

TITLE: anthropologists and all your friends
(on “Anthropologists and Other Friends,” Deloria Jr.)

[POWERPOINT: TITLE]

[POWERPOINT: INTRO]

SETTING: ~~a small classroom in the TIER BUILDING~~ The
 CROSS-COMMONS ROOM of ST. JOHN'S COLLEGE. A *symposium* is yet to
 start.

*enter LJ F, a fourth-year undergraduate student with too
 much on their plate.*

Say “hello” here!

[POWERPOINT: BLANK]

I hope that I'm able to capture the main thesis of what I'll be
 presenting on, but I'll also probably approach this presentation
 somewhat casually/informally.

This was originally given as part of a graduate-level
 anthropology course I'm currently enrolled in, titled *Applied
 Anthropology: Reclamation, Rematriation, and Respectful
 Caretaking*. The course is being facilitated by Dr. Laura Kelvin
 and Dr. Lara Rosenoff-Gauvin. We've had discussions about
 representation in museums, epistemic violence conducted by the
 academy, and the ways anthropology is complicit in colonial
 projects.

[POWERPOINT: TERRITORY ACKNOWLEDGEMENT]

For the final piece of this introduction, I think opening with the territory acknowledgement outlined by the UofM is pertinent, considering the topics of this presentation.

The University of Manitoba campuses are located on the ancestral lands of Anishinaabeg, Cree [Nehiyaw], Oji-Cree [Anisininew], Dakota Oyate, and Dene Chipewyan /CHIP-a-wyan/, and on the homeland of the Red River Métis Nation. We recognize that our water is protected by Shoal Lake 40 First Nation. We respect the Treaties that were made on these territories, we acknowledge continued harms and mistakes, and we dedicate ourselves to moving forward in partnership with Indigenous communities in a spirit of reconciliation and collaboration.

[POWERPOINT: DELORIA]

The focal reading of this presentation will be a chapter titled "Anthropologists and Other Friends," from the book *Custer Died for Your Sins: An Indian Manifesto*. The book was written by Vine Deloria Jr, a Standing Rock Sioux activist. Born in 1933, Deloria was a legal professional, political leader for Indigenous self-determination, and an academic (Martinez, 2014, pp. 654-655). Deloria is critical of the "relationship" between North American Indigenous communities and the scholars who chose to study the people there. It shows how anthropological work can either enforce harmful misrepresentations OR provide agency through creating opportunities for self-determination, based on the participation of a community's members (Deloria, 1969, p. 78).

[POWERPOINT: CUSTER FIGHT]

The title of the whole book, *Custer Died for Your Sins* is a reference to the Battle of Little Bighorn of 1876.

> just to be curious, how many here have heard of this event or know details regarding it? I personally had heard of it in passing but didn't realize its significance until I researched for this presentation.

The conflict took place at the eponymous river, Little Bighorn, and was fought between the American military and the allied Lakota, Dakota, Northern Cheyenne /shy-AN/, Arapaho, and other Plains Indigenous groups.

[POWERPOINT: CUSTER/BULL]

Respectively, the two forces were led by George Armstrong Custer and the Lakota Chief Sitting Bull (Urwin, 2023, para. 1). Little Bighorn River is located in modern-day Montana.

The battle was a defense of land that had been lawfully given to Lakota and Dakota groups according to a federal treaty, which was not respected after American settlers entered the region and began mining; rather than uphold the agreement, the government instead told the Indigenous groups to leave or, essentially, else by the end of January, 1876 (paras. 2-3).

The battle took place on June 25th, and resulted in the failure of Custer's forces to remove the Indigenous groups that had met at Little Big River after a rushed and ill-informed attack on Sitting Bull's camp (paras. 4, 7). The 210-some American soldiers under Custer's direct authority, and Custer himself, were killed (para. 7).

We can connect this historical conflict with the anti-Indigenous harm against North American groups outlined by Deloria. Although the Indigenous groups were able to push back against the army, Custer and the other American soldiers became valorized by the American public. The signing of new treaties afterwards restricted the lives of the Plains Indigenous people of Little Bighorn.

[POWERPOINT: BOOK COVER]

By using *Custer Died for Your Sins* as the title for this book, I think you can see Little Bighorn as more than a singular territorial dispute; we can identify the context of political-legal injustice with which Indigenous peoples have been and continue to be treated by Western institutions.

[POWERPOINT: CHAPTER SCREENSHOT]

Deloria begins by illustrating a picture of anthropologists conducting ethnographic and anthropological work ON Indigenous groups, rather than *with* them.

This is the crux of the chapter's argument, and it characterizes the work of anthropologists as being very distant (if not ignorant) from the lives of the communities they choose to study.

Deloria calls this academic process the "anthropological wars," which results in the dilution of humanity into abstracts and summaries (Deloria, 1969, pp. 79-80):

From one perspective, this is a pretty intrinsic process to the academy; I'm pretty sure that many of us are familiar with looking for primary literature to write an essay.

My own summary of the Battle of Little Bighorn was ironic; I had to engage in summarization to keep this presentation on topic, drawing only points I thought could be useful. I definitely missed things.

- The points that you or others construe from the same context can reveal different points of insight.

Where the anthro wars become harmful in the real world, the summaries produced by articles are used to justify oppressive policies.

[POWERPOINT: INDIAN ACT]

The bureaucratic nature of governments and organizations means that the people who read the summaries probably won't have the background to understand the meaning behind what they're reading, based on the sheer amount of summaries that must be examined.

Summaries become summarized even further, homogenizing countless groups of people in a cycle that perpetually misrepresents them. Ad infinitum.

Here, the chief concern isn't to work in a way that

- a) helps Indigenous groups or
- b) treats them as equals,

But rather, in a way that co-opts the lives of people and communities (including the past and present harms they face) for personal gain. Without engaging in collaboration, these academic misrepresentations become mobilized into government policy (p. 85, 94-95).

For instance, the 1876 Indian Act of Canada; this screenshot exemplifies the definition of Indigenous groups against their own terms.

SUBJECTS OF REPRESENTATION

[POWERPOINT: TITLE]

There are a lot of things to unpack regarding the anthropological war that Deloria describes. But the first and most crucial issue I identify is that Indigenous communities were not involved in the creation of knowledge *about* themselves.

They were not treated as equals in this way; they were the object of anthropological observation and thus subject to the authority of colonial institutions (p. 82). It was not a collaborative process, and the research "discovered" by the "anthro war" Deloria describes is not meaningful or useful to address the mistreatment that Indigenous people, or any who get caught up in the discipline, often face in their daily lives (p. 80).

Anthropology conducted in this way seems so isolating to me. But much more than what it appears to be, anthropology conducted in this way plays a strong role in justifying and perpetuating harm. The prevailing representations (or spectacles) of what a "real Indian" is or isn't enforces the idea that what they are is not enough (p. 82).

[POWERPOINT: RED CLOUD]

Not only is identity denied when Indigenous people are deprived from speaking on the matter of their own representation, but it becomes misrepresented in such a way that structures of harm

become hidden from view and in ways that dehumanize Indigenous lives:

The Oglala Lakota are one example of a group scrutinized by social science. Pictured is the leader of the community from 1865 to 1909, Mañpiya Lúta or Red Cloud. While absent during the Battle of Little Big Horn, Red Bull oversaw the Oglala Lakota during the implementation of the federal reserve system.

Anthropologists of Deloria's time saw Oglala as a tribe that had failed to progress; the thesis was proposed based on a desire to find some abstract sociocultural construct or reason to explain why this was the case. This rhetoric was prominent in discourse, and one explanation described the Oglala as *Warriors Without Weapons*, a people who had "lost" their culture.

Deloria only identifies the person who put forward this idea as a "famous anthropologist," but I researched that thesis a little and found that the book Deloria is talking about was released by Gordon Macgregor in 1946 and is still in publication and available on [Amazon](#) for a cool 9.99 on Kindle.

[POWERPOINT: AMAZON]

Its full title was *Warriors Without Weapons: A Study of the Society and Personality Development of the Pine Ridge Sioux*. The book was lauded, and contemporary reviews said that the book represents the potential "application of scientific methods toward increasing the effectiveness of

Indian administration" (Fenton, 1946, p. 565). And, to reiterate, you can order a paperback starting from 51.41.

[SLIDE: RED CLOUD]

Rather than being *Warriors Without Weapons*, the Oglala had been forcibly displaced when white farmers created a county on reservation land in 1868. The authority of the land was moved into government hands despite its importance to the community. The Oglala were theorized into vestiges of the warriors they once were during the Battle of Little Bighorn. They were assumed to be husks of their legacy, in complete ignorance of the lack of infrastructure, inadequate housing, inadequate education, and low incomes present amongst the . Instead, the difficulties faced on the reservation were attributed to the Oglala themselves.

[SLIDE: CUSTER]

As members of the Lakota Nation, the Oglala were involved in the signing of the Treaty of Fort Laramie that created the Great Sioux Reservation (Means, 2011, pp. 6-7).

At the beginning of this presentation, we discussed the Battle of Little Bighorn. The federal treaty in question that the government failed to negotiate and uphold, leading to the battle, was this one (Urwin, 2023, para. 2). The failure led to the deployment of American soldiers, including Custer, whom the Indigenous groups of the Little Bighorn River defended against (para. 4).

[SLIDES: STATUTE 1]

Though we know that the allied Indigenous communities were successful at the Battle of Little Bighorn, Custer's defeat

sparked retaliation. He and his men were posthumously valorized. Another such retaliation is evident in congressional policy. A statute passed in 1877, the next year, changed the treaty between the federal government and Lakota and Dakota nations to include the following provisions (19 Stat. 254):

[SLIDES: STATUTE 2]

- they were to be removed from the Great Sioux Reservation within a year, on the basis of finding "country where they may eventually become self-supporting and acquire the arts of civilized life."

[SLIDES: STATUE 3]

- federal assistance in the forms of money, rations, schools, and employment were dependent on the agreement of Indigenous groups to relinquish their lands.
- federal assistance being dependent on "fitness."
- modification of the Treaty of Fort Laramie to make it dependent on Indigenous groups being subject to federal laws.
- the official, federal, congressional definition of the term reservation.

This statute is from the 1870s. Deloria is writing on the cusp of the 1970s. in the span of less than 100 years, Indigenous groups were expected to "progress to self-dependency" within the economic, educational, and geographic constraints imposed upon them by the same authority that desired their self-dependency (Deloria, 1969, pp. 91-92). but this self-dependency is defined by an

idea of civilization distinct from the ways of life being practiced by Indigenous groups. it defines a world without the say of those who live within it.

these are heavy ideas. they're heavy because of the emotional charge they carry, and also because we may have, in some way or another, contributed to the institution that Deloria is criticizing. the anthropological war's casualties are the people subject to cold, empirical study, as well as those who fight it at all.

NOW WHAT?

[POWERPOINT: BLANK]

One of the closing lines of Deloria's chapter is that "until there is a frank understanding between the two people [sic] so that the relationship between them is honest, sincere, and equal, talk about culture will not really matter."

Anthropology is historically the study of humans, but this has led to the insular discourse that we've talked about today. Since we're humans ourselves, we have the responsibility to treat people and communities with the respect they deserve in this present moment, cognizant of the past.

CONCLUSION

Having said this, I hope to have shown the importance there is in creating spaces and opportunities where people can exercise the ability to represent themselves and collaborate on the production of knowledge and culture, on their own terms. This entire presentation has stressed this: we cannot expect accurate, holistic representations of humans or communities to be created by anthropologists, especially when created without

the input of the people who have become subject to anthropological studies. Especially where historical work conducted by anthropologists has played a hand in informing harmful public policy.

Beyond past and present, living in continuity involves an awareness of what came before to inform what we do now.

[POWERPOINT: CITATIONS]

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