

REPRESENTATIONS OF GENOCIDE: A CRITICAL EXAMINATION OF THE  
SCHOLARLY AND PUBLIC INTERPRETATIONS OF THE CONESTOGA  
MASSACRE

By

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As part of one of my first graduate classes at Middle Tennessee State University, I was required to write a historiography paper within the scope of American Indian/Early American History. As the professor prepared us for choosing our topics, she asked someone to volunteer to write a historiography about violence and American colonialism. With little knowledge on how to write a historiography, I found myself raising my hand to accept the challenge. After much deliberation, I settled on the topic of genocide against Native populations. It was then that I carried this project into a research paper, and subsequently into this thesis. After the many long hours of reading book after book and article after article, I must thank Dr. Riley Sousa for believing in my ability to write a succinct historiography of genocide, for encouraging that it be a thesis chapter, for always having her door open to chat, for spending the tireless hours of reading and editing my drafts, and for standing by me when I decided to do a thesis the semester before I graduate. I would also like to thank Sherry Teal and Lydia Harris, my esteemed and knowledgeable colleagues that have been invaluable aids in my development as a scholar, public historian, and friend. Finally I must thank my family for all the encouragement and meals provided while I non-stop worked on this thesis.

## **ABSTRACT**

In December 1763, a volunteer frontier militia group in Paxton, Pennsylvania rode into Conestoga Indiantown and massacred six Conestoga as they slept. The remaining fourteen were taken to the Lancaster workhouse attached to the county jail. It was then that the Paxton Boys returned, to slaughter the remaining Conestoga. This massacre has been frequently referred to in scholarly writing as ethnic cleansing, reducing the meaning of the massacre, how it is remembered, and how it is publicly disseminated through museums and historic markers. This thesis argues that the Conestoga Massacre should be interpreted in the context of genocide in order to change the perpetuated justified violence narrative that populates American Indian history, and brings to the forefront the genocidal tendencies that characterized the violent precursors to the Revolution committed against Native peoples, inseparable from the foundations of the building of America. This thesis will utilize scholarly and public interpretations as its primary source base in the examination and analysis of the memory of the massacre, give historiographical context, and will conclude with the introduction of a new interpretation and suggestions for the future of the massacre's public display.

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## INTRODUCTION

In the spring of 1763, the event known as Pontiac's War erupted in the Great Lakes region. As the result of Jeffery Amherst's termination of gift giving in 1761, gunpowder and ammunition utilized in warfare and hunting practices of Native peoples were banned.<sup>1</sup> "Essential to Indian diplomacy" Native peoples led by Pontiac, said to be part Ojibwe and part Ottawa, met to discuss a possible uprising against the British.<sup>2</sup> "Pontiac and his followers laid siege to Fort Detroit from May 9 to October 15" and "[b]y July . . . [they] had captured eight British forts."<sup>3</sup> This siege led to attacks on the Pennsylvania frontier by the Delaware and Shawnee.<sup>4</sup> Houses, farms, and small settlements were frequently attacked and burned on the Pennsylvania frontier, leading to the "boost[ed] . . . enlistment of young men" who would take up arms against Native peoples involved in Pontiac's uprising.<sup>5</sup> This violence on the frontier reminded settlers of the French and Indian War that preceded and had only recently declared peace between Britain and France.<sup>6</sup> Being so heavily plagued with violence on the frontier before and during Pontiac's uprising, it is surprising that Pennsylvania had no militia.<sup>7</sup> Frontier settlers then asked for the assistance through the formation of frontier protection. The Assembly of Pennsylvania heard their request and passed a resolution allowing for the

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<sup>1</sup> Kevin Kenny, *Peaceable Kingdom Lost: The Paxton Boys and the Destruction of William Penn's Holy Experiment* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009), 117.

<sup>2</sup> Kevin Kenny, *Peaceable Kingdom Lost*, 117.

<sup>3</sup> Kenny, *Peaceable Kingdom Lost*, 118.

<sup>4</sup> Kenny, *Peaceable Kingdom Lost*, 118.

<sup>5</sup> Kenny, *Peaceable Kingdom Lost*, 118.

<sup>6</sup> Kenny, *Peaceable Kingdom Lost*, 118.

<sup>7</sup> Kenny, *Peaceable Kingdom Lost*, 118.

creation of a small militia force for the sole purpose of protection for the length of a three-month period.<sup>8</sup> Yet, local settlers had already banded together in volunteer militia groups due to the onset of violence in the summer of 1763. Led by the pastor of Paxton John Elder, one of these groups came to be known as the Paxton Boys.<sup>9</sup> Due to several rumors of Indians soon coming down the Susquehanna River, fear and animosity grew among the Paxton Boys.<sup>10</sup>

August through September, the Paxton Boys sought out "battles" with Native groups of Pontiac's War and were eager for the next "battle" to come along.<sup>11</sup> In October of 1763, without authorization, the Paxton Boys set out under the instruction of John Elder for a settlement named Wyoming to burn their harvest fields so that Native peoples could not take the harvest as bounty.<sup>12</sup> Arriving too late, the Paxton Boys discovered a massacre.<sup>13</sup> It was shortly after this discovery that the Paxton Boys would seek their revenge for the massacred New Englanders. Due to Pontiac's War, the violence experienced on the frontier of Pennsylvania brought many Native groups under scrutiny, including the friendly and peaceful Conestoga.<sup>14</sup> Many of the settler inhabitants of Pennsylvania began to blur the line between enemy and friend, creating fear and

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<sup>8</sup> Kenny, *Peaceable Kingdom Lost*, 119.

<sup>9</sup> Kenny, *Peaceable Kingdom Lost*, 120.

<sup>10</sup> Kenny, *Peaceable Kingdom Lost*, 124-125.

<sup>11</sup> Kenny, *Peaceable Kingdom Lost*, 127.

<sup>12</sup> Kenny, *Peaceable Kingdom Lost*, 128.

<sup>13</sup> Kenny, *Peaceable Kingdom Lost*, 128-129.

<sup>14</sup> Kenny, *Peaceable Kingdom Lost*, 129.

instability in the minds of the Conestoga.<sup>15</sup> The Paxton Boys then lumped the Conestoga into a category of suspicious Natives that were "spying of harboring enemy Indians."<sup>16</sup>

On December 14, 1763, six of the Conestoga slept under the looming threat that would end their many years living peacefully with the Pennsylvanians.<sup>17</sup> The Conestoga were aware of the growing animosity toward American Indian groups, as the frontier became a hostile environment with deadly interactions and vengeful retaliation between the white colonizers and Native groups during Pontiac's War.<sup>18</sup> The Conestoga recognized the threat to their peaceful existence in Pennsylvania and wrote many letters reminding Governor John Penn of their peaceful dealings since the arrival of his ancestor William Penn in 1700.<sup>19</sup> Unfortunately, on that fateful December night, as they slumbered, a group of fifty or more frontiersmen arrived in the Conestoga Indiantown with anger and revenge in their hearts. The six Conestoga in the village at the time met a dreadful fate, as the Paxton Boys made their assault. After killing the six Conestoga, the Paxton Boys retired to their homes and laying in wait for the next thirteen days.

Upon the arrival of the remaining fourteen Conestoga who had eluded the Paxton Boys first offense, local Lancaster citizens warned them of the recent massacre and urged them to seek protection in the town workhouse.<sup>20</sup> Unfortunately, this move would not provide the Conestoga with the protection they had hoped for. On December 27, 1763, the Paxton Boys rode into Lancaster, detained the sheriff, and massacred the remaining

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<sup>15</sup> Kenny, *Peaceable Kingdom Lost*, 135.

<sup>16</sup> Kenny, *Peaceable Kingdom Lost*, 135.

<sup>17</sup> James H. Merrell, *Into the American Woods: Negotiators on the Pennsylvania Frontier* (New York : Norton, 2000).

<sup>18</sup> Merrell, *Into the American Woods*, 284-288.

<sup>19</sup> Merrell, *Into the American Woods*, 284-288

<sup>20</sup> Merrell, *Into the American Woods*, 284-288



fourteen Conestoga before they mounted their horses and rode back out to the frontier.<sup>21</sup> Following these two incidents, Governor John Penn issued a proclamation to “charge and command all Judges, Justices, Sheriffs, Constables, Officers Civil and Military, and all other His Majesty’s. . . subjects,” to see the Paxton Boys brought to justice for their actions and “be dealt with according to Law.”<sup>22</sup> The Paxton Boys, reacting to this proclamation, assembled a company of 250 men to march on Philadelphia with the intent to kill the Native Moravian Indians under protection in the city.<sup>23</sup> The Paxton Boys arrived just outside Philadelphia, in Germantown, where a blockade of military and citizen groups greeted them thwarting their genocidal intentions.<sup>24</sup> The Paxton Boys left a petition of their grievances about their lives on the frontier, outlining their outrage at the governmental aid afforded to Native groups (seen as their enemy) over the Crown’s loyal subjects.<sup>25</sup> After leaving this list of grievances known as their “Declaration and Remonstrance,” the Paxton Boys returned home without punishment or prosecution.<sup>26</sup> Unfortunately, in this vicious cycle of violence, the Conestoga ultimately ended in extermination.<sup>27</sup>

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<sup>21</sup> Merrell, *Into the American Woods*, 284-288

<sup>22</sup> John Penn, “By the Honorable John Penn- A Proclamation,” 1764, Digital Paxton: Digital Collection, Critical Edition, and Teaching Platform, The Historical Society of Pennsylvania, and the Library Company of Philadelphia, Philadelphia.

<sup>23</sup> John Smolenski, “Murder on the Margins: The Paxton Massacre and the Remaking of Sovereignty in Colonial Pennsylvania,” *Journal of Early Modern History* 19 (2015): 513–38.

<sup>24</sup> John Smolenski, “Murder on the Margins.”

<sup>25</sup> John Smolenski, “Murder on the Margins.”

<sup>26</sup> John Smolenski, “Murder on the Margins.”

<sup>27</sup> Jack Brubaker, a journalist in Pennsylvania, states that there are two American Indian voices mentioned that discuss oral histories passed down in their families about survivors who lived to tell about the Conestoga Massacre. Due to what Brubaker views as discrepancies in their story that do not match the Euro-American written record, he then dismisses these ancestral stories sharply. Jack Brubaker, *Massacre of the Conestogas*, Chapter 10.

This thesis investigates how the different interpretations by scholars, museums, and historic sites of the Paxton Boys and the Conestoga Massacre have skewed the memory of the massacre to focusing prominently on the Paxton Boys political insurgency, effacing the Conestoga, and stopping short of the deeper narrative of colonial genocidal justified violence in the form of Indian killing that characterized the building of America. With the introduction of the genocidal context of American settler-colonialism, this thesis will provide a new interpretation of the massacre in attempts to change the selective historical amnesia that currently exists. For too long, the massacre has been interpreted and remembered as an act of ethnic cleansing but was, in fact, a deliberate move to destroy an entire group of people, resulting in the reinterpretation of scholarship and museums exhibition as genocide. By neglecting to recognize the importance of the violent and painful contexts that surround American and American Indian history, scholars and museums create societal and ethnic barriers that perpetuate narratives of white perseverance and innocence, Indian savagery, and white superiority. Scholars and museum professionals must take responsibility for past and current interpretive offenses against Native groups. This research is done with the hope that not only scholars and museums, but also Americans, will begin to have conversations about the “conquering of the New World” and establishment of America through the context of genocide in order to create spaces for commemoration, healing, and respect for Native populations that still exist today. Scholars can continue to discuss, write books and articles about, and have conferences about genocide against Native groups, but we only constitute a small portion of the United States having this conversation. To have an impact and decolonize

American history in academia and the public sphere, we will need an understanding from a broader audience that is inclusive of Native and Non-Native populations alike.

### **Research Questions**

This thesis will deal with significant questions surrounding interpretation and historical memory of the Paxton Boys and the Conestoga Massacre. Precisely, how scholarly and museum-based interpretations portray the Paxton Boys and the reasons why they are so historically significant. It is also essential to understand who the authors of these interpretations are, how the context within which they are writing influence how scholars and the wider public remember the massacre and any contestations in interpretation between scholars. Furthermore, we must examine how this affects museum use of this scholarship for interpretations to the broader public. Most often, the widely distributed stories of the past as presented to the public are through schooling or museum experiences. For American Indian history especially, interpretations in many museums portray Native groups as “savages,” “primitive,” or “past peoples.”

As museum interpretations are some of the most widely distributed public narratives affecting memory, it is important to ask questions about museum interpretation techniques, inclusion or exclusion of the event in state history narratives, what narrative the museum is telling in place of the massacre, and where researchers are extracting the primary sources for their interpretations. By understanding the difference in how scholars, museum professionals, and American Indians discuss the event, we can begin to assess a new interpretation. However, in order to address these questions and produce a new interpretation within the context of genocide, it is important to also ask questions

about the nature of the terms genocide and ethnic cleansing, how they have been applied historically in American History, and what the use of these terms means for memory.

The story of the Paxton Boys is just one among many massacres in American colonial history. Contemporary historians minimize the severity of and affect the memory of these massacres by deeming them ethnic cleansing instead of genocide.<sup>28</sup> When faced with the terms ethnic cleansing and genocide, the most common reaction of the general public is to be confused, as many are unaware of the difference in definition of these terms. This confusion could be the cause of much misunderstanding and misuse of the terms by the public, educational programs, and scholars when discussing American colonial history. It is critical to retain a fortified understanding of the differences in these terms as they define different events, intentions, and meanings. Historians of the Paxton Boys and the Conestoga Massacre discuss in detail the brutality and savagery of what occurred in Conestoga Village and Lancaster but never place it in the broader context of American colonialism as genocide.<sup>29</sup> This lack of discussion of American settler-colonialism as genocide is true within much of the interpretation of American colonial history as a whole and is especially so in museums. It concerns me that historians and

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<sup>28</sup> Jack Brubaker, *Massacre of the Conestogas*. Daniel Richter, *Facing East From Indian Country: A Native History of Early America* (Cambridge Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 2001). James H. Merrell, *Into the American Woods: Negotiators on the Pennsylvania Frontier* (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 1999).

<sup>29</sup> For detailed discussions on the brutality of the massacres, see Jack Brubaker, *Massacre of the Conestogas*. Daniel Richter, *Facing East From Indian Country*, James Merrell, *Into the American Woods*. Scott Paul Gordon, “The Paxton Boys and Edward Shippen: Defiance and Deference on a Collapsing Frontier,” *Early American Studies*, Spring 2016, 329–47, Scott Paul Gordon, “The Paxton Boys and the Moravians: Terror and Faith in the Pennsylvania Back Country,” *Journal of Moravian History* 14, no. 2 (n.d.): 2014, and Jeremy Engles, “‘Equipped for Murder’: The Paxton Boys and ‘the Spirit of Killing All Indians’ in Pennsylvania, 1763-1764,” *Rhetoric and Public Affairs* 8, no. 3 (2005).

museums frequently fail to provide the painful, challenging, and genocidal colonial contexts surrounding the “survivance” narrative in Native histories and museums, allowing for the perpetuation of the past peoples narrative and Native victim blaming for contemporary societal ills.<sup>30</sup> The survivance narrative refers to the shift in focus in museums to telling the survival of Native groups today instead of the previous narratives of the perpetual victim. This narrative can sometimes neglect the violent context that created the environment that Native groups needed to survive.<sup>31</sup> In 2012 Amy Lonetree was one of the first scholars to introduce this concept of the necessary connection between colonial contexts and native survival into the discourse of Public Historians through her book, *Decolonizing Museums: Representing Native America in National and Tribal Museums*.<sup>32</sup>

## **Genocide and Ethnic Cleansing**

The terms genocide and ethnic cleansing have resulted in much controversy when describing historical events. The term genocide was originally coined by Raphael Lemkin in 1943 and appeared in his 1944 in his book *Axis Rule in Occupied Europe*.<sup>33</sup> After this book, Lemkin began a chapter titled “Genocide Against American Indians,” showing that he had the intentions of applying the term to American colonial history and the violent

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<sup>30</sup> Amy Lonetree, *Decolonizing Museums: Representing Native American in National and Tribal Museums* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2012), 6.

<sup>31</sup> Lonetree, *Decolonizing Museums*, 6.

<sup>32</sup> Lonetree, *Decolonizing Museums*, 6.

<sup>33</sup> When Lemkin coined the term genocide, he did so by using the Greek word *genos* meaning tribe or race and combining it with the Latin word *cide* or killing. David E. Stannard, *American Holocaust: The Conquest of the New World*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993). Benjamin Madley, *An American Genocide*, (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2016), 4.

acts against American Indians.<sup>34</sup> Two years after Lemkin's book, the United Nations General Assembly passed a resolution and in 1948 The Convention on Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide was codified as an independent crime under international law.<sup>35</sup> As of 2018, the Convention applies to genocide no matter if a country has ratified it or not, due to the definition of genocide being a crime under international law. This means that any country is legally bound. The Convention defines genocide as the commitment of any of the following with the:

‘intent to destroy, in whole or in part, a national, ethnical, racial or religious group. . . .’

- a. Killing members of the group;
- b. Causing serious bodily or mental harm to members of the group;
- c. Deliberately inflicting on the group conditions of life calculated to bring about its physical destruction in whole or in part;
- d. Imposing measures intended to prevent births within the group; (e) Forcibly transferring children of the group to another group.<sup>36</sup>

What is unique about genocide, is the specific intent of the perpetrators as well as the deliberate targeting of a group for extermination.<sup>37</sup> This means that to constitute genocide, the acts of violence cannot be random.<sup>38</sup> Genocide and ethnic cleansing had occurred long before these terms came into use. It is arguable that it is not possible to apply a twentieth-century term to events dating back to the fifteenth century. Although both terms are twentieth-century constructions, they are “ancient phenomenon and can, therefore, be used to analyze the past.”<sup>39</sup> If one were to equate only the use of the term

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<sup>34</sup> Madley, *An American Genocide*, 5.

<sup>35</sup> “United Nations Office of Genocide Prevention and the Responsibility to Protect, Definitions, Genocide,” *United Nations*, accessed January 28, 2017.

<sup>36</sup> “United Nations Office of Genocide . . . Definitions, Genocide,” *United Nations*.

<sup>37</sup> “United Nations Office of Genocide . . . Definitions, Genocide,” *United Nations*.

<sup>38</sup> “United Nations Office of Genocide . . . Definitions, Genocide,” *United Nations*.

<sup>39</sup> Madley, *An American Genocide*, 5.

genocide as applying to events post its linguistic inception, then even the Nazi Holocaust would not qualify. The same could apply to the term ethnic cleansing.

At the core, ethnic cleansing and genocide overlap in definition when “forced removal of population leads to a group’s destruction,” ultimately characterized by violence.<sup>40</sup> It is possible that scholarly and public interpretations utilize the terms interchangeably or are more inclined to use ethnic cleansing as an interpretation of history, deeming genocide too harsh of a term. The terms do, however, have very different meanings. As developed by the United Nations, ethnic cleansing is not “an independent crime under international law,” but is placed under crimes against humanity and is considered “rendering an area ethnically homogeneous by using force or intimidation to remove persons of given groups from the area.”<sup>41</sup> This definition is broad and leaves much room for discussion, as it has no international convention.<sup>42</sup> The term ethnic cleansing sprouted most prominently in the 1990’s in conjunction with the wars for the former Yugoslavia. However, seen throughout its history, ethnic cleansing occurred in waves that “remade the ethnic and religious map.”<sup>43</sup> Ethnic cleansing, simply put, is the forced removal of a people from a geographic area and usually occurs when a society is ethnically mixed, such as the Indian removal of the 1830’s.<sup>44</sup> The controversy that first sparked over the term ethnic cleansing was that it “could function as a

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<sup>40</sup> Benjamin Leiberan, “‘Ethnic Cleansing’ versus Genocide?,” in *The Oxford Handbook of Genocide Studies* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010).

<sup>41</sup> “United Nations Office of Genocide Prevention and the Responsibility to Protect, Definitions, Ethnic Cleansing,” *United Nations*, accessed January 28, 2017.

<sup>42</sup> Leiberan, “‘Ethnic Cleansing’ versus Genocide?” 42.

<sup>43</sup> Leiberan, “‘Ethnic Cleansing’ versus Genocide?” 42-43.

<sup>44</sup> Leiberan, “‘Ethnic Cleansing’ versus Genocide?” 43.

euphemism to cover up violence or to render it more harmless.”<sup>45</sup> However, the more distinct controversy is the relationship between the terms ethnic cleansing and genocide as genocide is codified as international law and ethnic cleansing is not.<sup>46</sup> For example, The International Criminal Tribunal of the Former Yugoslavia have employed the term genocide, or have used the term ethnic cleansing in quotation marks because it has no legal definition under international law and is defined most commonly by its “form of previously defined crimes.”<sup>47</sup>

Many scholars of American Indian history would agree that when the term ethnic cleansing is used to discuss the widespread massacre of American Indians by settler-colonial powers, it reduces responsibility to cover up the violence.<sup>48</sup> This reduction changes the meaning and alters the understanding of settler-colonial violence. One of the most distinct differences between ethnic cleansing and genocide is the intentions of the actors.<sup>49</sup> In ethnic cleansing, the intention is the forced removal of a group, while genocide pursues the destruction of a group.<sup>50</sup> Confusion in the use of the terms as separate entities, which occurs because the assumed intention of ethnic cleansing is to remove a group from a geographic area and in many cases has ended in violence or death. What many fail to recognize is the introduction of violent killings in an episode of ethnic

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<sup>45</sup> Leiberman, “ ‘Ethnic Cleansing’ versus Genocide?” 45.

<sup>46</sup> Leiberman, “ ‘Ethnic Cleansing’ versus Genocide?” 45.

<sup>47</sup> Leiberman, “ ‘Ethnic Cleansing’ versus Genocide?” 46.

<sup>48</sup> Madley, *An American Genocide*. David E. Stanndard, *American Holocaust*.

<sup>49</sup> Leiberman, “ ‘Ethnic Cleansing’ versus Genocide?” 46.

<sup>50</sup> Leiberman, “ ‘Ethnic Cleansing’ versus Genocide?”



cleansing changed the intention of the actors from forced removal to the targeted killing of a group and is in result genocide.<sup>51</sup>

## Theories and Methodologies

This paper does not seek to solely add to the body of literature surrounding genocide and Native populations, but to examine the disconnect between scholarship and public interpretation that ultimately affects how we remember a historical event, actor, or time period. To accomplish this, I will employ many theories and methodologies of genocide scholarship, historical memory, and museums, paramount to the construction of this thesis. Originally, the research began as a historiography paper exploring violence in American Indian history, specifically in the context of genocide studies. As it developed, the Paxton Boys and the Conestoga Massacre became the light at the end of the case study tunnel. I began to recognize a familiar pattern in scholarship referring to the massacre as a bout of ethnic cleansing.<sup>52</sup> These scholars neglected to define their use of the term, merely adding this massacre under the umbrella of American justification of violence.<sup>53</sup> Thus, a project was born to examine the interpretations and popular images of the massacre to assess how these interpretations affect the memory of the event. Specifically, to investigate how these interpretations perpetuate a memory of justified violence through white perseverance against the “savage” and “primitive” Indians.

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<sup>51</sup> Leiberman, “‘Ethnic Cleansing’ versus Genocide?” 45.

<sup>52</sup> Richter, *Facing East From Indian Country*. Brubaker, *Massacre of the Conestogas*. Rick Kearns, “Ethnic Cleansing in Pennsylvania: The 1763 Massacre of the Conestoga,” *Indian Country Today*, 2014, <https://indiancountrymedianetwork.com/history/events/ethnic-cleansing-in-pennsylvania-the-1763-massacre-of-the-conestoga/>.

<sup>53</sup> Richter, *Facing East From Indian Country*. Brubaker, *Massacre of the Conestogas*. Rick Kearns, “Ethnic Cleansing in Pennsylvania.”

The methodology explored and utilized here will be the analysis of secondary literature, museum exhibitions, and historical markers as the primary source platforms for evaluation. As the ultimate goal is to demonstrate how we remember the massacre, primary source documentation from 1763, along with the secondary literature, and museum interpretation will provide multiple avenues of memory for primary analysis. It should be noted that this thesis is incomplete without Native perspectives, and to encompass the full extent of memory, one would need these Native perspectives of the history and the scholarly and public interpretations. Methodologies put forth by prominent historians of memory, such as Ari Kelman and Boyd Cothran, are just a few of the methodologies followed in this thesis to provide efficient identification and reinterpretation of the Conestoga Massacre.<sup>54</sup> Both scholars address how the public remembers their respective events, who is constructing these memories, how they these memories get constructed, and how these memories disseminate to the broader public through interpretation.

Kelman, in his book *A Misplaced Massacre: Struggling Over the Memory of Sand Creek*, addresses the Sand Creek Massacre and how memories of the event have shaped where the massacre will be interpreted on the landscape.<sup>55</sup> Kelman demonstrates how different memories of the massacre have affected the public interpretation of the event as well. For example, the historical marker for the massacre for some time stated

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<sup>54</sup> Ari Kelman, *A Misplaced Massacre: Struggling Over the Memory of Sand Creek* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2015). Boyd Cothran, *Remembering the Modoc War: Redemptive Violence and the Making of American Innocence* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2014).

<sup>55</sup> Kelman, *A Misplaced Massacre*.

“Sand Creek Battle,” rather than “Sand Creek Massacre.”<sup>56</sup> Kelman shows that language is just as large of a piece in the memory of the Sand Creek Massacre as is the location within the landscape that it occurred. Therefore, this literature is a robust methodological model for my argument of the need for reinterpretation due to the long-term effects of language use in public interpretive settings. Boyd Cothran addresses memory making and the narrative of justified violence surrounding the Modoc War in his book *Remembering the Modoc War: Redemptive Violence and the Making of American Innocence*. Cothran treats the Modoc War as a central piece of colonial violence that was then adapted and used to blame the Modoc’s and justify white innocence.<sup>57</sup> Cothran uses the white narratives produced after the war, interprets how this affected and shaped memory, and what this meant for justified violence throughout the country.<sup>58</sup> Specifically, Cothran argues for his theory of cultural marketplaces where these narratives were created and commodified to tell a distinctly Anglo-centric story that would become the dominant memory.<sup>59</sup>

Another influence steering this thesis is the aforementioned “decolonizing museums” theory and methodology addressed by Amy Lonetree.<sup>60</sup> I would argue that decolonizing the museum should be applied more broadly to include historical writing and scholarship outside the museum as well. By decolonizing the museum, Lonetree does not mean taking the colonization out of the narrative of Native history. Decolonizing the museum intends to remove the common colonial narrative of progress and perseverance,

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<sup>56</sup> Kelman, *A Misplaced Massacre*.

<sup>57</sup> Cothran, *Remembering the Modoc War*.

<sup>58</sup> Cothran, *Remembering the Modoc War*.

<sup>59</sup> Cothran, *Remembering the Modoc War*.

<sup>60</sup> Lonetree, *Decolonizing Museums*.

and focus on the effaced narrative of violence, survival, reconciliation, and healing.<sup>61</sup> By doing so, decolonizing the museum increasing includes the reclaiming of Native history by Native groups. This means that white scholars and museum exhibit writers can no longer colonize the stories of Native history. They become Native stories by Native people.

Engaging literature in genocide studies of American history has provided significant influence to the methodologies and theories reflected in this thesis. Benjamin Madley explores genocidal contexts in California and the events that helped create them through vigilante violence in his book *An American Genocide: The United States and the California Indian Catastrophe, 1846-1873*, a parallel to the actions of the Paxton boys seen even eighty-three or more years later.<sup>62</sup> Madley utilizes the political, societal and governmental support of the massacres of California Indians to show how, from start to finish, these massacres constituted genocide. From pre-genocidal contact and unrest due to the gold rush to vigilante and state-sponsored violence, the model Madley argues is applicable more broadly through time and space. At the root, Madley's meticulous exploration of the process of American Indian genocide is very similar to events happening in Pennsylvania in 1763 and his methods are foundational to the analysis of the Conestoga Massacre. As Madley observes, many of the California massacres occurred due to the unrest of vigilante groups on the frontier asking form governmental aid that they were not receiving.<sup>63</sup> Much like the Paxton Boys on the Pennsylvania frontier, recognizing assistance to Native groups and not colonial settlements. Both

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<sup>61</sup> Lonetree, *Decolonizing Museums*.

<sup>62</sup> Madley, *An American Genocide*.

<sup>63</sup> Madley, *An American Genocide*.

instances, although distant in time reflect settler attitudes about the value of Native lives. David E. Stannard examines the foundations of Christian and European ideologies as the underlying justification for their violent actions, in his book *American Holocaust: The Conquest of the New World*.<sup>64</sup> What is significant about both of these scholars and their methodologies is how applicable they are to the Conestoga Massacre and the actions of the Paxton Boys. Both Madley and Stannard argue for the continued applicability of the historical genocide methodology across not only the United States, but also other parts of the world, and can even find parallels to contemporary military interventions.<sup>65</sup>

In addition to the introductory chapter, this thesis will include three more chapters an appendix and a bibliography. Crucial to this thesis is the examination of museum and historic site interpretation, specifically of the massacre of the Conestoga, as museum interpretations are some of the most publicly distributed narratives affecting memory. Thus, to understand this effect, questions about museum interpretation techniques, inclusion or exclusion of the event in state history narratives, and where the researchers extract primary source information for interpretations from, are the dominant primary sources for this thesis. Chapter one will demonstrate the historiography necessary for the completion of this thesis. Historiographical topics included in this chapter will focus mainly on genocide and ethnic cleansing studies for American colonial history and Native groups. This extensive literature focuses on changing common attitudes of scholars, the general public, public education, and museums surrounding Native histories. The goal is to foster a more diverse intellectually responsible community that will not be

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<sup>64</sup> Stannard, *American Holocaust*.

<sup>65</sup> Stannard, *American Holocaust*. Madley, *An American Genocide*.

afraid to villainize, (to see Europeans/Euro-Americans as the villain in colonial violence) American history, a community that will not be afraid to villainize their ancestral history by reframing American colonialism under the greater context of genocide. With examples and discussions from scholars in the field of genocide and American Indian studies, this historiography will play a significant role in the proposed reinterpretation of the Paxton Boys, and the Conestoga Massacre presented in chapter three. More integral historiography discussed includes literature from scholars studying and arguing for collaborative partnerships between museums and Native groups, such as Amy Lonetree and Raney Bench.

The literature that addresses the failures and successes of collaborative history and representation in museums with Native communities is pivotal in the intersection of my proposed reinterpretation of the narratives surrounding the Conestoga Massacre and the museums that represent these narratives. Lonetree describes museums as “. . . have[ing] played a major role in dispossessing and misrepresenting Native Americans, and this has been a critical part of the identity of Euro-American museums.”<sup>66</sup> Therefore, the historiography of the changing roles of museums and American Indian history are necessary foundations for the chapter to follow. Beyond this, the historiography of massacres and collective memory are explored as interpretations of Native histories in scholarship and museums collectively affect and perpetuate the selective amnesia of difficult topics. This historiography also provides methodologies employed throughout the examination of the interpretations that are normalizing the memory of the Conestoga Massacre.

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<sup>66</sup> Lonetree, *Decolonizing Museums*, 9.

Chapter two focuses my selected primary source documentation from scholarly and public interpretations of the massacre. For example, for most scholars, the Paxton Boys story simply ends after their negotiation and explanation of their actions. Choices were made by the Pennsylvania government not to punish the Paxton Boys, which in turn created an environment of memory that was grounded in the rejection of a narrative of genocide. Following this, the lack of discussion by scholars about this absence of punishment reinforces this rejection and bolsters mainstream interpretation of the massacre as a small episode of ethnic cleansing.

Understanding the context within which scholars constructed these interpretations is vital in analyzing how the interpretation, in turn, affects the memory of the Paxton Boys and the Conestoga Massacre. I explore the interpretations of prominent scholars, their contexts, and how these interpretations have changed the memory of the events in 1763. Finally, the chapter focuses on the interpretations put forth by the LancasterHistory.org, the Fulton Opera House, and the historical markers for the massacre in the Lancaster and Philadelphia areas to name a few.<sup>67</sup> I investigate whether these museum exhibitions are using primary or secondary scholarly source materials in their construction of the Conestoga Massacre narratives or better yet, their absence of narrative, and how this has affected the memory of the event.

The final chapter of this thesis provides its readers with a newly proposed interpretation of the Paxton Boys and the Conestoga Massacre in historical writing and

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<sup>67</sup> The Fulton Opera House is a performing arts theater built on the site of the second massacre in the workhouse or jail in Lancaster, Pennsylvania. Leslie Stainton, *Staging Ground: An American Theater and Its Ghosts* (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2014).

museum exhibitions. This chapter uses the previous discussion of genocide and ethnic cleansing studies to reframe the interpretation of the Conestoga Massacre. I argue for a stronger context of American colonialism as genocide and the implications this has for museum interpretations and overall collective memory. Just as museums have begun to reinterpret Native history with Native perspectives, it is essential to have collaboration with the closest (geographically) Native groups to the massacre for the effective reinterpretation. However, presented in this thesis is an interpretation that lacks in this collaboration and future studies should pick up where this has left off. What I argue for is the significance of including methods of decolonizing the museum, creating a space for guilt, reconciliation, healing, and collaboration with Native groups about the representation of their history in museums.

Whether the average person is reading historical scholarship or visiting museums on their vacations, they trust whole-heartedly the narratives presented to them. With this trust in mind, museum visitors most often attend museums to have their preconceived notions fulfilled. As part of the long history of American innocence and justified violence, scholars and public interpretations have groomed citizens of the United States for preconceived notions of American nationalism that translates to victim blaming for violent historical acts against Native groups. Instead of interpreting the Native histories within their genocidal and violent colonial contexts, many museums still harbor the ‘we are what we make’ interpretation by just displaying Native goods and artifacts.<sup>68</sup> What museum visitors do not recognize is that their country was built on the suppression and genocide of an indigenous group already occupying the physical space of what came to

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<sup>68</sup> Lonetree, *Decolonizing Museums*.



be called “America.” There are contemporary cultures that persist and survive even after everything they have been through. However, if we do not tell the story of what these cultures have been through, then misinformed museum visitors will continue to view contemporary Native issues as a product of being Native, instead of placing the responsibility on past, current, and future colonizers.<sup>69</sup> The Conestoga Massacre is a historical event that was born in violence, one that has no story of survival. Thus, this thesis will give the Conestoga back a place in their history, treating their massacre as an episode of genocide and not merely ethnic cleansing. This thesis will ensure that they survive in the memory of scholarly and public interpretations, as well as in the minds of the broader public.

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<sup>69</sup> Lonetree, *Decolonizing Museums*.

## CHAPTER I: 'GENOCIDE IS GENOCIDE, NO MATTER WHAT FORM IT TAKES AND NO MATTER WHAT YOU CALL IT.'<sup>1</sup>

"Our nation was born in genocide when it embraced the doctrine that the original American, the Indian, was an inferior race. Even before there were large numbers of Negroes on our shores, the scar of racial hatred had already disfigured colonial society. From the sixteenth century forward, blood flowed in battles of racial supremacy. We are perhaps the only nation which tried as a matter of national policy to wipe out its indigenous population. Moreover, we elevated that tragic experience into a noble crusade. Indeed, even today we have not permitted ourselves to reject or to feel remorse for this shameful episode. Our literature, our films, our drama, our folklore all exalt it."

- Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.<sup>2</sup>

The history of the United States, from first colonization to the present day has been riddled with violence. The tumultuous past of contact between European colonizers, the resulting American citizens, and Native populations was a repetitive cycle of what some scholars would refer to as genocide. Although not all scholars believe that genocide was enacted against American Indians, many provide detailed examples that adhere to the definition and parameters the United Nations Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide. The violent history of America opens many avenues of study into why the violence persisted for so long and how this continues to affect relationships between Americans and Native populations today. Many scholars and the public alike have made the comparison between Nazi Germany and American genocide history, as it wasn't until WWII that the term genocide received its linguistic inception. While many scholars use the comparison to show that genocide comes in many

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<sup>1</sup> Ward Churchill, *Kill the Indian, Save the Man: The Genocidal Impact of American Indian Residential Schools* (San Francisco: City Lights Books, 2004).

<sup>2</sup> Martin Luther King Jr., *Why We Can't Wait* (New York: Signet Books, 1964).

forms, others use it as the poster child for genocide, claiming that if the violence is not exactly like Nazi Germany, then it is not genocide. Others would argue for the one of a kind uniqueness of the Jewish Holocaust, and thus genocide is an impenetrable category.<sup>3</sup> Scholars denying the existence of genocide against American Indians instead find alternative explanations such as ethnic cleansing to explain the bouts of violence that decimated Native populations.

Genocide defined broadly in the public understanding as the destruction, or elimination of a group, whether that is racial or religious. Other popular understandings refer to genocide as the killing of a group. Just as these understandings differ in their wording, so too does their meaning. The first uses the terms destruction and elimination and does not specify the mode by which they are carried out. The second replaces destruction or elimination with killing, explicitly implying that “destruction” or “elimination” and “killing” are one in the same. It is apparent however that these definitions are very different. Destruction of a group of people does not necessarily mean physical extermination. By definition, put forth by the UN and by other scholars of American Indian history, genocide can also encompass cultural or psychological destruction.<sup>4</sup> When Raphaël Lemkin coined the term genocide in 1944, he combined the Greek term ‘genos’ meaning race or tribe with the Latin term ‘cide’ meaning killing.<sup>5</sup> By this definition, one would assume that the second understanding provided above is more consistent with the term's origination. What Lemkin truly meant for the definition of the

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<sup>3</sup> Rebecca Jinks refutes this in her discussion of the Holocaust as its own paradigm for memory of genocide. Rebecca Jinks, *Representing Genocide: The Holocaust As Paradigm* (New York: Bloomsbury Academic, 2016).

<sup>4</sup> Ward Churchill, *Kill the Indian Save the Man*.

<sup>5</sup> Ward Churchill, *Kill the Indian Save the Man*, 3.

term was a planned set of actions with the intent on annihilation of the group through the disintegration and “destruction of the essential foundations of the life of national groups.”<sup>6</sup> Although he acknowledges killing as an aspect of genocide, it was not the defining feature.<sup>7</sup>

For the purposes of this thesis, it is essential to discuss the theories, methodologies, and arguments that have informed its inception. Increasingly, more scholarly literature is being written about the controversy over the use of the term genocide and its applicability to settler-colonialism and what became labeled “America.” However, a few scholars of American Indian history address this controversy by providing clear arguable examples of genocide against Native populations of “America.” Solidifying their arguments, these scholars strictly follow the definition of genocide as a crime under international law by the United Nations Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide of December 1948. The resistance by scholars of American history and the general public to apply the term genocide to the Native experience is rooted in a cultivated historical memory that rejects genocide. Therefore, scholars of American violence against Native groups examining historical memory are central to the arguments made in this thesis and are included in this historiography. Further, explorations of literature surrounding Native history in museums as places of memory that shape public understanding, will also be examined to inform the discourse on the disconnection between scholarly and public interpretations.

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<sup>6</sup> Ward Churchill, *Kill the Indian Save the Man*, 3.

<sup>7</sup> Ward Churchill, *Kill the Indian Save the Man*, 3.

Several scholars of Genocide and American Indian history, such as Benjamin Madley, David E. Stannard, and Ward Churchill to name a few, find their guidelines on the use of the term genocide from the 1948 United Nations Convention on Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide. This convention put forth the definition of “ acts committed with intent to destroy, in whole or in part, a national, ethnical, racial or religious group.”<sup>8</sup> There are five acts that set the criteria for determining genocide, ranging from death to preventing births.<sup>9</sup> This is followed by five more related acts that stipulate the parameters for what is punishable, from genocide to attempts to commit genocide.<sup>10</sup> It is essential to frame the research of genocide historians within this definition put forth by the convention to keep a standard of reference. Of the scholars discussed in this chapter, only a few are in disagreement with the use the Convention as a law governing the reconceptualization of settler-colonial violence against Native groups as constituting genocide.

Benjamin Madley, in his foundational book *An American Genocide*, focuses on the abundant amount of primary sources for American violence against Native populations in the state of California. Specifically, Madley addresses the preconceived notion that American settler-colonial violence was ethnic cleansing and in opposition argues that it was in fact genocide.<sup>11</sup> However, he contends that the term genocide is explosive and must be used with care.<sup>12</sup> This cautious use of the term influences his strict application of the UN Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of

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<sup>8</sup> Madley, *An American Genocide*.

<sup>9</sup> Madley, *An American Genocide*.

<sup>10</sup> Madley, *An American Genocide*.

<sup>11</sup> Madley, *An American Genocide*.

<sup>12</sup> Madley, *An American Genocide*.

Genocide, because it is the only “internationally recognized and restrictive rubric for evaluating possible instances of genocide, and thus the ‘only authoritative. . . legal definition.’”<sup>13</sup> Therefore, this distinguished scholar finds the term genocide not only appropriate but also a necessary application to the context of American settler-colonial violence. Madley also distinguishes between four types of violence and their relation to the term genocide. His first type of violence is battles. He argues that battles are not “inherently genocidal” as both sides engage in mutual combat.<sup>14</sup> His second type is massacres, which he argues are intentional killings that are very frequently genocidal if part of a larger pattern of violence.<sup>15</sup> The third type is homicides, defined as the murder of four or fewer people, and again can be genocidal when part of a larger pattern of violence.<sup>16</sup> The fourth type and final type is legal executions, which Madley argues are similar to homicides and massacres in that they are only genocide if part of a larger pattern.<sup>17</sup> Therefore, it seems that Madley’s definition of genocide falls somewhere close to the idea of violence with intention and repetition.

As the bloody history of California Indian and White interactions were most often through large-scale massacres or repeat Indian hunting homicides, the history of California is, therefore, a history of genocide. Jack Norton, author of *Genocide in Northwestern California: When Our Worlds Cried*, would agree with Madley but also argue that instead of certain types of violence being a framework for assessing genocide,

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<sup>13</sup> Madley, *An American Genocide*, 4.

<sup>14</sup> Madley, *An American Genocide*, 11-12.

<sup>15</sup> Madley *An American Genocide*, 11-12.

<sup>16</sup> Madley *An American Genocide*, 11-12.

<sup>17</sup> Madley *An American Genocide*, 11-12.

all acts committed against California Indians was genocide.<sup>18</sup> Norton contends that California Indian history is wrought with physical, psychological, and cultural forms of genocide.<sup>19</sup> Even further, he argues that the entire United States was built upon acts of genocide. California for Norton is the “microcosm of the brutality of western expansion,” and manifest destiny is genocide.<sup>20</sup>

Madley argues that genocide happened in California almost as a progression over time from mild to extremely severe.<sup>21</sup> With the introduction of state sponsorship through material and financial means, genocidal acts began to increase.<sup>22</sup> Public support through newspaper headlines began to make the acts of violence seem more frequent and as a result, normalized the mass murders.<sup>23</sup> Madley asserts that legislators then stripped California Indians of their rights and excluded them legally, bringing about more and more acts of violence.<sup>24</sup> In this instance, the state government no longer had to police for the criminal acts against American Indians but continued to police acts by American Indians.<sup>25</sup> With the reduction in protection for California Indians, the violence seemed to increase.

As Norton discusses, violent massacres such as Weaverville, Hayfork, Yontoket, Indian Island and Humbolt County that occurred during the time of increased violence

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<sup>18</sup> Jack Norton, *Genocide in Northwestern California: When Our Worlds Cried* (San Francisco: The Indian Historian Press, 1979).

<sup>19</sup> Norton, *Genocide in Northwestern California*.

<sup>20</sup> Norton, *Genocide in Northwestern California*.

<sup>21</sup> Madley, *An American Genocide*.

<sup>22</sup> Madley, *An American Genocide*.

<sup>23</sup> Madley, *An American Genocide*.

<sup>24</sup> Madley, *An American Genocide*.

<sup>25</sup> Madley, *An American Genocide*.

stated by Madley were a regular occurrence.<sup>26</sup> The state of California established a state militia called the Rangers that took any excuse to kill American Indians.<sup>27</sup> They recruited volunteers that existed for no other reason than to commit genocide.<sup>28</sup> They did not check for the guilty, nor did they care, any Indian they came across was as good as dead.<sup>29</sup> The state sponsorship of the Rangers even sparked the enthusiasm of other volunteers outside the militia to go out and find Indians to kill. Thus, state sanctity and funding created a “killing machine” with the sole intent of destroying American Indians.<sup>30</sup> Madley argues, and Norton would most definitely agree, that genocide was committed against California Indians in all five acts that constitute it.<sup>31</sup>

In Ward Churchill’s book *Kill the Indian, Save the Man: The Genocidal Impact of Residential Schools*, he argues that genocide thrust upon American Indians of the United States and the First Nations of Canada was not only physical but also cultural, in the form of residential schools.<sup>32</sup> The taking of children alone constitutes genocide by the act of “forcibly transferring children of the group to another group.”<sup>33</sup> It may be possible that some children went on their own but there are primary sources that would suggest otherwise, and discuss the intense violence of taking American Indian children from their homelands forcing them into residential schools.<sup>34</sup>

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<sup>26</sup> Norton, *Genocide in Northwest California*.

<sup>27</sup> Madley, *An American Genocide*.

<sup>28</sup> Madley, *An American Genocide*.

<sup>29</sup> Norton, *Genocide in Northwest California*.

<sup>30</sup> Norton, *Genocide in Northwest California*.

<sup>31</sup> Madley, *An American Genocide*.

<sup>32</sup> Churchill, *Kill the Indian, Save the Man*.

<sup>33</sup> Churchill, *Kill the Indian, Save the Man*.

<sup>34</sup> Churchill, *Kill the Indian, Save the Man*.



The residential schools would force boys to cut their hair short in the hopes that it would destroy their sense of self. They would clean them with chemicals as if to wash away the Indian.<sup>35</sup> They would remove and keep their clothing and any personal items. They would rename them, strip them of their language and religious beliefs, insight violence to make the children feel fear and loneliness and obliterate their self-esteem, while also making them hate where they came from.<sup>36</sup> This type of genocide would most certainly fall under the act of causing “serious. . . mental harm.”<sup>37</sup> It also falls under the dimension of intent. The staff in these residential schools fully intended the destruction of all that was Indian identity.<sup>38</sup> They wanted the “extinction of the Indian as *Indians*” [emphasis in original].<sup>39</sup> These residential schools also used the children in forced labor, described most closely to imprisonment in an internment camp or life in the Spanish mission.<sup>40</sup>

Another act of mental harm constituting cultural genocide in residential schools was the psychologically detrimental effects of humiliation, the ruination of the conceptual self and the destruction of the social self.<sup>41</sup> This resulted in impacts still felt to this day commonly referred to in Canada as Residential School Syndrome (RSS).<sup>42</sup> The syndrome can be passed down to children, as it is a form of degraded self-esteem that residential

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<sup>35</sup> Churchill, *Kill the Indian, Save the Man*.

<sup>36</sup> Churchill, *Kill the Indian, Save the Man*.

<sup>37</sup> Churchill, *Kill the Indian, Save the Man*, 3.

<sup>38</sup> Churchill, *Kill the Indian, Save the Man*.

<sup>39</sup> Churchill, *Kill the Indian, Save the Man*, 19.

<sup>40</sup> Churchill, *Kill the Indian, Save the Man*.

<sup>41</sup> Churchill, *Kill the Indian, Save the Man*.

<sup>42</sup> Churchill, *Kill the Indian, Save the Man*.

school students have never recovered from.<sup>43</sup> The idea behind the residential schools was the complete and utter cultural genocide of everything the children knew about being Indian.<sup>44</sup> In the minds of the Americans, Native groups do not need to be physically exterminated if they can be culturally changed.<sup>45</sup>

Gary Clayton Anderson, author of *Ethnic Cleansing and the Indian: The Crime That Should Haunt America*, is not convinced that genocide occurred against American Indians. Although he looks at the definition of genocide as put forth by the Convention, Anderson argues that the Convention does not apply to American settler-colonial violence against Native groups because it is too broad and effectively describes felonies.<sup>46</sup> Instead, Anderson follows the Rome Statute that calls for proof of a policy authorizing such an action by the government or a government agency to be genocide.<sup>47</sup> However, the definition provided in article six, part two of the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court states a very similar definition of genocide as the one put forth by the UN Convention. The article reads:

#### Genocide

For the purpose of this Statute, "genocide" means any of the following acts committed with intent to destroy, in whole or in part, a national, ethnical, racial or religious group, as such:

- (a) Killing members of the group;
- (b) Causing serious bodily or mental harm to members of the group;
- (c) Deliberately inflicting on the group conditions of life calculated to bring about its physical destruction in whole or in part;

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<sup>43</sup> Churchill, *Kill the Indian, Save the Man*.

<sup>44</sup> Churchill, *Kill the Indian, Save the Man*.

<sup>45</sup> Churchill, *Kill the Indian, Save the Man*.

<sup>46</sup> Gary Clayton Anderson, *Ethnic Cleansing and the Indian: The Crime That Should Haunt America* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2015), 3.

<sup>47</sup> Anderson, *Ethnic Cleansing and the Indian*, 6.

- (d) Imposing measures intended to prevent births within the group;
- (e) Forcibly transferring children of the group to another group.<sup>48</sup>

As these definitions are part of the Rome Statute updated as recently as 2010, Anderson's 2015 book should have had access to this definition when making his argument. Anderson chooses to continue his argument, potentially disregarding this definition, and asserts that genocide did not occur because the United States government did not have a policy in place for the extinction of American Indians.<sup>49</sup> In his examinations, the perpetrators lacked the intent to kill, and the death toll was not high enough in numbers to constitute genocide.<sup>50</sup> By numbers, Anderson contends that so many American Indians survived that their number of deaths was not significant enough.<sup>51</sup> Anderson's assertion ignores the simplicity of the United Nations Convention definition in that there is no described number of fatalities that constitute genocide. As David E. Stannard would argue in his book, *American Holocaust: The Conquest of the New World*, so many Native deaths occurred that a quantifiable number could not be assigned.<sup>52</sup> Stannard contends that after Europeans arrived in the "New World," the Native depopulation rate averaged ninety-five percent.<sup>53</sup> He elucidates that the rate includes disease and despair, and is not reflective of only physical violence. Stannard

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<sup>48</sup> *Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court* (The Hague, Netherlands: International Criminal Court, 2011), 3, accessed November 12, 2017, <https://www.icc-cpi.int/resource-library/Documents/RS-Eng.pdf>.

<sup>49</sup> Anderson, *Ethnic Cleansing and the Indian*.

<sup>50</sup> Anderson, *Ethnic Cleansing and the Indian*.

<sup>51</sup> Anderson, *Ethnic Cleansing and the Indian*.

<sup>52</sup> Stannard, *American Holocaust*.

<sup>53</sup> Stannard, *American Holocaust*.

does, however, argue against the idea that the majority of the decline in population was from disease.<sup>54</sup> It is a commonly held argument that uncontrollable diseases swept through the “New World,” known as the virgin soil theory, and was the major factor in the decline of native populations. The virgin soil theory became the mainstream foundation behind the drive of scholars such as Elizabeth Fenn, to write about the patterns and use of disease, specifically smallpox, as a weapon for native elimination and a channel of direct depopulation.<sup>55</sup>

Stannard explains that despite the fact that violent diseases, such as smallpox, persisted, it would be incorrect to place the large numbers of depopulation solely on the diseases themselves. This theory would displace responsibility for the genocide from violent people, to uncontrollable violent diseases.<sup>56</sup> Thus, Stannard combats the argument by Anderson for the importance of numbers. Anderson defends that the violence between Americans and American Indians was, in fact, ethnic cleansing and resulted in war crimes or crime against humanity but there was no intention to exterminate Native populations.<sup>57</sup> He states that those indiscriminately acting in violent episodes were the few that ruin it for the whole, and was not reflective of the attitudes and actions of the country in its entirety.<sup>58</sup> At this moment is when Anderson attempts the argument that genocide was absent because Americans viewed violence against American Indians as

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<sup>54</sup> Anderson, *Ethnic Cleansing and the Indian*.

<sup>55</sup> Elizabeth Fenn, *Pox Americana: The Great Smallpox Epidemic of 1775-82*, (New York: Hill and Wang 2001).

<sup>56</sup> Stannard, *American Holocaust*.

<sup>57</sup> Anderson, *Ethnic Cleansing and the Indian*.

<sup>58</sup> Anderson, *Ethnic Cleansing and the Indian*.

morally wrong.<sup>59</sup> Anderson idealizes the American people by articulating that they were bound by teachings that it was morally wrong to kill Indians and that American people lived by the commandment of “Thou shalt not kill.”<sup>60</sup> It is possible that Americans viewed it as morally wrong to kill Native peoples. It is equally possible, as argued by Boyd Cothran in *Remembering the Modoc War: Redemptive Violence and the Making of American Innocence* that due to justified violence against Native groups and the ideology of American innocence, American’s would not have seen the killing of Native peoples as breaking their morals.<sup>61</sup> Therefore, they can claim it was morally wrong to kill, but only if it was genuinely viewed as breaking their morals.

Anderson states that ethnic cleansing is a more plausible explanation because of the government policy of Indian Removal since ethnic cleansing is the removal of a group to create a cohesive ethnic society.<sup>62</sup> This stance seems to neglect the exact adherence to the definition of genocide put forth by the convention and strongly asserts the connection with having a government policy.<sup>63</sup> Madley, Norton, and Stannard would disagree with Anderson, arguing that policy did not need to be in place by the government, but state-sanctioned and funded homicides and massacres fulfill this requirement.<sup>64</sup> Anderson also does not entertain the idea that is it possible that both genocide and ethnic cleansing occurred in American Indian history. Although he states that violence did ensue and this violence should be the “crime that should haunt

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<sup>59</sup> Anderson, *Ethnic Cleansing and the Indian*.

<sup>60</sup> Anderson, *Ethnic Cleansing and the Indian*.

<sup>61</sup> Cothran, *Remembering the Modoc War*.

<sup>62</sup> Anderson, *Ethnic Cleansing and the Indian*.

<sup>63</sup> Anderson, *Ethnic Cleansing and the Indian*.

<sup>64</sup> Anderson, *Ethnic Cleansing and the Indian*.

America,” he merely lumps the violence in as part of the ethnic cleansing definition rather than recognizing the violence of ethnic cleansing efforts was in fact genocide.<sup>65</sup>

David E. Stannard refutes Anderson by claiming that there was almost an entire incineration of Indians in the post-Columbian Americas. The title of his book alone puts the American Indian genocide onto a similar plane as the Holocaust in Nazi Germany. Stannard argues that the genocide against American Indians was purposeful, and a “deliberate racist purge.”<sup>66</sup> Stannard would also refute Anderson’s claim that because there were so many American Indian survivors, genocide did not occur. Stannard argues that in fact, for those who survive genocide, it has never stopped.<sup>67</sup> He addresses that genocide may have occurred some time ago, but because genocide was so influential in all of its forms, American Indian suffering is still occurring today.<sup>68</sup> Genocide, in this case, can span not only space but also time.

Today, reservations have the highest rate of many unfortunate conditions. Rates of poverty, suicide, drug and alcohol abuse and ill health are all above the average American cities.<sup>69</sup> Stannard attributes all of these modern issues to the lasting effect of genocide. By emphasizing the brutality of the massacre of American Indians, authors like Churchill, Norton, and Madley would agree that the intentional violence is definitive proof of genocide. Examples such as the Pequot war, a planned massacre where everything that moved was shot, and any survivors were hunted.<sup>70</sup> Stannard also

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<sup>65</sup> Anderson, *Ethnic Cleansing and the Indian*.

<sup>66</sup> Stannard, *American Holocaust*.

<sup>67</sup> Stannard, *American Holocaust*.

<sup>68</sup> Stannard, *American Holocaust*.

<sup>69</sup> Churchill, *Kill the Indian, Save the Man*.

<sup>70</sup> Stannard, *American Holocaust*.

recognizes that most genocidal acts, including most massacres, were committed against camps of women, children, and the elderly.<sup>71</sup> He declares that “[t]he European habit of indiscriminately killing women and children . . . was flatly and intentionally genocidal. For no population can survive if its women and children are destroyed.”<sup>72</sup>

For many of the authors discussed, there remains the question of why Americans committed genocide. Norton would argue whole-heartedly for the simple fact of greed as motivation.<sup>73</sup> For gold miners in California, their greediness for gold fueled their “brutality, savagery, and filthiness.”<sup>74</sup> Madley would confirm this idea that miner motivation was greed but also fear racial hatred, and the draw to teach Indians to fear the Whites through violence.<sup>75</sup> Stannard would also agree that greed was a significant factor in the choices to commit genocide. For Stannard, the Spanish were after gold and justified their treatment of American Indians through this venture because of reliance on Indian labor.<sup>76</sup> He would also argue that British or Anglo American greed was for land.<sup>77</sup> This is where Norton’s notion of manifest destiny as genocide finds its roots. Although Anderson would not agree on the point of genocide, his argument for forced removal or ethnic cleansing was also in pursuit of land.<sup>78</sup>

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<sup>71</sup> Stannard, *American Holocaust*, 114.

<sup>72</sup> Stannard, *American Holocaust*, 118-119.

<sup>73</sup> Norton, *Genocide in Northwestern California*.

<sup>74</sup> Norton, *Genocide in Northwester California*, 38.

<sup>75</sup> Madley, *An American Genocide*.

<sup>76</sup> Stannard, *American Holocaust*.

<sup>77</sup> Stannard, *American Holocaust*.

<sup>78</sup> Anderson, *Ethnic Cleansing and the Indian*.

Ward Churchill argues that Americans wanted the Indians to be entirely like and grow up thinking like American children.<sup>79</sup> With the addition of his argument for cultural genocide, one can infer that racism was also present as a motivation. Stannard offers the explanation that Spanish and Anglo Americans viewed American Indians as being preconditioned inferior beings, and because they were inferior, their deaths were of less importance and impact.<sup>80</sup> He also provides that European and Christian justification for the genocide against American Indians was fueled by the idea that they were the helpers of Satan and must be punished for their aid.<sup>81</sup>

The United Nations convention provided the world with an international law prohibiting the crime of genocide, so why hasn't the United States been punished for their actions of genocide against American Indians, who to this day still suffer? Today, over one hundred countries have ratified the international law against genocide.<sup>82</sup> The United States, however, has not. Norton asserts that this lack of ratification by the United States is due to the incredible hypocrisy of the United States as a country with the ideals of freedom and liberty, and yet they have committed unspeakable violence against American Indians and Africans during the African slave trade.<sup>83</sup> Churchill would also argue that the United States did not ratify due to fear of prosecution.<sup>84</sup> It is significant that in 1986 the United States did attempt to ratify, but not without objection from many other

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<sup>79</sup> Churchill, *Kill the Indian, Save the Man*.

<sup>80</sup> Stannard, *American Holocaust*.

<sup>81</sup> Stannard, *American Holocaust*.

<sup>82</sup> Madley, *An American Genocide*.

<sup>83</sup> Norton, *Genocide in Northwestern California*.

<sup>84</sup> Churchill, *Kill The Indian, Save the Man*.



countries.<sup>85</sup> The United States wanted to create their own set of laws surrounding genocide to be held in higher standing than the agreed upon laws from the UN convention.<sup>86</sup> Anderson would argue that there is nothing to fear since genocide was not committed, but also because it is too far from the time of genocide to indict someone today.<sup>87</sup>

So, where does that leave relations with American Indians today? Norton suggests that until Americans accept their role in the suppression and genocide of Indians, their silence is just as bad as denial, and is comparable to the deniers of the Holocaust.<sup>88</sup> Churchill offers the idea of decolonization, taking responsibility, reparations, and ratifying the Genocide Convention as a solution to the several centuries of suppression.<sup>89</sup> Madley argues that genocide must be looked at on a case-by-case basis due to the uniqueness of each historical condition.<sup>90</sup> He argues that too many scholars tend to blanket American Indians into one generalization and that each situation may be unique, although that does not mean genocide did not occur in more places that he explores.<sup>91</sup> Stannard argues that genocide happened all over the Americas, but there is yet to be a genocide case study as comprehensive as Benjamin Madley's California based scholarly examination.<sup>92</sup>

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<sup>85</sup> Churchill, *Kill the Indian, Save the Man*, 9.

<sup>86</sup> Churchill, *Kill the Indian, Save the Man*, 9.

<sup>87</sup> Anderson, *Ethnic Cleansing and the Indian*.

<sup>88</sup> Norton, *Genocide in Northwestern California*

<sup>89</sup> Churchill, *Kill the Indian, Save the Man*.

<sup>90</sup> Madley, *An American Genocide*.

<sup>91</sup> Madley, *An American Genocide*.

<sup>92</sup> Stannard, *American Holocaust*.

Placing genocide history into the broader historiography of early American history is a relatively simple task. It is difficult to discuss American Indian history or contact with Europeans without discussing the topic of violence. Although, as far as the common elementary and secondary school textbooks are concerned violence is not the core subject of American Indian history. While many scholars recognize violence in the form of the Native slave trade, Spanish missions, and massacres, they do not directly assess the topic of genocide. Violence, however, was entirely part of the function of European settler-colonialism. Genocide is an unusually specific and touchy topic in history. When asked, the general public's first response to the question of genocide would be Nazi Germany. It is unfortunate that American society today would most likely not classify the violence as genocide, or even understand that violent acts committed against American Indians are genocide under international law. That is why it is the responsibility of the historian to provide the public with plausible explanations of American Indian contact violence in order to foster re-interpretation and responsibility. Norton, Churchill, Madley, Stannard, and Anderson all provide very detailed arguments on their stance of the genocide against American Indians. There is no doubt that future historians as well will enter the debate over what it means to constitute genocide and how this meaning is applied to American Indian history. Madley believes that it is crucial for future researchers to be conscious of the absences, occurrences, variability, and frequency of genocide to accurately assess the application of genocide to historical narratives.<sup>93</sup>

Media based sources, such as newspapers, and arguments of massacre normalization utilized by Madley are reflected in Boyd Cothran's discussions of

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<sup>93</sup> Stannard, *American Holocaust*.

historical memory (collective memory of a historical event), in his book *Remembering the Modoc War*. Cothran focuses on media, popular imagery, and entertainment to tell the story of the Modoc War. The Modoc War in November of 1872 was the result of another treaty gone wrong, between the Modoc Indians of the Klamath Basin in Oregon and the federal government.<sup>94</sup> In attempts to purchase land from the Klamaths, Yahooskin Paiutes, and the Modoc's, the federal government drew up a treaty to receive "more than one million acres of land" in exchange for money, supplies, and "protection from Euro-American settlers" for fifteen years.<sup>95</sup> When the supplies never arrived, the Modoc's led by their Headman, known as Kintpuash or Captain Jack, left the reservation and "repudiated the treaty."<sup>96</sup> The federal government responded by sending U.S. Army soldiers to arrest Captain Jack and return the Modoc's to the reservation. However, the Modoc's resisted, erupting in the Modoc War.<sup>97</sup> What is significant about the examination of this war is the exposed extermination rhetoric that, although common in American history pertaining to American Indians, was rampant through popular media during this time. Cothran recognizes this rhetoric as being genocidal but does not spend extensive time proving that the War was genocide, rather than focusing on how this rhetoric created the commodification of Native suffering and violence that reinforced narratives of innocence in American colonial history.<sup>98</sup> The narrative of innocence in American colonial history has significant implications in the story of the Paxton Boys. By not receiving punishment by the government for not only their political insurgency but

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<sup>94</sup> Cothran, *Remembering the Modoc War*, 2.

<sup>95</sup> Cothran, *Remembering the Modoc War*, 2.

<sup>96</sup> Cothran, *Remembering the Modoc War*.

<sup>97</sup> Cothran, *Remembering the Modoc War*.

<sup>98</sup> Cothran, *Remembering the Modoc War*.

also their genocidal massacre of the Conestoga, the Paxton Boys reinforce the innocence narrative that implies their justification was accepted. Therefore, Cothran's examination of the narrative of American innocence and justified violence has paramount insights for the analysis of the Paxton Boys and the Conestoga Massacre's interpretations.

Further, through the examination of cultural history recorded by popular imagery, newspapers, and entertainment, Cothran shows how the making of American Indian history, through cultural and societal "marketplaces of remembering," is not only tied to violence, but also to the portrayal of that violence in the making of history would affect the way we remember the war.<sup>99</sup> For Cothran, these marketplaces helped perpetuate the "widespread belief that the Modoc War and other incidents of U.S.-Indian violence were justified and to the tendency to view the westward expansion of the United States within the framework of inevitability" and white American innocence.<sup>100</sup> What Cothran means by marketplaces, is the places in which we access the past. For instance, Cothran's primary sources for his argument come from sources of commodification such as "newspaper accounts, traveling Indian Shows, dime novels, promotional literature . . . commemorative reenactments . . . and even scholarly texts," that all determine memory.<sup>101</sup> Therefore, Cothran's examination of the history of the Modoc War concludes that it was intended to rest in the memory of the public from the nineteenth century onward as a "redemptive narrative of American innocence" through justified violence.<sup>102</sup>

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<sup>99</sup> Cothran, *Remembering the Modoc War*.

<sup>100</sup> Cothran, *Remembering the Modoc War*, 15-16.

<sup>101</sup> Cothran, *Remembering the Modoc War*.

<sup>102</sup> Cothran, *Remembering the Modoc War*.

What Cothran exposes here, is something seen throughout American Indian history, the rejection of genocidal violence.

Explored most drastically in Cothran's analysis of the marketplaces of popular media and entertainment, such as Wild West Show that blended narratives of "American innocence and Indian savagery to convince white Americans that they were the victims of Indian wars and not in fact the victorious aggressors."<sup>103</sup> Cothran argues that Americans use distinct modes of knowledge production that manipulate narratives "to conform to the markets in which they come to circulate."<sup>104</sup> Thus due to widespread dissemination of these narratives through cultural marketplaces, Cothran argues that "through [this] consumption of history, Americans have made and remade their self-identity as fundamentally innocent through remembering past episodes of violence."<sup>105</sup> This innocence is inextricably tied to the narrative of justified violence, and therefore the War's manipulated narrative rejected genocide, even though it was a federal and state-sanctioned military expedition with the goal of 'utter extermination' of the Modoc's as ordered by President Ulysses S. Grant.<sup>106</sup>

Another scholar of historical memory focuses on how knowledge production in the remembrances of historical events can significantly shape contemporary public understandings. On the morning of November 29, 1864, when Colonel John Chivington and his men descended on a Cheyenne village of men, women, and children, killing them mercilessly, they were unaware that their participation in a cycle of contested and

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<sup>103</sup> Cothran, *Remembering the Modoc War*, 209.

<sup>104</sup> Cothran, *Remembering the Modoc War*, 21.

<sup>105</sup> Cothran, *Remembering the Modoc War*, 20.

<sup>106</sup> Cothran, *Remembering the Modoc War*, 18.

misplaced interpretations of what would become known as the Sand Creek Massacre.<sup>107</sup> Author Ari Kelman's book *A Misplaced Massacre: Struggling Over the Memory of Sand Creek* is an excellent example of the power in the production of history, and I would argue an example of the power in the production of memory. Kelman's book examines the debates over the 2007 establishment of the Sand Creek Massacre National Historic Site and the accompanying museum interpretations of the Sand Creek Massacre between the National Park Service and groups of Southern Cheyenne and Arapaho.<sup>108</sup> For many years and even today, the site has had contested narrative interpretations as well as a contested location.<sup>109</sup> Kelman explores the development of the National Park Service site location project and their collaboration (sometimes lack thereof) with Arapaho and Southern Cheyenne that blossomed into an "accurate but not precise" declaration of the location of the massacre for historical commemoration.<sup>110</sup>

Kelman demonstrates that there is significant primary source material for the massacre from Colonel Chivington. However, his remembrance and portrayal of what happened at Sand Creek could not be farther from the truth. As Kelman argues, in the state of Colorado, "the massacre can be hard to escape."<sup>111</sup> Yet, there are so many conflicting stories and interpretations of the massacre. Kelman addresses the three main portals of information regarding the memory of the massacre provided by Colonel Chivington (the perpetrator), Silas Soule (a witness), and George Bent (a victim and

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<sup>107</sup> Kelman, *A Misplaced Massacre*.

<sup>108</sup> Kelman, *A Misplaced Massacre*.

<sup>109</sup> Kelman, *A Misplaced Massacre*.

<sup>110</sup> Kelman, *A Misplaced Massacre*, 135.

<sup>111</sup> Kelman, *A Misplaced Massacre*.

survivor), recognizing that another important piece was missing, Native oral histories.<sup>112</sup> Kelman argues that the same contestations in the stories of Chivington, Soule, and Bent - continental expansion, racial ideologies, sovereignty, state-sponsored violence against Native groups, and “contradictions in American nationalism” - were rekindled in the contemporary arguments of the commemoration of the massacre.<sup>113</sup> This, Kelman questions, is part of the controversial argument throughout American Indian history and especially in museums of whether the crimes of American expansion should or should not be commemorated. Kelman contends that “the process of commemorating Sand Creek proved that the massacre remained a ‘history front’ in a simmering ‘culture war,’ as contested perceptions of the past revealed fault lines in the present.”<sup>114</sup> However, through this process of contested and difficult collaboration among the National Parks Service, the residents of Kiowa County, and the Southern Cheyenne, it produced a bridge of understanding that multiple memories can exist over a “unified collective memory.”<sup>115</sup>

As part of their involvement in the site search, the Arapaho and Southern Cheyenne would only participate if their views were respected and utilized.<sup>116</sup> This meant that the National Park Service had to stop relying solely on severely contested historical documents and start relying on Cheyenne and Arapaho traditions of oral history and the memories that helped them make sense of the brutal massacre.<sup>117</sup> This is important for understanding the connections between collaboration with Native groups and memory

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<sup>112</sup> Kelman, *A Misplaced Massacre*, 8.

<sup>113</sup> Kelman, *A Misplaced Massacre*, 42.

<sup>114</sup> Kelman, *A Misplaced Massacre*.

<sup>115</sup> Kelman, *A Misplaced Massacre*.

<sup>116</sup> Kelman, *A Misplaced Massacre*.

<sup>117</sup> Kelman, *A Misplaced Massacre*.

because in this case the collaboration and memory of the Cheyenne and Arapaho proved to be essential in avoiding yet another misplaced massacre. Subsequently, the Cheyenne and Arapaho also requested that their perspectives be included in the interpretation of the site, a way of decolonizing the history of the massacre and beginning to recognize the violent hard truths of American colonial history.<sup>118</sup>

This is an argument perpetuated in the work of Amy Lonetree and her book *Decolonizing Museums: Representing Native America in National and Tribal Museums*. By decolonizing the museum - attempting to remove the white narrative and tell a more inclusive history from the perspective of native peoples - we can begin to create spaces of healing and understanding.<sup>119</sup> Lonetree argues that Native populations today have unresolved grief that is only heightened by the colonized museum exhibits.<sup>120</sup> The purpose of decolonizing the museum is to allow for critical awareness and the transformation of museums spaces into spaces of healing and begin resolving the historical grief that continues to harm Native populations today.<sup>121</sup> Lonetree's definition of historically unresolved grief is 'the impaired or delayed mourning' "that occurs as a result of the many traumas that Indigenous people have suffered . . ."<sup>122</sup> Therefore, by decolonizing the museum exhibitions and telling the hard truths of history, museums can move forward in their relationships with Native peoples toward resolving this grief. However, Lonetree addresses the backlash in the museum community to this idea. She states that many in the museum community do not display the hard truths, such as the

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<sup>118</sup> Kelman, *A Misplaced Massacre*.

<sup>119</sup> Lonetree, *Decolonizing Museums*.

<sup>120</sup> Lonetree, *Decolonizing Museums*.

<sup>121</sup> Lonetree, *Decolonizing Museums*, 7.

<sup>122</sup> Lonetree, *Decolonizing Museums*, 6.



Native Holocaust because they don't want to 'hang out our dirty laundry' or 'subscribe to the language of victimization.'<sup>123</sup> Some museums would prefer to leave the violence out of the interpretation because they believe it continues the perpetual victim narrative. These museums will then tend to focus on the survivance narrative of Native populations, showing their perseverance and continued existence today.<sup>124</sup> Lonetree argues that they were victims, and they did survive, but it is impossible to tell a survivance narrative without the initial context of violence and genocide.<sup>125</sup> In other words, they cannot have a narrative of survival without including what they had to go through to survive, and you cannot decolonize the museum without first recognizing the colonialism.<sup>126</sup> Instead, telling the full story of the Native Holocaust is a "testament not to Native victimhood but to Native skill, adaptability, courage, tenacity, and countless other qualities that made [their] survival a reality against all odds."<sup>127</sup>

For Lonetree, the primary goal of museums is to serve the Native community. First and foremost, the Native communities perspectives and meanings they draw are what matters to the success of museum exhibits in decolonization.<sup>128</sup> Too often historians hide behind passive voice, allowing for them to say a wrong was done, without having to say exactly who the culprit was.<sup>129</sup> When museums build upon this scholarly research for their exhibits the same colonized history gets perpetuated, that Native peoples were violent savages or that they are defined by functional technology: "we are only what we

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<sup>123</sup> Lonetree, *Decolonizing Museums*, 6.

<sup>124</sup> Lonetree, *Decolonizing Museums*.

<sup>125</sup> Lonetree, *Decolonizing Museums*.

<sup>126</sup> Lonetree, *Decolonizing Museums*.

<sup>127</sup> Lonetree, *Decolonizing Museums*, 6.

<sup>128</sup> Lonetree, *Decolonizing Museums*, 6

<sup>129</sup> Lonetree, *Decolonizing Museums*, 8.

made.”<sup>130</sup> Therefore “museums have played a major role in dispossessing and misrepresenting Native Americans.”<sup>131</sup> For Lonetree, collaboration with Native populations is the essential piece of a museum exhibition of Native peoples or topics. However, she argues that the most successful museum exhibitions come from Native operated or tribal museums.<sup>132</sup> Through these collaborations and Native operated tribal museums, Native populations have developed a “collective public memory and history,” or historical memory, that allows for Native controlled “public perceptions of their past.”<sup>133</sup> Important for Lonetree is also the recognition of the museum as a forum. A forum for the hard conversations of American Indian history including the genocidal acts committed against them. For Lonetree, there is no question that genocide was committed, a belief that other American Indian scholars also express. She argues that the museum and the greater public have “willfully ignored the [shameful] history” of violence and have “tried to silence [Native] versions of the past.”<sup>134</sup> It is here that Lonetree once again shows that museums are forum sites that should be in service of the Native community as a space for “education, commemoration, and truth telling.”<sup>135</sup>

Similar to Lonetree, Raney Bench examines the importance and best practices of museum collaboration with Native groups in her book *Interpreting Native American History and Culture at Museums and Historic Sites*. Recognizing the faults of the museum in the representation and interpretation of Native groups and history, Bench

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<sup>130</sup> Lonetree, *Decolonizing Museums*, 14.

<sup>131</sup> Lonetree, *Decolonizing Museums*, 9.

<sup>132</sup> Lonetree, *Decolonizing Museums*.

<sup>133</sup> Lonetree, *Decolonizing Museums*, 30.

<sup>134</sup> Lonetree, *Decolonizing Museums*, 122.

<sup>135</sup> Lonetree, *Decolonizing Museums*, 122.

argues for the best practices in developing trusting and respectful collaborative relationships with Native Groups. Heavily influenced by Lonetree, Bench contends that the interpretation of “American Indian material culture or history [in museums has] a long history of excluding Native people from the process.”<sup>136</sup> Thus, in moving forward with a museum exhibition and interpretation of Native histories, museums must involve themselves in relationship building with Native groups in a collaborative effort to be sharing a better, Native centered history to the public.<sup>137</sup> She argues for a simple step process of first identifying what groups the museum exhibits represent. Following this, is contact with those Native groups, how to rebuild broken relationships, how to represent a group that was forcibly relocated to different parts of the country, building relationships, authority sharing, establishing educational partnerships, establishing Native councils or boards for review of material, and finally taking responsibility for the past collecting and misrepresentations by the museum.<sup>138</sup> Although Bench’s book is more of a “how to” guide for museums, it is an incredibly important piece of literature to understand the first steps toward decolonizing the museum in collaboration with Native groups.

These changes in museum interpretation and methodology do not just come about due to the initiative of the museum staff. Native groups have played and continue to play important roles in the decolonizing of the museum. For authors such as Lonetree, the civil rights movement, postmodernism, and the Native American Graves Protection and Repatriation Act (NAGPRA) played a role in this turn toward collaboration, but even

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<sup>136</sup> Raney Bench, *Interpreting Native American History and Culture at Museums and Historic Sites*, *Interpreting History* (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield, 2014), XI.

<sup>137</sup> Bench, *Interpreting Native American History and Culture*.

<sup>138</sup> Bench, *Interpreting Native American History and Culture*.

more so the Native activism was at the “forefront of asserting Indigenous participation in developing exhibitions . . .”<sup>139</sup> Karen Coody Cooper reflects the same passion for the importance of Native activism in establishing changing methodologies of museums in her book *Spirited Encounters: American Indians Protest Museum Policies and Practices*. Cooper argues that museums across the world must realize that they have to “talk to those whose materials they hold, that they must let cultural voices be heard in exhibitions and in public programs . . .”<sup>140</sup> Therefore, the decolonizing paradigm is very much alive in current museum scholarship and needs to be implemented further in practice across the nation. The reason the decolonizing paradigm exists is because of the fight by Native groups since contact to destroy stereotypes and reclaim their history and identities so often misrepresented through scholarship and public interpretation.

This chapter set out to examine the past and current scholarship of genocide and American Indian history, violence and historical memory in America, and American Indian history and museums all to provide the surrounding body of literature that influences the analysis contained in this thesis. As we can see, many authors of American Indian or Native history are not afraid of the word genocide, especially not the Native authors contained in much of the historiography above. It is essential then for museums, as places that hold memory and perpetuate false historical memory disseminated to the public for further misrepresentation and abstraction, to begin decolonizing American and Native histories interpreted in their exhibits. All of the literature above informs the arguments made in the next chapter. The conversation on genocide is especially crucial

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<sup>139</sup> Lonetree, *Decolonizing Museums*, 17.

<sup>140</sup> Cooper, *Spirited Encounters*, XVI.

for the proposed new interpretation that analyzes the frontier violence as a precursor to the Revolution that was, in fact, the norm in the building of America. This literature is also critical as it guides my critiques and suggestions for the future of scholarly and public interpretations as these resources are the primary sources of information affecting the memory of the Conestoga Massacre. By utilizing the theories of these many scholars, I will be able to showcase the connections between genocide, frontier violence, scholarly and public interpretations, and how these affect or shape memory.

## CHAPTER II: INTERPRETING THE MASSACRE, ETHNIC CLEANSING AND THE SILENCES IN PUBLIC REPRESENTATION

“When someone else is telling your stories, in effect what they’re doing is defining to the world who you are, what you are, and what they think you are and what they think you should be.”

-Lenore Keeshig-Tobias, Ojibwa writer and Canada  
Parks cultural interpreter.<sup>1</sup>

In recent years the tendency of scholarly interpretations has shifted from objective “truth” to recognizing personal biases in our work and realizing that our “truth” about a historical event, person, or place is one of many “truths.” In this case, the tendency has switched from “Truth” with a capital T, to “truth” with a lowercase t, allowing for the transparency about how subjective our work is. I will examine an example of these many truths in the following pages.<sup>2</sup> Most scholars of the Paxton Boys and the Conestoga massacre are in agreement about the basic mechanics of what happened that fateful December of 1763, but many argue for different motives of the Paxton Boys in their crusade to eliminate the Conestoga. Outside of primary source documentation, the analysis of Paxton Boys scholarship by prominent scholars in the field of American history have shaped collective memory of academics, curators of historical institutions, and the broader public. Disseminated through generations, the next scholars of this topic utilized the memory and created references for public interpretations.

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<sup>1</sup> This was taken from Karen Coody Cooper’s dedication page, she cited it from an article by Michael Ames. Karen Coody Cooper, *Spirited Encounters: American Indians Protest Museum Policies and Practices* (Lanham: AltaMira Press, 2008). Michael Ames, “Biculturalism in Exhibitions,” *Museum Anthropology* 15, no. 2 (May 1991).

<sup>2</sup> For more information on the discussions of trends in historical writing see Anna Green and Kathleen Troup, *The Houses of History: A Critical Reader in Twentieth-Century History and Theory* (New York: New York University Press, 1999), Richard J. Evans, *In Defense of History*, (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1999), and Lynn Hunt, *Writing History in the Global Era*, (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 2015).

Interestingly, there is a disconnect between the vast amount of scholarly interpretations and the interpretations utilized in public spaces, such as historical markers and museums. Although the scholarly interpretations, historical markers, and museum exhibits show a similar pattern of second thought when it comes to the story of the Conestoga, and sometimes the massacre. There is also a drastic difference in the amount of interpretation that exists. Most often there is an acknowledgment of the massacre, and it's brutality in the scholarship and historical interpretation, but the scholarship has a more in-depth exploration of the Paxton Boys while the historical interpretations hardly explore the massacre at all. Therefore, this chapter's purpose is to examine the scholarly and public interpretations of the massacre to determine possible avenues of memory that these representations perpetuate.

Among the scholars that interpret the Conestoga Massacre, there are a few discernable overarching interpretations affecting the memory of the massacre: revenge, politics, land, and fear, but not violence. Although violence is a subject in each interpretation, the most prevalent argument throughout the scholarly literature for the Conestoga Massacre confines the memory of the event to a political rebellion, something I term the political Paxton narrative. While the massacre is a necessary piece of this rebellion, most scholars, such as Jane Merritt, Krista Camenzind, and Daniel Richter to name a few, attribute their primary attention to everything that happened after the massacre. The culmination of the animosity and hatred that the Paxton Boys felt for Native groups essentially exploded resulting in the two massacres of the Conestoga people. However, these scholars argue that the most critical aspects of this story arrive after the massacre when the Paxton Boys march on Philadelphia. For the historical actors

of the time in Pennsylvania's government, they too saw the Paxton Boys efforts as a significant political move, a narrative that is no doubt seen in the sources to follow and perpetuated as the dominant memory of the massacre.<sup>3</sup>

Examining Krista Camenzind's contribution to an edited volume about the racial past of colonial Pennsylvania, "Violence, Race, and the Paxton Boys" in *Friends and Enemies in Penn's Woods: Indians, Colonists, and the Racial Construction of Pennsylvania*, she makes the political argument flourish with the backing of a racial foundation of gendered violence. Camenzind argues that the massacre was a turning point in Pennsylvania history, in that it was the first time "a group of colonists engaged in an extralegal, large-scale, and organized act of racial violence" that would influence future violent interactions with Native groups.<sup>4</sup> Camenzind contends that this is the "legacy" that the Paxton Boys left behind, one "of a frontier associated with the violent defense of White patriarchy against a racialized Native American enemy."<sup>5</sup> Although Camenzind argues for the underpinning of race as the motivations for the Paxton Boys violence, she makes it clear that this evolution in Paxton Boys racial thinking was part of a larger "displeasure with an official policy designed to support Native community."<sup>6</sup> Therefore the conditions Camenzind examines are ones of political rebellion with a racially charged resentment for Native groups.

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<sup>3</sup> Jane T. Merritt, *At the Crossroads: Indians and Empires on a Mid-Atlantic Frontier, 1700-1763* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2003), 287.

<sup>4</sup> Krista Camenzind, "Violence, Race, and the Paxton Boys," in *Friends and Enemies in Penn's Woods: Indians, Colonists, and the Racial Construction of Pennsylvania*, ed. William A. Pencak and Daniel K. Richter (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2004), 202.

<sup>5</sup> Camenzind, "Violence, Race, and the Paxton Boys," 219.

<sup>6</sup> Camenzind, "Violence, Race, and the Paxton Boys," 217.



Camenzind addresses the violence by the Paxton Boys, recognizing that there is a considerable influence on the frontier life for these men. As is standard in arguments about the political moves of the Paxton Boys, they were mainly concerned with policies that aided sovereign Native communities unincorporated under British doctrines, while the Paxton Boys suffered protecting the frontier during the Seven Year's War.<sup>7</sup> The frontier was a place that frequently subjected the Paxton Boys to violence and often the discovery of the brutal aftermath of white colonial settlements left behind by their enemies. This frontier is where the animosity against Native groups was forming the minds of the Paxton Boys into thinking that any Native is an enemy. However, Camenzind also gives credit to colonial violence as a whole. She states the Paxton Boys' massacre of the Conestogas was part of a "larger pattern of Euro-American violence against Native Americans that had characterized British North America almost from the moment of settlement."<sup>8</sup> This is, in fact, the very environment and influence that allowed for and shaped the Paxton Boys understanding of settler colonial –Native interaction. Although she recognizes the larger pattern of violence, she does not fully explore the connections between the influence of this larger pattern in shaping their move to obtain political recognition through genocide, and what this means for the broader context of settler-colonialism and frontier violence in the making of America.

As far as Camenzind examines, the Paxton Boys had a political motive to gain the resources that they needed on the frontier while arguing for the reduction of protections

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<sup>7</sup> Camenzind, "Violence, Race, and the Paxton Boys," 204.

<sup>8</sup> Camenzind, "Violence, Race, and the Paxton Boys," 204.

and freedoms for Native groups.<sup>9</sup> What Camenzind is missing here is a stronger focus on her statement about the “larger pattern of Euro-American violence against Native Americans.”<sup>10</sup> By reducing the massacre of the Conestoga to the icing on the cake of built-up tension, Camenzind perpetuates a memory of the massacre that is rooted in their political motives with little attention to the Conestoga. In this instance the Conestoga and their massacre are lost in the background, solely a supporting actor to the Paxton Boys lead role in this history of Pennsylvania. That being said, Camenzind’s recognition of the massacre as part of a pattern of violence in colonial American is a step in the right direction. Although, it is vital to further this argument and find that not only is it a part of the pattern, but also significantly influenced by it. It is necessary to recognize that the violence committed by the Paxton Boys was the norm and the peace preceding it was the aberration. By making this distinction, Camenzind could strengthen her argument and begin to shape the memory of the massacre as more than an instance of political insurgency characterized by violence and into a defining feature of settler-colonialism.

Other scholars of the political Paxton narrative also perpetuate this distinct collective memory. As Jane Merritt interprets it in her book *At the Crossroads: Indians & Empires on a Mid-Atlantic Frontier 1700-1763*, the massacre is an introduction to the manipulation by the Paxton Boys of common perceptions of Native peoples that affected their subsequent treatment, and no doubt how the public remembers them. Influenced by their experiences in Pontiac’s War on the frontier, the Paxton Boys found a way to create a narrative of brutality, savagery, and violence through their “Declaration and

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<sup>9</sup> Camenzind, “Violence, Race, and the Paxton Boys,” 204.

<sup>10</sup> Camenzind, “Violence, Race, and the Paxton Boys,” 204.

Remonstrance that “retold past Indian relations as brutal violence (on the part of Indians) and unappreciated sacrifice (on the part of whites).”<sup>11</sup> This led to the Paxton Boys ability to subvert the Pennsylvania government, commit murder, and then be able to recruit Paxton sympathizers, perpetuating the Paxton perspective and in turn the collective memory of what happened. Although there were others that publicly denounced the Paxton Boys, their narratives were ones of “primitive innocence” of the Conestoga.<sup>12</sup> Both narratives are on the extreme ends of where the Conestoga most likely would have placed themselves. It is possible through Native traditions of marriage unions with other Native groups that Conestoga ancestry survived outside of the massacre, although the white-imposed identity of each individual would have changed to the new Native group that they married into. However, there is little opportunity to explore the perspectives of the independent tribe named Conestoga. Thus we are stuck with the primary sources of passive white citizens, and contemporary analyses synthesized from these primary sources by scholars. We could make inferences about what the Conestoga wanted or were up to based on what we know about them through the primary sources, however, this cannot begin to encompass the Conestoga’s truth of what happened that December 1763. The introduction of Native voices to the narrative of the Conestoga is something that is not only missing from the historical record but also scholarly and public interpretations.

The Paxton Boys manipulated narratives that created and shaped stereotypes commonly associated with Native groups.<sup>13</sup> The term savage being the strongest of all the stereotypes, the Pennsylvania government also referred to the Paxton Boys and other

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<sup>11</sup> Merritt, *At the Crossroads*, 13.

<sup>12</sup> Merritt, *At the Crossroads*, 13.

<sup>13</sup> Merritt, *At the Crossroads*, 282.

white settlers as such due to their behaviors.<sup>14</sup> Due to the sixty-year period in between the treaty of William Penn and the massacre, Merritt argues that the Paxton Boys did not see this the treaty as particularly important.<sup>15</sup> It is apparent through her interpretation that the lives of the Conestoga were also not important to most of the passive citizens that allowed the Paxton Boys to wreak havoc.<sup>16</sup> Merritt includes positions of the magistrate Edward Shippen, as well as the proclamation language by John Penn, showcasing the public perceptions of the time on what the massacre meant to the colonizers. As far as Shippen was concerned, the massacre was something to be condemned yet his tone of inevitability for the extermination of the Conestoga reinforced the Paxton narrative of “savage” and “violent” Native groups.<sup>17</sup> As for the Honorable John Penn, his proclamation seeks the arrest of the Paxton Boys, yet it forgets the intention to arrest is for the murder of the Conestoga and instead uses the arrest to “discourage and suppress the Lawless Insurrection among the people.”<sup>18</sup> The Pennsylvania government was then more concerned about the massacre because it was done without permission and challenged the power of the government. A dynamic that Merritt interprets as revealing the relationship between frontier settlers and colonial powers, “rather than simply a hatred of Indians.”<sup>19</sup> This interpretation then removes the colonial violence from being the influential context shaping the motives of the Paxton Boys and shifting the context to one of political rebellion and balances of power.

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<sup>14</sup> Merritt, *At the Crossroads*, 282.

<sup>15</sup> Merritt, *At the Crossroads*, 285.

<sup>16</sup> Merritt, *At the Crossroads*, 285.

<sup>17</sup> Merritt, *At the Crossroads*, 285.

<sup>18</sup> Merritt, *At the Crossroads*, 287.

<sup>19</sup> Merritt, *At the Crossroads*, 282

Interpretations by the contemporary Lancaster historian Jack Brubaker in his book *Massacre of the Conestogas: On the Trail of the Paxton Boys in Lancaster County*, also addresses the lax behavior on behalf of the Lancaster citizen in protecting the Conestogas lives. Brubaker's interpretation outright accuses the citizens of Lancaster of not caring about the Conestoga, contending that there was no objection because all of the townsfolk also hated American Indians and did not care for their lives.<sup>20</sup> Further, he established that the sheriff, without objection, allowed for the Paxton Boys to enter the workhouse and slaughter the remaining fourteen Conestoga.<sup>21</sup> Under the protection of the magistrate Edward Shippen, the Paxton Boys then escaped prosecution.<sup>22</sup> Brubaker's interpretation suggests that there was a conspiracy to commit murder, agreed upon by the Paxton Boys, Edward Shippen, and the citizen of Lancaster. This interpretation is one of the many popular trade press books that will be the most accessible read for the general public. Brubaker also submits many articles to Lancaster Online, a local online news, and media center, making him an accessible outlet for the public to find information about the massacre.

As the arguments of political Paxton narratives continues to grow. This body of scholarly interpretation welcomes Daniel Richter and Scott Paul Gordon. Daniel Richter's interpretation in *Facing East From Indian Country: A Native History of Early America* includes a comparison to Pontiac and the shared categorization of ethnic cleansing.<sup>23</sup> However, the author does not define his use of the term ethnic cleansing and

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<sup>20</sup> Brubaker, *Massacre of the Conestogas*.

<sup>21</sup> Brubaker, Jack. *Massacre of the Conestogas*

<sup>22</sup> Brubaker, Jack. *Massacre of the Conestogas*

<sup>23</sup> Richter, *Facing East from Indian Country*, 191.

how this massacre constitutes it. Effectively, Richter's interpretation of the Conestoga Massacre as being ethnic cleansing places the event in the memory of its author and its readers as being a dispute over land with the intention of removal, rather than death. Richter's reinforces this idea in his interpretation of the reasons by which the Paxton Boys committed the acts of violence in their public political statements about "why Indians must not be permitted to share the land with Whites."<sup>24</sup> Kevin Kenny's detailed examination of the Paxton Boys in his book *Peaceable Kingdom Lost: The Paxton Boys and the Destruction of William Penn's Holy Experiment* also reflects the narrative of the Paxton Boys motive for the acquisition of land resources. Kenny's interpretation begins with the discussion of the intentions of the Paxton Boys being "security and land and would use whatever means needed to achieve their goals."<sup>25</sup> The Paxton Boys then went on to claim what they viewed as their right to Conestoga land by right of conquest.<sup>26</sup>

Kenny further interprets that the Paxton Boys, as a frontier militia group, would target enemy American Indians on the frontier due to the growing fear of attack by Native groups on a volatile frontier border during Pontiac's War.<sup>27</sup> Kenny recognizes the strong connection between the violence committed by the Paxton Boys shortly after Pontiac's War and the wider context of colonial violence characteristic of the time frame. Kenny even goes so far as to make the distinction of the importance of the Paxton Boys violence being a precursor to the American Revolution.<sup>28</sup> After the Paxton Boys many failed expeditions in the Fall of 1763, they no longer distinguished between enemies and

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<sup>24</sup> Richter, *Facing East from Indian Country*, 202.

<sup>25</sup> Kenny, *Peaceable Kingdom Lost*, 125.

<sup>26</sup> Kenny, *Peaceable Kingdom Lost*, 2.

<sup>27</sup> Kenny, *Peaceable Kingdom Lost*, 133.

<sup>28</sup> Kenny, *Peaceable Kingdom Lost*, 5-8.

friends.<sup>29</sup> Will Sock, a Conestoga man, was utilized as the justification tool by the Paxton Boys as to why they specifically targeted the Conestoga. As far as White written accounts have provided, the Paxton Boys viewed Will Sock as an enemy to the British Crown.<sup>30</sup> He is said to have carried around a French flag, taken British citizens captive, and killed a White settler.<sup>31</sup> This led the Paxton boys to be convinced that the entire group of Conestoga were “conspiring against Pennsylvania during wartime, [and they] set out to annihilate them.”<sup>32</sup> Kenny’s interpretation could be read in many ways, shaping the memory of the massacre between several possible explanations. At first glance, the argument of the Paxton Boys motive being a land dispute allows for the inference that Kenny’s interpretation leans toward the understanding of Paxton violence as being ethnic cleansing. However, he states that the Paxton Boys “pushed the logic of displacement to its most brutal extreme.”<sup>33</sup> Closely tied to the rhetoric of ethnic cleansing, this statement would further support his interpretation, but the final three words in that statement could also counter balance the ethnic cleansing narrative where the “most brutal extreme” is genocide. It could also be that Kenny simply means the “most brutal extreme” is death, with ethnic cleansing as the motive but genocide as the real intent. Without Kenny’s outright use of either term, we can only make suggestive inferences about where his interpretation stands on this issue.

Scott Paul Gordon, in his article “The Paxton Boys and the Moravians,” also interprets within the political Paxton narrative. Gordon similarly refers to the Conestoga

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<sup>29</sup> Kenny, *Peaceable Kingdom Lost*, 133.

<sup>30</sup> Kenny, *Peaceable Kingdom Lost*, 133.

<sup>31</sup> Kenny, *Peaceable Kingdom Lost*, 134.

<sup>32</sup> Kenny, *Peaceable Kingdom Lost*, 137.

<sup>33</sup> Kenny, *Peaceable Kingdom Lost*, 5.

massacre as ethnic cleansing. He interprets their behaviors as wanting Pennsylvania to be “cleansed ethnically of Indians,” perpetuating the same narrative affecting memory provided by Richter.<sup>34</sup> Where they differ in their interpretation is in Gordon’s use of Moravian sources to paint a slightly different political picture. Gordon interprets that the Paxton Boys massacred the Conestoga as a deliberate move toward magistrate Edward Shippen who was ignoring their pleas for aid on the frontier.

Gordon’s interpretation also contests the common and widely agreed upon interpretation of the events on December 27. As Gordon’s interpretation explains, the Paxton Boys visited Edward Shippen before the massacre and threatened him with killing the Conestoga.<sup>35</sup> With little acknowledgment from Shippen, the Paxton Boys moved to massacre the first six Conestoga. After the first massacre, the Paxton Boys still did not receive the response they were hoping for. This is the trigger that led the Paxton Boys to kill the remaining fourteen under Shippen’s protection in Lancaster.<sup>36</sup> This one of two contested discussions of different events taking place on each day of the massacre, and in turn shapes the interpretive discussion further as the original motives of Paxton Boys in Gordon’s interpretation was not to kill the Conestoga but to get the resources they requested. However, this interpretation is still part of the political Paxton narrative as they targeted a public figure challenging the balance of power to leverage their needs on the frontier. Not obtaining this cooperation from Lancaster, the Paxton Boys moved their

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<sup>34</sup> Gordon, “The Paxton Boys and the Moravians,” 126.

<sup>35</sup> Gordon, “The Paxton Boys and the Moravians.

<sup>36</sup> Gordon, “The Paxton Boys and the Moravians.



grievances on toward Philadelphia, starting the pamphlet war that ravaged the political landscape of Pennsylvania.<sup>37</sup>

Similar to the interpretations provided previously by Merritt, scholar Jeremy Engles also interprets the rhetoric of “savagery” as positively reinforcing negative attitudes toward associations with American Indians giving the Paxton Boys the opportunity to apply justifications for “[redefining] murder as revenge” in his article “Equipped for Murder.”<sup>38</sup> This scholarly interpretation falls into the dominant interpretive categories of both revenge and fear. An interpretation also expressed by John Smolenski in his article “Murder on the Margins.”<sup>39</sup> Backcountry fears due to violence on the frontier created built up tensions and animosity that fueled Paxton justification for violence against Native groups.<sup>40</sup> Seeing the brutality and violence of the Wyoming settlement of Connecticut folk, was the moment the Paxton Boys fears transitioned to revenge. The revenge came in the form of remolding their conception of Native groups under one blanket term of “Indian.”<sup>41</sup> Therefore, the Paxton Boys viewed any Native as an enemy.

Interpretations of the Conestoga Massacre are not limited to scholarly representations. Historical markers, pamphlets, and exhibits are arguably some of the most critical interpretations. Although, one would hope that the public interpretations mentioned above would utilize primary or scholarly sources. However, there is a

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<sup>37</sup> Alison Olson, “The Pamphlet War over the Paxton Boys,” *The Pennsylvania Magazine of History and Biography* 123, no. 1/2 (April 1999): 31–55.

<sup>38</sup> Engles, “Equipped for Murder.”

<sup>39</sup> Smolenski, “Murder on the Margins.”

<sup>40</sup> Smolenski, “Murder on the Margins.”

<sup>41</sup> Smolenski, “Murder on the Margins.”

disconnect between the scholarly interpretations and public interpretations that must be explored here to understand the difference in memory perpetuated in the public sphere. These public displays of interpretation are most often the first, if not only, exposure the greater public receives for this historic event. It is vital then that the interpretation be just and liberal in its representation of this massacre to educate the public on the hard truths of history, something that the scholarly interpretations should provide for them. In this next section, I will explore the existing public interpretations available in Lancaster County through historical markers, pamphlets, and exhibitions. This research is limited in the number of public representations as there are other websites and a digital archive that is not discussed here. The public representations are also interpreted through their text, lack of interpretation, and placement, missing the vital discussion with the organizations that created them. Thus, this research does not begin to infer the process by which these organizations choose their materials that inform their current public interpretations.

In Lancaster County, there is most definitely no shortage of references to the Conestoga massacre through historical institutions and markers. However, the markers usually only briefly detail the massacre or sometimes just give a statement of acknowledgment that the massacre occurred. In this section, I will utilize the historic public interpretations as my base for understanding the publicly disseminated memory of the massacre. I analyze the public interpretations of the massacre through two historical markers, three plaques, a pamphlet, and two museum exhibit labels. It is important to note that this research is restricted. In the time allotted for a research trip to the Philadelphia and Lancaster areas of Pennsylvania, I chose to analyze the most prominent and well-exposed, or most easily accessible public interpretations of the massacre. I did

this through the examination of state commissioned historical markers, only one of which I was able to find that had direct contact with Native groups, and through museum or historic site materials.

The first interpretation that will I discuss here is a marker sponsored by the Safe Harbor Water and Power Corp. (Appendix A, Figure 1) located on the edge of what is currently called Conestoga Township in Lancaster County beside the Conestoga River. This marker is one of two, demarcating the territory associated with the Conestoga. As you drive through the Lancaster countryside toward Conestoga Township, you will soon approach a small bridge over a stream branching from the Conestoga River, where a large brown rusted sign stands tall with the title “Conestoga Indian Town.”<sup>42</sup> The marker reads:

The Conestoga Indians lived in scattered settlements along this stream. They were the last of the once mighty Susquehannocks. Their final location was along the road leading to Creswell. William Penn visited the Conestoga Indians in 1701. The remnants of this tribe were massacred by the Paxton boys in December 1763.<sup>43</sup>

It is apparent by the language of this marker that initially the intention may have been to remember the Conestoga in all the time they lived before the massacre along the Conestoga River. With the addition of the final line, the public interpretation attempts to ensure the public knows of or acknowledges the massacre. However, the massacre, in this case, is a second thought to all the lines that come before it. The marker misses the opportunity to interpret the massacre further or the Conestoga as a whole. It is difficult to judge historical markers based on length because you want to catch the eye of the visitor without overwhelming them. It is a proven statistic that museum or historical visitors

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<sup>42</sup> “Conestoga Indian Town,” ca. 1930, Historical Marker, Sign, Lancaster County, PA.

<sup>43</sup> “Conestoga Indian Town,” ca. 1930, Historical Marker, Sign, Lancaster County, PA

only spend small amounts of time reading text panels.<sup>44</sup> If the panel is too wordy, you can believe that your visitors will lose focus after roughly the first two to five lines.<sup>45</sup> In the case of this historical marker, the narrative is disjointed and appears as several different standalone topics collapsed into one non-flowing narrative. This means that any number of people passing by and reading it will have several choices of big ideas to remember from the text, which can deter the effect of the marker providing the visitor with too many options. For more information, it is most likely that the visitor will choose to further explore either the mighty Susquehannocks, William Penn in 1701, or the massacre. The marker gives a lot of freedom to the visitor, but not much guidance. The guidance that that marker does provide the visitor is the concept of “lasting” provided by Jean M. O’Brien. By using the language “They were the [last] of the once mighty Susquehannocks,” the marker implies the narrative of Indian extinction.<sup>46</sup> However, this misrepresents the many Susquehannocks and possibly Conestoga that engaged in marriage and new identity formation with other groups of Native peoples in the area. Effectively, this “shape[s], limit[s], and inhibit[s] views of Indians even today,” by effacing the story of the Conestoga at their massacre.<sup>47</sup>

The second historical interpretation is the plaque located at the intersection of Safe Harbor Road and Indian Marker Road, on the way to Creswell as stated by the first

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<sup>44</sup> Gianna Moscardo, Roy Ballantyne, and Karen Hughes, *Designing Interpretive Signs: Principles in Practice* (Golden: Fulcrum Press, 2007).

<sup>45</sup> Moscardo et al. *Designing Interpretive Signs*.

<sup>46</sup>“Conestoga Indian Town,” ca. 1930, Historical Marker, Sign, Lancaster County, PA. Concerning the theory of the implied narrative of extinction, and the uses of the terms “first” or “last” see Jean O’Brien, *Firsting and Lasting: Writing Indians out of Existence in New England* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2010).

<sup>47</sup> O’Brien, *Firsting and Lasting*, xiv.

marker. This marker (Appendix A, Figure 2) marks another boundary to the Conestoga Indian Town that dotted the landscape of this southern part of Lancaster County. Situated on the side of the road, between the yards of private homes, the plaque reads:

Conestoga Indian Town The Conestoga Indians in origin largely the survivors of the defeated ancient Susquehannas or Minquas of Iroquoian stock located their village variously on these lands in the Penn Proprietary manor of Conestoga chiefly west of this point they were visited here in 1701 by William Penn who made treaties with them the tribe was exterminated by the Paxton Boys in 1763 Marked by the Pennsylvania Historical Commission and the Lancaster County Historical Society 1924.<sup>48</sup>

Without punctuation and all capital letters, this marker can be confusing to the untrained and even trained eye. Similarly, this marker again refers to the Susquehanna, William Penn, and the massacre. There is little information here that is different from the first marker, thereby creating repetition without saying a whole lot. The locations of each marker then call into question the interpretation of the landscape. As the markers contain the same information, what is the most accurate or which is the closest marker to where the massacre took place? This interpretation thus seems slightly meaningless and serves only to confuse its visitors. “William Penn” is also in extra large font, indicating that his visits with the Conestoga are the most interpretively important information provided. The massacre once again takes a back seat and receives a second thought. A final interpretive issue for this marker is the use of the term “ancient Susquehannas.”<sup>49</sup> This indicates a before contact group of peoples that are long distant from today. This perpetuates the “past peoples” narrative that populates modern societies understanding of contemporary

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<sup>48</sup> “Conestoga Indian Town,” September 1, 1924, Historical Marker, Plaque, Lancaster County, PA.

<sup>49</sup> Conestoga Indian Town,” September 1, 1924, Historical Marker, Plaque, Lancaster County, PA.

Native groups. If 1763 is now the standard of “ancient,” then many historical interpretations would need revision. The Conestoga are said to be the final of the Susquehanna, but there are Native groups today that live in the area. Native peoples are not a long gone, past people. Although the historical record indicated that the Paxton Boys massacred all of the Conestoga, this marker neglects the dynamics of the Iroquoian nation, where many Susquehanna could have been relocated to different areas of the colonies and then became part of something new or absorbed into a different Native group. Therefore, there are most likely even ancestors of Susquehanna that persist today.

The final markers and the pamphlet are all associated with the Fulton Theater in Downtown Lancaster. The theater itself is on the National Register of Historic Places due in part to the massacre that happened in the stone-lined basement below. We will begin on the exterior of the Fulton Theater. On almost all four sides, there is an acknowledgment of the massacre. On the rear of the building is the original foundational stone, and doors to the workhouse (Appendix A, Figure 3) where the remaining fourteen Conestoga waited for their “protection.” Placed up high, above eye level is a small roughly six-inch by nine-inch plaque acknowledging the theater as the “site of Conestoga Indian Massacre. December 27, 1763.”<sup>50</sup> Although this plaque does not say much, the location of its placement on the original foundation of the workhouse has meaningful interpretive implications. It is arguable that you may pass by the plaque without reading it unless you know what you are looking for. The plaque is not only small but high off the ground, infringing upon the visitor experience and almost effacing the interpretation.

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<sup>50</sup> “Site of the Conestoga Indian Massacre. December 27, 1763,” Historical Marker, Plaque, The Fulton Theater, Lancaster, PA.

However, again the plaque does little more than acknowledge that the massacre happened.

As you round the side of the building to West King Street, the Native peoples from the Circle Legacy Center have dedicated a new marker that stands tall since 2015. Due to a previous marker that went missing, the new one was dedicated in its place.<sup>51</sup>

This marker is titled “Old Jail” and reads:

The Lancaster Jail was located a half block to the north from 1753 to 1851. The last remaining Conestoga Indians were held here in protective custody in 1763. They were killed by a vigilante group, the Paxton Boys. No arrests were made. Pennsylvania Historical and Museum Commission 2013.<sup>52</sup>

The marker’s dedication was an important moment in the memory of this massacre. As stated by the founder of Circle Legacy Victoria Valentine, 'It was important to us that the Conestoga Indians in that massacre never be forgotten, . . . [a]nd now they won't be. People will see it everyday, and the native people will now know that they are respected and honored here in Lancaster city.'<sup>53</sup> In the analysis of this marker, it is hard to know if the Pennsylvania Historical and Museum Commission were in collaboration with Native groups. Although of the plaques and markers we have seen thus far, this marker provides more contextual information surrounding the massacre. This interpretation allows for a meaningful experience with the visitors and is in a location that will remind the citizens of Lancaster every day of this event, ingraining it in their memories.

However, this marker has moved away from the previous language of “extermination”

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<sup>51</sup> K. Scott Kreider, “New Historical Marker Honors Native Americans Massacred by Vigilante Group in Lancaster,” *Lancaster Online*, 2015.

<sup>52</sup> “Old Jail,” September 19, 2015, Historical Marker, Sign, Lancaster, PA.

<sup>53</sup> Kreider, “New Historical Marker.”

and “massacred” from the first two historical interpretations. It is a curious change to make and almost boasts a more passive feeling of interaction.

As we walk inside the grand double doors of the Fulton Theater, the shining faces of the employees greet us at the ticketing and will call windows. Near these windows are pamphlets of information about the Conestoga Massacre. Of all the public interpretation in existence for the massacre, this pamphlet provides the most engaging and informational study. A bi-folded yellow pamphlet, the front cover greets you right away with a historic drawing of the old jail with a mini-biography of the jail’s structural history.<sup>54</sup> When you open the pamphlet, your eyes are immediately drawn to the headline “Tragedy . . . The Massacre of Last of the Conestogas at Lancaster County Workhouse, 1763,” with special emphasis on the words tragedy, massacre, last, and Conestogas.<sup>55</sup> In this way, the interpretation is already effective in drawing the visitor into the information. However, we again see Jean O’Brien’s concept of “lasting” that removes the Conestoga from further discussion outside their massacre and infers that none of the ancestry exists today. The interpretation of the Conestoga Massacre in this pamphlet only populates the left side of its open position, recounting the story I discussed at the beginning of this thesis. Included here is something that no other historic public interpretation has thus far, is the inclusion of deeper interpretation about the effects of the massacre on the “people of colonial America” and the inclusion of contemporary commemoration accompanied by descendants of Native peoples, an academic conference, and a ceremonial healing

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<sup>54</sup> “Tragedy & Triumph Lancaster County Jail, Site of Fulton Opera House,” May 2016, Pamphlet, Fulton Opera House Foundation, Lancaster, PA.

<sup>55</sup> Pamphlet



service.<sup>56</sup> This pamphlet is the first of many it seems to recognize the attempts at decolonizing the interpretation of the massacre. The pamphlets also use language like “murderer,” “anti-Indian hysteria,” and “torturing and killing . . . innocent people.”<sup>57</sup> This interpretation has the potential to significantly alter the public understanding and memory of the event as even the language portrays the importance of recognition of the brutal violence enacted by the Paxton Boys. However, being a small pamphlet, the information and interpretations are still limited in the scope of what they can include. Leaving many gaps open in the interpretation that alter the public historical memory.

Now, without a ticket or a planned tour you are attending, the rest of the plaques and markers are only available for viewing if you ask. Even with a ticket, it is possible that you would never walk by the information housed internally. The deeper you go into this theater, the deeper the interpretation. Next to a large original wooden door to the basement (workhouse), just to the left of the entrance, is a significant plaque interpreting the massacre. Outside of the usual story, this plaque includes a paragraph about paying their respects to the dead and lifting any potential indication of the blame (Paxton Boys blame for being Indian) off of the Conestoga by essentially saying wrong place, wrong time. What is unique about this plaque is the inclusion of all the names of the slain Conestoga. No other interpretive representation includes this information. The Fulton Theater thus takes another step in the right direction for public interpretation. Significantly, this alters the memory of the massacre as it personalizes it for the public.

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<sup>56</sup> Pamphlet

<sup>57</sup> Pamphlet

Not even the scholarly interpretations include all the names of the twenty massacred that December.

Finally, we examine the exhibit at the Lancaster history museums, Lancasterhistory.org. Here they advertise learning about Conestoga history through their “FREEDOM: *‘to secure the Blessings of Liberty’*” exhibit.<sup>58</sup> At first glance, it is easy to miss the inclusion of the Conestoga in this museum. After a second lap around, I was able to pinpoint two artifacts associated with the massacre, the lock and key of the oil jail. These objects are situated in the “FREEDOM” exhibit surrounded by narratives of African American enslavement. Specifically, the lock and key have only a small paragraph on a shared text label with a crop harvesting corn knife used by two African Americans ca 1850.<sup>59</sup> As I read the label for the lock and key, I began to see that similar pattern of massacre acknowledgment with little deeper interpretation about the massacre or the Conestoga. It is safe to say that with the difficulty of finding the interpretation of the massacre and the lack of interpretation on the exhibit label, the museum does little to bolster our memory of the Conestoga and the massacre.

Many interpretations exist for the Paxton Boys and the Conestoga massacre, and these interpretations have important implications for how we remember the massacre. This thesis cannot even begin to scratch the surface of all the interpretations available, but it can provide insight into how all of these different narratives have important relevance to how the massacre is remembered. What many of these interpretations have

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<sup>58</sup> “FREEDOM: to secure the Blessings of Liberty,” Museum Exhibit, LancasterHistory.org, Lancaster, PA.

<sup>59</sup> “FREEDOM: to secure the Blessings of Liberty,” Museum Exhibit, LancasterHistory.org, Lancaster, PA.

in common is a detailed focus on what happened *after* the massacre, but not what happened after the declaration and remonstrance. If the government would only prosecute for insurrection, how come they didn't? In the scholarly interpretations, only Kevin Kenny addresses the fact that the Paxton Boys escaped punishments, and should have been prosecuted for murder and cowardice.<sup>60</sup> For some, the massacre's interpretations become part of the collective narrative of a political rebellion where the Conestoga are merely a pit stop on the road to Philadelphia. This narrative distorts the importance of violence in the context of American colonial history and perpetuates a historical memory that places the massacre as a second thought to the aggressive political battle that ensues, even though the catalyst for the political insurgency was the massacre. This effaces much of the Conestoga from the historical conversation and memory by only focusing on the Paxton Boys. Other interpretations focus on the fear and revenge of the Paxton Boys from a life on the borderlands of violence with little support from their government. This narrative focuses on the emotional drives of the Paxton Boys, but does include the role of violence in the narrative. However, it mostly focuses on the role of violence enacted by Native groups that ignited the revenge in the Paxton Boys. This type of narrative reinforces and perpetuates the "savage" rhetoric and stereotypes typically associated with narratives of justified violence. By placing the blame for the Paxton Boys behavior on the Native violence, this obscures the role of settler colonial violence, which created a collective consciousness about the equity of life for Native peoples, decided by the White settler colonizers.

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<sup>60</sup> Kenny, *Peaceable Kingdom Lost*.

While still, some scholars interpret the massacre as a land dispute. The Paxton Boys viewed their claim to the land as a key motivation in their actions. This claim leads to an interpretation of ethnic cleansing by many scholars that do not define their use of the term and how they are applying it to the massacre. All of the different interpretations of ethnic cleansing as a motive suggest either very different understandings of ethnic cleansing as they are referred to, or they simply misuse the word in the description of the violence, unintentionally or intentionally.

Examined in the historical markers, plaques, pamphlet, and museum exhibit, interpretation to the public is the broad acknowledgment that the massacre happened. Much like David E. Stannard argues, "It is not enough merely to acknowledge that much was lost."<sup>61</sup> By only acknowledging the loss of the Conestoga, the interpretation leaves its visitors wanting more. The interpretation leaves the memory of the massacre at the fact that it happened. By doing this, the historic public interpretation remains a colonized history obscuring the importance of the remembering this event and why it should be remembered. By doing this, the historic public interpretation reduces the opportunity for healing and reconciliation for the brutal genocide of the Conestoga. Stated by Mary Robbins, the president of the Circle Legacy Center, "Lancaster is a culturally diverse area, but one of the aspects that is missing is the Native awareness."<sup>62</sup> This lack of Native awareness is a direct result of the lack of public interpretations concerning the massacre of the Conestoga as well as the lack of public interpretations about the contemporary Native groups that populate Lancaster.

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<sup>61</sup> Stannard, *American Holocaust*, Xi.

<sup>62</sup> Kreider, "New Historical Marker."

A final issue of interpretation is that none of the scholarly interpretations and all but one of the public interpretations discussed here includes the voices of Native peoples. It is difficult to incorporate a voice that was effaced so long ago from the narrative of this massacre.<sup>63</sup> However, there are Native peoples today that continue to live in Lancaster and continue to fight for the proper recognition of the massacre in Lancaster history. It is possible but unsubstantiated by this research that the “Old Jail” historical marker includes the voices of Native people. It does include the collaborative efforts of the Circle Legacy Center, yet it is equally possible that the Pennsylvania Historical and Museum Commission wrote the text for the panel and simply sought approval by the Native peoples of the Circle Legacy Center. This is the one step toward decolonizing the story of the Paxton Boys and the Conestoga Massacre.

As we have seen, most scholarly and public interpretations do not adequately address the broader context of settler - colonial violence that allowed for justified genocidal massacres against Native people due to the inherent “logic of elimination” of settler colonialism.<sup>64</sup> What many scholars and public interpretations also exclude is conversations about the prolonged peace in Pennsylvania being the aberrant when violence was the norm. Therefore that massacre of the Conestoga was not a one-off aberrant event that characterized the ideas of a single group in a single time frame. As so

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<sup>63</sup> Jack Brubaker and many historians agree that all of the Conestoga were killed in December of 1763. There are two American Indian voices mentioned by Brubaker that discuss oral histories passed down in their families about survivors who lived to tell about the Conestoga Massacre. Due to what Brubaker views as discrepancies in their story that do not match the Euro-American written record, he then dismisses these ancestral stories sharply as being radically Indian centered. Brubaker, *Massacre of the Conestogas*, Chapter 10.

<sup>64</sup> Patrick Wolfe, “Settler Colonialism and the Elimination of the Native,” *Journal of Genocide Research* 8, no. 4 (December 2006), 387.

eloquently stated by Patrick Wolfe, settler colonialism is inherently eliminatory, but not always genocidal. Though, he acknowledges that the “logic of elimination” inherent in settler colonialism has many times manifested as genocide.<sup>65</sup> In his article “Settler Colonialism and the Elimination of the Native,” settler colonialism is a structure that perpetuates through the many strategies, including violence, seen through the “logic of elimination.”<sup>66</sup> Although he focuses strongly on assimilation, he argues that the “logic of elimination” is “premised on the securing – the obtaining and maintaining – of territory.”<sup>67</sup> It was the permanence of Native peoples that sparked settler-colonial groups to make decisions about eliminating them from the land and comfort they so deeply desired.<sup>68</sup> If we apply this theory to the Paxton Boys, we can see that inherent in their place as settler-colonizers, surrounded by the use of the logic of elimination through violence, is the central piece to the maintenance of European/Euro-American dominion, Indian killing, and genocide.

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<sup>65</sup> Wolfe, “Settler Colonialism and the Elimination of the Native,” 387.

<sup>66</sup> Wolfe, “Settler Colonialism and the Elimination of the Native,” 387.

<sup>67</sup> Wolfe, “Settler Colonialism and the Elimination of the Native,” 402.

<sup>68</sup> Wolfe, “Settler Colonialism and the Elimination of the Native,” 396.

### CHAPTER III: GENOCIDE IN COLONIAL PENNSYLVANIA: AN INTERPRETATION AND SUGGESTION FOR THE FUTURE

"It was important to us that the Conestoga Indians in that massacre never be forgotten . . . And now they won't be. People will see it everyday, and the native people will now know that they are respected and honored here in Lancaster city."

- Victoria Valentine, Founder, Circle Legacy Center<sup>1</sup>

Interpreting the themes of tension, political insurgency, Indian killing, genocide, innocence, and memory can be a difficult and daunting task. How do interpret such ideas as settler-colonial genocide and Indian killing as foundational to the making of America, without creating outrage in the public or academic spheres? How do we tell a more inclusive narrative that focuses on the hard topics of history? One thing is for sure, you cannot teach, and for that matter interpret, American history without American Indians.<sup>2</sup> As we move into an increasingly decolonizing era of history and public history, we must recognize this truth of teaching and interpreting American history, being careful, transparent, and not forget whom our work is for and why we do it. Freeman Tilden, a foundational scholar in interpretive theory, has six principles for interpreting at historic institutions. The second, fourth and fifth principles are the most applicable to this research. First, the second principle states that “[i]nformation, as such, is not interpretation. Interpretation is revelation based upon information . . .”<sup>3</sup> The fourth

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<sup>1</sup> Kreider, “New Historical Marker.”

<sup>2</sup> For a collection of essays about how American Indians are central to the construction and understanding of American history, see Susan Sleeper-Smith et al., eds., *Why You Can't Teach United States History Without American Indians* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2015).

<sup>3</sup> Freeman Tilden, *Interpreting Our Heritage* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1967).

principle is “[t]he chief aim of interpretation is not instruction, but provocation.”<sup>4</sup> The fifth principle is “[i]nterpretation should aim to present a whole rather than a part . . .”<sup>5</sup> All three principles are in exact accordance with the missing pieces of public interpretations for the Conestoga Massacre. That is why in this chapter I seek to provide an alternative scholarly interpretation as well as some recommendations for the future of public interpretations of the massacre. These recommendations and interpretations will focus on the logic of elimination inherent in settler-colonialism manifested as genocide and Indian killing that characterized the making of America.

The Conestoga Massacre is a contested historical event that will forever be unresolved. As interpretations continue to generate, this topic will always be one of heated discussion about the motives and influences behind the behavior of the frontier vigilant militia group known as the Paxton Boys. And until we can find more information about each Conestoga, the Paxton Boys Anglo-centric narrative will dominate the conversations and representations of the massacre. As the historical actors in this instance, the Paxton Boys positioned themselves to be the focus of scholarly interpreters two hundred and fifty years later. As discussed in chapter one, many scholars of the Conestoga Massacre agree that the Paxton Boys influences behind their actions were politically and racially charged. What these interpretations are missing is the distinct role of violence, precisely, the role of genocide in the settler-colonial context that shaped the Paxton Boys understandings of interactions with Native groups. The subject of American colonialism as genocide can be extremely controversial. Mainly because most often,

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<sup>4</sup> Tilden, *Interpreting Our Heritage*.

<sup>5</sup> Tilden, *Interpreting Our Heritage*



Americans choose to efface events from memory in favor of balancing the events they deem as worth remembering.<sup>6</sup> What then are the characteristics of American settler-colonial history that drives the American people, educators, museums, and memorials to wash their hands clean from the violence?

While many of the scholarly interpretations recognize the violence committed by the Paxton Boys and the violence they encountered on the frontier, few examine the role of genocide as a normalized accepted form of settler-colonial violence. They utilize the violence as part of the frontier context but do not fully recognize how the colonial genocidal normative ideology permeated the Paxton Boys lives. If the scholarly interpretations do reference violence as playing a more significant role, they usually focus this on the part of the Wyoming settler community and Native violence rather than the broader context of White settler-colonial violence. Instead, the scholarly interpretations concentrate primarily on the role of politics that dominated the Paxton narrative. I propose a new interpretation of the Conestoga Massacre by the Paxton Boys that centers on the argument that the settler colonial context of genocide underpinned the Paxton Boy intent to kill the Conestoga no matter the motive. Whether their motive was fear, revenge, politics, or land, the Paxton Boys were rooted in a violent frontier environment that was part of broader pattern of colonial violence that allowed for the massacre to occur. Not all instances of violence in colonial America were genocidal acts. Instances of violence like the Paxton Boys, however, were systematic, planned massacres

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<sup>6</sup> Kenneth E. Foote, "To Remember and Forget: Archives, Memory, and Culture," *American Archivist* 53 (Summer 1990).

with a premeditated intent to kill. This intent to kill was significantly influenced by the narrative of genocide that populated colonial American since contact.

The Paxton Boys frontier of violence placed them strategically within this context and among the extermination rhetoric so prevalent throughout American settler colonialism. The Paxton Boys themselves stated that:

In what Nation under the Sun was it ever the custom, that when a neighboring Nation took up Arms, not an individual of the nation should be touched, but only the Persons that offered hostilities? Who ever proclaimed War with part of a Nation and not with the Whole?<sup>7</sup>

This statement from the Paxton Boys “Declaration and Remonstrance” is the exact rhetoric, which ties to the genocidal context of colonial America. As stated by many of the scholarly interpretations examined in chapter one, there was a point at which the Paxton Boys essentially snapped. To these scholars, the event that pushed the Paxton Boys over the edge was when they stumbled upon the Wyoming settler community that had been attacked and murdered by hostile Native groups on the frontier. The Paxton Boys then set out to seek revenge for the deaths of white colonizers. It was here that the brutality of what the Paxton Boys saw blurred the line between friendly and enemy.<sup>8</sup> However, this was not an isolated event that all of a sudden triggered the Paxton Boys racial hatred. This hatred Native groups and categorization of them all being hostile was rooted in an ideology of genocide. Not only did the Paxton Boys deliberately target the Conestoga, but the only intention they had was to kill. They very well could have stopped at the first massacre if they intended to receive the attention of the government in

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<sup>7</sup> “A declaration and Remonstrance” in Dunbar, *The Paxton Papers*.

<sup>8</sup> Merrell, *Into the American Woods*, 286.

remedying their plights. However, they road back into Lancaster and like shooting fish in a barrel slaughtered the remaining Conestoga.

The submission of their “Declaration and Remonstrance” is also an essential piece of this interpretation. By marching on Philadelphia and submitting this document, the Paxton Boys knew that the Pennsylvania government was not going to punish them for their actions. They were able to commit these massacres with full knowledge that their government would be sympathetic. Although they received some backlash in their condemnation from Benjamin Franklin and the Quakers, it is apparent that even the citizens of Lancaster held the Conestoga lives with little regard or respect.<sup>9</sup> This points to a much deeper understanding of their accepted colonial context of genocide. When the killing of peaceful Native populations is accepted with no prosecution, the interpretation lends itself well to the idea that genocidal violence played a normative role in society. Therefore, we cannot merely look at the Paxton Boys motives for the Conestoga Massacre as either political, based on fear, revenge or land. We must view the Paxton Boys as a product of a widely held belief that genocidal violence against Native groups was justified in the settler-colonial context.

Several of the scholarly interpretations also interpret the massacre as ethnic cleansing. By doing so they, the significantly misrepresent the massacre and reduce the responsibility for the violence to being a mere land dispute that unfortunately ended with death. Ethnic cleansing is a softer word than its counterpart genocide. With genocide

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<sup>9</sup> Benjamin Franklin and many Quaker peoples engaged in a pamphlet war that they ultimately lost against Paxton sympathizers and the Pennsylvania government, as Paxton Boys did not receive prosecution or punishment. Benjamin Franklin’s “A Narrative of the Late Massacres” in Dunbar, *The Paxton Papers*. Olson, “The Pamphlet War over the Paxton Boys,”

being a loaded word, commonly associated with the Jewish Holocaust, it is easy to see why some scholars are inclined to use the softer language because using the term genocide is making a very bold statement. However, this reluctance to use the term genocide and instead populate the interpretations with the term ethnic cleansing further pushes the Conestoga Massacre into the back seat. This supports the Paxton Boys constructed narrative of justified violence, which in turn reinforces the European/Euro-American narrative of innocence in colonial Indian killing in the construction of what would become America. Ethnic cleansing takes away the brutality and gruesomeness of a context in which the Paxton Boys lived. Instead of recognizing the massacre as the cold-blooded intent to kill, authors labeling the massacre as ethnic cleansing are then recognizing it as an unfortunate side effect of a less violent intention. This less violent intention is the memory that is perpetuated through these scholarly interpretations that utilize the term ethnic cleansing without defining the term and arguing their for use it.

For sixty-three years the Conestoga lived peacefully in Pennsylvania until the Paxton Boys decided to change that. The Paxton Boys decision was not a newly developed idea. Settler-colonial violence had existed for quite some time, especially during times of war. The frontier environment, in which the Paxton Boys lived, exacerbated the logic of elimination inherent in settler-colonialism as previously discussed by Patrick Wolfe. Therefore this long-term peace in Pennsylvania was an aberration from the settler-colonial norm, making the Paxton Boys a particularly specific and salient example of the logic of elimination that manifested as genocide. With the lack of punishment for the Paxton Boys violent actions, the Pennsylvania government and

citizens, in fact, conformed to the idea of settler-colonial innocence reinforcing what would characterize the choices and actions of the American Revolutionary cause.

By placing the Paxton Boys and the Conestoga Massacre within this settler-colonial context of the logic of elimination manifested as genocide, we can begin to develop better interpretations that bring the Conestoga back into the discourse of the Massacre. Too often the scholarly interpretations of the Conestoga only reference them concerning the two nights in December. Scholars complete this interpretation in one to three paragraphs. On the other hand, the Paxton Boys have pages, chapters, and even entire books focused on their motives and our attempts to understand them. When what we truly need to understand them is grounded in the theory that the Paxton Boys are a direct product of a broad genocidal context against Native populations.

### **Recommendations for Public Interpretation**

In the field of museum interpretation, many professionals will agree that sometimes the most devastating piece of interpretation can be what is not said, rather than what is. These “silences” in the interpretation can be due to many factors, including a lack of research, a lack of information in the historical record, or a restricted source base because of heavy reliance on a paper trail. As interpretations of the Conestoga Massacre move forward, historical organizations have an opportunity bridge the gap between scholarly and public interpretations of the massacre while also addressing the silences in the interpretation. It is shocking that with so much abundant academic research on the massacre, that the historical interpretations give the bare minimum when it comes to telling this violent story.

Much like a story that develops from a plot diagram with a beginning, middle, and end, it is the role of the museum to use its collections to create an interpretative narrative. The goal is an experience that captivates, frustrates, and provides its visitors with a new and meaningful connection, interpreted beyond the simple fact that an event took place. Most of the public interpretations that exist for the Conestoga Massacre are displayed through the markers, pamphlets, and the museum exhibit panel discussed previously. These interpretations offer little more than a title merely acknowledging the loss of the Conestoga with no development into the story. Museums have the responsibility to take material culture, such as an old lock and key from the jail that held the Conestoga for “protection,” and share the beginning, middle, and end surrounding these objects. It is possible to argue that simple interpretations of the massacre do fit the plot diagram. However, the diagram is purely a guide to the story and therefore only provides surface details with no further intellectual development.

The markers discussing the Conestoga are all limited in intellectual development due to their size and available text space. The first recommendation would be to more efficiently utilize the space available on the historical markers by incorporating scholarly interpretive efforts surrounding the massacre. Utilizing this space in a more inclusive and profoundly interpretive way rather than stating many disjointed facts sentence after sentence as they currently do, would develop stronger ties of memory between the marker and the visitor. It is also possible to remedy this with the creation of a new marker dedicated solely to the massacre, as one does not currently exist.

Another recommendation is to increase the exhibit discussion of the massacre at the local history museum. [Lancasterhistory.org](http://Lancasterhistory.org), the history museum of Lancaster, is one

such place where the exhibits not only showcase the silences in what they do not say about the massacre, but also a lack of a full contextual interpretation in what they do say about the massacre. Currently, with only one small text label, the lock and key do little to represent the massacre. The museum needs to move away from object centered discussion of the massacre and toward a community centered interpretation and review of the contested event.<sup>10</sup> By doing this, museums create a stronger connection between the meaning of the objects and their relationship to contemporary communities.<sup>11</sup> This community would involve the Native population of the county, finding a way to exhibit what the massacre means to them, what the objects mean to them, and what scholarly representation means to them. An exhibit about Native history should be focused on serving the Native populations, as it is their history you are attempting to interpret.<sup>12</sup>

This museum would better serve its Native community, and be able to decolonize through the inclusion of a separate freestanding exhibit that focuses on the Conestoga Massacre with the incorporation of contemporary Native voices. As I stated in chapter one, there is no shortage or recognition of the massacre throughout Lancaster. The trouble is, the recognition is simply the acknowledgment that the massacre happened. There is a township named Conestoga, there is a wagon named Conestoga, and there is a river named Conestoga. Lancaster County recognizes the importance of the Conestoga but does not interpret them enough. Without stronger interpretation, it looks as though Lancaster has appropriated the Conestoga without proper giving critical examination to

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<sup>10</sup> Lonetree, *Decolonizing Museums*, 22.

<sup>11</sup> Lonetree, *Decolonizing Museums*, 22

<sup>12</sup> Lonetree, *Decolonizing Museums*.

or respect to their lives. This is where LancasterHistory.org is in the perfect position to bring the Conestoga back into their history.

The current museum based interpretation is located in the “FREEDOM: to secure the Blessings of Liberty” exhibit of LancasterHistory.org between a ca.1850s corn harvesting knife used in the resistance and liberation of two enslaved men escaping Maryland, and a ca.1830 portrait of Nathaniel Ellmaker, an accomplished white Pennsylvanian who served in the Pennsylvania Senate in 1796.<sup>13</sup> Hopping over one of the only other representations of Native groups in this museum, a watercolor of a Native male, is the Remonstrance letter written by the Paxton Boys.<sup>14</sup> This strange grouping of the Conestoga and other independent Native groups in the center of discussions about enslaved African/African Americans in Pennsylvania is curious. Not only does it restrict the interpretation of the massacre, but it also places Native groups that were living peacefully and independently in Pennsylvania in a struggle for freedom alongside enslaved people. If there were discussions of enslaved Native peoples or a more direct interpretive explanation for this grouping, the location would make more sense. However, this curious grouping only allows for a snapshot of the Conestoga story, where so much more can be done. Until the museum decolonizes the Conestoga Massacre through the inclusion of Native voices and collaboration and increases the interpretation of the massacre to tell the hard truths of this history, the museum either consciously or

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<sup>13</sup> “FREEDOM: to secure the Blessings of Liberty,” Museum Exhibit, LancasterHistory.org, Lancaster, PA.

<sup>14</sup> “FREEDOM: to secure the Blessings of Liberty,” Museum Exhibit, LancasterHistory.org, Lancaster, PA.



subconsciously participates in the perpetuation of a Paxton centric narrative of justified violence.

On the most basic level, public representations would benefit from a more in-depth interpretation of the massacre. In almost all the historical markers, the massacre was the final sentence in the text, leaving the visitor to infer that massacre is a second thought in the historical significance of marking these locations. In the Fulton Theater and LancasterHistory.org, we see steps toward interpreting the massacre more fully while still missing the vital genocidal settler-colonial context that supported and allowed for the massacre to occur. These recommendations for new interpretive avenues include the reduction of Paxton Anglo-centric narratives and the decolonization of the museum interpretation through collaborative partnerships with Native groups. It is especially beneficial that there is already a built relationship with the Pennsylvania Historical and Museums Commission as well as the Lancaster town historian, Lancaster Historical Society, and the Circle Legacy Center. For future researchers it is my wish that they incorporate Native voices and collaboration into their research as well, something that this thesis was missing. Otherwise, the research becomes another outsider attempting to say how Native history *should be* or *is* interpreted. Ideally the research would include interviews with contemporary Native groups in Lancaster and surrounding areas concerning the ways in which they interpret the massacre, genocide, and the public representations of the massacre. By doing so we would begin to enrich and decolonize the scholarly and public interpretations that exist today.

By placing the massacre in the framework of a genocidal settler-colonial context, we can bring the Conestoga back into the focus of this contested history. Due to the

extended period of peace preceding the massacre, significant implications of this story connect directly to the Paxton Boys insurgency and Indian killing being an embodiment of the precursory ideas of the American Revolutionary cause. By including this context and embodiment of ideas, and the decolonization of the museum, we can also bridge the gap between the scholarly and public interpretations that have the opportunity to honor the Conestogas in memory and create new understandings of the massacre by representing and disseminating the hard stuff of history that characterized the making of America.

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## **APPENDICES**



## APPENDIX A: PHOTOGRAPHS



Figure 1. Image of the historic marker “Conestoga Indian Town.” Marker on the edge of Conestoga Township and the Conestoga River. Donated by Safe Harbor Power and Water (Photo taken by the author January 12, 2018)



Figure 2. Image of the historic plaque “Conestoga Indian Town.” Plaque next to private homes demarcating another boundary most likely connected to the Conestoga original land. (Photo taken by the author January 12, 2018)



Figure 3. Image of the original foundation and plaque on the back of the Fulton Theater. Remnants of what was the jail and workhouse where the remaining fourteen Conestoga were massacred. (Photos taken by the author January 12, 2018)