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Wild West in Upstate New York:
Native American Culture, Performances, and Public Debates about Indian Affairs, 1880s-1930s

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Master's Thesis

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Introduction

In February 1969, Freeman Johnson, a member of the Tonawanda Band of the Seneca near Rochester, NY, prepared for a speech on the state of Indian affairs in the United States. Although the precise date is unknown and the audience and location unmentioned, Johnson's passion and intent regarding the message he wished to spread is palpable. To his audience, Johnson tried to denote valuable intrinsic qualities Natives possessed which Americans could use to improve their society. His argument came across bluntly in Johnson's rough draft as he wrote "the Indian is a natural warrior, a natural logician [and] a natural artist." He further argued against the full assimilation of Native peoples, and instead contended that the country should work to improve Native living conditions on reservations in order to help revitalize traditional cultures that were valuable to both whites and Natives. As Johnson sums up in the end of his first paragraph: "Our proper work with him [the Indian] is improvement, not transformation."¹

Johnson's concerns mirrored many of the century-old philosophical and ideological arguments surrounding Indian policy common between the 1880s and 1930s. These ideas often mixed in contradictory ways. Historian Tom Holm, whose book *The Great Confusion in Indian Affairs* is instrumental in understanding this time frame, argues this was a "period of confusion, conflict, ambiguity, and, finally, an attempt to discover a sound philosophical foundation for a new policy toward Native Americans."² Prior to 1900, Indian affairs mostly focused on the policy of allotment. White Indian policymakers endeavored to assimilate Natives into American society by breaking up tribal lands, encouraging Natives to become individualist property-owning farmers, and eliminating traditional culture through boarding schools or dance bans.

¹ Rochester Museum and Science Center Collections: Freeman C. Johnson, 70.133.19.

² Tom Holm, *The Great Confusion in Indian Affairs: Native Americans & Whites in the Progressive Era* (Austin, TX: Univ. of Texas Press, 2005), xii.

Notions of the “vanishing Indian” influenced many of these people, who claimed that as white civilization expanded, more primitive cultures were doomed to extinction because of their supposed “inferiority.”

By 1900 a new wave of progressive-minded policymakers complicated the direction of allotment. Influenced by Progressive Movement philosophies of social transformation through national economic and health reforms, these peoples argued allotment was failing in its goals and endeavored to improve the social welfare of Native communities in these ways. Progressive reformers also saw value in stereotypes of Native culture (such as connections to nature or physical vitality) which could be used to combat the effects of industrialization and urbanization, and encouraged Natives to maintain their traditions. Even so, many simultaneously called for Natives to assimilate as most Progressives still believed they needed to be saved from vanishing. It would not be until the 1920s when most Indian policymakers abandoned ideas of assimilation or vanishing Indians, and focused more on supporting the sovereignty of tribes and socioeconomic aspects of Native societies. This direction culminated in the passage of the Indian Reorganization Act (IRA, 1934) which ended the policy of allotment in favor of tribal reorganization and cultural revitalization policies, though still largely according to the directives of the federal government rather than Native groups.

White policymakers and educators in New York State mirrored federal Indian policy in many ways. Most state officials initially believed in the vanishing ideology and endorsed assimilation. The Ogden Company (an unincorporated syndicate of land investors in NYS), however, prevented allotment from affecting the state due to its land claims. The Company claimed pre-emptive rights to purchase Indian lands if Natives ever offered to sell it, causing land rights debates which lasted well until the present day. As New York policymakers debated

their implementation of allotment, the Progressive Movement swept the nation. More officials saw value in learning about Native culture and increased support of Native communities to “preserve” their traditional culture. Amidst these shifting ideologies, the Iroquois’ distinct and powerful sovereignty claims complicated New York Indian policies due to their historic treaty relations with the state. New York and federal officials were often confused as to their jurisdictional power over the Iroquois, who resisted most attempts at control over their lands.

As policymakers debated the direction of Indian affairs, exhibitions displaying Native culture became popular across the country. These “show-Indian” events—performances by Natives which display stereotypes of Native culture, such as equestrianism, bowmanship, dress, and dances—drew crowds in many cities and towns. Audiences mostly attended Wild West shows, which claimed to offer authentic displays of Native culture. Managers framed the shows to mirror the public’s various views about Native Americans. Initially they displayed the ruthless “savagery” of Natives, though gradually offered presentations of their “noble” traits—stoicism, physiological strength, and ties to nature. Whether or not audiences were captivated by these events is uncertain as it is difficult to analyze the mindset of those viewing them, but the shows reflect a strong interest in Native cultures among Americans as they were vastly popular until America’s entry into World War I (1917). After the war, public fascination with Native culture endured in film and novels. Many Americans even imitated Native cultures individually or in organizations, such as the Boy Scouts and Camp Fire Girls, to channel the noble virtues of Natives which they believed could limit the effects of industrialization and modernization.

Show-Indian events were common in New York State. Focusing on Rochester, NY, Native exhibitions in Seabreeze and Ontario Beach staged Wild West shows which mostly depicted Natives as “bloodthirsty savages.” By the early 1900s, other parks in Rochester, which

by this time were internationally renowned for their beauty, drew large crowds for different reasons. Organizers portrayed traditional Native culture as part of the country's noble, yet primitive, past. Maplewood and Seneca Parks especially became known for staging Native dances, adoption ceremonies, and other cultural demonstrations (see figure 1). As across the U.S., America's entry into WWI caused these events to decline, though as with the rest of the nation Rochester's fascination with Native culture continued to resonate in film, theatre, museum exhibits, school plays, and organizations such as the Boy Scouts.



(Figure 1) Iroquois and white Rochesterians pose together for a picture at Maplewood Park. Many of the Native participants are dressed in stereotypical ways, such as donning Plains-style war bonnets or wearing face paint. The day's events included dances, adoption ceremonies of members of the Park Board, and other cultural demonstrations. As chapter 3 describes, most of these events were not entirely accurate. (Image from *Democrat and Chronicle* [Rochester, NY], Sun. Sep. 7, 1913, page 29).

The popularity of these events are important for several reasons. For one, while show-Indian events stereotyped Native culture, they also offered opportunities for cultural transformation and economic gain for Native participants. Performers gained additional income

outside of struggling reservations. Their paid travel experiences also allowed performers to mingle with white audiences and teach about their traditions despite the pressure of Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA) officials and Christian missionaries to abandon them. Stereotypes remained, however, as such tropes became signifiers of Native identity for whites which Natives could use to more closely connect with American groups. Native and white critics of public events gradually worked to correct these stereotypes in order to alternatively emphasize Native contributions to the country's development or revitalize more accurate Native traditions.

Second, these shows kept alive an important aspect of Native cultural identity: dances. Dance has long been a vital marker of Native identity for Natives and whites alike. As the federal and New York governments moved to eliminate Native identity, show-Indian events kept a significant piece of Native culture alive, though usually in modified form. The popularity of public dance performances also became a medium for whites and Natives to discuss concepts of Native identity, Indian policies, and American Indian roles within the U.S.

Finally, while they did not directly lead to the IRA, show-Indian events and other public cultural demonstrations by Natives contributed to fostering the public sentiments necessary to pass it. Show-Indian events ultimately helped keep aspects of traditional Native culture alive (namely dance, dress, and language) by having them remain in the public eye. While Indian identity in these performances might still be romanticized or exaggerated, it certainly did not appear to be disappearing. As more Americans came to see Native American culture as vibrant, they also grew less inclined to believe in a key aspect of allotment policies: that Native peoples were vanishing and needed to be assimilated in order to be saved. This shift mixed with other Progressive-minded movements in the country to transition public support away from tribal dissolution to tribal reorganization

Chapter 1: National and New York State (NYS) Indian Policies and Dance: 1880s-1930s

National and NYS Indian policies between the 1880s and 1930s are best summarized as transitional. Many white officials promoted policies geared towards eradicating traditional Indian identities and ways of life so as to ease Native assimilation into American society, primarily via allotment and boarding schools. They also believed Natives were “vanishing” as their supposedly primitive cultures stood no match against the progress of civilization. These conversations were slightly more complex in NYS, however. Allotment policies did not affect New York Indians because of the Ogden Land Company’s claims of pre-emptive rights to purchase Native lands. Due to the provisions of treaties between the federal government and New York Natives, such as the Treaty of Canandaigua (1794), the Haudenosaunee also developed strong claims to sovereignty.

By the 1900s, the Progressive Movement, the close proximity of many white New Yorkers to Iroquois, and especially song and dance ceremonies by Natives had a significant impact on generating interest in Native affairs among white officials, scholars, and Native Americans. This awareness encouraged many state and federal officials to push for social welfare reforms on reservations, and discussions about dance also encouraged Natives to transform or revitalize their cultures amidst pressures to assimilate. Ultimately, despite the distinct historic relationships between the Iroquois and NYS, Natives’ combined practice of traditional cultural ceremonies across the nation helped generate Indian policies from the 1880s-1930s which became arguably more sympathetic to Native issues, although state and federal officials continued to weave concepts of paternalism into many policies. Discussions over dance also illuminate how Natives used dance to renegotiate their positions in American society while maintaining aspects of their traditional cultures and powerful claims to sovereignty.

Federal Policies Towards Native Americans and Dances: 1880s-1930s

The policy of allotment dominated federal Indian policies throughout much of the 19th century. It encouraged Natives to assimilate into American society under a new allegiance to the federal government rather than to their own tribe via new legislation and boarding schools. The 1887 General Allotment Act (more commonly known as the “Dawes Act”) provided the federal government the means to implement many of these measures under the direction of the Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA). It called on federal officials to survey Native landholdings and parcel them out to individual tribe members, and also bestowed citizenship on any Indian who owned a parcel of land apart from the tribe.³ Most federal officials, such as Commissioner of Indian Affairs J.D.C. Atkins, applauded the act for fitting in well with 19th century American liberalism by stressing individual private property as a true measure of freedom and citizenship. In 1887 he wrote that the Dawes Act “may be hopeful and should be energetic” in federal efforts to encourage Natives to adopt American social values of “industry, thrift, intelligence, and Christianity.”⁴ By the late 19th and early 20th centuries, the BIA also funded more boarding schools to further support assimilation policies by attempting to directly transform Native cultures. School officials cut students’ long hair, forced them to learn English, and subjected Native youth to military protocols such as being uniformed, drilled, and marched to class.⁵

Most Indian policymakers endorsed these procedures because they argued Natives were in danger of “vanishing,” physically and culturally, as American society progressed around them.

³ “Transcript of the Dawes Act (1887),” transcribed by The Avalon Project, *Ourdocuments.gov*, date accessed 3/26/2019, <https://www.ourdocuments.gov/doc.php?flash=false&doc=50&page=transcript>, secs. 2, 5, and 6. specifically on land selection, holding in trust, and citizenship.

⁴United States Office of Indian Affairs, *Annual report of the commissioner of Indian affairs, for the year 1887* (Washington, D.C.: G.P.O., 1887), <http://digital.library.wisc.edu/1711.dl/History.AnnRep87>, vi.

⁵ Holm, *The Great Confusion*, 17-18. Pratt also sent students on summer “outing systems” whereby Native children lived and worked with white families.

Influenced by leading anthropologists like Lewis Henry Morgan and prominent historians, such as Henry Adams, many believed that mankind progressed from stages of savagery to barbarism and ultimately to civilization. These views contributed to theories of social Darwinism, which contended that humans progress across certain stages of natural development based on their innate qualities.⁶ Most federal officials embraced this worldview and believed that the United States as a Christian nation, with its democratic virtue, technological might, and superior capitalist form of economy, was the world's pinnacle of civilized society. They sought to launch Native peoples on an upward march towards civilization by breaking up tribes as a social unit, converting them to Christianity, and forcing them to adopt Euro-American-style culture and economically-dependent individual farming households after breaking up tribal lands.

By the 1890s, the Progressive Movement began to affect national Indian policies. Progressives wanted to change the national political system for the greater social good by eliminating problems caused by industrialization, urbanization, immigration, and political corruption.⁷ Many Indian reformers spawned from the Progressive Movement and focused on improving the socioeconomic well-being of Natives while encouraging incorporations of their culture into American society. Most also retained complex views about Native Americans. Advocates sought to illustrate Native contributions to American society –past, present, and future—and foster mutual respect between Indians and whites. More young Americans also believed the effects of industrialization and modernization were causing them to become more lethargic and less connected with the natural world. As one result, more people celebrated Indians' alleged “anti-modern” cultural traits, such as “rugged individualism,” and thought that

⁶ Holm, *The Great Confusion*, 14-16.

⁷ See Lears, *Rebirth of a Nation*, 195-198 for a deeper discussion on the roots and ideologies of Progressives.

by analyzing Native cultures and better understanding Native societies, they might help Americans create a more perfect modernity.⁸

Historian Tom Holm describes the goal of these efforts as “integration” rather than “assimilation” (though contemporaries might still refer to the process as assimilation). Their goal was not to eliminate Native cultures through the melting pot of American society, but rather to retain and emphasize Native culture.⁹ Supporters fostered appreciation for Natives among the white public through academic or church discussions, museum projects, literature, and other forms of art. Many people became self-proclaimed “preservationists” of Native cultures, who wanted to accurately capture the values Native cultures possessed for white society in their “original state” before they progressed to civilization. Most preservationists, such as anthropologist Alice C. Fletcher, analyzed song and dance as many considered them central to Native identity.¹⁰ But assimilationists and preservationists did not necessarily form two distinct groups, as Holm argues. Most internalized both views to the point that they believed Natives should retain noble aspects of their culture, but only insofar as they also made efforts to civilize by assimilating into white American society.¹¹

Despite the growth of Progressivism, most federal and state policymakers clung to paternalistic controls over Indian policy from the late-19th to early 20th-centuries. Many debates concerning assimilation and Native American rights often centered on increased federal attacks against Native dances. BIA officials considered dance a more primitive aspect of Native identity

⁸ Deloria, *Playing Indian*, 99-102. Deloria describes this process as “salvage ethnography,” which had roots as far back as the 1840s –see page 79.

⁹ Holm, *The Great Confusion*, 86.

¹⁰ Holm, *The Great Confusion*, 106. Curiously, Fletcher also participated in the breakup of Native lands under the Dawes Act.

¹¹ Holm, *The Great Confusion*, 146.

and issued dance bans as early as the 1880s to eliminate them. Christian missionaries largely encouraged federal officials to issue dance bans by criticizing cultural aspects of Native dances, which is reflected in Secretary of the Interior Henry Teller's basis for the BIA's first formal dance bans. In his annual report of 1883, he declared that the integral aspects of the Scalp, Sun, and War dances were "debauchery, diabolism, and savagery," which he viewed as impediments to social progress.¹²

From 1900-1934, however, BIA officials mostly argued Native dances impeded acceptance of the American capitalist values of industry, settlement, and thrift. To most BIA officials, Native dances represented idleness, nomadism, and excessive charity, as dances were often communal events in which members would give gifts to one another as well as the poor. In 1909, Commissioner Robert G. Valentine (1909-1913) impressed upon William Belden, superintendent of the Standing Rock Reservation, to "[m]ake it clear to the Indians that this Office is strictly opposed to any old time practices which help to keep them in ignorance and poverty, and that if they cannot hold a dance or celebration without neglecting their homes, farms, and stock, giving away their goods and money, etc., the Office will be compelled to forbid their continuance."¹³ Commissioner Charles Burke's (1921-1929) Circular No. 1665 and Supplement (1921/1923), which banned traditional Indian dances, also focused on the negative economic impacts of dance. While noting the "primitive" and "pagan" conditions of traditional dance, Burke primarily stressed dance's offensive practices of "the reckless giving away of property," "idleness," and "shiftless indifference to family welfare," and ultimately sought to

¹² Gabriella Treglia, "The Consistency and Inconsistency of Cultural Oppression: American Indian Dance Bans, 1900-1933," *Western Historical Quarterly*, Vol. 44, No. 2 (Summer 2013): 148; United States Dept. of the Interior, *Annual Report of the Secretary of the Interior* (Washington, D.C.: G.P.O, 1882/1883), <https://catalog.hathitrust.org/Record/004761459>, xi.

¹³ Robert G. Valentine, as quoted in Treglia, "The Consistency and Inconsistency," 149.

prevent “periods of celebration which bring the Indians together from remote points to the neglect of their crops, livestock, and home interests.”¹⁴ Scholar Tisa Treglia also notes the capitalist work-ethic arguments underlying dance bans. She argues that correspondence between Burke and BIA superintendents mostly focused on time-wasting aspects of dance, and states that “when BIA officials mentioned noneconomic reasons for curtailing dances in this period [1900-1934], they usually presented them as secondary to the key concern of crop neglect.”¹⁵

Dance bans were never completely successful partly due to jurisdictional confusion and the specific needs of local BIA officials. First, they often lacked means of enforcement. Many localities did not enact actual laws banning dances, and several superintendents were unsure whether they actually possessed the authority to enforce dance bans.¹⁶ Second, as Treglia argues, “assimilation-era dance policy was never a universal construct and that consistency in implementation was hardly a realistic expectation.” BIA officials experienced different situations within each of their jurisdictions, and occasionally chose to allow dances so long as they felt dances did not impede with socioeconomic progress.¹⁷

Native groups also heavily resisted dance bans through outright insubordination or by appealing to common American values such as freedom of expression and patriotism. Many Native groups continued to dance publicly or underground in defiance of orders. Native peoples were also often sophisticated in their resistance to dance bans by invoking collective American ideals to justify their continuing dances. They argued that because dances were religious they

¹⁴ United States, Washington, D.C., Dept. of the Interior Office of Indian Affairs, “Segments from the Circular No. 1665 and Supplement to Circular No. 1665, April 26th, 1921 and February 14th, 1923,” Charles Burke (*Webpages.uidaho.edu*, date accessed 3/29/2019), <https://www.webpages.uidaho.edu/~rfrey/PDF/329/IndianDances.pdf>

¹⁵ Treglia, “The Consistency and Inconsistency,” 151, 154.

¹⁶ Treglia, “The Consistency and Inconsistency,” 161, 164.

¹⁷ Treglia, “The Consistency and Inconsistency,” 165.

should be protected as symbols of an individual's freedom of expression. When Commissioner Cato Sells encouraged the Blackfeet Indians of Montana to limit their Fourth of July celebration to only one day, for example, tribal representative Wolf Tail argued that "These gatherings are to us as Easter is to white people," continuing with "We pray, and baptize our babies only instead of water we paint them."¹⁸

Some dance traditions changed amidst these debates, although many Natives still attached sacred significance to the performance of social dances. Socioeconomic transformations brought on by allotment threatened to diminish the spiritual implications of Native dances. Historian Clyde Ellis notes how many groups across the Great Plains prior to allotment practiced the Omaha Dance, which developed out of ceremonies linked to medicine societies across many Plains groups. As these groups became more sedentary and allotment policies pressured groups to assimilate, the dances became "more social in form and function" by the late-19th century. Many Natives found greater freedom to dance inter-tribally at fairs and exhibitions where officials did not accuse participants of immorality or preserving "savagery." Amidst these changes, dances still held great significance to these groups. The secularization process was never complete, and many Natives still attached sacred and cultural significance to dances. Dance therefore was a critical way for Native groups to escape assimilation policies of the BIA.¹⁹

NYS Policies Towards Native Americans and Dance: 1880s-1930s

Many New York State officials also endorsed allotment and assimilation policies during this period, although they struggled to implement them due to the state's complex jurisdictional

¹⁸ Wolf Tail, as quoted in Tisa Wenger, "Indian Dances and the Politics of Religious Freedom, 1870-1930," *Journal of the American Academy of Religion*, Vol. 79, No. 4 (December 2011): 865.

¹⁹ Clyde Ellis, *A Dancing People: Powwow Culture on the Southern Plains* (Lawrence, KS: Univ. Press of Kansas, 2003), 46-48, 50-54, 119-121.

relationship with the Iroquois. By the 19th century, land purchases and the state's transportation revolution greatly reduced the Iroquois' territories in the state.²⁰ Even so, the Iroquois retained land claims as a sovereign nation amidst the process of dispossession via a number of treaties. In particular, the Treaty of Fort Stanwix (1784) provided that the Iroquois relinquish claims to the Ohio Country south and west of present-day New York, though the federal government thereon promised to recognize the collective sovereignty of the Six Nations and protect their lands in NYS.²¹ The Treaty of Canandaigua (1794) was another important treaty. It provides federal guarantees of territorial integrity to the Six Nations by declaring America must not "claim or disturb" any lands belonging to the Haudenosaunee nation.²²

Despite these treaties, the Iroquois were unable to prevent New York State expansion to their sovereign territory, and two additional treaties greatly affected federal and state Indian policies well into the 20th century. In 1838, some Iroquois chiefs signed the Second Treaty of Buffalo Creek with the Ogden Land Company.²³ The Ogden Company purchased the Seneca reservations, thereby owning "all the right, title, and interest and claim of the said Seneca nation to certain lands."²⁴ Many state and federal officials, as well as the Quaker Society of Friends, opposed the treaty on the grounds of fraud and corruption. With the aid of the Friends and

²⁰ The Phelps and Gorham Purchase, for example, acquired the pre-emptive rights to 6 million acres of Native land in modern-day NYS. See Blake McKelvey "Historic Aspects of the Phelps and Gorham Treaty of July 4-8, 1788," *Rochester History* vol. 1 No. 1 (Jan. 1939). Also see Hauptman, *Conspiracy of Interests*, chapters 1, 7, and 9 for a deeper analysis of dispossession pertaining to the state's transportation revolution.

²¹ Lawrence Hauptman, *The Iroquois and the New Deal* (Syracuse, NY: Syracuse Univ. Press, 1979), 3. His first chapter of this book is a fantastic overview of Iroquois sovereignty claims.

²² "Treaty of Canandaigua, 1794," *americanindian.si.edu*, date accessed 4/10/2019, <https://americanindian.si.edu/nationtonation/treaty-of-canandaigua.html>. Article 1 relates to notions of perpetual friendship; article 3 refers to territory; and article 4 relates to territorial integrity.

²³ The Ogden Land Company was another unincorporated syndicate of investors in NYS, which formed in 1810 after purchasing the pre-emptive rights to five Seneca reservations, and one belonging to the Tuscarora, from the Holland Land Company. See Upton, *Everett Report*, pages 45-47.

²⁴ Section of the Treaty as quoted in Upton, *Everett Report*, 45-46. The treaty also required the Iroquois move to lands granted to them by the federal government in Missouri within five years, although many did not move.

sympathetic state officials, the Ogden Company and New York Indians entered a new agreement in 1842 that returned the Allegany and Cattaraugus reservations to the Seneca, but also maintained the Ogden Company's pre-emptive rights to Native lands.²⁵ As scholar Helen Upton notes, the 1842 treaty had the dual effects of strengthening Native land integrity while establishing the "Ogden claim," namely the Company's assertion that it had first rights to purchase New York Indian lands should certain Native groups choose to do so.²⁶

Because of the Ogden Claim the federal Dawes Act specifically excluded the Senecas, which provoked the NYS Assembly to resolve the many issues surrounding Indian affairs.²⁷ In 1888 the Assembly created a Special Committee to examine survey treaties to date and investigate "the Indian problem," namely the state's ability to allot Native lands (i.e. divide tribal lands, deed pieces to Native peoples, and hasten assimilation by encouraging individual farming homesteads and granting U.S. citizenship). In its concluding "Whipple Report," named after the Committee's Chairman J.S. Whipple, the Committee claimed that "the aid from the State and nation and from public charity is not enough to support the Indian in comfort and decency and health" and declared change must take place by both governments.²⁸ Mirroring much of the national government's Indian policies, they called for a mandatory school attendance law, allotment of Indian lands in severalty, dissolving tribal governments, and conferring citizenship, though diverged by calling for an extension of NYS laws to Native groups.²⁹ Considering New

²⁵ Hauptman, *Conspiracy of Interests*, 177. The Tonawanda repurchased a small portion of their reservation in 1856.

²⁶ Upton, *Everett Report*, 49, 62.

²⁷ "Transcript of the Dawes Act (1887)," transcribed by The Avalon Project, *Ourdocuments.gov*, date accessed 3/26/2019, <https://www.ourdocuments.gov/doc.php?flash=false&doc=50&page=transcript>, section 8.

²⁸ New York (State) Legislature, *Report of Special Committee*, no. 51, 67.

²⁹ Upton, *Everett Report*, 65-66. Most Natives interviewed during the investigation did not support allotment. When John Kennedy, a Tonawanda Seneca and one of the few Native allotment supporters, asked fellow Tonawandan Marvin Crouse whether there are "Indians on this reservation that are capable of becoming citizens

York Indians as wards of the state, the Committee argued “plainly and bluntly his [Native] consent to any measures manifestly and clearly tending to benefit and improve him should no longer be asked.” Even so, they declared that allotment could not “go into effect as to lands affected by the Ogden Company’s claim until that claim be removed.”³⁰

Throughout the early 20th century, NYS was unable to buy out the Ogden Claim, and officials mostly attempted to employ assimilation policies through education reforms on and off reservations.³¹ These reforms mirrored national education policies in their intent to transform Native children’s traditional customs into American-style culture. Since 1846 the NYS legislature appropriated money to help build small, uncentralized state-funded reservation schools which partially focused on “civilizing” school children through industrial training and teaching English language skills.³² Funding increased by the turn of the 19th century, and officials pushed for the construction of more official boarding schools. In 1905 the state legislature changed the name of the only Indian boarding school in the state from the “Thomas Asylum for Orphan and Destitute Indian Children” to the “Thomas Indian School.” This reflected their intent to assimilate Indian children in American cultural codes –farming or husbandry jobs for boys, cooking and cleaning jobs for girls—and ease their paths to “civilization” by eliminating traditional cultural values.³³ The state legislature also passed a law

of the United States” Mr. Crouse replied “No, I don’t; and I don’t think, Mr. Kennedy, that you are, either.” See New York (State) Legislature, *Report of Special Committee*, no. 51, p. 827.

³⁰ New York (State) Legislature, *Report of Special Committee*, no. 51, 73, 78-79, 827.

³¹ The state’s most concerted effort to resolve the Claim occurred in 1900 with state’s creation of the “Garett Committee.” See Lawrence Hauptman, “Governor Theodore Roosevelt and the Indians of New York State,” *Proceedings of the American Philosophical Society*, Vol. 119, No. 1 (Feb. 21, 1975): 2-3, 6-7 for more information.

³² New York (State) Bureau of Elementary School Supervision, *Indian Education*, 10-11.

³³ Keith R. Burich, “‘No Place to Go’: The Thomas Indian School and the “Forgotten” Indian Children of New York,” *Wicazo Sa Review*, Vol. 22, No. 2 (Fall, 2017): 96. As Burich explains, the school was never truly an orphanage, but a refuge for children whose families could not afford to care for them.

in 1904 encouraging the compulsory attendance of Native children on reservations to state-funded schools, which became more strongly enforced by the mid-1910s.³⁴

Following the national trend, New York State policies also became more complex from 1900-1920s. More intellectuals and state officials endorsed Progressive policies of social reform as well as romantic views that Native peoples possessed noble traits worthy of imitation that could improve white civilized American society. Many NYS officials and intellectuals argued studying or imitating Native cultures could limit the negative effects –such as lethargy and lower spiritual connections with the natural world—of industrialization and modernization. Elizabeth S. Wend’s 1937 thesis on Iroquois’ culture and its value for NYS school curriculums illustrates these views. Wend argues that although Anglo-Americans were “a people of mechanical genius,” they had become too civilized by creating “a civilization of unrest with very little creative art.” Wend also insists that by becoming more culture-conscious people and imitating traditional Native culture, such as dress, ceremonies, and language, people could develop a manhood imbued with a Native’s “courageous, poised, enduring... above all, self-controlled” manly attributes to develop children into adults who were both civilized and rugged individualists.³⁵

Many NYS intellectuals mirrored Wend’s arguments. In 1908, the director of the NYS Museum, John Clarke, wrote a preface to a study by ethnologist Harriet Converse in which he contends that Americans could become more well-balanced modern citizens by drawing values from Natives, whose close proximity “to nature mirrors the supreme law of the universe in its

³⁴ Upton, *Everett Report*, 76; New York (State) Bureau of Elementary School Supervision, *Indian Education*, 10-11.

³⁵ Elizabeth Scudder Wend, *The Culture of the Iroquois Indians: Its Value for the Schools of New York State* (Theses (M.S.) --New York State College for Teachers, 1937), 103-104, 174-175

simplest and most elemental expressions.”³⁶ Most state educators shared similar views. In 1901 Samuel Moulthrop of Rochester, NY wrote his monograph *Iroquois* which became a textbook for many schools across New York. Moulthrop developed a close relationship with the Tonawanda band of Seneca due to an interest in archaeology and documented many aspects of Iroquois culture.³⁷ His work encourages readers to respect and preserve the contributions of early Iroquois politics, technology, and culture to America’s development. Moulthrop wrote “their institutions have a present value irrespective of what they might have become.” He additionally retains notions of the vanishing ideology by claiming Americans should “do justice to their memory by preserving their name, deeds, customs and institutions” which white American society could benefit from before Indians disappeared amidst the progress of civilization.³⁸

Progressive officials also sought to improve the social welfare of Native communities, though they clung to notions of assimilation. Their individual work or close interactions with Native communities encouraged many to reform the social conditions of Native groups. Ethnologist Harriet Converse was one such person. Describing the state of missionary work on reservations, she noted in 1897 that many missionaries simply aimed to disrupt Native community practices, and that “the Indians have never received anything but harm from the whites, and I do not blame him for not trusting them.”³⁹

Around 1920, two incidents provoked more concerted efforts among government officials to determine the state’s political relationship with NYS Indians. First, in 1917 a

³⁶ John Clarke, prefatory note to *Myths and legends of the New York state Iroquois*, by Harriet Maxwell Converse, with introduction by Arthur C. Parker (Albany, N.Y.: Univ. of the State of New York, 1908), <https://archive.org/details/cu31924055492973/page/n11>, 5-6

³⁷ Blake McKelvey, “Samuel Parker Moulthrop: Devoted Educator and Good Citizen,” *Rochester History* Vol. XIX No. 2 (April, 1957): 1-2, 8-9. The book also became a best seller at the Buffalo Pan American Exposition.

³⁸ Samuel P. Moulthrop, *Iroquois* (Rochester, N.Y.: E. Hart, 1901), 22-23, 98; Holm, *The Great Confusion*, 146.

³⁹ “Great Crowds at Silver Lake,” *Democrat and Chronicle* (Rochester, N.Y.), Aug. 6th, 1897.

smallpox outbreak on the Cattaraugus reservation spread to the Allegany region, and state officials enacted severe containment procedures to prevent its spread off-reservations. Despite officials' success, many New Yorkers pressured state officials to examine conditions on Native reservations in order to prevent the spread of future outbreaks. Second, the federal court case *United States v. Boylan et al* (1920) encouraged state officials to determine New York's jurisdictional rights over Native groups. The court decision declared Natives as alien entities who were also wards of the federal government. As a result, the state comptroller questioned whether he could legally provide Native relief and education funds if such affairs were the obligation of the federal government.⁴⁰

The State Legislature created the New York State Indian Commission (1919-1922) to address the problems of state jurisdiction over Native lands and the social welfare of NYS Indians. The legislature appointed Potsdam lawyer Edward A. Everett as chairman, and he encouraged the commission to focus on three main goals: the current welfare of NYS Indians; the political morality of historic state and federal Indian policies; and, primarily, to determine the status of Natives in the state. Due to his more progressive views towards Native affairs than most state officials, he asserted that findings of the report must remain objective. He also argued that the state, despite its claims, held no jurisdiction over Natives as there had never been a definitive court ruling to the question.⁴¹ The Everett investigation eventually concluded in its closing "Everett Report" that "the said Indians of the State of New York, as a nation, are still the owners of the fee simple title to the territory ceded to them by the Treaty of 1784," and that they were under federal, rather than state, jurisdiction. Ultimately, the Committee failed to enforce its

⁴⁰ Upton, *Everett Report*, 77. He also claimed that Natives deserved absolute justice from the state above all else due to the historic treatment of whites against Indians

⁴¹ New York State Indian Commission, *Report of the New York State Indian Commission*, 26-27.

conclusions.⁴² The New York legislature refused to accept that state lands belonged to Native groups as per treaty obligations and attempted to erase its findings from the public record. Committee members were also divided on its conclusions. Only Everett signed the report, which the state further used to argue that the report's findings were inadequate.⁴³

While it failed to uphold its findings, the Everett investigation encouraged Natives and white officials to debate New York Indian affairs more strongly during the 1920s. Many Iroquois continued to fight legal battles over land claims, jurisdictional control, and especially citizenship.⁴⁴ Some Natives, such as the Seneca educator Arthur C. Parker, supported citizenship. He argued it would provide Natives “the right of an assured status,” a greater voice in Indian policy decisions, and a more respectable reputation among Americans.⁴⁵ According to historian Lawrence Hauptman, however, most Iroquois favored full sovereignty in the state. They argued legislation such as the federal 1924 Indian Citizenship Act as well as the 1930 “Snell Bill,” which called for full state authority over NYS Indians, would override federal obligations of treaties and intertwine Native groups into New York politics “beyond redemption” of federal intervention.⁴⁶ Meanwhile, state officials sought to determine their jurisdictional rights over the Iroquois in other ways. By 1930 state-sponsored economic and health care support for NYS Indians increased and began to become more centralized. Various department heads also

⁴² See NYS Indian Commission, *Report of the New York State Indian Commission* 398-399 for full findings.

⁴³ Upton, *Everett Report*, 108-109, 116. The report was finally released in 1971. Lulu Stillman, the stenographer of the Commission, kept the only surviving record of the report. See Upton 109-110 for the story on its release.

⁴⁴ Upton, *Everett Report*, 110, 120.

⁴⁵ Arthur C. Parker, “The Social Elements of the Indian Problem,” *American Journal of Sociology*, Vol. 22, No. 2 (Sep. 1916): 254-255. See 258-262, 264 for views on assimilation and taking pride in Native identity.

⁴⁶ Hauptman, *The Iroquois and the New Deal*, 8-9. The Snell Bill failed to pass.

suggested creating a director of Indian affairs in the Department of Social Welfare – the department responsible for most Native services—to increase the efficiency of welfare support.⁴⁷

Despite increases in health care and economic assistance many Indians continued to live in poverty which –coupled with pressures to assimilate and increased interactions with white communities—negatively affected Iroquois cultural identities by the 1930s. “Iroquois art was in a state of crisis in the early 1930s,” as Hauptman notes. Many Natives had forgotten traditional customs or adopted western-style regalia, such as Plains-style war bonnets over the Iroquoian *gustoweh*, amidst the influence of popularized imagery of Native culture (see figure 2). The quality of Iroquois art also declined as more artists commodified their traditional material culture to meet the demands of tourists. The selling of masks, such as those worn by the medicinal False Face society, especially became a point of contention as the Iroquois consider such masks sacred and not to be used for exhibition.⁴⁸ Assimilation also affected the Iroquois’ traditional languages. By the 1910s the state increased attempts to teach English among Native students as a first language, and the Thomas School especially limited the use of traditional languages.⁴⁹



(Figure 2) Examples of Plains headdresses (left and middle) and a *gustoweh* (right). The *gustoweh* is much less ornate, and the position of feathers indicate one’s nation. Three

feathers positioned straight as on the right, for instance, indicate the person is Mohawk. (Images on left and middle downloaded from <http://www.native-languages.org/headdresses.htm>, accessed 5/14/19. Image on right downloaded from <https://www.albany.com/event/artist-demonstration-iroquois-headdresses-188212/>, date accessed 5/14/19).

⁴⁷ Upton, *Everett Report*, 135-138.

⁴⁸ Hauptman, *The Iroquois and the New Deal*, 138-140.

⁴⁹ New York (State) Bureau of Elementary School Supervision, *Indian Education*, 10; Burich, “No Place to Go,” 103.

As these debates over Indian policy continued, public interest in Native culture encouraged various levels of cultural modification among Native and white groups. Due to the state and federal government's complicated jurisdictional rights over New York Indians, dance bans mostly did not affect the Iroquois as they did other Native groups around the nation, which allowed the Iroquois to hold traditional ceremonies relatively undisturbed. A history of public and academic interest in dance and ceremonies also encouraged the Iroquois to maintain their traditional culture. Numerous anthropologists lived with and documented Iroquois cultures, and newspapers described ceremonies of the Iroquois for interested readers. A 1900 *Democrat and Chronicle* article described various feasts and ceremonies held by Native Americans, noting (quite derogatorily) how traditional ceremonies “are religiously observed by the survivors [of the “vanishing race”], just as they were before the pale faces came and when the tomahawk and the swift arrow ruled the land.”⁵⁰ Even though white Americans might view Native culture as vanishing, they still encouraged Native peoples to maintain their traditions by regularly attending traditional cultural practices. This allowed groups to maintain or modify traditional aspects of their culture, reassess areas which required a return to traditional customs, and allowed opportunities to more greatly interact with American communities for support or education.⁵¹

Many Iroquois used social dances as a way to educate white Americans about their traditional culture. In August 1933, Freeman Johnson and other members of the Tonawanda band of Seneca camped with the Jewish Young Women's Association Camp at Conesus Lake. Johnson invited members of the Association to learn traditional social dances and participate in

⁵⁰ “Thanksgiving of Iroquois Indians: Gratitude for All Growing and Living Things, for the Powers of Nature and for the Elements – Dance of Virgins,” *Democrat and Chronicle* (Rochester, N.Y.), Nov. 25th, 1900.

⁵¹ Murphy, *The People Have Never Stopped Dancing*, 10, 22, 32.

traditional beading and weaving practices, though each dressed in stereotypical Native regalia to connect more tightly with imagined ideas of Native identity (see figure 3).⁵² Other Iroquois were more critical of such clichés. They viewed social dances as an opportunity to educate both whites and Natives about their traditional culture. In particular, Arthur Parker stressed the need for cultural accuracy so that the white public and Natives who lost touch with their cultural roots more accurately understood Native cultures. In November 1920, he spoke on “show-Indians” at an appreciation ceremony for anthropologist Lewis Henry Morgan at Rochester, NY’s Mt. Hope Cemetery, stating “The white man has a false enough notion of the New York Indian without the Indian assisting in perpetuating such mistaken notions.” He further encouraged Natives to proudly wear “the correct costume with real buckskin and real eagle feathers; let them wear the *gustoweh* and not the Sioux war bonnet.”⁵³



Top: Lyman Johnson, Seneca chief of uncertain age from the Seneca reservation at Tonawanda, greeted at Camp Conesus by squares of the girls' camp-faring women at the camp. Below: Chief Freeman Johnson of Seneca, welcomed by Celia Bloom, director of the camp.

IRONDEQUOIT
GOP RENAMES
PROPERTY

Cure Proved Worse Than His Complaint

A hal... (unclear) near... (unclear) of 112... (unclear) street, his life yesterday afternoon. Embury said deputy... (unclear) that a... (unclear) spirit... (unclear) brought on by the... (unclear) caused him to lose control of his car, which... (unclear) through a guard rail at... (unclear) Boulevard and... (unclear) road and... (unclear) of feet below on an abandoned... (unclear) track. Burdick... (unclear) from... (unclear) and... (unclear) the man... (unclear) for... (unclear) to the... (unclear) Hospital, and... (unclear) was discharged.

(Figure 3) Members of the Girls’ Camp dress in Native regalia to more “effectively” imbibe Native virtues in their camping excursion with Chief Freeman Johnson and members of the Tonawanda. The Tonawanda interestingly don Sioux war bonnets in this picture instead of the traditional *gustoweh*, perhaps to play to stereotyped white perceptions of Native identity (See footnote 52 for source).

⁵² “Real Red Men Help Initiate ‘Squaw’ Group: Camp Fire Ceremonies Feature Event at Girls’ Camp,” *Democrat and Chronicle* (Rochester, N.Y.), Aug. 18th, 1933.

⁵³ Robert Daniel Burns, *An Iroquois Twentieth Century Ceremony of Appreciation, Mt. Hope Cemetery, Rochester, N.Y.* (Rochester, N.Y.: Lewis H. Morgan Chapter, 1921), 87-88.

As American and traditional Native cultures mixed, many Iroquois blended familiar traditions of song, dance, and charity together to transform their identities. A series of letters in the *Carlisle Arrow* published by Native students at the Carlisle Institute in Carlisle, PA highlights this process. Members of the Iroquois wrote about Christmas customs on their reservations and described how people found joy in singing and gift-giving as a community. The Mohawk Margaret DeLorimiere noted “Our people observe the rule of exchanging presents the same as we do here. They also believe in charity. They manage to get up a large collection of gifts and eatables and give them to the poor.” Others closely maintained traditional spiritual beliefs. Reuben Charles, a Seneca, wrote how after Christmas he and “the Indians are grateful to Ha-wen-ne-yuh, the (Great Spirit) who supplies their wants, and who is always their protector.”⁵⁴

The Iroquois also used public dances for economic reasons, although some criticized this for inappropriately portraying their culture. New York Indians occasionally used public dances to draw white crowds to reservations, who then purchased Indian crafts or bought into events. In September 1900, for instance, the Iroquois Indian Fair Association held free public dances and other cultural demonstrations on the Tonawanda reservation along with race competitions, which white visitors to the fair could pay to participate in.⁵⁵ Natives also gave public dances and ceremonies to increase marketing opportunities. The state Indian Commissioner’s 1928 report to the BIA on NYS Indian Affairs described how a group of New York Indians frequently attended a “farmers’ picnic” as part of a winter course at Cornell University. Each year members of Cornell encouraged the Natives to give dance demonstrations, and in 1928 they succeeded.

⁵⁴ Margaret DeLorimiere, “Christmas the Greatest Day”; Reuben Charles, “Christmas on the Tonawanda Reservation,” *Carlisle Arrow*, vol. 6, no. 18 (Jan. 7, 1910), <http://carlisleindian.dickinson.edu/publications/carlisle-arrow-vol-6-no-18>: 4.

⁵⁵ “Indians to Hold a Fair: Sports to be Held at the Tonawanda Reservation Next Month,” *Democrat and Chronicle* (Rochester, N.Y.), Aug. 28, 1900.

Natives who favored giving the dance, according to the Commissioner, argued “that it would keep the white visitors in attendance and enable the Indians to sell more food and the like.”

However, many of those who opposed the dance feared it would present an inappropriate view of Native customs, simply entertain “the white men,” and portray performers as “savages.”⁵⁶

Contribution of Dance and Resistance to Dance Bans to Changing Indian Policies

Overall, dance and white and Native resistance to dance bans helped encourage Indian policy shifts by the 1920s. At the federal level, many BIA officials still condemned Native dances, but became less concerned about their practice if they did not interfere with crop and livestock production. So long as Natives displayed growing semblances of “thrift, industry, and the accumulation of capital,” according to Treglia, they generally did not ban dances.⁵⁷

Conversely, more Progressive-minded officials who argued that allotment, rather than Natives’ alleged racial or cultural inferiority, was the cause of their plight on reservations altogether condemned dance bans. Indian reformers often used such criticisms of dance bans as a major way to attack allotment policies.⁵⁸ In 1923, John Collier—an Indian-rights advocate, sociologist, and future Commissioner for the BIA— criticized the bans as unconstitutional in the *New York Times*. He encouraged officials to view dances in a more culturally-sensitive way, and argued that because Native rituals were religious those seeking to ban dances were robbing them of their basic human rights and spiritual well-being.⁵⁹

⁵⁶ “New York Indian Report,” Arthur Caswell Parker papers, box 3, folder 10, A.P23, Rare Books, Special Collections, and Preservation, River Campus Libraries, University of Rochester.

⁵⁷ Treglia, “The Consistency and Inconsistency,” 163.

⁵⁸ Holm, *The Great Confusion*, 188.

⁵⁹ John Collier, “Indian Dances Defended,” *New York Times*, Dec. 16 1923, date accessed 3/28/2019, <https://www.nytimes.com/1923/12/16/archives/indian-dances-defended-the-question-is-made-one-of-religious.html>

Indian reformers' attacks on Indian policy helped foster a resurgent public interest in Indian policies. By the end of the 1920s, more Americans encouraged transitioning federal control over tribes to Native groups themselves. Newspapers published more articles on Indian issues, such as debates on Native dances, land battles, and legislation. Local organizations also took increased action to defend Native rights, according to Holm.⁶⁰ Rochester' NY's local Federation of Women's Clubs, for example, voted in 1927 to oppose the enforcement of U.S. game laws on Iroquoians who were not American citizens. Members encouraged their local Congressman Meyer Jacobstein to defend Native rights to self-govern by tribal law.⁶¹

Around the late 1920s-early 1930s, most policymakers were in favor of ending assimilation by strengthening, encouraging, and perpetuating traditional tribal structures to boost Native economies and cultures. The Boas school of thought influenced many of these people. Supporters of this theory argued that culture, not race, determines human behavior, and that cultures are not higher or lower than one another, they simply develop along different tracks. Many policymakers also still clung to ideas that Natives held cultural traits which were valuable to white society. Holm describes Collier's own interest in Indian affairs largely as a reaction against urbanism. He enjoyed studying the communal aspects of Native societies and shared sympathies with earlier romantics that their "customs and ideas were worthy of emulation."⁶²

By 1934, Indian affairs finally had a new direction. Federal policies officially shifted away from those of allotment, although many Natives and white Indian activists continued to criticize such policies for implementing too much federal oversight and control. In 1933,

⁶⁰ Holm, *The Great Confusion*, 186-187.

⁶¹ "Club Federation Votes Resolution on Indian Policy: Problem of Red Man Subject of Talk by Counsel," *Democrat and Chronicle* (Rochester, NY) Dec. 17, 1927.

⁶² Holm, *The Great Confusion*, 190.

President Franklin D. Roosevelt appointed John Collier as the new commissioner of Indian Affairs (1933-1945). Collier worked closely with officials to develop a new policy towards Indian Affairs which culminated in the Indian Reorganization Act (IRA, 1934). The Act ended allotment, permitted tribes to organize governments, and allowed them to incorporate or consolidate their trust lands. Such reorganization still required approval and review by the BIA, however, as federal officials still sought to retain discretionary power over Native groups. Most tribes also remained under close supervision of the BIA.⁶³

Collier did, however, endeavor to reverse the cultural assimilation of Native Americans, which historians and Natives generally view as a more favorable goal of his policies. He encouraged the preservation of Natives' traditional culture, and sought ways for the federal government to help boost Native economies. He canceled the dance bans and helped create the Indian Arts and Crafts Board in 1935, which encouraged the development of Indian arts and crafts to revitalize Native cultural aspects. It also provided the legal foundation to fine and/or prosecute "any person who shall counterfeit or colorably imitate" Indian arts and crafts with a misdemeanor.⁶⁴ Altogether, the political, social, and cultural agendas of Collier's term as head of the BIA continued to dominate federal Indian policies until the end of the Second World War.

As for the Iroquois, many were initially critical and suspicious of the IRA's intent, although many slowly accepted it as economic, health, and educational conditions improved on reservations. Tensions remained high between the BIA and the Six Nations, according to Hauptman, because neither side "completely understood what motivated the other." Collier did

⁶³ Holm, *The Great Confusion*, 188.

⁶⁴ United States, Washington, D.C., U.S. Department of the Interior, "Indian Arts and Crafts Act of 1935," Public-No. 335-74th Congress, S. 2203 (*doi.gov*, Washington, date accessed 3/29/2019), <https://www.doi.gov/iacb/indian-arts-and-crafts-act-1935>

not understand why the Iroquois claimed that tribal reorganization inhibited the federal government's pledge, via the treaties of 1784 and 1794, to refrain from interfering in Iroquois lands in NYS, nor did he pass or address the IRA's contents with the Iroquois' consent.⁶⁵ As economic, health, and educational conditions improved, however, many came to accept aspects of the Indian New Deal. Native employment in the job sector vastly benefited from the act. By 1935, the Civilian Conservation Corps – Indian Division's programs employed 10 percent of the Iroquois.⁶⁶ Health care and education also improved due to increased federal funding and the work of more culturally-sensitive Indian agents. Anthropologists such as William Fenton, for instance, sought to build trust with Native families to encourage them that medical professionals sent to reservations by the program worked for their benefit, rather than to subvert traditional cultural practices.⁶⁷ Arthur Parker additionally created the Seneca Arts Project, which hired Natives to create objects for museums and largely helped revitalize their traditional culture on the Tonawanda and Cattaraugus reservations from 1935-1941. The Iroquois remained skeptical of federal and state policies on their lands, however, as they believed (with fair reason) that each government ultimately attempted to undermine Native autonomy through many of their policies.⁶⁸

Conclusion

New York State's Indian policies mirrored and differed from federal policies in many ways. They largely followed the same path – from paternalist racial condescension amidst allotment pushes, to vitalist/romantic paternalism among Progressive-minded reformers. As with

⁶⁵ Hauptman, *The Iroquois and the New Deal*, 64-65, 136-137, 140-141, 148.

⁶⁶ Hauptman, *The Iroquois and the New Deal*, 118.

⁶⁷ Hauptman, *The Iroquois and the New Deal*, 108.

⁶⁸ Hauptman, *The Iroquois and the New Deal*, 178-179, 183. See chapter 8 for full impact of the project.

other reformers around the nation, these Progressives were interested in revitalizing Native cultures for each tribe's own benefit as well as white Americans who sought to revitalize their spirits amidst the forces of modernization and industrialization. Yet the Iroquois' distinct federal and state histories, as compared to most Native groups, resulted in several treaties and land negotiations which tightened Iroquois claims to sovereignty and obfuscated NYS and federal Indian policies. Although allotment was not a possibility, many officials and intellectuals pushed for assimilation. A healthy respect and interest in Iroquois culture encouraged traditional Iroquois dances and ceremonies on reservations to continue, however. As around the nation, many Natives and whites expressed their theoretical attitudes towards Native identity through the medium of dance. Natives also used such occasions to transform their cultural identities among whites or Native groups or to increase economic opportunities for impoverished Native communities, although some Natives argued such benefits came at the cost of their cultural integrity. By the 1920s, more Indian policymakers had solid theoretical foundations for implementing new Indian policies, and discussions about Native dance joined greater debates over allotment and how Americans could more greatly appreciate Native cultures. These debates continued until the Indian New Deal ended allotment in 1934, though many disputes about Indian affairs continued.

Chapter 2: “Show-Indians”

From the late 19th to early 20th centuries, so-called “show-Indian” events were popular forms of entertainment for American audiences across the country. The term describes Native American participation in public events, such as Wild West shows or exhibitions in museums and fairs, in which actors dressed and acted in highly stereotyped ways while reenacting historic events, demonstrating equestrianism, or performing songs and dances for white audiences. While some federal officials and Indian reformers criticized the shows as inappropriate displays of Native culture, millions of Americans flocked to show-Indian events, whose presentations of civilization’s triumph over “primitivism” could help ease anxieties over modernization, colonization, and industrialization. Performances of Native songs and dances might also attract white Americans to the shows because they were powerful links to Native identity.

Because of these stereotypes, many scholars might consider show-Indian events to have been negative experiences for Native peoples and further evidence of America exercising its colonial power over indigenous groups. Native participants in show-Indian events were not entirely trapped in worlds of oppression, however. During their tours, Native performers engaged in processes of cultural transformation on and off-reservations with whites and other Native peoples and also earned additional economic opportunities by receiving payment for their performances and travel. While “show Indian” events ultimately perpetuated stereotypes of Indian identity, such events provided Natives with opportunities to modify or revitalize their cultural identity and gain economic opportunities. The public’s interest in attending these performances also helped increase Native and white peoples’ interests in advocating for social welfare improvements in Native communities as the 20th century progressed.

Background and Context of Show Popularity Until 1880s

Show-Indian exhibitions in the United States were not common in the early 19th century. By the 1830s, many American intellectuals (such as scholars or educators) and officials viewed Native Americans as a part of their recent and rapidly disappearing past. These people argued that Native cultures were “vanishing” as the expansion of American civilization increased, and also believed that their past was so immediate that one could still find tattered remnants of Native communities which recently lived out west.⁶⁹ Many artists and businessmen attempted to capitalize on these notions by creating traveling shows which displayed Native American cultures or people in a natural and “preserved” state. George Catlin, an American painter who specialized in portraits of Native Americans in the Old West, was one such artist. He employed Native Americans to travel with him as part of his “Indian Gallery” in the late 1830s, which toured across the Eastern United States and contained hundreds of his personal paintings of Native Americans and collections of Native-made goods. Catlin’s show struggled to attract crowds, however, and he took his collections overseas instead as his gallery did not earn enough money in the U.S. to turn a profit.⁷⁰

By the 1870s, interest in Native cultures increased in the United States. Shocking news of so-called “Indian wars” in western territories fueled frightening stereotypes of Native Americans as bloodthirsty savages. For example, the *New York Times* reported in 1873 that while white settlers committed “outrages,” such as raiding communities, against Native peoples, “In his long experience with the [white] race which for 200 years has been pushing him from one hunting-

⁶⁹ Deloria, *Playing Indian*, 64.

⁷⁰ Moses, L.G., *Wild West Shows and the Images of American Indians, 1883-1933* (Albuquerque, NM: Univ. of New Mexico Press, 1999), 18-19.

ground to another, the Indian has known no law but that of retaliation.”⁷¹ Other stories stereotyped Natives by embellishing atrocities committed by Native warriors. Another *New York Times* author did just this as he discussed how the “formidable and well-drilled bodies of savages” frequently amused themselves by “scalping defenseless bands of emigrants, cattle drovers and settlers remote from the protecting agencies.”⁷² Stories about the horrific Indian wars, according to the historian L.G. Moses, raised public fears about the alleged savagery of Natives. As a result, public interest in shows featuring Native Americans also increased, since they provided Americans an occasion to view firsthand the exotic savages they had read about.⁷³

Many Americans attended exhibitions featuring Native American displays by the late 1870s because they depicted Western expansion amidst the Indian wars as an inevitable, rather than a forceful, process. They also provided opportunities to redefine concepts of American identity as the nation healed following the American Civil War (1861-1865) by appropriating Natives as part of America’s natural, vanished past. United neither by race nor history, many Euro-Americans sought to develop a more unified sense of “Americanness” by setting it against Native identity and history. Exhibitions –especially world’s fairs—were venues for this process in which organizers stressed in various displays that the conquest of Natives was unavoidable due to the natural triumph of civilization over Native “primitiveness,” as per the laws of social Darwinism. At the Philadelphia Centennial Exposition (1876), for example, planners displayed modern technologies that were positively transforming America and contrasted these technologies with Native American exhibits featuring “primitive” technologies, such as bows or axes, in smaller rooms. According to historian Shari Huhndorf, organizers also displayed Native

⁷¹ “The Indian Problem,” *New York Times* (New York, NY), July 1st, 1873, p.4.

⁷² “The Indians,” *New York Times* (New York, NY), August 27th, 1874, p.4.

⁷³ L.G. Moses, *Wild West Shows*, 19-20.

weaponry to illustrate the purported violence and “savagery” of Natives.⁷⁴ Other displays, such as the century vase at the 1876 fair, also overlooked the violent conquest of Native groups by incorporating Native histories as a part of America’s distant past which the country had naturally evolved from. The vase told the story of the nation’s history as a tale of human progress, casting both pioneers and Natives at the first phase of civilization. As the vase proceeded to later stages of American history it no longer included Native Americans, suggesting they gave way to American expansion due to their racial and cultural inferiority.⁷⁵

By the 1880s, concerns over industrialization, modernity, and immigration among middle-and upper-class white Americans encouraged them to reimagine their personal, national, and racial identities. Many feared that city living and an increased reliance on new technologies brought with it materialism, excessive wealth, and lethargy. As a consequence of these anxieties, more Americans sought to rejuvenate their spirits by becoming connected with pre-industrial lifestyles. Nature treks, camping, and outdoor activities became popular activities to limit the effects of industrialization and modernization, especially among men who endeavored to become more in-tune with physical aspects of their manliness.⁷⁶ As the number of immigrants living in the United States increased, many middle-and upper-class Americans also attempted to redefine their sense of Americanness as distinctly separate from Eastern European groups. Many “revivalists,” as they were known, reimaged the definitive American as an industrious, white Anglo-Saxon freedom-loving individualist. They further claimed the ancestors of such people

⁷⁴ Shari M Huhndorf, *Going Native: Indians in the American Cultural Imagination* (Ithaca, New York: Cornell Univ. Press, 2001), 27, 31. Many exhibits also featured Native mannequins dressed in war bonnets or face paint, as well.

⁷⁵ Huhndorf, *Going Native*, 33-34.

⁷⁶ Lears, *Rebirth of a Nation*, 36-37.

helped form the foundation of America from its more primitive stages to its contemporary civilized greatness.⁷⁷

Revivalists appropriated Native identity as a way to reimagine this identity. They considered Natives as part of the country's distant primitive, yet noble, past, who also reflected many of the manly physical and psychological traits—fortitude, strength, cunningness—middle- and upper-class males desired. As most revivalists tied Native Americans to nature, they also argued that learning about or experiencing their customs as intimately as possible could offer the same revitalizing effects for the individual spirit as one might receive in nature treks or camping. Some Native scholars, such as Charles A. Eastman, a Santee Dakota physician and Indian reformer, helped feed these notions. He argued that Native Americans offered lifestyles grounded in simplicity, athleticism, and communities thriving in clean air and pure food and water, and that living more like Natives could promote healthier lifestyles and conservationism in American society.⁷⁸

Despite romanticizing Native Americans, white Americans continued to stress the superiority of the white race. Learning about Native cultures, and even mimicking them through dress, language, or traditions such as dance enabled Americans to co-opt “noble” aspects of Native culture while reasserting the racial-cultural dominance of Anglo-Saxon Americans. Huhndorf notes that Native representations in popular imaginations or events were not just escapes from modernity, but also opportunities for Anglo-Saxon Americans to reaffirm the “racialized, progressivist ethos of industrialist capitalism.”⁷⁹ Influenced by popular social science

⁷⁷ Huhndorf, *Going Native*, 38-39; Gary Gerstle, *American Crucible: Race and Nation in the Twentieth Century* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton Univ. Press, 2001), 16.

⁷⁸ Tom Holm, *The Great Confusion*, 62-64.

⁷⁹ Huhndorf, *Going Native*, 14.

of the day, such as Henry Morgan's theory of cultural evolution or social Darwinism, Americans continued to argue that white American society was naturally superior to primitive Native societies. Native Americans certainly played their role in American history, they suggested, but they ultimately celebrated Anglo-Saxon Americans for progressing from frontier primitivism to modern American civilization because of their advanced intelligence, technology, and biological endowment. Native Americans, meanwhile, remained in a state of savagery and could not fully assimilate due to their innate biological and cultural inferiority.⁸⁰

By the late 1800s, most middle-and upper-class Americans also largely accepted the notion that Native Americans were naturally, rather than forcibly, vanishing as a culture and people, which further strengthened public interest in show-Indian events. After the Wounded Knee massacre effectively ended the Indian wars in 1890, scholars such as Frederick Jackson Turner argued that most Natives who fought in the wars no longer existed, and those who remained were soon doomed to vanish due to their inability to assimilate into American society.⁸¹ Popular literature and newspapers fed American obsessions to learn about or catch whatever glimpse they could of their distant foes over land battles. Though written in 1907, a *National Geographic* piece focusing on photographer Edward S. Curtis's work with Native individuals and groups captures the sentiments of this period nicely. According to the author, Curtis "realized how rapidly the habits and character of such few tribes as remain on the continent are disappearing," and claimed his photographs had great value "to the future generations who will have no opportunity of seeing primitive Indians." Articles such as these also eased American conscience over its violent conquest by overlooking the brutality of the

⁸⁰ Lears, *Rebirth of a Nation*, 38-40.

⁸¹ Lears, *Rebirth of a Nation*, 40-43.

Indian wars. The article further stressed to its readers how Natives were simply at the “point of passing away,” rather than forcibly removed, because they have “lived under conditions through which our own race passed so many ages ago that not a vestige of their memory remains.”⁸²

Rise of Show-Indian Event Popularity

Amidst this context, Wild West shows became a popular form of entertainment for white Americans, and by 1886 became a national sensation. In 1883 William “Buffalo Bill” Cody founded the most famous Wild West show event. After previously working as a civilian scout during the Indian wars and participating in theatrical productions dramatizing scenes of frontier life and the wars, Cody and his partners produced the *Buffalo Bill’s Wild West Show* which, they argued, accurately portrayed frontier life. Their shows included eccentric displays of sharp-shooting, hunting, racing, and re-enactments of historic events, such as Custer’s Last Stand, which depicted the supposedly noble death of General George A. Custer against his Native foes at the Battle of the Little Bighorn (1876). Audience members were particularly thrilled to witness the Native participants.⁸³ Cody hired actors from several Native tribes—especially the Pawnee and Sioux—to display equestrianism, bow and arrow skills, and dances. The show’s re-enactments of historic events portrayed Native peoples as worthy and noble adversaries to American expansion. Due to their technological and cultural inferiority, however, Native actors always lost to their foes.⁸⁴ Audiences were attracted to the illusions portrayed in Cody’s show, which enabled them to temporarily escape the mundaneness of city life. According to historian

⁸² “North American Indians,” *National Geographic Magazine*, 1907, 469, 484.

⁸³ L.G. Moses, *Wild West Shows*, 30-31.

⁸⁴ L.G. Moses, *Wild West Shows*, 8.

L.G. Moses, viewers also delighted in the noble attributes of its Native performers, yet found comfort in white pioneers' guaranteed triumphs over their Native foes.⁸⁵

The popularity of show-Indian events by the late 19th century was also part of a larger obsession with representations of Native cultures in many Western European countries. Organizers of Native exhibitions transplanted hundreds of indigenous peoples from far away colonies to reconstructions of “authentic” Native villages in cities like London, England as early as the 1840s.⁸⁶ According to historian Sadiah Quereshi, these exhibitions continued to grow by the 19th century as organizers used displayed colonial subjects within “politicized hierarchical classifications of humanity” to reassert the superiority of white peoples over Natives. As in America, English audiences viewed clothing which did not match English styles of dress as distinctly non-European, and organizers coupled clothing with material artifacts – especially weaponry—against backgrounds illustrating nature scenes to infer the extent of non-Western cultures as intellectually and developmentally inferior. Buffalo Bill's show also became popular in Western Europe by the 1880s and periodically played in London as well.⁸⁷

The authenticity of Native identity in Wild West shows became a complex combination of a manager's needs, audience expectations of Native culture, and the material provisions of Native American performers, themselves. Cody and his planners generally hired Sioux Indians as their Native performers, which communicated to their audiences that the dress and customs of the Sioux were representative of all Native cultures. Feathered headdresses and ceremonial regalia of the Sioux thus became representative of all American Indians – the war bonnet,

⁸⁵ L.G. Moses, 65, 222.

⁸⁶ Sadiah Quereshi, *Peoples on Parade: Exhibitions, Empire, and Anthropology in Nineteenth-Century Britain* (Chicago, IL: Univ. of Chicago Press, 2011), 2-4.

⁸⁷ Quereshi, *Peoples on Parade*, 118, 120-1; Moses, *Wild West Shows*, 58-59.

especially, became an indicator of one's true sense of "Indianness."⁸⁸ Cody's show stereotyped Natives in other ways, too, depicting them as natural equestrian masters and technologically inferior by encouraging performers to use bow and arrows. It also emphasized show-Indians as spiritually connected with nature and stoic under pressure. Audiences even deemed shows as inauthentic if Native performers did not dress or act to their expectations.⁸⁹

Wild West shows were also opportunities for cultural exchange and immersion among managers, audiences, and performers alike. As historian L.G. Moses argues, Wild West shows provided Native performers with an opportunity to express their cultural values largely outside the influence of missionaries or the Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA). While Cody organized his event to assert the cultural and racial dominance of the United States, he mostly allowed Native performers to choose which clothing to wear and what dances to perform, as he claimed such freedoms would provide for more organic, authentic performances. He also encouraged patrons to speak with performers so as to learn about Native cultures and affairs from their point of view. Many performers appreciated publicly engaging in cultural practices (especially dance and horse riding) and frequently spoke highly of Cody.⁹⁰

The shows also provided economic opportunities for Native performers. Cody paid Native actors in Wild West shows well, which enticed many Natives to join the shows as allotment policies failed to provide economic stability on reservations. Many even re-signed for further tours.⁹¹ Performers also enjoyed having paid travel opportunities which offered new life experiences while teaching their cultural values. Organizers frequently took performers into

⁸⁸ Quereshi, *Peoples on Parade*, 120.

⁸⁹ Moses, *Wild West Shows*, 225.

⁹⁰ Moses, *Wild West Shows*, 272.

⁹¹ Moses, *Wild West Shows*, 101, 125-128.

nearby towns where community members treated them kindly in their homes, and they even built relationships with town officials. In one noteworthy case, members of Cody's cast toured the Vatican in 1890, where Pope Leo XIII bestowed blessings and gifts to Native performers.⁹²

In exhibitions including Native American performers, song and dance became powerful and exciting links to Native identity for non-Natives. White audience expectations influenced how organizers designed the shows, cast Native performers, and made Indian song and dance staples of many show-Indian exhibitions. Quereshi argues, for example, that audiences at George Catlin's London exhibition in the 1840s were "more than likely to have expected that any exhibition of the Anishinabe or Bakhoje would include demonstrations of the various dances and songs discussed in his writings."⁹³ Dance scholar Jacqueline Murphy also notes the link of song and dance to Native identity during the late 19th to early 20th centuries. She discusses how the *Buffalo Bill Wild West Show* hired Natives to perform the Ghost Dances, including scalp or war dances as staples of the show.⁹⁴ She also argues that because people considered stage performances in the late 19th to early 20th centuries as ways to quell violent warlike passions, managers were able to replace audiences' "anxieties and fears of attack" by Natives and their alleged belligerent behaviors with "fascination and titillation at a safe distance."⁹⁵

By the 1890s, show-Indian events grew in popularity among many Americans. Exhibitions featuring Native Americans increased, the more famous being World's Fairs, such as the 1893 World's Columbian Exposition in Chicago. Others also existed which drew thousands of audience members. In one of the most notable examples, in 1897 the explorer Robert Peary

⁹² Moses, *Wild West Shows*, 88-89, 277; Quereshi, *Peoples on Parade*, 278.

⁹³ Quereshi, *Peoples on Parade*, 124.

⁹⁴ Jacqueline Shea Murphy, *The People Have Never Stopped Dancing: Native American Modern Dance Histories* (Minneapolis, MN: Univ. of Minnesota Press, 2007), 54-55.

⁹⁵ Murphy, *The People Have Never Stopped Dancing*, 75.

convinced six Inuit in northern Greenland to travel with him to the American Museum of Natural History at anthropologist Franz Boas's request. Influenced by the success of exhibitions in the World's Fairs, Boas and Peary intended the visit to be for both scientific study and exhibition. On the first day alone, before the party even left the ship *Hope*, 20,000 visitors flocked to view the Native visitors, and the exhibition remained immensely popular during its year-long run. Americans were so fascinated by the event that audiences even flocked to witness as four of the six displayed Inuit succumbed to tuberculosis.⁹⁶

While exhibitions featuring Natives increased, audiences especially enjoyed Wild West-style events. The success of Buffalo Bill's Wild West Shows spawned competitors like the popular 101 Ranch Wild West Show.⁹⁷ On many occasions, these events could even overshadow other show-Indian exhibitions. In the 1893 Chicago World's Fair, members of the Department of Ethnology and Archaeology constructed imitations of Native American villages on The Midway leading up to the White City, and the Department of the Interior also constructed a mock Indian School at the fair. Each department employed Native actors to perform in its displays, with the intent that visitors would witness "primitive" Natives who wore traditional regalia and spoke their indigenous languages undergo assimilation into modern civilization as their children dressed in modern school uniforms and spoke English. Organizers also intended the fair to function as a larger reification of the cultural and racial progress of "civilized" America, as visitors transitioned from the "primitive" Native villages to the technological wonders and white-washed neoclassical buildings of the White City.⁹⁸ Yet these exhibits did not impress audiences

⁹⁶ Huhndorf, *Going Native*, 79-80. One adult recovered, and one child, Minik, unsuccessfully struggled to recover his father's bones until his own death from TB in 1918.

⁹⁷ Moses, *Wild West Shows*, 176.

⁹⁸ Moses, *Wild West Shows*, 133-134.

the most. A few blocks away from the fair, Cody's Wild West show dazzled visitors with seemingly more authentic performances of Native horse-riding, arrow shooting, and dancing. As Moses notes, the show was far more popular than the federal government's Indian exhibits because most audiences preferred to witness Native actors portray a more thrilling, yet equally contained, imagined past, rather than view government attempts at assimilation.⁹⁹

Peak of Show-Indian Exhibition Popularity: 1900-1917

During their heyday from 1900-1917, Wild West shows continued to depict "vanishing Indians." But as federal allotment policies fell out of favor, many people came to see romanticized depictions of Native identity. Historian Jackson Lears argues that middle-and upper-class Americans found the "physical and sensual vitality that marked peoples as backward" comforting, and attempted to discover characteristics in "primitive" peoples worth knowing to prevent becoming too civilized.¹⁰⁰ In particular, spectators appreciated the athleticism and artistry of Native dancers and singers, and shows increasingly emphasized stereotypical Native connections with nature.¹⁰¹ America also became a global power at this time, which encouraged Wild West shows to highlight U.S. soldiers' technological might and sharpshooting skills. Many shows further emphasized the "wildness" of Native actors to stress the dichotomy between Native and white groups, and assert America's innocence in expansion out West and overseas.¹⁰² Additionally, some shows became much more artificial as professional actors, who were not always Native American, mixed with Native actors by 1903. Managers

⁹⁹ Moses, *Wild West Shows*, 137.

¹⁰⁰ Lears, *Rebirth of a Nation*, 289.

¹⁰¹ Moses, *Wild West Shows*, 167.

¹⁰² Moses, *Wild West Shows*, 176-177, 183.

could hire them more easily, and simply give the impression that they were “authentic” Natives by teaching them dances and dressing them in Indian regalia.¹⁰³

As middle-and upper-class Americans flocked to Wild West shows BIA officials increasingly disapproved of them, which reflects their views towards Native dances. Prior to the 1900s, federal officials in the BIA criticized but did not prohibit Native involvement in exhibitions. By the 1910s, as Indian reformers attacked federal allotment policies, many officials defended those policies and assimilation by condemning show-Indian events. In his 1917 Annual Report, the Commissioner of Indian Affairs strongly discouraged “the employment of Indians for exhibition purposes,” and argued that “participation in such exhibitions is not conducive to the formation of habits of industry and thrift which I am endeavoring to inculcate among the Indians.”¹⁰⁴ Moses claims that BIA agents feared that Indian performances might give the impression to audiences that assimilation policies did not work.¹⁰⁵

Many Indian reformers also criticized exhibitions for depicting Indians as “backwards” while emphasizing the success of Indian assimilation. Christian reformers in particular argued that shows should illustrate the successes of allotment in civilizing Indians and elevating them into property-owning citizens who dressed in Western clothing and abandoned traditional regalia and dance practices.¹⁰⁶ The Indian Rights Association (IRA), comprised of white reformist European-American “friends” of the Indians, claimed the shows misrepresented Native cultures and reduced performers to objects of entertainment, rather than dignified individuals. Yet despite

¹⁰³ Moses, *Wild West Shows*, 171-173, 253.

¹⁰⁴ United States, Office of Indian Affairs, *Annual report of the commissioner of Indian affairs, for the year 1917* (Washington, D.C.: G.P.O., 1917), <http://digicoll.library.wisc.edu/cgi-bin/History/History-idx?type=article&did=History.AnnRep1517.i0003&id=History.AnnRep1517&size=M>, 40.

¹⁰⁵ Moses, *Wild West Shows*, 222.

¹⁰⁶ Moses, *Wild West Shows*, 118.

their greater approach to cultural sensitivity, the IRA mainly wanted to have show-Indians depicted as people not as supposedly stuck in a primitive past, but as capable of assimilating.¹⁰⁷

America's entry into World War I, the growing age of actors, and increased criticisms by the BIA largely contributed to the declining popularity of Wild West shows and other Indian exhibitions. When the United States entered World War 1 (1917), public interest in Wild West shows and other show-Indian exhibitions declined. Wild West show actors were then aged, and the death of Buffalo Bill Cody in 1917 effectively ended the era.¹⁰⁸ The BIA also increased its opposition to shows (along with dances) in the 1920s. In 1921 BIA Commissioner Charles Burke discouraged show-Indian events, suggesting such pageants and fairs displayed "old-time feats of barbarity that have no elevating effect upon the spectators" and that hindered Native abilities to farm and work their lands.¹⁰⁹ Burke also worried that these events obfuscated the federal government's push for a unified American culture amidst the Red Scare (America's fear over subversion of communists and political radicalists in the country) by suggesting that cultural and racial distinctions thrived within the country. Instead, Burke encouraged BIA superintendents to supervise Native-run agricultural fairs to "divert the interests of the Indians from so-called Wild West shows and sensational round-ups," and motivated county and state agricultural associations to participate in supporting Native groups' involvement in farming competitions.¹¹⁰

By the late 1910s, the film industry shifted the country's interest from the shows as well; although, Natives hardly played Native American roles. Films could focus on certain narratives

¹⁰⁷ Moses, *Wild West Shows*, 5.

¹⁰⁸ Moses, *Wild West Shows*, 193.

¹⁰⁹ United States, Office of Indian Affairs, *Annual report of the commissioner of Indian affairs, for the year 1921* (Washington, D.C.: G.P.O., 1921), <http://digicoll.library.wisc.edu/cgi-bin/History/History-idx?type=article&did=History.AnnRep2132.i0001&id=History.AnnRep2132&isize=M>, 11-12.

¹¹⁰ Moses, *Wild West Shows*, 258; quote from United States, Office of Indian Affairs, *Annual Report*, 12.

of the exhibitions, such as romance and conquest, more easily than the often hectic and larger exhibition arena events. Movie theatre tickets could also be cheaper than exhibition tickets, locations less cumbersome to travel to, and directors did not have to employ as many performers for their films, as Wild West shows often employed hundreds of different actors.¹¹¹ Natives rarely participated in Wild West-style films, however. As the BIA stepped up criticisms of Wild West shows and other exhibitions in the 1920s, directors mostly hired non-Native actors as they were less costly and easier to contract. Natives largely ceased to play Native roles in films until the civil rights reforms during the 1960s-1970s.¹¹²

For Natives who did appear in film, their stereotyped roles as primitive, yet noble, savages continued to reflect American anxieties about becoming too civilized or America's colonial pursuits. In one particular example, after the live Arctic exhibit ended in 1898 at the Museum of Natural History, many Americans continued to be enthralled by Arctic life and romanticized the region as a place of cleanliness, purity, redemption, and noble virtues, even as they asserted colonial power and racial superiority over indigenous Arctic peoples.¹¹³ The popular 1922 film *Nanook of the North* reflected many of these sentiments as the director depicted Nanook (real name Allakariallak) as a noble hunter, stoic in the face of severe environmental conditions, but also as a "savage" who hunts with primitive spears instead of modern guns. He also told Allakariallak to act confused when a white European trader attempted to teach him how to use a gramophone, and even encouraged him to bite the record as a mark of his childlike primitivism and the need to colonize and assimilate Arctic Natives (see figure 4).¹¹⁴

¹¹¹ Moses, *Wild West Shows*, 250-251, 253.

¹¹² Moses, *Wild West Shows*, 275.

¹¹³ Huhndorf, 127-126.

¹¹⁴ Huhndorf, *Going Native*, 100, 110-113. By the 1970s, many Inuit drew upon the negative experiences of Minik and films such as *Nanook* to fight for greater sovereign rights in the Arctic region and the state of Alaska.



(Figure 4) Allakariallak laughing in the gramophone scene of *Nanook of the North*. Director Robert J. Flaherty instructed him to inspect and bite the gramophone out of his supposed ignorance of the technology. Allakariallak knew what it was, however, and laughed at the orders. Flaherty kept the laughing to illustrate the supposed naivety of Allakariallak, but read in another way, this image is one of a Native’s mockery of the culturally-insensitive demands of people imbued with notions of social Darwinism. (From https://1001movienights.files.wordpress.com/2014/04/nanook_record.jpg, date posted 4/29/2014, date accessed 4/25/2019)

Effects of Shows on Changing Indian Policies and Cultural Revitalism for Natives

Despite the decline in popularity of show-Indian exhibitions, continued public interest in Native culture encouraged more white Americans to criticize allotment policies and call for increased support for Native culture and societies. As historian Tom Holm argues, romanticized notions of Native identity –simple lives, healthful physiques, and natural lifestyles— portrayed in show-Indian events translated well into literature and film. In 1911 alone, around 200 films depicting “Indian lives,” rather than simple western adventure stories, filled movie theatres

across the country and attracted large audiences.¹¹⁵ The country's growing fascination with Native identity contributed to increased criticisms by many white Americans against allotment policies. White Americans who feared the degenerative effects of industrialization and modernity celebrated romanticized notions of Native identity and increasingly supported federal attempts to support the preservation of traditional Native cultures and social welfare of Native communities.¹¹⁶ Popular interest and Natives' battles against stereotypes of their identity culminated in public support for the so-called "Indian New Deal" in 1934, as Native involvement in show-Indian events swayed national support away from allotment policies and towards tribal autonomy. As Moses succinctly argues, "Show Indians were not responsible for the Native American cultural renaissance that began in earnest in the 1930s; but they contributed to it by creating and sustaining powerful images of real Indians from real places in the American West."¹¹⁷

Native American criticisms of show-Indian exhibitions also encouraged them to eliminate stereotypes about their own identity. Native scholars, such as Charles Eastman and Arthur Parker, endorsed the growing national interest in Native cultures as avenues to more tightly weave into American society. By the late 1910s, they also stepped up criticisms of show-Indian events. These activists recognized that because most Americans viewed Native Americans as living, cognizant symbols, Natives could manipulate their own symbolic meanings, and thus eliminate stereotypes these events perpetuated.¹¹⁸ Eastman and Parker both viewed the growth of the Boy Scouts and Camp Fire Girls, in particular, as a major avenue for this change. These

¹¹⁵ Tom Holm, *The Great Confusion*, 120-121. See Chapter 5 for his full discussion on America's fascination real and imagined aspects of Native identity.

¹¹⁶ Holm, *The Great Confusion*, 128-130, 188-189.

¹¹⁷ Moses, *Wild West Shows*, 273.

¹¹⁸ Deloria, *Playing Indian*, 124.

youth organizations often imitated Indian culture, such as regalia, dances, or languages, to channel the noble virtues of Natives which could be used to offset the effects of modernity. By placing real Native Americans in important positions within these groups, such as camp counselors, Eastman and Parker endeavored to reduce stereotypes (such as the feathered headdress) of Native identity while increasing economic opportunities for Native Americans.¹¹⁹

Conclusion

Many supporters of the Indian New Deal believed that they were “saving” Native cultures, but Native Americans had been using their participation in show-Indian events as ways to modify and continue cultural traditions for decades. Performers were largely able to dress in their traditional regalia and engage in traditional customs, such as dance, outside the influence of castigating BIA officials, and received greater economic opportunities than they may have acquired on reservations. Native Americans also had a strong role in negotiating their use as symbols for American cultural and spiritual rejuvenation and sought to counter popular stereotypes by educating Americans as to more accurate aspects of Native identity. While film, literature, and various clubs continued to reify many stereotypes of Native identity, show-Indian events contributed in generating increased promotions for social welfare reform for Native groups among the American public. They also provided many Native Americans the ability to maintain or transform traditional cultural aspects while attaining greater financial opportunities within the repressive socioeconomic structure established by white American officials.

¹¹⁹ Deloria, *Playing Indian*, 120, 125.

Chapter 3: Rochester's Show-Indians

Rochesterians flocked to show-Indian events just as much white audiences did around the country. From the 1880s to the 1930s, public officials and businessmen in Rochester, NY staged Wild West shows, Native dances, and exhibitions stereotyping Indian culture. White middle- and upper-class Rochesterians who attended these events likely viewed them through similar cultural lenses as people around the country. Initially viewing Native cultural performances as demonstrations of savagery, Rochester audiences came to romanticize these performances as expressions of physical vitality, spiritual connections to nature, and, for some, the country's vanishing past. Moreover, as in national show-Indian events, performances offered Native participants opportunities for income and cultural revitalization. White audiences and Natives also recognized dance as a cornerstone of Native identity, and it functioned as a medium to discuss broader topics of Native affairs. These performances arguably contributed to developing more amiable Native-white relations in the state. Native Americans were in the Rochester community's eye, and their local performances in the city—whether stereotyped or authentic—fostered the public sympathy that helped change state Native policies which intended to save “vanishing” Native communities towards the more culturally-sensitive (yet still paternalistic) policies of the 1934 Indian Reorganization Act.¹²⁰

Background/Context of Wild West Performances in Rochester, NY

Prior to the 1880s, some public events and festivals in Rochester featured Native American cultural performances, but by this time the events did not yet provide the Wild West-

¹²⁰ As documentation of the events scarcely exists, most of the evidence derives from newspaper accounts. Annual reports from the Park's Dept. do not contain much different information than in newspapers. Source material of those involved in creating the events, however, such as Samuel Moulthrop, are woven in when possible.

style offerings of equestrianism, bowmanship, or frontier skirmishes. Most of the shows included dances and occurred around holidays, especially the Fourth of July. A local union known as “the workingmen,” for example, helped to organize a Fourth of July picnic in 1873 at Maple Grove Park and encouraged their manager to invite members of the Tuscarora to provide additional entertainment for the event. The Tuscarora performed a war dance for its white attendees, including the mayor and members of the University of Rochester.¹²¹

By the 1880s-1890s, exaggerated stories of belligerent Natives increased white Rochesterians’ fears and excitement over their perceptions of Native identity. The Indian wars out West increased awareness of Native affairs in the city as much as they did around the country. Newspaper stories about the Ghost Dance religion in the West also strengthened public interest in and fear of Native culture. The Paiute spiritual leader Wovoka began the Ghost Dance religious movement as a peaceful way to forge pan-Indian unity against white expansion by claiming the Creator would return the world to an aboriginal state through the dances. Native groups like the Lakota, however, incorporated more militaristic elements to their Ghost Dances, such as wearing shirts they claimed could repel bullets.¹²² Many white Americans feared these adaptations would lead to increased Native attacks on white settlements. An 1890 Rochester news article claimed the religious movement was “simply a dance of cruel endurance,” and that “the situation is so grave that even old Indian fighters and scouts refuse to express an opinion as to the final outcome of [the Ghost Dances].”¹²³

¹²¹ “The Workingmen and the Fourth,” *Democrat and Chronicle* (Rochester, NY), July 3rd, 1873, p. 4.

¹²² Troy R. Johnson, *Red Power: The Native American Civil Rights Movement* (New York, NY: Chelsea House, 2007), 18-21.

¹²³ “Indians on the Warpath,” *Democrat and Chronicle* (Rochester, NY), November 22, 1890, page 1.

Conditions within New York State also fostered public interest in Native affairs which facilitated the formation of Rochester's show-Indian events. In the late 1880s, many news articles discussed the Whipple Committee's investigation into New York's debates over allotment and jurisdictional rights over Native groups. A popular topic was the state of social welfare of Natives on reservations. One such article in the *Democrat and Chronicle* (D&C) from March 26, 1888 discussed the committee's investigation of the Cattaraugus reservation in western NY and noted "now that public attention has been called to them [Native Americans] by the energetic assemblymen [Mr. Whipple] it is to be hoped that steps will be taken to improve their moral and physical condition."¹²⁴ According to scholar Helen Upton, such reports about the social welfare of Native groups stimulated public discussions about Native affairs and encouraged more whites to reconsider Native roles within the state's sociopolitical structure.¹²⁵

Finally, the cognitive frameworks surrounding Native-white relations by the 1880s further facilitated the production of these exhibitions. Events featuring Native Americans were not just forms of entertainment for white Rochesterians. They also offered glimpses of part of the country's "vanishing" past and affirmed notions of white dominance. Influenced by social theories of their day, such as anthropologist Lewis Henry Morgan's theory of social evolution, or others like social Darwinism, they believed Natives still resided in the "savage" stage of human development, and were in danger of vanishing as more civilized societies progressed around them. Many encouraged them to assimilate into white society to escape their supposedly more primitive cultures, as did an 1889 *D&C* article which applauded a Dakota for attending the Hampton Institute (a Virginian college which offered formal education for Native Americans)

¹²⁴ "Some Important Measures," *Democrat and Chronicle* (Rochester, NY), March 26, 1888, page 1.

¹²⁵ Upton, *Everett Report*, 76.

and his efforts to “climb the ladder of civilization and Christianity” now that “the buffalo was gone.”¹²⁶

Some white Rochesterians could also view Native culture as representations of anti-modernity or anti-Victorianism while affirming notions of white supremacy. More white Americans by the late 19th century were concerned about becoming “overcivilized,” as historian Jackson Lears describes it. They worried modernization and industrialization had created lifestyles grounded in sedentary occupations and materialism, leading people to become physically lethargic, emotionally exhausted, and spiritually unconnected with their own sense of free will and the natural world. These people could therefore view Native primitiveness – anti-modern ties to nature, physical strength, and endurance—as an asset to prevent overcivilizing by imitating or experiencing traditional Native culture. By continuing to view Natives as savage, however, they also still worked to affirm notions of their racial superiority to non-whites.¹²⁷

Wild West shows in Rochester: Ontario Beach and Seabreeze

By the 1880s, these various forces contributed to the increased popularity of local Native American performances in places like Ontario Beach and Seabreeze Parks. As popular leisure destinations, these areas were the perfect locations to feature Native American cultural displays. Ontario Beach, in Charlotte, had been a popular resort area during the 1870s for middle and upper class white Rochesterians, which transitioned in the 1880s into a cross-class amusement park. Seabreeze, in Irondequoit, became another popular tourist attraction in 1879 for its scenic views of Lake Ontario and Irondequoit Bay. Due to their popularity, these amusement parks

¹²⁶ “Working for many Races: The Education and Civilization of Negroes and Indians,” *Democrat and Chronicle* (Rochester, NY), November 22, 1889, page 6.

¹²⁷ Deloria, *Playing Indian*, 94; Lears, *Rebirth*, 37, 102, 289.

were nicknamed the “Coney Island of Western New York.”¹²⁸ Historian Kyle Somerville notes that local businessmen funded the development of these parks, and also hired non-whites to exhibit their “strange cultures” for white Rochesterians, such as Japanese immigrants who staged a mock “bazaar” for visitors to view, and Africans and Native Canadians who dressed in traditional regalia to display their “savagery.”¹²⁹ While Somerville overlooks Iroquois performances in his list of non-white exhibitions, he echoes the claims of Lears by noting that these exhibitions “gave a sense of exotic uniqueness” for white Rochesterians. When coupled with the Moorish, Oriental, and Queen-Anne styled structures of the midway at Ontario, non-white performances provided white Rochesterians with an opportunity to escape the confines of modernity in the city by gazing at the lifestyles of more “primitive” cultures. White Rochesterians likely viewed these experiences as an opportunity to combat anxieties of modernization by reconnecting with supposedly more simple worlds around them, or as a way to reassure themselves of their cultural superiority over non-white groups.¹³⁰

Various people tried to boost attendance to Ontario Beach and Seabreeze by hiring Native Americans for public exhibitions that were both entertaining and culturally and racially appealing for white audiences. Businessmen typically contracted Native groups to these locations because of their role in funding the parks’ amusement projects. One such man was J.D. Scott, excursion manager of the Bay Railroad Company in 1891, who secured “Chief Williams’s troupe of wild west Indians to give free exhibitions at the Sea Breeze, who camped on the grounds for six days.”¹³¹ Non-businessmen were also involved in hiring Native groups, such as R. E. Lawton.

¹²⁸ Kyle Somerville, “This is where I love to go’: The (re)creation of Place at Ontario Beach Park,” *Central Library of Rochester and Monroe County*, vol. 75 no. 1 (Spring 2013): 2. Somerville gives the title specifically to Ontario, though Seabreeze also lays claim to the nickname.

¹²⁹ Somerville, “This is where,” 7, 16. Whether these are African-born people or American citizens is unknown.

¹³⁰ Somerville, “This is where,” 17-18; Deloria, *Playing Indian*, 101-102; Lears, *Rebirth of a Nation*, 7-8.

¹³¹ “At Sea Breeze,” *Democrat and Chronicle* (Rochester, NY), August 18, 1891, page 8.

A close friend of Rochesterian George H. Harris, who had close ties with many Seneca, Lawton contracted them to come to the parks to foster feelings of cultural and racial superiority among white audiences by contrasting themselves against the supposed “primitiveness” of Native groups. According to an 1899 article describing his involvement in Native events at Ontario Beach Park, Lawton wished “it to be known that these are strictly pagan Indians, having not the slightest pretense to civilization, and that their mode of living and behavior while at the beach will be in exact accordance with the life they lead on the reservation.”¹³² Since Native performances were both entertaining and supported notions of cultural and racial supremacy for white audiences, managers frequently rehired groups to increase parks attendance. Thus in 1892 a group of Tuscarora had their contracts extended for another two weeks at Seabreeze, as their performances drew “large crowds daily for the last two months.”¹³³

Native performers provided various cultural displays for white audiences which could be educational, while others, grounded in racial assertions of the day, were more competitive. Informative demonstrations might include how to craft bead works and wampum. More entertaining events displayed Native skills with a bow or lacrosse games, although competitions between Native and white sports groups were also popular to attend. Such competitions drew white audiences, according to historian Tom Holm, because while many white Americans claimed themselves racially superior to Native Americans, they also claimed Natives were physically dominant to white Americans due to their lifestyles conditioned in the wilderness rather than the city. Sporting events between Natives and whites therefore became a strenuous

¹³² William T. Davis, “The Search for Rochester’s Earliest Inhabitants: On the Trail with George Harris, The Pathfinder,” *Rochester History*, Vol. 44, Nos. 1 and 2 (Jan. and Apr. 1982): 2-5, 8; “Indian Invasion: Ontario Beach Park to be the Scene of Mimic War Dances,” *Democrat and Chronicle* (Rochester, NY), June 23, 1899, page 9.

¹³³ “Re-Engagement of Indians,” *Democrat and Chronicle* (Rochester, NY), Aug. 4, 1892, page 10. The group is mentioned as being led by the same “Chief Williams,” though it is unclear whether that is a title by the author or his actual title.

test against two racially distinct opponents whose modes of living conditioned their bodies in different ways.¹³⁴ Newspaper articles nicely reflect this view. As one article promised, white competitors would receive “\$50 in gold to any amateur team that can defeat the Iroquois.”¹³⁵

Managers also attempted to illustrate the benefits of assimilation for Native Americans in these events, although many white Americans found more excitement in traditional portrayals of Native culture. Amidst national and state-wide debates over assimilation, events incorporating Native performers provided occasions for managers to emphasize the supposed benefits of civilization to Native groups. Organizers hired Native musicians from boarding schools, such as the Carlisle Indian Industrial School, or from state-funded reservation schools to demonstrate the progress of assimilation among Natives through their Euro-American-style musicianship.

GRAND CONCERT	
By Tuscarora Indians, Windsor Beach, To-day, June 16th, 1889, at 3:30 P. M.	
SPECIAL TRAINS VIA ROME, WATERTOWN & OGDENSBURG R. R.	
PART FIRST.	
Overture—Indian Medicine Dance.	
Quartette—Medley	C. E. White
Glee Club.	
Spy Dance.	
Song—Sweet Spirit Hear My Prayer	W. T. Wallace
Helen M. Beaver, Queen.	
Bass solo	Southwell
N. T. Thompson.	
Cornet Solo—Warrior's Dream	Rollinson
N. Cusick.	
Quartette—Let one dream while life shall linger	Packard
Glee Club.	
Quartette—Selected	
Enos Johnson, Helen M. Beaver, Rachel Mt. Pleasant, Luther Jack.	
Song and chorus—I am King from land and o'er seas	W. L. Thompson
Enos Johnson.	
War Dance.	
Quartette—The Tar's Farewell	Stephen Adams
Glee Club.	
Song—Selected	
Rachel Mt. Pleasant.	
Snake Dance.	
Medley Quartette	
Glee Club.	
Indian Lacrosse	All Indians.
One Mile Race—National Prize.	
A series of races will be run during the season by Indians for a national belt.	
TUSCARORA NATIONAL GLEE CLUB.	
Enos Johnson, Second Bass.	
Eli Cusick, First Bass.	
Elizar Garlow, Second Tenor.	
Helen M. Beaver, Alto.	
Rachel Mt. Pleasant, Soprano.	
Chief Luther W. Jack, Director and First Tenor.	

Traditional Native customs still remained integral parts of their performances, however. Many white audiences expected dance to be a part of any Native performances because it was a powerful link to Native identity.¹³⁶ Managers of Rochester's Native events followed suit by weaving dances into the itineraries of Native bands (see figure 5).

(Figure 5) An advertisement featuring the daily schedule for Native exhibitions at Windsor Beach is similar to those at Ontario and Seabreeze. The itinerary mixed traditional performances, such as war dances, with Euro-American ones, such as songs by the quartette. (*D&C* [Rochester, NY], Sun. Jun. 16, 1889, page 7, image from *newspapers.com*, downloaded Jan. 22, 2019).

¹³⁴ Holm, *The Great Confusion*, 117-119.

¹³⁵ "Pavilion Theater," *Democrat and Chronicle* (Rochester, NY), July 2, 1892, page 8.

¹³⁶ Qureshi, *Peoples on Parade*, 124.

Dances, especially the war dance, were so popular among white audiences that they were always a part of the events. The green corn dance and ghost dance are among some of the performances listed at Ontario Beach and Seabreeze. The war dance was most frequently mentioned, perhaps because audiences enjoyed the dance and connected it to the supposedly innate war-like attributes of Native Americans. Many white Americans such as Theodore Roosevelt considered Native Americans natural-born warriors who were brave, cunning, and ferocious, as historian Gary Gerstle explains.¹³⁷ Frequent performances of war dances also supports scholar Jacqueline Murphy's claim that the presentation of dances in a contained atmosphere, such as in parks, replaced white fears of attack from Native dancers with fascination from a safe distance as white audiences viewed the performers as under white men's control.¹³⁸ A final reason for the dance's popularity could relate to how many white Rochesterians tightly linked the war dance with Native "savagery." Authors occasionally described fits of rage by whites as "war dances" to make them seem more barbaric. When describing the domestic troubles between one separated couple, a writer noted how the wife executed "a war dance with her bonnet off" while "shouting all sorts of names and throwing rocks at the house."¹³⁹

Compared to later events, a more distinct feature of the Ontario Beach and Seabreeze exhibitions were Wild West-style performances. Rochester's shows mirrored the model and intent of those around the nation, as managers designed the shows to justify the expansion of white American domination over allegedly savage Native groups.¹⁴⁰ Organizers in these locations often setup mock pioneer and Indian villages, raids, and simulated battles between

¹³⁷ Gerstle, *American Crucible*, 20.

¹³⁸ Murphy, *The People Have Never Stopped Dancing*, 75.

¹³⁹ "They Are Both in Jail," *Democrat and Chronicle* (Rochester, NY), August 27th, 1895, page 4.

¹⁴⁰ Moses, *Wild West Shows*, 146-148.

pioneers or Native groups. The torture of captives by “savage” Natives were also common features of the events. One such performance in 1903 featured “a thrilling attack on a rival band of redskins, a fierce sham battle, after which the victorious warriors will celebrate their victory by torturing their captives, tying them to trees and starting fires around them.”¹⁴¹ Others illustrated the heroics of white pioneers in rescue situations to highlight feelings of imperial glory among many white Americans: an 1892 exhibition featured “Indian war dances, burning of the log cabin, torture of the captives and rescue by the scouts.”¹⁴² By 1904, as a national craze inspired professionalized spinoffs of Buffalo Bill Cody’s Wild West Shows, the events became more elaborate and included lassoing and feats of equestrianism (see figures 6 and 7).

AT SEA BREEZE
Indian Village
—AND—
Indian Cornet Band.



CONCERTS FREE!
Come One, Come All!

Purchase the yellow 35c ticket from your home to Sea Breeze by Bay R. R., to Summerville or Ontario Beach by steamer J. D. Scott, home by electric cars. What a combination. No ticket in Rochester sold by anyone that can compare. All the street-car conductors have them, also at W. J. Wilcox Book Store, 12 State Street.

**Genesee River and Lake Ontario
Steamboat Company.**

J. D. SCOTT, President. W. J. WILCOX, Sec. and Treas.

WILD WEST AT SEA BREEZE

Indian Congress Opens an Engagement at the Resort Sunday.

Kennedy Brothers' Indian Congress, Wild West show and hippodrome will begin an engagement Sunday at Sea Breeze, the performance to be given at the ball grounds. The congress is said to comprise many interesting and novel features.

The Wild West feature of the entertainment opens with a pow-wow of Indians previous to their declaring war on the whites. This is followed by the burning of a settler's cabin, an attack upon immigrants' wagons, and the rout of the Indians by cowboys. Fancy and trick riding, lassoing and roping, Indian races and the capturing and hanging of a horse thief are included in the performance.

(Figure 6 - left) An advertisement to attend exhibition shows at Seabreeze, focusing on Native American performers and imitations of Native history. Companies such as Bay Railroad often funded the events, and concerts were usually free. (*D&C* [Rochester, NY], Sun. Jul. 21, 1895, page 13, image from *newspapers.com*, downloaded Jan. 26, 2019).

¹⁴¹ “Indian War and Life: Realistic Scenes from Border Wars and Camp Life, at Sea Breeze,” *Democrat and Chronicle* (Rochester, NY), August 30, 1903, page 21.

¹⁴² “All This at the Sea Breeze,” *Democrat and Chronicle* (Rochester, NY), July 9th, 1892, page 9.

(Figure 7 - right) An ad describing Wild West style performances at Seabreeze. The Kennedy Brothers' Indian Congress was a spinoff of Buffalo Bill Cody's Wild West shows. Describing Natives as "declaring war on the whites" is noteworthy, as it helps depict white settlers as the victims during expansion. (*D&C* [Rochester, NY], Fri. May 27, 1904, page 10. Image from *newspapers.com*, downloaded Jan. 27, 2019).¹⁴³

Native Americans also performed in other locations around Rochester. White audiences, both old and young, continued to view Natives as racial and cultural inferiors, matching the sentiments of their contemporaries around the nation.¹⁴⁴ Numerous plays throughout the city boasted of having "real" Native actors. Advertisements for the traveling drama "The Indian Mail Carrier" featuring Native actress Gowango Mohawk promised "authentic" Native performances of "singing, dancing, and comedy."¹⁴⁵ In another case, R.E. Lawton brought Seneca Indians to the Ontario County Orphan Asylum in September 1899 at the invitation of the Ontario County Agricultural Society to hold dances, sports, and other games for children at the institution. Apparently invited to entertain rather than educate, the Seneca performed alongside a dog circus, providing the sense that audiences derogatorily viewed the Native group as a mere novelty act performing alongside trained animals.¹⁴⁶ Buffalo Bill's Wild West show also occasionally toured the city. Reviewers noted that a July 1897 performance was "a show to remember," and that the crowds were "as large as Rochester would turn out for any sort of entertainment." Racial and cultural bigotry was evident, however, as reviewers demeaningly described Native horse riders

¹⁴³ Wild West events could be dangerous to its performers as well as audiences. In mid-July 1899 members of the Tuscarora and white performers presented the storming of a settler's cabin in Summerville. Several of the Natives' cartridges in their guns (which were supposed to be blank) exploded, injuring six persons in the crowd. The reason why the guns were loaded appears to be unknown. See "Indians Fired into the Crowd," *D&C*, July 14th, 1899, page 10, and "Sheriff is on the Indians' Trail," *D&C*, July 15th, 1899, page 12, for more information.

¹⁴⁴ Tom Holm, *The Great Confusion*, 115, 121.

¹⁴⁵ Advertisement for "The Indian Mail Carrier" in *The Catholic Journal* (Rochester, NY), May 30, 1890, page 6.

¹⁴⁶ "County Orphans Treated to the Fair's Sights Through Society's Generosity," *Democrat and Chronicle* (Rochester, NY), Sep. 22, 1899, page 4.

as “not as wonderful as those of the cowboys and cavalry” and the show’s Native dances as “the most weird thing imaginable.”¹⁴⁷

These events were not entirely patronizing for Native performers. Mirroring national opportunities, performing off reservation at public events in Rochester could offer additional sources of revenue for Native Americans so long as they maintained contractual obligations.¹⁴⁸ The *D&C* noted in 1892 that a group of 16 Seneca signed a \$250/week contract with M.E. Robinson to hold dances and lacrosse games at Charlotte during the month of July, and also paid for their travel from Salamanca to Charlotte. According to the author, however, Robinson severed the contract when the Seneca group showed up late to a performance “not only with no la crosses” but also because they “had only four players among them.” Robinson then sent out new advertisements “calling for exhibition Indians” to perform in place of the original group.¹⁴⁹

As across the nation, white Rochesterians’ attendance of these events also enabled Native Americans to exercise traditional customs relatively free from the pressures of assimilationists on and off reservations. By the early 1900s New York State’s ability to impose assimilation policies on Native groups was uncertain, mostly due to the Ogden Company’s claim to pre-emptive rights to purchase Native lands. Many Iroquois also strongly fought to maintain sociopolitical sovereignty, and continued to practice traditional customs more freely on reservations as compared with the rest of the country. Seneca author Jesse Cornplanter documented many of these social activities in work *Iroquois Indian games and dances* (1903), in which his colorful illustrations show how many Iroquois dressed in traditional regalia during dances or games.¹⁵⁰

¹⁴⁷ “Buffalo Bill’s Rough Riders,” *Democrat and Chronicle* (Rochester, NY), July 22, 1897, page 5.

¹⁴⁸ Moses, *Wild West Shows*, 277.

¹⁴⁹ “Stranded Aborigines,” *Democrat and Chronicle* (Rochester, NY), July 12th, 1892, page 9.

¹⁵⁰ Jesse J. Cornplanter, *Iroquois Indian games and dances: drawn by Jesse Cornplanter, Seneca Indian boy* (United States: Starr, Frederick, 1903), date accessed 5/1/2019, <https://acdc.amherst.edu/view/asc:789722/asc:789751>

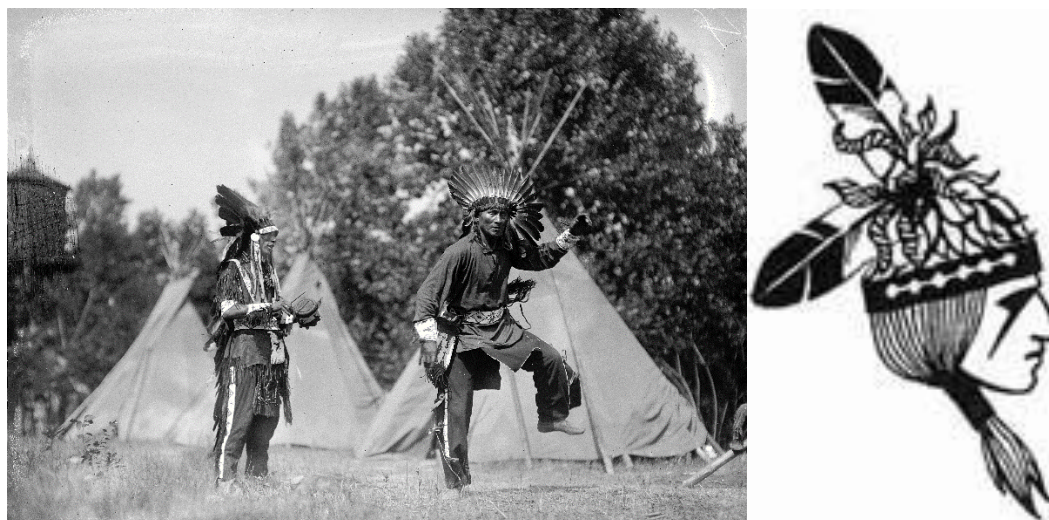
Even so, reservation schools still strived for Native Americans to abandon their traditional culture, and Christian Natives also opposed the free practice such cultural customs as dance (see chapter 1).¹⁵¹ Show-Indian events, as Moses stipulates, therefore created additional spaces for Native peoples to express cultural customs outside pressures of assimilationists on reservations, and white audiences' fascination with traditional Native culture further encouraged performers to more freely express their traditions.¹⁵² A July 1905 *D&C* article reflected these public sentiments, as it described how viewing traditional Native dances at Seabreeze made "many a small boy's heart beat like a trip hammer," and performers' "jackets elaborately decorated with bead-work" were envied by white audiences, as well, for their craftsmanship.¹⁵³

By the 1900s Rochester's show-Indian events also obfuscated the white public's understanding of traditional Iroquois culture in many ways. As they practiced traditional cultural customs such as dance, many Native performers in Rochester's exhibits also dressed in ways suited to white audiences' stereotypes of Native Americans. The most common non-traditional piece of regalia Iroquois performers donned was the Plains-style feathered headdress, instead of the more appropriate Eastern Woodlands-style *gustoweh*. They also occasionally built tepees on camp grounds instead of demonstrating the construction of a longhouse to further meet audience expectations of Native identity (see figure 8).

¹⁵¹ See page 24 of chapter 3; New York (State) Bureau of Elementary School Supervision, *Indian Education*, 10; Burich, "No Place to Go," 103; Upton, *Everett Report*, 56-58

¹⁵² Moses, *Wild West Shows*, 277-279.

¹⁵³ "Indians at Sea Breeze," *Democrat and Chronicle* (Rochester, NY), July 24th, 1905, page 9.



(Figure 8) Unfortunately, no images of the Ontario Beach or Seabreeze events could be found, though a public dance at Maplewood Park around 1910 represents various stereotypes of Native identity prevalent among many white Rochesterians during the period. The Iroquois on the left are in front of teepees (the dwelling of most Plains groups, not the Iroquois) and also don Sioux-style war bonnets instead of the Eastern Woodlands-style *gustoweh* depicted on the right, which is far less ornate and free-flowing.¹⁵⁴ (Image on left from the Albert R. Stone Negative Collection, Rochester Museum & Science Center, Rochester, NY. *Gustoweh* on right downloaded from *Onondaganation.org*, date accessed 5/1/2019, <https://www.onondaganation.org/culture/dress/>)

Height of Show-Indian Events in Rochester, Maplewood and Seneca Parks: 1900s-1920s

In the decade before America's entry in World War I (1917), Rochester mirrored changes in show-Indian events and public perceptions of Native identity across the nation. Many appropriated Native identity to regenerate their sense of physical and mental vitality. While criticisms of allotment increased, several people still viewed Natives as vanishing and Indian reformers increasingly attempted to prevent their disappearance by focusing on preserving Native cultures for their "valuable intrinsic tenets," according to Holm.¹⁵⁵ Historian Jackson Lears also notes that around the turn of the 19th century, many more white Americans believed Native Americans' primitive yet "noble virtues" of physical endurance, divine connectivity with

¹⁵⁴ The position of the feathers in a *gustoweh* indicates an individual's nation. In this case, the feathers show the man is Onondaga, whereas one feather pointing skyward would indicate he is Seneca.

¹⁵⁵ Holm, *The Great Confusion*, 130-132, 146.

nature, and stoicism could be learned and adopted to offset the degenerative spiritual and physical effects of modernization and industrialization. As a result, white Americans more actively pursued ways to improve their fitness or reconnect with the natural world through nature treks, imitating Native culture, or attending exhibitions displaying Native peoples.¹⁵⁶

White Americans also used Native identity to recreate their sense of Americanness during this period. As more immigrants arrived to the United States by the late 19th century, Americans increasingly sought to redefine their sense of American identity as distinctly white. Those who sought to imbibe the noble anti-modern virtues of Native Americans thus argued they could do so while safely remaining atop of the cultural and racial hierarchy due to the supposed racial inferiority of Natives.¹⁵⁷ Moses also claims Americans recreated their sense of identity by incorporating Natives as a part of the country's distinct history. White Americans considered Native groups a discrete part of the country's noble, yet primitive, past from which white Americans claimed their society had since progressed. Public Native performances often offered opportunities to memorialize this part of the country's supposed vanishing history.¹⁵⁸

Various Native exhibitions during this period illustrate how many white Rochesterians appropriated Native identity to recreate their sense of Americanness. Most depicted Natives in nature scenes or retained notions of the vanishing ideology. Native American concerts, plays, and parades often portrayed them in "natural settings," which scholar Shari Hundorf argues implied that Native Americans, like the wild continental landscape, were conquered and civilized by America's natural development.¹⁵⁹ Rochester's September 1912 Centennial Day Parade float

¹⁵⁶ Lears, *Rebirth of a Nation*, 7-8, 37, 289. See also discussion in section 4, pages 14-15.

¹⁵⁷ Deloria, *Playing Indian*, 99-101.

¹⁵⁸ Moses, *Wild West Shows*, 5.

¹⁵⁹ Hundorf, *Going Native*, 60-61.

(which represented the city in 1770) supports this claim as it featured members of an Iroquois group on the float in a nature scene. Organizers surrounded them with tall grass, a tree, and other stereotypes of Native identity, such as a tepee (see figure 9). Wild West shows also continued to be popular attractions around the city for similar reasons. A May 1911 newspaper article noted how the 101 Ranch Wild West show offered a study of “the Indian... that can be taught by no other institution” as it allowed white audiences to view Native cultures at “the very firesides of civilization,” indicating that many whites considered Natives separate from American society. The article also reflected how some white Rochesterians still considered Natives to be “vanishing” by stating the show would contain Natives’ “habits, dances, manner of living... and all that goes to make the Indian interesting” before they became “a race entirely of the past.”¹⁶⁰



(Figure 9) A float in the 1912 Rochester Centennial Day Parade representing Rochester in 1770. Part of the context of the float includes natural settings, such as tall grass and a tree. The float also incorrectly includes a tepee as a form of Iroquois housing – the tepee is a Plains-style form of dwelling, whereas the Iroquois used longhouses. (From the Albert R. Stone Negative Collection, Rochester Museum & Science Center, Rochester, NY.)

¹⁶⁰ “Genuine Indians in Show: Kind that Haven’t Acquired Ways and Habits of White Men,” *Democrat and Chronicle* (Rochester, NY), May 14th, 1911, page 23.

Other Native exhibitions in the city more strongly emphasized the noble virtues of Native peoples that American society should integrate. Samuel P. Moulthrop's activities at Maplewood Park in 1907 most clearly illustrated this shift towards a greater appreciation of Native culture. He revived annual Native American cultural performances at the park while he was principal of School no. 26 to offer American aboriginal cultural studies for his students. Moulthrop had close ties with many local Iroquois groups, and he likely wanted to teach his students and community members about the benefits of learning Native culture. In his 1901 book *Iroquois*, he attempted to persuade readers how their lifestyles supposedly conditioned by nature created a "haughty sense of independence" and "hard and stern physiognomy" which were valuable traits for civilized people to learn.¹⁶¹ Moulthrop invited members of the Tonawanda to hold games, dances, and foot races for his students and also made plans to construct a longhouse on the park's camping ground.¹⁶² The *D&C* reported that "hundreds of people flocked to Maplewood Park... to witness the athletic prowess and the interesting dances of the bands of Senecas encamped there." These white audience members were thrilled to see Native dances and the competition between a local baseball team against the Tonawanda's team as a test of the Senecas' strength.¹⁶³

The continued popularity of Rochester's parks and their supposed rejuvenating benefits for white Rochesterians made them a great location for Native cultural performances. Parks commissioners made rapid developments of the parks system prior to 1900, improving transportation to park areas, games, buildings, and especially its horticulture. Rochester's horticultural improvements built upon the "Flower City's" reputation as a chief distributor of

¹⁶¹ Moulthrop, *Iroquois*, 6, 22-23.

¹⁶² "Indian Camp Affords Study of Primitive American Life," *Democrat and Chronicle* (Rochester, NY), June 22, 1907.

¹⁶³ "Indians in Their Own Dances and in Baseball and Lacrosse Games," *Democrat and Chronicle* (Rochester, NY), June 23, 1907. Interestingly, the article noted that a false faces dance was held, which are typically held in much more private ceremonies.

nursery crops, and the city became internationally known for the beauty of its parks.¹⁶⁴

Rochester's parks also became more popular by the early 1900s as people claimed that park systems functioned as ways to alleviate urban stress and combat anxieties of industrialization, historian Joy Porter argues.¹⁶⁵ These improvements and the supposed psychological benefits of parks led to the creation of new ones within the city, such as Maplewood Park in 1904.¹⁶⁶

Maplewood and Seneca Parks mostly held Native cultural performances from 1907- around 1918, and various individuals overseeing park affairs, especially William S. Riley and Alexander B. Lamberton, helped bring Native groups to these areas. In 1888 the city formed a 20 member Park Commission to stimulate the development of thriving neighborhoods, ease Rochester's debt, and fulfill residents' demands for more public parks. Its members elected a president among themselves along with a chairman to oversee affairs. In 1902, the commission appointed Riley as chairman of the Genesee Valley Park committee, and elected Lamberton as its president. In 1915, the mayor reorganized the Park Commission into the Department of Parks, appointing Lamberton as the sole commissioner and Riley as deputy commissioner.¹⁶⁷ Both men dedicated themselves to promoting events, such as Native exhibitions, to boost attendance to the city's parks. City historian Blake McKelvey notes, for example, how the establishment of Maplewood Park helped generate interest in continuing Moulthrop's revival of Native performances at the park, which culminated in the creation of "Indian Day" at Maplewood. The

¹⁶⁴ McKelvey, "An Historical View," 9; Blake McKelvey, "Economic Stages in the Growth of Rochester," *Rochester History*, vol. III, no. 4 (Oct. 1941): 15-16.

¹⁶⁵ Joy Porter, *To Be Indian*, 187.

¹⁶⁶ McKelvey, "An Historical View," 12-13. Maplewood formed from the west end of Seneca Park in 1904 after Maple Grove's addition to Seneca that year prompted a reformation of Seneca Park's organizational structure.

¹⁶⁷ Blake McKelvey, "An Historical View of Rochester's Parks and Playgrounds," *Rochester History*, vol. XI, No.1 (Jan. 1949): 2-3. Due to Lamberton's old age by 1915, Riley took over most of the department's duties despite being chairman, though Lamberton remained an influential presence in the department.

event included various demonstrations of Native culture around late May, though Native Americans also held cultural demonstrations there and at Seneca Park throughout the year.¹⁶⁸

Shows at some of Rochester's parks during this period continued to depict Native Americans as "savage." These mirrored various Wild West-style attributes, such as battle scenes, raids, or marksmanship displays, of Ontario and Seabreeze Parks in previous years. Based on research into newspaper articles and reports of the parks commissions, Maplewood and Seneca Park do not appear to have held Wild West-style events, though other parks around the city did. McKelvey notes that sham battles occasionally occurred between Native groups at Durand-Eastman Park as ways to boost attendance, and claimed that over 12,000 Rochesterians attended one such event on October 10, 1909.¹⁶⁹ A newspaper ad from September 27, 1914 also indicated that a charity circus held at Exposition Park offered Native dances and "Wild West scenes" alongside acrobatic exhibitions, trap shooters, and jugglers.¹⁷⁰ As Moses argues, Wild West events helped provide the false-impression for white audiences that Native performers continued to live in a past that was wild, primitive, or uncivilized.¹⁷¹

Maplewood and Seneca Park's shows offered displays of Native culture that were slightly more educational and participatory. This gradual shift supports historian Philip Deloria's arguments that by the early 1900s more Americans viewed and imitated Native "primitiveness" as a way to offer remedies to feelings of becoming too civilized, or to recreate notions of a culturally superior white American identity.¹⁷² Native participants in these exhibitions offered

¹⁶⁸ McKelvey, "An Historical View," 12-14.

¹⁶⁹ McKelvey, "An Historical View," 14. Durand-Eastman came under the department's control after Dr. Henry Durand and George Eastman gave the land to the commissioners as a gift in 1907.

¹⁷⁰ "All This for 25c at the Charity Circus: Exposition Park," *Democrat and Chronicle* (Rochester, NY), Sep. 27, 1914, page 26.

¹⁷¹ Moses, *Wild West Shows*, 222.

¹⁷² Holm, *Great Confusion*, 86-87; Deloria, *Playing Indian*, 94.

demonstrations of traditional practices, such as basket weaving, bead work, or grinding corn, though the most popular “educational” demonstrations were adoption ceremonies of influential white Rochesterians (as noted below, the ceremonies were not actually official adoptions). In late July 1912, for instance, the Seneca adopted various parks commissioners and Mayor Edgerton, who also participated in various dances which reporters claimed “appeared to amuse the crowd immensely.”¹⁷³ Though certainly entertaining for white Rochesterians, the quasi-adoption of Rochester officials could also function as a way for white participants to renegotiate their own identities. By miming traditional Native practices, according to Deloria, participants believed they could channel the virtues of Native individuality while visually contrasting Native identity against notions of white Euro-Americanness to help “define individual and group identities” through the medium of their bodies.¹⁷⁴

Despite the prevalence of more educational displays of Native culture, athletic displays or competitions also continued to be popular events. “Indian races,” arrow shooting, and especially dances continued to be common features of the park events. Games between Native and white sports teams also drew white audiences as they did at the Ontario and Seabreeze parks. One reporter even argued that events which did not highlight Native athleticism were not even “worth mentioning” in reports of Native exhibitions, as white audiences mostly came to witness the supposedly natural physicality of Native performers.¹⁷⁵

By 1915, the popularity of the events sparked debates over the Park Department’s representations of Native culture in the exhibitions. A *D&C* article described how both

¹⁷³ “Mayor Adept in Feather Dance: Takes Indian Steps Like Native Seneca, Acquired Imposing Title,” *Democrat and Chronicle* (Rochester, NY), July 21, 1912, page 22.

¹⁷⁴ Deloria, *Playing Indian*, 120.

¹⁷⁵ “Reservation Comedian Performs with Other Red Men at Park and Keeps Thousands Laughing,” *Democrat and Chronicle* (Rochester, NY), September 8, 1913, page 13.

traditionalist and Christian Natives on reservations largely objected to the performances for various reasons. Regarding traditional performances, George W. Kellogg, a resident of Charlotte who claimed to have studied Iroquoian culture for 15 years, argued the dances were not accurate depictions of ceremonial traditions due to the low number of performers. Citing the works of anthropologists Lewis Morgan and Harriet Maxwell Converse, Kellogg also argued that the adoption ceremonies were inaccurate. Despite the Department's claims, no actual Iroquois chiefs were present at the ceremonies, which was required to effectually adopt someone into the nation. Kellogg also joined the complaints of Freeman Johnson, a member of the Tonawanda Band of Seneca and later sachem (chief) of the Wolf Clan, regarding assimilation. Kellogg specifically claimed that "The Christian or progressive Indians do not like the way in which dances are performed" due to their representations of a supposed "pagan" tradition and performances on Sundays. Christian Natives worried that more traditional performances in the parks gave the impression to white audiences that Native people were somehow stuck in a pre-Christian past despite the integration of white cultural customs among many Iroquois.¹⁷⁶

To assuage both camps, Kellogg and Johnson suggested discontinuing the dances. Instead, they could be replaced by concerts from the Carlisle Indian Industrial School to depict Natives as more assimilated. Kellogg and Johnson also recommended having "an Indian picnic," whereby white Rochesterians could meet "prominent representatives of the Indians on the reservations and outside them" to discuss Native affairs and traditional culture. The Park Department's president, Lamberton, offered to discuss the "future matter of a musical performance" with Native chiefs, and suggested that entertainments might be held on days other

¹⁷⁶ "Indian Dances Said not to be Representative: Substitute Recommended to Park Department; Adoption Rite Ineffective," *Democrat and Chronicle* (Rochester, NY), Oct. 14, 1915, page 16.

than the Christian Sabbath of Sunday. The Park's chairman William Riley, however, objected the complaints, arguing that "people wanted to see the Indians as they were in the early days of the country, not as they are now." He further touted the success of the shows in bringing large audiences to the parks due to these performances, and claimed that "they do have the effect of bringing the Indians and the white citizens closer together" regardless of their inaccuracies, and further claimed "they give the general public education as to Indian rites."¹⁷⁷

Debates about Indian performances continued in 1916 as critics argued they inaccurately portrayed tradition or hindered the goals of assimilation. Kellogg upped his attacks of the show, again citing criticisms from traditionalist and Christianized Natives, and even claimed that "there never has been a genuine corn festival in Rochester" due to its inaccurate portrayals in the park.¹⁷⁸ R.E. Lawton, the organizer of the Ontario Beach and Seabreeze events, also criticized the events. In a letter to the *D&C*, Lawton claimed dances on reservations promoted gambling and drinking, as some Natives supposedly drank and or played card games during ceremonies. He argued that because of these connections, the dances in the park "have no good effect on the Indian himself, and only teach wrong ideas to the young," thereby impeding progress to assimilation.¹⁷⁹ General Henry Pratt, head of the Carlisle School, similarly criticized Rochester's events for "commercializing their alleged practices to deceive and breed false notions about Indians among our own people" as "dance and the Indians who engage in it belong to the Wild-West-show class." Pratt encouraged depictions of Natives that appeared more "civilized."¹⁸⁰

¹⁷⁷ "Indian Dances Said not to be Representative," *Democrat and Chronicle*, page 16.

¹⁷⁸ "Corn Dance not Real as Given in Parks Here," *Democrat and Chronicle* (Rochester, NY), Oct. 3, 1916, page 18. Kellogg specifically criticized that the dance's duration lasted but a few hours, whereas the real ceremony lasts three days. See Alan Kennedy "The Seneca's Green Corn Dance," *The Red Man*, vol. 3, no. 2 (Oct. 1910): 77-78.

¹⁷⁹ R.E. Lawton, "More About Pagan Indians," *Democrat and Chronicle* (Rochester, NY), Oct. 7, 1916, page 9.

¹⁸⁰ "Indians Placed in False Light by Exhibitions," *Democrat and Chronicle* (Rochester, NY), Oct. 11, 1916, page 19.

Despite their efforts, Rochester officials largely dismissed complaints about the parks' events, and Native American performances in city parks continued for the next few years. In late 1916, Kellogg headed a delegation of objectors who brought their complaints directly to mayor Hiram Egerton in an attempt to bring more rapid changes to the parks' exhibitions. Unfortunately for Kellogg, Egerton did not take the complaints seriously, as he claimed "the Mayor said he looked on the Indian show as a joke, and believed that most of the people of Rochester did the same." Egerton only offered to cancel the dance on Sunday October 15, and referred further matters to the Park Department. Feeling defeated, Kellogg simply ended his endeavors. Citing the previous years' complaints, he noted how the Park Department "had a year to investigate and act on our statements" but made no changes to the events.¹⁸¹

By the 1920s, Native performances in the city's parks largely came to an end for many of the same reasons as show-Indian events around the country. Historian Blake McKelvey notes that America's entry into World War I (1917) ended most Indian Day celebrations as the city's attention turned towards supporting the war effort.¹⁸² Somerville further describes how Native exhibitions in the city's parks also declined as more white Rochesterians became interested in the allure of film and radio shows. Many events at Ontario Beach and Seabreeze were also in decline after Rochester annexed Charlotte in 1916. The city took greater control over the area due to concerns over "illicit and rowdy behavior" in the parks or at Prohibition-era speakeasies, and eventually tore down the amusement park in Ontario Beach after purchasing the area in 1918.¹⁸³

¹⁸¹ "Indians to Put on Dance To-Morrow," *Democrat and Chronicle* (Rochester, NY), Oct. 13, 1916, page 20.

¹⁸² McKelvey, "Rochester's Parks," 18.

¹⁸³ Somerville, "This is Where," 24-25. Only the carousel remains today.

1920s: Effect of Shows on Increased Interest in Native Culture

While park exhibitions declined by 1920, white Rochesterians grew more interested in Native American affairs and continued to attend exhibits that depicted Native cultures in great numbers. Following the criticisms of park events, many journalists stressed that cultural displays were not depictions of people who might be “stuck in the past,” but were rather honored traditions which formed a distinct aspect of contemporary Native identity. The writer of one such article retained derisive descriptions of Native culture by claiming many Seneca “believes no more in the insane war dance of his ancestors than does his white brother,” but also noted “he [the Seneca] does honor and cherish certain tribal traditions [such as dance], however.”¹⁸⁴

As Upton argues, the Everett Committee’s (1919-1922) investigation into the state of Native affairs in New York also regenerated public discussion about Indian affairs, especially the social welfare of Native Americans on reservations. The author of a 1921 *D&C* article noted that members of the Tonawanda were working with local schools to learn agricultural techniques that would improve crop yield and quality. It applauded the state’s partial funding of this education, as well as the fact that “Indian students did better than the average white students and carried heavier courses than 80 per cent. [sic] of their classmates.” Many of these Tonawandans also attended the Genesee County Fair that year to display their knowledge of enhanced farming techniques. They additionally brought with them a cornet band to play music and demonstrate their alleged progress with assimilation, though still maintained aspects of their Native identity by wearing traditional “tribal costume” during the fair to attract white audiences.¹⁸⁵

¹⁸⁴ “Indians Dance for Edification of Large Crowd,” *Democrat and Chronicle* (Rochester, NY), Oct. 15, 1916, page 36.

¹⁸⁵ “Scientific Agriculture Taught in White Man’s Schools Put in Practice by Tonawanda Indians,” *Democrat and Chronicle* (Rochester, NY), Mar. 24, 1924, page 12.

During the 1920s more articles also began to correct public misconceptions of Native culture, especially concerning dance and music. John Collier, a sociologist and future BIA Commissioner (1933-45), was instrumental in this change. Collier wrote several newspaper and magazine articles with the General Federation of Women's Clubs (a Progressive-minded federation of women's clubs who fought for Native American rights) that opposed federal Indian policies. Their attacks sparked an increase in public interest in Native affairs, Holm claims, and popular magazines and newspapers around the country especially devoted much space to debates surrounding Native dance.¹⁸⁶ Rochester's newspapers largely mirror this change. One such article discussing the passing of supplements to Circular 1665 (1923), which aimed to ban Native dances, urged readers to understand that Native dances simply "perpetuate tribal traditions" rather than hinder paths to assimilation. It also encouraged including Native voices in debates about dance bans by noting that "it must be admitted that at present they have quite as definite ideas as any parties to the discussion."¹⁸⁷ Other articles more directly incorporated Native voices into discussions of their culture. A 1927 *D&C* interview with a Native actress known as "Princess Atalon" of the Chickasaw nation, who was performing in a play in the city, explained how she felt her performances greatly represented Native culture because "so much of the Indian life is music." She also explained that through her musical performances she could "do something for her people" by teaching both Natives and whites of Native culture and history.¹⁸⁸

Other articles focused on correcting white misconceptions of Natives depicted in Wild West shows, which often portrayed them as "savages." This shift, which first began to take shape

¹⁸⁶ Holm, *The Great Confusion*, 183-187.

¹⁸⁷ "The Status of the Dance," *Democrat and Chronicle* (Rochester, NY), April 29, 1923, page 48.

¹⁸⁸ "Customs of the Red Men are Described at Baptist Church," *Democrat and Chronicle* (Rochester, NY), Jan. 29, 1927, page 23.

in the early 20th century, became more popular by the 1920s as more white Americans followed anthropologist Franz Boas's theory of cultural relativism, the idea that culture, rather than race, determines human behavior. Proponents of this theory still viewed Natives as racially inferior, but viewed their "primitivism" –muscular builds, stoicism, spiritual connections with nature— not as a threat, but worthy of emulating and supporting.¹⁸⁹ As one result, some articles described how Americans overstated stories of Native attacks on pioneers. A 1926 news article explained how "historical fiction of the wild west appears to have exaggerated the number of sanguinary attacks by Indians upon immigrant trains," and that "nature and not Aborigines" most threatened pioneers in the Old West.¹⁹⁰ These stories did not dismiss public interest in Wild West shows throughout the 1920s, though descriptions of Native performers in the show no longer labeled its performers as savage. An August 1928 article reviewing the 101 Ranch Wild West show's visit to Rochester continued to describe the "thrill, danger, daring and great skill" of Native performers and takes excitement in the "Indian war whoops" during the show, but strikingly does not describe performers as violent or "barbaric," as in previous reviews of Wild West shows.¹⁹¹

Outside the medium of newspapers, Native Americans continued to influence changes in Native affairs in other ways around the city. Various organizations, such as the Lewis H. Morgan Chapter, State Archaeological Association, frequently invited Natives to discuss Indian affairs during the 1920s, such as the university student Miss Ruth Muskrat who addressed problems on reservations to the group in 1925.¹⁹² The Seneca educator Arthur C. Parker likely held the most

¹⁸⁹ Holm, *The Great Confusion*, 115-117, 186-187, 191.

¹⁹⁰ "'Wild West' Indian Tales Exaggerated," *Democrat and Chronicle* (Rochester, NY) Feb. 14, 1926, page 47.

¹⁹¹ "Indian War Whoops and Gunfire Make 'Wild West' of Show Arena," *Democrat and Chronicle* (Rochester, NY), Aug. 12, 1928, page 21.

¹⁹² "Indian Speakers Will Address Archaeologists," *Democrat and Chronicle* (Rochester, NY), Feb. 18, 1925, page 19. Other groups include the Doud Post, American Legion and the NYS Indian Welfare Society, which many Iroquois and white Rochesterians attended during one of its largest annual meetings in 1921: see "Going to Indian Meeting," *D&C* (Roc., NY), June 4, 1921, page 19.

sway over white interpretations of Native culture in Rochester due to his influence both within Native and white communities. He viewed museums as the greatest path to good citizenship, and during his tenure as director of the Rochester Municipal Museum (1924-1946, later called Rochester Museum and Science Center) he sought to transform the fledgling museum into the central local and regional hub of the city where Americans of any age or class could learn about various topics, including Native American culture.¹⁹³ In order to address misconceptions about Native peoples, he included numerous Native artifacts dug up from around the Rochester area as part of his Native displays, as well as clothing and beadworks crafted by contemporary Native Americans.¹⁹⁴ He also distributed many pamphlets about the Six Nations. One such museum pamphlet from 1935 corrects a list of ten stereotypes about Iroquois culture, including how the “Iroquois Indians did not wear the feathered war bonnets characteristic of” Plains Indians, but actually the *gustoweh*. It also occasionally notes the source of these stereotypes, such as how “the circus made the war bonnet popular as Indian head gear for tribes that never used them.”¹⁹⁵

Parker also retained stereotypes of Native culture to reach broader white audiences in order to more tightly integrate Native Americans into white society. He believed Lewis Henry Morgan’s social evolutionary design was most appropriate for his museum as it did not impede on many white Americans’ idea that they were the rightful successor to their “primitive” past. Many recognized that his depictions of cultural progression were behind the times, as most museums began adopting Boas’s theory of cultural relativism. Still, many people flocked to Parker’s museum by the 1930s because of their romanticized interests in Native culture that he

¹⁹³ Joy Porter, *To Be Indian*, 165.

¹⁹⁴ Porter, *To be Indian*,” 176-180.

¹⁹⁵ “Indian episodes of New York. Rochester, NY: Rochester Museum of Arts and Sciences, 1935,” Arthur Caswell Parker papers, box 11, folder 9, A.P23, Rare Books, Special Collections, and Preservation, River Campus Libraries, University of Rochester.

touched upon within the museum.¹⁹⁶ His lectures around the city also depicted the Iroquois as both early and living models of quintessential democratic American values. At the annual dinner of the State Archaeological Association in 1928, Parker gave a speech in which he stressed “the astonishing mental vigor no less than the physical prowess of the Iroquois” and noted how “they would not stay defeated... and they refused to yield when principle must be sacrificed.”¹⁹⁷

Other Native Americans also continued to play to stereotypes to increase interest in Native culture. In 1929, Freeman Johnson brought other members of the Tonawanda band of Seneca to a Fourth of July celebration in the city (see figure 10). Johnson dressed in a stereotypical war bonnet and also staged a war dance. The article covering the event, however,



noted that the war dance circle contained “palefaces [whites]” as well as “several chubby little Indian boys fretting in the arms of their young mothers,” which apparently “caused the eyes of small and adventurous boys to shine” due to their excited participation in the event.¹⁹⁸

(Figure 10) Freeman Johnson and two Seneca at the 18th Ward Fourth of July celebration at in 1929 Webster Park. The two children are Alva Ground on the left, and Pearl George on the right. Johnson and Ground are each wearing war bonnets. (From the Albert R. Stone Negative Collection, Rochester Museum & Science Center, Rochester, NY.)

¹⁹⁶ Porter, *To be Indian*, 90, 188-189. Another reason is his complex views regarding Native identity. He advocated for Native rights and assimilation, but also claimed Natives were too inferior to fully “civilize.” See Porter 165-167.

¹⁹⁷ “Indian Dances Demonstrated for Palefaces,” *Democrat and Chronicle* (Rochester, NY), Feb. 24, 1928, page 19.

¹⁹⁸ “‘Sane Fourth’ Entertains Thousands Without Mishap,” *Democrat and Chronicle* (Rochester, NY), July 5, 1929, page 18.

White Rochesterians' grew interested in imitating Native culture by the 1920s to both redefine notions of Americanness and develop more perfect, modern citizens. As more white Americans further distanced themselves from the vanishing notions of Natives during the 1920s, according to Deloria, they also increasingly redefined their sense of American identity by acting out stereotypes of Native culture.¹⁹⁹ This idea is reflected in school children's imitations of Native dances during their plays. In 1924, graduating boys from grades 4-6 at the Penfield Union School gave "an Indian war dance" for entertainment and to depict Indianness as a part of America's distinct history, as the dances were coupled with folk songs and patriotic raisings of the flag.²⁰⁰ During the 1930s scholar Elizabeth Wend also argues that teaching Iroquois culture could develop students into more courageous, enduring, self-controlled, and culture-conscious individuals (see chapter 1).²⁰¹ Kindergarteners of Eugene Field School 10 in 1931 reflected this view by dressing in stereotypical Native regalia, building a wigwam, and learning Native dances to more effectively imbibe the noble traits of Native cultures (see figure 11). Largely thanks to Parker's efforts, Rochester's Boy Scout and Camp Fire Girls clubs also flourished by the 1920s as they did around the country, and they too imitated Native cultures to channel their virtues.²⁰² As he argued in 1932, "there were certain moral qualities that the Indians stressed" which came from "observations of nature and nature's plan," and scouts "may keep alive these older American traditions [of Natives]," especially bravery and courage, by living lifestyles outdoors.²⁰³

¹⁹⁹ Holm, *The Great Confusion*, 147; Deloria, *Playing Indian*, 120, 125-126.

²⁰⁰ "Penfield," *The Herald, Fairport* (Fairport, NY), June 25, 1924, page 10.

²⁰¹ Wend, *The Culture of the Iroquois*, 174-175.

²⁰² Deloria, *Paying Indian*, 124.

²⁰³ "Indians Set Example for Every Scout," *Democrat and Chronicle* (Rochester, NY), June 26, 1932, page 7.



(Figure 11) Kindergarten students of Eugene Field School 10 dressed in stereotypical Native regalia of the time. The students also learned certain traditional cultural practices and constructed a wigwam. Educators argued channeling the noble virtues of Native Americans through mimetic performances of their culture could develop students into more well-rounded modern individuals. (“Paleface Tots Counsel in Own Indian Setting,” *Democrat and Chronicle* (Rochester, NY), Nov. 28, 1931, page 13.)

Influence of Public Native Cultural Performances on Shifts Away from Allotment

Amidst white Rochesterians’ constantly changing views of Native identity, public interest in events displaying Native culture, especially dance, remained. As scholar Jacqueline Murphy argues, many white Americans still considered dance as a cornerstone of Native identity by the 1930s and still attended public events displaying Native dances as ways to redefine their own identity.²⁰⁴ A journalist covering the Green Corn Dance held by Senecas in September 1932 at Indian Falls near the Tonawanda Reservation reflected this. They described the event as an “annual revival of the primitive American rite” which offered “an unrivalled opportunity to this

²⁰⁴ Murphy, *The People Have Never Stopped Dancing*, 32.

generation [of Rochesterians] to catch a glimpse of the life of early America,” indicating that some whites viewed Native dances as a distinct part of America’s primitive history from which they had since progressed to more civilized stages.²⁰⁵

Recognition of dance as part of Native American identity created spaces for Natives and whites to rethink of cultural practices as customs that did not need to be “revived,” but as ones that were continually occurring. As less people believed Natives were vanishing by the 1930s, discussions about dance became a way for Native groups to impart new understandings of their culture to whites.²⁰⁶ By way of illustration, in mid-August 1933 Freeman Johnson and other members of the Tonawanda Band of Senecas camped with members of Rochester’s Jewish Young Women’s Association Camp at Conesus Lake.²⁰⁷ Johnson and the other Seneca wore stereotypical regalia, such as war bonnets, to more tightly connect with the associations’ expectations of Native identity, although the journalist covering the event noted the Senecas’ “telling of their history and traditions” were of primary interest to the association. Many of the women asked what the current state of social dances were on Native American reservations. Johnson replied that “you may dance, have all the good time you like: music is freely given and we feed you besides,” which significantly depicted dances as continuous occasions that involved the active communal participation of the community. The two groups further discussed Native history and dance traditions in contemporary terms by describing how “the Indians gave dances of their own regular ceremonies” at the Lake, rather than as renewals.²⁰⁸

²⁰⁵ “The Corn Dance,” *Democrat and Chronicle* (Rochester, NY), Sep. 22, 1932, page 12.

²⁰⁶ Holm, *The Great Confusion*, 191-194.

²⁰⁷ This event is also discussed in chapter 1 of this thesis, which examines the stereotypes of the regalia Johnson and other Seneca wore more in-depth.

²⁰⁸ Anderson, “Real Red Men,” page 16.

In 1934, Congress passed the Indian Reorganization Act (IRA). The creation and passing of the IRA signaled the Federal Government's official departure from vanishing policies of assimilation in favor of more culturally-sensitive notions of tribal reorganization. Many Iroquois initially opposed the bill, though gradually praised the act's socioeconomic effects on their communities (see chapter 1). While numerous factors contributed to fostering the public sentiments necessary to implement the IRA's passage and goals, one which might be lost to scholars is the role of public dance and show-Indian displays in generating perceptions of Native identity that recognized their common humanity. It is unlikely show-Indians were directly responsible for white Americans' complex shift from the notion of "vanishing Indians" to supporting social welfare and cultural revitalism programs on reservations, though they certainly contributed to it. Show-Indian events helped push public opinion towards creating and passing the IRA as it "helped to get Indians off the reservation, paid them a living wage, kept them in the public eye, and freed some from the unremitting cultural repressions" among BIA officials and Christian missionaries, as Moses argues.²⁰⁹ It should be noted the IRA was not entirely positive, as it also increased the bureaucratic role of the BIA over Native affairs. Regardless, as Holm argues, the Indian New Deal "essentially accommodated the federal government to the fact of Native resiliency," a major driving force leading to reconsiderations of the policies of allotment. For decades, this resiliency largely derived from Native participation in public events, as their performances generated discussions of Native identity among Native and white Americans.²¹⁰

Show-Indian events in Rochester mirror this process in many ways. Native performers helped generate discussions of Native affairs among white audience members, whose

²⁰⁹ Moses, *Wild West Shows*, 272-273.

²¹⁰ Holm, *The Great Confusion*, 194-196; Moses, *Wild West Shows*, 277-279.

understandings of Native culture largely derived from the shows.²¹¹ Many mid-and upper-class white Rochesterians initially considered Native American performers in Wild West events at Ontario Beach and Seabreeze as vanishing and inferior savages. By the early 1900s, as with the rest of the nation many white Rochesterians' opinions of Native identity began to shift. They considered show-Indian performers in areas such as Maplewood Park as people possessing noble traits worthy of imitating, though argued Natives themselves could not fully assimilate due to continued ideas of cultural and racial inferiority among whites. While some audiences considered cultural displays in these events as authentic, critics of the shows variably contested the shows did not display the progress of assimilation among Native groups or claimed they misrepresented actual cultural traditions.

These arguments contributed to many Rochesterians' gradual shift towards understanding Native affairs more sensitively. Romanticized notions of Native identity remained in the form of museums, scouts clubs, or other public performances during the period, and many white and Native American reformers in Rochester increasingly sought to correct misconceptions of Native identity as whites attempted to channel noble virtues of American Indian identity through imitations of their culture. Public cultural performances, especially in the form of dances, strongly continued to function as a medium through which white and Native Americans discussed their constantly transforming views of Native culture.

Conclusion

As with the rest of the nation, public performances of Native American culture in Rochester, whether stereotyped or authentic, contributed to generating the sentiments necessary

²¹¹ Moses, *Wild West Shows*, 5-7, 272.

to implement greater social welfare reform policies in New York State. Even if performances contained stereotypes of Native culture, white audiences nonetheless viewed and interacted with real Native performers, who had a voice in how they displayed their culture. Many Iroquois understood playing to stereotypes could occasionally be necessary to reach white audiences, as white Rochesterians considered Native American cultural tropes, such as war bonnets, as indicative of all Native groups in the country. Yet others contested show-Indian events should retain as authentic an illustration of their culture as possible. In a 1936 speech at Rochester's American Indian Day, Arthur Parker described how Native Americans might be tempted to publicly perform aspects of their culture for show, but argued that "there can be a dignity and a seriousness, however, when our Indians, remembering their ancestral customs, dress for ceremony" in order to teach Rochesterians of their "beautiful and significant rituals."²¹² Show-Indians may have always been a topic of ideological interest, entertainment, education, and debate among white Rochesterians, though their performances were never entirely derogatory for Natives. By simply remaining in the public eye Native Americans defied the oppressive ideologies of allotment, and through the medium of their own performances helped coax discussions of Native affairs towards amiable relations with the state and general public.

²¹² "American Indian Day in the Year 1936," Arthur Caswell Parker papers, box 12, folder 7, A.P23, Rare Books, Special Collections, and Preservation, River Campus Libraries, University of Rochester.

Thesis Conclusion

Public performances for white audiences by Native Americans during the late 19th and early 20th centuries were far more than mere entertainment. They fit into a complex and often contradictory age of federal and New York State Indian policies, during which officials tried to alternatively eliminate or preserve Native culture and people from vanishing. They also offered ways for white Americans to ease concerns about the spiritual and physical degenerative effects of industrialization and modernity, redefine concepts of American identity, or assuage their anxieties about the country's colonial past.

Amidst white audience expectations of the shows, Native peoples found avenues for cultural transformation, revitalization, and economic gain during this turbulent period of Indian affairs. Many Native performers certainly dressed to white stereotypes of Native identity, though by doing so they were able to more tightly connect with white audiences to gain economic opportunities on and off reservations. Whether stereotyped or authentic, Native culture also more clearly remained in the public eye which, over time, helped more Americans view Native culture as vibrant and transforming, rather than disappearing. Native and white critics of such performances were also well-aware of these tropes and endeavored to more accurately portray traditional Native cultures. Public interest in Native cultures remained well after public exhibitions declined in the form of cinema, theatre, or clubs which imitated Native culture. This interest ultimately helped foster the public sentiment necessary to pass socioeconomic and cultural revitalization programs for Native communities, emblemized in the Indian Reorganization Act (1934), although debates concerning Native affairs continue to this day.

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