UCLA

American Indian Culture and Research Journal

Title

Staging Indigeneity: Salvage Tourism and the Performance of Native American History. By Katrina M. Phillips.

Permalink

https://escholarship.org/uc/item/7qq6b9dj

Journal

American Indian Culture and Research Journal, 44(4)

ISSN

0161-6463

Author

Parezo, Nancy J.

Publication Date

2020-09-01

Copyright Information

This work is made available under the terms of a Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial License, available at <u>https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc/4.0/</u>

Scholars and lay readers interested in developing a richer understanding of contemporary Anishinabe perspectives will enjoy this book. Broken into small, manageable chunks by frequent subheadings (many of them in Anishinabemowin), it will be put to good use within university-level courses in Indigenous studies, especially those specializing in past and present relationships and Indigenous leadership and politics. While the text assumes that readers possess a basic knowledge of the history of colonization and of the three featured leaders, a helpful timeline and maps are included as appendices. Our Hearts Are as One Fire will be welcomed by Indigenous people and allies eager to put their struggle into historical context. As Fontaine recognizes, settlers have profited profoundly from Indian removal. While dispossession now takes different forms, it remains "a thriving industry" (146). This book is a powerful reminder that Anishinabe resistance has been ongoing for hundreds of years and continues to this day. Future directions for research could include expanding the discussions of Anishinabe leadership commenced here to include contemporary Anishinabe leaders fighting for land-based self-determination on political, legal, and environmental fronts. As Fontaine reminds his readers, Geyaabi go g'doo bi-ma-di-zi-min: We are still here (201).

Anna J. Willow Ohio State University

Staging Indigeneity: Salvage Tourism and the Performance of Native American History. By Katrina M. Phillips. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2021. 246 pages. \$95.00 cloth; \$29.95 paper; \$24.99 electronic.

I read *Staging Indigeneity* with a sense of wistfulness for my youth and the years spent as a scholar of Native American studies, anthropology, and museology. Historian Katrina M. Phillips's book analyzes how selective nostalgia, together with Euro-America's quest for authentic experience in entertainment venues, created a distinct form of cultural tourism actualized in in the form of outdoor dramas, pageants, parades, and theater. I immediately recognized the overarching and specific types of historical-ethnic tourist performance she identified in her informative introduction. As she described the history of an Oregon Indian pageant and Wild West show, I remembered when my parents, brother, and I traveled to visit my mother's relatives in Kansas and Colorado. As we drove to Yellowstone National Park on our grand automobile tour of the West, we visited tourist attractions at Manitou Springs, Cheyenne, and Cody. My strongest memories are reinforced by the photos of my brother and I shyly flanking regal, regalia-clad men, tangible evidence we had interacted with the Indians of our imagination. What we had seen on television was "real."

I was ten in 1961. As I continued reading this book, memories less naïve were also triggered. Just after graduating from Miami University in 1973, I attended the *Tecumseh!* outdoor drama and was appalled and shocked at its inaccurate, self-serving portrait of

conquest and colonialism. Now I learned the subsequent trajectory of this production—how entrepreneurs' goals and perspectives influenced the telling of history and whose story was actually being portrayed. It was enlightening to read how descendants of settlers who had taken Shawnee land then told a generalized story about the fate of all Indians. Any good book should make one think, and hopefully, tie the book's central topic to one's own life. *Staging Indigeneity* made me think and reflect once more about tourism, American history and how it is portrayed in local settings, Euro-American society's tenacious use of stereotype, and how Native communities have both fought against and used Euro-American preconceptions and expectations to earn a living.

It also reminded me of what National Museum of the American Indian curator Paul Chaat Smith has called the contradictions of "the Indian business" in his insightful *Everything You Know about Indians Is Wrong* (2009). Phillips both literally and figuratively documents the history of an understudied aspect of the Indian business: local community entertainments that emphasized Native Americans as tourist attractions to promote economic development, specifically in the form of outdoor dramas. Phillips conducted three historical case studies using a mixed methodology of historical documentation, rapid ethnography—periods of interaction with participants—and systematic observation as a reflexive tourist. The carefully chosen events and communities are the *Happy Canyon Indian Pageant and Wild West Show* held in Pendleton, Oregon, and the outdoor dramas *Tecumseh*! in Chillicothe, Ohio and *Unto These Hills* in Cherokee, North Carolina. Each is contextualized within Phillips's own experience as an enrolled member of the Red Cliff Band of Lake Superior Ojibwe, the festivals she and her father attended, similar outdoor performances she uncovered through her historical research, and her keen historian's eye for important detail.

Phillips's key features in her choice of entertainment venues are in themselves conclusions: (1) settler populations wrote and staged their vision of history as outdoor dramas that met audience expectations of an imagined Indianness; (2) the stories told in outdoor productions were supposedly not entirely fictions but grounded in some semblance of historical events depicting conquest situations and their consequences; and (3) productions had lasted over time, surviving entertainment fads and the feck-lessness of tourism, so that change, consistency, and adaptation between inception and the present time could be analyzed. These intellectual decisions allowed Phillips to analyze community and organization social structures, behaviors, and rationales. Significantly, it enabled her to identify that all the stories performed focused on classic tropes of nobility and historical tragedy, propositions and contestations about Euro-America's past, its moral or predestined basis and its destiny, and ideas about democracy, modernity, and a postmodern world, in addition to the consequences of the dark side of playing with history.

I learned a great deal from reading this book about American local communities and their quests for stable economics over time. In addition, Phillips's observations made me think of stereotyping instances at other levels of social analyses and how her work adds to what is known about colonized and postcolonial situations. Many scholars, including myself, have researched entertainment performances dealing with Native Americans that assess the nation and its ideological principles, Euro-American culture, and specific Native cultures, as well as quests for economic security at the individual and family level. *Staging Indigeneity* joins a rich body of scholarship in American Indian studies, anthropology, cultural studies, geography, law, and cultural history on films, music, drama, rodeos and Wild West shows, expositions, rhetoric and lectures, and tourism in anthropology and cultural geography.

Drawing on postmodern studies for her historical and contemporary analysis, Phillips's use of existing knowledge is, curiously, highly selective by intention. Simultaneously, the author asserts paradigmatic independence by redefining and broadening a very concise concept that appears in a 1970 American Anthropologist article in which Jacob Gruber described late-nineteenth and early-twentieth-century anthropological methodology as "salvage ethnography." As a historian of anthropology, in this case I find the category "salvage tourism" to be forced. To term these outdoor dramas "salvage" is unconvincing, as the book's analyses did not reveal that the communities were saving ethnographically authentic information for posterity. Rather, the outdoor drama organizers were producing narratives that were the opposite of foundational anthropology's goals for observational accuracy. The Tecumseh! production's lack of interest in Shawnee consultancy is a case in point. For this reader, Phillips's choice of term obfuscated complex cultural and social processes that she repeatedly highlighted in her study, leaving me wishing the author had invented an entirely new term to characterize this interesting category of community-based tourism and the fascinating paradoxes that she so eloquently explores. Ultimately, Staging Indigeneity is an excellent study of conquest or settler tourism and how three local communities have used for their own benefit, and continue to use, the idea of the "real" Indian created in the guise of nineteenth-century social progress.

Nancy J. Parezo University of Arizona

We Had a Little Real Estate Problem: The Unheralded Story of Native Americans and Comedy. By Kliph Nesteroff. New York: Simon & Schuster, 2021. 336 pages. \$27.00 cloth; \$17.00 paper; \$39.99 audio CD; \$12.99 electronic.

Native comedy is happening everywhere: on the back of a flatbed truck, in the middle of the desert, at the Oregon Shakespeare Festival, and this year on television screens in the homes of millions of Americans. Yet until now, that story has not been told. Kliph Nesteroff, a Canadian comedy writer and the author of *We Had a Little Real Estate Problem: The Unberalded Story of Native Americans and Comedy*, has become an authority on the history of Native American comedy. In the last two decades, scholars have explored the significance of Native representation in media ranging from silent films to other visual culture, especially how it shapes perceptions of Native peoples. Arguing that Native people should control and articulate their own narrative, Nesteroff engages these same issues through Native comedy. Although the text features a few First Nations comics from Canada, it prominently focuses on Native