, 'Kill the Indian and Save the Man,' reflected a curriculum marked by harsh discipline and derision for indigenous modes of life. At the school, students were stripped of their Native beliefs, customs, languages and even names."<sup>51</sup> In fact, Pratt was appointed by the American military to create the first Indian boarding school due to both controlling and torturing Native American prisoners in Fort Marion in Florida during his time in serving the army.<sup>52</sup> Furthermore, his efforts "were designed to put a final end to the Indian Wars by disrupting the passing down of indigenous

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<sup>50</sup> Daniel C. Redmond, "The Sartorial Indian: Zitkala-Ša, Clothing, and Resistance to Colonization." *Studies in American Indian Literatures* 28, no. 3 (2016): 56.

<sup>51</sup> Lewandowski, 34.

<sup>52</sup> Laura Briggs, *Taking Children: A History of American Terror* (California, University of California Press, 2020), 47.

languages and the organization of tribal nations."<sup>53</sup> Even though Zitkala-Sa does not go to this specific school, the one she does attend is very Christian which can show white peoples' attempts to "civilize" the children as well as their goal to dispose of their culture: "White 'civilization' is therefore not a new life for the Indian but, more likely, death."<sup>54</sup> And this so-called teaching environment involved a lot of abuses towards the children at the hands of white people.

When Zitkala-Sa first wrote *Indian Day Stories*, she "sought to prove to her white audience that forced assimilation, such as the regimes at the boarding schools, caused profoundly harmful psychological damage to Native people."<sup>55</sup> One of the first things that happens to her when she arrives at the school is being tied down and having her hair cut despite trying to resist at first:

I resisted by kicking and scratching wildly. In spite of myself, I was carried downstairs and tied fast in a chair. I cried aloud, shaking my head all the while until I felt the cold blades of the scissors against my neck, and heard them gnaw off one of my thick braids. Then I lost my spirit. Since the day I was taken from my mother I had suffered extreme indignities. People had stared at me. I had been tossed about in the air like a wooden puppet. And now my long hair was shingled like a coward's!<sup>56</sup>

Zitkala-Sa feeling resentful for being marked as a coward with her shingled hair can be linked to an earlier passage where she talks about cut hair being a sign of shame for Native warriors: "Our mothers had taught us that only unskilled warriors who were captured had their hair shingled by the enemy. Among our people, short hair was worn by

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<sup>53</sup> Briggs, 48.

<sup>54</sup> Lewandoswki, 36.

<sup>55</sup> Redmond, 77.

<sup>56</sup> Zitkala-Sa, *American Indian Stories*. (Boston: Digireads.com Publishing, 2012), 22.

mourners, and shingled hair by cowards!"<sup>57</sup> These two passages present the audience an example of both the physical and psychological abuse that the Native children faced.

After leaving the school, Zitkala-Sa has trouble reconnecting with her Native roots: "After three years at White's, Gertrude reunited with her mother but experienced a profound cultural alienation."<sup>58</sup> Even though she eventually regains her sense of identity and culture, this statement proves just how psychologically damaging the white schools were to the Native children. Not only did the schools impact the children's identities but also their relationships with other Native people, a lot of whom they were close to.

Zitkala-Sa describes the children going east for the school only to return "civilized":

That moonlight night, I cried in my mother's presence when I heard the jolly young people pass by our cottage. They were no more young braves in blankets and eagle plumes, nor Indian maids with prettily painted cheeks. They had gone three years to school in the East, and had become civilized. The young men wore the white man's coat and trousers, with bright neckties. The girls wore tight muslin dresses, with ribbons at neck and waist. At these gatherings they talked English.<sup>59</sup>

During her time as a student at school, an incident happens when another classmate is harshly punished for falling in the snow even though the teachers had told them not to. After the children forget these rules, Zitkala-Sa's classmate gets beaten by one of the teachers:

The woman meant her blows to smart, for the poor frightened girl shrieked at the top of her voice. In the midst of the whipping the blows ceased abruptly, and the woman asked another question: "Are you going to fall in the snow again?" Thowin gave her bad password another trial. We heard her say feebly, "No! No!"<sup>60</sup>

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<sup>57</sup> Zitkala-Sa, 21.

<sup>58</sup> Lewandowski, 34.

<sup>59</sup> Zitkala-Sa, 28.

<sup>60</sup> Zitkala-Sa, 23.

And there was the use of Christianity to intimidate the children into following the ways of white people. What can also be seen in this passage is how Zitkala-Sa frequently compares white people to the Devil, which can further show her fear of them:

Out of a large book she showed me a picture of the white man's devil. I looked in horror upon the strong claws that grew out of his fur-covered fingers. His feet were like his hands. Trailing at his heels was a scaly tail tipped with a serpent's open jaws. His face was a patchwork: he had bearded cheeks, like some I had seen palefaces wear; his nose was an eagle's bill, and his sharp-pointed ears were pricked up like those of a sly fox. Above them a pair of cow's horns curved upward. I trembled with awe, and my heart throbbed in my throat, as I looked at the king of evil spirits. Then I heard the paleface woman say that this terrible creature roamed loose in the world, and that little girls who disobeyed school regulations were to be tortured by him.<sup>61</sup>

While the Native students were tortured anyway, these few but powerful passages can implant a very haunting image of the abuses that Native children suffered to the audience.

Some white people still believe that Native culture is fading out of existence as Bethany Schnider, associate professor at Bryn Mawr College, discusses while talking about both Zitkala-Sa and Laura Ingalls Wilder. She also brings up the word *survivance* which is a Native American term for the continuation of Native traditions and practices amidst white presence: "The Indians still disappear in that tussle over historical accuracy. The living discourse of *survivance* that did and does continue in the face of these 'facts' remains unheard,"<sup>62</sup> Zitkala-Sa's proves in her book that while struggling to survive amidst European expansion, Native culture is not extinct as Redmond states: "Zitkala-Ša establishes that prior to the boarding school she already was part of a civilization that was not dying out; instead, it was surviving and learning to cope with the encroachments of

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<sup>61</sup> Zitkala-Sa, 24.

<sup>62</sup> Bethany Schnider, "A Modest Proposal: Laura Ingalls Wilder ate Zitkala-Ša." English Faculty Research and Scholarship, Bryn Mawr College, 2014.

European American expansion."<sup>63</sup> Redmond talks more about this claim by stating that she dresses in traditional Native garments in both public and photographs since this was the only way she could show her white audience the true image of Native people rather than the image they wanted to believe which was a savage Vanishing Indian. She did not want to give them the satisfaction of seeing her and her people in history books doomed for extinction.<sup>64</sup> Enoch backs this statement up further by describing Zitkala-Sa as "An Indian teacher who challenged and countered educational norms that silenced Indian voices and erased Indian culture."<sup>65</sup> Despite some white people having the mindset about the "Vanishing Indian," the fact that this book was written about a hundred years ago shows that Native culture did not get assimilated into mainstream white society but rather it adapted and pushed back against this process.

Not only can *Indian Day Stories* present the audience a perspective of Native history which includes the effects of European actions, but also be used as a warning. Although it is stated that Native culture has not faded out of existence, it is still struggling to survive which should be more of an importance for people to try and preserve it. This is something very important today because Native people only make up a small percentage of the current American population. Native Hope dives into detail about this while also discussing how culture is a part of identity, like family recipes, songs, and dances, and that it will disappear along with the people who are a part of it. Finally, it shows how Native culture is struggling to stay alive and that it needs attention in order to

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<sup>63</sup> Redmond, 59.

<sup>64</sup> Redmond, 77.

<sup>65</sup> Jessica Enoch, "Resisting the Script of Indian Education: Zitkala Ša and the Carlisle Indian School." *College English* 65, no. 2 (2002): 118.

survive and it can only heal when people start to call from the past in order to help shape the future.<sup>66</sup> And sadly, a few aspects of Native culture like some languages and lifestyle are no longer a part of Indigenous American lifestyle. However, people are making an effort on bringing some Native traditions and languages back. For example, Cape Breton University, located in the Canadian province of Nova Scotia, has programs that not only teach the history of the Mi'kmaq people, who are the indigenous people of the island, but also their language: "At CBU, the Mi'kmaq Studies courses focus on two major themes of study: Mi'kmaw language and culture; and Mi'kmaw politics, history and governance. These courses are designed to provide a solid foundation for both Indigenous and non-Indigenous students alike."<sup>67</sup> Ultimately, people who can gain knowledge from this book have the ability to apply it to the present and make the future a better place for those who have been oppressed and misrepresented.

### **The Plague of Doves**

*The Plague of Doves* is a novel by Ojibwe author Louise Erdrich published in 2008 as the first book in her "Justice Series." The story is about the people in the fictional town of Pluto, North Dakota, during the mid to late 20th century. The residents are haunted by a lynching that happened in 1911 when three Native Americans, including a thirteen-year-old boy named Holy Track, were killed by a white mob. The mob believed the Native Americans were behind the massacre of the white farming family known as the Lochrens, which left only one baby alive. The story also focuses on the life of Evelina

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<sup>66</sup> Native Hope, "Keeping Culture Alive," Native Hope, <https://blog.nativehope.org/keeping-culture-alive-0>.

<sup>67</sup> "Mi'kmaq Studies." Cape Breton University. <https://www.cbu.ca/academics/programs/mikmaq-studies/>.

Harp, a young woman of both Native American and European descent. She recounts her family's history, which involves her grandfather, Mooshum, a survivor of the lynching. The book is fiction, but the lynching is based on a real-life event called the Spicer Massacre. While events in the novel happened in the past, the characters are still haunted by it. This symbolizes the way white violence against Native Americans in the past reverberates through indigenous cultures today. Erdrich retells the massacre and offers an alternative version of what really happened and who the murderer was that undermines stereotypical Eurocentric beliefs about Native American violence. The book can furthermore offer people a view of the lingering legacy of European colonization as well as the effects of white colonialism in the form of multi-generational trauma, which is revisited in another novel in the justice series, *The Round House*.

In 1897 in what would become the state of North Dakota, a white farming family of six named the Spicers was brutally attacked in their home and killed "with the exception of two daughters of Mr. and Mrs. Spicer, who chanced to be away from home at the time."<sup>68</sup> After a farmer discovered the crime scene, law enforcement started a search for the perpetrators. While it is still a mystery as to who really killed the Spicer family, some people believed that Native Americans were involved:

It is believed that Indians may have been the murderers, although there is nothing to substantiate the theory other than that a number of them are said to have been seen loitering about the neighborhood. It is said they were decked with war paint, which is considered proof that they were out for mischief.<sup>69</sup>

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<sup>68</sup> "A Horrible Deed," *Stevens Point Journal* (Stevens Point, WI), Feb. 19, 1897.

<sup>69</sup> "A Horrible Deed."

A group of vigilantes sought out two Native men and a boy and lynched them as an old newspaper details in rather biased language:

The murder of the Spicer family, near the village of Winona, in this county, on Feb. 21 last, has been summarily avenged. Alexander Coudot, the Indian halfbreed; Paul Holytrack, and Phillip Ireland, full-blooded Indians, were taken from the jail here last night and lynched by a mob of white men. The lynching had been coolly and carefully planned and was carried out without a hitch in the programme. The lynchers worked quietly and with determination. They were in sufficient force to have overcome any resistance that might have been offered, and as there is no such thing as a militia company or other like body in the vicinity, and as there are only a few residents in the town, there was no one to offer any opposition.<sup>70</sup>

The way the newspaper seems to applaud the lynching and is clearly biased against the Native men and boy shows that not only were the people behind the lynching racist but also the writer of this work and presumably the readers. White settlers enacted their own form of "frontier justice" that did not consider the rights of the Native Americans and assumed their guilt based on racism.

Erdrich uses the Spicer massacre as inspiration but changes the details to give the Native American point of view and to criticize the role of white people. The setting of the novel itself offers a clue about white ignorance and arrogance. *The Plague of Doves* is set in the fictional town of Pluto. The name of the town is very ironic in the story because Pluto is the name of the Roman god of death and the underworld; and it is within this town that death takes place, as with the lynching of the Native men. The town's name also reveals the ignorance of the white people who founded it. Cordelia Lochren, the sole survivor of the murdered white family, explains, "Frank Harp suggested Pluto and it was

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<sup>70</sup> The Inter Ocean (Chicago, Illinois) printed on the 15th of November, 1897, Massacre of the Spicer Family Is Avenged By a Mob.



accepted before anyone realized they'd named a town for the god of the underworld."<sup>71</sup>

While this passage at first glance seems unimportant, it functions as an example of white arrogance and ignorance. The founders of Pluto did not take into consideration that they would be naming their potentially prosperous town after a god that does not represent what the founders envisioned. However the town does end up being a place of death for the Native American inhabitants.

In addition to referring to the pagan god of the dead, the book alludes to the Christian religion brought by white people and twists the Christian symbolism into something negative. According to the *Oxford English Dictionary*, a dove is a bird, but it can also be "a messenger of peace and deliverance from anxiety, as was the dove to Noah."<sup>72</sup> Doves are a symbol of peace in the Christian religion. For the Native people of Pluto however, the doves are a plague, just as the white settlers and their religion were. Evelina recounts: "The doves ate the wheat seedlings and the rye and started on the corn. They ate the sprouts of new flowers and the buds of apples and the tough leaves of oak tress and even last year's chaff."<sup>73</sup> The doves clearly symbolize how white settlers took everything, including land, from the Native people leaving nothing for the indigenous people to salvage.

Erdrich's novel exposes both the legacy of European colonization and the violence inflicted upon the Native people, which continue in the present, specifically using historical events such as the massacre. Eldrich makes this clear in *The Plague of Doves*;

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<sup>71</sup> Louise Erdrich, *The Plague of Doves* (New York: HarperCollins Publisher, 2008): 297.

<sup>72</sup> *Oxford English Dictionary*, 2nd ed (1989), s.v. "Dove."

<sup>73</sup> Erdrich, 5.

Deborah Madsen, professor of American Literature at the University of Geneva, discusses how the misfortunes of Native Americans, such as land division, historical displacement, and murder, are advantages that whites have used in order to gain power. Madsen writes that Erdrich uses characters like Evelina and Judge Antone Coutts, who are mostly unaware of their family history, to illustrate white privilege and the impact it has had on all generations.<sup>74</sup> An example of the legacy of European colonization in North America is shown in *The Plague of Doves* when Evelina describes her future grandmother who is Métis, a person who has both white and Native American ancestry:

She had the pale, opaque skin and slanting black eyes of the Metis or Michif women in whose honor the bishop of that diocese had written a warning to his priests, advising them to pray hard in the presence of half-breed women, and to remember that although their forms were inordinately fair their hearts were savage and permeable.<sup>75</sup>

The way Evelina describes the clergy's perception of Native or Métis women reflects what most white people have projected onto Native women, which has justified their sexualization and white domination.

*The Plague of Doves* depicts the greed of white people and how it directly and indirectly affects the lives of Native Americans. To further demonstrate her point of the legacy of colonialism, Erdrich uses the cannibalistic monster known as the *wiindigoo* to represent the white colonizers, which is common in Native American stories:

"Wiindigo—otherwise known as colonization—is the name of the monster that was

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<sup>74</sup> Deborah Madsen, "Discontinuous Narrative, Ojibwe Sovereignty, and the Wiindigoo Logic of Settler Colonialism: Louise Erdrich's *Marn Wolde*." *Studies in American Indian Literatures* 28, no. 3 (2016): 25-26.

<sup>75</sup> Erdrich, 11-12.

killing us."<sup>76</sup> In fact, one of Mooshum's stories, "Liver Eater Johnson," depicts a type of *wiindigoo* because not only does the title character, who is a trapper, hate Native Americans but he is also a cannibal: "He then related the horrifying story of Liver-Eating Johnson's hatred of the Indian and how in lawless days this evil trapper and coward jumped his prey and was said to cut out the liver from his living victim and devour the organ right before their eyes."<sup>77</sup> While the word *wiindigoo* is not mentioned in the story, it is implied by the liver-eater's description; the liver-eater/*wiindigoo* works as a metaphor for settler greed for land and hatred for Native people, as Madsen discusses: "Greed for land and a willingness to murder in order to satisfy the hunger for land defines the *wiindigoo* logic of settler colonialism."<sup>78</sup> Like the *wiindigoo*'s constant craving for human flesh, white settlers have always hungered for Native land to settle in and will do anything to fulfill that desire.

*The Round House* is the second book of Erdrich's "Justice Trilogy" which takes place in 1988. The story has Joe Coutts, a thirteen-year old Ojibwe boy and the son of Antone Coutts from *The Plague of Doves*, investigating, with the help of his friends, the attack and rape of his mother, Geraldine. Very much like *The Plague of Doves*, *The Round House* tackles themes such as the colonial legacy and white greed. For example, Linda Lark, the sister of Joe's mother's rapist, who is white, explains to him why her brother, Linden, raped Geraldine:

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<sup>76</sup> Bezhigobinesikwe Elaine Fleming, "Nanaboozhoo and the Wiindigo: An Ojibwe History from Colonization to the Present," *Indigenous People's History* 28, no. 3 (2017), accessed April 14, 2022, <https://tribalcollegejournal.org/nanaboozhoo-wiindigo-ojibwe-history-colonization-present/>.

<sup>77</sup> Erdrich, 37.

<sup>78</sup> Madsen, 37.

I saw the monster in my brother way back in the hospital and it made me deathly ill. I knew that someday he would let it loose. It would lurch out with part of me inside. Yes. I was part of the monster too. I gave and gave, but know what? It was still hungry. Know why? Because no matter how much it ate, it couldn't get the right thing. There was always something it needed.<sup>79</sup>

This passage refers to white greed even though this book is set during a time where white colonization is long over, yet violence against Native people continues.

*The Round House* connects to the *wiindigoo* and *The Plague of Doves* in addition to bringing in a sexual component to the monster. In this case, the *wiindigoo*, which is Linden Lark, robs Geraldine of her body through rape just as white colonizers robbed Native people of their land and culture, often through sexual assault as well as other forms of violence. Seema Kurup, author of *Understanding Louise Erdrich*, further breaks this concept down: "Geraldine's assault has to do as much with power as with brutal sexual violence. The perpetrator, Linden Lark, is a non-Native member of the surrounding community and carries out his assault with impunity, as the tribal courts are powerless to prosecute him."<sup>80</sup> This analysis links rape to theft of Native land and identity and also illustrates how helpless modern Native Americans are in the face of injustices that stem from colonialism, such as white privilege. Although white American colonization may be over, the legacy it has left behind is still active in the sexual assaults of Native American women. According to Amnesty International: "Native American and Alaska Native women are more than 2.5 times more likely to be raped or sexually assaulted than other women in the USA. . . . According to the U.S. Department of Justice,

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<sup>79</sup> Louise Erdrich, *The Round House* (New York: HarperCollins Publisher, 2012): 300.

<sup>80</sup> Seema Kurup, *Understanding Louise Erdrich* (South Carolina: University of South Carolina Press, 2015), 66.

in at least eighty-six per cent of the reported cases of rape or sexual assault against American Indian and Alaska Native women, survivors report that the perpetrators are non-Native men."<sup>81</sup> While *The Round House* may be a different book, it, along with *The Plague of Doves*, delivers Erdrich's message of the struggles that Native people face in the modern world due to the legacy of the past. The fact that both these books are connected in terms of themes and setting strengthens the delivery of the author's message.

When *The Plague of Doves* switches from Evelina's point of view to Antone's, the chapter has him tell Geraldine that the men who lynched the Natives very likely targeted the wrong people: "I told her that later on the vigilantes admitted that they were probably mistaken. She hadn't known that."<sup>82</sup> Near the end of the book, Cordelia Lochren, who grows up to become a doctor, is treating a senile man named Warren Wolde who pays her a lot of money. At first, she believes that he is doing this because he is sympathetic for the loss of her family: "I could perhaps believe that the money gifts and the legacy were only marks of Wolde's sympathy for the tragic star of my past, and later gratitude for what I had done. I might be inclined to think so, were it not for many small, strange truths."<sup>83</sup> Later however, she realizes that the real reason Wolde was doing it was because he was the real killer of her family and not the Native men: "My last act as the president of Pluto's historical society is this: I would like to declare a town holiday to commemorate the year I saved the life of my family's murderer."<sup>84</sup> These two passages

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<sup>81</sup> "Maze of Injustice," Amnesty International USA, Aug. 8, 2011, <https://www.amnestyusa.org/reports/maze-of-injustice/>.

<sup>82</sup> Erdrich, *The Plague of Doves*, 92.

<sup>83</sup> Erdrich, *The Plague of Doves*, 310.

<sup>84</sup> Erdrich, *The Plague of Doves*, 311.

are a part of Erdrich's goal to provide historical accuracy to the Spicer massacre. Even though the real murder remains a mystery, the way she makes a white man the real killer in her story brings up the possibility that the Native men who got lynched were scapegoats. In addition, she refocuses the audience's attention onto the prevalence of white violence against Native Americans, which historically was greater than Native violence.

Even though European colonization of America has long since passed, the legacy that it has left behind is still alive with fragile relationships between Native Americans and white people, violence towards Native people, and the federal government's lack of help to address the needs of Native Americans. These are all topics that Louise Erdrich's *The Plague of Doves*, as well as *The Round House*, brings to the table. Even though things are not as bad as they were either one hundred or thirty years ago, that does not mean that America should put the past behind. All these circumstances have led directly to unfortunate events such as those related in these novels, as well as the lingering effects like the ongoing sexual violence against indigenous women. In fact, it should be more important to learn about America's dark past, as it may be one of the first steps to finally acknowledge what Native people have suffered, past and present, and try to heal the scars.

### **Native American Historiography**

So far, this paper has presented several historical fictions and narratives by Native American authors. These facts can give accurate facts about Native American people and culture such as kinship, women's roles, European colonization and the legacy and ill

effects it has had on the Native populations. While it is important to show all of this information about Native people with the use of literature, it is also crucial to understand what historians have written about this subject matter. Even though these writings may be true to some extent, there is a considerable amount of biased and Eurocentric language written in the records and there is also the difficult case of teaching Native American history.

In her work, American Indian historian, Susan A. Miller, talks about how Native people think of themselves as parts of a larger community rather than as individuals as well as how they see the cosmos and universe as a mother and father according to indigenous thought. They also believe that everything is alive and has the same amount of rights as human beings do which is important for people not to only care for themselves and their families, but also for the surrounding environment.<sup>85</sup> While the theme of kinship has been demonstrated thoroughly in *Waterlily*, the fact that it originated from the way indigenous people think can present the audience the connection to both fiction and reality and how they can illustrate the bigger picture. Angela Wilson, another scholar and history professor of indigenous descent, talks about stories she heard from her family and how it influenced her writing of history:

Growing up in a Dakota family with a rich oral tradition, I often heard my grandmother end a story with, 'that was never written in a history book.' It was her account of the Dakota past which fostered my love for history and led to my pursuit of a degree in the discipline.<sup>86</sup>

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<sup>85</sup> Susan Miller. "Native Historians Write Back: The Indigenous Paradigm in Indian Historiography," *Wicazo Sa Review* 24, no. 1 (2009): 27-28.

<sup>86</sup> Angela Cavender Wilson. "Grandmother to Granddaughter: Generations of Oral History in a Dakota Family." *American Indian Quarterly* 20, no. 1 (1996): 7.

Just like Miller, Wilson draws upon her Native background and experience to write about her history. Because of this, both historians can further give readers a wider scope of Native life.

While some historians, like Miller and Wilson, have tried to give audiences accurate teachings about Native American history, there are sadly other historians, mainly white, who have written biased things in their works about Native people. Frederick Jackson Turner, who viewed Native Americans as savages and obstacles to white progress and United States history, is an example. He believed that "white" American history represented civilization. What can also be taken away from Turner is during the year he was living in, which was 1893, no Native American history courses in were being offered by universities or historians.<sup>87</sup> Turner's open beliefs in his work can be somewhat foiled to *Waterlily* because of how the book teaches the exact opposite of what he talks about which is how Native people already had their own cultures, communities, and histories long before the Europeans showed up. His words also present the outdated Eurocentric views that white people had on Native Americans.

Turner's views can be further illustrated in his thesis that focuses on nineteenth century trade in Wisconsin. From the very first sentence in his work, Turner's Eurocentric feelings towards Native people are clearly established:

The trading post is an old and influential institution. Established in the midst of an undeveloped society by a more advanced people, it is a center not only of new

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<sup>87</sup> Steven Crum, "Rare Exceptions: Some University Professors and the Teaching of Native American History, 1900-1970." *The History Teacher* 39 no. 2 (2006): 154.



economic influences, but also of all the transforming forces that accompany the intercourse of a higher with a lower civilization.<sup>88</sup>

Later in the thesis, he starts discussing the background for forest commerce:

The Illinois bought firearms of the Indians who traded directly with the French, and that they went to the south and west to carry off slaves, which they sold at a high price to other nations. It was on the foundation, therefore, of an extensive inter-tribal trade that the white man built up the forest commerce.<sup>89</sup>

This passage not only further illustrates Turner's Eurocentric views, but it also shows how he contradicts himself. While he says that the post was the foundation for forest commerce, he brings up the fact that Native Americans originally used it for trade before white people made it their own trading center.

Even though twentieth century historians still produced works that depict a Eurocentric view of Native American history and culture, some steps were being taken in order to give Indigenous people a place in American history. In 1932 for example, the press started publishing a series called *Forgotten Frontiers* which included "biographies, volumes of edited documents, oral traditions, and ethnographic accounts but was noted for its publication of tribal histories, to which many prominent historians contributed studies."<sup>90</sup> However, it was not until the 1960s that Native American history started to be transformed. This was the result of the civil rights movement emerging that "markedly increased both the public's and the academy's interest in the history of ethnic minority

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<sup>88</sup> Frederick Jackson Turner, "The Character and Influence of the Indian Trade in Wisconsin," PhD, diss., (University of Wisconsin, 1891): 8.

<sup>89</sup> Turner, 11.

<sup>90</sup> David R. Edmunds. " Native Americans, New Voices: American Indian History, 1895-1995." *The American Historical Review*, 100, no. 3 (1995): 723.

groups."<sup>91</sup> Further public interest in Native American history increased with both the release of Dee Brown's *Bury My Heart at Wounded Knee* and the self-reliant social movement known as the Red Power movement.<sup>92</sup> The 1970s were when Native history and culture really started to get reexamined and looked at, especially for the use of teaching in classrooms with the McNickle Center, a research center of the Newberry Library in Chicago, playing a role in the development.<sup>93</sup> The 1970s even went further with Native American history attracting:

considerable attention. Long dismissed as irrelevant to the 'mainstream' of American history, pre-Columbian Native Americans had been dehumanized in opening sections of textbooks, which often included pre-Columbian societies in general discussions of climate, topography, flora, and fauna.<sup>94</sup>

And this interest has kept increasing throughout the decades, eventually leading into the twenty-first century.

From the end of the twentieth century and continuing into the twenty-first century, multiple books giving more accurate depth to Native American history and culture have been written and published. One of these books, *The Indians' New World* by James H. Merrell, addresses the Eurocentric mindset towards Native Americans in regards to how white people have always thought about them as background information in mainstream white American society: "The question has come up so often, I suspect, because the notion that Indians are somehow separate from the history of colonial

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<sup>91</sup> Edmunds, 723.

<sup>92</sup> Edmunds, 724.

<sup>93</sup> Edmunds, 724.

<sup>94</sup> Edmunds, 724.

America--indeed, of all America is so common."<sup>95</sup> *The Middle Ground*, written by Richard White, documents how white historians leave out certain aspects of American history that have been shaped by Indigenous people; many historians also ignore forced assimilation and white conquest.<sup>96</sup> Finally, *Facing East from Indian Country* by Daniel E. Richter goes into detail about seeing America from a Native perspective rather than a European one.<sup>97</sup> These three books function as examples of how the understanding of Native American history as American history has widened in the past few decades. This is also extremely prevalent now that white culture is more open to accepting the Native American viewpoint than in the past, and there is also greater accessibility to more accurate information about Native Americans.

Wilson discusses how Native people and white historians do not trust each other as regards Native history. This is because historians do not trust that Native Americans keep accurate historical records while Native Americans don't trust historians to accurately interpret their history.<sup>98</sup> This distrust has led to Native Americans being treated as background in the teachings of American history despite having their own history long before the Europeans came, as Arnold Krupat, professor of literature at

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<sup>95</sup> James H. Merrel, *The Indian's New World: Catawbas and Their Neighbors From European Contact Through The Era of Removal*. (New York: W. W. Norton and Company, 1991), vii.

<sup>96</sup> Richard White, *The Middle Ground: Indians, Empires, and Republics in the Great Lakes Region, 1650-1815*. (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1991), ix.

<sup>97</sup> Daniel K. Richter, *Facing East from Indian Country: A Native History of Early America*. (Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 2001), 8.

<sup>98</sup> Angela Cavender Wilson. "Educating America: The Historian's Responsibility To Native Americans and The Public," *Perspectives on History*, 1 May, 2000, <https://www.historians.org/publications-and-directories/perspectives-on-history/may-2000/educating-america-the-historians-responsibility-to-native-americans-and-the-public>.

Sarah Lawrence College, notes:

The second claim barring Natives from history instantiates the presumed timeless or static quality of the lives, as in the distinction of French historians--the formula here, is Bernard Cohn's--'between event-based history and history conceived as 'motionless' and of long duration.'<sup>99</sup>

The way that these scholars present how white historians have written about Native American people and culture can further illustrate how outdated and inaccurate their works are in this modern age.

Even though the European perspective in writing historical information about Native Americans has been both racist and biased, white historians do make a point about Native history being difficult to teach. Unlike the way white historians have preserved history, which is through the use of writing and keeping records, Native Americans have usually relied upon oral tradition, which is storytelling passed down by word of mouth, in their history like Wilson's grandmother practiced.<sup>100</sup> Miller also points out the complicated differences of how Native American and white historians write history when she discusses that while unwritten narratives have been used for many generations, they are a source of conflict for both white and Native historians.<sup>101</sup> The way Native Americans have presented history has contrasted to what white historians have done in the way they have used written records. Professor Steven Crum of the University of California, Davis, makes the same point as Miller while also noting that people have thought of Native Americans as "primitive people who lived outside history" or, as

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<sup>99</sup> Arnold Krupat, "American Histories, Native American Narratives." *Early American Literature*, 30, no. 2 (1995): 166.

<sup>100</sup> Wilson, *Grandmother to Granddaughter*, 7.

<sup>101</sup> Miller, 30.

anthropologist Eric Wolf, called them: "people without history."<sup>102</sup> Not only is this statement inaccurate considering that *Waterlily* shows the audience that Native people had their own cultures, communities, and histories before the Europeans took over, but it can also demonstrate the Eurocentric views white people have continued to hold. Krupat further notes the European assumption that without alphabetical writing, Native Americans could not record history.<sup>103</sup> While *Waterlily* contradicts this statement, it is very important for the audience to know about this in order because it can add more to the broad view of Native Americans, especially when it comes to history, written or not.

It is crucial for the audience to understand as much historically accurate information as possible about Native American people and culture from the Native perspective of history. However, the way that white historians and teachers have presented Native American history, while biased, is also important because the two sides can be combined to give the audience the broader view of Native Americans.

### **Teaching Native American History in Schools**

While this paper has presented what Native American authors have written about their histories as well as what white and Native professional historians have both documented, how the American school system teaches this subject must also be addressed. As mentioned earlier, many students in the United States are still being taught things about Native people that would be considered outdated and inaccurate today. However, some steps have been taken to present more accurate information and history about Native people, and recently students have started showing interest in learning more

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<sup>102</sup> Crum, 161.

<sup>103</sup> Krupat, 166.

about them. Unfortunately, many obstacles still need to be overcome such as using course materials produced by Native Americans themselves in addition to standard textbooks.

Native American representation has been biased, outdated, and Eurocentric in the American school system. This has contributed to students having limited knowledge about Native American history and culture, as a 2015 study of K-12 history standards concluded: "Findings reveal that standards overwhelmingly present Indigenous Peoples in a pre-1900 context and relegate the importance and presence of Indigenous Peoples to the distant past."<sup>104</sup> Some aspects of this treatment can be linked to how previous scholars, historians, and the public had originally thought of Native American people as a "vanishing race." This mindset originated from the belief that Native culture was primitive, would not adapt to mainstream white society, and therefore would eventually vanish.<sup>105</sup> This also brings up the white assumption, both academic and social, of Native culture dying due to not adapting to the modern world, thus further representing the biased nature of the American school system.

Despite Native American history still being outdated in schools, there have been some steps forward into trying to change this. For example, there has been a push at Westwood High School, which is located in Arizona, for the use of better accuracy for teaching Native American culture with some success achieved such as students learning more about Native American literature. In addition, the school administration is looking

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<sup>104</sup> Sarah B. Shear et al, "Manifesting Destiny: Re/presentation of Indigenous People in K-12 U.S. History Standards," *Theory & Research in Social Education* 43, no. 1 (2015): 68.

<sup>105</sup> Crum, 153-54.

for a teacher for a Native American history class.<sup>106</sup> This progress can be further demonstrated with the fact that Westwood High School has a lot Navajo students who are happy that one of the books they are reading, *Code Breaker* which is a young adult novel about Native American roles during World War II, has their language being shown as an important component of World War II history.<sup>107</sup> In fact, one student named Daniel had originally threatened to drop out of the school due to the school's teaching of Native American culture. After he read it though, he found a reason to stay enrolled.<sup>108</sup> Not only does this passage point out student awareness for the improper teaching of the school subject matter, but it also shows how students can contribute to the school's selection of teaching materials.

Just like *Code Breaker*, the books that have been discussed throughout this paper can be used in a classroom to provide a Native American perspective of American history that centers the indigenous experience rather than pushing it off to the side. For example, the website Book Rags, which notes that *Waterlily* has a target grade level between seventh and twelfth grade, has a lesson plan that includes potential worksheets, tests, quizzes, multiple choice questions and essay topics with one of them asking how the title character changes throughout the book.<sup>109</sup> This specific topic could perhaps help students link *Waterlily's* journey into fully embracing her Native kinship system to an understanding of how Native kinships systems function and how the European colonial

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<sup>106</sup> Kenan Metzger, "Embracing Intercultural Diversification: Teaching Young Adult Literature with Native American Themes." *The English Journal* 102, no. 5 (2013): 60.

<sup>107</sup> Metzger, 60.

<sup>108</sup> Metzger, 60.

<sup>109</sup> "Waterlily Lesson Plans for Teachers," Book Rags, accessed April 16, 2022, <http://www.bookrags.com/lessonplan/waterlily/#gsc.tab=0>.

enterprise disrupted this age-old system. With *American Indian Stories*. The website, TeacherVision, has a collection of discussion questions with one that asks what students can learn of the history and practice of Native American genocide. Another question asks the difficulties of a Native woman writing for a white audience at the beginning of the twentieth century.<sup>110</sup> Since it was Zitkala-Sa's goal for her white audience to understand the pain and suffering their government put her people through, the use of TeacherVision can help schoolteachers educate students into knowing more about it. Finally with *The Plague of Doves*, Study.com is a website similar to Book Rags that lists essay questions about the novel, including one that asks students to find clues to solve the Lochrens' murders.<sup>111</sup> Looking at the clues Erdrich provides and then observing how the people investigating the real-life Spicer Massacre leaped to conclusions about the Natives rather than look for clues, can show students the legacy of injustice suffered by Native Americans historically. The tragic and violent events in *The Plague of Doves* and later in *The Round House* further show how this legacy continues to affect present-day Native Americans. Since, as mentioned earlier, Indigenous People use storytelling to recount their own history, it seems appropriate to use Native American-authored literature in the same way.

Westwood High is not the only school that is changing its curriculum for more Native American representation. There have recently been some laws passed, in the wake

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<sup>110</sup> TeacherVision Staff, "American Indian Stories, Legends, and Other Writings," last updated Nov. 15, 2019, <https://www.teachervision.com/native-american-history-american-indians/american-indian-stories-legends-other-writings>.

<sup>111</sup> "The Plague of Doves Discussion Questions," Study.com, accessed April 16, 2022, <https://study.com/academy/lesson/the-plague-of-doves-discussion-questions.html>.



of the killing of George Floyd, that require schools to not only teach more accurate history about Native Americans but also forbidding them from using racist mascots as well as banning the celebration of Christopher Columbus Day and having it replaced with Indigenous Peoples Day.<sup>112</sup> Despite these working successes and pushes for better education however, there are some difficulties with teaching this specific subject.

According to Metzger, presenting accurate Native American history is not everything. It is also the case of teachers and schools altering their attitudes and views: "changing teaching practices in secondary history classrooms requires teachers to first change their attitudes and views towards teaching history."<sup>113</sup> Professor Rachel Ragland of Lake Forest College further backs this passage by using the work of adult educator Patricia Cranton, which talks about the need for people to change their attitudes and views in order to teach, to further demonstrate her point:

If their process leads to a change in assumption, it also leads to a new way of interpreting the world, and transformation has taken place. Actions and behaviors will be changed based on the changed perspective. The changes in perspectives, attitudes, and subsequent instructional practice of our history teachers support this view of transformative learning as it is applied to professional development.<sup>114</sup>

This is the case of Native American history being outdated in schools. It may be a lot to work on, but Americans are becoming more aware of their country's past and it may make it possible for the schools systems to finally reform and actually give true representation about Native people.

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<sup>112</sup> Susan Haigh, "Push for Native American curriculum in schools makes gains." ABC News, Sept. 4, 2021, <https://abcnews.go.com/US/wireStory/push-native-american-curriculum-schools-makes-gains-80004154>.

<sup>113</sup> Metzger, 60.

<sup>114</sup> Rachel G. Ragland, "Changing Secondary Teachers' Views of Teaching American History." *The History Teacher*, 40, no. 2 (2007): 220-221.

Even though the American school system has not been the best at teaching true Native American history, that does not mean that change cannot happen. Not only is the American public becoming more aware of this, but students, such as Michael from Westwood High School, are also making a stand on teaching true information. And while there is still a long way to go in not only correcting the system such as having teachers readjust their attitudes towards the teaching material and getting rid of the Eurocentric attitude of the schools, learning environments can truly become a place where everyone, especially Native Americans, is given a chance to express their cultures, practices, and beliefs.

### **Conclusion**

For generations, perspectives towards Native American culture, history, and people have been biased, racist, and Eurocentric. This attitude has been explored in several different fields of study such as history and literature with educational systems being the main representatives. However, not only can fictional works, which have been produced by Native American writers, give the audience a different perspective of the history that happened, but the school systems that teach Eurocentric material like *Little House on the Prairie* are also being pressured to change their approach. All this has occurred in light of recent events that have focused public attention on the damage caused to certain populations by often unconscious Eurocentrism. This realization has resulted in events like changing Columbus Day to Indigenous People's Day and the ongoing protests against pipelines through Native American lands.

Even though some progress has been made, in order to give Native Americans a proper place in history, there are still some obstacles to overcome. One way to achieve positive change is to increase the amount of writing by indigenous authors that is taught in schools. People who work in fields that relate to history will also have to reconsider the approach that they have always used in studying history. While all this will take some time and effort that does not mean that it cannot be done considering the progress that has already been made to combat this problem.

While white-authored materials, such as *Little House on the Prairie* and histories of Native Americans written in the first half of the 20th century, are considered outdated today, that does not mean that they should be discarded. These works have some historical value, and they can also show how historians used to approach Native American history, a kind of history of history. But while outdated works can be used, at the same time we should teach and promote books and sources written by Native Americans. This way, the audience can not only be presented with accurate facts about Indigenous Americans but they can also get a grasp of the past and how it was documented and written and strive to improve future instruction in history. Using an interdisciplinary approach, as has been done here by using both history and literature, has two advantages. First, the use of Native American literature shows that the Native American experience is not just historical and part of the past, but is also a literary effort. Second, since Native Americans themselves used storytelling to recount their own history, using literature to teach history also reproduces the indigenous way of talking about history, which will make the teaching of history in our schools less Eurocentric.

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