



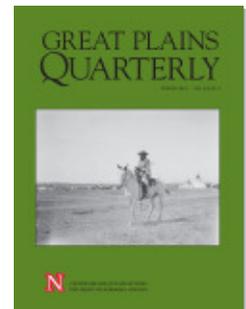
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Immigration as Cultural Imperialism: An Indian Boarding School Experience or The Peer Gynt Suite and the Seventh Cavalry Cafe

Tom Gannon

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Immigration as Cultural Imperialism

An Indian Boarding School Experience

or

The *Peer Gynt Suite* and the Seventh Cavalry Cafe

TOM GANNON

There is a hefty memorial stone among the US Cavalry graves at the Little Bighorn Battlefield National Monument. Worn from the Montana weather and sternly archaic in its typography and very discourse, the epitaph must be one of the earliest official markers to still grace this site:

TO THE OFFICERS AND SOLDIERS
KILLED,
OR WHO DIED OF WOUNDS RECEIVED
IN ACTION
IN THE TERRITORY OF MONTANA,
WHILE CLEARING THE DISTRICT OF
THE YELLOWSTONE
OF HOSTILE INDIANS.¹

*Tom Gannon is an associate professor of English and Ethnic Studies at the University of Nebraska–Lincoln. His first book, an ecocritical study of avian representation, is titled *Skylark Meets Meadowlark: Reimagining the Bird in British Romantic and Contemporary Native American Literature* (2009). His second book-in-progress, *Sins of the Mission: A Memoir of Hybridity*, aims to be a mixed-voice medley of his Catholic Indian boarding school experience and a critique of the ongoing discourse of Christo-Custer imperialism in Great Plains culture. Tom is an enrolled member of the Cheyenne River Sioux Tribe.*

The place is no longer officially called the Custer Battlefield National Monument, and there are now headstones scattered along the hillsides of the site marking several fallen Lakota warriors. However, the many neat rows of cavalymen's white headstones in the main cemetery are the park's most salient feature and the first and main attraction greeting the visitor upon entrance. The rest of the venue largely remains the relatively desolate rolling dry-grass prairie that it was at the time of the famous battle—or “massacre”—of 1876.

And so visitors to the site are still confronted with this tribute in stone, which continues to erase the crimes of colonial aggression and land theft by way of the final damning epithet, “hostile Indians.” But now, wouldn't *you* have been hostile, too, given the situation? I'm reminded of seeing the crocodile hunter Steve Irwin on one of his TV episodes, jabbing at a poisonous snake with a stick and jawing in his rich Aussie accent: “When you poke them with a stick, they tend to get irritable and aggressive” (that is—*hostile*). Even my seven-

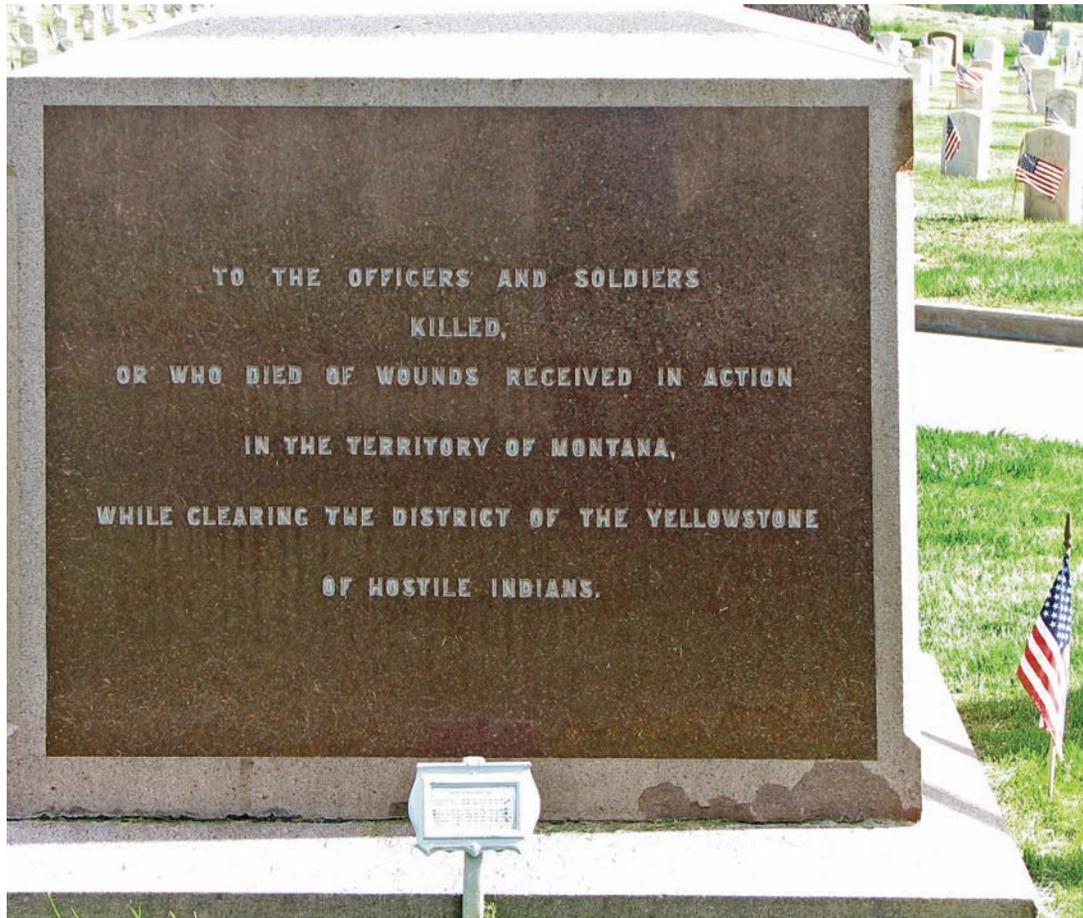


Fig. 1. Memorial stone and inscription, Little Bighorn Battlefield National Monument. (Photo by the author.)

year-old daughter had the sense to exclaim, as we watched that episode together: “Well, stop *poking* it, then!”

• • •

After the 1890 massacre at Wounded Knee—a *real* massacre, involving women and children—Black Elk, still one of the Oglala Lakota “hostiles,” was involved in a skirmish near Drexel Mission “about four miles north of Pine Ridge Agency.” Raymond J. DeMallie glosses this as (the later) “Holy Rosary” Mission, where I went to school—as we will see—in the third and fourth grades. Black Elk

says, pretty much in passing, but with a certain degree of pride: “there are many bullets in the Mission yet.”²² The metaphorical readings thereof are rampant indeed; it’s as multivalent as a trope. For one, this essay is intended to put a few more bullet holes in that Mission.

• • •

I often find myself needing to stand the topic of “immigration” on its head a bit by going back one hundred (or five hundred) years. There is even a little inside joke, you see, among us members of the Native American component of the Institute for Ethnic Studies

at the University of Nebraska–Lincoln. Every time a colloquium topic of immigration comes up, we say, “Well—we’re *against* it.” Of course we’re talking about a five-hundred-year history and issue, not the contemporary one that most of us talk about today. I think that the Great Plains Indian experience with immigration needs addressing nonetheless. I can’t count the times that I’ve heard radio-talk-show callers proclaim during the current debate: “After all, we’re *all* immigrants!” As usual, a whole lot of forgetting and historical erasure is going on with such statements.

For the North American indigenous, immigration has been by and large that of Western colonization, spearheaded not only by the military forces of the Custers and Sheridans of the US Army and Cavalry, but by their complicit confreres of religious proselytizing, the Christian missionaries. Together in what I would dub a “Christo-Custer colonialism,” they performed a two-fisted attack upon the Plains Indian tribes and must have seemed a very strange Janus-faced figure, with a Winchester rifle in one hand and a King James Bible in the other—the brute force of avaricious land-grabbing conquest justified by ideological rationalizations and sanctimoniousness. Vine Deloria’s joke in *Custer Died for Your Sins* retains its black, sardonic humor to this day: “It has been said of the missionaries that when they arrived they had only the Book and we had the land; now we have the Book and they have the land.”³ It may be too facile to call this colonial strategy the old “good cop/bad cop” routine, in which the might-makes-right theft of Indian homelands for gold, oil, and cattle grazing, among other things, was ameliorated by the missionaries’ ostensibly positive offering of good Christian morality and civilization to the unsaved Indian heathen masses.

A better analog might be Althusser’s notion of the modern capitalist state’s control of the workers, via a combination of (1) police and military force (the repressive state apparatuses); and (2) the ideological state apparatuses—that is, the “kinder and gentler” forms of control and indoctrination epitomized in the educational system and institutionalized religion. In such a nation-state, things run much more smoothly when these ideological state apparatuses can effectively do most of the work of socializing a potentially unruly underclass into accepting their situation.⁴ In the case of the so-called Indian problem, after the policy of assimilation replaced the original ad hoc agenda of eradication and extinction via genocide, brute coercion alone was not a sufficient, or even viable, option; enter the Indian boarding school system.

• • •

When we first arrived at that Catholic Indian boarding school, my brother and I—first and third graders—were assigned one locker, in which we deposited a variety of care-package-style food items that our mother had left us—and to which, as prototypically stupid little boys, we either immediately lost the key or forgot the locker number (I don’t even remember which). Throughout the school year, then, that inaccessible locker was a lacuna, a gap, that gnawed at my brain like a forgotten first memory. When the authorities finally opened the locker for us at year’s end, the various food items had been ransacked by mice or rats, and copious rodent droppings had been left in their stead. A poor trade-off, at last, much like the entire year had been: an age of innocence had been woefully exchanged for a bitter worldview of guilt and sin and low ethnic and cultural self-esteem. I knew that my life would be downhill from there.

I'd grown up in north Rapid City, South Dakota, and when my Indian mom had to get a divorce from my hard-drinking Irish father, she pretty much had to take a year off from us kids, between restraining orders and actual flights and hidings from my crazy dad. So there we were, Timmy and me, at the Holy Rosary Mission, just outside Pine Ridge. They've subsequently changed the name to Red Cloud Indian School, and ostensibly the name change is a good thing, a reinscription "by the Native," as it were, and I've heard nothing but good things from other educators about how "progressive" it is now, and on and on. (Former Oglala tribal chairperson Cecelia Fire Thunder, for one, has told me that it gave her the organizational turn of mind and intellectual rigor to succeed in her bureaucratic career choice.)

But let's look at the Red Cloud "History" web page itself:

In 1969, Holy Rosary Mission School officially changed its name to Red Cloud Indian School, both as a token of respect for the man whose work had made it possible to found the school, and as a part of a program [or *pogrom*?] of *reidentification* meant to demonstrate to the world that Red Cloud was *not* meant to be an organization of *cultural imperialism*, but rather the product of a lasting bond formed between groups of two separate cultures, hoping to enhance the best parts of both[?!] and serve the people of the Pine Ridge Reservation.

To this day, Red Cloud Indian School, Inc. looks forward towards a brighter future for the children of the Pine Ridge Reservation. The schools work towards achieving Chief Red Cloud's dream of a Lakota youth who are able to walk *equally* in both

worlds—a Lakota people who are educated and able to do whatever they want [*yeah, right*], on the reservation or off, and who will choose to live in a *good* [define your ethical notion of "good"?—a *Christian* values system, of course] way and strive to *succeed* [isn't that the Western way?] wherever their path may take them [all emphasizes mine].⁵

Such a clever discourse of power this is, pretending toward some equity, attempting to efface its very cultural imperialism. The words "good" and "succeed" connote, especially, specifically Euro-American Christian ideals. And notice that they didn't name it Crazy Horse Indian School—for that *other* Oglala Lakota, that off-the-rez renegade who was still putting up a fight before the massacre at Wounded Knee. Red Cloud, mighty as he was as a young Lakota warrior, became an emblem in his later life as an assimilationist, even a *collaborateur*.⁶ Let's just say that the Jesuits weren't casual about their selection of Indian heroes.

Yes, these were the Jesuits—the "black robes"—in many ways the preeminent proselytizing order of Catholicism. Their methods of brainwashing were physically imposing and psychologically comprehensive. To this day, I'm still a "recovering Catholic" par excellence, in that I still haven't recovered very well from those Jesuitical ways . . . as my wife ceaselessly reminds me. I just realized that I even still dress like them, as I stand here in this black shirt and black pants. My students sometimes ask me, "Why do you wear black so often? Are you in mourning or what?" "Yes," I say, "I've been in mourning for *years*; I just can't remember for what." (But I still have a few faint memories.)

I called a previous talk on my Indian board-

ing school experience “A Holocaust of the Mind,” with ramifications of “colonization of the mind” and with even a nod to the Native anthology entitled *Genocide of the Mind* (although that’s a rather tortured metaphor). The point of all these titles is that the Western colonization of the Native, short of a literal holocaust, has nonetheless entailed a forceful internalization of the imperialist *Weltanschauung* on the part of the colonized, to the point that the result has been a veritable near-destruction of the indigenous culture and psyche.

As evidence of this, my Indian mom was already Christianized (but also desperate) enough to think that an Indian Catholic boarding school would be fine for my brother and me. Even my old French-Indian Mnikojou granny had been a practicing Catholic, in spite of suffering the slings and arrows of blatant, condescending racism in Fort Pierre, South Dakota. (And I’m not even venturing here into the controversy of Black Elk’s likely hybrid religious views.) But this is what happens when a militarily dominant race claims that its God and worldview are superior. The problem, as I see it, is the theological development of the jealous monotheistic God of the “one true way” that developed in the Middle East two millennia ago, whose followers later perceived a need to convert the rest of the people on the planet to the universal truths of what was once a very specific ethnic, sand-tribe-based set of ceremonies and beliefs. Unfortunately for current geopolitics, two of these one-true-God religions are at each other’s throat right now.

In contrast, consider Native American cultures’ (more usual) religious pluralism and acceptance: to be able to place that statuette of the Virgin Mary right next to the Corn Goddess kachina on one’s shelf of household

gods, without any cognitive dissonance,⁷ and to be *unable* to conceive that one’s own culture-based and place-based “religion” is also therefore the best one for that other tribe on the other side of the mountain. When the Lakota kicked the Crow or Pawnee onto the other side of a stretch of ground for more *lebensraum*, they didn’t automatically think, “Oh, by the way, now you must worship *wakantanka*.” They realized that a good “religion” only worked for a particular group of people whose ceremonial relationships with the cosmos emerged from a particular place. In sum, Lakota *missionaries* have never been a problem: why, after all, would a non-Lakota in his or her right mind want to join the Lakota religion? (Of course, and unfortunately, this *has* become something of a phenomenon in the last few decades, because many non-Lakota have found their own religions vacuous and unfulfilling, and because some Lakota *have* enlisted in the “New Age medicine-man circuit,” as Vine Deloria has dubbed it.⁸)

To adopt the tone of a famous Native American book title, *I Tell You Now*, Holy Rosary Mission *was* on a mission of culture slaughter, of social genocide. By the mid-1960s, when I was there, sure, there were no doubt a good majority of Lakota parents who had already been “successfully” proselytized, who did think that raising their kids as Catholics was a laudable or at least a necessary thing. But that didn’t make it right. What they and their kids suffered was a monomaniacal erasure of anything indigenous, an onslaught upon the Lakota language and way of life. And again: it was a brainwashing into Western theology, which says there is only one (very-human-like) God, and that therefore the eagle (*wanbli*) and the bison (*tatanka*) and the meadowlark (*tashiyagnunpa*) have no part in

the deity, are no longer *wakan*. (And from my own eco-point of view, frankly, that's complete anathema.) Navajo writer Berenice Levchuk's call to memory regarding the more famous Carlisle Indian school might apply equally well to Holy Rosary:

We must especially remember those who died at Carlisle and never returned home. [. . .] Cruel and unconscionable policy and practices forever robbed the students of their natural childhood and youth. [. . .] There must be a healing of all generations of Native Americans who, as children and youth, have become stunted and crippled physically, emotionally, and spiritually by the boarding-school system. The boarding-school experience must be remembered and told in its true reality. [. . .] Those of us who have been scarred by the boarding-school system should unashamedly tell the whole story of this phase of our Native American holocaust.⁹

• • •

Just a few years ago—in 2007—Pope Benedict created a stir when he spoke about the Christianizing of the Americas:

Outraged Indian leaders in Brazil said on Monday they were offended by Pope Benedict's "arrogant and disrespectful" comments that the Roman Catholic Church had purified them and a revival of their religions would be a backward step.

In a speech to Latin American and Caribbean bishops at the end of a visit to Brazil, the Pope said the Church had not imposed itself on the indigenous peoples of the Americas.

They had welcomed the arrival of European priests at the time of the conquest as

they were "silently longing" [!] for Christianity, he said.¹⁰

Nine days later, the Pope spoke again:

Pope Benedict, under fire in Latin America for saying the Catholic Church had purified Indians, acknowledged on Wednesday that "unjustifiable crimes" were committed during the colonization of the Americas.

But he stopped short of apologizing.¹¹

These two news items pretty much speak for themselves, given the hypocrisy of the Pope's subsequent (lack of) "apology." For among the "unjustifiable crimes" he admits to, on the part of the *conquistadores* and others, the hemispheric deicide performed by Christian proselytizing "purifications" was as great a *crime* as any, and more significant at last, maybe, than the "material" history of such episodes as Sand Creek and Wounded Knee.

• • •

When Catholic missionaries arrived in the Dakotas in the late nineteenth century, they were even then perceived as exotic interlopers, as evident in the following description from that era: Catholics "huddle together in the dark, shut off from modern thought, cherishing dear but exploded theories and legends, reviving antiquated customs, and seeking to impose them as laws upon others, thus binding living men to-day in the ceremonies of the dead past."¹² No, that wasn't some disgruntled old Lakota traditionalist like Lame Deer, nor was it some freethinking atheist, a Nietzsche or a Madalyn Murray O'Hair. It was Episcopalian bishop William Hobart Hare, one of the leading *Protestant* churchmen and missionaries of the late nineteenth century, himself later dubbed the "Apostle to the Sioux." Jon K. Lauck's recent history of the Dakota Territory



Fig. 2. Seventh Cavalry Cafe sign, between Custer, South Dakota, and Custer State Park. (Photo by the author.)

makes much, in fact, of the importance of religion among the Dakota pioneers, although his main proof brings up the unpleasant realities of Christian sectarian intolerance: “The friction between Catholics and Protestants demonstrates the passionate commitment to religion in Dakota Territory and in the rural Midwest in general.”¹³ Since Lauck is obviously a political conservative himself, it isn’t surprising that he pretty much ignores the presence of Native peoples in the Dakotas, and the untidy fact that the criminalization of traditional Lakota ceremonial practices like the Sun Dance was an even greater example of religious “friction” at work at that time. Even when he speaks of intermarriage, this author can’t seem to imagine that my Irish dad would

want to marry a French-Lakota woman: “Religious and ethnic differences in Dakota Territory affected social life and such basic rituals as marriage. [. . .] Ethnic or religious intermarriage was discouraged . [. . .] This ethnic and religious solidarity explains the origin of the old saw holding that a mixed marriage in the Dakotas was a union of a Catholic and a Lutheran.”¹⁴ (*Oh, but it got so much “worse” than that, Mr. Lauck!*)

• • •

The constant reminders of the original military brute force remain. You *still* can’t get over Custer, really, here on the Great Plains. There’s a town in the southern Black Hills called Custer, next to a state park called Custer State Park, and between them is a business whose

cuisine is, I'm sure, to die for, the Seventh Cavalry Cafe. Oh, the full sign reads "Wheels West RV Park—7th Calvary Cafe" and below it another sign reads "Custer Outdoor Rentals: Bikes—Canoes—Kayaks—Fishing Gear." Yes, you can rent a kayak.

My wife has coordinated a week-long Holocaust conference the last few summers at the University of South Dakota in Vermillion. The conference considers in combination the holocausts experienced by both Jewish and Native American ethnicities. As alluded to, I gave a very different version of this paper at an early iteration of this conference. More recently, the main Native American spokesperson had to give his main presentation via Skype because he was in the Black Hills teaching another class. He said (as my wife relates), "Here I am in a town called Custer. What the f—? It's as if I'm a Jew living in Germany, and the town is called Hitler. Do you think *they'd* be able to get away with that?" Maybe the analogy is a bit hyperbolic, but the truth is there: beside the nearly completely victorious Christian churches on the Great Plains are these incredibly strident examples of Euro-American military conquest. The names of Colonel Custer, General Crook, and others infect many of the town and school names in South Dakota, and the innumerable tourist traps laud the exploits of gold-lusting hooligans. The "rah-rah" brainwashing is still going on.

• • •

To reinforce that brainwashing, we attended Mass seven days a week at Holy Rosary Mission. As a member of the choir, I learned to sing an ecclesiastical chant in the Phrygian mode, a still medieval-sounding minor key that haunts me to this day (in E Phrygian minor: e-f-d-e). The absence of a major or minor

third gives this particular snippet of melody an especially creepy, alien sound, and before 1980s death metal, the Phrygian mode automatically evoked rope-cinctured monks in a European monastery of the Middle Ages. Then there is the irony of the words I was actually singing: "LORD, HAVE MER-CY." It only occurred to me years later, as I pondered a Church complicit in the butchering at Wounded Knee and elsewhere, to ask—how bloody merciful was all *that*?

And then there was dormitory life. Every few nights, the attending Jesuit Brother would play a recording of Edvard Grieg's *Peer Gynt Suite*, highlighted by the tune "In the Hall of the Mountain King." I'm pretty sure that that melody was meant to replicate the terrors of Hell, and to keep all little Indian boys awake and fearfully conscious of their sins and thankfully conscious of the rewards of Christian salvation. (This, too, frankly, epitomizes the scare tactics of a bogus alien metaphysics.) But there was little room for protest: a good ol' Anglo-Saxon swear word on my part led to Sister Bonaventure feeding me a bar of soap. More to my main point, the same fate, or worse, awaited any boy who ventured to speak—Lakota. Well, my younger brother was an even worse miscreant, a spawn from some lower level of Dante's *Inferno*, apparently, and so I saw him beaten interminably by the Brothers, by a paddle several inches thick; on one occasion, they struck his buttocks so hard that his head was propelled into the concrete wall several feet away.

So we ran away, once, my brother and me. (If there's any common thread to Indian boarding school narratives, it is this: running away.) Not from any consciousness of "fleeing the tyranny of colonialist ideology"; no—we were just tired of being physically and psycho-

logically beaten to a pulp. We were also too young and stupid to realize that home—Rapid City—was almost a hundred miles away. And we only got about two or three miles, I figure, through the semi-desert, cactus-ridden terrain before we gave up and lay down on the side of the highway, waiting for the Jesuit van to find us and take us back. To another nice paddle-beating, as you can well imagine.

• • •

Once at Holy Rosary, I was sent to the cobbler's to get my worn-out shoes "cobbled," or repaired. As I waited my turn outside the building, an older boy was squeezing his neck and then falling down in a faint, and then squeezing his neck again. He was playing the "choking game," as I later heard it called. To my query, he said that it made him feel as good as Crazy Horse. My budding rationalism begged to know how he knew how Crazy Horse had felt, but I gave it a try. Ah, deprive blood from a few million brain cells, and a temporary euphoria resulted: yes, it felt great. And what an escape from Jesuitical indoctrination, and—well, frankly, it became a habit for a while, an act of rebellion as fine as saying "*enèh*," or even swearing, in front of a nun or a Brother. But most of all, it was an *escape*. I'm sure there are still thousands of Indian boys under bridges huffing glue, and yes, their dads are still drinking Old Milwaukee and white port. And thousands of Father O'Learys, with their numbing dogmas and their small stemmed glasses of red wine, are still shaking their heads and wondering why.

• • •

"Make no mistake: a holocaust happened here in our lands and it continues here and elsewhere." So writes Dakota poet and scholar Elizabeth Cook-Lynn. She continues: "[A]nti-

Indianism is a concept in American Christian life, just as Islamophobia and anti-Semitism are concepts in Christian Europe." Cook-Lynn sees this Western monomania for cultural and religious imperialism as still controlling US foreign policy in a quite sinister way: "Perhaps it is all too simple: the unfortunate people called the 'terrorists' of the twenty-first century in Baghdad have become what the 'savages' of the northern Plains were thought to be so long ago; thus, powerful and determined colonizers will [win] out."¹⁵ I'm not going to stray too far into Ward Churchill territory here, but it was pretty symptomatic that, immediately after the events of 9/11, the US administration immediately appealed to the old tried-and-true binary of "civilization" versus "barbarism." Given the history of nineteenth-century US expansionism, there is a certain irony in the appellation of "civilization" here. Ironic, too, was the too-common sentiment, in the wake of 9/11, that those against administration policies were unfit Americans who should leave the country and "go back where they came from." As someone part Native American, that left me in something of a quandary.

The immigrant descendants of the US settler state still win out. Recently, the North Dakota House of Representatives upheld its support of the state university's nickname, the Fighting Sioux—even though the very name "Sioux" is an insulting misnomer and bad translation, and local Lakota and Dakota people have long been against it (well, by and large—the politics of assimilation and internalized racism is a weird deal). One Republican representative "called the legislation a 'state identity' bill."¹⁶ Huh? Your state's identity is based upon another people, an ethnicity you're pretty proud of having dumped into the ash heap of history? That's pretty pathetic.

Another representative said: “And when the Fighting Sioux take the ice, if that doesn’t give you a thrill, then that’s too bad. If you want to turn it into the flying chipmunks, that’s your business. I don’t and neither do thousands and thousands of ND’s.”¹⁷ Scary.

Even more recently, Dan Snyder, the owner of the Washington Redskins, defended his team’s racist name by pulling out the old “we’re really honoring you savages” ploy. In an open letter to Redskins fans, he writes, “Washington Redskins is more than a name we have called our football team for over eight decades. It is a symbol of everything we stand for: strength, courage, pride, and respect—the same values we know guide Native Americans and which are embedded throughout their rich history as the original Americans.”¹⁸ This is not an honoring but another victory lap over colonized peoples. One doubts that Snyder knows anything about the “values” of any specific Native tribe, as he wallows in stereotypical, platitudinous signifiers. His frantic defense of his team’s name is evidence only of an adherence to “eight decades” of blind tradition and to the fact that, in such matters, big capitalism talks, and social justice walks.

Then there’s the really bad marketing idea known as Crazy Horse Malt Liquor, which has been made by Hornell Brewing Company since 1992 (distributed by Heileman, then Stroh’s, Brewing). Their incredibly bad taste in choice of an indigenous name for “firewater” is compounded, not attenuated, by their apparent (self-alleged) ignorance. A lawsuit resulted in an apology from Stroh’s in 2001, but as an attorney for the Crazy Horse estate explains it, “Hornell didn’t know Crazy Horse was a real person or that there were any Sioux Indians alive!”¹⁹ (*What?*)

Speaking of such contemporary “minor”

examples of racist Indianism,²⁰ in contrast to the grand historical crimes of conquest and land theft, Sherman Alexie may be resorting to his usual hyperbole when he claims that “[i]t’s the small things that hurt the most.”²¹ But it’s just such continued “small” slaps in the Native face that my narrative has involved, beyond the threats of metaphysical terror by the Jesuits toward one little boy: it’s the very existence of—oh, well, the Seventh Cavalry Cafe.

• • •

As a second-year tenure-track PhD teaching at the University of Nebraska–Lincoln, I eagerly agreed when a non-Native teaching assistant asked me to speak to his Native American Literature class, in the wake of their reading of Standing Bear’s experiences at Carlisle Indian School. He knew that I had attended a latter-day version thereof, and he rightfully felt that some firsthand contemporary testimony would be a beneficial sequel to their assignment. But the night before, I had a strange premonitory dream: as I began my talk to the class, people in black robes entered the back of the room and promptly took over the class by showing an old film on an old-fashioned projector, to futile and fading protests from me.

I initiated my actual talk, then, by recounting this dream as a segue to the “black robes,” to the Jesuit priests and Brothers at Holy Rosary Mission who ruled my life for an entire year²² in the mid-1960s. I was silent, however, about what I took as the ultimate import of the dream: that my own talk would likely be “ruled,” unconsciously, by my internalization of their dictates—that, in sum, they had still won. And the fact that one of the students in the front row was a Catholic nun actually bore this out—especially when she subsequently brought a formal complaint against me to my supervisors for my dastardly “apostasy.”

What angered her most was probably my recounting of the game we played at Holy Rosary Mission called “Heaven or Hell.” We were hardly conscious of the sacrilege involved, but the game’s implications were certainly against the best tenets of the papacy. Our main (publically accepted) informal recreation, I should add, involved simple pop-bottle caps, lagged toward a small “golf hole” cut in the concrete in front of the main building. The winner of each “hole” kept all, and displayed his warrior prowess by carrying around a sock filled with lots of pop-bottle caps. But for this other game, we retreated to a soft-dirt hill behind the cafeteria with a few marbles, and we etched a fine downward line branching into two directions: the left took you to Hell, the right, to Heaven. Thus with each roll of a marble, we parodically reinscribed our own definitions of predestination and/or good works, playing mock Saint Peters in our own self-condemnations or self-ascensions. I recall Silko’s great short story “The Man to Send Rain Clouds” in this context: there the local Natives desire the Catholic priest’s baptismal water—for *their own purposes*.²³ And, I think, so did we want the Christian eschatology for our own “child’s” game—a bone game or hand game, at last, in which true Native trickster “chance” could come into play. But this may be pressing the issue too much. More to the point, perhaps, it allowed us some feeling of compensatory self-agency in a Great Theological Universe that seemed too all-powerful and way beyond our ken.

• • •

I’m not saying that my year at Holy Rosary Mission was mere unmitigated torture. Cornmeal mush for breakfast every day (and oh, cornflakes on Sunday!) was probably bet-

ter than I would have gotten from my food-stamp-aided home life. We even got to watch a fairly recently released movie once a week, played on a big hissing movie projector set up in the gym. (I remember one title—*Thomasina*—and another movie with the song “Amen” in it. But I most remember being warned never to pronounce the holy mantra “AH-MEN” like those damned Protestants in the film!) And the Sisters and Brothers did foster my intellectual bent, to the point that I may have been one of the few fourth graders in history to have memorized all the US presidents, all fifty state capitals, and—what I’m still most thankful for, as a lifelong birder—all fifty *state birds*. I also vaguely recall one Jesuit Brother who was unusual in his kindness toward me, especially when we were occasionally away from the confines of the Mission. On those outdoor excursions, he would point out to me the newts and suckers in a narrow stream; he would show me how to peel a prairie cactus for its fruit. One might even say that he fostered my budding naturism. If, like the other Jesuits, he truly believed that his mission was the saving of heathen Indian souls, it never came across as his main agenda in our interactions. For that, at least, I am thankful.

There was, however, my white teacher’s chore, in the next grade back in Rapid City, of making me stop saying *enèh*, that sentence-ending phatic tag that drips of the reservation. That took a good year, I think. And a lot more forgetting had to take place: if my year at Holy Rosary has been the matrix of this narrative, it is also still the great aporia and black hole of my life in a crucial way, the still mostly silenced center of a maelstrom, a complex of repressed memories of a time and place best characterized as a double-edged constant fear of corporal punishment and eternal damna-

tion. For this reason, I still believe that—to invoke Black Elk once again—there are still not enough “bullets in the Mission yet.”

Notes

1. Oddly enough, the monument's wording, at least, was conceived in the 1880s, for a monument to US soldiers killed on other Montana battlefields—thus the generic wording. The epitaph stone itself wound up at the Little Bighorn in 1910. Mark Hughes, *Bivouac of the Dead* (Westminster MD: Heritage Books, 2008), 196.
2. John G. Neihardt, *Black Elk Speaks*, ed. Raymond J. DeMallie (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2008), 214.
3. Vine Deloria Jr., *Custer Died for Your Sins* (New York: Avon, 1970), 105.
4. Louis Althusser, “Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses,” in *Critical Theory since 1965*, ed. Hazard Adams and Leroy Searle (Tallahassee: Florida State University Press, 1986), 239, 242, 248.
5. Red Cloud Indian School, “Red Cloud History,” 2007, <http://www.redcloudschool.org/history/history.htm>.
6. I can only find it sadly ironic that not only did the Jesuits found Holy Rosary Mission “in response to an invitation from Chief Red Cloud” but also that Holy Rosary was the site of Black Elk's later Christian baptism and the locus of much of his early proselytizing activities. Raymond J. DeMallie, “Nicholas Black Elk and John G. Neihardt,” in *The Sixth Grandfather*, by John G. Neihardt (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1984), 12, 14, 17, 22, 24, 59.
7. Leslie Marmon Silko, *Yellow Woman and a Beauty of the Spirit* (New York: Touchstone, 1997), 177. Indeed, “[f]or Europeans, it was quite unimaginable that Quetzalcoatl might ever share the altar with Jesus.”
8. Vine Deloria Jr., *For This Land*, ed. James Treat (New York: Routledge, 1999), 261.
9. Berenice Levchuk, “Leaving Home for Carlisle Indian School,” in *Reinventing the Enemy's Language*, ed. Joy Harjo and Gloria Bird (New York: Norton, 1997), 185.
10. Raymond Colitt, “Brazil's Indians Offended by Pope Comments,” *Reuters*, May 14, 2007, <http://www.reuters.com/article/2007/05/14/us-pope-brazil-indians-idUSN1428799220070514>.
11. Phil Stewart, “Pope Acknowledges Colonial Injustice in Americas,” *Reuters*, May 23, 2007, <http://www.reuters.com/article/2007/05/23/us-pope-indians-injustices-idUSL2323713820070523>.
12. William Hobart Hare, quoted in John K. Lauck, *Prairie Republic: The Political Culture of Dakota Territory, 1879–1889* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2010), 81.
13. Lauck, *Prairie Republic*, 62.
14. Lauck, *Prairie Republic*, 82.
15. Elizabeth Cook-Lynn, “New Indians, Old Wars,” in *Native American Voices: A Reader*, ed. Susan Lobo, Steve Talbot, and Traci L. Morris, 3rd ed. (Boston: Prentice Hall, 2010), 198, 196, 197.
16. Teri Finneman, “North Dakota House Votes to Keep UND Fighting Sioux Nickname, Logo,” *Inforum*, February 22, 2011, <http://www.inforum.com/event/article/id/309545/>.
17. Donnell Presky, “ND House Votes for Fighting Sioux Nickname,” *KXNet*, February 21, 2011, <http://www.kxnet.com/getArticle.asp?ArticleId=729368>.
18. Manuel Balce Ceneta, “Letter from Washington Redskins Owner Dan Snyder to Fans,” *Washington Post*, October 8, 2013, http://www.washingtonpost.com/local/letter-from-washington-redskins-owner-dan-snyder-to-fans/2013/10/09/e7670ba0-30fe-11e3-8627-c5d7de0a046b_story.html.
19. Little Hawk, “Crazy Horse Wins,” Mixed-Blood-L Archives, May 9, 2001, <http://archiver.rootsweb.ancestry.com/th/read/MIXED-BLOODS/2001-05/0989432094>.
20. I prefer my coinage—“Indianism”—over Elizabeth Cook-Lynn's “anti-Indianism” (though we mean roughly the same thing) because of its linguistic parallelism with Edward Said's notion of Orientalism, to which it is closely related, of course.
21. Sherman Alexie, *The Lone Ranger and Tonto Fistfight in Heaven* (New York: HarperPerennial, 1994), 49.
22. How did I attend the third and fourth grades at Holy Rosary in one year? They advanced me to the fourth grade at the Christmas break, since I was apparently “way ahead” of everyone else (probably from my extreme introverted bookishness). Of course, this became a logistical problem for the public-school administrators when I returned to Rapid City.
23. Leslie Marmon Silko, “The Man to Send Rain Clouds,” in *Storyteller* (New York: Arcade, 1981), 182–86.