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# Colorado Stories: Interpreting History for Public Audiences at the History Colorado Center

William Convery III

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**COLORADO STORIES:  
INTERPRETING COLORADO HISTORY  
FOR PUBLIC AUDIENCES  
AT THE HISTORY COLORADO CENTER**

**BY**

**William J. Convery III**

B.A., History, University of Colorado, Boulder, 1991  
M.A., American Western History, University of Colorado, Denver, 1998

**DISSERTATION**

Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the  
Requirements of the Degree of

**Doctor of Philosophy  
History**

The University of New Mexico  
Albuquerque, New Mexico

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**ABSTRACT**

Interpreting cultural conflict at History Colorado's communities exhibit, Colorado Stories, created a three-way dialogue between scholars, museum audiences, and community stakeholders. Four communities, Amache, Sand Creek, Lincoln Hills, and the Latino borderlands of southern Colorado required particular care. The interpretation for each of these communities was inherently political, requiring careful contextual study, audience research and occasionally bruising negotiations with stakeholders. The formulation of the Colorado Stories exhibit reveals the intersection of history, memory, representation, and the creation of historical narratives for lay audiences. At the same time, they remind historians of the importance of blending scholarship with a willingness to transcend the confines of their craft to in order to translate complex content and deliver satisfactory emotional and intellectual interpretation.

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## **CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION**

When I accepted the Colorado Historical Society's offer to become State Historian in 2008, the job looked pretty straightforward. Since the creation of this position in 1924, the Colorado State Historian performed archival research, published scholarly works, kept up on new interpretation, supervised publications, oversaw an interpretive marker program, and served as the Society's ombudsman for factual accuracy. The Historian represented the Society on various commemorative committees and commissions and gave a fairish number of public lectures and tours each year. His or her exhibit responsibilities centered around issues of scholarly research and interpretation. The Historian produced primary research and context reports, provided intellectually sound interpretive analysis, and assembled scholarly teams who put the stamp of academic approval on museum interpretation. Their research sometimes failed to engage or enlighten visitors, but at the least it was intellectually watertight. And hey, what was an exhibit anyway except a book on a wall?

All that changed in 2009, when the staff of the Colorado Historical Society began preparing to make way for an expanded state justice center. The Colorado History Museum's forced relocation elicited an expansion of the State Historian's responsibilities. The team of exhibit developers and historians developing the first slate of exhibits for Colorado's new state museum, the History Colorado Center, now works under my direction. Together our staffers criss-crossed Colorado, visiting

more than two dozen communities in search of stories that capture the state's history, hopes, and identity. We spoke with miners, millworkers, and High Plains ranchers; scientists and historians; high school students and schoolteachers; religious leaders, tribal elders, soldiers and veterans; civic developers, water engineers, and environmentalists; archeologists, park rangers, historians, archivists, and museum professionals, as well as business and community leaders. We asked them to share their history, their hopes and dreams for the future, and their big ideas for Colorado. We invited them to tell us what makes their communities unique and to discuss how each contributes to the fabric of our state.

Simultaneously, the Colorado Historical Society (CHS) underwent some earthshaking paradigm shifts. In 2010 CHS closed its old museum, mothballing core exhibits and programs that had remained essentially unaltered for thirty years or more, with some dating back to the 1930s. The Society packed away its entire collection and placed it in temporary storage. Hoping to change its image from a stuffy, static institution to a more welcoming, dynamic hub of civic engagement, administrators changed the Society's name from the Colorado Historical Society to History Colorado. Staffers began a long, painful evaluation of the museum's business model, organizational structure, and interpretive goals. Along the way, they embraced a dynamic new system of exhibition development, replacing a traditional curator-driven method with a new audience-centered process.

Exhibit developers (including myself) underwent a self-imposed crash study program in recent museum theory. We read and discussed leading books and articles, attended professional conferences, and met with developers at

groundbreaking history and science museums throughout the country.<sup>1</sup> Our readings on museum theory were extensive. Freeman Tilden’s landmark *Interpreting Our Heritage* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1977) outlined interpretive standards, including a focus on visitor needs and interests, the desirability of creating affective experiences, and an appreciation of interpretation as an artistic style. The Standing Professional Committees Council of the American Association of Museums published its own “Standards for Museum Exhibitions and Indicators of Excellence.” The exhibits team adopted the “developer model” to museum exhibit development proposed by Janet Kamien’s “An Advocate for Everything: Exploring Exhibit Development Models (*Curator* 44, no.1 (January 2001)). This audience-oriented development model stands in contrast to traditional content-centered “curatorial” models. Betty Farrell and Maria Medvedeva’s study, *Demographic Transformation and the Future of Museums* (Washington, D.C.: American Association of Museums, 2010) outlines how changing demographics, and, in particular, majority-minority transformations and immigration patterns, will affect future museum audiences. Judy Diamond’s *Practical Evaluation Guide: Tools for Museums & Other Informal Educational Settings* (Walnut Creek: AltaMira Press,

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1. Among others, exhibit team members made professional visits to the Chicago History Museum, the Skirball Cultural Center, the Newseum, the New Mexico History Museum, the Bob Bullock Texas State History Museum, the Minnesota Historical Society, the Science Museum of Minnesota, the National World War I Museum, the Japanese American National Museum, the Grammy Museum, and the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame.

1999) and Kevin Coffee's "Audience Research and the Museum Experience as Social Practice," published in *Museum Management and Curatorship* 22, no. 4 (December 2007) provided groundwork on the strengths and limitations of informal education in museum settings and helped HC exhibit teams define objectives and approaches to audience and program evaluation.

John Falk's *Identity and the Museum Visitor Experience* (Walnut Creek: Left Coast Press, 2009) explores the identity-related motivations of museum visitors and stresses the desirability of placing visitor satisfaction over intellectual goals as a means of increasing the effectiveness of museum exhibits. Falk identifies several visitor "types," (e.g. Explorer, Facilitator, Experience Seekers, Professionals/Hobbyists, Rechargers) and urges exhibit developers to layer experiences that both consider the totality of a museum visit (including arrival, ticketing, the gift store and café, bathrooms, benches, orientation signage, exhibit galleries, label text, media, etc.), and meet the visitors' identity-related needs and interests. In *Connecting Kids to History with Museum Exhibitions* (Walnut Creek: Left Coast Press, 2010), Chicago History Museum exhibit developers D. Lynn McRainey and John Russick present pedagogical approaches to creating meaningful experiences for children in history museum, developed during the creation of their landmark "Sensing Chicago" exhibit. "Families First! Rethinking Exhibits to Engage All Ages" by Anne Grimes Rand and Sarah Watkins (AASLH Technical Leaflet #245) provide specific examples of compelling social interactives for families at the USS Constitution Museum. *Ideas and Images: Developing Interpretive History Events*, edited by Kenneth L. Ames, Barbara Franco, and L. Thomas Frye (Walnut Creek:

AltaMira Press, 1997) provides several case studies of collaborative multicultural history exhibits, including the influential “bottom-up” Brooklyn History Museum. The American Association of Museums handbook, *Mastering Civic Engagement* (Washington, D.C.: AAM, 2002) and National Constitution Center Director of Exhibits Steve Frank’s conference paper, “Creating Cultures of Citizenship,” (American Association of Museums Annual Meeting, April 29, 2008) guided our discussions on the civic function of museums as hubs of public service and community engagement. Nina Simon’s *The Participatory Museum* (Santa Cruz: Museum 20, 2010) evaluates opportunities and techniques for creating dynamic personal and social experiences in museums, while *Visitor Voices in Museum Exhibitions*, edited by Kathleen McLean and Wendy Pollock (Washington, D.C.: Association of Science-Technology Centers, 2007) encourage museum developers to incorporate visitor-generated content into their exhibitions.

From these and other sources, we learned that traditional history museums are in serious trouble. The general public feels that history museums, ours included, are failing to make connections with their visitors, that they are losing touch with current concerns and needs.<sup>2</sup> History museums have become too one sided,

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2. Center for Nonprofit Management and the American Association for State and Local History, “Colorado History Museum Performance Management Report, Visitor Survey 2008.” Author’s copy. Used with permission. Former Colonial Williamsburg Vice President Cary Carson outlines the dire straights of history museums in “The End of History Museums: What’s Plan B?” *The Public Historian* 30, no. 4 (November 2008): 9-11.

presenting insufficient diversity but too much information. For much of America's rapidly diversifying, technologically savvy population, a visit to a history museum promises as much emotional satisfaction as a visit to the Department of Motor Vehicles. Across the nation, history museums face declining attendance, evaporating revenue streams, severe budgetary shortfalls, museum closures, and layoffs. Rising energy prices and falling school budgets are placing family vacations and class field trips—the bread and butter of many local history museums—out of reach. State-appropriated museums, such as the Colorado History Museum, could no longer afford to be complacent about weak attendance and a lack of repeat visitors. Although it went against the essentially conservative nature of a historical society to admit it, we perceived the painful truth: our museum needed to change, or die.

But we also saw hope. Even as visitation at history museums nationwide stagnated, attendance at science and children's museums remained stable, or even grew. History museums everywhere were tightening their belts, but history remained popular. Sales of books on the Revolutionary War Generation continue to hum along, and Civil War films and re-enactments still attract crowds. Visitation at Civil War historic sites is thriving, the practice of family genealogy, online and in archives, continues to rise, and millions of Americans tune in to the History Channel or to cable TV docudramas such as *Deadwood*, the *Tudors*, or *Rome*.<sup>3</sup> Each of these facts provided some form of lesson. Museums who embraced their audiences, who

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3. Janet Kamien, "History Colorado 2009 Museum-Wide Interpretive Plan," Colorado Historical Society, September 23, 2009, 1.

kept their visitors' needs and expectations forefront in their minds, who fed a public hunger for compelling stories, who lectured less and listened more, and who cultivated a culture of citizenship and personal relevance for their visitors where (perhaps) seeing their way through.

This information elicited some soul-searching conversations at the Colorado Historical Society. Out of these conversations, staff extracted two overarching interpretive themes. The first is that "Colorado is unique." This is a tough case to make to historians, and I have to admit that I winced when this theme first came up. Yet as much as historians disparage the idea of exceptionalism, the History Colorado Center must make the case for its audiences that Colorado is unlike any other state. This state's history provides much to celebrate—and as much again to reflect upon. Our job is to present Colorado's collective story in ways that enliven and enrich the lives of our visitors.

We also believe that "history matters. The past informs our present and guides the decisions we make about the future. Our past is relevant to our lives because it teaches and inspires, and touches us in profound ways. Museums such as the History Colorado Center have a charge to cultivate citizenship and to apply history in ways that allow our community to think critically about the past and imagine a better present and future.

The exhibits at the History Colorado Center will be a starting place for these civic conversations. I say "starting place," because both historians and museum curators often forget that exhibits in themselves are not particularly good at delivering didactic information, or that visitors do not come into museums with the

same level of engagement and enthusiasm that historians might have. Steven Frank, the director of exhibitions and education at Philadelphia's National Constitution Center tells a story that illustrates this point. In 2008, comedian Stephen Colbert took a VIP tour of the exhibits at the Center. As the tour approached one of the museum's centerpiece exhibits, a ten-foot tall stack of hundreds of law books, Colbert quipped: "Hmmm, the building blocks of boring."<sup>4</sup>

This story was a nice cautionary moral for historians working in museums. Exhibits are, after all, a kind of cultural performance. Good exhibits inspire and spark curiosity. They evoke emotional responses which in turn lead to further intellectual inquiry. Good exhibit developers have in common with good historians a gift for storytelling. But there are notable differences as well. Unlike formal educational institutions, museums are informal educational settings. They create opportunities for learning to discretionary visitors. They provide holistic environmental experiences, but they do not test visitors on their accumulated knowledge. Visitors cannot earn, nor do they seek, educational credit from the museums they visit, nor can they directly apply what they learned to a particular form of professional training. As institutions of informal education, museums often have more in common with other forms of leisure than with formal academic institutions.

A museum's informal setting has important implications for the way information is delivered. No longer can a curator (or a historian) select exhibits and

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4. Steve Frank, "Creating Cultures of Citizenship" (conference paper, American Association of Museums Annual Meeting, Philadelphia, PA, April 29, 2008).



create interpretation simply because it is what visitors “should” learn. The momentum for selecting content, as well as how that content is presented, has shifted away from the curator (or historian) and into the visitor’s favor. Exhibit developers often have just seconds to engage a visitor’s attention, provide sufficient context, and create an emotional hook that will pull the visitor through an exhibit. Effective exhibit development combines elements of history, theater, and Socratic discourse. Brief text panels, strategic use of media, affective stories and experiences, and opportunities for visitors to interact with exhibits are often the most effective means of making stories memorable. Visitors flee, on the other hand, from wordy text panels, deep analysis, nuanced historical arguments, and exhibits that take for granted audiences’ understanding of context and significance. The most successful exhibits inspire visitors to learn for themselves, and good museums need to take advantage of this inspiration by providing venues of additional exploration— websites, programs and lectures, a well-stocked bookstore—that allows visitors to continue their journey.

The now-closed Colorado History Museum contained a good example of an approach that served visitors poorly. The museum’s centerpiece exhibit was a large interpretive timeline of Colorado history, containing hundreds of chronologically arranged objects. Although popular with some visitors (although not popular enough to inspire them to return for a second visit), the exhibit combined hundreds of objects with densely-worded small-print text panels. And yet for all of the didactic information contained on the wall, sometimes the text did not deliver anything at all for visitors to hook on to. The heading for the year 1832, for example, read simply:

“Bonneville enters the Rocky Mountains.” Visitors seeking enlightenment about who “Bonneville” was, or why he (or she) entered the Rocky Mountains, or whether this event took place in Colorado at all, needed to look elsewhere—if they remembered to look at all.

Rather than transferring this chronological approach to our new exhibits, History Colorado’s staff decided to organize new displays thematically. For its three opening exhibits, the History Colorado Center staff selected a single overarching theme with three parts—that people who came to Colorado had big dreams, that they built enduring communities, and that they shaped the landscape even as the landscape shaped them in return. While all of these themes intertwine through the initial exhibits, each exhibit revolves around one of the core themes of dreams, community, and landscape. The exhibits will open in phases between 2012 and 2015, beginning with an exhibit exploring the concept of community (Colorado Stories), followed by exhibits addressing people in the landscape (Living West) and Coloradans’ dreams and aspirations (Dreams & Visions). Several introductory elements, including an orientation media program (The People, Place, and Promise), a large interactive map, and an initial exhibit on a dryland farming community in eastern Colorado called Keota (Destination Colorado), pull the three themes together at key points.

This dissertation will focus on the communities exhibit, known as Colorado Stories. To create this exhibit, exhibition developers drew up an initial list of hundreds of Colorado communities, past and present, representing more than thirty different interpretive themes. Developers next winnowed the list down to twenty-

five potential community stories. The candidates included communities from Colorado's ancient past, countercultural and utopian settlements, mining camps, military bases, Cheyenne villages, an African American summer resort, a Japanese internment camp, and other communities representing a wide diversity of culture, geography, and economic activity.

After visiting the twenty-five candidates, the team assembled initial treatments for approximately fifteen finalists, and then began a period of front-end audience testing in the winter of 2009 and spring 2010. Armed with clipboards, survey forms, and exhibit notebooks, developers fanned out to Denver-area museums, bookstores, and coffee shops to interview hundreds of potential visitors about their level of understanding and interest in the stories, themes, and potential activities related to each community. This task was essential to the development of historical interpretation that would meet visitors at their point of engagement for each story. The research suggested which stories were good candidates for elimination, which activities needed refinement, and which were likely winners in term of interest, audience engagement, and appropriate interpretive content.

The front-end audience study report hit exhibit developers some unexpected and sometimes painful results. A potential exhibit on a southeastern Colorado Japanese American internment camp called Amache posted surprisingly high interest levels—roughly seventy percent of potential visitors rated this story as one of high interest—suggesting that this story has strong potential for ancillary civic engagement programming. At the same time, a story about the Hispano community of San Luis, Colorado's oldest non-Indian settlement, came back with

disappointingly low interest ratings among both self-identified Latinos and non-Latinos.<sup>5</sup>

In the latter case, exhibit developers returned to the drawing board, hosting a follow-up set of focus groups to learn more about the interest areas of Latino visitors. Out of these focus groups came a new, more contemporary and dynamic exhibit area about the shifting borderlands of southern Colorado and the many conflicts and acts of accommodation that took place between rival groups there. This and similar revisions helped us find new ways to create safe places for civic discussions about our past, present, and future. In order to be successful, the History Colorado Center will have to it is part of our job to stimulate these discussions through provocative exhibits and programs.<sup>6</sup>

When all was said and done, exhibit developers selected ten initial communities to interpret: Lindenmeier (a Paleo-Indian encampment), Keota (a dry-

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5. Jeff Hayward and Brian Werner, *People, Places, and Design Research*, "Front End' Research for Colorado Stories." Unpublished report prepared for History Colorado, April 2010. Used with permission.

6. Literature on the civic mission of museums is extensive. I relied on Christopher T. Gates, "The Civic Landscape," in *Mastering Civic Engagement: A Challenge to Museums*, ed. Robert R. Archibald (Washington, D.C.: American Association of Museums, 2002), 23-28, and Frank, "Creating Cultures of Citizenship."

land boom/bust story), the World War II-era Amache/Granada Relocation Center (a story about the balance between liberty and security), Sand Creek (a story of community breakdown), Bent's Fort (a multicultural global trade emporium on the plains), Lincoln Hills (a haven from Jim Crow), Steamboat Springs (joy and skiing), Silverton (the daily lives of miners), the Ute Indian Reservations of southern Colorado (resilience), and Colorado's southern borderlands. As new exhibit space opened up through space planning, staff subsequently added Denver. Later phases will highlight Mesa Verde, Aspen, Grand Junction, Drop City, Nucla, and perhaps a second look at San Luis.

Four highlighted communities, the Amache, Sand Creek, Lincoln Hills, and the southern Colorado borderlands, share common elements. Each represents a form of cultural conflict in Colorado, each has a living stakeholder community, or communities, who serve as interpretive advisors, and each have extant archives containing significant primary research. The discussion of how each of these stories will be interpreted to the public at the History Colorado Center will contain analysis of audience expectations, stakeholders' viewpoints, and primary research. A successful exhibit can only come together through the adroit blending of these elements.

Another common thread for each of these stories is their inherently political nature. Any decision a state history museum makes about representing (or not representing) a particular story can be perceived as a decision to rewrite Colorado's

“official” history.<sup>7</sup> The interpretation for each of these communities is inherently political and we have, at times, crossed wires with our advisors in ways that have produced significant tension about the outcome. Stakeholders have no qualms about expressing strong views about which messages should reach the floor of the “state” history museum, and how those messages are presented. Exhibit developers must consequently negotiate between the pressures to tell “dutiful” history and the mission of the museum to present multiple perspectives and to attend carefully to the needs and expectations of a broad museum-going public. Stakeholders often insist that the museum tell stories that they feel are essential to understanding the past, but which sometimes represent one-sided or narrow views of history, or

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7. These perceptions can work both before and against the museum, depending, of course, on whether a particular favored story is included or not. A recent press release for a private fishing club development near Lincoln Hills feted the museum’s choice of interpreting Lincoln Hills. The Flyfisher Group, “The Legendary Lincoln Hills will finally have its official place in Colorado history!” <http://www.theflyfishergroup.com/news/releases/History-Colorado-Center-Press-Release.pdf> [accessed December 8, 2011]. On the other hand, a military historian castigated museum officials for choosing not to open with a set-piece exhibit on Colorado’s World War II-era 10<sup>th</sup> Mountain Division a “slap in the face to those veterans and their families who sacrificed all to defend our state and nation.” Flint Whitlock, letter to Kathryn Hill and William Convery, June 17, 2011, Phase I Military Interpretation file, History Colorado, Denver, CO.

present complexities and nuances that elude and discourage museum visitors. Finding common ground requires sometimes bruising negotiations. If I have learned one lesson as state historian, it is that history is always first about identity. In the public sphere, successful historical performances are always a triangulation between scholarly content, the needs of audiences, and the desires of stakeholders. When we tell stories without making due diligence, we risk offending stakeholders and losing their trust. But focusing always on stakeholder or scholarly dynamics risks something equally bad, if not worse—the loss of visitor interest and, in the end, irrelevance.

I have worked as a full-time museum professional for more than four years, while my graduate school coursework is now almost eight years behind me. As an officer of the museum, it is not always easy for me to remain objective about History Colorado's goals and aspirations. Part of my job is to think critically about how History Colorado goes about achieving these goals, but I am also expected (and have often needed) to defend our goals against the slings and arrows of external critics. I consequently sense that much of my writing about these exhibits over the past two years has something of a boosterish quality. There is a latent conflict of interest between a scholar's interpretive or intellectual goals and the audience goals of a museum professional that I hope will not (but I'm betting sometimes will) compromise my analysis. On the other hand, museum work required me to learn an entirely a different kit of storytelling techniques than those commonly employed by academic historians. One of the central challenges of public history is that, while maintaining authenticity and intellectual integrity, it must also appeal to the public

in order to remain sustainable. History Colorado's first goal is "audience first," that is, we must relay clear, simple, and emotionally satisfying stories about Colorado's past to a lay audience in three-dimensional object and media-based exhibits. A successful museum exhibit is measured by a rewarding visitor experience, by an increase in repeat visitations, and by increasing financial sustainability over the next several years. That's very different from producing the deeper historical analysis for an academic audience in a scholarly dissertation.

The two activities mesh in many ways; this project is, after all, historical interpretation committed on behalf of a museum-going audience. Maintaining authenticity is, of course, the center of any responsible historian's professional code. And no matter how it may be presented, authenticity, and the preservation of intellectual integrity underpin any satisfactory visitor experience at this or any other history museum. Without a central focus on our visitor's satisfaction, whatever it may be (a memorable environment, an beautiful object, a fulfilling story, a shared experience with a grandchild, a decent cup of coffee, or even a clean bathroom), then all of the intellectual integrity in the world is not worth much, because a museum that does not satisfactorily engage its audience must eventually shut its doors.



## **CHAPTER 2: COLLISION, INTERPRETING THE 1864 SAND CREEK MASSACRE**

How did it come to this? On November 29, 1864, a force of federalized Colorado soldiers savagely attacked a village of Cheyenne and Arapaho Indians, whose leaders believed they had negotiated a truce. The short-term Colorado volunteers shot scores of women and children, committed brutal acts of sexual mutilation, and sparked a fierce, four-year long war on the Great Plains of Kansas, Nebraska, Wyoming, and Colorado. The Sand Creek Massacre holds a unique and turbulent place in Colorado's history. And few stories are more layered with interpretive pitfalls. And when I first attempted to explain this event to our exhibit designers, I turned to that ever-reliable source, Wikipedia:

*The Sand Creek massacre (also known as the Chivington massacre, the Battle of Sand Creek or the Massacre of Cheyenne Indians) was an incident in the Indian Wars of the United States that occurred on November 29, 1864, when a 700-man force of Colorado Territory militia attacked and destroyed a village of Cheyenne and Arapaho encamped in southeastern Colorado Territory, killing and mutilating an estimated 70-163 Indians, about two-thirds of whom were women and children.<sup>8</sup>*

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8. Wikipedia, "Sand Creek Massacre,"

[http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sand\\_Creek\\_massacre](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sand_Creek_massacre) [accessed January 8, 2011]. A subsequent check on December 5, 2011 revealed the word "incident" replaced by "atrocities" and the phrase "village of Cheyenne and Arapaho" revised to "a village of friendly Cheyenne and Arapaho."

This unsatisfying definition hardly scratches the surface of the complex causes and consequences underlying the massacre. Beyond the date and the broad location, each of these facts has been disputed at one time or another. Depending on the source, Sand Creek was a hard-fought battle among equals or a barbaric slaughter of innocents. Some eyewitnesses cited hideous acts of mutilation against the dead, while others insisted that no such atrocities occurred. No one agrees on the number of Cheyenne and Arapaho casualties; sources go below eighty and as high as five hundred, although most settle on a range from 125-150. The massacre's architects have been labeled heroes and butchers; protectors of civilization and bloody-handed war criminals. A Congressional investigation deemed it a massacre of innocent civilians, even as settlers termed it a heroic battle. Cheyenne and Arapaho people have their own perspective; in 2002, Gordon Yellowman, program coordinator for the Southern Cheyenne cultural protection program, compared Sand Creek to the Oklahoma City bombing. Otto Braided Hair, coordinator for the Northern Cheyenne Sand Creek Massacre Descendant's Committee hypothesized that the murder of the Cheyenne leaders at Sand Creek was equivalent in political terrorism to the annihilation of the U.S. Congress. Scholars have deemed it a tragedy and a symbol—of America's "Legacy of Dishonor" to American Indians, and of our nation's misadventures in Vietnam or other global escapades. Patty Limerick has called it "a haunting memory you can't put away." "What happened at Sand Creek," Gary Roberts, dean of Sand Creek historians, writes, "was infinitely complex."<sup>9</sup>

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9. Historians quoted in Alan Dumas, "The Agony and the Infamy: Historians Re-evaluate the Civil War Hero Who Led the Bloody Raid on Sand Creek," *Rocky*

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*Mountain News*, October 12, 1997. Otto Braided Hair, remarks to History Colorado staff, Sand Creek Massacre Exhibit Tribal Consultation, Billings, MT, December 14, 2011. Sources on the Sand Creek Massacre and its effects are extensive. In addition to other works cited, the resources consulted for this chapter include Jerome A. Greene and Douglas D. Scott, *Finding Sand Creek: History, Archeology, and the 1864 Massacre Site* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2004); David Fridtjof Halaas and Andrew E. Masich, "You Could Hear the Drums for Miles: A Cheyenne Ledgerbook History," *Colorado Heritage* (Autumn 1996): 2-15; David Fridjof Halaas and Andrew E. Masich, *Halfbreed: The Remarkable True Story of George Bent: Caught between the Words of the Indian and the White Man* (Cambridge: Da Capo Press, 2004); Stan Hoig, *The Sand Creek Massacre* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1961); George E. Hyde, *The Life of George Bent, Written From His Letters*, ed. Savoie Lottinville (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1958); Gary L. Roberts, "Sand Creek: Tragedy and Symbol" (Ph. D. diss., University of Oklahoma, 1984); Gary L. Roberts and David F. Halaas, "Written in Blood: The Soule-Cramer Sand Creek Massacre Letters," *Colorado Heritage* (Winter 2001): 22-32; *The Sand Creek Massacre: A Documentary History*, ed. John M. Carroll (New York: Sol Lewis, 1973); Edward W. Wynkoop, "The Tall Chief: The Autobiography of Edward W. Wynkoop," ed. Christopher B. Gerboth, *Essays and Monographs in Colorado History* 9 (1993). Understanding the full spectrum of opinions regarding the massacre required the assimilation of a separate body of literature defending the action as a justifiable battle against

And if Sand Creek is complex, it is also emotionally charged. As a student at the University of New Mexico, I drew a lot of fire when I proposed reconsidering Chivington to balance the intemperate analyses, both left and right, of his character and motivations. Some colleagues accused me of trying to excuse Chivington's inexcusable actions. One professor gently tried to warn me away from the project, suggesting that trying to make rational sense of Chivington would damage my career. "People engage the massacre emotionally and you are asking them to consider it rationally," she counseled. "They can't follow you where you want to go."

It is natural for people to place a perfectly reasonable moral distance between themselves and actions that appear in their lights indefensible. That said,

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equals. Resources included Jeff Broome, *Dog Soldier Justice: The Ordeal of Susanna Alderdice in the Kansas Indian War* (Lincoln: Bison Books, 2009); John Evans, "Reply of Governor Evans, of the Territory of Colorado, to the Part Referring to Him, of the Report of the Committee on the Conduct of the War, Headed 'Massacre of the Cheyenne Indians,'" Denver, CO, 1865, John Evans manuscript collection (MSS#226), Stephen Hart Research Center, History Colorado, Denver, CO; Gregory F. Michno, *Battle at Sand Creek: The Military Perspective* (El Segundo: Upton & Sons, 2004); Nolie Mumey, "John Milton Chivington: The Misunderstood Man," in *1956 Brand Book of the Denver Westerners* (Boulder: Johnson Publishing Company, 1957); and Reginald S. Craig, *The Fighting Parson: The Biography of Colonel John M. Chivington* (Los Angeles: Westernlore Press, 1959).

audiences are open to the possibility that they cannot really make sense of Sand Creek unless they see themselves in the story—that is, until they consider the possibility that the “Monsters ‘R Us,” then it is not really possible to come to terms with this atrocity and consider how to avoid future examples. Critics of Sand Creek often characterize the hundred-day volunteers of the Third Colorado Cavalry, recruited expressly to punish Cheyennes and Arapahos for raiding civilian ranches, freight trains, and stage stations, as criminals and reprobates—the dregs of the Colorado mining camps. Not so, claims one of their number, Irving Howbert. The men who enlisted in the “Bloody Thirdsters” were “farmers, merchants, and professional men.” Howbert became a respected founder of Colorado Springs, and evidence from recruitment records corroborate that many of his comrades were everyday people, much like any one of us. Fear, helplessness, and fantasies of reprisal motivated the Colorado soldiers as much as racism. “Among the members of our regiment,” Howbert writes, with some exaggeration, “there were many who had had friends and relatives killed, scalped, and mutilated by these Indians, and almost every man had sustained financial loss by reason of their raids; consequently it is not surprising they should be determined to inflict such punishment upon the savages as would deter them from further raids upon our settlements.”<sup>10</sup>

It fringes on interpretive heresy to consider such claims seriously. And yet, it is our charge at History Colorado to critically examine the multiple perspectives that

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10. Irving Howbert, *The Indians of the Pike’s Peak Region* (New York: Knickerbocker Press, 1914), 110-11.

add up to a common identity. At the HCC groundbreaking ceremony in 2009, Governor Bill Ritter specifically called on History Colorado to dedicate exhibition space for this event. The 1864 conflict represents a seminal failure of community; its complex trajectory contains precisely the kinds of social lessons that the museum hopes to address.

It doesn't help that the Colorado Historical Society has to contend with its own close relationship with the massacre. The tragedy was still a living memory when Governor Frederick Pitkin signed a bill creating the State Historical and Natural History Society in January 1879—as much time had elapsed between Sand Creek and the creation of CHS has since passed since the Columbine High School shootings in 1999. Charter members of the Society included John Evans, who presided over the massacre as Colorado's territorial governor, William N. Byers, owner and publisher of the *Rocky Mountain News*, the newspaper that served as the massacre's leading cheerleader, and Scott Anthony, who as a Major in the First Colorado Cavalry personally led troops into the conflict.<sup>11</sup>

Tensions over Indian removal still ran high in Colorado as well. Within months of the Society's creation, feeling against the Ute Indian bands of western Colorado reached a boiling point, with Colorado newspapers, settlers, miners—even the governor—chanting that “The Utes Must Go!” The Historical Society held its first official meeting less than two weeks before the White River Uprising that led to the

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11. LeRoy R. Hafen, “History of the State Historical Society of Colorado,” *Colorado Magazine* 30, no. 3 (July 1953), 165-66.

Utes' ultimate marginalization in Utah and on reservations on the farthest edges of Colorado. Denver mayor Richard Sopris gave a revealing keynote address, reporting that Denver's history, and by extension Colorado's history, was a chronicle of white settlers overcoming the challenge presented by the hostile Indians that surrounded them on all sides. Faced with isolation, Civil War, and Indian resistance, Colorado nevertheless rose to become "a marvel of modern civilization." Sopris liberally sprinkled the words "progress," "metropolis," "enterprise," and "civilization" throughout his address, contrasting the state's progress with the darker time that really wasn't past at all.<sup>12</sup>

From the outset, the Society collected artifacts that confirmed a progress-oriented interpretation of the past. Among the Society's earliest gifts were objects removed from the Sand Creek battle site within days of the massacre, including bows and arrows, parfleches, a shattered trade rifle, adult and children's moccasins, a buckskin shirt evidently cut from the body of a Cheyenne male, and a four-foot long silver concho hairpiece which also may have been removed from a victim. The Society also received at least one scalp lock, which was placed on display at the old Colorado State Museum on 14<sup>th</sup> and Sherman between 1920 and 1960. As the History Colorado curator of material culture, Bridget Ambler, put it, these collections "represented a victory, a symbol of the Indian problem solved, and making way for progress." As additional evidence, Ambler cites a brass armband in

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12. *Rocky Mountain News*, November 11, 1879, quoted in Hafen, "History of the State Historical Society of Colorado," 169.

our collection taken from a Cheyenne hunter killed by settlers in southeastern Colorado at the time of the Society's founding in 1879. To Ambler, this armband, marred by a bullet hole, represents the violent pioneer reaction to the inconvenient persistence of the Cheyennes and Arapahos who still considered Colorado their home.<sup>13</sup>

As time passed, and the pioneer generation passed along with it, the Society took a cautiously nuanced view of the massacre. Introducing a "pioneer" memoir of the massacre in 1938, CHS historian Lynn Perrigo called it a "controverted [sic] event" that occurred in the context of Colorado's debate over statehood during the 1860s. It wasn't until 1950 that the Society placed a bronze commemorative marker near the site, at the faded railroad boomtown of Chivington some eight miles away. State historian LeRoy Hafen's interpretation of the event skated between conflicting interpretations, identifying Sand Creek as a "'Battle' or 'Massacre'" and "one of the regrettable tragedies in the conquest of the West."<sup>14</sup>

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13. Bridget Ambler, History Colorado, interview with author, January 11, 2011.

Colorado Stories: Sand Creek Massacre exhibit development file, History Colorado, Denver, CO.

14. Lynn I. Perrigo, "Major Hal Sayr's Diary of the Sand Creek Campaign,"

*Colorado Magazine* 15, no. 2 (March 1938), 48; Sand Creek Massacre Historical Marker site file (CHS#75), History Colorado, Denver, CO.



The 1950 marker was the first of a series of official interpretive markers placed near the site. In a 1970s-era review of the Society marker program, a subsequent state historian, Dr. David Halaas, concluded that the Society's interpretation of American Indian history was "less than satisfactory." He cited the Sand Creek marker as a particularly egregious example of the Society's "patronizing and inadequate" approach. Working with the Colorado Department of Highways and the Colorado Native American Heritage Council, the Society placed a new wooden sign on Colorado Highway 96, about a mile east of Chivington, in 1986. This sign also contained significant factual errors and problems of interpretation.<sup>15</sup>

CHS tried again in 2002, this time replacing the wooden marker with a new fiberglass panel that included, among other subjects, an interpretation of the marker's "controverted" interpretive history. Predictably, controversy immediately followed. Soon after the marker's installation, the National Park Service, then involved in discussions over the sale of the land that would become the Sand Creek Massacre National Historic Site, requested that the Society temporarily remove the marker so as not to prejudice price negotiations.

Once it was restored in 2004, visitors objected to the inclusion of an image of the old 1950 "Battle or Massacre" plaque, even though a caption explained how sensibilities had changed in the intervening years. The marker had other problems, most notably the inclusion of an incorrect date for the massacre. But it was an unknown vandal who had the final word, when he or she fired a single large caliber

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15. Sand Creek Massacre Historical Marker site file (CHS#166), History Colorado, Denver, CO.

bullet through a photo of John M. Chivington. Under this press of verbal and physical criticism, the Society removed the marker again. Its frame currently stands empty, although History Colorado is negotiating with the Park Service on a new joint interpretive marker for the site.<sup>16</sup>

In the intervening time since 1950, the Society's approach to American Indian history has changed. The advent of the 1992 Native American Graves Repatriation Act realigned the relationship between American Indian tribes and the museums and historical societies nationwide, who considered themselves the stewards of American Indian heritage. After extensive collaboration with cultural leaders from the Northern Cheyenne Tribe, the Northern Arapaho Tribe, and the Cheyenne and Arapaho Tribes of Oklahoma, the Society finally repatriated the Sand Creek scalp lock in its collection in 2004. Reburial services were held at the massacre site in 2010. History Colorado's NAGPRA program has become a model for collaborative stewardship, a partnership that has borne interpretive fruit in the creation of jointly-curated exhibits on American Indian history such as Ancient Voices and Tribal Paths. Working with the affiliated tribes and the National Park Service, the Colorado Historical Society led the effort to locate the physical site of the massacre, paving the way for the creation of the Sand Creek Massacre National

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16. Sand Creek Massacre Historical Marker site file, History Colorado, Denver, CO; Alden Miller, superintendent, Sand Creek Massacre National Historic Site, correspondence to William J. Convery, State Historian, History Colorado, November 3, 2010.

Historic Site in 2000. And, since 1999, the Society has been a partner on the annual Sand Creek Massacre Spiritual Healing Run/Walk.<sup>17</sup>

And yet . . .

In initial drafts, exhibit developers characterized the event as “a story of communities in collision—a 360-degree tragedy” fed by fear, anger, vengeance, and the incapacitation of moderate voices.<sup>18</sup> The Sand Creek exhibit aimed to engage visitors by presenting multiple perspectives of Colorado’s seminal tragedy. While walking through this gallery visitors would discover objects taken from the site attesting to the personal violence of the massacre. These objects appeared in ghostly, backlit settings behind curving walls of stretch fabric, evocative of Plains Indian tipis. Floating overhead, projected quotes from witnesses and participants on both sides represented multiple viewpoints. Both in quotations and in accompanying biographical panels, visitors were to encounter Moke-to-ve-to (Black Kettle), who by 1861 emerged as the most influential leader of the Cheyennes. Black Kettle caused tension among other members of the Cheyenne people by focusing on

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17. History Colorado, “NAGPRA Program”

<http://www.historycolorado.org/content/nagpra-program-0>, December 7,

2011 [ccessed February 18, 2012]; Ben Fogelberg, ed., “Ancient Voices/Tribal Paths,” *Colorado Heritage* (Spring 2007): 1, 43-44.

18. William J. Convery, “Sand Creek Massacre Pre-Write,” October 27, 2010, Colorado Stories: Sand Creek Massacre exhibit development file, History Colorado, Denver, CO.

the maintenance of peace. Speaking at a council with Colorado officials just a few weeks before the massacre, Black Kettle implored, “We have come with our eyes shut . . . like coming through the fire. All we ask is that we may have peace with the whites. We want to hold you by the hand.” His words contrasted with the bellicose language of John Milton Chivington, a frontier minister who won glory as a volunteer Civil War commander, but whose desire to translate military success into political capital spurred him into a genocidal attack on Black Kettle’s village. When disbelieving military officers protested the colonel’s plans, he thundered: “I believe that it is right and honorable to use any means under God’s heaven to kill Indians that would kill women and children. Damn any man who is in sympathy with an Indian!”<sup>19</sup>

Visitors also met three individual soldiers, George Bent, Captain Silas S. Soule, and Private Irving Howbert. Although each viewed the events from the front lines, each conveyed different perspective about the tragedy. George Bent was the

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19. Black Kettle quoted in Simon Whiteley, “Report of Council with Cheyenne and Arapahoe [sic] Chiefs and Warriors, Brought to Denver by Major Wynkoop,” Camp Weld, Denver, CO, September 28, 1864, in *The Sand Creek Massacre: A Documentary History* (New York: Sol Lewis, 1973), iv; John M. Chivington quoted in Joseph A. Cramer, letter to Major Edward W. Wynkoop, December 19, 1864, printed in Gary L. Roberts and David Fridtjof Halaas, “Written in Blood: The Soule-Cramer Sand Creek Massacre Letters,” *Colorado Heritage* (Winter 2001), 28.

son of a prominent St. Louis trader and his Southern Cheyenne wife. He joined the Confederate Army, was captured, paroled, and returned to the plains, where he ran afoul of local soldiers who resented him as both a Confederate and an Indian. Unable to make peace in the outside world, Bent intended to sit out the war in Black Kettle's village. His graphic account of the ensuing tragedy anchors the massacre section: "[I saw] women and children screaming at sight of the troops; men running back into the lodges for their arms . . . . I saw that Black Kettle had a large American flag tied to the end of a long lodgepole and was standing in front of his lodge, holding the pole, with the flag fluttering. . . . Then the troops opened fire from two sides of the camps."<sup>20</sup>

Captain Silas Soule, commander of Company D, First Colorado Cavalry, was a man of action, a veteran volunteer officer and a former Jayhawker during the civil war in Kansas and Missouri in the 1850s. Soule's letters to his mother and sister in New England reflect his expectation of evil times ahead and, when the time came, he stood up against actions he felt were inexcusably wrong: "I told [Major Anthony] that I would not take part in their intended murder, but if they were going after the Sioux, Kiowa's [sic], or any fighting Indians, I would go as far as any of them."<sup>21</sup>

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20. George Bent quoted in George H. Hyde, *Life of George Bent: Written from his Letters*, edited by Savoie Lottinville (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1968), 152.

21. Silas S. Soule, letter to Major Edward W. Wynkoop, December 14, 1864, quoted in Roberts and Halaas, "Written in Blood," 25.

Soule's graphic letters describing the true nature of the massacre to authorities helped spark military investigations into the conduct of the Colorado soldiers—and led to Soule's assassination at the hands of a Chivington partisan.

At seventeen, Irving Howbert homesteaded near today's Colorado Springs, in an area that was vulnerable to Indian raids. Howbert learned at an early age to sleep on his rifle and, when the time came, he was among the first to sign up as a hundred days' Indian fighting volunteer. His viewpoint reflects the insecurity felt by many non-Indian settlers, and the sense of one who perceives himself as a victim, even as he invaded the Cheyennes' and Arapahos' homeland. Settlers such as Howbert told and re-told chilling stories of victims who were "roasted alive, shot full of arrows, and subjected to every kind of cruelty the savages could devise."<sup>22</sup>

Finally, the exhibit expressed the viewpoints of three people caught in the middle. Laura Roper and Lucinda Eubank were settlers captured during a raid on Nebraska's Little Blue River settlements during the summer of conflict preceding the massacre. A twenty-four year old homesteader with two children, Eubank watched Cheyenne warriors kill her husband and adult family members. Taken captive along with her four-year old daughter and infant son, Lucinda began a harrowing experience that took her far away from her Nebraska home. As she later testified, "I was taken to the lodge of an old chief. . . He forced me, by the most terrible threats and menaces, to yield my person to him. He treated me as his wife.

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22. Howbert, *Indians of the Pike's Peak Region*, 94.

He then traded me to Two Face, a Sioux, who did not treat me as a wife, but forced me to do all menial labor done by squaws, and he beat me terribly. . . . The Indians generally treated me as though I was a dog.” Permanently separated from her daughter, repeatedly assaulted, and left shattered by the incident, Eubank buried her experiences deeply into her psyche. Her son reported that she never spoke about her captivity in later life.<sup>23</sup>

Sixteen year old Laura Roper, by contrast, put the best face on her situation, determining to stay pleasant in hopes of being treated well in return. About a month after Laura’s abduction, her Cheyenne captor traded her to a friendly Arapaho named Neva. Neva spoke fluent English and treated Roper well, reminding her that he did not think it was right for Laura to remain a captive and working to arrange her release at the first opportunity. Roper was among the group of captives repurchased by Black Kettle and released in Denver as a gesture of good will in September 1864. Yet despite her kind treatment, Roper expressed an extreme view on the issue of Indian removal. Consoling a fellow captive in early 1865, Roper

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23. *Rocky Mountain News*, September 13, 1865; John G. Ellenbecker, “Oak Grove Massacre, Indian Raids on the Little Blue River in 1864,” *Advocate-Democrat*, Marysville, Kansas, 1927; Ronald Becher, *Massacre along the Medicine Road: A Social History of the Indian War of 1864 in Nebraska Territory* (Caldwell: Caxton Press, 1999), 376.

wrote: "Hope your wish will come true that every one of the Indians will be extinguished."<sup>24</sup>

Born in 1852, White Buffalo Woman lived among a loving family in Black Kettle's village. From her mother and aunts, she learned the skills and traditions of a Cheyenne woman. At the age of twelve, her parents gave away a horse to signify her passage into womanhood; the year was 1864. White Buffalo Woman survived both Sand Creek and, subsequently, Lieutenant Colonel George A. Custer's attack on Black Kettle's village at the Washita River. She did not leave a memoir or interview, but she survived long enough to hold her great-granddaughter, Standing Twenty, in 1932. Her impressions of that occasion are recorded: "The Creator has answered my prayers and blessed me. . . . I have seen my [great]granddaughter. I have held her in my arms. I have offered her in prayer to the four sacred directions as one of The People. I have known her. My life is now complete." White Buffalo Woman's great-granddaughter, also known as Henrietta Mann, became the first Cheyenne woman to earn a Ph.D., and currently serves as the president of the Cheyenne and Arapaho University in Oklahoma.<sup>25</sup>

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24. Laura Roper, letter to Ann Marble, January 7, 1865, quoted in Becher, *Massacre along the Medicine Road*, 438.

25. All quotes from White Buffalo Woman cited in Henrietta Mann, *Cheyenne-Arapaho Education 1871-1982* (Niwot: University Press of Colorado, 1997).



History Colorado staff made efforts to collaborate with the members of the Northern Cheyenne Tribe, the Northern Arapaho Tribe, and the Cheyenne and Arapaho Tribes of Oklahoma, and with the museum's standing American Indian Advisory Committee. In January, 2011, the American Indian Advisory Committee commented on the Sand Creek exhibit. Some committee members expressed concern over John M. Chivington's prominent role in the exhibit, suggesting that visitors would take away the mistaken impression that the museum endorses the colonel's views. Staff agreed to test this to make sure that visitors did not come away with an unintended takeaway message. On March 17, 2011, History Colorado staff invited tribal elders and government representatives to review the tone and interpretive goals of the Sand Creek exhibit. This group, which included participants from the National Park Service, the Northern Arapaho Tribe, and the Southern Cheyenne and Arapaho Tribes of Oklahoma, felt that it was important to keep Chivington's role prominent, so that visitors might understand the hatred and bigotry that provoked the massacre.<sup>26</sup>

Tribal elders also expressed the importance of revealing the Cheyennes' and Arapahos' sense of betrayal at the massacre, a feeling captured in a Henrietta Mann quote about White Buffalo Woman: "My great-grandmother always slept with her

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26. History Colorado American Indian Advisory Meeting Notes, January 19, 2011 and History Colorado Tribal Consultation Notes, "Sand Creek in 'Colorado Communities,'" March 17, 2011. Colorado Stories Sand Creek Massacre exhibit development file, History Colorado, Denver, CO.

moccasins on because there could be another massacre and she'd have to run," and another from Black Kettle: "My shame (mortification) is as big as the earth. . . . I once thought that I was the only man that persevered to be the friend of the white man, but since they have come and cleaned out our lodges, horses, and everything else, it is hard for me to believe white men anymore."<sup>27</sup>

Despite some consultation, the museum's efforts to portray the events surrounding the massacre as a holistic tragedy, affecting people on all sides, proved controversial. Both a prominent Colorado military historian and the adjutant general of the Colorado National Guard objected to the characterization of Colorado soldiers as brutal murderers, and advised History Colorado to ignore the massacre in favor of stories that cast fewer shadows on Colorado's past.<sup>28</sup> Conversely, some American Indian advisors took great offence at the initial exhibit draft. Northern Cheyenne Sand Creek Massacre Descendants' Committee, who had been invited but did not attend the March 2011 meeting, found little to love in the first draft of the Sand Creek exhibit. Writing on behalf of the Northern Cheyenne Tribe, Vice President Joe Fox, Jr. expressed "deep concerns" about History Colorado's

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27. Black Kettle quoted in Stan Hoig, *The Peace Chiefs of the Cheyennes* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1980), 112.

28. Flint Whitlock, letter to Kathryn Hill and William Convery, June 17, 2011, Phase I Military Interpretation file, History Colorado, Denver, CO.

interpretation of Cheyenne people and characterized the draft as “offensive to the memory of our ancestors murdered at Sand Creek and to their descendants.”<sup>29</sup>

Part of the Northern Cheyenne committee’s concerns were procedural. Having missed the March 2011 meeting, Northern Cheyenne stakeholders felt left out of subsequent developments. (“We’re not feeling important,” committee coordinator Otto Braided Hair commented.)<sup>30</sup> Part of their care also reflected a deeper concern about the recent absence of History Colorado representatives from consultation meetings regarding the Sand Creek Massacre National Historic Site. Yet many objections sprang from a sense that History Colorado exhibit developers were using primary sources in ways that mischaracterized or distorted the massacre and its participants. Tribal consultants expressed outrage at the use of a tongue-in-cheek confession that Soule made to his sister, hoping his “Methodist Preacher” commanding officer would curb Soule’s “drinking, gambling, stealing, or murdering.” (“To use this quote, in this context, caricatures and demeans Soule and completely minimizes his importance in the history of the Sand Creek Massacre.”) Consultants

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29. Vice President Joe Fox, Jr., Northern Cheyenne Tribe, letter to William Convery, December 5, 2011. Colorado Stories: Sand Creek Massacre exhibit development file, History Colorado, Denver, CO.

30. Fox letter to Convery; Otto Braided Hair quoted in William J. Convery, “Sand Creek Massacre Spiritual Healing Run debriefing meeting notes,” November 27, 2011. Colorado Stories: Sand Creek Massacre exhibit development file, History Colorado, Denver, CO.

also took offence at a quote that decontextualized the justifications for Cheyenne and Arapaho frustration during the summer of 1864, and castigated a perceived attempt to relate a “balanced “story by including quotes from Sand Creek apologist Irving Howbert. (“CHS, determined to offer a ‘balanced’ exhibit, succeeds in satisfying no one, certainly not the tribes, but even present-day Chivington supporters will complain.”) At a bruising follow-up meeting in Billings, Montana, in December, 2011, consultants from all three tribes expressed their deep sense of personal pain, insult, and outrage at History Colorado’s interpretation, and requested a formal apology from the lead developer and the institution’s CEO.<sup>31</sup>

Coming late in the exhibit development cycle, the tribes’ concerns have thrown the Sand Creek exhibit into some confusion, as of this writing. At no point did History Colorado intend to remain morally neutral. While presenting diverse viewpoints, including those of men and women who cheered on the actions of the Colorado soldiers, the museum’s credibility rests on its willingness to take a stand that the action was an indefensible massacre of women and children. It may be hard, for example, for many modern stakeholders to empathize with the viewpoint of Colorado soldiers such as Private Irving Howbert. In a memoir written some forty years after the fact, the Colorado Springs resident defended the character and

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31. Fox, letter to Convery; Bridget Ambler, “Notes from Sand Creek Massacre Exhibit Tribal Consultation,” Billings, MT, December 14, 2012. Colorado Stories: Sand Creek Massacre exhibit development file, History Colorado, Denver, CO.

motivations of the Colorado troopers and hotly denied accusations that anyone committed atrocities. Yet his words also reveal his own moral reservations on the battlefield. The engagement, he wrote, “made some of us, myself among the number, feel pretty queer. I am sure, speaking for myself, if I hadn’t been too proud, I should have stayed out of the fight altogether.”<sup>32</sup> A careful presentation of these words may help reveal the moral ambiguity of some perpetrators.

Other areas of tension came from differing expectations about audience needs. Tribal consultants took exhibit developers to task for using quotation ellipses to distill brevity from complex quotations. The consultants correctly pointed out that in some cases, such distillation risked stripping the quotes of important context, or minimized the eloquence of tribal leaders. Yet, visitor research shows that such tradeoffs are sometimes necessary in order to maintain audience engagement. Such an explanation failed to satisfy some advisors. As one consultant put it, “why are you inviting stupid people into your exhibit? You should invite smart people with good hearts, who want to know the truth.”<sup>33</sup>

In retrospect, it was perhaps inevitable that some bad feelings would ensue in an exhibit about the Sand Creek Massacre. The wounds of 150 years of injustice are not ready to heal, and the challenge of interpretive representation for American

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32. Howbert, *Indians of the Pike’s Peak Region*, 102.

33. William Convery, “Notes from Sand Creek Massacre Exhibit Tribal Consultation,” Billings, MT, December 14, 2012. Colorado Stories: Sand Creek Massacre exhibit development file, History Colorado, Denver, CO.

Indian tribes is still volatile. Although History Colorado's staff has revised exhibit copy in response to critiques, attempts to hold follow-up consultations have fallen through. Admittedly, History Colorado staff could have done more to reach out to the full spectrum of tribal consultants, and to involve them more thoroughly in the entire exhibit development process, although such consultations as time and budget constraints allowed did occur. At this late date, it is unlikely that developers will be able to find a satisfactory solution for all stakeholders, and controversy will almost certainly stalk the Sand Creek exhibit at the time of its opening.<sup>34</sup>

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34. For a parallel case study about the challenges of diverse representation and the politics of identity, see Virginia Joy Scharff, "Else Surely We Shall All Hang Separately: The Politics of Western Women's History," *Pacific Historical Review* 61, no. 4 (November 1992): 535-555. Like Dr. Scharff, I would call for the airing of disagreements in a climate of mutual respect, and believe that historians in public settings need to continue working in good faith towards a better understanding of our diverse social and political narratives.

**CHAPTER 3:  
“WITH LIBERTY AND JUSTICE FOR ALL (EXCEPT US)”,  
COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT AND  
THE AMACHE-GRANADA RELOCATION CENTER**

The shock and desolation that the first group of Japanese Americans felt when they first arrived at the 160-acre Granada Relocation Center in southeastern Colorado is hard to imagine. Environmentally, spiritually, and socially, the unfinished, sand-blown construction site was a galaxies away from the southern California and San Joaquin river valley homes of the displaced men, women and children of Japanese ancestry. The camp boasted plenty of yucca and rattlesnakes, but no potable water or electricity. Residents confronted inadequate shelters and mess halls, and rudimentary health care facilities. Dust storms sifted fine sand into barracks, laundries, and mess halls, ruining food, clothing, and complexions. Surrounding Coloradans bristled at the thought of hosting a Japanese population in their midst. Looking around, middle-schooler Tom Shigekuni recalled, “I had never seen such a desolate place in all my life.” Relocated Los Angelino Chez Momii’s first thoughts were, “Oh my God, are we going to live here?”<sup>35</sup>

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35. Cited in Robert Harvey, *Amache: The Story of Japanese Internment in Colorado during World War II* (Dallas: Taylor Trade Publishing, 2004), 77. Other works consulted for this chapter include Jeffery F. Burton, Mary M. Farrell, Florence B. Lord, and Richard W. Lord, *Confinement and Ethnicity: An Overview of World War II Japanese American Relocation Sites* (Tucson: Western Archeological and Conservation Center 1999); Lane Ryo Hirabayashi with Kenchiro Shimada, *Japanese American Resettlement Through the Lens: Hikaru*

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*Carl Iwasaki and the WRA's Photographic Section, 1943-1945* (Boulder: University Press of Colorado, 2009); Bill Hosokawa, *Nisei: The Quiet Americans* (New York: William Morrow & Co., Inc., 1969) and *Colorado's Japanese Americans from 1886 to the Present* (Boulder: University Press of Colorado, 2005); National Park Service Intermountain Regional Office Heritage Partnerships Program, "Granada Relocation Center (Amache) National Historic Landmark Comprehensive Interpretive Plan and Conceptual Development Plan," Denver, CO, April 2007; M. Paul Holsinger, "Amache," *Colorado Magazine* 41, no. 1 (Winter 1964): 50-60; and Melvyn Johnson, "At Home in Amache: A Japanese American Internment Camp," *Colorado Heritage* 1 (1989): 2-11. Development for this exhibit required primary research in multiple archival collections, including the Lloyd Garrison collection, Henry F. Halliday collection, Joseph H. McClelland collection, Kathy Odum collection, Ernest Tigges collection, and Phillip Tigges collection at the Auraria Library Archives, Denver, CO; the United States Japanese Relocation Center Papers at the Charles Learning Tutt Library, Colorado College, Colorado Springs, CO; the Amache Japanese Relocation Center papers (MSS #1269) at the Stephen Hart Research Center, History Colorado, Denver, CO; the Governor Ralph Carr Council of Defense papers at the Colorado State Archives, Denver, CO; and oral histories from the Densho Digital Archive ([www.densho.org](http://www.densho.org)) and the Amache Project at the Western History Department, Denver Public Library, Denver, CO.



It was therefore with similar reservations as American Indian advisors that former Amache internees approached a collaborative partnership with History Colorado to tell their story. Former residents had been put off by the perceived inauthenticity of internment exhibits at the Smithsonian Institution and, more recently, at the Aurora (Colorado) History Museum, and they expressed “shock and disappointment” at early drafts of the History Colorado Amache exhibit. Negotiations between survivors and History Colorado exhibit developers over the themes and appearance of the exhibit were sometimes bruising. Stakeholders objected to the exhibit’s proposed title “A Test of Loyalty,” a perceived “justification” of internment stemming from WWII-era U.S. propaganda, an absence of interpretation about the constitutionality of internment, and what was perceived to be a misleading treatment of the reparations issue. Throughout, former residents consulted by the museum expressed genuine fear that visitors would leave thinking “It wasn’t so bad!”<sup>36</sup> Through extensive outreach, exhibit developers made progress, coming closer to the interpretive goals of the exhibit’s primary stakeholders. Yet it remains to be seen to what extent developers have reconciled the needs of Japanese American stakeholders to impress upon visitors the depth and

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36. Minoru Tonai, Amache Historical Society, electronic communication to William J. Convery, February 4, 2011; Bob Fuchigami, electronic communication to Katherine Macedo and Carolyn Takeshita, February 3, 2011. Colorado Stories: Amache exhibit development file, History Colorado, Denver, CO.

complexity (and horror) of internment, and the needs of lay visitors to comprehend the story on a more personal level.

As with Sand Creek, the basis for exhibit negotiations rests in a painful episode of injustice. Between August 1942 and October 1945, the center, popularly known as Amache, was home to more than 7,500 Japanese and Japanese Americans, removed from their homes in California and incarcerated without charges and without benefit of judicial proceedings of any kind. On February 19, 1942, just ten weeks after the Japanese surprise attack on Pearl Harbor, President Franklin D. Roosevelt signed Executive Order 9066. The document authorized the United States military to exclude “any and all persons” from designated military zones, paving the way to evacuate America’s residents and citizens of Japanese descent away from the West Coast. Officials framed the measure as a wartime necessity; yet underpinning Roosevelt’s order were foundations of racism and anti-Japanese prejudice that had festered in the United States since the 1880s. In all, approximately 120,000 World War II-era Japanese and Japanese American citizens fell victim to racial prejudice, wartime panic, and an intense fear of terrorism and espionage.

The Granada Relocation Center was one of ten internment sites built by the War Relocation Authority, the federal agency that supervised Japanese internment during World War II. (“Internment camp” is a despised phrase among many internees, who feel that the phrase evokes inappropriate associations with recreational summer camps; the Japanese American National Museum uses the term, “concentration camp.”) Amache opened in August 1942 and closed in October 1945. In between these two dates, more than 10,000 men, women, and children

passed through its gates. At its peak, the center housed 7,318 people of Japanese ancestry, 1/3 of whom were Japanese-born (Issei) and 2/3 of whom were American-born citizens (Nisei). Most hailed from Los Angeles or from farmlands in northern California. More than half were children.

Residents lived in fiberboard or asbestos-shingle sided barracks arranged in rigid military grids. Daily life was strictly regimented and communally oriented. Internees struggled with a lack of privacy, Spartan living conditions, and a heavily regulated environment. At least initially, residents were reminded daily of their incarceration. Barbed-wire fences and guard towers manned by armed military policemen encircled the 200-acre compound, and spotlights shone across the camp at night; internees required passes to enter or leave the camp. Although Amache was the smallest of the ten United States War Relocation Authority internment sites, its population made the camp Colorado's tenth-largest city at its peak.

Amache stood out from other internment centers in many ways. As the smallest, it suffered relatively less from overcrowding and other problems faced by larger sites. Residents benefited from the sympathetic support of Colorado's established Japanese farming community, who had resided near towns such as Brighton, Greeley, and Alamosa since the early 1900s. The site also held the highest percentage of Japanese who answered "Yes" to questions twenty-seven (willingness to serve in the U. S. armed forces) and twenty-eight (willingness to renounce allegiance to the Empire of Japan) of the War Relocation Authority's controversial "loyalty questionnaire." Amache consequently had fewer violent incidents than any of the others. Four hundred ninety four Amache internees volunteered for duty the

Military Intelligence Service and in the highly decorated 442<sup>nd</sup> “Go For Broke” Combat Infantry Team, and thirty-one died in combat. Ironically, external critics often missed the significance of such gestures. Some Colorado newspapers and political leaders called the construction of schools at Amache a financial “waste,” intended to “coddle” young enemy sympathizers. To counter such claims, the federal War Relocation Authority, which supervised the centers’ educational programs, established a curriculum that focused on “Americanization,” loyalty, and “the responsibilities of citizenship.”<sup>37</sup>

The Amache exhibit’s interpretive themes—the balance between liberty and security, the persistence of internees coping with an unimaginable situation, Governor Carr’s political courage, and the ironic patriotism of a population suspected *en masse* of disloyalty—help explain the high audience interest in this story. Amache ranked highest among eight potential stories in front end testing, with about seventy percent of potential visitors ranking the story as one of high interest.<sup>38</sup> That fact gave exhibit developers much food for thought. Although more testing needs to be done to confirm these theories, developers speculate that visitors recognize echoes of contemporary post-9/11 themes in the exhibit. The mass incarceration of a loyal population in wartime evokes recent political debates over the incarceration of terrorism suspects at Guantanamo Bay, the occasional

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37. Modupe Labode, “Amache High School,” *Colorado History NOW* (January 2004): 3.

38. Hayward and Werner, “‘Front End’ Research for Colorado Stories,” 20.

blanket accusations of terrorism directed at America's Muslim population, or the more prosaic inconveniences of airport security searches.

The Amache exhibit focuses on similar World War II-era issues, as well as other themes of high audience interest, such as the numerous small acts of the everyday resistance internees deployed against their jail-keepers. The Japanese at Amache strove to establish a sense of normality and clung to shared Japanese and American traditions. Residents planted Chinese elm and cottonwood trees to soften the concentration center's rigid lines. Many laid out public and private ornamental gardens, complete with bridges, bonsai trees, and koi ponds, alongside Victory gardens. Rules strictly forbade cooking in individual barracks, yet cooking was such an important part of family life that nearly every family possessed clandestine cooking utensils and some ate their most important meals on precious imported Japanese ceramics.

While the internees were struggling to make their prisons more livable, the United States government turned some of its formidable wartime resources to the campaign to persuade Americans of the justice of forced internment. The War Relocation Authority produced two films, *Japanese Relocation* (1943) and *A Challenge to Democracy* (1944), which emphasized the need to secure the West Coast from sabotage and fifth column activity, touted educational and employment opportunities provided to the internees, self-government, the contentment of the incarcerated population, and their cooperation with the war effort. While hinting at the injustice of the American internment policy, both films compare the Japanese

internees to America's pioneer settlers, emphasizing the opportunities to "tame" a "raw desert land."<sup>39</sup>

The dissonance between the propaganda sold to the American public and the experiences of Japanese American internees is the subject of one interpretive film in the exhibit. The film *Japanese Relocation* deployed as its narrator Milton S. Eisenhower, brother of the Supreme Allied Commander in Europe, who briefly supervised the WRA during its initial phases. According to his memoirs, the longtime presidential aide harbored personal reservations about relocation and forced internment. Writing long after the war, Eisenhower reflected, "I have brooded about this whole episode for the past three decades, for it illustrates how an entire society can somehow plunge off course."<sup>40</sup> Yet at the time, the former WRA director notes without a hint of irony, "military and civilian agencies alike

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39. U. S. Office of War information, *Japanese Relocation*, motion picture (1943), Prelinger Digital Archives, <http://www.archive.org/details/Japanese1943> [accessed April 2, 2011]; U.S. War Relocation Authority, *A Challenge to Democracy*, motion picture (1944), Prelinger Digital Archives, <http://www.archive.org/details/Challeng1944> [accessed April 2, 2011].

40. Milton S. Eisenhower, *The President is Calling* (Garden City: Doubleday, 1974), 125.

determined to do the job as a democracy should, with real consideration for the people involved.”<sup>41</sup>

Such assurances belied the experiences of the internees. Noting the presence of armed guards and a barbed wire fence, an arriving detainee recalled, “I will never forget the shocking feeling that human beings were behind this fence like animals. . . . When the gates were shut, we knew that we had lost something that was very precious; that we were no longer free.” When a teacher tried to reassure students by suggesting that the guard towers surrounding Amache were placed to protect residents from “angry Americans,” junior-high schooler Tom Shigekuni earned a trip to the principal’s office for asking why the guns and searchlights pointed inside instead of out.<sup>42</sup>

A second film, also shot in the style of a World War II-era propaganda film, addresses Colorado Governor Ralph Carr’s principled decision to support of the Japanese, and to invite them to stay following the war. A staunch anti-New Deal Republican, Governor Carr stood alone among Western governors in welcoming the Japanese internees to his state. His motivations were mixed. Born in a multi-ethnic mining camp of Rosita, Carr spent much of his early life as a water attorney in southern Colorado and the San Luis Valley. His experience in the mining towns and Hispano villages with people of all cultures inculcated a strong sense of ethnic

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41. Adam Schrager, *The Principled Politician: The Ralph Carr Story* (Golden: Fulcrum Publishing, 2008).

42. Thomas Shigekuni quoted in Harvey, *Amache*, 114.

equity and fair play. At the same time, Carr opposed relocation and internment as another oppressive example of what he viewed as the New Deal nanny-state. And like many Colorado (and Western) political leaders during the Great Depression, he plugged small government and self-reliance with one hand while accepting federal development dollars with the other.

The governor took intense political heat for welcoming the Japanese. He nevertheless defended it as not only the wartime duty of Coloradans but as the right and just course of action. “We are big enough and patriotic enough to do our duty,” he told radio audiences on February 29, 1942. Reminding Coloradans of the sacrifices of American troops in the Philippines, he implored Coloradans to accept any hardship necessary to secure peace and victory. And he admonished newspapers and public officials against making inflammatory statements. “In my presence the other morning,” Carr observed, “a young man in uniform quoted a superior as favoring a firing squad as the solution to this [Japanese] problem. Such reckless statements may bring reactions which we shall always regret. Let it be understood that such contact is not approved by the code of humanity. Americans have too great a sense of fair play.”<sup>43</sup>

Mail flooded the governor’s desk in the wake of his February speech. Most came from Coloradans outraged by his decision. Denver attorney C. W. Varnum

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43. Ralph Carr, “Radio Address to the People of Colorado,” February 29, 1942, transcription in the Governor Ralph Carr Council of Defense Papers, Colorado State Archives, Denver, CO; *Colorado Springs Gazette*, March 1, 1942.



declared, "Every Japanese in this country is here primarily as a spy. And every Japanese in this country is necessarily an enemy to every white man and woman in this country." Fort Collins resident Edith Wilshire asked, "Why sacrifice our boys and money to keep them from coming over here and ruling us and then go to work and let the ones that are already here right in our back door to knife us in the back?" Citing rumors that Japanese farmers were putting glass in canned produce, a Colorado Springs grandmother pled with the governor to "tell California to keep her Japs." Mick Smith put his opinion concisely: "This is war and I am in favor of getting all Japs out even if we kill every one of them in Colo[rado]." Denver resident Sylvia L. Johnson expressed a shared disappointment at the governor's stance: "We feel that Colorado deserved better treatment at your hands."<sup>44</sup>

Despite the majority of Coloradans who opposed Governor Carr's decision, others spoke out in support. Citing Abraham Lincoln's charge to treat potential enemies "with malice toward none and charity for all," Stovington, Colorado, storekeeper Alvin Bourguin praised the governor's "straightforward, courageous and above all just" sentiments. Colorado Springs high school teacher Amy M. Aspen

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44. C. W. Varnum, Letter to Governor Ralph Carr, February 1, 1942; Edith Wilshire, Letter to Governor Carr, February 19, 1942; Mrs. Gilbert Worrell, Letter to Governor Carr, February 18, 1942; Mick Smith, Letter to Governor Carr, February 25, 1942; Sylvia L. Johnson, Letter to Governor Carr, March 7, 1942, Governor Ralph Carr Council of Defense Papers, Colorado State Archives, Denver, CO.

requested additional copies of Carr's address welcoming the Japanese: "I should like every member of my ninth grade civics class to know what our governor thinks we as Coloradoans should do to help win this war." Oak Creek resident Bessie Reese compared those who opposed the Japanese in Colorado to the Nazis. "Race hatred is something we must never stoop to. If we cannot give these Japanese a place to sleep and something to eat . . . then we are not the democratic people we think we are."<sup>45</sup>

Carr's decision, and the decisions of those Coloradans who stood alongside him, are the silver lining of this story—a key decision point for visitors contemplating what they might do in similar circumstances. As the governor told one group of disgruntled Coloradans: "If you harm them, you must first harm me. I was brought up in small towns where I know the shame and dishonor of race hatred. I grew up to despise it because it threatened the happiness of you, and you, and you." Governor Carr's principled stand hastened the end of his political career. A 1942 bid for the U.S. Senate foundered on opposition to his policy. Yet in 1996, the Colorado General Assembly honored for his "efforts to protect Americans of Japanese descent during World War II" and three years later, the *Denver Post* named Ralph Carr Colorado's "Person of the Century."

Even as Coloradans debated the relative threat posed by introducing the West Coast Japanese into the state, the Japanese themselves disagreed over how

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45. Alvin L. Bourguin, Letter to Governor Carr, March 3, 1942; Amy M. Aspen, Letter to Governor Carr, March 11, 1942; Bessie R. Reese, Letter to Governor Carr, March 3, 1942, Governor Ralph Carr Council of Defense Papers, Colorado State Archives, Denver, CO.

they should best respond to their nation's need for wartime service. A final introductory film will highlight the struggles of one particular family. Kiichi Saito immigrated to America at the age of eighteen. Like many Japanese immigrants, he experienced anti-Japanese prejudice in California during the 1920s and 30s. Kiichi and his wife nevertheless raised five children in what could be considered an "all-American" lifestyle. While the parents operated a produce stand in Los Angeles, the Saito children went to school, joined the Boy Scouts, and played on their high school football team.

December 7<sup>th</sup> changed everything. From an all-American family, the Saitos' status changed overnight to potential enemies. FBI agents searched the family's apartment and confiscated their radio and camera. Neighbors whispered that perhaps Kiichi was a spy. The family was given one week to dispose of their business, then evacuated along with the rest of the West Coast Japanese, first to an overcrowded interim camp at the Santa Anita racetrack, then to Amache. Like all Japanese in America, they endured the slights and suspicious glances of former neighbors, and read hyperbolic newspaper editorials calling for their extermination, or at least exile to far-off desert lands.

Such memories rankled when the Saito family confronted the issue of military service in early 1943. Not long after Pearl Harbor, the army had discharged all Nisei serving in Hawaii, reclassifying them and all other Americans of Japanese ancestry as 4C, enemy aliens. Discharged veterans immediately began lobbying military officials to reconstitute an all-Nisei combat team, stressing their service, loyalty, and exemplary conduct. Impressed by their passion, General George C.

Marshall authorized the all-Japanese American 100<sup>th</sup> Infantry Battalion, comprised of discharged Nisei veterans, in May 1942. Other Nisei volunteered for duty teaching Japanese to Pacific-bound officers in the Military Intelligence Service Language School at Fort Snelling, Minnesota. And on February 1, 1942, President Franklin Roosevelt announced the formation of the 442<sup>nd</sup> Regimental Combat Team, a mixed unit of infantry, engineers, and artillery destined to serve on the front lines in Europe.<sup>46</sup>

In Buddhist temples, in internment center newspaper editorials, and around family tables debates raged about whether or not the second-generation Nisei should serve their country if called. Even in Amache, the most loyal of all ten War Relocation Authority internment sites, opinion was divided. Responding in the Amache camp newspaper, the *Granada Pioneer*, internee Khan Komai reminded readers of the loss of faith in the American system that many Japanese Americans had undergone: “Our belief in America and Americanism is something inborn, but the principles of Americanism embodied in the Bill of Rights were among the first casualties of the war. Our faith in our country, while not broken, has received a fracture from the discrimination accorded us.” But another editorial, entitled “Opportunity,” expressed the hopes that military service would convince Americans of the Niseis’ patriotism and, perhaps, help create a better future. “[The Nisei] have wanted a chance to demonstrate their desire to live the American way. The opportunity has come . . . The War Department is giving the Nisei a chance to defend

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46. Harvey, *Amache*, 178.

that home and all it stands for. Need more be said?"<sup>47</sup> Yet despite such encouragement, only 1,256 out of 23,606 draft-age Nisei in all the centers volunteered for service.<sup>48</sup>

Amache resident George Saito and his younger brothers, Shozo and Calvin, were among that five percent. It is impossible to know exactly what arguments took place in the barracks apartment that the Saito family called home. From later context, it could be inferred that a scene played out that was familiar in other households. Many Issei parents objected strenuously to their children's decision to enlist. In her memoir, *Nisei Daughter*, Monica Sone, a detainee at Idaho's Minidoka Relocation Center, recalled a neighboring mother's furious reaction when her teenaged son decided to enlist: "Is this what we deserve from our children,' [Mrs. Oshima] said, "after years and years of work and hardship for their sake? Ah, we've bred nothing but fools! They can be insulted, their parents insulted, and still they volunteer." Fourteen-year-old Amache resident Bob Fuchigami listened as his father vainly tried to talk his four eldest sons out of enlistment. Gesturing to their bleak, overcrowded barracks apartment and, more generally, to the barbed wire and guard towers outside the camp's perimeter, he asked, "Why would you want to join the

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47. *Granada Pioneer*, February 6, 1943; January 30, 1943.

48. Harvey, *Amache*, 179.

military when people have done this to you?" Mrs. Oshima refused to speak to her enlisting son; other parents disowned their sons and daughters for volunteering.<sup>49</sup>

Many Nisei nevertheless risked parental disapproval because they viewed military service as means to earn respect, and to forge a path to a more tolerant America. At first shocked at the "brass" of an Army recruiter asking for his enlistment, Monica Sone's friend "Dunks" Oshima defiantly exclaims: "They want proof of our loyalty. Okay, I'm giving it to them, and maybe I'll die for it if I'm unlucky. But if after the war's over and our two cents don't cut any ice with the American public, well, to blazes with them!" Karl Gozo Yoneda, a thirty-eight year old Communist labor activist from San Francisco, volunteered while incarcerated at California's Manzanar Relocation Center. He joined the U.S. Military Intelligence Service linguist with an elite Nisei unit in the China-Burma-India Theater to fight for "a better world" where his incarcerated son "may live a free man."<sup>50</sup>

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49. Monica Sone, *Nisei Daughter* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1979; Boston: Little, Brown, 1953), 200; Bob Fuchigami, "Minutes of Meeting with Amache Historical Society, Los Angeles, CA, March 11, 2011," Colorado Stories: Amache exhibit development file, History Colorado, Denver, CO.

50. Monica Sone, *Nisei Daughter*, 199; Edgar Laytha, "Nisei," *CBI [China-Burma-India] Roundup*, September 14, 1944, excerpted in Karen Masamoto, "Dig Deep: Nisei in the World War II Pacific," teachers' guide, Bainbridge Island Japanese American Community, September 2009, 10; James C. Naughton, *Nisei Linguists: Japanese Americans in the Military Intelligence Service during*

Back in Amache, those who knew the family well say that the parents especially objected when Calvin Saito, the youngest brother, enlisted. His death in action during the Italian campaign in July 1944, hit the family particularly hard.<sup>51</sup> Taking a break from combat during a driving rainstorm soon after, the oldest brother, George, wrote a letter of consolation to his parents. In it, George tried to express the feelings he and his brothers felt toward serving their country:

Dad—this is no time to be preaching to you but I have something on my chest, which I want you to hear. In spite of Cal’s supreme sacrifice, don’t let anyone tell you that he was foolish or made a mistake to “volunteer.” Of what I’ve seen in my travels, on our mission, I am more than convinced that we’ve done the right thing in spite of what has happened in the past. America is a damn good country and don’t let anyone tell you otherwise.

Three months later, in October 1944, George Saito was killed in action in Bruyeres, France. All told, thirty-one Amache internees lost their lives defending the country that had imprisoned them, including one posthumous Medal of Honor

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*World War II* (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Department of the Army, 2006), 12, n. 23; “Finding Aid for the Karl G. Yoneda Papers, 1928-1989,” University of California Special Collections, Charles E. Young Research Library, Los Angeles, CA. <http://www.oac.cdlib.org/findaid/ark:/13030/tf0c6002wh> [accessed September 2, 2011].

51. Bob Fuchigami, Minoru Tonai, Toshiko Aiboshi, George Yas Hirano, Shig Hirano, Tom Shigekuni, Amache Historical Society, interview with author, Venice, CA, March 11, 2011.

winner. Overall, the 442nd regiment was the most decorated unit of its size in the US military.

After losing two sons, Kiichi was released from the Amache internment camp in October, 1945. Partly in response to the wartime contribution of the Japanese American community, discrimination against the Japanese eased after the war. In 1952, first generation Japanese Americans, including George and Calvin Saito's father, were allowed to become U.S. citizens. In 1988, the US government issued a formal apology and agreed to pay reparations to survivors of the camps. While signing the legislation authorizing \$20,000 restitution payments to Japanese American internees, President Ronald Reagan said: "no payment can make up for those lost years. So what is most important . . . has less to do with property than with honor. For here we admit a wrong, here we reaffirm our commitment as a nation to equal justice under the law."<sup>52</sup>

The question of justice also weighed heavily on the minds of Amache's student population. Students at Amache High School strove for normality. They

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52. Ronald W. Reagan, "Remarks on Signing a Bill Providing Restitution for the Wartime Internment of Japanese American Civilians," August 10, 1988," transcript, University of Wisconsin-Madison History Department website, <http://history.wisc.edu/archdeacon/404tja/redress.html> [accessed April 3, 2011]. Reagan's remarks, no less than his agreement to short circuit a lawsuit by signing a watered-down restitution bill, is still a controversial issue for many Japanese Americans who feel that the Nisei and Issei repayment claims never received a fair day in court.



studied a variety of subjects ranging from art, to physics, to shop. Students organized a junior-senior prom, published a yearbook, participated in student council, and joined the Future Farmers of American and the YWCA. Football and basketball received enthusiastic support—at least until opposition from the parents of student athletes in neighboring communities led to the cancellation of intramural sports programs.

Despite this, the War Relocation Authority worried about the effect that interment would have on the loyalty of Amache's second generation Japanese. So in addition to classes on physics, literature, art, and shop, school administrators promoted civics debates, flag ceremonies, plays, and writing assignments that promoted "Americanization." Amache High School's "primary task," wrote WRA officials, was to encourage "the understanding of American ideals and loyalty to American institutions and to train [students] for the responsibilities of citizenship."<sup>53</sup> Such programs were intended to counteract the discontent of many Issei parents, who watched with dismay as cramped housing, communal mess halls, and a lack of privacy eroded their parental authority.

Students recognized the irony of being instructed to appreciate freedom from behind barbed wire, and often recorded their thoughts with a teen-aged passion and intensity. Writing for the Amache High School yearbook, the *Onlooker*, Betty Kanameishi couched her feelings on separation from "my dear America" in the terms of a jilted lover: "You are my first love, my last love, and all the loves in

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53. Quoted in Labode, "Amache High School," 3.

between. I worship you in spite of the errors you have made. . . . All I ask is that you do not make the same mistake twice; this is inexcusable even in the eyes of one who loves you so.”<sup>54</sup> Tom Shigekuni responded with similar passion, if less romance. Summoned to the principal’s office to explain an essay critical of drafting Japanese Americans, the junior-high schooler felt “infuriated.” “I really blasted the situation, saying . . . they shouldn’t be drafting us because if we were Americans we wouldn’t be in this confounded place.” As his class intoned “with liberty and justice for all” at the conclusion of his school’s daily Pledge of Allegiance ceremony, another middle-schooler, Bob Fuchigami, mumbled “except for us.”<sup>55</sup>

The Amache exhibit will address this issue with a media program in the exhibit’s barracks area. Visitors sitting at a writing desk will hear an audio program about Marion Konishi, high school valedictorian for 1942-43 and resident of apartment 6D, block 12-E. Konishi saw straight through her school’s patriotism curriculum. Asked to write about freedom, equality, security, and justice, she resolved to try, “unmindful of the searchlights reflecting in my windows.” She took her country to task: “I wondered if America still means and will mean freedom, equality, security, and justice when some of its citizens were segregated,

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54. Betty Kanameishi, “My Dear America,” *The Onlooker*, yearbook, April 30, 1944.

55. Tom Shikeguni, quoted in Harvey, *Amache*, 113; Tom Shigekuni, Amache Historical Society, interview with author, Venice, CA, March 11, 2011.

discriminated against, and treated so unfairly.” Yet as a native-born American, she wanted to subscribe to her country’s value system, even as her faith was put to an extreme test. Surveying American history for symptoms of justice, equality, and fair play, she tried to give her nation the benefit of the doubt. America “hounded and harassed” American Indians, but awarded them citizenship. Her nation enslaved African Americans, but created the Emancipation Proclamation. It persecuted German Americans during the First World War, but then “repented.” Konishi deemed America’s history “full of errors” and admitted to being “embittered.” Yet she concluded that America must ultimately stand up for its highest principles. To believe otherwise required her to consider implications that were too terrible to contemplate.<sup>56</sup>

Representing the feelings of many Japanese American students at Amache, Konishi’s address captures a revealing blend of bitterness and hope. There was no way to know, in early summer 1943, whether her optimism was warranted, or whether the fortunes of war would relieve the heartbreak of America’s incarcerated Japanese and Japanese Americans. A YMCA administrator noticed a deep unhappiness behind the smiles that many of the camp’s children wore. “Those children have been hurt,” the administrator wrote, “many of them much more

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56. Marion Konishi, “America, Our Hope is In You,” June 25, 1943, address transcript, United States Japanese Relocation Center Records, MSS 0011, Folder 11, Colorado College, Colorado Springs, CO.

deeply hurt than they themselves may realize.”<sup>57</sup> It remained to be seen if time would heal their scars or leave deep psychological wounds.

The internees themselves both recognized and memorialized those wounds when Amache officially closed on October 15, 1945. Departing internees left behind a small memorial, inked in Japanese script, that remembered the thirty-one Amache soldiers killed in combat and captured the community’s bittersweet feelings. It read in part: “In spite of the strong camaraderie we came to know over the long and trying years, and the many fond memories we hold so dear, it shall be ever so difficult to revisit these grounds.”<sup>58</sup>

Internees and their descendants continue to play a strong role in the interpretation of the site. Members of Denver’s Friends of Amache Club work with students of the Granada Consolidated High School to operate a small museum and provide interpretive outreach on Amache and Japanese internment. The organization sponsors an annual pilgrimage to the site in May. The Amache Historical Society (AHS), a survivors’ group based in Los Angeles, takes a strong interest in interpretation of the site as well. Survivors have a strong stake in instilling their memories and interpretation in to the record. Even the youngest are in their seventies and eighties, and more people with direct memories of the camps

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57. Quoted in Thomas, *Amache*, 114.

58. Quoted in Bill Hosokawa, *Colorado’s Japanese Americans from 1886 to the Present*, (Boulder: University Press of Colorado, 2005), 112.

pass away each month. As Denver advisor Bob Fuchigami put it: “When we are gone, no one will know this story as we do. Then it will be lost.”

History Colorado staffers reached out to members of the Denver and Granada-area groups in early 2010. Not until early 2011 did they engage the Amache Historical Society in Los Angeles. Stakeholders consequently concluded that the museum was consulting in bad faith. Late engagement “is a tactic some people use, who do not want to make revisions,” observed AHS president Minoru Tonai. Even after receiving assurances that the museum was willing to listen to their suggestions, relations sometimes remained contentious. Survivors initially objected to the use of barracks as a setting for films about Amache, seeing in early floor plan drafts the “beautified and open rooms” that had in their minds characterized the Smithsonian and Aurora barracks exhibits. “It does not show the deprivation of the people when they arrived at Amache . . . . The audience will have fun, but will the audience really feel the crushing blow physically, economically, and emotionally that the internees suffered?” asked Minoru Tonai. Some disagreed with the decision to title the exhibit “A Test of Loyalty,” arguing that the title cast doubt on the loyalty of Nisei internees—a doubt that many had felt that the media had encouraged, both during the war and later. Most strongly opposed what they felt to be a false “feel-good” moment when President Reagan signed an act authorizing reparations—repayments that many former internees viewed as a token payoff. Bob Fuchigami, a former Amache resident and retired educator, urged the developers to focus on governmental wrongdoing, exclaiming, “Those in power removed us just as the

Nazis removed the Jews in Europe.” He pushed hard for a presentation on the constitutionality of internment.<sup>59</sup>

Against such concerns, the exhibit team had to balance the needs of visitors to make sense of the story in an informal setting. No audience data was available on how visitors had received the Smithsonian and Aurora exhibits, and little was known about whether visitors really came away unmoved by the shock of dislocation and incarceration. Data did exist showing that potential visitors knew very little about the events surrounding Executive Order #9066, and the creation of the internment camps. The exhibit was going to have to deliver quite a lot of information and context very quickly, while visitors remained engaged. As I wrote at the time, “If [our visitors] are not of Japanese ancestry, or even if they are, if they did not live through the war or close to it, they may know nothing about this issue and it

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59. Minoru Tonai, Amache Historical Society, electronic communication to Bob Fuchigami, Friends of Amache, January 27, 2011; Bob Fuchigami, Friends of Amache, electronic communication to Katherine Macedo and Carolyn Takeshita, February 3, 2001; Bob Fuchigami, electronic communication to William J. Convery, August 13, 2011, Colorado Stories: Amache exhibit development file, History Colorado, Denver, CO.

is our job to help them get the basic facts and feelings. Otherwise, the messages will be completely lost on them, though the presentation may be completely accurate.”<sup>60</sup>

Through a series of meetings, the exhibit team and the Amache advisory group groped for common ground. Also reserving the right to claim space for Americans with Disabilities Act requirements (a requirement that the center’s original WRA contractors did not have to consider), exhibit staff accepted a floor plan overhaul based on the memories of a former internee. HC staff balked at changing the exhibit title from “A Test of Loyalty” to “A Test of Constitutionality,” but settled eventually on “Confined Citizens.” They revised the reparations episode to point out that Reagan’s assertion of justice was contested, and that the debate continues.

As with Sand Creek, exhibit developers hold out hope their changes are enough to satisfy the stakeholder group without alienating visitors. There is no question that the exhibit is stronger with stakeholder input, but the real test remains ahead. There is cause for guarded optimism. Bob Fuchigami, one of the exhibit’s most outspoken critics initially, ultimately applauded the lead exhibit developer as “reasonable, rational and very capable individual who is willing to listen to us who were in the camps.” Other advisors remain skeptical or, unfortunately, were forced by age and infirmity to withdraw from the project. It was not our intention to create a “feel-good” history about tolerance. But if we can tell a

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60. William J. Convery, electronic communication to Minoru Tonai, Amache Historical Society, February 1, 2011, Colorado Stories: Amache exhibit development file, History Colorado, Denver, CO.

few stories memorably enough to spark an interest or fan a curiosity to learn more, without creating serious distortions of the truth, than we have done the best we could do.



**CHAPTER 4:**  
**HARLEM RENAISSANCE IN THE ROCKIES,**  
**LINCOLN HILLS, 1925-1965**

On a given summer Saturday, crowds of people flock to Wink's Panorama Lodge in Lincoln Hills, near Pinecliffe, Colorado, seeking fresh air, music, barbeque and ice cream, and a chance to be outdoors. Adults sit in folding chairs and socialize, while children climb nearby boulders or wander far into the surrounding woods. At the end of the day, families retire to their mountain cabins for a weekend of solitude. Nearby, a Black-owned fly fishing club offers exclusive fishing rights to well-to-do African Americans. The year is 1928 . . . or 1955 . . . or 2011.

Denver businessmen Robert E. Ewalt and E. C. Regnier founded Lincoln Hills on the site of a defunct Gilpin County placer mining operation in 1922. Their Lincoln Hills Country Club and the associated Winks Panorama Lodge, opened by Obrey "Wink" and Naomi Hamlet in 1928, provided opportunities for leisure unlike any others in the American West. At a time when recreational facilities for African Americans were severely circumscribed, Lincoln Hills offered Blacks a chance to own mountain cabins, vacation, and recreate in the Rocky Mountains, away from discrimination. Similar, better-known resorts, including Idlewild, Michigan, Oak Bluffs at Martha's Vineyard, the Hotel Waddy in West Baden, Indiana, the Crittenden Hotel in Hot Springs, Arkansas, the Cedar Country Club near Cleveland, and Florida's American Beach, catered to affluent Blacks in the East. Lincoln Hills was nonetheless

the only resort of any longevity west of the Mississippi River exclusively serving African Americans.<sup>61</sup>

Lincoln Hills is the story of Coloradans' love of the outdoors, told through an unexpected lens. Between 1925 and the 1940s, Wink's Lodge and the surrounding Lincoln Hills resort development attracted African Americans from the West, Midwest, and South. Most had long endured the humiliations of segregated train travel and understood the challenges of finding decent accommodations, let alone recreational opportunities, in American cities during Jim Crow. Less well remembered today than the Dearfield agricultural colony or other economic or reform-minded institutions catering to African Americans in Colorado, Lincoln Hills speaks to a growing desire among urbanized Western and Midwestern Blacks to seek leisure opportunities, free from discrimination, during the early twentieth century. Gary Jackson, a descendent of Lincoln Hills developers, observed that African Americans at Lincoln Hills "could feel complete, secure, and safe. You had your dignity. You were living the American Dream."

Lincoln Hills symbolized the hopes, ambitions, and fears of Colorado's African Americans during a low point in American race relations. By the 1920s, the

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61. Andrea Juarez, "A Home in the Hills: Lincoln Hills, An African-American Monument in Colorado's Mountains," *Urban Spectrum*, online edition (June 2007), [http://archives.urbanspectrum.net/may07/writers/home\\_hills.htm](http://archives.urbanspectrum.net/may07/writers/home_hills.htm) [accessed August 29, 2011]; Mark S. Foster, "In the Face of 'Jim Crow': Prosperous Blacks and Vacations, Travel, and Outdoor Leisure, 1890-1945," *The Journal of Negro History* 84, no. 2 (Spring 1999): 138-39.

state's Black community had established reasonable levels of economic and social stability. The Centennial State's Black population was relatively small compared to similar enclaves in the South, or in the large cities of the industrial northeast. African Americans constituted between one and one-and-a-half percent of Colorado's total population between 1860 and 1940. Nevertheless, migration from the South and elsewhere increased the state's Black population dramatically, from 46 in 1860, to 6,215 in 1890, to 12,176 in 1940. By 1900, stable African American communities existed in Denver, Pueblo, and Colorado Springs. Most Blacks worked as domestic servants, laborers, railroad porters, janitors, or waiters. Urban centers such as Denver also boasted an expanding professional class of doctors, dentists, real estate developers, and restaurateurs. As early as 1900, Colorado's Blacks enjoyed some of the highest literacy rates for African Americans in the nation, and, by 1920, one in three Denver Blacks owned their own homes.<sup>62</sup>

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62. C. Vann Woodward, *The Strange Career of Jim Crow* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1974; 1955), 115; Campbell Gibson and Kay Jung, "Table 20. Colorado – Race and Hispanic Origin: 1960-1990," *Historical Census Statistics on Population Totals by Race, 1790 to 1990, and by Hispanic Origin, 1970 to 1990, for the United States, Regions, Divisions, and States*, Working Paper Series No. 56 (September 2002), <http://www.census.gov/population/www/documentation/twps0056/twps0056.html> [accessed August 31, 2011]; Jesse T. Moore, Jr., "Seeking a New Life: Blacks in Post-Civil War Colorado," *The Journal of Negro History* 78, no. 3 (Summer 1993): 176, 178; Stephen J. Leonard and Thomas J. Noel,

The rise of affluent Blacks in Colorado reflected national trends. Affluence helped create a desire in African Americans to seek the same kinds of leisure pursuits that, as servants, so many helped facilitate for upper- and middle-class Whites. Newfound purchasing power gave Blacks a potential tool to leverage respect and deference from Whites, and emerging middle and upper class African Americans did not hesitate to demand respect through refinements in dress, speech, consumer patterns, and conduct.<sup>63</sup> Although expensive pastimes remained out of reach for many working class African Americans, a growing number of affluent Blacks embraced golf, tennis, bicycling, sporting events, and vacations at new lakefront and beachside resorts catering exclusively to the African American moneyed classes. Closer to home, Denver's Black community sponsored balls, attended picnics and church outings, joined service and social clubs, and organized semi-professional baseball games.<sup>64</sup>

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*Denver: Mining Camp to Metropolis* (Niwot: University Press of Colorado, 1990), 192.

63. C. Vann Woodward, *The Strange Career of Jim Crow*, 130.

64. Foster, "In the Face of 'Jim Crow,'" 130-31; Moya Hansen, "Entitled to Full and Equal Enjoyment: Leisure and Entertainment in the Denver Black Community, 1900 to 1930," *University of Colorado Denver Historical Studies Journal* 10, no. 1 (Spring 1993), op. cit. For a broader survey of leisure pursuits as a means of establishing race or class identity, see Cindy S. Aron,

Blacks often struggled to create opportunities for leisure destination centers in the face of White efforts to defend the racial status quo and to relegate African Americans to the roles of leisure providers as servants, porters, waiters, hotel workers, and entertainers. For every Idlewild or American Beach success story, other resorts faltered in part through racial hostility. White pressure gradually forced elite Black families away from the resort at Saratoga Springs, New York, into a segregated “Quartier de Africane” in the 1880s. White resistance thwarted Black attempts to create a vacation destination at Harpers Ferry, West Virginia, a historically significant site for African Americans because of its association with John Brown’s raid, in the 1890s. In California, Santa Monica’s town council passed an ordinance banning the construction of a proposed Black bathhouse and amusement center in 1922, while at Huntington Beach, a nearly completed beach club for African Americans mysteriously burned down. (Los Angeles did not construct a hotel for traveling Blacks until 1928.) Ku Klux Klan pressure helped

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*Working at Play: A History of Vacations in the United States* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2001); Roy Rosenzweig, *Eight Hours for What We Will: Workers and Leisure in an Industrial City, 1870-1920* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1985); Scott E. Giltner, *Hunting and Fishing in the New South: Black Labor and White Leisure after the Civil War* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2008); Cara C. Aitchison, *Gender and Leisure: Social and Cultural Perspectives* (London: Routledge, 2003).

shutter the popular “King’s Wigwam,” near Kennesaw, Georgia, in the 1920s as well.<sup>65</sup>

The proliferation of affordable automobiles in the 1910s and 20s provided a real but ephemeral promise of “escape” on the open road. For Blacks as well as Whites, the acquisition of a car became an expedient means to display economic and social mobility. As long as it was within their means—a open question considering the economic inequities of the time—automobiles ideally cut African Americans loose from Jim Crow restrictions on space, speed, choice, and mobility and allowed Blacks, like other American vacationers, to “See America First.” In 1933, a Washington, D.C., schoolteacher named Alfred Edgar Smith expressed a shared sense of relief when he remarked: “It’s mighty good to be the skipper for a change and pilot our craft whither and when we will. . . . It’s good for the spirit to give the old railroad Jim Crow the laugh.”<sup>66</sup>

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65. Foster, “In the Face of Jim Crow,” 136, 137, 140; Andrew W. Kahrl, “The Political Work of Leisure: Class, Recreation, and African American Commemoration at Harpers Ferry, West Virginia, 1881-1931,” *Journal of Social History* 42, no. 1 (Fall 2008): 57-77.

66. Quoted in Cotten Seiler, “‘So That We as a Race Might Have Something To Travel By’: African American Automobility and Cold-War Liberalism,” *American Quarterly* 58, no. 4 (December 2006): 1095.

It was one thing to blithely wave at Jim Crow in the rear view mirror, and another yet to find the cagey bird waiting when a Black traveler arrived at his or her destination. Black drivers, men and women, not only experienced the standard hazards of bad roads, chancy weather, breakdowns, flat tires, and construction detours; they sometimes encountered obstacles unknown to most white drivers. Segregated restaurants, garages, gas stations, hotels, and medical facilities made travel an uncertain ordeal. The absence of services catering to Black travelers, and the presence of hostile locals, “sundown” ordinances, or police harassment subjected Black leisure seekers, and their families, to everything from inconvenience and humiliation to physical danger.<sup>67</sup> Denver resident Linda Tucker KaiKai remembered her father’s growing frustration as their family passed each successive “vacancy” sign on a trip east to visit relatives. Finally pulling over at a highway turnout, Linda’s father kept vigil through the night while his car-bound family slumbered. Such frustrations provoked an editor at *The Crisis* to ask in 1947:

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67. Foster, “In the Face of ‘Jim Crow’”; Seiler, “African American Automobility”; Paul Gilroy, “Driving While Black,” in *Car Cultures: Materializing Culture*, ed. Daniel Miller (London: Berg Publishers, 2001), op. cit. Virginia Joy Scharff makes a comparable examination of the social roles, power relationships, cultural dynamics, opportunities, and constraints that women confronted when they got behind the wheel in *Taking the Wheel: Women and the Coming of the Motor Age* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1999; New York: Free Press, 1991).

“Would a Negro like to pursue a little happiness at a theater, a beach, pool, hotel, restaurant, on a train, plain, ship, a golf course, summer or winter resort? Would he like to stop overnight in a tourist camp while he motors about his native land ‘Seeing America First’? Well, just let him try!”<sup>68</sup>

Publishers responded to the hazards of “Negro Motoring Conditions” by publishing travel guides targeted at Black motorists in the 1930s, 40s, 50s, and 60s. Designed to help African American vacationers and business travelers avoid inconvenient, humiliating, or dangerous situations on the open road, and sponsored by Ford, Esso, or other major corporations that depended on the patronage of automobile users, handbooks such as *Travelguide* and *The Negro Motorist Green Book* served as a kind of Michelin travel guide to Jim Crow America. The guides listed hotels, restaurants, or private homes that accommodated African American travelers, and provided gentle economic pressure by encouraging establishments to acknowledge the purchasing power of Black patrons. As historian Cotten Seiler points out, the Jim Crow travel guides “simultaneously protested the discrimination that confronted black motorists on American roads and proffered the hegemonic image of American freedom through driving.” Understanding that this image did not yet exist, most guidebook publishers looked forward to a Utopian future when their product would no longer be necessary. The 1949 *Green Book*, for instance, insisted

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68. Linda M. Tucker KaiKai, “Memories of Uncle Wink and Lincoln Hills,”

unpublished manuscript, 2011, author’s collection; “Democracy Defined at Moscow,” *The Crisis*, April 1947, 105.



“There will be a day sometime in the near future when this guide will not have to be published . . . . It will be a great day for us to suspend this publication for then we can go wherever we please, and without embarrassment.”<sup>69</sup>

Lincoln Hills afforded Blacks an opportunity, then, to pursue leisure without fear of discrimination. Colorado already offered a comparably relaxed racial climate. Officials in cash-strapped Gilpin County, where the resort was situated, supported the vacation spot as a means to economic revival. Yet racial attitudes were hardening, both in Colorado and nationwide, in the 1890s and early 1900s, ironically just as Coloradans of African descent began to stretch their economic and social wings. Although the state harbored no documented “sundown towns,” Colorado Blacks felt increasingly hemmed in by anti-Black customs and social conventions by the 1920s.<sup>70</sup> Hotels, restaurants and public places of amusement

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69. Seiler, “African American Automobility,” 1099-1100.

70. Catholic University of America visiting scholar James Loewen cites circumstantial evidence to identify four possible “sundown towns,” i.e. communities that enforced white racial exclusivity by requiring African Americans or other ethnic groups to leave by sundown, in Colorado (Colorado Springs, Cedaredge, Durango, and Longmont). Loewen concedes that more investigation is required to prove these claims. James Loewen, “Sundown Towns: A Hidden Dimension in American Racism,” 2010, <http://sundown.afro.illinois.edu/sundowntowns.php> [accessed August 31, 2011].

generally ignored an 1895 state ordinance protecting the rights of citizens to “full and equal” accommodation. Theaters required Black moviegoers to sit in the balcony. The public swimming pool at Denver’s Curtis Park admitted Black children every Thursday; on Friday, work crews drained and refilled it before reopening for White patrons.<sup>71</sup>

Social pressure and restrictive real estate covenants prevented African Americans from moving out of the Five Points neighborhood. Blacks who crossed the “color line” on Race Street risked bombing.<sup>72</sup> Blacks who openly challenged the racial status quo also faced mob violence. More than three hundred angry Whites, many armed with clubs, swarmed a group of 150 civil rights activists who attempted to desegregate the “Whites-only” swim beach at Denver’s Washington Park in August 1932. Police arrested ten African American activists, as well as several White sympathizers, while the *Denver Post* blamed Communist instigators for “inciting” Denver’s “quiet, peace loving, and peace abiding” Black population.<sup>73</sup>

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71. Charleszine “Terry” Nelson, Special Collections and Community Resource Manager, Blair-Caldwell African American Research Library, interview with author, January 22, 2011.

72. Hansen, “Entitled to Full and Equal Enjoyment,” 47-8; Leonard & Noel, *Denver: Mining Camp to Metropolis*, 193.

73. *Rocky Mountain News*, August 18, 1932; *Denver Post*, August 18, 1932.

As restricted opportunities clashed with rising expectations, Denver Blacks pushed back. African American newspapers such as the *Denver Star* and *Colorado Statesman* exposed discrimination and promoted civil rights. Blacks joined with sympathetic Whites to form a chapter of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) in 1915, electing George W. Gross, the governor's official messenger, as its first president. The organization won a symbolic victory when it persuaded city commissioners to cancel a public screening of the D.W. Griffith film, *Birth of a Nation* during its Denver run.<sup>74</sup> Civil rights activists pressed for the integration of theaters, restaurants, school dances, and municipal parks and pools and, in 1931, leaders from the African American, Jewish, Japanese, and White communities founded the intercultural Cosmopolitan Club to draw attention to racial, religious, and cultural discrimination.<sup>75</sup>

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74. Phil Goodstein, *In the Shadow of the Klan: When the KKK Ruled Denver, 1920-1926* (Denver: New Social Publications, 2006), 25-7. A Denver municipal judge subsequently overturned the commission's decision, allowing the film to be screened.

75. Clarence F. Holmes, interview by Juanita Gray and Jim Davis, September 12, 1973, transcript, Clarence F. Homes Oral History, Blair-Caldwell African American Research Library, Denver, CO; Leonard & Noel, *Denver: Mining Camp to Metropolis*, 193; Robert Alan Goldberg, "Denver: Queen City of the Colorado Realm," in *The Invisible Empire in the West: Toward a New*

The growing African American rebellion against second-class citizenship provided fodder for recruiters from the resurgent Ku Klux Klan of the 1920s. Already entrenched in other parts of the country, the hooded legions invaded Colorado in 1921. Historian Robert Alan Goldberg has listed a number of reasons by the Klan found fertile ground in the Centennial State, including a concentrated population, charismatic leadership, concerns over lax law enforcement, fears over racial mixing and economic competition, and a lack of an effective opposition. Klan membership skyrocketed. Klaverns in Denver, Boulder, Fort Collins, Colorado Springs, Durango, and elsewhere boasted between thirty-five and forty thousand members by 1925.<sup>76</sup>

Citing a formula of 100% Americanism and White Anglo-Saxon Protestantism, the hooded legions focused their pressure on favorite scapegoats—

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*Historical Appraisal of the Ku Klux Klan in the 1920s*, ed. Shawn Lay (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2004, 1992), 45.

76. Goldberg, "Denver: Queen City of the Colorado Realm," 39-40. For full examinations of the motivations that drove men and women into the Klan in the West, see also Kenneth T. Jackson, *The Ku Klux Klan in the City* (Lanham: Ivan R. Dee, 1992; New York: Oxford University Press, 1967); Robert Alan Goldberg, *Hooded Empire: The Ku Klux Klan in Colorado* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1981); Phil Goodstein, *In the Shadow of the Klan: When the KKK Ruled Denver, 1920-1926* (Denver: New Social Publications, 2006).

immigrants, Catholics, and Jews. They also targeted particular hate crimes against African Americans. When the Denver NAACP chapter successfully challenged the Klan's non-profit incorporation filing, Klansmen lashed back by sending NAACP leader George Gross a death threat. Hooded Knights burned a cross at civil rights activist Clarence Holmes's Five Points dentist office and, according to local oral traditions, at other homes where families were suspected of miscegenation or committing other seeming transgressions of racial separation. The Klan provoked a criminal investigation by Denver's District Attorney's office by sending a threatening letter on official Klan stationary to a Black janitor named Ward Gash. The letter accused Gash using "abusive language" and enjoying "intimate relations" with a white woman. "Nigger, do not look lightly upon this," the letter's anonymous authors warned, ordering him to leave town or face punishment.<sup>77</sup>

With racial tensions growing in Colorado's Front Range cities, it was small wonder that increasingly affluent African Americans clamored to spend time at the mountain resort when it opened in 1922. Lincoln Hills offered an escape from Jim Crow, a place where African Americans could relax and, in the words of scholar Mark S. Foster, "insulate themselves, and particularly their children, from

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77. Goldberg, "Denver: Queen City of the Colorado Realm," 43; Goodstein, *In the Shadow of the Klan*, 24-5; Billie Arlene Grant, Ernestine Smith, and Gladys Smith, *Growing up Black in Denver* (Denver: Self-published, 1988), 35; Clarence Holmes interview, 1973.

unpleasant confrontations with whites.”<sup>78</sup> Lincoln Hills developers offered fishing, hiking, canoeing, and other outdoor sports, and advertised lots in Black newspapers around the Midwest. For between \$50 and \$100, prospective buyers could purchase 25 x 100-foot lots on which to situate a rustic mountain cabin. The offer attracted families from the West, Midwest, and South, including Kansas City, Chicago, Rawlins, Albuquerque, Lincoln, Topeka, Los Angeles, and Tennessee, Virginia, Alabama, Louisiana, and Florida.<sup>79</sup> Day-trippers patronized the resort’s roads, picnic grounds, and tavern, while weekenders spent a night or two at Wink’s Panorama Lodge. Luminaries such as Count Basie, Billy Eckstein, Duke Ellington, Lena Horne and writers Langston Hughes and Zora Neale Hurston reportedly enjoyed down time at the lodge.<sup>80</sup>

Lest critics think that pleasure seeking African Americans were somehow abandoning the struggle for equal accommodation, boosters framed the development in the language of civil rights activism. Promoters worked hard to wrap their sales pitches in cause-oriented “New Negro” rhetoric. Artists, literary

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78. Foster, “In the Face of ‘Jim Crow,’” 131.

79. Lincoln Hills Country Club, “Register of Property Owners,” n.d., author’s collection.

80. Linda Jones, “Wink Hamlet’s Marvelous Legacy,” *The Colorado Gambler* (Gilpin County), February 6, 2007, 31.

figures, and cultural leaders embraced the “New Negro” as a metaphorical “reconstruction” of Black identity, in the words of Henry Louis Gates, Jr., that challenged, and aspired to replace, older racist representations. Beginning in the mid 1890s and peaking by the mid 1920s, the New Negro movement projected a public image of prosperous, progressive, proud, refined, educated, strong Americans of African descent, ready to assume their civil rights. Advocates of the New Negro movement used the metaphor to encourage pride and self-sufficiency among Blacks, counter crude stereotypes, and deployed it to fuel the cultural and literary explosion of the Harlem Renaissance.<sup>81</sup>

In addition to pitching the sites cool breezes, mountain scenery, convenience location to major urban centers, and high investment returns, advertisements and promotional material framed land ownership at Lincoln Hills in the context of the New Negro movement. A 1927 *Chicago Defender* advertisement plugged the resort as the answer for the twin goals of “race advancement and pleasure.” The resort, the ad claimed, presented an unparalleled chance to prove Black affluence and organizational abilities, “the very thing the entire Race has been hoping and waiting for.” A prospectus characterized the resort’s successful development as a “challenge” to “our racial unity, civic pride, and courage.”<sup>82</sup>

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81. Henry Louis Gates, Jr., “The Trope of a New Negro and the Reconstruction of the Image of the Black,” *Representations* 24 (Autumn 1988), 136-38.

82. *Chicago Defender*, August 27, 1927; Lincoln Hills prospectus, n. d., Beckwourth Mountain Club collection, Denver, CO.

Private endorsements also appealed to the “New Negro” ideal. Lodge operator Obrey Wendell “Wink” Hamlet submitted a testament to the rewards of self-sufficiency: “My own cottage—built with my own hands, painted orange and trimmed brown. Nestled amid the evergreen trees; away from the smoke, noise, and confusion of the city and where the air and water are always pure, fulfills my every desire for rest and recreation.” Baptist pastor G. L. Price gushed: “[Lincoln Hills is] a place where our race can show to the Nation a constructive piece of work . . . . Lincoln Hills is destined to become a monument to the vision and constructive ability of the Colored Race.” Denver civil rights leader Joseph H. P. Westbrook urged investors to jump on board, writing: “This is the last opportunity for colored people to get such a location. . . . There is no segregation about it, only a chance to get a large acreage where we can go in peace and contentment.” Even former Colorado supreme court chief justice James H. Teller weighed in with a somewhat patronizing testimonial: “I think [Lincoln Hills is] a fine humanitarian movement which should receive the hearty endorsement not only of the colored people, but of all others who feel an interest in the welfare of the colored race.”<sup>83</sup>

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83. Obrey W. Hamlet, Letter to Lincoln Hills, Inc., January 24, 1928; G. L. Prince, Letter to Lincoln Hills, Inc., March 17, 1926; Joseph H. P. Westbrook, Letter to R. E. Ewalt and E. C. Regnier, July 4, 1925; James H. Teller, Letter to Robert E. Ewalt, June 6, 1925, Lincoln Hills Papers, MS ARL-39, Blair-Caldwell African American Research Library, Denver, CO.



Lincoln Hills developers confirmed their commitment to the welfare of African Americans by deeding land to the Young Women's Christian Association for an annual African American girls' summer camp. Founded in 1916, the Phyllis Wheatley Branch had sought a permanent home for its girls' camp since the early 1920s. Under YWCA rules, African American girls were forbidden from attending White camps. But when White property owners protested the construction of a camp for Black girls in neighboring Clear Creek County, the Lincoln Hills Company donated a creek-side location at their development. Lincoln Hills co-founder Robert E. Ewalt explained that the gift advanced the company's aim of "upbuilding a great National gathering place" at Lincoln Hills, and hoped that the YWCA camp would attract "the highest type of influential citizens" to the project.<sup>84</sup>

For the next twenty years, teenaged city girls from Denver, Pueblo, and Colorado Springs traveled to Camp Nizhoni by train for a two- or three-week getaway. Under the guidance of camp director Mary Wood, camp matron Mary "Mother" Gross, and a staff of experienced counselors, the girls camped, hiked, sang, slept outdoors, and bathed in a nearby creek. They picked up the fundamentals of botany and astronomy, fashioned outdoor beds out of pine boughs, and acquired

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84. Robert E. Ewalt, Letter to the Phyllis Wheatley Branch, Denver YWCA, Board of Management, Denver, CO, April 8, 1926; Report of the Phyllis Wheatley Branch, YWCA, 1927-1930, Box 11, Metropolitan Denver Young Women's Christian Association manuscript collection, MSS #1254, Stephen H. Hart Research Center, History Colorado, Denver, CO.

first aid and outdoor survival skills, including the ability to cook bacon, eggs, and biscuits on a hot rock. They made new friends and built comradeship, recorded their thoughts in a camp newspaper, the *Camp Nizhoni Echo*, and studied crafts, drama, music, and dancing. They nurtured their spirituality in an outdoor chapel, and learned about their “rich African heritage” during Black history courses.<sup>85</sup> Although not every girl benefitted from their stay, the camp opened the girls’ horizons and built lasting social connections. Assessing the impact on the campers, former camp counselor Marie Anderson Greenwood put it this way: “It made us comrades. It gave them a sense of appreciation with nature . . . . It just broadened their perspectives and gave them an appreciation they would not have had otherwise.” Former camper

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85. *Pittsburgh Courier*, July 3, 1937; *Chicago Defender*, Feb. 29, 1936, July 11, 1936, August 20, 1938; Modupe Labode, “Off to Summer Camp,” *Colorado History NOW* (June 2002): 3; Marcia Tremmel Goldstein, “Breaking Down Barriers: Black and White Women’s Visions of Integration—The Young Women’s Christian Association in Denver and the Phyllis Wheatley Branch, 1915-1964,” M.A. thesis, University of Colorado, Denver, 1995. For context on race and summer camps, see also *Men and Women Adrift: The YMCA and the YWCA in the City*, edited by Margaret Sprat and Nin Mjagkij (New York: New York University Press, 1997) and Judith Weisenfeld, *African American Women and Christian Activism: New York’s Black YWCA, 1905-1945* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1997).

Jenny Rucker recalled that her sister hid from the train taking her siblings to the camp, then hid again at the camp in order to remain for an extra week.<sup>86</sup>

Although well beloved, Camp Nizhoni's days were numbered. Deferred maintenance took its toll by the Second World War and, in 1943, the YWCA took tentative steps to desegregate its Colorado camps. By 1945, Camp Lookout, the Central YWCA's summer camp, included mixed groups of White girls, former Camp Nizhoni campers, and Japanese American YWCA members from "Camp" Amache. Camp Nizhoni's directors closed its doors for good that same year. The loss of Camp Nizhoni evoked mixed feelings among those who had loved the camp, but who also saw its demise as a sign of better race relations to come. Former counselor Marie Greenwood, whose association with the camp went back to 1928, felt "really very sorry" to see it go. "I had such a wonderful time all those years . . . . But I also understood, because after all [the] Phyllis Wheatley [Branch of the YWCA] could not keep it going and, you see, they were getting to the place where they were pretty much starting to close out the branch. Because everything had opened up . . . . Everything had opened up to where we could participate everywhere."<sup>87</sup>

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86. Marie Greenwood, Interview with Bill Convery and Moya Hansen, February 9, 2010, History Colorado, Denver, CO; Jenny Rucker, Interview with Bill Convery and Moya Hansen, February 24, 2010, History Colorado, Denver, CO.

87. Greenwood, Interview with Convery and Hansen.

The gradual death of Jim Crow, and the triumph of the civil rights movement also led to a similarly bittersweet demise to Lincoln Hills, and to the other leisure institutions that African Americans had constructed to circumvent racism. Jackie Robinson's breakthrough into the Brooklyn Dodgers' lineup spelled the end of the African American professional baseball leagues. True to their promises, *Travelguide* and the *Negro Motorist Green Book* survived into the late 1950s and early 1960s before being absorbed into larger, White-controlled, publications. The Civil Rights Act of 1964 opened up country clubs and other public accommodations to Black patronage, effectively pinching off the need for Winks Panorama Lodge and the Lincoln Hills Country Club. Many African Americans had sold their cabins in the intervening years, although several have remained in the hands of the same families since the 1920s.<sup>88</sup>

After a long dormancy, Lincoln Hills is showing new life in the twenty-first century. With help from a History Colorado preservation grant, Beckwourth Outdoors, a nonprofit organization dedicated to providing year-round outdoor opportunities to children and adults, purchased the National Register Winks Lodge in 2006. Today, visitors can tour the restored lodge and attend historical reenactments, jazz festivals, barbeques, and other special events that evoke the gatherings of Lincoln Hills's heyday. In 2007, Matthew Burkett, an African American fly-fishing guide and instructor, and his business partner, the retired professional

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88. For discussions on the impact of the civil rights movement on African

American leisure institutions, see Foster, "In the Face of 'Jim Crow,'" 146;

Seiler, "African American Automobility," 1109; Juarez, "A Home in the Hills."

basketball player Keith Van Horn, founded the Lincoln Hills Fly Fishing Club. The recreational facility appears to be a mixed blessing. Developers have fenced off access to South Boulder Creek, including a bathing area used by Camp Nizhoni campers in the 1920s and 30s. Contractors gouged out new retention ponds, destroyed historic buildings, disrupted the area's mountain stillness with heavy construction equipment, and posted forbidding "no trespassing" signs along once-open vistas. On the other hand, this Black-owned resort revives the original vision of Lincoln Hills as an exclusive place to enjoy the outdoors, fish, and enjoy nature. It's hard to know whether to laugh or cry.

The History Colorado exhibit on Lincoln Hills is designed to bring all of these diverse threads together in an accessible way to a lay audience. Lincoln Hills is a relatively unknown story, with a dense context, and exhibit developers struggled to find a manageable narrative direction that made sense in a three-dimensional space. Ultimately, staff decided on an approach that moved visitors through an object gallery evoking the nadir of Jim Crow in Colorado, and into a mini-theater space providing a media program about Lincoln Hills's role as a mountain haven. Visitors will first encounter exhibit cases displaying robes, hoods, and other paraphernalia of the Ku Klux Klan in Colorado. Klan robes loom up, ghost-like, on either side of visitors, while blown-up newspaper headlines speak of the Klan's power and about segregation of public facilities. A sign advertising the "Kozy Klean Kafe," a pseudonym used by Klansman Gano Senter for his Radio Café in downtown Denver, suggests the pitfalls of seeking a meal in the wrong restaurant in the 1920s. Beyond the Klan zone, a brief display on how African Americans coped with the perils of

vacationing during Jim Crow will center around a *Negro Motorist's Green Book*. A sign, titled "This Way to Escape," will guide visitors into the mini-theater. There, visitors will encounter an environment designed to look like the front porch of a mountain cabin. Visitors will sit on benches, rockers, or Adirondack chairs, and view a documentary film about Lincoln Hills. The tone is upbeat, featuring promotional advertising from the 1920s and 30s, and music from national jazz impresarios who stayed at the resort. Images of Camp Nizhoni campers bathing and hiking will intersperse with reenactments of family life in the cabins. Modern residents of Lincoln Hills will speak about the reasons their family came to Colorado, and talk about the sense of freedom they felt—and still feel—when they spend the night in the mountain retreat. The film will end with a Langston Hughes poem, "I Dream a World,"

*I dream a world where man  
No other man will scorn,  
Where love will bless the earth  
And peace its paths adorn  
I dream a world where all  
Will know sweet freedom's way,  
Where greed no longer saps the soul  
Nor avarice blights our day.  
A world I dream where black or white,  
Whatever race you be,  
Will share the bounties of the earth  
And every man is free.*

The development process for Lincoln Hills as thus far avoided some of the pain and bad feelings that characterized the Sand Creek and Amache exhibits. Relations with the exhibit's African American advisory group, many of whom own family homes in Lincoln Hills, is cordial. It's hard to say why, exactly. This story is more clearly about triumph over racism and social disharmony than the other two.

In a certain respect, Lincoln Hills was a remedy for, not a cause of, society's ills. The community's stakeholders are not saddled with a lasting negative legacy stemming of this event; they do not, in other words, feel ostracized or disenfranchised by the past. In ways, the lack of tension proved a liability for exhibit developers. The exhibit team had to cast back to the dark days of the Klan, and to emphasize the national story of Jim Crow, in order to provide enough grounding for the sustainment of Lincoln Hills to feel like a triumph. Fortunately, the stakeholders feel that this part of the story is essential for a young generation that is completely disconnected from the more explicit racism endured by their parents and grandparents.

**CHAPTER 5:  
“I DIDN’T CROSS THE BORDER,”  
INTERPRETING THE SOUTHERN COLORADO BORDERLANDS**

Situated near the center of the Trans-Mississippi west, remote from easily traveled river systems, and buttressed by a forbidding mountain backbone, Colorado served as a perennial borderland between contending empires. Over succeeding generations, a place such as Pueblo, Colorado, occupied a contested zone claimed by the nations of Spain, France, Mexico, and the United States, the states and territories of Texas, New Mexico, and Colorado, and in territory controlled by Comanche, Apache, Cheyenne, or Ute Indian tribes. Each succeeding tribe, nation, or territory had unique geopolitical hopes and dreams, and defined specific expectations about the behavior of residents within their territory. For a fictional resident of Pueblo, living through four hundred years of shifting borders, keeping up with the new landlords could be a vexing experience.

The “Borderlands” exhibit distills a complex, seven-hundred-year imperial history of Colorado into a brief but vivid interactive. Visitors encounter a game-show like setting, wherein they to confront political leaders representing the powerful, but contested, political might of New Spain, Comanchería, Mexico, Colorado, and the U.S. justice system. In each case, successive political leaders offer visitors a difficult choice—give up your independence as an Apache in order to receive Spanish protection from your enemies; participate in an uneven exchange with Comanche traders or face unpleasant consequences; settle on Mexico’s northern border or become a satellite of the United States; sneak into Colorado for a



job or watch your family starve; surrender your homeland or fight back in a legal system stacked against you.

Because of a constrained timeline for exhibit development, but also because complexity did not serve our end goals for this exhibit, the exhibit team did comparatively less primary research on the Borderlands story than on Amache, Lincoln Hills, or others. Yet Colorado's borderlands story draws on a rich and, in many cases, relatively recent historiography of the U.S./Spanish/Mexico/Comanche borderlands. David J. Weber's *The Spanish Frontier in North America* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1992), a masterful reconsideration of Herbert Eugene Bolton and John Francis Bannon's work, is an important foundation for Spanish, Mexican and American colonial history. Weber's *The Mexican Frontier, 1821-1846* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1982) fleshes out the history of the Mexican Republic, with special attention to the land grant period that affected subsequent settlement in Colorado. Phil Carson's *Across the Northern Frontier: Spanish Explorations in Colorado* (Boulder: Johnson Books, 1998) provides analysis of Spanish imperial goals and expeditions to Colorado. *After Coronado: Spanish Exploration Northeast of New Mexico*, edited by Alfred Barnaby Thomas (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1935) and Thomas's *Forgotten Frontiers: A Study of the Spanish Indian Policy of Don Juan Bautista de Anza, Governor of New Mexico, 1777-1787* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1969) provide detailed translations of the journals and reports of talks between by Spanish frontier captains and Comanche and Apache leaders in Colorado. Pekka Hämäläinen's *The Comanche Empire* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2008) and *Empire of the*

*Summer Moon* by S. C. Gwynne (New York: Scribner, 2011) give sensitive views of Comanche commercial and political objectives. Taken together with Colin G. Calloway's *One Vast Winter Count: The Native American West before Lewis and Clark* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2003), these works go a long way towards creating a history of the American West from an indigenous point of view. In many respects, the Borderlands story is a story of political and cultural resistance against shifting hegemonies. To that end, developers took inspiration from books such as *Mexicano Resistance in the Southwest* by Robert J. Rosenbaum (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1981) and *The Chicano Homeland: A Chicano History of New Mexico*, edited by Erlinda Gonzales-Berry and David R. Maciel (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 2000). Stephen J. Leonard's *Trials and Triumphs: A Colorado Portrait of the Great Depression* (Niwot: University Press of Colorado, 1993) provides the most complete overview of Governor Edwin C. Johnson's bid to close the Colorado-New Mexico border. Essays by José Aguayo and Tanya W. Kulkosky provide a broader overview of Mexican migrant labor in early twentieth century Colorado in *La Gente: Hispano History and Life in Colorado*, edited by Vincent c. de Baca (Denver: Colorado Historical Society, 1998). Nicki Margaret Gonzales's dissertation, "Yo Soy Loco por esa Sierra': The History of Land Rights Activism in San Luis, Colorado, 1863-2002," (University of Colorado, Boulder, 2007) and María E. Montoya's *Translating Property: The Maxwell Land Grant and the Conflict over Land in the American West, 1840-1900* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002) set the context for conflict over culture and land use rights in the La Sierra land grant case, while Dick Johnston's self-published *The Taylor Ranch War:*

*Property Rights Die* (Bloomington: AuthorHouse, 2006) offers a rebuttal in defense of Anglo-American traditions of property rights. Certainly not least, Rodolfo “Corky” Gonzales’s poem, “I am Joaquin,” defines many of the Chicano themes that this exhibit attempts to illustrate.

Exhibit developers deliberately evoked contemporary debates about immigration and the role of government in the daily lives of individuals to illustrate the impact of shifting geopolitical borders on the everyday people who lived in southern Colorado over time. The Borderlands story is a risky component to include in a history museum. Related in a straightforward narrative, a dense succession of nations, states, and tribes, individuals, events, representing a wide array of languages, and outlooks, shifting boundaries, and global and diplomatic nuances unfold over a four-hundred year timeline. Engaging with this storyline requires transmitting a high level of context to visitors. On the other hand, this story provides opportunities to introduce deep-time history, and to suggest how that history is shapes the trajectory of our lives right up to the present. The interpretive challenges of this exhibit required developers to interrogate their audiences’ needs more deeply than in any other gallery. In fact, “Borderlands” provides an excellent example of how audience feedback can influence an exhibit, even taking exhibit developers in unexpected directions. What began as a straightforward community exhibit about a single town changed, over time, into a complex interactive about the evolving political interchange between Colorado’s diverse people.

If exhibit developers convinced themselves of one idea at the outset of History Colorado’s exhibit planning process, it was that at least one exhibit would

focus on the southern Colorado town of San Luis. Founded in the San Luis Valley prior to the formation of Colorado Territory, San Luis is the state's oldest continually inhabited non-Indian settlement. San Luis and nearby communities boast Colorado's oldest irrigation ditch, oldest church, and deepest roots. In many respects, the valley's settlers and their descendents live in a cultural island, preserving idiomatic language patterns, ancient religious practices and folkways, and community celebrations that reach back to traditions in colonial Mexico, and fifteenth-century Spain. Exhibit developers felt that the town and its surrounding villages supported a pleasing diversity of themes, including agriculture, railroads, spirituality, conservation, and settlement. The valley's strong Hispano storylines offered a desirable (if somewhat dutiful) nod to cultural diversity that had regrettably faded from exhibits at the previous museum. And exhibit developers were eager to interpret Colorado's Mexican land grants, although they were equally aware of the challenges of explaining the legal, cultural, and social complexities of this particular story.<sup>89</sup>

Intent on creating a set-piece exhibit about San Luis, an exhibit team held a preliminary meeting with local community leaders in August 2009. If anything, the conversation generated even more excitement. The advisors generously elaborated on San Luis's unique character—its adobe buildings, *acequia* irrigation system,

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89. William J. Convery, "History Colorado Communities Summary" planning document, February 20, 2009, Communities Exhibit Development Notebook, History Colorado, Denver, CO.

liturgical calendar, and common town pasture. They emphasized the importance of historical land grants in forging community ties, and pointed out the region's sacred landscape, from indigenous rock circles to traditional Hispano churches to New Age worship. They shared information about age-old community celebrations, including Christmastime *Los Pastores* passion plays and *Las Posadas* processions. Some sang songs from the Easter celebrations sponsored by local Penitente brotherhoods. They talked about traditional food, arts, and crafts, and they strongly articulated the idea of continuity from generation to generation. Standing on an overlook above the town, Rick Manzanares, a descendent of the first Hispano settlers to arrive in Colorado, sighed as he said, "From here I can reach out and touch my grandmother's hand."<sup>90</sup>

In the wake of these conversations, an initial exhibit concept seemed to write itself. San Luis resident Juanita Dominguez related a story about hiring a contractor to cut an interior door in her adobe home. When the contractor began to saw through the dividing wall, a spout of sand plumed out of the wall onto her living room floor. Investigations revealed that the house's original builders had simply framed out a crude wattle-and-daub interior shelter, using mud that had, over time, dried into sand. Subsequent residents added adobe rooms as time and necessity allowed. This story spawned an exhibit idea about a "talking" house that reminisced

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90. William J. Convery, Moya Hansen, and Beth Kaminsky, *History Colorado*, interview with Robert Rael, Juanita Dominguez, and Rick Manzanares, San Luis, Colorado, August 13, 2009.

as it grew to accommodate a larger family over time. Developers based their concept on the 1863 Gallegos House, a home belonging to a pioneer San Luis family. In our vision, the house looked back over its relationship to a single San Luis family on a particular feast or wedding day. The planned exhibit would speak to culture, continuity, and persistence over the generations.<sup>91</sup>

And yet, even as developers advanced their ideas, front-end audience research for the Colorado Stories exhibit undermined some of the team's basic assumptions, pushing the initial concept in a different direction. The study, performed between January and March, 2010, exposed 337 potential museum goers to different Colorado history topics, as well as to ideas and concepts from each of the specific community exhibits. As a general topic, the "Hispano Experience" garnered medium interest, with self-identified "Hispano" respondents rating a significantly higher level of interest (80%) in this topic than non-Hispano respondents (42%).<sup>92</sup>

As a generic topic, Hispano history may have fared moderately well. But as a specific exhibit component, San Luis rated an across-the-board yawn from potential museum audiences. In samples where potential visitors received a simple one-line description of the exhibit, 36 percent of non-Hispanos, but only 30 percent from

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91. Beth Kaminsky, William J. Convery, and Moya Hansen, "Hometown Colorado Concept Document," November 25, 2009, Communities Exhibit Development Notebook, History Colorado, Denver, CO.

92. Haywood and Werner, "'Front End' Research for Colorado Stories," 12.

Hispanos, expressed high interest in the San Luis exhibit. Even more discouraging, potential visitors who viewed a more elaborate description, including timelines, maps, images, and descriptions of interactives, were even less impressed. Overall interest fell from 35 percent to 27 percent, although interest among Hispanos rose to 38 percent (compared to only 25 percent for non-Hispanos). In either scenario, potential visitors rated San Luis second-to-least interesting among eight potential storylines, leading only Greeley (a community that was subsequently dropped).<sup>93</sup>

The low interest ratings created a significant dilemma for the exhibit team. History Colorado has a crucial interpretive and economic stake in creating strong Latino history elements. And as a potential audience pool, metropolitan Denver's Latino population is a desirable asset. Metro Denver Latinos kept up with the rest of the nation, growing by 42 percent between 2000 and 2010. Latinos in 2010 made up 22 percent of metropolitan Denver's population, and 31.8 percent of the City and County of Denver, while Latino children under eighteen increased from 25 percent to 33 percent for metro Denver. Museums long ago learned that visitors prefer exhibits in which they recognize themselves. Attracting Latino families would go a long way to help support History Colorado's long-term sustainability goals.<sup>94</sup>

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93. Haywood and Werner, "Front End' Research for Colorado Stories," 19, 37.

94. The Piton Foundation, "2010 Census Project Regional Focus,"

<http://www.piton.org/census2010/> [accessed December 5, 2011]; United

States Census Bureau, "State and County Quick Facts, Denver County, 2010,"

Visitation goals aside, as responsible historians we felt that it was our duty to present the “important” stories of Colorado. San Luis seemed to fit this criterion. Our visitors, on the other hand, signaled a different conclusion. Given the discretionary nature of museum visitation, they seemed to be telling us that spending dollars on this story represented a potential waste of resources.

Consequently, the front-end study report sparked a major reconsideration of the topic and approach. Writing to an advisor in May, 2010, I articulated our concern: “Our worry from the audience research is that San Luis does not relate to the urban Latinos who will constitute part of our primary potential audience at the HCC. If we can tie this story, and the story of a broader segment of Colorado's Latino/Chicano people to a greater narrative of struggle, celebrate folkways, and demonstrate the victory of Colorado's Latinos/Chicanos, then I think we will make a more compelling exhibit all the way around.”<sup>95</sup>

The exhibit team considered and rejected a variety of alternatives (or, in some cases, additives) to the San Luis exhibit. Drawing from a conclusion that visitors appreciated dramatic human-interest themes, exhibit developers

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<http://quickfacts.census.gov/qfd/states/08/08031.html> [accessed December 5, 2011].

95. William J. Convery, electronic communication to Deborah Espinosa, May 10, 2010. Colorado Stories: Borderlands exhibit development file, History Colorado, Denver, CO.



entertained ideas about urban Chicano life and culture and a story about Colorado as part of the spiritual Mestizo homeland of Aztlán.<sup>96</sup> The concept for “Aztlán,” the spiritual community that ties together Chicanos and Chicanas from around North America, took shape in Denver, Colorado, at a gathering of Chicano activists at the Youth and Liberation Conference in March, 1969.<sup>97</sup> A Chicano history exhibit could highlight the achievements of the Coloradans who claim the Centennial State as part of a Mestizo homeland. Exhibit staff proposed emblazing icons representing the stories of Chicano achievements in a one-hundred fifty-year fight against injustice and discrimination on a reconditioned low rider or another symbol of Chicano cultural pride. Proposed stories included southern Colorado rancher and legislator Felipe Baca’s fight to protect Hispano legal rights in the 1870s; World War II soldier Joe Martinez’s achievements as Colorado’s first Medal of Honor recipient; the rise of Denver political activist Rodolfo “Corky” Gonzales and the creation of the landmark poem of Chicano identity and activism, “Yo Soy Joaquin;” the battle for labor rights in the fields and farms of northeastern Colorado; the displacement and persistence

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96. Haywood and Werner, “‘Front End’ Research for Colorado Stories,” 3;

William J. Convery, communication to Beth Kaminsky, et. al., May 6, 2010.

Colorado Stories: San Luis exhibit development file, History Colorado,

Denver, CO.

97. “El Plan de Aztlan: A Program of the Chicano Movement,” n.d., Rodolfo

“Corky” Gonzales papers, WH1971, Series 6, Box 4, FF 57, Western History

Department, Denver Public Library, Denver, CO.

of Hispanos from West Denver; and the fight for land traditional rights in the San Luis Valley in the 2000s.

The Chicano storyline offered some interesting opportunities linking the experiences of urban Denver Latinos with more recent immigrants. At the same time, the complexities inherent in the storylines, the concept of Aztlán, and even the term “Chicano” presented some daunting interpretive challenges. By summer of 2010, the exhibit development team concluded that it needed to gather more information from potential visitors, and especially Latino visitors. If San Luis could not sustain the attention of audiences, and a Chicano story promised too much complexity, what was the answer?

To find clarity, History Colorado staff invited fifteen self-identified Latinos to participate in a pair of focus groups at Denver’s Museo de las Americas on August 28, 2010. Many of the participants were recruited at area museums and libraries, as well as from the Auraria Campus. Others came as “friends of friends.” Most had extensive international museum experience. Exhibit staff collaborated with focus group moderators, Jeff Hayward, Ph. D., from People, Places, and Design Research in Northampton, Massachusetts, and Tey Marianna Nunn, Ph. D., from the National Hispanic Cultural Center in Albuquerque, New Mexico, to shape a series of discussion questions around how the museum could better serve Latino audiences. Participants were asked to respond to two alternative exhibit scenarios. The first was a San Luis Valley-centered exhibit, called “I am from el Valle,” that emphasized roots, tradition, agriculture, water, and trans-generational connections. The second outlined a preliminary “Borderlands” scenario that emphasized boundaries,

migration, and politico-cultural history. At the heart of the second proposal was a line from a song called *Somos Mas Americanos*, performed by the norteño band Los Tigres del Norte, that translated to “I didn’t cross the border, the border crossed me.” The interview also included opportunities to respond to other exhibit ideas in progress.<sup>98</sup>

The focus group participants pointed out some things that seemed obvious in retrospect. There was no monolithic “Latino” point of view; participants originated from southern Colorado, New Mexico, Mexico, Peru, Argentina, Chicago, California, and Washington, D.C., and their experiences were, in the words of consultant Tey Nunn, “complex, multi-tiered, and multilayered.” But while most felt that the exhibit should interpret “histories of place,” only the participants from southern Colorado considered the southern Colorado/San Luis Valley story an important one; those from elsewhere related to the story far less strongly.

The political, migration, and adaptation themes of the second scenario, on the other hand, resonated widely among the participants. Most could relate the phrase “I didn’t cross the border” to their own experiences. The story of Amache created an equally strong sense of identification, while exhibits about Denver and Steamboat

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98. William J. Convery and Jeff Hayward, “History Colorado Communities exhibit Latino/San Luis Valley Exhibit Scenarios,” August 18, 2010; William J. Convery, communication to Jeff Hayward, August 24, 2010. Colorado Stories: Borderlands exhibit development file, History Colorado, Denver, CO.

Springs, including a skiing story more appropriate in a museum for “rich folk,” in one participant’s words, left this group relatively cold.<sup>99</sup>

So where did that leave the exhibit? The phrase “I didn’t cross the border, the border crossed me” gave developers a wide latitude. Over time, many different nations, states, and tribes overlaid competing political and economic claims in Colorado. Various maps showed Colorado as Spain, France, New England, Virginia, Louisiana, Mexico, New Mexico, Utah, Texas, and Nebraska. Utes, Kiowas, Comanches, Apaches, Navajos, Pawnees, Cheyennes, Arapahos, Shoshones, Jumanos, Kansas, Crows, Sioux, and Pueblo Indians, among others, called parts of Colorado “home” at various times. Pioneer Hispano settlements, organized around traditional communal land regimes, helped define the state’s cultural geography. More recently, waves of labor migrations to and between Colorado’s railyards, steel mills, mines, beet fields, and service industries transformed the state’s economy, shaping and reshaping the character of neighborhoods and regions.

Exhibit developers eventually distilled down this history down from a timeline list of several dozen events to five specific episodes—a negotiation between a Spanish governor and a Jicarilla Apache chief in 1719, a confrontation

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99. Tey Marianna Nunn and Jeff Hayward, “Summary of

Latino/Chicano/Hispanic Focus Groups,” September 13, 2010; William J. Convery, communication to Jeff Hayward, September 11, 2010; and Jeff Hayward, communication to William J. Convery, September 13, 2010. Colorado Stories: Borderlands exhibit development file, History Colorado, Denver, CO.

between a Comanche chieftain and a New Mexican settler in 1779, an invitation from a Mexican governor to potential New Mexican settlers in 1844, an ultimatum from a Colorado governor to migrant laborers in 1936; and a ruling by a U.S. district court judge against longtime Hispano residents over land use rights in 1960. These events represent the diversity of encounters between different hegemonic and subordinate groups that took place in Colorado since the beginning of European contact. In each case, “subordinate” groups faced a difficult choice from among a discrete set of options, perhaps even having to select from several negative outcomes. The clarity of these encounters, the relative simplicity of the choices, and the ample documentary evidence for each event fit the game dynamics that exhibit developers were attempting to capture. Visitors assume the role of the everyday people and face decisions about how to accommodate, negotiate, or resist the offers they face from a succession of political leaders.<sup>100</sup>

The first emblematic event occurred between Spanish officials and Jicarilla and Sierra Blanca Apache residents in southern Colorado in the early 1700s. Spain’s claims to Colorado date to the settlement of the Spanish colony of Nuevo Mexico by Juan de Oñate in 1598. In 1706, the frontier captain Juan de Ulibarrí traversed far southeastern Colorado and, with due ceremony, formally claimed the region for King Philip V of Spain. Unable to establish permanent settlements in this far

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100. William J. Convery, “Revised Borderlands Concept” exhibit planning document, April 9, 2011. Colorado Stories: Borderlands exhibit development files, History Colorado, Denver, CO.

northern fringe of empire, the Spanish instead pursued a diplomatic course, fashioning political and trade alliances with the Apache villages strung along the Arkansas River and making occasional forays north to punish Comanche and Pawnee raiders, and to show the flag against French incursions from the north.<sup>101</sup>

In 1719, Don Antonio Valverde y Cosío, Governor and Captain-General of the kingdom of New Mexico for His Majesty, Philip V of Spain, marched north from Santa Fe with a force of sixty presidial soldiers, forty militia, and five hundred Pueblo Indians to punish Comanche raiders and to reconnoiter rumored French incursions into Colorado. Forty-eight years old, a native of Castile, Spain, Valverde served in the reconquest of New Mexico following the 1680-1692 Pueblo revolt. He then settled in El Paso del Norte, where he became a well-known vintner. He served as governor of New Mexico from 1717-1722, earning a solid reputation as a businessman and frontier leader.<sup>102</sup>

Crossing into present day Colorado in late September, 1719, Valverde's expedition headed toward a string of friendly Apache villages in southeastern Colorado and southwestern Kansas known as *El Cuartelejo* ("The Northern Quarter"). But as they ascended the Purgatoire river, Valverde's army passed into the heart of a war zone. Drawn by the promise of slaves, but seized by the possibility

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101. Phil Carson, *Across the Northern Frontier: Spanish Explorations in Colorado* (Boulder: Johnson Books, 1998.), 62-70.

102. Carson, *Across the Northern Frontier*, 76.

of living on the plains as mounted hunters, mountain-dwelling Comanches and Utes had slashed through the villages of the Sierra Blanca Apaches and other Apache bands who had occupied southeastern Colorado since the 1500s, killing men and taking women and children captive. What began as a series of aggressive raids flowered into a full-blown invasion. At the same time, Pawnee and Jumano Indians, well supplied with weapons by their French allies, increased their pressure from the East. It seemed only a matter of time before the Apaches collapsed altogether.<sup>103</sup>

For beleaguered Apache leaders such as Carlana, who agreed to escort Valverde's march through their Colorado homelands, the *entrada* must have seemed a godsend. Equipped with modern armor and firearms, and offering gifts of tobacco and chocolate, promising to impose peace and justice, and to smite the Apaches' enemies, the Spanish seemed in every sense the men on white horses, arriving in the nick of time to save the day. Yet their offer of an alliance came with a price. The Spanish asked the Apaches to embrace Catholicism and become vassals of the Spanish crown. The Europeans spoke incessantly about the distant rewards of heaven, but did not always attend to the immediate needs of the people under their

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103. Pekka Hämäläinen, *The Comanche Empire* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2008), 28; Antonio Valverde y Cosío, "Diary of the Campaign of Governor Antonio Valverde y Cosío against the Utes and Comanche Indians, 1719," *After Coronado: Spanish Exploration Northeast of New Mexico, 1696-1727*, ed. Alfred B. Thomas (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1935), 113, 119-20.

protection. And even as the Spanish pledged to avenge the loss of Apache women and children to the Comanches, Carlana's Apache kinsmen in southern New Mexico and Texas, were fighting to protect their families from Spanish slave raiders and their Pueblo allies.<sup>104</sup>

Ultimately, the Spanish-Apache alliance bore little fruit for either side. Learning of French efforts to expand their imperial sphere of influence, via the Pawnees, Governor Valverde y y Cosío ordered his lieutenant governor, Pedro de Villasur, to lead a punitive expedition onto the plains in 1720. Pawnees, perhaps with French support, wiped out Villasur's command near the junction of the Platte and Loup rivers, in today's Nebraska, on August 13, 1720. The ambush effectively ended the expansion of Spanish authority on the plains. Although the Spanish debated establishing a presidio at El Cuartelejo, they never took effective action. By 1730, Comanches had forced the Apaches to abandon their Colorado homes.<sup>105</sup>

The rise of the Comanche empire gave exhibit developers a second keystone. The Comanches (*Numunu* in their own language) emerged from the Rocky Mountains in the early 1700s seeking opportunities as bison hunters and traders on the Great Plains. Within twenty or thirty years, the tribe had moved out onto the Colorado plains. Over the next one hundred years the tribe co-opted European

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104. David J. Weber, *The Spanish Frontier in North America* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1992), 127-28; Carson, *Across the Northern Frontier*, 78.

105. Hämäläinen, *Comanche Empire*, 36-37; Carson, *Across the Northern Frontier*, 87-90.



innovations, such as horses, guns, and metal tools, while carving out an uncontested commercial empire in the heart of North America. The Comanches drove out rival Apaches, held at bay the expanding empires of Spain, France, Texas, and the United States into the mid-1800s, and dictated terms along a long-distance trade network that tied together the Rocky Mountains, Great Plains, and Southwest.

Working from trade centers such as the Big Timbers along the Arkansas River in today's Colorado, the Comanches dominated trade from the Missouri River to western Texas. The adaptive, aggressive, and commercially-oriented tribe impressed their will on neighboring communities, exploited the economic potential of New Mexico and Texas, persuaded rivals to adopt their norms and customs, and traded or raided for necessities, exchanging these items across a vast trade network that reached to the Mississippi and Missouri rivers and down into Mexico. "The Comanche empire was not . . . an entity that could be displayed on a map as a solid block with clear cut borders," writes scholar Pekka Hämäläinen. Its reach nevertheless cut across lands claimed, if not effectively controlled, by rival European colonial powers.<sup>106</sup>

Comanches judged foreigners by their potential to contribute to the Comanche empire, either through trade or captive labor. Along the way, the tribe built up a massive, brutal, and exploitative slave system, softened somewhat by the fact that most slaves were sooner or later adopted into Comanche families. Although slaves could be bought and sold, most eventually found protection in Comanche kinship networks that translated true slaves into "captives." For such people, social

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106. Hämäläinen, *Comanche Empire*, 4.

distinctions were never completely erased, but assimilation granted access to the right to marry, own property, and acquire total freedom.

During the 1760s and 1770s, New Mexico's settlements were nearly brought to their knees by intense Comanche raids. Many of the raids were orchestrated by a Comanche war chief known as Cuerno Verde or "Green Horn," so called because of his characteristic buffalo headdress decorated with a single green horn. Little is directly known of this "little king," as one New Mexico governor described him. However Pekka Hämäläinen has speculated that Cuerno Verde was likely a Jupe war chief and civil leader who gained his authority from "traditional Comanche leadership qualities—personal charisma, courage, and generosity." Upon his death in a 1768 raid, Cuerno Verde was succeeded by a second leader of the same name, perhaps a son, who was also known in Comanche as Tabivo Naritgant, the "Dangerous One." The second Cuerno Verde died in battle with New Mexico governor Juan Bautista de Anza just south of Pueblo in 1779.<sup>107</sup>

The crux of the Comanches relationship with settlers on the New Mexico-Colorado borderland was an exchange, both voluntary and involuntary, of livestock, captives, and material goods. Spanish officials could draw lines on a map and claim authority over distant lands, but Madrid remained far away. True power rested with the horse lords of the plains. Comanches half joked that Spanish and Mexican labor created Comanche wealth. Warriors took what they wanted, or traded when they chose. They expected gifts, but they also expected to negotiate fairly when

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107. Hämäläinen, *Comanche Empire*, 103; Carson, *Across the Northern Frontier*,

necessary, transferring hides, robes, meat, horse and mules, skins, and Pawnee, Ute, and Apache captives for guns and powder, serapes, sugar, corn, wheat, tortillas, bread, knives, awls, pots, and other useful items. Peaceful relations continued as long as the Comanches' Mexican and Spanish trading partners remembered exactly who controlled the balance of power.

Yet New Mexico's political leaders could not long suffer such an uneven relationship. When frontier captain Juan Bautista de Anza assumed the governorship of New Mexico in 1778, he found a district on the verge of collapse. Operating out of secure bases in Colorado, Comanche raids devastated New Mexico's northern frontier and threatened Santa Fe. In response, De Anza pursued a two-pronged offensive to restore balance. He launched a surprise attack on Cuerno Verde's village near today's Greenhorn Peak in southern Colorado, killing the chieftain and many of his lieutenants. Then, de Anza worked to create a beneficial relationship with the Jupe Comanches in Colorado. He pressured Comanche leaders to select a mutually acceptable spokesman, Ecueraçapa, to replace Cuerno Verde, and showered the new leader and other chiefs with gifts—silver-headed canes, uniforms, flags, and other acknowledgements of his authority. De Anza also provided material aid to help the Jupe Comanches settle down and become farmers. The governor sent laborers, tools, and craftsmen to help the Comanche build a plaza, San Carlos de Los Jupes, along the lines of a Spanish village. He donated sheep, oxen, maize, and seeds and sent farmers to help dig *acequias* to water newly-planted crops. And he supplied his new friends with guns and powder to hunt, and established regular trade fairs in Pecos and Taos, hoping that such concessions

would both preserve the peace and accelerate Comanche dependence on Spanish trade.<sup>108</sup>

The accord reached between Governor Anza and the Comanches stabilized diplomatic relations on the plains. Hispano traders increasingly ventured into Comanche lands to trade for bison meat and hides, while peace opened up new markets for Comanche goods. No matter that the cooperative village of San Carlos failed to achieve expectations—The Jupes Comanches abandoned it after a holy woman died there. The *Pax Comanche* largely remained in place for the rest of the Spanish era.<sup>109</sup>

Mexico, the subject of the third interactive episode, achieved its independence from Spain in 1821, acquiring from its old colonial master an international border that ran through the heart of the Comanche empire, and abutted land claimed by the expansion-minded United States. In today's Colorado, the Arkansas River boundary became an active international trading commercial zone. The Santa Fe Trail between Santa Fe and St. Louis linked traditional trading

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108. Alfred Barnaby Thomas, *Forgotten Frontiers: A Study of the Spanish Indian Policy of Don Juan Bautista de Anza, Governor of New Mexico, 1777-1787* (Norman: University of New Mexico Press, 1969), 74; Carson, *Across the Northern Frontier*, 151-153.

109. Colin Calloway, *One Vast Winter Count: The Native American West Before Lewis and Clark* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2003), 386-87; Thomas, *Forgotten Frontiers*, 82.

hubs such as the Big Timbers, between today's La Junta and Las Animas, with newer emporiums such as Bent's Fort.

Hungry for manufactured goods, New Mexico initially embraced commerce with the United States. After the Mexican government reversed Spanish trade restrictions in 1821, American caravans entered Santa Fe loaded with manufactured goods from around the world and departed again with the region's surplus bullion, horses, and mules. But over time, Mexican leaders came to view trade with the Yankees as an irresistible devil's bargain. American trade made New Mexicans more dependent on imported goods. American trappers infiltrated the southern Rocky Mountains, lifting beaver skins that rightly belonged to New Mexico. American merchants settled down to stay in Santa Fe and Taos, adopting Catholicism, learning Spanish, and marrying into prominent New Mexican families. Nationalists such as the energetic Taos curate, Father Antonio José Martínez, railed against the growing influence of Americans who constructed borderland trading posts, traded liquor and guns to Indians, and acquired New Mexican land grants. But other officials, such as Governor Manuel Armijo, condemned American power even as they cultivated lucrative commercial partnerships with the despised "gringos."<sup>110</sup>

Opportunists such as Governor Armijo played both sides of the table. Condemning Yankee economic aggression, he granted millions of acres of land grants to influential New Mexicans in the hope that they would establish settlements

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110. David J. Weber, *The Mexican Frontier, 1821-1846* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1982), 56.

that would in turn provide a buffer against the Americans. Five of these grants reached into Colorado and two, the Nolan Grant and the Vigil and St. Vrain Grant, touched the Arkansas River along their northern border. On the other hand, he frequently awarded grants to his own business partners, including the naturalized Mexican citizen Ceran St. Vrain, the American trader Charles Bent, and other recent immigrants whose loyalty to the Mexican Republic were arguably suspect.<sup>111</sup>

Ultimately, Armijo's plan to bolster New Mexican settlement on the U.S. Mexico border failed to prevent the American annexation of northern Mexico. The 1848 Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo guaranteed the private property rights of Mexican citizens, including the heirs and descendants of those who received land grants in Colorado under the Mexican regime. Among these was Charles Beaubien, a wealthy naturalized New Mexican who, along with partner Guadalupe Miranda, owned the 1.7 million acre Beaubien-Miranda land grant in northern New Mexico. By 1847, Beaubien had also acquired through inheritance or purchase, the 900,000-acre Sangre de Cristo Grant in the San Luis Valley of southern Colorado—a grant made in part to his young son, Narcisco, in 1844. New Mexican settlers began filtering into the valley by 1849 and, by 1851, had established the town of San Luis on Beaubien's estate. In 1863, the ailing entrepreneur conveyed specific rights for his settlers to hunt, gather firewood, use water, and common pastures. Beaubien's heirs made these rights explicit in a contract drawn up to convey title to the land grant to a new proprietor, William Gilpin, in 1864. Use rights continued to be

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111. Weber, *The Mexican Frontier, 190-95*; Janet Lecompte, "Manuel Armijo and the Americans," *Journal of the West* 19, no. 3 (July 1980): 53, 57-59.

conveyed as parcels of land passed from owner to owner until 1960, when a tough North Carolina lumberman named Jack Taylor acquired the 77, 500 acre Mountain Tract, encompassing Culebra Peak and surrounding mountains, and began putting up "no trespassing" signs.<sup>112</sup>

The resulting land dispute over "La Sierra," is the subject of a fourth interactive episode. Taylor erected fences around the tract, issued warnings to trespassers, and filed in U.S. district court to liquidate prior use rights. The restriction of traditional rights sparked a bitter, sometimes violent struggle over conflicting cultural and legal conceptions of property rights in the San Luis Valley. At issue were clashing ideologies about property ownership—the "fee simple" concept of absolute property rights enshrined in the American legal system and a traditional Hispanic concept of communal or shared use under which the land had initially been granted.

For longtime Hispanic residents, the conflict was more than a mere battle over property. For one plaintiff, Apiloniar Rael, Taylor's actions threatened the town with destitution. The mountain provided firewood for cold winter nights, fish and game to supplement crops, grazing for sheep and cattle, a place to relax and recreate from a day of hard work. La Sierra protected the town's water supply and filled irrigation ditches each spring so that crops would not die of thirst. More importantly, it challenged the traditional residents' identity. Rael appealed to an

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112. Montoya, *Translating Property*, 211-13; Marianne L. Stoller, "Grants of Desperation, Lands of Speculation: Mexican Period Land Grants in Colorado," *Journal of the West* 19, no. 3 (July 1980): 31.

older law, and deeper rights, than Jack Taylor's American law. "The men who sold [Taylor] the land told him he could handle the people in Costilla County 'cause we didn't have guts," the eighty-nine year old Rael declared. "I have plenty of guts. I can fight this forever."<sup>113</sup>

Small wonder that the conflict at times became violent. Taylor was accused of pistol-whipping alleged trespassers, and nighttime snipers fired into his house in 1975, permanently injuring the truculent rancher.<sup>114</sup> Residents of San Luis filed a civil action in 1981 and, in the 2002 *Lobato v. Taylor* decision, the Colorado Supreme Court upheld the use rights of San Luis residents on the La Sierra tract. For activists, the decision represented a stunning victory for traditional communal rights. As one analyst put it, "*Lobato v. Taylor* made it clear that a U.S. court could understand and

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113. Rael quoted in Johnston, *The Taylor Ranch War*, 135; see also Nicki

Margaret Gonzalez, "'Yo Soy Loco por esa Sierra': The History of Land Rights Activism in San Luis, Colorado, 1863-2002," Ph. D. dissertation (University of Colorado, Boulder, 2007), 165-66.

114. María E. Montoya, *Translating Property*, 212-213; Dick Johnston, *The Taylor Ranch War: Property Rights Die*, 66-67; LeRoy R. Hafen, "Mexican Land Grants in Colorado," *Colorado Magazine* 4, no. 3 (May 1927): 83-86; Ralph Carr, "Private Land Claims in Colorado," *Colorado Magazine* 25, no. 1 (January 1948): 17-18; Olibama Lopez Tushar, *The People of "El Valle": A History of the Spanish Colonials in the San Luis Valley* (Self-published, 1975), 15.



interpret another legal regime to vindicate rights emanating out of a culture and legal system different from but not entirely dissimilar from the dominant Anglo-American legal system. Justice and fairness mean the same thing, whether written in English or Spanish.” Critics on the other side call the case a victory of “political correctness” and castigated what they viewed as another step, along with building codes, zoning, the protection of wetlands and endangered species, in the erosion of the American right to private property without compensation to property owners.<sup>115</sup>

Crippled by a nighttime sniper attack at his ranch in 1975, Jack Taylor eventually moved away. He died in 1988. His heirs sold the ranch to the enigmatic former Enron CEO Lou Pai in 1999, whose plans to instigate large-scale logging on the tract sparked a new round of ecological protests. Pai sold out in 2004. The current owners, Bobby and Dottie Hill and Richard and Kelly Welch, instigated negotiations to settle outstanding land claims and prepare the way a mutually satisfactory use policy for both sides.

The Armijo and La Sierra threads address the issues that confronted Hispano settlers and their descendants in southern Colorado between 1850 and 2002. A fifth episode bridges the two eras while addressing Colorado’s continuing struggles with the importation of undocumented migrant labor. More than a million Mexican immigrants came to the United States between 1910 and 1930, seeking good wages and fleeing the unrest of the Mexican Revolution. Of these, over 57,000 Mexican

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115. Johnston, *The Taylor Ranch War*, 336-37.

nationals made their way to Colorado by 1930, where steady, if back-breaking employment beckoned in the state's mines, railroads, and sugar beet fields. As Mexicans and Mexican Americans strove to escape segregated sugar beet factory towns, known as *colonias*, they transformed cities such as Denver, Pueblo, Greeley, Trinidad, and Las Animas into havens of Mexican culture.<sup>116</sup>

Anglo American Coloradans had always struggled to adjust to their Spanish-speaking neighbors. Although Hispanic settlements predated the Pikes Peak gold rush, Colorado Anglos consistently disparaged the American-born "Mexicans" who farmed and mined in isolated pockets of southern Colorado. Residents of the South Platte beet-growing communities discriminated against "Mexicans," both citizen and non-citizen, in barbershops, drug stores, restaurants, and theaters.<sup>117</sup>

For many Coloradans and their political leaders, the Great Depression amplified cultural tensions. In 1935, Edwin C. "Big Ed" Johnson, Colorado's popular Democratic governor, protested the inclusion of Mexicans on the state's Federal

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116. José Aguayo, "Los Betabeleros," 108 and Tanya Kolkosky, "Mexican Migrant Workers in Depression-era Colorado," *La Gente: Hispano History and Life in Colorado*, ed. Vincent c. De Baca (Colorado Historical Society, 1998), 122-24.

117. Carl Abbott, Stephen J. Leonard, and Thomas J. Noel, *Colorado: A History of the Centennial State*, fourth edition (Boulder: University Press of Colorado, 2005), 353-55.

Emergency Relief Administration rolls. Over the protests of Colorado's Mexican consul, he considered placing all Mexican citizens in a concentration camp near Golden before deporting them from the state. The following year he declared martial law along the 365-mile long Colorado-New Mexico border and dispatched the Colorado National Guard to intercept aliens and job-seeking indigents whom Johnson claimed were preparing to invade. Guardsmen searched cars, busses, trucks, and trains, turning away anyone who carried insufficient documentation (including American citizens of Hispanic descent) or who did not have money or prospects of a job. The commander of the Raton Pass checkpoint, General Neil West Kimball, sent spies into New Mexico and kept an eye out for illicit border crossers from an airplane. Hundreds of people were forced to turn around, including Ramon Ruiz, his wife, and five children. Ruiz, a migrant laborer who was born in Greeley, Colorado, was turned away after it was discovered he had less than \$3 in his pocket.<sup>118</sup>

Governor Johnson argued that his actions defended of Colorado's economic interests from non-citizens, indigents, and "invaders." "Jobs in Colorado are for those who are entitled to them; not for the cheap labor of foreign countries and the out-at-the-heel wanderers from other states," he declared.<sup>119</sup> Unfair competition for jobs threatened to breed discontent, lawlessness, and unrest among citizens of the

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118. Stephen J. Leonard, *Trials and Triumphs*, 74-79; *Denver Post*, April 19, 1936.

119. *Denver Post*, April 18, 1936

state. Many Coloradans wrote letters praising the governor for preserving Colorado jobs for American citizens. But Johnson's actions confused tourists, irritated farmers and ranchers, who relied on cheap Mexican labor to get by, and drew criticism from political leaders who saw the ploy as a form of blatant discrimination against people with brown skin. Others recognized that the blockade violated the constitutional right of citizens to travel where they pleased. "You would think that New Mexico had been cut off from the United States and was a foreign country," raged New Mexico governor Clyde Tingley, "New Mexicans . . . are descendants of people who settled this country when Colorado was still part of New Mexico."<sup>120</sup> Under the face of such legal and social criticism, Johnson rescinded martial law after ten days. Yet many Coloradans viewed his actions in a favorable light. Gratified that Johnson had bucked legal and national opinion to save Colorado jobs for Coloradans, voters catapulted the former governor to the United States Senate in 1938. It is no small irony that his successor as Colorado governor, Ralph Carr, lost his own Senate bid over his welcoming stance toward another oppressed ethnic group.

The Borderlands exhibit attempts to distill the complexity of four hundred years of intercultural relations in southern Colorado into a manageable and appealing exhibit for lay visitors. The takeaway message is that, over time, longtime residents of southern Colorado struggled to negotiate, accommodate, or resist the imposition of a succession of elites, who arrived anew with every shifting border. Unequal power relationships did not always mean victory for the most powerful side. The Borderlands exhibit attempts to capture this dynamic in a game-show

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120. *Denver Post*, April 23, 1936; Leonard, *Trials and Triumphs*, 79.

setting, where visitors encounter leaders—a Spanish governor, a Comanche chieftain, a Mexican governor of New Mexico, a Colorado governor, or a U.S. district court judge—who each offer a difficult choice. In Apachería, Governor Valverde promises protection against the Apaches' enemies—in exchange for conversion. The Comanche leader offers a settler the advantages of trade—or else. Governor Armijo's offer of a new home on the U.S.-New Mexico border isn't all that it's cracked up to be. Governor Johnson offers visitors the choice to stand on their rights—and starve. A state Supreme Court judge eventually rules in favor of traditional rights for San Luis residents—after years and years (and years) pass by. In each case, visitors learn the historical outcome—that the Apache-Spanish alliance faltered against the Comanche onslaught; that unequal trade with the powerful Comanches was often preferable to resistance; that life on the American border had its own perils; that indigent and noncitizen migrants had rights, even during the Great Depression; that, in time, men and women who stand by their rights eventually triumph. With luck, this exhibit will succeed by making connections between both Latinos and non-Latinos to contemporary issues of immigration and life in southern Colorado's borderland. If so, then it will invoke curiosity, stimulate debate and discussion, and provide an outlet for civic programming that will further explore these oh-so-contemporary issues.

## **CHAPTER 6:**

### **CONCLUSION**

I have such a different understanding of my duties as State Historian now compared to three years ago. The exhibit historian's job, as I saw it then, was to assemble the team of academics and scholars who would, in turn, supply the required intellectual rigor to the new exhibits at the History Colorado Center. We would do great work, I fantasized, by introducing the proper scholarly complexity and nuance to these exhibits. We would challenge visitors to see the world as scholars see it, and we would help shape an exhibit that, for its complete intellectual engagement of our topics, every historian could be proud of.

Three years in, I have a far different view. To be sure, intellectual integrity is still the first responsibility of museum-based historians. Their facts must be correct, their research well documented. Historians are trained to present the truth, to provide footnotes, to embrace complexity and nuance, to never fudge. And yet despite this rigor, the dirty little secret of public historians is that they cannot force casual visitors to learn anything at all. Historical exhibits are discretionary experiences. Visitors choose whether or not to visit a museum. They select which exhibits to attend. They decide what to heed, and what to ignore. They do not take an exam at the end to test what they learned. They don't submit a paper. They don't even receive college credit.

Consequently, the presentation of engaging, memorable exhibits to casual public audiences sometimes requires tools drawn from a bag of tricks that few self-

respecting academic historians would touch. Museums routinely deploy role-playing and synthesis, rely on oversimplification, dabble occasionally in fictionalization, and use other techniques that provide satisfactory experiences and meet the needs of audiences, including families and children, at the appropriate level of engagement. I often joke now that I stopped being a historian the minute that I began working in a museum. Regrettably, more than a few of my academic colleagues now agree—some at the tops of their voices. At various times, both internal and external critics from the historical profession have critiqued the different components of the History Colorado exhibits as dumbed down and context light, at best misleading in their lack of nuance and complexity, at worst relying on outright gimmicks such as game shows, fictional video game “avatars,” or synthesized materials, that do not adequately present the “facts” of history. At the same time, participants in the historical events that we have chosen to present, or their descendants, have accused us of bad faith negotiations.<sup>121</sup> Under such pressure, I sometimes wonder if I have failed at my primary calling.

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121. Flint Whitlock, letter to Kathryn Hill and William Convery, June 17, 2011, Phase I Military Interpretation file, History Colorado, Denver, CO; Dr. Astrid Liverman, Director of Preservation Planning Unit, History Colorado Office of Archaeology and Historic Preservation, memorandum to William J. Convery and Lyle Miller, January 20, 2011. Communities exhibit notebook, History Colorado, Denver, CO; Minoru Tonai, electronic communication to Bob Fuchigami, January 27, 2011, Colorado Stories: Amache exhibit development file, History Colorado, Denver, CO; Joe Fox, Jr., Vice President, Northern

And yet, while remaining true to the facts, to the best of their ability, successful museum historians must also be ready to transcend the confines of their craft to in order to translate complex content and deliver satisfactory emotional and intellectual experiences for their audiences. While reviewing an early exhibition draft, one scholarly advisor, a Ph. D. historian, prefaced a remark with the phrase: “Well, I am not your average museum visitor, but . . . “ In fact, no professional historian is an average museum-goer; that’s why working in a museum is such a difficult (and rewarding) challenge. Trained historians are always looking for more than an average museum visit can provide. But if an average museum only worked to meet the needs of its scholarly audience, then it would require a terrific endowment, or it would otherwise soon have to close its doors. Consequently, museum historians must constantly seek a better understanding of the audiences they serve, and acquire the content translation skills necessary to reach them.

And yet, scholarship and audience needs are only two of three pillars required to build a responsible history exhibit. Historical exhibit developers in a public setting must also engage their community stakeholders. To be sure stakeholding advisors can be unsympathetic with the scholarly and audience cultivation requirements for an exhibit. They may request that an exhibit focus on a privileged point of view, or eliminate perspectives that (they fear) may prejudice visitors for or against a particular conclusion. Or they may demand interpretation of

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Cheyenne Tribe, letter to William Convery, December 5, 2011. Colorado

Stories: Sand Creek Massacre exhibit development file, History Colorado,

Denver, CO.



a particular document, object, event, or idea as the “only” means for visitors to understand a given story about the past.

If there is one area where History Colorado can improve, it is with engagement of community stakeholders. Given the scale, timeframe, staff, and budget constraints of this project, we have not always lived up to the standards we wish to achieve. This exhibit is riddled with moments when exhibit development staff had to backfill lapsed opportunities to consult with stakeholders. Only last December, I received letter of rebuke from the Northern Cheyenne tribal vice president for insufficient discussions about the Sand Creek exhibit. I subsequently traveled to Billings, Montana, to help repair the damage of insufficiently consulting with this group. The tense meeting ended with an agreement, in effect, to start over on this exhibit, so that the Cheyenne and Arapaho tribes have an opportunity to collaborate on their own history. Since then, our ability to work together seems to have broken down. We have much work to do, and only a few precious weeks left to restore their trust and reach a mutually satisfactory solution. We will always need more time, more resources, more attention, to tell the best story possible.

This setback is a reminder that, ultimately, we are always telling other peoples’ stories. Early and meaningful engagement with the individuals who most identify with each story not only creates essential community buy-in; it also provides emotional content and authenticity that adds greatly to the effectiveness of an exhibit. And, if we have done our job well, the staff at History Colorado will have created a museum that cultivates interest and inspires curiosity among people who may otherwise consider the pursuit of history an undesirable way to pass the time.

By attending to scholarship, audience needs, and the perspectives of community stakeholders, we hope to create engaging social environments in which people can talk and laugh and explore together. If we did our job right, we will have created experiences that visitors will remember far longer than the facts we present to them. They may not come away with every fact or context. But they could become inspired enough to learn more on their own. And, if we are paying attention, we can help them with that too.

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