

On Being an Active Historian and the Usefulness of History: The Case of the Ongoing Struggle for *dzil nchaa si'an* (Mount Graham)

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Mount Graham, an ecologically unique mountain in southeast Arizona, is quite possibly the most studied mountain in the United States.¹ At 10,720 feet tall, Mount Graham contains five life or vegetative zones, the most of any isolated mountain in the United States.² Mount Graham is a “Sky Island,” a mountain island surrounded by a sea of desert. There are approximately “30 or so endemic, rare, threatened, endangered, and unique distributions of plants and animals,” including the endangered Mount Graham red squirrel, on Mount Graham, according to anthropologist and biologist Peter Warshall.³ Warshall wrote, “The southwestern sky island ‘archipelago’ is unique on the planet. It is the only sky-island complex extending from subtropical to temperate latitudes ... with an exceptionally complex pattern of species of northern and southern origins.”⁴

For at least the last 140 years, Mount Graham has been a site of intense battle over the ownership of Southwestern lands and mineral wealth. Mount Graham, or *dzil nchaa si'an*, as it is called by Western Apache people, “has been a locus of conflict through increasingly intrusive iterations of conquest pursued by Spanish, Mexican, and American forays since the 1700s.”⁵ The struggle for Western Apache traditional spiritual homelands, including this sacred mountain, began in the wake of the Mexican American War. In 1871, the American government ceased its treaty making responsibilities and created the White Mountain Reservation by Executive Order. In 1872, by presidential proclamation, President Ulysses S. Grant increased the size of the reservation to include the mountain range, but by 1873, the U.S. government returned mineral and water resources, including all of Mount Graham, “to the public domain.” Between 1873 and 1902, a series of Executive Orders reduced the size of the reservation by about two-thirds of its normal size and created two large, separate Western Apache reservations. Shortly after the turn of the twentieth century, the mountain became a national forest while simultaneously the University of Arizona’s (UA) astronomy program took off. Throughout the twentieth century, various Arizona peaks were gobbled up for telescopes and Southern Arizona became a hotbed for astronomy. However, Western Apaches maintained a lasting relationship to their sacred Mount Graham in the post-reservation era and throughout the twentieth century.

In the early 1980s, a UA-led consortium of universities and research institutions selected Mount Graham as a location to highlight the next generation of telescopes. By the end of President Ronald Reagan’s second term, a complex web of national and international alliances was formed.⁶ As Christian clerics and scientific astronomers assembled on one side of the battlefield, Apache traditionalists and environmentalists gathered on the other side. These alliances illustrate a

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misplaced dichotomization of the fight over the mountain as one of “science” versus “religion.”⁷ In fact, the environmentalists who rely on scientific methods are allied with the Apaches, while the Vatican is allied with the astronomers.⁸ The history of the struggle for Mount Graham speaks to and destabilizes conventional understandings of the separation between science and religion.

When faced with growing environmental and Apache opposition, UA used its U.S. Congressional delegation to pass the Arizona-Idaho Conservation Act of 1988, that “authorize[d] the University of Arizona to establish an international astronomical observatory on Mount Graham.”⁹ Despite setbacks to astronomers’ plans (among many technological difficulties, UA ignored existing scientific data and selected the wrong site for the telescopes) and periodic victories by Apaches and their environmentalist allies (on court order, UA was forced to halt construction of the telescopes in the early 1990s), UA and its research partners, with this precedent-setting legislation in hand, quickly moved forward with plans for astrophysical development.¹⁰

In the process of obtaining a foothold on the mountain, UA was the initial academic institution in the United States to achieve several dubious firsts regarding American environmental, cultural, religious, and human rights law in its pursuit of astronomical excellence. Before it obtained an exemption from federal environmental and cultural laws, UA was the first university to lobby against the creation of a national wilderness (Mount Graham Wilderness Area) in 1984 and the first university to fight against the listing of an endangered species in 1986.¹¹ UA obtained the additional recognition of being the first university to lobby and secure not one, but two, precedent-setting congressional exemptions (1988 and 1996) to subvert American Indian cultural and religious protection law, as well as U.S. environmental law; to promote a project whose biological approval was acknowledged to be fraudulent; to fight in court against an endangered animal species; to litigate against traditional American Indian religious practice rights; to arrest for trespass an American Indian accessing his ancestral sacred ground for prayer; to require “prayer permits” for Native American prayer on ancestral sacred ground; to be the only U.S. university in the twentieth century to sue an Indian tribe for its religious beliefs; and to devise a written plan to divide and exploit differences and factions within a sovereign Indian tribe.¹² UA’s observatory is also the only observatory in the world protected by police attack dogs.¹³ Although UA led the efforts, numerous academic institutions and scientific organizations, including the Vatican, Italy’s Arcetri Astronomical Observatory (a research arm of the Italian government), and Germany’s Max Planck Institute, as well as the Ohio State University and Notre Dame, have followed, been party to, and entirely supported and endorsed these actions.

In late 2001, as UA searched for new partners, I became involved as a graduate student with an effort to oppose the University of Minnesota’s (UMN) participation in the astrophysical development project. I initially attended a gath-

ering by two activists from Tucson: radical printer Dwight Metzger and former UA student Anthony Guy Lopez, (a member of the Lakota tribe). I could not believe what they were telling me about UA's actions and the Vatican's search for extraterrestrial life and plans to baptize aliens. I assumed incorrectly that UA could not repeat its colonial endeavors in the "Indian Country" of the Upper Midwest and the birthplace of the American Indian Movement. UMN and the University of Virginia (UVA) joined the project in the fall of 2002, despite immense opposition.¹⁴ The ways in which the UMN went about joining the project and staying with it was by using misinterpretations of history, corrupting the truth, and misinforming the faculty, administrators, and trustees on the Board of Regents about Mount Graham, its history, and the Apaches and environmentalists who have fought to protect the sacred site. UMN followed the lead of UA's propaganda and public relations machine and claimed, for example, that the mountain was not sacred to Apaches, that the telescopes were built, that all lawsuits were settled, and that Apaches supported the telescope project.

This essay is an effort to combat assertions made since the early 1980s by UA, affiliated institutions such as the Vatican and UMN, and various proponents of planned astrophysical development that deny Apache ownership, spiritual connections, and claims to Mount Graham. Indeed, it is important to consistently and repeatedly document an Apache presence on Mount Graham because UA and its research partners have at various points in the recent past attempted to deny this reality. Here I argue not only with historians and historiography but also with astronomers, Jesuit priests, politicians, and bureaucrats. Because as the struggle for Mount Graham in particular, and sacred sites generally, is ongoing and ever-evolving in the present, the essay also deals directly with the role of the historian in contemporary political debates and the relationship between academic historians and the broader community.

Mythmaking and historical revisionism are weapons, in this case. Why would some groups, including some individual Apaches, create the myth that Mount Graham is not spiritually significant for Apaches? It is clear that UA and its research partners have tried to use history to disempower Indians and discredit their allies. In 1992, Jesuit astronomer Father George Coyne, a chief Vatican-endorsed proponent of astrophysical development, stated that both he and the curator of ethnohistory at UA's Arizona State Museum "suggested there is little evidence historically that Mt. Graham is sacred to the San Carlos Apache."¹⁵ In other documents, Coyne asserted, "there is no clear documentary or archaeological evidence that indicates any continuous, permanent or extensive use of the summit of Mt. Graham by Apaches for seasonal dwellings, burial grounds, or religious rituals.... Apaches did not revere Mt. Graham as they did many other mountains in the surrounding region."¹⁶ Coyne requested that Apaches show him the physical structure to prove the mountain's sacredness. Jesuit priest and ethnohistorian Charles Polzer repeated many of Coyne's assertions and stated that Apaches did

not use the mountain, while several UA faculty administrators fought a war against facts in the press.¹⁷ Journalist Fergus Bordewich, in his book, *Killing the White Man's Indian*, proclaimed, "there is scant mention of Mount Graham in anthropological writings and almost no reference to it in historical literature."¹⁸ Studies by John Wilson for the U.S. Forest Service echoed claims made by astronomers and their allies.¹⁹ Coyne, Polzer, Bordewich, and Wilson bent, misused, and ignored history for their political agenda. UA also employed lobbying firms that falsified letters by Indians that supported "the observatory consortium and denigrated preservation efforts."²⁰ They are not historians, but they make history that is then used by corrupted historians. In 2002, astronomers at Minnesota and Virginia used Bordewich's work, for example, and the few Apaches who supported astrophysical development to prop up their decisions to join the Mount Graham International Observatory.²¹

All of the arguments and comments by astronomers and their allies seemed to support claims from 1985 that "Mount Graham apparently has no tribe to defend it."²² Extensive scholarly documentation proves these claims, some of which were asserted in court documents, are false.²³ Yet such claims stand and are still supported, as the most recent battles at UMN and UVA show. As the White Mountain Apache Tribe's historic preservation officer John Welch wrote, the telescope proponents' "notions about the Apache rely on reports from soldiers and explorers who seldom spent more than a few weeks in *Apacheria* or cared to learn more about its residents than was required to subdue them or take their land."²⁴ Still, plenty of evidence exists, especially from the San Carlos and White Mountain Apache elders but also from U.S. soldiers and explorers, to support Apache use and reverence of Mount Graham, both when the mountain was part of traditional homelands and included within reservation boundaries and after the modification of reservation boundaries—and at various points thereafter.²⁵ There is documentation regarding Mount Graham as the home of the supernatural "Mountain Spirits" (*Gaan*), a location for gathering of medicinal and sacred herbs for ceremonial uses, a place of prayer and burial rituals, a source of supernatural power, and site of refuge in earlier times.²⁶

Western Apaches historically and more importantly today consider Mount Graham a most holy and important mountain. What is most significant and most difficult to argue against is that in 2002, after an exhaustive process and a mountain of evidence, the entire mountain range was determined eligible for listing on the National Register of Historic Places as a Traditional Cultural Property of the Western Apache people—proof of Apache claims to Mount Graham.²⁷ The Mount Graham Coalition—a large partnership of Indigenous and environmental groups—put it best when it stated that telescope proponents have "been grossly misinformed about the Western Apache people in Arizona and their history."²⁸

The UA and its research partners are part of a wider trend of Euro-

Americans appropriating resources. Attacking and ravaging the land/ecology has been a way for Euro-Americans to weaken Indian tribes in a variety of contexts and places (kill the buffalo, remove the Indian threat, et cetera), especially Mount Graham. In this case, by removing Mount Graham from reservation boundaries, placing Indians on government-created reservations, controlling the movement of Apaches by having military power over Arizona's mountain ranges, and harvesting the numerous resources on and around Mount Graham, the U.S. government carried out a successful campaign to weaken and denigrate Apaches, and exercise its will and control over a people and their lands. As historian Yuichiro Onishi wrote, "the denial of the United States as a colonial power relegated histories of conquest, enslavement, colonial subjugation, imperial wars, military occupation, and economic exploitation to the margins of national memory."²⁹ That history is the foundation on which more recent struggles for Mount Graham rest.

It's Always Personal & Political³⁰

My initial attraction to the struggle for Mount Graham was purely activist, not theoretical. I had always been an advocate for the environment, but the opportunity to connect history, activism, and nature was extremely enticing. My reasons for writing about Mount Graham are many and all of them are personal. It all began during my first year of graduate school at UMN, although I had become keenly aware of and had begun to interrogate U.S. foreign policies while living in Scotland and studying American history at the University of Glasgow. When I arrived in Minneapolis in 1999, I began to think more critically about U.S. history as I listened to certain radio programs, began to read alternative press publications, criticized the media, joined activists in protest, and socialized with local military veterans, radicals, union leaders, artists, students, and faculty. That education enabled me to think critically about the world around me, especially regarding U.S. history. In early 2000, I experienced an additional shift in my thinking that would impact my remaining years at Minnesota. During a presentation I gave to UMN's Early American History Workshop regarding "Benito Cereno," Herman Melville's short story about a slave revolt on a merchant ship, historian Jean O'Brien, a (White Earth Ojibwe) asked, "So what? What's the point?" I soon realized that if I did not try to do something with my work, and if I could not argue for a reason to write anything, there probably were going to be many more times and places where scholars and the general public would ask, "So what?"

I came to my study of Mount Graham, initially, with a naiveté and utter disbelief that, in the twenty-first century, colonial struggles were still taking place on U.S. soil. What The struggle for Mount Graham teaches historians is that there are a multitude of examples of imperialism within U.S. borders. What I initially failed to recognize, given my years in academia, was that universities are promoters and supporters of oftentimes symbolically violent colonial and imperial endeavors. As Mohawk Taiaiake Alfred pointed out, universities "are adamantly

and aggressively opposed to Indigenous ways.”³¹ The anthologies edited by Oklahoma Choctaw Devon Abbott Mihesuah, *Natives and Academics* and *Indigenizing the Academy*, drive home the point that higher education nearly always fails to benefit the Native communities about which it studies, and often fails to include Native voices or take into consideration the needs of various Indigenous peoples. By the Spring of 2002, when it became clear that UMN would move forward with its plans to join the astrophysical development on Mount Graham, I ramped up my opposition and devoted myself full-time to educating myself about the history of the mountain, sharing knowledge with the general public, meeting with allies, and doing anything I could to help the Western Apaches and environmentalists I was meeting.

I have learned a great amount from the struggles of Native and non-Native activists who have encountered and challenged racism at academic institutions. Spokane artist and activist Charlene Teters, a significant voice against the use of Indians as mascots for sports teams, once said regarding the University of Illinois, where she was a graduate student in the late 1980s and began to protest the school’s mascot, Chief Illiniwek: “I could not be here [University of Illinois] and not address that issue.”³² Her comments resonated with me as I began to think about what I could do to help convince my academic institution, the University of Minnesota, to back away from what I thought and still consider a similarly unsound project. I was inspired by Teters’s commitment, as well as by the writings of other activists. . In the introduction to his Masters thesis regarding Mount Graham, Giovanni Panza, an environmental and cultural rights activist, wrote,

In these pages there is no pretense to objectivity, nor does the author pose as neutral. While conflicts are destructive to all, as is often the case with human tragedy, the friction of opposites generates energy and change. The perpetrator vs. victim polarity is not an outmoded construct. Calling a conflict a “controversy,” a “saga,” or even worse, an “affair,” betrays a reluctance to take responsibility, a denial of the dignity of the victim. I will not sacrifice justice to a show of fairness.³³

I took some of my cues from activist intellectuals like Teters and Panza, among many others, who see a purpose in and to their work.

Yet there are historians who criticize my work because they feel it is too “presentist” and because my own personal history and politics are wrapped up with the larger narrative. Historian David Hackett Fischer once wrote in *Historians’ Fallacies*,

The *pragmatic fallacy* selects useful facts—immediately and directly useful facts—in the service of a social cause. Most historians hope their work is, or will be, useful to somebody, somewhere, someday.... But the pragmatic fallacy short-circuits the problem. It consists in the attempt to

combine scholarly monographs and social manifestoes in a single operation. The result is double trouble: distorted monographs and dull manifestoes.³⁴

Historian Gordon Wood, in his book, *The Purpose of the Past*, stated that historians should not use the past to deal with present problems. . He derided scholars who find a usable and useful past. Moreover, Wood wrote, “I am reminded of Rebecca West’s wise observation that when politics comes in the door, truth flies out the window.” He sarcastically added, “Historians who want to influence politics with their history writing have missed the point of the craft; they ought to run for office.”³⁵ Many historians will consider my work more about current events than history. Given that there is no set date by which everything before becomes history, and given that I use many of the tools and techniques of a historian—research in archives, interviewing, writing, thinking, and dissemination of knowledge—I feel that the naysayers have little ground on which to stand. Moreover, history does have “usefulness.”

Many historians and academics, even within my own department, have looked down on my work as being too activist. Indeed, they criticized the ways in which I involved myself at UMN in my work. As Mihesuah once noted, “Writing about topics that may have political and cultural meanings to Indians often bothers our colleagues who do not approve when academia and activism are bound together.” During my undergraduate and graduate years, I investigated slavery and the African Diaspora, specifically through the life of Tom Molineaux, the first African American boxer to fight for a heavyweight title. After years of coursework, reading, and research in African American history, I changed my dissertation project in order to investigate the struggle over Mount Graham. Over the last eight years, I have spoken about Mount Graham at various scholarly and community conferences and workshops, on radio programs, and in classes at UMN and elsewhere. I wrote opinion columns about Mount Graham in community newspapers and in *The Minnesota Daily* and *The Wake*, two student-run newspapers at UMN. . I testified before university-wide faculty and departmental committees. I worked with other activists to disrupt meetings of the Board of Regents. In 2002 and 2003, I traveled to the San Carlos and Fort Apache Reservations, and Tucson and Phoenix, to speak with elders, tribal leaders, biologists, and environmental and cultural rights activists; to visit UA and Mount Graham; and to witness a Changing Woman Ceremony for a young Western Apache woman’s puberty rite in San Carlos.³⁶ In order to place my work in a larger context, I visited Mount Shasta in California and Mount Hood in Oregon—sacred sites that are threatened by “progress” and recreation. .n 2003, I participated in the annual Mount Graham Sacred Run. All of my actions, lobbying, and protest was in an effort to effect the status-quo, bring about a change, and influence and educate the faculty, students, administration, and general public about the astrophysical development project.

As I continued to study sacred sites struggles, which are often struggles

about land and the ecosystems in which they sit, I wondered why so few academics are willing to walk the talk or even talk the talk.³⁷ The challenges of other scholars to my work ring hollow, especially when I look at the ways in which scholars select their research topics. What the scholars criticize is my perceived lack of historical objectivity and my partial stance.³⁸ I remain committed to the thinking that if historians are to pursue objectivity as a goal it should be with the assumption that “objectivity is not neutrality.”³⁹ I try to follow the lead of scholars such as environmental historian Roderick Frazier Nash. In *Wilderness and the American Mind*, a text that is seen as a foundational work in the field of environmental history, currently in its fourth edition, Nash took on the issues of objectivity and impartiality. Like Nash, “I will veer away from the hallowed (if always somewhat hollow) traditions of academic objectivity.”⁴⁰ The purpose of an explicitly radical history — co-opting the University, giving help to groups that struggle against various injustices, committing to social change, and advocating for the environment, for example — comes directly into play regarding any history and writing about communities struggling to protect sacred and ecologically unique places. I outwardly acknowledge outwardly my political standpoint and agenda regarding Mount Graham.

Activist Scholarship and Active History

“You’re either an activist, or an inactivist,” stated Louie Psihoyos, director of the 2010 Academy Award winning documentary film, *The Cove*, which detailed the slaughter of 20,000 dolphins off the coast of Japan each year.⁴¹ Through my life, work, teaching, and writing, I have worked to bring my activism to the forefront. I tend to agree with influential educator Paulo Freire, who stated, “I can’t respect the teacher who doesn’t dream of a certain kind of society that he would like to live in, and would like the new generation to live in. [Educators should pursue] a dream of a society less ugly than those we have today.”⁴² Certainly there will always be bias in any work; after all, historians have to create arguments based on research findings. Although I was involved in the struggle to keep UMN from joining a telescope project, it was my findings as a researcher that enabled me to take a position, distinguish between right and wrong, and craft an argument based on my findings. I firmly believe that it is the duty of academics to engage themselves in the debates that take place within our societies. Universities, especially state universities such as UMN, have a duty to the citizens of the state and nation—indeed, of the world.⁴³ Unfortunately, as Onandaga psychologist Keith James wrote, “While colleges and universities have the stated missions of education, research, and service to the community, the reality is that they often put much more effort into rule making, paper shuffling, internal politics and game playing, resource grabbing and hoarding, rewarding of friends, and empty gestures than into any activities directly related to their mission.”⁴⁴

As I have seen, I believe that some of the best history books were writ-

ten by scholars who lived through a particular event and then wrote about it. Scholars such as Angie Debo wrote about “current events” or historical moments about which she had just lived. Debo’s book, *And Still the Waters Run: The Betrayal of the Five Civilized Tribes*, an exposure of a governmental conspiracy to steal mineral rich lands from Native peoples in Oklahoma, helped to bring down several corrupt officials who were still in power in 1940 when the book was published.⁴⁵ As historian Eric Foner wrote in 2002, “A century ago, in his presidential address to the American Historical Association, Charles Francis Adams called on historians to step outside the ivory tower and engage forthrightly in public discourse. The study of history, he insisted, had a ‘public function,’ and historians had an obligation to contribute to debates in which history was frequently invoked with little genuine understanding of knowledge.”⁴⁶ In a 2004 address to the UMN, the “most prolific indigenous writer in history,” Standing Rock Sioux Vine Deloria, Jr., admonished that academics need to do something to engage the public in dialogue, discussion, and debate.⁴⁷ Debo and Deloria engaged in and offered the best examples of work that had meaning, especially for Native peoples.

I also try to follow the example of Elizabeth “Betsy” Brandt, an anthropologist at Arizona State University, who has worked for and with Western Apache people for decades. She participates in the best forms of public scholarship. In 1992, her credibility as a researcher was attacked and her efforts as an academic activist were questioned. In response, she wrote:

As a scholar I feel that I have a responsibility both to be as accurate and truthful as I can be, and to assist the people I work with when they ask for help to the best of my ability. I don’t think that is misuse of academic status. I think it is the best use of it. I find it very difficult to stand by and see what I think is injustice being done and not try to do something about it.⁴⁸

I dare readers to find an objective scholar today. What academic writes about that which they are not passionate about and have no interest? My current work came out of a deeply personal struggle against the very university I attended and for which I worked. Historian Vijay Prashad, who once discussed efforts to never “let the public forget,” helped me to realize that my writings could provide a counterbalance to the actions of the university at which I received my degree.⁴⁹

My years of public participation, engagement, and community involvement have allowed me to better understand the importance of the collaborative possibilities between the academy and the larger community. What is the point of intellectual conversations if the conversation does nothing for the citizen on the street? I think that scholars and academics have a responsibility to be, in some small way, activists. Otherwise, historians’ works and teachings are merely forms of intellectual gymnastics. What is the point of writing a book that only scholars read? What does that do for society? How does that book help to bring about change—socially, environmentally, economically? “Indian Studies as an academic

discipline was meant to have as its constituencies the Native tribal nations of America and its major purpose the defense of lands and resources and the sovereign right to nation-to-nation status," Crow Creek Sioux scholar Elizabeth Cook-Lynn (Crow Creek Sioux) once pointed out.⁵⁰ Society needs books that it can use, books that can teach us about ourselves and help us to make change. What society does not need are books that fulfill some ego within the writer or help the author make tenure. Why are some of the best books that come out of academia from scholars who already have tenure? Does not that waiting lead to a more conservative ideology that then pervades the halls of the academy? What society needs are scholars who are willing to write what is right from the outset, not scholars who are more worried about how their words will be received.

During my years in academia, I have been witness to an attitude type that pervades some faculty members and academic departments. One example that shows the kind of treatment Western Apaches have historically received came from UMN astronomer Robert Gehrz. A large proponent of Minnesota's participation in the Mount Graham telescope project, he was once photographed on the mountain with the donor who provided the university's initial telescope funds.⁵¹ During an annual meeting of the American Astronomical Association, Gehrz once compared Apaches to "fundamentalists" and the "Taliban" during a conversation I overheard with Tucson activist Dwight Metzger. In response, Metzger asked, "Do you mean traditionalists?" Gehrz replied that Apaches are the "same people who won't ever let their women take their *burkas* [head scarves] off." Gehrz then angrily added that "every mountain is sacred to some Native group."⁵² When I share such ways of thinking on the part of astronomers it is not to demonize their scientific pursuits. Let me make something clear: I do not oppose science, nor do I oppose astronomy. I oppose the ways in which I have seen astronomers run roughshod over Apaches and sacred and ecologically unique lands.⁵³ The opposition was not to the work of the astronomy departments in which I came into contact. Rather it is against the arrogance of some astronomers and their supporters, as well as to the historical resemblances between their work and efforts, and colonial endeavors of the past. All misinformation, especially when it comes from a place of willful ignorance, needs to be challenged. The same day that Gehrz made his comments, I coauthored and distributed an article, written for the Minnesota community, that rained on the astronomers' conference.⁵⁴ I continue to craft a career that combines my academic pursuits with my activist interests.⁵⁵

The Presence of the Past⁵⁶

The past is in the present, especially in my work. It is carried with every person who has struggled to protect Mount Graham. As folk singer, storyteller, and political activist Utah Phillips once stated, "The Past Didn't Go Anywhere."⁵⁷ Many of the actions and strategies used by the promoters and supporters of astrophysical development on Mount Graham are a continuation of policies from the nine-

teenth century. A key component of any analysis of the history of the recent struggle for Mount Graham concerns the disentailment of sovereignty and the ever-mutating forms of colonialism that still unfold in the present.

Not only is this history about the use and similarities of the past but it is also a history infused and informed by the present. Historian Cicely Veronica Wedgwood once observed about the role of the historian: "Surely he is looking for the truth—for what really happened. It is his job as a scholar to form as exact an idea of past events as he can from the surviving evidence." She wrote, "But the instrument with which he looks at the past is modern. It was made, and shaped, and it operates, in the present. It is his own mind. And however much he bends his thoughts toward the past, his own way of thinking, his outlook, his opinions are the products of the time in which he lives. . . So that all written history . . . [is] a compound of past and present."⁵⁸ Countless scholars and social critics have connected the past and the present. As Foner reminds us, "'History,' wrote James Baldwin, an unusually astute observer of twentieth-century American life, 'does not refer merely, or even principally, to the past. On the contrary, the great force of history comes from the fact that we carry it within us, are unconsciously controlled by it in many ways, and history is literally *present* in all that we do.'"⁵⁹

Some of the best historians have written from an open engagement with the events and circumstances of their times.⁶⁰ Historian David Roediger tells us in *Colored White: Transcending the Racial Past*, that he "deliberate[ly] . . . moves back and forth in time, treating past and present in the same volume, in the same section of the book, and even in the same essay." Although he states that "Historians often deride such mixing of yesterday and today with the damning adjectives present-minded and . . . presentist," Roediger argues that when historians "bring their work to bear on contemporary issues," they can create "a 'usable present,' which enables us to . . . pose different and better questions about the past." All of the issues about which I write have historical roots. "[T]aking a longer historical view is indispensable to understanding the recent past," as Roediger put it.⁶¹ As historian Karen Dubinsky once wrote in this journal, "Left historians [are] made of sterner stuff; our history Means Something. . . [W]ho would deny that it's that explicit past/present engagement which gives left critique its punch?" Queried Dubinsky, "Who hasn't felt the thrilling shock of recognition in the lives or writings of someone—especially someone marginal—centuries dead, or watched students light up when they realize 'that's just like...' or ask 'why haven't I heard of...?'"⁶²

History is involved so often involved in the present, and used as a prop for certain agendas, that historians are duty-bound to make solid scholarly connections. On a daily basis, history is brought to bear on current problems in many in-the-news-stories. For example, what are the relevant connections between the wars in Afghanistan and Vietnam, or September 11, 2001, and Pearl Harbor? In what ways does the 2010 BP oil spill resemble the Exxon Valdez disaster, or any num-

ber of environmental disasters? History as a discipline is a conversation between the present and the past. Positing a separation between present and past is illusory at best, downright harmful at worst. Paying close attention to the conversation between the past and the present has provided many historians with the opportunity to acknowledge and embrace the role of contemporary politics in their works. All historians, at some level, are influenced by and commenting on their contemporary age, but not all historians are explicit about their endeavors and agendas. Yet there still exists a tension between some scholars and historians concerning how explicit to make one's connection to the present and to what ends one's project will contribute. Many historians move back and forth between the present and the past in an attempt to make history relevant, all the while developing new ideas about what history is, related to the explosion of modern subjectivity—and notions about objectivity.

American Indian history and environmental history are good examples what role the present can play in work on the past. Historians of the environment and of Native peoples are often writing about the past while grappling personally with the problems of the present. Put another way, environmental and American Indian histories are good examples what role the present can play in work on the past. In "Peace & Dignity Song," inspired by the organizers of the "Run for Peace and Dignity" to Mexico City in 1992, Mitch Walking Elk of Cheyenne-Arapaho-Hopi ancestry riffs, "Touched by the new, but believe in the old." The director of Two Rivers Gallery in Minneapolis, Juanita Espinosa (both a Dakota and Ojibwe), once pointed out that, "for Native Americans, the present is 'synonymous with the past.'"⁶³ My work for the past decade has dealt with the intersections between past and present, in an effort to imagine a postcolonial future for Native peoples and the environment—indeed, for everyone.

Active history does something. It should attempt to be useful. Historians should follow the idea posited by historian Staughton Lynd many decades ago when he stated that he was "more and more committed to the thesis that the professor of history should also be a historical protagonist."⁶⁴ I have attempted to follow Lynd's admonishment. If my work has done anything, I hope that it has helped both environmental organizations and Western Apache cultural and human rights groups with whom I have worked to document the oppression of Native peoples and the land, highlight Native and non-Native resistance, and show support and solidarity with Native and non-Native activists. I also hope that my actions, especially my writings and efforts on the UMN campus, are useful to the San Carlos and White Mountain Apache Tribes who have been working so hard for so long to be heard and have the telescopes removed from Mount Graham. . As the current San Carlos Apache Tribal Chairman Wendsler Nosie once told me, my efforts can help him to continue his lifelong work to educate his people regarding their struggle for their sacred Mount Graham. I would like to think that I have played a small role in that effort, but I am also not so arrogant to believe that I

have. I ultimately hope that my writing, advocacy, and activism will see the return of Mount Graham to the Western Apache people for, as Vine Deloria once wrote, “The world we live in is full of choice opportunities for the young scholar to make his or her mark.”⁶⁵

As I argued elsewhere, the time has come to return, as the federal government has done on other occasions with other Indigenous peoples, Mount Graham to the Western Apache people. In fact, such a bold move would go a long way toward assisting with the health and healing of all Apaches to begin. Such actions are probable only if President Obama would do as President Nixon did with Taos Blue Lake and Mount Adams, and return a traditional cultural property to an American Indian tribe. If Obama stands by his words from the election year 2008, that he “supports legal protections for sacred places and cultural traditions,” anything is possible.⁶⁶

More than any strategy, the time is long overdue for the U.S. President to sign a new executive order—one that does not take away land like so many of the nineteenth and early twentieth century proclamations, that does not create forest reserves, that does not deal with Indian religion and spirituality, and that does not deal with environmental justice. What the Western Apache tribes, possibly in collaboration with the Zuni Tribe, want is a return, by executive order, of their sacred Mount Graham. The Apaches can then decide how long the lease for the telescopes should continue; whom they would like to have manage the forest, its history, sacred characteristics, and creatures; what times of the year will be closed off to visitors; and if any part of the mountain should be declared a Wilderness Area or a cultural area. Western Apaches would also have the option to return the name of Mount Graham to *dzil nchaa si'an*, just as names of locations in India, once mispronounced or renamed by the British, were returned to their “original” names during the last decade. That Mount Graham sits within a forest named after the Spanish colonizer, Francisco Vasquez de Coronado, is reason enough to at least change the name and get the mountain out of that particular national forest system. Few people involved in the Mount Graham struggle feel upset that efforts to rename the forest for the politician who sold out, Morris “Mo” Udall, have failed.⁶⁷ Certainly the insult of UA’s astrophysical development proposal, initially called the “Columbus Project,” remains. The colonizers of the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries have teamed up with present day colonizers such as universities and research institutions. But through presidential proclamation, the land could be restored to its original caretakers, the Western Apache people. The telescopes, as well as the roads and power lines to the summit could be removed. The summer homes on the mountain and the bible camp on its summit could also be removed. The future of Mount Graham and all of the species and supernaturals that inhabit that place should be placed in the hands of the Western Apache people. The examples are there. It will merely take a courageous effort to make it happen.

Perhaps the United States government, and UA and its research partners,

should take its cue from efforts in Australia and elsewhere to get at truth and reconciliation. At the closing ceremonies of the 2000 Olympics in Sydney, Australia, the music group Midnight Oil performed its 1988 hit song, “Beds are Burning,” before a worldwide audience. All band members wore black. . On each of their shirts was printed the word “Sorry.” This political song is about giving native lands back to the Pintupi, a desert dwelling aboriginal people who were originally encouraged to leave and then were forcibly removed from their homes by the Australian government during the twentieth century until as late as the 1960s. In the late 1980s, at approximately the same time that the University of Arizona and its allies were lobbying for a Congressional exemption of all cultural and environmental laws, Midnight Oil stated,

The time has come to say “fair’s fair,”
To pay the rent, now, to pay our share,
The time has come, a fact’s a fact,
It belongs to them, we’re gonna give it back.⁶⁸

NOTES

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- ² Elizabeth A. Brandt, “The Fight for *dził nchaa si’an*, Mount Graham: Apaches and Astrophysical Development in Arizona,” *Cultural Survival Quarterly* (Special Issue guest editor: Alfonso Ortiz), 19, no. 4 (Winter 1996): 50-57; Jess Huffman, “Astronomy Industry Threatens Sacred Site: Vatican Denies Apache Claim to Religious Significance: Studies Falsified by Wildlife Officials,” *21st Century News* (West Palm Beach, FL), Nov 1993.
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- ⁵ John R. Welch, Ramon Riley, and Michael V. Nixon, “Discretionary Desecration: Dził Nchaa Si An (Mount Graham) and Federal Agency Decisions Affecting American Indian Sacred Sites,” *American Indian Culture and Research Journal*, vol. 33, no. 4 (2009): 36.
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- ⁷ Among other recent articles, see Deborah Locke, "Religion vs. Science," *St. Paul Pioneer Press*, 31 Jan 2002; Sara Hebel, "On a Mountaintop, a Fight Between Science and Religion: Universities weigh support for a telescope project on land American Indians consider sacred," *The Chronicle of Higher Education*, 28 June 2002, A21-22; Roger Geertz Gonzalez, "Land as Sacred as a Church," letter to editor, *The Chronicle of Higher Education*, 2 Aug 2002; Deborah Locke, "To the Point: Telescope Project: where religion, science collide," *St. Paul Pioneer Press*, 9 Oct 2002.
- ⁸ Alfonso Ortiz, "American Indian Religious Freedom: First People and the First Amendment," *Cultural Survival Quarterly* (Special Issue guest editor: Alfonso Ortiz), vol. 19, no. 4 (Winter 1996).
- ⁹ PL 100-696, 102 Stat. 4571 (18 Nov 1988).
- ¹⁰ The 1988 Arizona-Idaho bill was the first legislation involving an endangered species that was exempted from the National Environmental Protection Act. The snail darter case is extremely similar to the Mount Graham case; in 1979, Congress exempted the Tennessee Valley Authority's Tellico Dam project on the Little Tennessee River from the Endangered Species Act. "Congress End-Runs Endangered Species Act in Arizona, Called Worst Threat Since Tellico Dam," *Land Letter: The Newsletter for Natural Resource Professionals*, vol. 7, no. 20 (1 Nov 1988). See also, James Coates, "Endangered squirrels losing Arizona fight," *Chicago Tribune*, 18 Jun 1990, C4.
- ¹¹ Charles Bowden, "How the University [of Arizona] Knocked Off Mount Graham," *City Magazine* (Tucson), 1 Jan 1989, 29-30; Jim Erickson, "UA asks U.S. to drop rare squirrel from endangered list," *Arizona Daily Star* (Tucson), 27 Aug 1986; John Dougherty, "Star Whores: The Ruthless Pursuit of Astronomical Sums of Cash and Scientific Excellence," *Phoenix New Times*, vol. 24, no. 25 (16-22 June 1993); 2-11; Gregory McNamee, "Mountain Under Heavens," *terrain.org: A Journal of the Built and Natural Environments*, no. 8 (Autumn 2000), <http://www.terrain.org/articles/8/mcnamee.htm>; Frank Graham, "Mt. Graham makes all equal," letter to editor, *Eastern Arizona Courier* (Safford, AZ), 5 Jun 2002.
- ¹² Ruth Rogers, letter to editor, "Science on sacred site," *Star Tribune* (Minneapolis), 9 Jul 2002.
- ¹³ Gregg Jones, "K-9s need constant training," *Eastern Arizona Courier* (Safford, AZ), 18 Apr 2004, 1A, 7A.
- ¹⁴ See Joel T. Helfrich, "A Mountain of Politics: The Struggle for *dzil nchaa si'an* (Mount Graham), 1871-2002" (PhD diss., University of Minnesota, 2010), esp. 358-421.
- ¹⁵ George V. Coyne, "An Open Letter Particularly Addressed to the Non-Indian Members of the Apache Survival Coalition," 30 Apr 1992, 1.
- ¹⁶ George V. Coyne, The Vatican Observatory, affidavit, "Statement of the Vatican Observatory on the Mount Graham International Observatory and American Indian Peoples," 5 Mar 1992, <http://vaticanobservatory.org/indian.html> (revised version, 8 May 1997).
- ¹⁷ Charles W. Polzer, S.J., affidavit, 6 Apr 1992. For example, see Michael A. Cusanovich, "Dzil Nachaa Si An, Mt. Graham: Fact and Fiction," *Cultural Survival Quarterly*, vol. 20, no. 3 (31 Oct 1996); Lisa Jones, "The administrator," *High Country News*, vol. 27, no. 13 (24 Jul 1995). Regarding UA's public relations strategies, see Tim Vanderpool, "Public Relations Sleazeballs Go Too Far In Defense Of The Latest Mount Graham Telescope Project," *Tucson Weekly*, 22-28 May 1997.
- ¹⁸ Fergus M. Bordewich, *Killing the White Man's Indian: Reinventing Native Americans at the End of the Twentieth Century* (1996; New York: Anchor Books, 1997), 206. For a critique of Bordewich's work, see book reviews by Elizabeth Cook-Lynn, Les W. Field, Thomas J. Hoffman, Scott Riney, and Richard White. "Keith Basso, a colleague whose decadeslong work with the Western Apache is well-known, sent me documents that showed how little research Bordewich had done about the Mt. Graham dispute," wrote Field. "If myth and reality lay behind separate doors, Fergus Bordewich's attempt to find 'real Indians' would be a lot easier," wrote historian White. Continued

White, “The tools that he brings to his task are journalistic—the vignette, the interview, the historical sketch—and they are not always up to the task.” White also wrote, “Bordewich has a tendency, too, to resort to one of the most revealing nineteenth-century versions of Indians and whites—the assault on helpless white victims.” As White put it, “Bordewich has a stubborn attraction to stories of white victims of Indian sovereignty.” White urged, “Indians cannot escape the rest of us, but they deserve to negotiate their own fate among us.” Cook-Lynn wrote that Bordewich’s book is popular, but “In terms of scholarship such works are neither history, nor anthropology, nor good research, nor even good literature.” A review by Hoffman discussed the book’s “fatal flaw.” Historian Riney put it best when he wrote, “*Killing the White Man’s Indian* would best serve our understandings of modern tribalism by disappearing without a trace.” See the following book reviews: Elizabeth Cook-Lynn, *Chicago Sa Review*, vol. 12, no. 1 (Spring 1997); 228-232; Les W. Field, “Lightening That Burden,” *Current Anthropology*, vol. 39, no. 4 (Aug-Oct 1998); 583-584; Thomas J. Hoffman, *The Social Science Journal*, vol. 36 (Jan 1999), 185-187; Scott Riney, *The Western Historical Quarterly*, vol. 29, no. 3 (Autumn 1998); 399-400; Richard White, *The New Republic*, vol. 214, no. 2 (8 Jul 1996); 37-41. Bordewich’s comments regarding Mount Graham are inaccurate in many places and flat wrong in others. Bordewich’s book is still listed as recommended reading on the website for Ohio State University’s Department of Astronomy. But Bordewich’s work is not uncorrupted by a point of view, an agenda, and political bias. Discriminating readers need only connect the people upon whom he looks down on in the book with the people whose voices he appreciates in his acknowledgements. At least two people associated with the MG telescope project are mentioned, while no Apaches, especially Ola Cassadore Davis, whom he belittles, are thanked. What is more: he barely mentions the icons of late twentieth century Indian America—people like Lakota scholar-activist Vine Deloria, Jr., or Kiowa author and critic N. Scott Momaday. Even the book by Robert F. Berkhofer, Jr., titled *The White Man’s Indian: Images of the American Indian from Columbus to the Present* (New York: Vintage Books, 1979), from whom it appears that Bordewich takes his book’s title and hopes to kill its subject, is barely mentioned. But Mount Graham figures prominently in a chapter in which he discusses Indian religious revivals, efforts to have their sacred lands returned, and sacred sites struggles (Chapter 6: “Predators, Victims, and Mother Earth,” 204-239). It is also a chapter in which Bordewich shows how little he knew about his subject material. It is clear that he does not know the history of Western Apaches, the history of the current struggle for Mount Graham, the vast amount of documentation of the sacred-sites protection and place-based communities, the events that had already transpired before he wrote this chapter or finished the book. He gets so much wrong and yet a number of astronomers still cite this book and use it to argue their case.

¹⁹ John P. Wilson, *Apache Use of the Pinaleno Mountain Range*, Report No. 55 (Tucson, AZ: Prepared for the Coronado National Forest, 1991); John P. Wilson, *Apache Use of the Pinaleno Mountain Range*, Report No. 57 (Tucson, AZ: Prepared for the Coronado National Forest, 1992). Thanks to Alan Ferg for copies of these reports. For a strong critique of Wilson’s work and an important study of the history and cultural ties to Mount Graham, see John R. Welch, “White Eyes’ Lies and the Battle for *dzil nachaa si’an*,” *American Indian Quarterly*, Special Issue: “To Hear the Eagles Cry: Contemporary Themes in Native American Spirituality,” Lee Irwin, ed., vol. 21, no. 1 (Winter 1997); 75-109.

²⁰ Welch, Riley, and Nixon, “Discretionary Desecration,” 66.

²¹ Both UMN and the UVA took their cues from the UA’s propaganda machine. See Gregory Savikoff, “Unjustly magnified problems,” in University Forum: “Should the University support the Mt. Graham telescope project?” *The Cavalier Daily* (University of Virginia), 14 Feb 2002; Elizabeth Managan, “Protect telescope project from politics,” *The Cavalier Daily* (University of Virginia), 30 Jan 2002; Department of Astronomy, University of Virginia, “What They Have Said: San Carlos Apaches and the Mount Graham International Observatory,” www.astro.virginia.edu/LBT/san_carlos.html, accessed 2 Nov 2003; The Mount Graham

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- ²² Paul Brinkley Rogers, "Telescope sites focus on shrines," *Arizona Republic* (Phoenix), 17 Nov 1985, B19.
- ²³ Elizabeth A. Brandt, "Executive Summary of the Preliminary Investigation of Apache Use and Occupancy and Review of Cultural Resource Surveys of the Proposed Mt. Graham Astrophysical Area, Pinaleno Mountains, Arizona," for Apache Survival Coalition, 28 May 1991; Elizabeth A. Brandt, "Response to the Statements of the Vatican Observatory On the Mount Graham International Observatory and American Indian Peoples; and Statement on the Mount Graham International Observatory (MGIO), The Ecology of the Pinaleno Mountains, and Related Political Issues," 5 May 1992; Brandt, "The Fight for *dzil nachaa si'an*, Mount Graham," 50-57; Welch, "White Eyes' Lies and the Battle for *dzil nachaa si'an*"; Giovanni B. A. M. Panza, "The Impaling of Apache Holy Ground: No Conflict Resolution on Mt. Graham" (master's MA thesis, Prescott College, Arizona, 1997), 1-50; Alice Feldman, "Othering Knowledge and Unknowing Law: Colonialist Legacies, Indigenous Pedagogies, and Social Transformation" (PhD diss., Arizona State University, 1998); The sheer amount of newspaper references to Mount Graham, its sacred characteristics, and the Apache use of the mountain is breathtaking. See Seth Pilsk, "Inspiring to read about groundbreaking work," letter to editor, *San Carlos Apache Moccasin* (Globe, AZ), 11 Dec 2002; Sandra Rambler, "Science without humanity," Traditionally Speaking column, *San Carlos Apache Moccasin* (Globe, AZ), 11 Dec 2002; Ola Cassadore Davis, "Learning about Apache folklore from our parents," *San Carlos Apache Moccasin* (Globe, AZ), 11 Dec 2002.
- ²⁴ Welch, "White Eyes' Lies and the Battle for *dzil nachaa si'an*."
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- ²⁸ The Mount Graham Coalition, "Setting the Record Straight: Rebuttal to the U of M's Head of Astronomy." See also, The Mount Graham Coalition, "Reply to U. of Minnesota Astronomy Department's Mt. Graham position paper, Dec. 2001. Author, Dr. Leonard Kuhl, Chair, Dept. of Astronomy," rough draft (ca. Feb 2002).

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- ³⁹ Thomas L. Haskell, *Objectivity is Not Neutrality: Exploratory Schemes in History* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1998).
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⁶⁵ Deloria Jr., "Marginal and Submarginal," 30.

⁶⁶ "Barack Obama's Principles for Stronger Tribal Communities," BarackObama.com.

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