Decolonizing the Wakarusa Museum: The Role of Public Education and Forced Displacement Within the Settler Colonial Structure

Claire Cox

HIST 690/691

Advised by Dr. Kent Blansett

April 11, 2023

Acknowledgements

I wish to thank Kent Blansett, Nishani Frazier, Kim Warren, and Nathan Wood for their advice, guidance, and dedication throughout the course of this research project. Their expertise and encouragement helped make this thesis paper possible. I also wish to thank Marin Massa and Martha Parker for their willingness to provide oral history interviews, without which this thesis would not have taken shape. I want to acknowledge the Kenneth Spencer Research Library, where I spent countless hours researching and writing. Finally, I wish to thank my fellow thesis cohort, whose unwavering support pushed me all the way to the finish line.

Abstract

The Wakarusa River Valley Heritage Museum aims to preserve, collect, and display the history of the Wakarusa River Valley before the construction of Clinton Lake. However, Indigenous perspectives and Native voices have been omitted from the historical narrative. To this day, the Wakarusa Museum does not acknowledge the Native American history that was submerged beneath Clinton Lake. As a result, the Wakarusa Museum is an institution of colonization. This thesis argues that the Wakarusa Museum exemplifies the consequences of living under a settler colonial empire by exposing two foundational pillars of settler colonialism: public education and forced displacement.

On a sunny afternoon in May of 2022, I arrived for my first day as an intern at the Wakarusa River Valley Heritage Museum. The President of the Clinton Lake Historical Society, Marin Massa, provided a grand tour as she explained in detail the current exhibits on display, future exhibition plans, and the museum's dense collection of family histories, photographs, and other related artifacts. Together, these collections brought to life the memory of ten interconnected rural communities located throughout the Wakarusa River Valley. Today, only four of these communities still exist. The others were either demolished, flooded, or abandoned when the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers built Clinton Lake. The Wakarusa River Valley Heritage Museum, or Wakarusa Museum, was established in 1983 as a direct response to the construction of Clinton Lake, which began in 1972 and ended in 1982.

The long and complex history of the Wakarusa River Valley spoke to the region's rural settlements, which were as old, if not slightly older, than the state of Kansas itself. The majority of the Wakarusa Museum's documented history takes place during the Civil War era and the violent age known popularly as Bleeding Kansas.[1] In this period, the Wakarusa River Valley served as a battleground between abolitionists and pro-slavery settlers. The community of Bloomington, the remnants of which are found in Bloomington Park on the west side of Clinton Lake, was a primarily all-Black settlement established in 1855 with a uniquely integrated school.[2] The Wakarusa region also housed several stops along the Underground Railroad. Overall, the historic events and heroic characters of the Wakarusa River Valley are preserved with great pride in the Wakarusa Museum. Throughout the tour, I became fascinated with learning more about the region's deep history and the meticulous care with which it had been preserved and displayed. However, I was concerned with the startling absence of Indigenous voices and pronounced omittance of Native history, which, in addition to Clinton Lake itself, further entrenched the idea that Native Americans would never regain title over their former lands. The Wakarusa Museum itself is based on a book, written by the founder of the museum Martha Parker and her colleague Betty Laird, entitled *Soil of Our Soils*. In this book, the

[1] For further research, see: Brie Swenson Arnold, *Bleeding Kansas, Bleeding Missouri: The Long Civil War on the Border*, ed. Jonathan Halperin Earle and Diane Mutti Burke (Lawrence, Kansas: University Press of Kansas, 2013).
[2] The Bloomington schoolhouse may have been the first integrated school in the region, reporting 23 white and black pupils in 1898. Additionally, the school was taught by both white and black teachers. However, as the original white settlers of Bloomington moved out and new black families moved in, the school saw less integrated attendance. In 1906, Clyde Adams was the last white teacher. In 1915, 18 black students were enrolled, while the white students attended school in the neighboring town of Clinton.

introduction, written by Parker, begins with, "The Indian history and prehistory are infinitely deserving of attention; however, only students of Indian culture are qualified to write on the subject."[3] Parker dismissed her ability to include Native American history in both the book and the museum and justified this dismissal by citing her personal lack of expertise on the topic, or rather, a gap in her previous education. However, the omittance of Native history in the Wakarusa Museum can be explained using the inherent characteristics of settler colonialism.

Museums are colonial institutions designed to preserve and share collective history. Brandie Macdonald, a citizen of the Chickasaw Nation and director of Decolonizing Initiatives at the Museum of Us in San Diego, California, layers this definition with concepts of decolonization. According to Macdonald, museums are informal educational resources that hold a unique colonial position.[4] The Wakarusa Museum's website claims the museum is dedicated to, "the communities and the founding settlers for their perseverance of defending their staunch beliefs in difficult times."[5] Based on the Wakarusa Museum's historic and contemporary collections and exhibits, the museum has only preserved the history of the white communities, with the exception of Bloomington, affected by the construction of Clinton Lake. While this history is valuable and worth preservation, it ignores the complex history of the Native Americans who lived in the valley long before white settlers. The current information displayed in the museum implies that the region's history began in the 1850s with Euro-American settlement. Not only does this undermine the museum's purpose, but it also makes the Wakarusa Museum an institution of colonization.[6] To this day, the Wakarusa Museum fails to publicly acknowledge the Native American history that was submerged beneath Clinton Lake. Using Macdonald's analysis, the Wakarusa Museum "replicates colonial erasure and violence" through current exhibitions and collections.[7] The Wakarusa Museum memorializes the settler colonial expansion of rural farmers rather than acknowledging and representing the history of Native Americans.

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[3] Martha Parker, *Soil of Our Soils* (Overbrook, Kan.: Freedom Publishing Company, 1976). 11.
[4] Brandie Macdonald, "Pausing, Reflection, and Action: Decolonizing Museum Practices." *Journal of Museum Education* 47, no. 1 (2022): 8.
[5] https://www.wakarusamuseum.org. Accessed August 25, 2022.
[6] Amy Lonetree, *Decolonizing Museums: Representing Native America in National and Tribal Museums* (Chapel Hill, N.C.; London: University Of North Carolina Press, 2012). 19-42.
[7] Macdonald, "Pausing, Reflection, and Action: Decolonizing Museum Practices." 8.

My research explores the reasons why the Wakarusa Museum has operated for nearly forty years without an appropriate or permanent exhibit that values Indigenous voices and contributions to the history of the region. In order to understand why colonial institutions are established and maintained, it is important to understand the circumstances that influenced Parker to exclude information about Native Americans and perpetuate their erasure from a public institution dedicated to regional history. This erasure is an ongoing force of colonization. Using Parker and the Wakarusa Museum as a case study, I hope to discover how patterns of omittance promote colonial spaces, and subsequently, how this promotion reinforces a wider general acceptance of exclusion and misrepresentation of Native American history. I will explain this phenomenon by using two pillars of settler colonialism, forced displacement and public education. Additionally, I will uncover and explain how these ongoing settler colonial forces created parallel narratives of history.[8] By exposing this parallel, I hope to encourage future conversations regarding a potential path toward reconciliation of the cycle of colonialism. This paper is divided into four main parts. The first section provides a brief introduction to settler colonialism. The second and third sections will outline individual pillars of settler colonialism, forced displacement and public education, respectively. And finally, the fourth section will explain the process of decolonization as a proposed solution to the research question. Each section will critically analyze Parker and Wakarusa Museum through the lens of settler colonial studies as well as museum theory.

The Settler Colonial Structure

Patrick Wolfe, a groundbreaking scholar in the field of settler colonial studies, defines settler colonialism as a structure upon which a settler colonial society is built using land emptied of Indigenous peoples.[9] According to Wolfe, access to territory is the primary objective of settler colonialism.[10] Settler colonialism relies on the logic of elimination to remove, assimilate, or kill Indigenous populations in order to provide land for white settlers. Wolfe claims that "settler colonialism destroys to replace."[11] Using the logic of elimination, Native society is replaced with

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[8] Although I focus on these two specific pillars, I believe there are many more to be unearthed. However, that investigation remained outside the scope of this project.
[9] Patrick Wolfe. "Settler Colonialism and the Elimination of the Native." *Journal of Genocide Research* 8, no. 4 (2006): 388.
[10] Ibid.
[11] Ibid.

a settler colonial society. As a result, rather than a singular historical event, settler colonialism embeds a structure into settler colonial society that continuously erases Native peoples in order to construct the foundation for an empire.[12] From this foundation, central pillars are constructed to support the empire, and without such pillars, the empire would collapse. Public education is a key pillar of the settler colonial structure. Displacement in the name of modern progress, or, as Wolfe argues, elimination of the Native, establishes another pillar. These pillars require maintenance and protection to ensure their permanence. Maintenance for settler colonial pillars comes in the form of a cyclical process. During this process, public systems, like education, and federal organizations, like the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, utilize settler colonial values to perpetuate objectives of empire and yield products suited to participate in and contribute to a settler colonial society. Martha Parker and the Wakarusa Museum exemplify this cycle. In order to decolonize institutions and break the cycle of American colonialism effectively, it is important to understand the factors that informed their initial creation. The Wakarusa Museum offers a pertinent example of this process as it is one of 35,000 museums across the United States. Furthermore, in examining the Wakarusa Museum, I seek to understand how the pillars of settler colonialism transform both individuals and their communities.

When given the opportunity to preserve the history of the Wakarusa River Valley in the face of displacement, Martha Parker relied upon her education to inform her subject choices. A settler colonial education, much like the curriculum Parker received in a one-room Kansas schoolhouse, sponsored the production of a colonial institution embedded with settler colonial objectives. Additionally, within the climate of panic and fear created by forced displacement, Parker preserved the heritage of Wakarusa communities rather than accurate history. As a product of both public education and displacement, Parker established a colonial institution by omitting Indigenous history. As a result, the information presented in the museum is highly distorted, and it confirms and reinforces settler colonial values. The promotion of distorted history in educational resources, like the Wakarusa Museum, furthers the cycle of colonialism, which functions as a machine of violence, destruction, and expropriation. Often hidden within the pages of textbooks or among the fine print of federal government contracts, settler colonialism justifies

[12] Wolfe's definition of settler colonialism has not been accepted without issue. For further study on this argument, see: Lorenzo Veracini, "Patrick Wolfe's Dialectics," *Aboriginal History* 40, no. 40 (2016): 249–60.

the transformation of landscapes and the dislocation of certain populations in the name of "necessary" progress. As an empire, America seeks to exert control over both external and internal factors. Public education and forced displacement are used as means for controlling the American populace through omittance of truthful history and removal of colonial threats. As a nation, we are products of these colonial systems. This is an uncomfortable realization for many, who may react by turning away from museums and rejecting the idea of dismantling colonial institutions altogether. Nevertheless, in the face of such an understanding, we must move beyond awareness and begin to take action. The problems addressed throughout this research not only affect Native Americans, but rather these issues should concern every American – we have all been colonized.

Why study the Wakarusa Museum in this context? The Wakarusa Museum and Martha Parker are regional examples that exemplify the cycle of settler colonialism. Since America's founding as a colonial empire, this cycle remains unbroken and the Wakarusa Museum provides a window to view this national dilemma. Due to the time and place of the museum's creation, the origins of the Wakarusa Museum are unique and perplexing. The museum was established during a time of increased social awareness for Indigenous human rights and the Red Power movement of the 1960s and 70s. Even more fascinating, the museum was built less than ten miles away from Lawrence, Kansas, home of Haskell Indian Nations University. In the 1970s, Native Americans had a significant presence not only in Lawrence, but across the nation, a presence which is still highly visible today. These two factors alone raise troubling questions that remain unaddressed in existing academic conversations. Some of these questions include: How and why did Parker choose to exclude Native American history during a time of increased awareness for Native peoples and Native voices? And how do settler colonial structures persevere in the face of questioning, protest, and human rights movements? The Wakarusa Museum offers just one example of a much bigger, nation-wide problem. Using the Wakarusa Museum as a model, this research offers an intervention to shift academic conversations toward recognizing cycles of colonialism and initiating a collective process toward decolonization.

The Pillar of Forced Displacement

In times of loss, which are often accompanied by feelings of anxiety, fear, strangeness, and vulnerability, communities seek to understand their situation by relying on what they believe to be true about the world. To understand an unprecedented situation, people use their own personal knowledge as the foundation for creating reasonable explanations and potential solutions. For individuals like Martha Parker and her fellow community members, their basis for knowledge came from standardized public education. The construction of Clinton Lake, which guaranteed the displacement of residents and the destruction of rural communities, presented itself as a time of crisis for residents of the Wakarusa River Valley. As a form of damage control, the collection and preservation of the Wakarusa River Valley's history offered a solution to the dislocation of Clinton Lake.

On the dedication page of *Soil of Our Souls*, Parker writes, "The history recounted within the pages of this book is my heritage. I hope to preserve it for those who have lived its most recent chapter with me and to share it for those who have not."[13] In historian David Lowenthal's book entitled *Possessed by the Past*, he defines the concept of heritage tourism. According to Lowenthal, "in recoiling from grievous loss or fending off a fearsome future, people of the world often revert to ancestral legacies."[14] Lowenthal's conclusion perfectly describes the process employed by Parker and her fellow community members throughout their development of the Wakarusa Museum. These founders faced the terrifying loss of their land, which held deep ties to their own rural identity. What would happen to their communities after the construction of Clinton Lake? In this state of panic, the Wakarusa River Valley *Heritage* Museum was established in an attempt to preserve the region's history and cultivate comfort through a shared ancestral legacy. The Wakarusa Museum provided local white residents with some degree of consolation in the face of loss due to an inevitable Clinton Lake project. Finally, the Wakarusa Museum transformed the Wakarusa River Valley settlers into heroes, defined in *Soil of Our Souls* as individuals "who through courage and steadfast determination fought for, won, and retained the freedoms which those in the Wakarusa basin still cherish…"[15] But, as Lowenthal

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[13] Parker, *Soil of Our Soils,* Dedication.
[14] David Lowenthal, *Possessed by the Past: The Heritage Crusade and the Spoils of History* (New York: Free Press, 1996). ix.
[15] Parker, *Soil of Our Soils*, Dedication.

states, heritage is never truthful history but rather a celebration of the past.[16] The Wakarusa Museum celebrates the region's past by focusing exclusively on the experiences of white settlers, therefore omitting all Indigenous history. As a result, the museum offers a display of heritage rather than history. The promotion of heritage and settler colonial history within the Wakarusa Museum results in a wider general acceptance of exclusion and misrepresentation of Native American history and peoples. This fuels the machine of American colonialism.

In telling her own story of displacement and loss through the preservation of the Wakarusa River Valley's rural communities, Parker failed to recognize a parallel history that took place almost 100 years prior to white settlement. Beginning in 1830s, Native American nations located within the Wakarusa River Valley, such as the Kaw and Osage, along with relocated Tribes from the East, namely the Shawnee and Delaware, who were removed from their homelands in the name of the Manifest Destiny; a term coined by journalist John O'Sullivan in 1845 to represent the narrative constructed around white progress and land improvement.[17] Settler colonialism defines both covert and overt forms of violence for Indigenous removal and erasure, a structure by which white settlers forced their way onto the Great Plains.[18] According to historian Jeffery Ostler, American independence has always presented a colonial threat to Native Americans. From the moment American independence was declared, Indigenous nations faced a crisis. Many Native communities, such as the Shawnee, Delaware, and Cherokee nations, had already experienced nearly two decades of settler colonial violence. Using knowledge based on their previous experiences, Native peoples predicted and feared the consequences of American independence as a colonial empire, and within the course of a century, these predictions culminated in a devastating and violent reality. Validating Native concerns and utilizing a settler colonial perspective, newly independent Americans believed they not only had the right to take Native lands and lives, but a duty.[19]

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[16] Lowenthal, *Possessed by the Past*, ix-xiii.
[17] For further research about Native American history in Kansas, see: Ronald D. Parks, *The Darkest Period: The Kanza Indians and Their Last Homeland, 1846-1873* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2014)., William E. Unrau, *Indians of Kansas: The Euro-American Invasion and Conquest of Indian Kansas* (Topeka, Kan.: Kansas State Historical Society, 1991)., David J. Wishart, *Great Plains Indians* (Lincoln; London: University of Nebraska Press, 2016).
[18] John P. Bowes, *The Oxford Handbook of American Indian History*, "U.S. Expansion and Its Consequences, 1815-1890," 93-94.
[19] Jeffrey Ostler, *Surviving Genocide: Native Nations and the United States from the American Revolution to Bleeding Kansas* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2019). 54-87.

According to historian John P. Bowes, this period of U.S. expansion and American Indian removal is one of the most studied eras of Native American history. In addition, Bowes claims the events that took place between 1815 and 1890 are some of the most well-known in "America's indigenous narrative." Therefore, Parker's omittance of these historical events becomes even more perplexing. It could be argued that this violent and disturbing era of Kansas history made Parker uncomfortable, or ashamed, and as a result she felt the exclusion of this history might help communicate an untarnished version of the Wakarusa River Valley's heritage. Not only does Parker exclude information about the removal of Native Americans from Eastern Kansas and the Wakarusa River Valley, but she fails to mention anything about the history of Indigenous peoples before American settlement. Bowes summarizes the process of Native removal by stating that, "driven by the desire to 'settle and improve' lands they viewed as untamed wilderness, both the U.S. state and its citizens often failed to acknowledge the full measure of the relationships and communities they swept aside in the process."[20] This pattern of complete disregard for existing communities, justified by reports of progress and improvement, was carried well into the twentieth century and written into environmental policies throughout the 1960s and 70s. This time, methods of settler colonialism were turned upon white, rural towns alongside Indigenous populations and communities of color to create a parallel narrative of history.

Before continuing farther, it must be acknowledged that these two historical events, the settlement of Kansas and the construction of Clinton Lake, are not equivalent on the level of sheer loss, degree of dislocation, violence, and trauma experienced by Indigenous nations, but they do exemplify how displacement often accompanies myths of progress. These myths require legislation to legitimize their authority and materialize their consequences onto the landscape. Without such legislation, narratives of improvement struggle to achieve their namesake. For the Indigenous Peoples of Kansas, waves of congressional laws, from the Indian Removal Act of 1830 to the Kansas-Nebraska Act of 1854, helped facilitate the legend of white settler progress through the erasure of Native peoples from shrinking reservations. The Indian Wars from 1860 to 1890 further entrenched objectives of settler colonialism onto the natural environment and into the lives of Indigenous peoples. For the rural communities of the Wakarusa River Valley, the

[20] Bowes, *The Oxford Handbook of American Indian History*, 94.

Flood Control Act, originally passed by Congress in 1917, directed the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers to begin evaluating issues of flood control along tributaries of the Mississippi River. This included the longest tributary of the Mississippi River, the Missouri River, which feeds the Kansas River. The Wakarusa River is a major tributary of the Kansas River. The Flood Control Act of 1962 authorized funding to dam the Wakarusa River and build Clinton Lake. Prior to the construction of Clinton Lake, the Wakarusa River was prone to frequent flooding. However, the Wakarusa communities were accustomed to annual floods, having dealt with the unpredictable and fearsome nature of the river for generations. Despite protests from many Wakarusa River Valley citizens, the Corps of Engineers began buying land as early as 1968 and construction of the dam started in 1972. Thus, the "invasion of the Corps of Engineers" was underway.[21]

Swift action on behalf of the Corps of Engineers prompted local residents of the Wakarusa region to form the Clinton Lake Landowner's Association, which advocated for the landownership rights of Wakarusa River Valley citizens. An auxiliary group, the Clinton Lake Historical Society, or CLHS, was formed with the goal of gathering and preserving the region's history, which many feared would be lost forever beneath the lake. According to Parker, "Some of the organization's members were concerned about the potential loss of their identity and the valley's history along with their land."[22] Therefore, it is clear that many of these community members held feelings of great anxiety about the proposed construction of Clinton Lake. This anxiety was not only rooted in an intense fear of the unknown, which often accompanies displacement, but the idea that the disappearance of regional history meant the erasure of one's identity. Martha Parker, a lifetime resident of Clinton and an active community member, assumed a leadership role in both the Clinton Lake Landowner's Association and the CLHS.

"They did nothing but lie to you. We used to have a saying, 'How can you tell a Corps man is lying? When his lips start moving.'"[23] In an authoritative and matter-of-fact tone, Parker described her experience with the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers. At 93 years old, Parker recalled her lifetime as a resident of the Wakarusa River Valley with a combination of

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[21] Parker, *Soil of Our Souls*, 19.
[22] Martha Parker, "Prospectus for the Clinton Lake Historical Society and the Construction of a New Home for the Clinton Lake Museum," Folder 2 Box 34, RH MS 1022, Carol Francis Papers, Kansas Collection, Kenneth Spencer Research Library, University of Kansas.
[23] Martha Parker, interview by author, Lawrence, Kansas, January 30, 2023.

excitement and pride. Sitting on a floral-print couch with a Diet Coke in hand, Parker vividly described the construction of Clinton Lake and the displacement of her fellow community members. Often known as "The Empress" by her friends and family, Parker remains a force to be reckoned with as she holds onto an unwavering passion for the Wakarusa River Valley communities. Much like the antique furniture that fills her small retirement apartment, Parker's fiery opinion about Clinton Lake and the destruction of her community has withstood the test of time. The first of many local farmers to sell their land to the Corps of Engineers in 1968, Parker's father, Leslie Demeritt, believed he could buy more acreage a few miles down the road. However, by 1973, the Corps of Engineers had bought enough surrounding land to begin the construction of Clinton Lake. "People just had no idea what was about to happen to them," Parker explained, "Tons of people were selling all their belongings, their land, everything. I kept telling folks, don't sell. Nobody listened."[24] Parker dedicated her life to the collection and preservation of the Wakarusa River Valley. Today, as a product of her admirable dedication, the Wakarusa Museum sits on the west side of Clinton Lake in Bloomington Park, named in honor of the ten historic communities that once united the region as "the soul of the Wakarusa soil."[25] However, Parker was not the only one to record the experience of those dislocated by Clinton Lake.

Upon completion of the dam in 1975, the Corps of Engineers continued to face resistance from local residents. In response, Carol Francis started a project titled *Plowshares to Waterskis: Clinton, Uprooted Kansas Community*, "which explores the simple lives of one community's members when confronted with an overwhelming government bureaucracy. The community: Clinton, Kansas. The bureaucracy: The U.S. Army Corps of Engineers."[26] Francis, a University of Kansas alumna and local business owner, worked closely with the Wakarusa communities in order to document the story of Clinton Lake from the perspective of displaced residents. Francis began this project in 1975 in collaboration with Martha Parker. However, this was not a localized endeavor funded by private citizens. According to Francis, "Before much of the Clinton area was drowned under 7,000 acres of water, the Kansas Committee for the Humanities funded a project

[24] Ibid.
[25] Parker, *Soil of Our Souls*, 19.
[26] Carol Francis, "All Things Considered on Clinton," Folder 2 Box 2, RH MS 1473, Carol Francis Papers, Kansas Collection, Kenneth Spencer Research Library, University of Kansas.

that taped 36 oral histories and captured 456 related photographs. Interviews not only uncovered little-community topics, but also revealed the lake's impact on individual lives."[27] This was a project deemed valuable and worthy of preservation by an organization dedicated to "the study and application of the humanities to the human environment…."[28] Francis was granted $10,000 in support of *Plowshares to Waterskis* by the Kansas Committee for the Humanities, now the Kansas Humanities Council.[29] Through this funding, the committee agreed that something of historical, humanitarian value was being sacrificed for and replaced by Clinton Lake.

Plowshares to Waterskis was originally intended to produce an informative documentary presentation for local audiences. According to the 1975 Kansas Committee for the Humanities press release, "The project will explore feelings about ancestral ownership of the land, disorientation caused by the forced removal from the land, and the difficulty of adjusting without the shelter and comfort of familiar neighborhoods and communities."[30] The language used to describe the displacement of rural residents mirrors that of Indigenous nations during the period of nineteenth-century removal.[31] The citizens of the Wakarusa communities, whose relatives dispossessed Native peoples of their ancestral lands a century prior, now found themselves on the wrong side of a utilitarian, progressive narrative. The press release continued with, "The Clinton experience emphasizes conflicting human values of rural community and lifelong intimacy with the land, versus taking the land for casual public use."[32] This statement indicates different levels of tolerability for different removal circumstances; taking the land from Indigenous peoples for white rural development and agriculture was justified in the 1850s, but seizing the land for flood control and recreation, or "casual public use," is deemed unacceptable in the 1970s. The Kansas Committee for the Humanities concluded by expressing hope for the project's capacity to unite regions "outside of Kansas where reservoir projects are planned."[33] Perhaps a common experience of displacement was predicted as a consequence of the Flood

[27] Ibid.
[28] Kansas Committee for the Humanities, "Press Release," Folder 11 Box 2, RH MS 1473, Carol Francis Papers, Kansas Collection, Kenneth Spencer Research Library, University of Kansas.
[29] Carol Francis, "Kansas Committee for the Humanities Grant Application," Folder 10 Box 2, RH MS 1473, Carol Francis Papers, Kansas Collection, Kenneth Spencer Research Library, University of Kansas.
[30] Kansas Committee for the Humanities, "Press Release," Folder 11 Box 2, RH MS 1473, Carol Francis Papers, Kansas Collection, Kenneth Spencer Research Library, University of Kansas.
[31] Ostler, Surviving Genocide, "Part Three: Removal," 247-359.
[32] Ibid.
[33] Ibid.

Control Act, and therefore, *Plowshares to Waterskis* could lay the foundation for a system of nationwide support. Did this unifying link extend to the Kaw Nation in Ponca City, Oklahoma, who were experiencing displacement for the third or fourth time as the construction of the Kaw Reservoir decreased the amount of federally promised Kaw reservation lands once again?[34] Reaching out to those with historical understanding and practical knowledge about displacement may have been useful for Wakarusa River Valley citizens. Despite fighting against forces of modernity, the Wakarusa communities unknowingly joined Indigenous peoples as victims of the powerful myth of progress.

As part of the *Plowshares to Waterskis* research process, Francis and Parker spent hundreds of hours conducting interviews with local residents, many of whom lived in the community of Clinton. During these interviews, the topic of land acquisition often generated lengthy, emotional conversations. All twelve interviews shared a common theme: the Corps of Engineers had cheated, lied to, and taken advantage of Wakarusa River Valley residents. According to Jarvis Brink, a resident and local realtor, "80% of the land that had been acquired by [the Corps of Engineers] had been bought for less than the appraised value."[35] The Corps of Engineers often refused to put land acquisition agreements in writing, causing immense frustration from residents who were promised one thing and then forced to sign an agreement declaring something entirely different. The Corps would frequently threaten legal action if the residents did not agree to sign. Arletta Flory firmly believed the Corps bought land from rural residents at rock bottom prices simply because "they know they can."[36] Flory's statement implies the isolation of the Wakarusa communities and the exploitative power of the Corps of Engineers. For residents like Charlie Montfort, the land was priceless. After farming the same acreage for generations, no monetary value could justify selling the Montfort family farm to the Corps of Engineers. Rumors about Clinton Lake had been circulating since the early 1950s, however,

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[34] In 1966, the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers began the construction of Kaw Reservoir, or Kaw Lake. The lake was built on former Kanza reservation land about eight miles east of Ponca City, Oklahoma. Construction of the lake and recreational areas was completed in 1980. Once again, Indigenous peoples were pushed off their land. The Kanza Nation had to relocate the tribal Council House as well as the tribal cemetery. For more information, visit the Kaw Nation's official website, https://kawnation.com/, as well as the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers web page about Kaw Lake, https://corpslakes.erdc.dren.mil/visitors/projects.cfm?ID=M508790

[35] Carol Francis, "Land Acquisition Excerpts from Tapes," Folder 45 Box 2, RH MS 1473, Carol Francis Papers, Kansas Collection, Kenneth Spencer Research Library, University of Kansas.

[36] Ibid.

prior to the wave of land acquisition, Parker described a sense of permanence that accompanied living in the Wakarusa River Valley. When rumor became reality in the late 1960s, several residents found themselves investigating the purpose behind their displacement. According to a 1971 pamphlet written by the Corps of Engineers entitled *How the Government Will Acquire Land for Clinton Lake*, "The Congress of the United States, in the development and promotion of our Country's resources, directs the construction, alteration, or improvement of our rivers, lakes, channels and harbors for flood control, navigation, conservation, power, and other related purposes."[37] However, despite claims of improvement, many rural community members questioned whether Clinton Lake was truly about flood control, and many wondered if those outside the Wakarusa River Valley would fully understand or appreciate the sacrifice made by people like Arletta Flory and Charlie Montfort. Parker believed the Wakarusa residents' displacement would be ignored in favor of the lake's recreational possibilities. Overall, the Wakarusa communities felt unseen, unheard, and unappreciated as the Corps of Engineers continued to justify the construction of Clinton Lake with narratives of flood control. Despite immense protest, community organization, and several court cases against the Corps of Engineers, citizens of the Wakarusa River Valley felt alone and powerless against the agenda of environmental progress.

The recurring debate over proper land usage had once again emerged.[38] Rather than utilize the region for agricultural production and farmland, the Corps of Engineers believed the Wakarusa River Valley could be employed more efficiently as a means of flood control while also providing a source of recreation for surrounding urban cities. As explained in the "Why is Your Land Needed?" section of the informational pamphlet, the location of Clinton Lake was determined "to be the most economical and practical to provide the maximum public benefits."[39] Therefore, at the expense of small, rural townships, the area would be converted into a more optimal format. Michael H. Shaw, an assistant professor in the Classics department, and Roy E. Gridley, a professor in the English department, at the University of Kansas worked with Francis

[37] Carol Francis, "Clinton Pamphlets," Folder 90 Box 1, RH MS 1473, Carol Francis Papers, Kansas Collection, Kenneth Spencer Research Library, University of Kansas.
[38] For further research about the commodification and rationalization of land, see: Ted Steinberg, *Down to Earth: Nature's Role in American History*, 4th edition (New York: Oxford University Press, 2018).
[39] Carol Francis, "Clinton Pamphlets," Folder 90 Box 1, RH MS 1473, Carol Francis Papers, Kansas Collection, Kenneth Spencer Research Library, University of Kansas.

on *Plowshares to Waterskis* as humanitarian consultants. Each critically examined the Corps of Engineers and the justifications behind the construction of Clinton Lake. Professor Shaw argued that perhaps Clinton Lake was a historical inevitability, a mere continuation of Manifest Destiny and the idea of Westward expansion as inherently tied to American progress.[40] Afterall, western settlement includes the commodification, and subsequent control, of rivers and therefore “The fate of Clinton was sealed, in a sense, when the first settlers came there.”[41] Local residents were often baffled by the seemingly arbitrary nature of land acquisition, and Arletta Flory expressed her deep frustration and outrage that the Corps of Engineers “sat up there in an office and drew a line!”[42] The same process that displaced Native Americans 100 years prior was still functioning in the same manner, justified by the same ideology.

According to Shaw, “…Clinton people lived settled, busy, pleasant lives…until their lives clashed with the pre-destined, pre-packaged plans by the Corps…The Corps’ steadily progressing conquest of nature contrasted to the small community value of living with nature…Clinton [Lake] plans were drawn to accommodate ‘new’ forms of recreation...”[43] In these statements, Shaw confronts the idea of progress directly. The Corps of Engineers, in their mission to dominate the Wakarusa River and transform the surrounding environment into tame recreational parks and hiking trails, determined the dislocation of rural communities was a necessary sacrifice. Through his analysis, Shaw appears to place the Ecological Indian trope onto white communities. The term Ecological Indian was defined by environmental historian Shepard Krech III in his 1999 work *The Ecological Indian*: *Myth and History*. Krech claims the Ecological Indian, or Noble Savage, was a category crafted by Euro-Americans to understand and define Indigenous peoples. According to Krech, the Ecological Indian lives in harmony with

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[40] Popularized in the 19th century, Manifest Destiny refers to the belief that United States expansion throughout the American continent was justified and inevitable. For further research, see: Andrew C. Isenberg and Thomas Richards, “Alternative Wests: Rethinking Manifest Destiny,” *Pacific Historical Review* 86, no. 1 (2017): 4–17.; David Stephen Heidler, *Manifest Destiny*, Greenwood Guides to Historic Events, 1500-1900 (Westport, Conn.: Greenwood Press, 2003).

[41] Carol Francis, “Project Director Evaluation Project,” paper entitled *Plowshares to Waterskis* by Professor Michael H. Shaw, Folder 15 Box 2, RH MS 1473, Carol Francis Papers, Kansas Collection, Kenneth Spencer Research Library, University of Kansas.

[42] Carol Francis, “Land Acquisition Excerpts from Tapes,” Folder 45 Box 2, RH MS 1473, Carol Francis Papers, Kansas Collection, Kenneth Spencer Research Library, University of Kansas.

[43] Carol Francis, “Project Director Evaluation,” Folder 15 Box 2, RH MS 1473, Carol Francis Papers, Kansas Collection, Kenneth Spencer Research Library, University of Kansas.

nature as both an ecologist and conservationist.[44] Based on both the Corps of Engineers actions and Shaw's humanitarian assessment, the township of Clinton and the rest of the Wakarusa River Valley communities were simply living in harmony with nature, as opposed to using the land for a better, more profitable purpose. This echoes the values of settler colonialism in regard to land usage. Historically, improper handling of the land, combined with a lack of European-style agriculture, provided ample justification for white settlers to remove Indigenous peoples from the landscape. Paradoxically, the use of rural land for agriculture in the 1970s was also considered mismanagement due to the region's close proximity to the urban sprawl of both Lawrence and Topeka. While these experiences of removal differ greatly, they exemplify displacement as a pillar of the settler colonial structure that can often be disguised under myths of progress, which further confirms the idea that in order to establish a successful settler colonial empire, a complete transformation of the landscape is required.

The finished project of *Plowshares to Waterskis* generated a "…500-page, illustrated manuscript connecting the present to the past…"[41] Unfortunately, despite the effort of Francis, *Plowshares to Waterskis* was never published. Francis received rejection letters from the University Press of Kansas and the Oklahoma University Press. According to these rejection letters, *Plowshares to Waterskis* was "too local," and the predicted market did not justify the cost of publication.[45] Overall, the message was clear: the nation did not care about Clinton Lake nor the citizens of the Wakarusa River Valley. On June 25th, 1998, Carol Francis submitted a proposal to the National Public Radio program "All Things Considered" to discuss *Plowshares to Waterskis*. Almost 20 years after Clinton Lake was completed, Francis and her fellow colleagues were still working toward memorializing the rural communities submerged under the lake and recording the impact the massive environmental project had on the remaining townships.

The displacement that accompanied the construction of Clinton Lake was justified through narratives of economic, recreational, and environmental progress. On June 28th, 1980,

[44] Shepard Krech III, *The Ecological Indian: Myth and History* (New York, NY: W. W. Norton & Company, 1999). 15-28.
[45] Carol Francis, "University of Oklahoma Press Book Proposal," Folder 17 Box 2, RH MS 1473, Carol Francis Papers, Kansas Collection, Kenneth Spencer Research Library, University of Kansas; Carol Francis, "The University Press of Kansas," Folder 48 Box 2, RH MS 1473, Carol Francis Papers, Kansas Collection, Kenneth Spencer Research Library, University of Kansas.

the *Lawrence Journal-World* published a supplement entitled *Clinton, A lake at Lawrence's doorstep*. From the title alone, it becomes clear this project had not considered the ten rural communities that had inhabited the Wakarusa River Valley since the 1850s. The impact of Clinton Lake, both positive and negative, would be evaluated in terms of the city of Lawrence. Within the supplement, the section "Value of Clinton measured in dollars and livability" reported potential economic benefits for Lawrence with anticipation and hope. According to Glenn West, the executive president of the Lawrence Chamber of Commerce, "The lake will have much the same effect as any new industry. Clinton Lake will draw more people into Douglas County, bringing with them money that will be spent [in Lawrence]. That money will then circulate throughout the local economy…"[46] Therefore, the profits generated by Clinton Lake, and new development projects prompted by increased tourism to the region, would boost the economy of Lawrence rather than benefit the communities whose land and livelihood was taken in the name of improvement. The supplement continues with a section entitled "Schools find Clinton a natural classroom," which boasts that, "…for students in Lawrence School District 497 and at Haskell Indian Junior College, [Clinton Lake] is a giant outdoor classroom…More than 300 acres of land at Clinton have been set aside for educational preserves."[47] In addition to recreation, education, and economic profit, Clinton Lake was built as a water supply for nearly 100,000 residents across Lawrence, Baldwin City, and other small, neighboring towns. Ironically, the only benefit the Wakarusa communities received from the construction of Clinton Lake was their ability to purchase water from rural water districts using the lake as a supply source. Finally, the *Lawrence Journal-World* included a section about regional history. Within this article, nearly all of the Wakarusa communities are mentioned. A special focus is given to the community of Bloomington and the site of the J.C. Steele house. However, there is no acknowledgement of the Native American history drowned beneath the lake. Therefore, Parker was not the only one to exclude Indigenous perspectives when discussing the history of the Wakarusa region. Once again, we are all products of the settler colonial system. As a pillar of settler colonialism, public education impacts everyone. Whether it be an individual like Parker or

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[46] Jeff Colins, "Clinton Lake- *Lawrence Journal-World* supplement June 28, 1980," Folder 3 Box 2, RH MS 1473, Carol Francis Papers, Kansas Collection, Kenneth Spencer Research Library, University of Kansas.
[47] Ibid.

an entire newspaper company, the education we receive promotes the erasure of Indigenous peoples through omittance of Native American history.

The Pillar of Public Education

Although there are several reasons behind the exclusion of Native American history within the Wakarusa Museum, there is no doubt that public education, alongside forced displacement and Parker's own sense of loss, also played a major role in Parker's decision-making process. According to the National Center for Education Statistics, there are over 98,000 public schools in the United States. Within these schools, public education teaches students distorted, inaccurate, and racialized versions of history that reinforce racial hierarchies and justify white superiority. This includes the misrepresentation, and often exclusion, of Native American history. These themes of deception are often propagated in rural schools, where limited funding promotes the recycling of antiquated textbooks. This is best exemplified through the 1899 publication of *History of Kansas* by Noble Prentis, an author, journalist, and newspaper editor.[48] This textbook was used within Wakarusa River Valley schools and remains a part of the Wakarusa Museum's collection today. Within this textbook is a chapter entitled "The Indian Territory," which details the history of Native American Tribes in Kansas. The introduction to this chapter states, "The story of their wars, and huntings, and migrations, has little interest to civilized people. When they moved away from Kansas and from the earth, they left nothing except mounds of earth, rings on the sod, fragments of pottery, rude weapons and ruder implements."[49] Students were taught that Native life and culture was void of any value, and the subject was not worth further study. In addition, the textbook implies that Native Americans only leave behind items of utility. If Parker was taught that only tools, pottery shards, and weapons were available as preservable items of Native history, then perhaps this textbook provides a better explanation of the Wakarusa Museum's lack of representation for Indigenous peoples. The textbook goes on to describe the life of a Native American in one sentence. "They fought each other, disputed possession with wild beasts, were stricken down with fell diseases, but their history never became of interest or importance to the world, because they did nothing for the

[48] Prentis currently sits in the Kansas Newspaper Hall of Fame for "outstanding contributions to [his] profession."
[49] Noble, Prentis. *A History of Kansas*. (Topeka, Kansas: Caroline Prentis, 1899.) 31.

world."[50] Overall, Native Americans were portrayed as violent, incompetent, and weak. According to the textbook, they spent their lives constantly fighting among each other, they were on the same level as wild animals, and they were not strong enough to combat diseases. Much like the American bison, Indigenous peoples were just another obstacle to progress. In this analysis, the textbook implies that Native peoples are without a history. It was always the same story of war, territory conflict, and death by disease. Therefore, Native peoples were incapable of contributing any prospect of value or meaning to the modern world. This version of history, communicated through public education, transmits ideas of colonialism through omittance and erasure of the colonized.

Another resource for public education was the 1937 publication of *Four Centuries in Kansas* by Bliss Isely, a publicist and historian who wrote several Kansas history textbooks, and W.M. Richards, a Kansas school teacher and administrator. This textbook belonged to Parker's father, Leslie Demeritt, who passed the book down to his children. Both authors "spent their lives with men and women who knew the color and truth of Kansas history…"[51] According to the introduction, the textbook prioritizes primary sources from "those who actually took part in the making of Kansas history."[52] Unit One, which covers Native American history, claims to rely on personal interviews with Native individuals. However, throughout the unit, quotes from Native peoples are rare. From what I have gathered, within Unit One, which consists of five chapters entitled "Early Kansas People," "The Emigrant Indians," "The Indian and the White Men," "Removing the Indians," and "Indians in Kansas Today," only 4 out of 63 references cite a Native individual as the source. For a textbook that claims to be based on "personal interviews with Indians" in addition to other "eye-witnesses," the scarcity of Native American sources contradicts the authors' assertion. Furthermore, the lack of Indigenous voice throughout the book creates an imbalance of perspectives. The textbook is written and sourced from a white man's viewpoint. In an attempt to certify the textbook with Native American approval, the manuscript was sent to the Wichita Indian Nation Association in Anadarko, Oklahoma. The Wichita Indian

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[50] Ibid.
[51] Bliss Isley and W.M. Richards. *Four Centuries in Kansas*. (Topeka, Kansas: The State of Kansas, 1937). Introduction
[52] Ibid.

Nation Association, a federally recognized collection of tribes,[53] then appointed a research committee of "educated Indians," to examine the textbook.

While efforts to record accurate Native history in the publication of this textbook are well-intended, readers must be skeptical of what an "educated Indian" truly meant to white scholars at the time. Boarding school education for Native Americans was an elimination method used by the federal government in order to promote settler colonial goals and sustain the settler colonial empire. According to historian David Wallace Adams, boarding school education was a bureaucratic system created to "…completely restructure Indigenous minds and identities."[54] Boarding schools exemplify another form of settler colonial education on a much more traumatic level.[55] However, contrary to assimilationist objectives, Indigenous children actively resisted the "curriculum of civilization" and formed an Intertribal identity that unified Indigenous nations and celebrated Native culture.[56]

As mentioned, Native Americans were not the only ones affected by systems of colonialism. As a colonial nation, America used public education as a means for maintaining empire and controlling the American populace. Classrooms transformed into ideological factories that produced useful citizens. However, the type of education received and the role each student was taught to play within the colonial system varied between white, Indigenous, and African American students.[57] As a means of saturating children and young adults with settler colonial values and goals, public education utilizes omittance, erasure, misrepresentation, and falsehood to fuel and maintain cycles of colonialism. Beginning in the 1960s, shortly before the Red Power movement was founded in 1968, there was an outcry for revision of the public

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[53] This association is currently known as the Wichita and Affiliated Tribes. For more information, visit the Wichita and Affiliated Tribes official website, https://wichitatribe.com/

[54] David Wallace Adams, *Education for Extinction: American Indians and the Boarding School Experience, 1875-1928*. (Second edition, Revised and Expanded. Lawrence, Kansas: University Press of Kansas, 2020.) 102-105

[55] For further research about the boarding school experience from a Native perspective, see: Brenda J. Child, *Boarding School Seasons: American Indian Families, 1900-1940* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1998). Historian Brenda J. Child, a member of the Red Lake Ojibwe Nation and a descendent of boarding school students, studies the experiences of Native boarding school students using letters written from Native students, parents, and school administrators.

[56] Ibid. 365-367.

[57] For more information about the type of education Native American and African American students received, see: Kim Cary Warren, *The Quest for Citizenship: African American and Native American Education in Kansas, 1880-1935* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2010). In this work, historian Kim Cary Warren argues that Indigenous and African American students "resisted and negotiated prescriptions for citizenship" placed upon them by white educators.

education system, with a particular focus on how Native American history and culture was being taught in classrooms. In 1970, Jeanette Henry published *Textbooks and the American Indian* through the Indian Historian Press. In this work, Henry and her fellow colleagues, a combination of thirty-two Native scholars, historians, and students, critique and analyze over 300 textbooks from the 1950s and 60s. Overall, Henry concludes that "Not one [textbook] could be approved as a dependable source of knowledge about the history and the culture of the Indian people in America."[58] Through misrepresentation, distortion, and omission, each textbook failed to communicate truthful and accurate history to elementary and high school students.[59]

While these textbooks provide examples of how Native American history was taught in public schools at the time, it is impossible to know exactly how much educational information was absorbed by students like Parker. However, within the *Plowshares to Waterskis* manuscript is a chapter entitled "Indians." Based upon the interviews conducted for the chapter, the true limitations of public education are revealed by the Wakarusa citizen's descriptions of Native Americans. For example, Ethyl Talley, a local resident, described Native Americans as such, "They had their gardens, and of course I know they had horses and they already had dogs, you know…that they used to have a feast when [the dogs] had puppies. They had to kill pups and have a feast."[60] Another resident reinforced this story by claiming local Native Americans "were just roamers…they had these dogs, and they would fatten them and eat 'em."[61] A common theme between all the interviews was the idea that Native Americans wandered aimlessly about the region with no permanent settlements. According to Llyod Talley, Ethyl's husband, "They just lived off the terrain they was goin' through…Sometimes they'd stay a week in a place then go. They was moved to Oklahoma in [1889] and they come and go."[62] Many of the interviewees describe trying to find Indigenous artifacts like arrowheads and beads to display like treasures in a collection. Several residents claim that items belonging to Native Americans, in addition to objects from wagon trains, can be found along the portion of the Santa Fe Trail that runs through the Wakarusa River Valley because "early pioneers made trips across, goin' west, and the

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[58] Jeannette Henry. *Textbooks and the American Indian.* (San Francisco: Indian Historian Press, 1970). 11.
[59] Ibid. 11-12.
[60] Carol Francis, "Plowshares to Waterskis Manuscript," Folder 7 Box 1, RH MS 1473, Carol Francis Papers, Kansas Collection, Kenneth Spencer Research Library, University of Kansas. 1-4.
[61] Ibid.
[62] Ibid.

Indians would come up and shoot ‘em up and kill ‘em off…”[63] Overall, Ethyl Talley sums up her opinion of Native Americans like so, “…you had to be good to ‘em. Those Indians were, well, Indians.”[64] Together, these interviews reveal not only the failure of public education to inform local residents about the true history of Indigenous peoples, but also the general lack of interest to learn more about Native Americans beyond classroom lectures or tall tales.

As products of a settler colonial education, further research beyond the classroom into topics deemed unworthy of attention, such as Native American studies, African American studies, etc., would be the exception rather than the rule. Nonetheless, it is important to examine the variety of public resources available on the subject of Native American studies outside of classroom textbooks. In short, after graduation from Lawrence High School and the completion of a teaching certificate from Kansas State University, what types of resources were available to Parker and her fellow researchers? Overall, there was an abundance of historians writing about Indigenous history and Native experiences during the 1960s and 70s. First, historian William E. Unrau’s 1971 publication of *The Kansa Indians: A History of the Wind People, 1673-1873* would have been an adequate start for research. According to the introduction, written by R. David Edmunds, the book is a “solid contribution in its field.” Edmunds claims the book “transcends professional historians to include anyone interested in the American West.”[65] Therefore, an easily accessible public resource like this book would have been a reliable option for Parker to use as a reference. Second, the 1978 publication of *The End of Indian Kansas: A Study of Cultural Revolution, 1854-1871* by Craig H. Miner would have provided an in-depth study of Native American nations in Eastern Kansas. Miner’s work includes the history of Native Americans living in or around the Wakarusa River Valley, such as the Shawnee and Delaware Tribes, during the period of Indigenous removal and white settlement.[66] Finally, a dissertation published in 1976 by Ona Mzhickteno-Keltcher entitled “The American Indian Dimension in Multi-Cultural Education,” stressed the importance of Native American studies in education

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[63] Ibid.
[64] Ibid.
[65] William E. Unrau, *The Kansa Indians: A History of the Wind People, 1673-1873*, 1st ed., Civilization of the American Indian Series; v. 114 (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1971).
[66] H. Craig Miner, *The End of Indian Kansas: A Study of Cultural Revolution, 1854-1871* (Lawrence: Regents Press of Kansas, 1978).

curriculums.[67] Regarding Parker's intention for the Wakarusa Museum to serve as an educational resource, this dissertation would have been an excellent reference and guide. These selected works provide only a handful of the multitude of resources available to Parker and her fellow colleagues throughout the course of their research for the Wakarusa Museum.

So, why were these sources neglected? The answer has two parts based on each pillar of settler colonialism. First, when faced with displacement and loss that accompanied the construction of Clinton Lake, Parker focused on the preservation of the Wakarusa communities' heritage rather than truthful history. Second, during this time of crisis, Parker relied on her public education as a basis for knowledge. As a product of the public education system, the history Parker learned was contaminated with the values and objectives of the settler colonial nation-state. Therefore, mirroring her education, Parker introduced patterns of omittance and erasure into the Wakarusa Museum. This methodology remained unchallenged by fellow Wakarusa River Valley residents, the Corps of Engineers, local newspapers, and organizations that supplied funding to the museum, all of whom were products of the settler colonial system themselves.

Decolonizing the Wakarusa Museum

Meaningful change within museum spaces goes far beyond simply the type of information presented, but rather, *how* these stories are told and *who* gets to tell them. This requires a complete restructuring of power. Facilitating such systematic change necessitates a thorough understanding of how the Wakarusa Museum functions as a public, educational institution. Desi Dwi Prianti and Wayan Suyadnya, both scholars in the field of cultural and frontier studies, argue that museums are vehicles for building national identity.[68] Currently, in an effort to establish a secure sense of identity, the Wakarusa Museum operates as a site of heritage tourism and contributes to the frontier complex. As previously mentioned, historian David Lowenthal coined the term heritage tourism in order to describe museums and memorial sites that communicate heritage rather than history to visiting audiences. This is problematic for multiple reasons. As Lowenthal describes, "Heritage exaggerates and omits, candidly invents and frankly

[67] Ona Mzhickteno-Keltcher, "The American Indian Dimension in Multi-Cultural Education.," Master of Science in Education Degree. (Department of Education, University of Kansas, 1976.)
[68] Desi Dwi Prianti and I. Wayan Suyadnya, "Decolonising Museum Practice in a Postcolonial Nation: Museum's Visual Order as the Work of Representation in Constructing Colonial Memory," *Open Cultural Studies* 6, no. 1 (2022): 228–42.

forgets, and thrives on ignorance and error."[69] Unlike history, heritage flourishes on bias.[70] As a result, heritage has the power to transform history by excluding what is "shameful or harmful."[71] In hiding the unsavory events of history, "heritage is enhanced by erasure."[72] Furthermore, the pillars of settler colonialism facilitate the preservation of heritage. As a proprietor of heritage tourism, the Wakarusa Museum adheres to these patterns. As a product of the settler colonial system, Parker and her colleagues omitted the uncomfortable and difficult history of the Wakarusa River Valley, which further erased Indigenous peoples from the region. In doing so, Parker's educational background was bolstered while the consequences of displacement were soothed.

Alongside heritage tourism, the Wakarusa Museum also actively participates in the frontier complex as defined in historian Daniel Maher's book, *Mythic Frontiers: Remembering, Forgetting, and Profiting With Cultural Heritage Tourism*. The American frontier, an imaginary border between Euro-American civilization and unknown wilderness, rested for a considerable time in Kansas.[73] The Wakarusa Museum documents this time period with courageous stories of anti-slavery settlers of the Wakarusa River Valley fighting to defend their newly acquired land from the pro-slavery ruffians of Missouri. While this history is true, it completely ignores the consequences that colonialism, racism, manifest destiny, and the mythic frontier complex inflicted on Native Americans.[74] Much like heritage tourism, the frontier complex is more fiction than fact, and often relies upon the collective imagination of the white majority. Drawing upon the frontier complex allowed the Wakarusa Museum to reenact an imaginary moment in time when white settlers enjoyed supremacy on the landscape. By "minimizing the devastating consequences that imperialism, racism, and sexism have had on social minorities," the frontier complex allows museums, memorial sites, and historical markers to "legitimize the privilege bestowed to white men past and present."[75] Therefore, the omittance of Indigenous history in the Wakarusa Museum not only speaks to Parker's settler colonial education and experience with

[69] Lowenthal, *Possessed by the Past*, 121.
[70] Ibid., 122.
[71] Ibid., 148
[72] Ibid., 156.
[73] Daniel R. Maher, *Mythic Frontiers: Remembering, Forgetting, and Profiting with Cultural Heritage Tourism*. Florida: University Press of Florida, 2016.)
[74] Ibid., 243.
[75] Ibid., 1-5.

forced displacement, but also reveals the material manifestation of the frontier complex, which encourages visitors to "live out fantasies and expectations associated with that site."[76] The Wakarusa Museum allows guests to experience the Wakarusa River Valley before the construction of Clinton Lake through the lens of noble abolitionists and rural farmers. Such an idealized perspective requires the omittance of Indigenous history in favor of the imaginary frontier complex, which can only be recalled by memory.

Historian Ari Kelman studies the "collision of history and memory" in his 2013 publication of *A Misplaced Massacre*. Using the 2007 establishment of the Sand Creek Massacre National Historic Site as a case study, Kelman analyzes how historical events are remembered by different groups of people in different ways. This phenomenon often leads to contested forms of memorialization. In addition, Kelman argues that federally funded historic sites use the process of memorialization as a means to achieve future unity from a divisive past. As a result, we must ask ourselves: whose interest do historical sites serve if they are sponsored by federal or state institutions? According to Bryony Onciul, a public historian, "Museums and heritage sites are places that are imbued with power and authority by the societies that build and authorize them."[77] Therefore, as both Onicul and Kelman demonstrate, much can be learned about a site of memorialization by studying its founders and funding sources. This paper has focused primarily on the museum founder; however, federal and state funding reveals a new layer of both support and compliance with the Wakarusa Museum's skewed historical narrative.

In the early years of operation, the museum relied heavily on annual funding from the Douglas County Commissioner's Office, as well as local donations, ticket sales for events, and other fundraising activities by Clinton Lake Historical Society members.[78] For example, the Clinton Lake Quilting Club was organized in 1979 to help raise money for the CLHS. The club's membership consisted of local women from the Wakarusa region who either experienced displacement firsthand or knew someone who had.[79] Using Kelman's argument, the Wakarusa

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[76] Ibid., 19.
[77] Bryony Onciul, *Museums, Heritage and Indigenous Voice: Decolonising Engagement*, Routledge Research in Museum Studies 10 (New York: Routledge, 2015).
[78] The Clinton Lake Historical Society, "Request for Funding from Douglas County Historical and Cultural Fund 1979," Museum Records, The Wakarusa River Valley Heritage Museum; Dale A. Johnson, "Douglas County Commissioners Proposed Budget 1983," Museum Records, The Wakarusa River Valley Heritage Museum.
[79] "Quilt Exhibit," Exhibit Files, The Wakarusa River Valley Heritage Museum.

Museum received power and authority from local Wakarusa River Valley residents who, much like Parker, were products of a settler colonial system that ignored Indigenous history. Today, the Wakarusa Museum continues to receive financial support from the Douglas County Commissioner's Office, which allocates funding for "heritage preservation" through the Douglas County Heritage Conservation Council, or HCC, and the Natural and Cultural Heritage Grant program each year. According to the Douglas County website, "the HCC encourages applications that focus on the conservation of cultural, natural, agricultural or environmental resources or projects that produce educational programs or products on these topics."[80] In addition, the museum has also received several grants from the Kansas Humanities Council, the Kansas Arts Commission, and the National Endowment for the Humanities.[81] Financial support from these programs reveals the belief that the Wakarusa Museum complies with the foundational ideals of these organizations. However, because the museum has yet to establish an exhibit which properly displays Native American history, I believe the Wakarusa Museum has yet to observe these values.

Ho-Chunk Nation historian Amy Lonetree has dedicated her career to studying the relationship between Indigenous communities and museums. In 2012, Lonetree published *Decolonizing Museums: Representing Native America in National and Tribal Museums*. In this book, Lonetree reveals how representations of Native American history and culture in museums has changed over time and how Indigenous activism and new museum theory has influenced this process. Lonetree's book highlights three specific museums, two of which are tribal museums and one of which is a national museum. Through each case study, Lonetree describes the process of museum decolonization. According to Lonetree, the decolonization process must begin with "hard truth telling," collaboration with Indigenous peoples, and prioritization of Native voices. Incorporating these methods when curating exhibits or engaging the community allows museums to transition from "sites of colonial harm into sites of healing."[82] In order for the Wakarusa Museum to serve all communities and effectively transform into a place of significance to Indigenous peoples, it must go through the process of decolonization.[83] In 1985, the Wakarusa

[80] https://www.douglascountyks.org Accessed March 28, 2023.
[81] "Grants," Museum Records, The Wakarusa River Valley Heritage Museum.
[82] Lonetree, *Decolonizing Museums,* 166.
[83] Ibid.

Museum displayed an exhibit entitled "Indian Period." This collection of Native tools and other objects, found during a 1974 archeological dig of the Wakarusa River Valley, has been one of only a few exhibits in the Wakarusa Museum's long history that mentions the presence of Native Americans. According to Lonetree, Indigenous objects were often described and categorized exclusively through a Western anthropological lens. [84] The "Indian Period" exhibit at the Wakarusa Museum used this methodology, and, as a result, not only did the early exhibit fail to offer a fair representation of Native history, but it further contributed to the colonial nature of the museum. Furthermore, the exhibit was donated to the Wakarusa Museum by the University of Kansas anthropology department and therefore was not a product of the museum itself. Although the previous existence of an exhibition that displayed Native artifacts might seem sufficient, upon further study, we must ask ourselves what good is an exhibit curated without the consultation of Native scholars nor permission from the Native community itself to use artifacts belonging to the original tribes of the Wakarusa Valley. Once again, we arrive at the question of power within museum spaces.

Historically, museums served as trophy cases to the "achievements of empire."[85] As a result, curatorial power within the museum typically resides with those who participate in the settler colonial system. In order to break down this hierarchy of power, museums must be willing to shift away from exclusionary practices and transition toward a "relationship of shared authority."[86] Historian Bryony Onciul claims that museums "must allow communities to speak for themselves," and stresses the importance of recognizing museums as "political and social constructions of the world based on particular viewpoints" rather than "neutral objective venues."[87] Furthermore, Vanessa Whittington, a scholar in the field of museum studies, argues that efforts of inclusion must avoid assimilationist tendencies in order to be successful.[88]

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[84] Ibid., 31.
[85] Vanessa Whittington, "Decolonising the Museum? Dilemmas, Possibilities, Alternatives," *Culture Unbound* 13, no. 2 (2022): 245–69.
[86] Lonetree, *Decolonizing Museums,* 19.
[87] Onciul, *Museums, Heritage and Indigenous Voice,* 6-7. For further research about the politics of museums and the argument of museum neutrality, see: Hannah Turner, *Cataloguing Culture: Legacies of Colonialism in Museum Documentation* (Vancouver, BC ; Toronto: UBC Press, 2020); Vivien Golding and Wayne Modest, *Museums and Communities: Curators, Collections and Collaboration* (London: Bloomsbury, 2013); Christina F. Kreps, *Liberating Culture: Cross-Cultural Perspectives on Museums, Curation, and Heritage Preservation*, Museum Meanings (London; New York: Routledge, 2003).; and Prianti and Suyadnya, "Decolonising Museum Practice in a Postcolonial Nation," 228–42.
[88] Whittington, "Decolonising the Museum?" 245-69.

Conversations surrounding the process of decolonization often prioritize ideas about engagement with marginalized communities. While engagement is important, Onciul argues that it is not a complete solution but rather "the start of a new form of relationship between museums and communities…"[89] Onciul's 2015 publication of *Museums, Heritage and Indigenous Voice: Decolonising Engagement* studies the relationship between museums and communities in order to critically analyze the theory of engagement. In particular, Onciul stresses the importance of finding a balance between Lonetree's idea of "hard truth-telling" and maintaining sensitivity toward Indigenous culture, generational trauma, and audience receptibility.[90] Additionally, Whittington advocates for an engagement approach that prioritizes Black and Indigenous peoples as professionals, community advisors, and audience members.[91] In order to effectively decolonize the Wakarusa Museum, efforts must follow both Whittington and Onicul's principles of engagement in order to limit the amount of negative consequences and produce the best possible outcome for all communities. However, as Whittington makes clear in the conclusion of her article, decolonization is not a one-size-fits-all process, and each museum, large or small, must share equal responsibility in the decolonization movement.[92]

In conclusion, the Wakarusa Museum is an institution which exemplifies the cycle of American settler colonialism. As a structure embedded within society, settler colonialism relies on support from two foundational pillars. Together, these pillars of settler colonialism act to promote the objectives of empire and sponsor the creation of colonial institutions. In order to understand how and why the Wakarusa Museum operated nearly forty years without the inclusion of Native American history, I conducted a study of the museum's founder, Martha Parker, and the settler colonial forces that influenced her decision-making process. Throughout this research, I focused on the two pillars that applied directly to Parker and the Wakarusa Museum, forced displacement and public education. When confronted with the construction of Clinton Lake, the first pillar of settler colonialism, forced displacement, created feelings of extreme loss for Wakarusa River Valley citizens, including Parker. Many residents feared that displacement from their land meant the loss of both their history and identity. The establishment

[89] Onciul, *Museums, Heritage and Indigenous Voice*, 1.
[90] Ibid., 196.
[91] Whittington, "Decolonising the Museum? Dilemmas, Possibilities, Alternatives," 252.
[92] Ibid., 269

of the Wakarusa Museum helped combat these feelings, however, in the process, Parker excluded Native American perspectives in favor of an idealized version of regional history. Additionally, in the face of such displacement, Parker relied on her settler colonial education to preserve the heritage of the Wakarusa River Valley communities. As the second pillar of settler colonialism, public education is used as a means for controlling the American population through the distortion of history and elimination of Indigenous peoples. Mirroring her education, Parker introduced these patterns of omittance and erasure into the Wakarusa Museum, creating a settler colonial institution. Furthermore, these ongoing settler colonial forces created parallel narratives of history that Parker and her fellow colleagues failed to recognize. Much like dislocation of rural communities during the construction of Clinton Lake in the 1970s, the removal of Indigenous peoples from the Wakarusa River Valley in the 1850s produced similar feelings of crisis, trauma, and loss for Native Americans. Throughout America's history as a settler colonial empire, displacement of Indigenous peoples, communities of color, and rural populations often accompanied myths of improvement. While these groups experienced very different degrees of displacement almost a century apart from each other, the means of justification carry comparable themes of modern progress. The exclusion of Native American history and Indigenous voices in a public resource, like the Wakarusa Museum, reinforces American objectives of empire, and as a result, the cycle of settler colonialism remains unchallenged. As a colonized populace, the issues discussed throughout this research should concern every American. Breaking down the settler colonial structure and decolonizing museum spaces must become a priority for not only Native Americans and people of color, but everyone living under the American empire.

Epilogue

The Wakarusa Museum is not doomed to remain an institution of colonization. In following the decolonization process, as outlined by scholars like Amy Lonetree, Vanessa Whittington, and Bryony Onciul, the Wakarusa Museum is working toward sharing authority with Indigenous populations in order to display truthful historical information. A new exhibit about Native American history is scheduled for installation at the end of May 2023. The information presented in the exhibit was primarily sourced from the Kaw and Shawnee Nations. The museum has also been in collaboration with Sydney Pursell, an enrolled member of the Ioway Nation and the curator of public practice at the Spencer Museum of Art, who has helped

guide the curation process and connect museum employees to both professors and students at Haskell Indian Nations University. In addition to historical information about the Indigenous peoples of the Wakarusa River Valley, the new exhibit aims to communicate the important presence of these tribal nations today. The exhibit will also showcase the parallel narratives of history between Indigenous peoples and the rural communities of the Wakarusa River Valley, as well as reveal the common thread of environmental activism shared between both groups using artwork created by Haskell students.

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