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**Redskin, Tanned Hide: A Book of Christian History  
Bound in the Flayed Skin of an American Indian:  
The Colonial Romance, christian Denial  
and the Cleansing of a christian School of Theology\***

**Tink Tinker (wazhazhe / Osage Nation)**

[ttinker@iliff.edu](mailto:ttinker@iliff.edu)

“...a priceless vestment for the teachings of brotherly love.”

— *Rocky Mountain News*, 1934, describing the *History of Christianity* book  
bound in the skin of an American Indian.

For eighty years, the Iliff School of Theology proudly and publicly displayed a volume bound in the skin taken from an American Indian killed by a quaker settler in western Virginia.<sup>1</sup> As an American Indian scholar, the macabre topic of this essay touches me in a way immeasurably more deeply than it can even the most sensitive and self-aware euro-christian on this continent.<sup>2</sup> It touches the nerve center of abject horror that we Indian folk must suppress and

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\*I would like to acknowledge the broad sources of critique and help in writing this essay. My wife, Dr. Loring Abeyta, put a great deal of time into this project, both in engaging primary research and creatively in helping me with producing text. A number of colleagues at Iliff, including especially Dr. Julie Todd, and current student Debra Stinnett, also contributed generous editing energies. I received great encouragement from Iliff students like Natasha Drake, who is working on a collateral essay, and alumni like Rachel Pater, who spearheaded the graduating class gift idea in 2013. 1974 alum Mike Hickcox made himself wonderfully available as one of the key participants at that time, as did Jerry Campbell, the former assistant librarian, now retired president of Claremont Lincoln University and Claremont School of Theology. The list of notable others, especially Iliff students, for this project is quite long.

<sup>1</sup> The book was displayed, with an interpretive note, in a glass display case at the entrance of the Iliff Library. Much of the evidence has been preserved in the Iliff School of Theology library archives, conveniently stored by conscientious library staff in an archival folder. Dr. Loring Abeyta and I have gathered copies and scanned them into our computer system at home. These digital copies are marked in annotations here as: Abeyta-Tinker digital file, followed by the particular file name.

<sup>2</sup> My use of the lower case for adjectives such as “euro-christian,” “christian,” “methodist,” “quaker,” “european,” and “american” is intentional. While the noun might be capitalized out of respect for each Christian—as for each Muslim or Buddhist—using the lower case “christian” or “biblical” allows us to avoid any unnecessary normativizing or universalizing of any principal euro-christian institutional political or religious category. I have likewise avoided capitalizing adjectives such as american, amer-european, european, etc., for the same reasons. Paradoxically, I insist on capitalizing the w in White (adjective or noun) to indicate a clear cultural pattern invested in Whiteness that is all too often overlooked or even denied by american Whites.

even repress just in order to live daily lives in what was our Native land. We live in constant awareness of the history of consistent and persistent euro-christian violence associated with the conquest of Native lands and peoples, a history that is largely forgotten among our euro-christian relatives, hidden away in the unconscious fog of denial and myth-making.<sup>3</sup> The history of this Indian skin-clad book is one that has been nearly swept away from the consciousness of contemporary students and faculty at Iliff, a memory comfortably erased. Yet, the remains of the book, without its binding, are still housed in the Iliff library—with its stale odor of religious pornography.

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<sup>3</sup> Some (anonymous) reviewers of an earlier version of this essay criticized what they named as an “over use” of negative descriptive identifiers of atrocious actions as heavy handed, if not inflammatory. I insist that my usage in this instance is necessary and intentional. For too many euro-christian colonial folk, the situation around this christian history book bound in the flayed and tanned skin of a slain aboriginal citizen of this continent and its triumphant display in a theological library is merely a mistake, a mildly offensive historical *faux pas*. “Oops! Our bad. How can we fix this?” Our euro-christian relatives persistently and necessarily fail to grasp the deeper significance of this book for Indian people. Hence, they might recoil at the repeated usage of words like horror, atrocious, ghastly, terror or terrorism when they are applied to themselves and directly challenge their sense of exceptionality. For Indian folk the incident is not merely mildly offensive; rather, it is an egregious affront, an utter violation of Indian cultural and spiritual values, an act steeped in deliberate disrespect that is at some level intentional and self-serving justification for invasion and conquest. To use an increasingly technical term defined by Julia Kristeva and advanced by Anne McClintock in her analysis of the colonial contest, it is an act that, for both the christian colonizer and for colonized Indian folk, signals the utter abjection of the original inhabitants of this continent. More importantly, it violates the deep cultural consciousness of Indian people across the continent. Unfortunately, this is not something that can be fixed quickly or easily. Julia Kristeva, *Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection*, trans. Leon S. Roudiez (New York: Columbia Univ. Press, 1982); Anne McClintock, *Imperial Leather: Race, Gender, and Sexuality in the Colonial Contest* (Routledge, 1995), 72.

The whole incident raises a series of significant questions: Who actually perpetrated the murder of this Indian person and what were their motives? Why on earth did a faithful, educated methodist minister think this gruesome gift was appropriate for a school preparing people for christian ministry? Why would the school have accepted the gift? What caused them to value it as such a treasure? And finally, why did it take this institution of higher learning and christian values so long to decide the gift was inappropriate, to say the least? Evidently at each twist and turn the White euro-christian folk involved in giving or receiving and keeping on display this macabre “gift” found a way to buy into the romantic colonialist narrative(s) that accompanied the book, narratives that in every case blamed the victim. I write this piece with the hope that, by owning this history of violence in which Iliff was an implicit accessory, students, faculty, and larger Iliff community well into the future can use this christian-perpetrated atrocity as fertile ground for developing more powerfully healing theologies.

All too often the truth of the euro-christian history of violence has been replaced by a comforting counter-narrative, a myth, of imputed Indian violence that functions to justify any and all acts of christian violence. Indeed, the history of christian violence, especially on this continent, is habitually erased from the romantic american narrative of exceptionalism. Having lived through the ascendancy of euro-christian modernity, all of us (Natives, euro-christian settlers and others) have become practically inured to the vast array of atrocities that modern humans can perpetrate against one another in the name of some supposed higher good. Yet, american peoples were largely hyper-appalled with the photos and reporting, for instance, of the atrocities that came out of the Abu Ghraib prison, perpetrated by Iraq’s presumed american “liberators.” Likewise, videos of U.S. military personnel urinating on slain afghani opponents

revolted many american people. A large portion of those same people, however, are capable of ignoring or even continuing to celebrate atrocities that helped secure this stolen continent for White euro-christian settlement, including their own homes and property.<sup>4</sup> Good christian folk in Minneapolis-St. Paul can blithely engage in idyllic summer family picnics in the quiet, romantic environs of old Fort Snelling, renovated for preservation by the Minnesota State Historical Society. Yet, this is the site where non-combatant Dakota women and children were incarcerated and suffered a high rate of death through a cold winter after the short war.<sup>5</sup> While many

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<sup>4</sup> A quick visit to any state historical society should demonstrate this, since state historical societies are invariably dedicated to the historical memory and narrative of the euro-christian settlers. Unable to erase totally the aboriginal inhabitants of their state, they create narratives to rationalize euro-christian occupation of the land. History Colorado, the renamed Colorado State Historical Society, showcased a 2012-2013 exhibit on the Sand Creek Massacre which they euphemistically titled “Collision” rather than “massacre.” The use of the word “collision” signals the american narrative of romance that casts the genocidal devastation of Indian peoples as an unfortunate but necessary tragedy. By feigning objectivity and what they saw as presenting both sides of the issue, they managed to cast doubt on Indian memories of genocide and to subtly affirm the euro-christian history of occupation and conquest. In this case the “Collision” exhibit was abruptly closed in 2013 due to the vigorous and repeated protest of the Cheyenne and Arapaho Nations who are survivors of the murderous attack on their ancestors that day in 1864. They protested not only the title of the exhibit but also the multiple gross errors, misrepresentations, and outright lies in the exhibit. An innocuous sounding choice of words can make a huge difference in what the underlying narrative is in actuality. See Patricia Calhoun, “Wake-up Call. Sand Creek Massacre: Exhibit Closes as Tribal Consultations Get under Way,” Denver Westword Blog,” Jun. 20 2013: [http://blogs.westword.com/latestword/2013/06/post\\_34.php](http://blogs.westword.com/latestword/2013/06/post_34.php); Steven K. Paulson, “History Colorado Center Closes Sand Creek Massacre Display,” *The Denver Post* (August 28, 2013): [http://www.denverpost.com/news/ci\\_23959631/history-colorado-center-closes-sand-creek-massacre-display](http://www.denverpost.com/news/ci_23959631/history-colorado-center-closes-sand-creek-massacre-display).

<sup>5</sup> See Waziyatawin, *What Does Justice Look Like? The Struggle for Liberation in Dakota Homeland* (Living Justice Press, 2008); Chris Mato Nunpa, “Dakota Commemorative March: Thoughts and

picnickers are naively oblivious to this history, too many others tacitly or even proactively continue to celebrate this genocidal devastation of Dakota women and children by reciting a narrative of self-exoneration and victim blaming.

The subject of this essay, however, has to do with a christian (methodist) school of theology in Denver, Colorado where a similar narrative of self-exoneration and victim-blaming was played out. The gruesomeness of bad taste enters a whole other realm when we find a christian graduate school formally glorying in its bloody colonial trophy by displaying what some have dismissed as “a curiosity,” albeit a treasured curiosity, in its library for more than the better part of a century—a book entitled *The History of Christianity*,<sup>6</sup> bound in the flayed and tanned skin of a murdered American Indian.<sup>7</sup>

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Reactions,” in *In the Footsteps of Our Ancestors: The Dakota Commemorative Marches of the 21<sup>st</sup> Century*, Waziyatawin Angela Wilson, editor (Living Justice Press, 2006), pp. 67-83.

<sup>6</sup> Johann Lorenz von Mosheim, *Institutionum Historiae Christianae Compendium* [“History of Christianity”] (apud C. F. Weygand, 1752). Mosheim was a german lutheran theologian of considerable note. He was president of Göttingen University and close to the end of his life at the time he wrote this volume—almost a quarter century *before* it was rebound in human skin.

<sup>7</sup> The book was on display from 1893 until sometime in 1974. We cannot ascertain exactly when the book was removed from public display in 1974, given some disparity in the memories of the participants of the time. Iliff’s assistant librarian at the time was Jerry D. Campbell, who just retired as the president of Claremont Lincoln University and the Claremont School of Theology. Campbell reported to me that he withdrew the “object” (Campbell’s interesting euphemism) from display because he found it just too gruesome. Rev. Mike Hickcox, a key student protest leader in 1974, remembers that the book was only removed from the display case a short time before the student protest erupted to the surface. Personal communication: I had telephone conversations with Dr. Campbell about this issue on October 23, 2013, and with the Rev Mike Hickcox on February 26, 2014. Further email communication followed with Hickcox in late April 2014.

For the historical incident at hand, the short, grisly details are that a euro-christian invader, in this case, a quaker,<sup>8</sup> murdered and then skinned his Indian victim and used the skin as the binding for this book of christian history. The book was eventually presented as a special gift to The Iliff School of Theology by a methodist minister in 1893 shortly after the school's inception. By the mid-1970s the existence of this atrocity at Iliff became a concern to a small group of Iliff students who found the triumphal public exhibit of the book in the Iliff library to be an "embarrassing and tragic fact," which led them to write a letter of appeal to the institution's

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Campbell did recall that the members of the donor family would come by from time to time asking to view the book—in what seems to have been a hyper example of fetishizing the abject Other. As Lumbee legal scholar Robert Williams suggests, the conquest is never complete until the normative divergence of the colonized is erased, a political-theological principal he traces from the euro-christian medieval crusades against Muslims through the invasion of the Americas to the present. This fetishizing of the colonized Other is a constant rehearsing of the euro-christian colonizer's narrative of the normative divergence (read cultural and religious inadequacy) of the Native whom he has violently displaced. Robert A. Williams, Jr., *The American Indian in Western Legal Thought: The Discourses of Conquest* (Oxford Univ. Press, 1990).

<sup>8</sup> The fixed myth maintained among modern day White euro-christian quaker folk is that only non-violent relations with Native Americans dominated quaker thinking in the 18<sup>th</sup> century. Modern non-violence theory cannot, of course, be applied to any analysis of quaker notions of pacifism more than two centuries ago. It turns out, however, that many quaker folk served extensively in the continental army during the american revolution (to wit, General Daniel Morgan) and in earlier militias and armies involved in warring against the aboriginal peoples of the land (to wit, the so-called French and Indian war), and, more to the point, quaker folk on the frontiers engaged in as much genocidal violence against Indians as did other christian folk. Not only was Daniel Boone, famous Kentucky frontiersman and Indian killer, a scion of a quaker family (Sarah Morgan and Squire Boone), but so also is David Morgan, the actual perpetrator of this crime. David Morgan, it should be noted, seems to have left his quaker roots in favor of a return to the church of England. He is reputed to have built the episcopal church at Fairmont in western Virginia (modern day West Virginia).

president.<sup>9</sup> One of the students involved remembered twenty-two years later that many found the display as a bizarre mirroring of atrocity tales coming out of nazi Germany—e.g., the purported tanning of jewish skin used to make knickknacks like lamp shades.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> Letter to President Jameson Jones, May 30, 1974, from students Dave Randle, Mike Hartman, and Mike Hickcox. “Request of the American Indian Movement Concerning a book bound in the skin of an American Indian,” p. 2. Iliff Library archives, Abeyta-Tinker digital file: Iliff BOOK.Denouement 1974. As an American Indian I want to express my deep gratitude to these students for their courage in pressing this issue with the Iliff administration, and my appreciation for the close attention Jerry Campbell gave to this concern. It certainly should be noted here that these were White methodist students voicing this protest and alerting Colorado AIM. It would be another decade, after the appointment of Professor Vincent Harding, a key 60s Sothern Freedom Movement leader, before Iliff would begin to seriously recruit students of color to its institution, let alone American Indian students.

Some early reviewers of this essay have asked about the role of the local methodist church judicatory in this situation. There is no indication in the Iliff archival records that the larger methodist church of Colorado was brought into the conversation about the book and its immediate fate in 1974. At the same time, methodist church folk, particularly methodist clergy and ranking church hierarchy (e.g., the sitting bishop at any given time from 1893-1974) certainly had to have known about Iliff’s possession of this atrocity. I have found no archival record that any church official emitted any voice of protest from 1893 through 1974. And it should be noted that the methodist bishop in 1893, Henry White Warren, along with his wife Elizabeth Iliff Warren, Iliff’s widow, were serving on the board of trustees at the time of the gift. The couple had also been the significant financial force behind the start-up of the school the year before.

<sup>10</sup> Letter from Mike Hickcox to president Donald Messer, May 28, 1996, in which Hickcox clarified some of the issues around the book that had become historically clouded with misinformation. “The book reminded us of stories about nazis and lampshades made of the skins of murdered Jews. The atrocious nature of this escaped no one.” By then, Hickcox was Director of Communications for the UMC New England Conference. Iliff library archives. Abeyta-Tinker digital file: Iliff BOOK.Denouement 1974.

The atrocities of the german nazi era are well known, and most are well-documented. At the same time, the common stories of nazi manufactured lampshades made of human skin have resisted intense attempts to validate as actually true. See Mark Jacobson, *The Lampshade: A Holocaust Detective Story*



## How I Came to Know about the Book

In the fall of 1985 I had been a new faculty hire at Iliff School of Theology for only a couple of months when my continued presence at Iliff was challenged by this shocking discovery, a story that left me feeling immediately compromised. A senior colleague had pulled me aside and described an historical set of events at Iliff that he felt I needed to know about and which no one else seemed ready to share with me. Indeed, said this colleague, it had become a dark secret that Iliff folk had stopped talking about. My older colleague recited some of the basics of the narrative to me, including the eventual protest of students and part played by the American Indian Movement that finally sparked some repudiation of this shameful legacy in 1974. AIM had become involved as a direct result of this student leadership, first by protesting the inexpressible gruesomeness of the library rare book “acquisition,” and then negotiating how to resolve the ghastly atrocity that had suddenly come to light in the metro Indian community. This colleague went on to report that a medicine man (sic., the AIM contingent did not include a “medicine man,” yet it seems any Indian with any spiritual responsibility gets identified that way by White liberals) had been brought in to help separate the book itself from its cover so that the

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*from Buchenwald to New Orleans*, (Simon and Schuster, 2010); and Flint Whitlock, *The Beasts of Buchenwald: Karl and Ilse Koch, Human-Skin Lampshades, and the War-Crimes Trial of the Century* (Cable Publishing, 2011). See also the balanced news media essay by Sean Hamilton, “Lampshade Bought at Car Boot Sale Is Made from Human Skin” *The Sun* (November 5, 2010):

<http://www.thesun.co.uk/sol/homepage/features/3213084/Car-boot-lampshade-made-from-human-skin.html>. One attempt to validate the stories is Jamie McCarthy, “Frau Ilse Koch, General Lucius Clay, and Human-Skin Atrocities,” *Jewish Virtual Library*, on-line publication:

<http://www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/jsource/Holocaust/skin.html>.

human remains could be dealt with respectfully and ceremonially and then interred in a safe grave.<sup>11</sup>

I thanked the colleague for sharing this story, and as soon as possible I smoked out the entire school with cedar smoke (without being too intrusive—as a young upstart scholar on this faculty) and began to wonder whether I could even stay as a member of the faculty of the school. I did begin to ask some of my faculty colleagues about the book, including a long-time historian with a scholarly interest in Iliff's history, who profusely denied any knowledge of the book or the incident. It did seem that there was a culture of silence surrounding the incident. Since that time, Dr. Loring Abeyta, a John Wesley Iliff senior adjunct faculty member, and I have also found occasion to remind Iliff of its inconceivable participation in euro-christian colonialist terrorism. At the same time, it is noteworthy that when Iliff was finally confronted after eight decades with the abject gruesomeness of their ownership of this object of horror, Iliff did what was asked of them by surrendering the ancestral remains of the book cover to a delegation from the American Indian Movement of Colorado for proper burial. We must still justifiably ask, what took so long? What, indeed, were these christian folk thinking all those years as they passed by the display while engaging in their theological research in the library? What gratification did these christian students and teachers derive from this iconic fetish, this constant reminder of violence perpetrated against an Indian person? Even in 1974, however, some weighty internal politics evolved around the whole incident, resulting in the hush-hush aura I met a decade later.

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<sup>11</sup> This colleague was Professor (now emeritus) Clarence Snelling, also a methodist clergyman, and to whom I continue to be very grateful. The person who actually performed the task of separating the cover from the book was assistant librarian Jerry Campbell and not a member of the AIM contingent, as he related it to me in our phone conversation.

How, for example, was the school's administration to explain the turn of events to the Board of Trustees—the Board being largely non-academic, non-theologian, upper-class financial supporters of Iliff, who were less oriented towards concerns of social justice?

### **Founding Iliff School of Theology**

A methodist school, Iliff has its own colonial history, of course, as does every institution in the colonized US.<sup>12</sup> But let us examine the Iliff School of Theology a bit more. Iliff was formed in 1892, originally as a school within the University of Denver. Both John Chivington and John Evans were essentially out of circulation and no longer served in positions of political power, although Evans did continue to serve as chair of the University of Denver until his death in 1897. Evans and Chivington were the two key methodist figures involved politically and militarily in the events around the U.S. Army's terrorist murders known as the Sand Creek Massacre,<sup>13</sup> Chivington as the military leader and perpetrator of the crimes, and Evans as the

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<sup>12</sup> Even our modern reservation governments are colonial institutions, since the 1934 Indian Reorganization Act shaped those governments the way the US wanted them shaped. That has resulted in dysfunctional Indian national self-governance that is in every instance easily controlled by the US federal government (through its hegemonic agency of Native population control, the Bureau of Indian Affairs). See, for instance, Vine Deloria, Jr., and Clifford Lytle, *American Indians, American Justice* (Univ. of Texas, 1983); also, Akim D. Reinhardt, *Ruling Pine Ridge: Oglala Lakota Politics from the IRA to Wounded Knee* (Texas Tech University Press: April 12, 2007).

<sup>13</sup> On November 29, 1864, a peaceful village of Cheyenne and Arapaho folk, who had actually followed directions from Territorial Gov. John Evans (who was also the territorial Indian agent for the U.S.) and formally surrendered to the U.S. military commander at Ft. Lyons a month before, were viciously attacked by a U.S. Army contingent of more than 700 soldiers led by Col. (the former methodist Rev.) John Chivington. Black Kettle (the principal chief) and his other chiefs had presumed that they were safe from any violence, living under the security of a U.S. flag. Since most of the young men had left the

territorial governor complicit by generating a war-making hysteria in the months that led to the army's attack.<sup>14</sup> Both were dedicated to methodist piety. Evans was a deeply engaged methodist layperson; Chivington had been the "presiding elder" of the fledgling methodist church in Colorado Territory but then resigned his ministry in order to assume a U.S. Army commission in 1861. Both Evans and Chivington were involved (as trustees) in the founding of Trinity Methodist Church in 1863.<sup>15</sup> Evans was deeply involved in the start-up of Iliff's (methodist)

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village for a last buffalo hunt before the winter set in fully, Chivington's attack resulted in a ruthless killing of mostly old men, women and children. See Gary Roberts and David F. Halaas, "Written in Blood: the Soule-Cramer Sand Creek Massacre Letters," in *Western Voices: 125 Years of Colorado Writing*, edited by Steve Grinstead and Ben Fogelberg (Colorado Historical Society, 2004), 319-337; Ari Kelman, *A Misplaced Massacre: Struggling over the Memory of Sand Creek* (Harvard Univ., 2013). Also note Ward Churchill, "It Did Happen Here: Sand Creek, Scholarship, and the American Character," in *Fantasies of the Master Race: Literature, Cinema and the Colonization of the American Indians* (City Lights, 1998), 19-26.

<sup>14</sup> John Evans was territorial governor of Colorado at the time of the massacre, and substantial circumstantial evidence points decidedly to him as complicit in this attack even if he was not directly involved or responsible. A hard-working committee of faculty at the University of Denver are currently engaged in an academic investigation of Evan's complicity. While he had physically no part in perpetrating the crimes of that murderous moment, he put considerable energies in ramping up the anti-Indian rhetoric that helped create a public atmosphere of war hysteria. The actual attack was perpetrated by Chivington, in spite of the fact that a number of his officers told him that the village was peaceful and under the protection of the U.S. flag. Chivington was a methodist minister but had resigned his ministry position in order to assume a military career during the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century civil war. At Sand Creek he functioned as military commander of the Colorado 1<sup>st</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> cavalry and led his men into a shameful slaughter and mutilation of a peaceful Cheyenne and Arapaho village. Those he killed were mostly women, children, and old men, including many of the principal peace chiefs of the Cheyenne.

<sup>15</sup> Chivington was appointed "presiding elder" both in 1860 and 1861. His presence is recorded for the first annual conference of the ministers of Colorado Territory, held in Denver July 10, 1863. Twelve days

sister campus, the University of Denver in 1864, the same year he was also engaged in generating the public hysteria that led to the military attacks on Cheyenne and Arapaho peoples, and a decade earlier had helped to found both a methodist school of theology and another methodist university located in an Illinois town named after himself prior to moving to Colorado.<sup>16</sup>

Iloff School of Theology was certainly not involved in that 1864 massacre, yet, at the same time, Iloff did indubitably capitalize on that colonial history. John Wesley Iloff, the namesake of Iloff School of Theology, made his fortune during the cattle boom of the later 1860s and 70s—on Indian land made safe for White euro-christian invasion, settlement and wealth-generating enterprises by Chivington’s terrorism at Sand Creek and facilitated by the railroading enterprises of Chivington’s political patron John Evans.<sup>17</sup> Railroads, of course, were

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later Trinity Church ("First Methodist Episcopal Church of Denver") was formally established with Chivington and Evans appointed as two of the five trustees. Excerpts from methodist documents of the time are published on the “Colorado Genealogy” website:

[http://coloradogenealogy.com/history1/methodist\\_episcopal\\_church\\_colorado.htm](http://coloradogenealogy.com/history1/methodist_episcopal_church_colorado.htm). Accessed 6-16-2014.

<sup>16</sup> Evanston, Illinois, is named after John Evans. The seminary started by Evans is called today Garrett Evangelical; and the university is Northwestern University. A committee of faculty at Northwestern have engaged in an analytical investigation of John Evans’ complicity in the events leading up to the Sand Creek Massacre. They just recently published their report on the matter:

<http://www.northwestern.edu/provost/committees/john-evans-study/study-committee-report.pdf>.

<sup>17</sup> The history of development on the frontiers in the american invasion cries out for significant critical analysis that moves decidedly beyond this history as romance genre. The history of Colorado and particularly John Wesley Iloff are a case in point. For a general description of the stockmen of the era, including Iloff, bending the law persistently, see Steven F. Mehls, “The Rancher’s Frontier,” Chapter IV in *The New Empire of the Rockies: A History of Northeast Colorado*, BLM Cultural Resource Series (Colorado: No. 16), 1984 (updated 2008):

fundamentally important to the wealth generated by so-called cattle barons like John Wesley Iliff, who were foundational to carrying forward the capitalization of land and livestock that had begun with Chivington's and Evans' methods of clearing Indian lands for white entrepreneurs. The small-scale selling of beef to a couple thousand Colorado miners (Iliff's early 1860s venture) escalated to a sophisticated enterprise of shipping thousands of head of cattle by rail to voracious eastern markets after 1867. Supplying a few miners was a far different economic enterprise from that of shipping carloads of beef, the enterprise that elevated JW Iliff to enormous wealth after the railroad began to connect the west with eastern populations. None of it could have been accomplished had Chivington, Evans, and other agents of Indian removal and extermination had not cleared the way. Before Lincoln named John Evans territorial governor of Colorado, Evans had already generated considerable wealth in Illinois as an entrepreneur engaged in the new railroad industry. Moreover, Evans seems to have come to Colorado with a presidential mandate to open the territory to transcontinental railroad expansion. For his part, Lincoln needed the

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[http://www.nps.gov/history/history/online\\_books/blm/co/16/chap4.htm](http://www.nps.gov/history/history/online_books/blm/co/16/chap4.htm). The standard and often cited biography of Iliff is a clear example of western history as romance: Agnes Wright Spring: "A Genius for Handling Cattle": John W. Iliff," in *When Grass Was King: Contributions to the Western Range Cattle Industry Study*, edited by Maurice Frink, W. Turrentine Jackson, and Agnes Wright Spring (University of Colorado Press, 1956), pp. 332-450. For a standard history of the cattlemen told within this romance genre, see Lewis Atherton, *The Cattle Kings* (Indiana Univ. Press, 1961). Building on this western romance genre, Tom Noel has relatively recently reiterated the legend of Iliff in a short newspaper op-ed piece: Tom Noel, "Iliff Crafted Kingdom from Cattle: Ohioan Struck Gold by Buying Up Land, Selling Livestock," *Rocky Mountain News* (March, 2008):

<http://m.rockymountainnews.com/news/2008/Mar/01/noel-iliff-crafted-kingdom-from-cattle/>. An early attempt to critique this historical romance can be found in a variety of sources. See, for instance, the 1953 masters' thesis by Donald La Grande Oglesby, "J.W. Iliff, Cattle King of Colorado," thesis, Western State College of Colorado Gunnison, 1953, particularly his conclusions in Chapter III.

railroad to provide quicker transcontinental transport of western precious metal resources in order to fund his war effort.

There is a largely un-explored story of J.W. Iliff and other early cattlemen building their enormous wealth by playing fast and loose with what were labeled at the time “public” lands (“open range”) and then blatantly misusing the 1862 Homestead Act and succeeding legislation to convert much of that property, in Iliff’s case for instance, into his own extensive private land holding and most importantly control of water resources.<sup>18</sup> Hagiographic descriptions of John Wesley Iliff as, among other things, “...the squarest man that rode the plains,”<sup>19</sup> were common epitaphs upon his death in 1878. Yet this little-told story of his land accumulation reveals that he was not averse to manipulating existing land laws in order to build his empire of wealth. Some may attribute this to savvy business sense, but certainly he involved friends and employees in a certain amount of legal deception in order to increase his control of cattle land and establish his

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<sup>18</sup> See, for instance, Mehls, “The Rancher’s Frontier”:

Cattlemen on the plains were using (and abusing) the various statutes soon after they were passed. First arrived stockmen, attracted by alleged easy wealth and liberal Federal land policies, set about to “cash in” on the “Beef Bonanza.” They were not concerned about bending the law if need or opportunity arose. After “pre-empting” or homesteading a ranch site, cattlemen informally took over adjacent range. As useable lands became filled, competition for remaining soil became intense. This led to stockmen filing claims under the Timber Culture [1873] and Desert Land [1877] Acts so they could better control the waterholes and prime range. This way a cattleman could dominate thousands of acres of surrounding public domain. To fulfill the requirements of the law area ranchers used various ruses. A popular trick was to construct an irrigation ditch by dragging a pointed stick or plow behind a horse and rider. Another trick was to dump a barrel of water on the ground and call it “irrigated” to satisfy Desert Land Act provisions.... Beyond the land fraud some ranchers, determined to control the best range, simply fenced portions of the public lands.

<sup>19</sup> *The Cheyenne Daily Leader*, February 10, 1878. Quoted in Oglesby, “J.W. Iliff, Cattle King of Colorado,” p. 46.

leadership in what would become a lucrative american beef industry. The vast majority of literature dealing with Iliff tends towards this genre of western romance. Nevertheless there are clear indications of the “trickery” and subterfuge that Iliff and other cattle barons employed in order to create the lucrative american beef industry in the late 1860s and beyond.<sup>20</sup>

While Iliff died young, his widow Elizabeth married the methodist bishop of Colorado and used Iliff’s wealth, made from Indian land, to start the school in 1892, fourteen years after Iliff’s passing. It seems no small irony that a book on the history of Christianity bound in a murdered Indian’s skin would be gifted to Iliff School of Theology so shortly after the death of the school’s namesake, given that John Wesley Iliff had his own ambivalence about the sincerity of christian adherents. Iliff’s biographers report that “...Iliff’s respect for real Christians was as great as his intolerance for ‘pretended’ Christians, and he had excused himself for not joining the church on grounds of ‘the inexcusable inconsistencies of so many professed Christians betrayed in their business transactions.’”<sup>21</sup> Elizabeth Iliff Warren, her husband the bishop Henry White Warren and Iliff’s oldest son William Seward Iliff were all serving on the board of trustees of the

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<sup>20</sup> Even Oglesby’s attempt to challenge and critique Iliff’s business practices as unethical ends up at the same romantic assessment of Iliff as all the other hagiographic literature about the cattle king whose final life legacy was a school of theology. According to Oglesby, what Iliff actually demonstrated was a “...shrewdness which seems to have brought him to success” and allowed him to “...skirt the law and yet be within it.” Oglesby, “J.W. Iliff, Cattle King of Colorado,” p. 51.

<sup>21</sup> Lewis Atherton, *The Cattle Kings*, A Bison Book, University of Nebraska Press, 1961, p. 132, quoting from Obituaries in Denver, *The Daily Rocky Mountain News*, February 10, 1878; *The Daily Tribune*, February 10, 1878.



parent institution (University of Denver) when the school received the gift.<sup>22</sup> Given the euro-christian / methodist enmeshment around the colonial conquest of the Colorado territory and the beginnings of key methodist institutions in Colorado, perhaps it is only natural that Iliff School of Theology would accept a tanned Indian hide as a special gift, especially when it was used as a binding for a revered history of Christianity, proudly displaying it along with its accompanying romantic narrative of euro-christian bravery and conquest. Indeed, such an “artifact” might not seem out of place at all given the popular White euro-christian ethos; it would in fact reinforce the abject status of the Native and the sense of intrinsic righteousness of White euro-christian domination over Indian peoples and Indian lands. Needless to say, American Indian people who know anything at all about this book, and especially Cheyenne and Arapaho people, often refuse to set foot on the Iliff campus, even if they know that the offensive cover is no longer wrapped around the book. For Cheyenne and Arapahos the history of the U.S. Army Massacre at Sand Creek and its deep connection with colorado methodism has been enough to keep them out of Iliff’s sacred halls to this day.

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<sup>22</sup> In spite of his methodist name, Iliff belonged to no church and was even critical of what he called “pretended Christians” (Atherton, *The Cattle Kings*, 132). While his wife made claims of a sickbed confession on his part (e.g., Atherton, 132), the methodist commitment seems to have been wholly his wife’s—in spite of the lingering myth that he himself had long “envisioned” such a school—presumably while out riding the range. Despite this deathbed conversion report, an Iliff School of Theology website persists in the invented religious Iliff who planned all along for a school of theology. According to this description, Iliff was “a highly religious man who hoped to create a training school for ministers in the Rocky Mountain region” (see the “Iliff Family Papers Biographical Sketches” posted on Iliff School of Theology’s Taylor Library archives website: <http://www.iliff.edu/research/archives/biosketches.htm>). It should be noted that many of the Iliff family still live in Colorado today and continue to support the school as a significant part of Iliff’s constituency base.

And yet the normative institutions of the dominant euro-christian culture seem systemically blind to the reasons causing Indian people to have an aversion to the very brick and mortar which constitutes the Iliff School of Theology. Even those on the liberal end of White euro-american landscape recoil at words like “atrocious” and “terror” when applied to themselves and their history. It is easier to neutralize the history of american violence with minimalizing platitudes such as “it really wasn’t that bad,” or “it was bad, too bad, a real tragedy, but one that is past now,” or “we atone for our sins.” Yet the ultimate result of this neutralization is to maintain the status quo of euro-christian wealth and the ownership of Indian land. If we peel away the layers of that status quo, we find the abjection and fetishizing of American Indian peoples that has sustained the euro-christian norm on this continent for centuries. In this one grotesque and nightmarish trophy of Indian skin covering a book on the history of Christianity, we find the nexus of fetish and abjection that has characterized the experience of American Indian peoples since the beginning of euro-christian settlement and colonization; indeed, a “priceless vestment for the teachings of brotherly love.”

The flaying of a slaughtered Indian marks the *abjection* of Indian Peoples (and Indian persons) in the public consciousness of the conquerors, a distinct deprecation and vilification of the displaced conquered Other. As contemporary postcolonial literature persistently insists, colonialism only works when the colonizer first of all rationalizes his superiority and normativity over against those he has colonized or displaced; when the social being of the colonizer is bounded and determined by the expulsion of the Other. The colonized must, in this case, be relegated in the narrative of the colonizer to the ashbin of abjection.<sup>23</sup> Ultimately, Kristeva and

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<sup>23</sup> See Julia Kristeva, *Powers of Horror*.

other critical theorists use abjection as a category to describe a less-than-humanness of certain humans—who are nevertheless integral to the social whole by helping define the social whole from the periphery of society's discards. It is precisely impurity of the Other on the periphery who help define purity of the Self; yet those abject discards are simultaneously vitally necessary. As Anne McClintock argues in the context of Victorian England and the British Empire:

Abject peoples are those whom industrial imperialism rejects but cannot do without: slaves, prostitutes, the colonized, domestic workers, the insane, the unemployed, and so on. Certain threshold zones become abject zones and are policed with vigor: the Arab Casbah, the Jewish ghetto, the Irish slum, the Victorian garret and kitchen, the squatter camp, the mental asylum, the red light district, and the bedroom. Inhabiting the cusp of domesticity and market, industry and empire, the abject returns to haunt modernity as its constitutive, inner repudiation: the rejected from which one does not part.<sup>24</sup>

In this schema, Indian people on the frontier of the advancing Euro-Christian invasion must necessarily be cast as abject. This is the only way for the colonizer to draw a bright line between the uncertainty of the Native wilderness and the security of the rising colonial metropolis. They

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<sup>24</sup> Anne McClintock, *Imperial Leather*, 72.

are the savage, uncivilized barbarians, cast as “unfriendly” or “hostiles” who “raid” christian settlements across the continent. The narrative of abjection justifies to the euro-christian colonial Self that they have behaved within the boundaries of justice and morality when they killed the Natives they found living on the land they coveted and stole their lands. By this persistent narrative, the Native peoples actually deserved to be conquered, and euro-christian conquerors were bound to demonstrate that fact to the victims themselves in multiple ways. Thus, Cheyenne and Arapaho people were left to deal with the utter desecration / mutilation of their dead by the U.S. Army in the Sand Creek Massacre when, for instance, both male and female genitalia were cut off of the bodies as trophies, leaving Cheyenne and Arapaho with a perpetual sense of utter abjection, as societal cast-asides, something that persists into the present in those nations’ (reservations’) experiences of poverty and poverty-accompanying levels of substance abuse. On the other hand, there must be a nagging sub-conscious sense among the euro-christian colonizer that this was *not* moral or just—hence, the need to fetishize, even or especially in a theological context, in order to comfort the colonizer’s self and cast the Natives as abject and undeserving. This might explain the gratification felt by White euro-christian folk viewing this book and the fetishizing homage paid to it over the years. As Robert Stoller observes, “a fetish is a story masquerading as an object,”<sup>25</sup> a notion that connects back to our opening characterization of the book as religious pornography.

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<sup>25</sup> Robert J. Stoller, *Observing the Erotic Imagination*, New Haven: Yale University Press, 1985, p. 155. Stoller provides a relevant insight informing our notion here that the book served as a fetish for faithful christian folk who viewed themselves as living only in the light of purest piety:

...an object (inanimate thing, animal, or body part) becomes a fetish when it stands for – condenses in itself – meanings that are... unconscious: a fetish is a story masquerading as an object. We should not be

For Indian people, who continue to experience a status rooted in abjection even today, however, the stuff of bodily mutilation and desecration extends even far beyond these helpful, albeit abstract, notions of abjection and fetish. It has far more to do with our experience of the disruption of any person's spiritual energy when the body is violated after death, something that continues to affect us even centuries later. Just as Cheyenne and Arapaho peoples continue to deal with the spiritual disruption that persists around the murders and mutilations of old people, women, and children at Sand Creek, all Native people in the metropolitan area around Iliff School of Theology continue to deal with the same sort of disruption of the sacred that continues to reside with this book of christian history. While euro-christian folk may have their own emotional attachment to the bodies of their dead, euro-christian doctrines of souls leaving their bodies at the moment of death has meant that euro-christian folk have less absolute regard for the body that a soul has left behind. Thus, they can only minimally empathize with the deep sense of Indian loss. I, for one, have resisted making any pilgrimage downstairs at Iliff to view what remains of the book over the past 29 years. The negative spiritual energy still attached to the book would make it impossible for me to merely view it without engaging in significant ceremonial cleansing both of myself in preparation and of the object itself, not to mention the personal purification that would be necessary afterwards. So I have chosen to rely on others (allies among students particularly), who seem less affected by, of at least less aware of, the spiritual energies around the book to report back to me what they have seen. For Indian people yet today, the matter is deeply personal and deeply spiritual. With this in mind, I ask the reader

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fooled, because the conscious experience is of instantaneous arousal, into thinking that the process if therefore simple, obvious, reflexive, unmotivated.

to make room for what some may find to be my over-determining of the horror involved in a christian book (or any book) bound in the skin of an Indian ancestor.

### **History of Iliff's "Gift"**

So let us turn now to something of the history of this gift and the multiple but invariably distinctly colonialist narratives about the book's origins that traveled with it. Pressing those narratives against historical actualities immediately reveals the fabrication of the narratives but makes the re-creation of an accurate history more difficult. It never ceases to amaze how euro-christian settlers in America can create history, that is, fabricate imagined narrative accounts that manage to exonerate themselves as guiltless, while shifting blame to the very victims of their euro-christian invasion and conquest of this continent for their own destruction. Stories get twisted and convoluted, becoming "facts" invented in the colonialist consciousness and given a proper dressing-up so that they seem to reflect a triumphalist justification of murder itself. Likewise, the narratives surrounding this Iliff book are thick with the sentimental romance and dangerous adventure of territorial conquest of Native inhabitants. Stories of genocide and ethnic cleansing become "exciting" or "thrilling" stories of christian heroism, and function as self-justifying romance tales about the building a new country.<sup>26</sup> All of this is part of the process of fetishizing the abject Native Peoples who were displaced by the christian invasion.

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<sup>26</sup> A relatively recent historian in West Virginia describes the story of David Morgan's 1779 killing of two Indians, who were then flayed to harvest and tan their skin, as "One of the most exciting and enduring stories of pioneer adventure in West Virginia," naming the act as "Morgan's heroism" and casting the ensuing colonial narrative tradition as "a sort of legend." Jack B. Moore, "The Earliest Printed Version of David Morgan and the Two Indians," *West Virginia History*, 23.2 (1962): 101-115.

There are variant stories, which underscores how deeply rooted the mythic romance is in the American frontier narrative. The stories differ in various details, including the date and location. Both 1774 and 1776 are reported as dates of occurrence. While one narrative reports Kentucky, rather than western Virginia, as the location, the murder most evidently took place in western Virginia in 1779 as the Christian invasion was in the midst of establishing new settlements in what were still Indian lands, an invasion happening simultaneous to the Christian colonialists' civil war further east against the rightful state rule of England over their (albeit, ill-gotten) colonies in North America.<sup>27</sup> Different persons are identified as the heroized murderer in these romantic colonialist narratives. The one that accompanied the book to Iliff identifies the killer as a high-ranking American "revolutionary army" military officer, a general named Daniel Morgan, a colonialist settler from Virginia who saw extensive military service in western Pennsylvania and other early civil war/aka revolutionary war venues.<sup>28</sup> The narratives continue with reports of the killing of one or two Indian people (the narratives vary). In the general Daniel Morgan version, he is touted in the legends of the book's cover as a revolutionary war hero who used the tanned Native skin to make trinkets as gifts for underlings; as a vengeful husband and

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<sup>27</sup> I.e., the so-called American revolution was in actuality an illegal civil war against the proper European monarch to whom colonial North America owed fealty—however that war gets rationalized in American Euro-Christian narrativizing.

<sup>28</sup> Daniel Morgan, already a famous military figure for his leadership of a long-rifle company of sharpshooters (Morgan's Riflemen), was a colonel at the time of the 1779 incident, commander of the 11<sup>th</sup> Virginia Regiment. Don Higginbotham, *Daniel Morgan Revolutionary Rifleman*. Published for the Institute of Early American History and Culture at Williamsburg, Virginia (University of North Carolina Press, 1961); James Graham, *Life of General Daniel Morgan of the Virginia Line of the Army of the United States* (Nabu Press, 2010, reprint, 1856).

father wreaking vengeance on the alleged murderer of his wife and daughter.<sup>29</sup> In some accounts, Morgan fought a hand to hand battle with an Indian person for several hours, with the handicap of a severe wound, before finally overcoming his foe. Whether he killed the Indian person(s) himself or they were killed under his command (again, the narratives vary), he does give the ensuing order for desecrating the body(ies). In flagrant violation of any civilized behavior—at least, other than christian civilized behavior—this colonial terrorist invader ordered the body(ies) to be flayed and the skin tanned to be used in various ways as treasured knickknacks and curiosities. A piece of the tanned Native skin was used then as the leather binding for one of the colonizer’s sacred books, *A History of Christianity*. Eventually, the book changed hands from the killer Morgan to a physician named Barns, whose descendent minister finally donated it to Iliff, presumably as a special gift to help inspire young ministers of the gospel. At this point we should at least note that the most probable killer was someone named David Morgan and not this Gen. Daniel Morgan who is named so frequently in these stories. Indeed, the mythical nature of the narrative is demonstrated by the confusion over the actual name of the killer, who is variously named as David, Daniel, or General Morgan.<sup>30</sup>

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<sup>29</sup> Daniel Morgan married Abigail Bailey around 1862. They did have two daughters, but the historical fact is that Abigail outlived Daniel. Thus, the “Daniel Morgan” myth fails the test of historical veracity on the face of it.

<sup>30</sup> There is also one other but much later attribution that assigns this act of murder to another general Morgan, namely to a confederate general named John Hunt Morgan, most famous for his renegade raid into Union territory in Ohio. Mike Hickcox directed my attention to a 1927 newspaper article from Woodville, Mississippi, which makes this attribution and complicates the search for the actual perpetrator. “Skin of Indian Binds Old Book,” *Woodville Republican*, 8-13-1927, front page. Interestingly, the *Republican* repeats much of the mythic narrative that has been attached to both Daniel and David



The undated interpretive note accompanying the book itself inside the display case outside the Iliff Library read:

This Latin church history book, written by Johann Lorenz von Mosheim in 1752, is bound in American Indian skin. The Indian was killed in hand-to-hand combat by General David Morgan of Morgantown, West Virginia, on April 1, 1779.<sup>31</sup>

On the inside cover of the book, dated September 16, 1893, is an inscription that reads:

This book was published 150 years ago and is covered with the skin of an Indian who was killed after a desperate struggle by General Morgan, proprietor of Morgantown,

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Morgan. The article is available on-line:

<http://news.google.com/newspapers?nid=999&dat=19270813&id=wKM8AAAAIIBAJ&sjid=YfYFAAAAIIBAJ&pg=1554,4772517>. Since this is the only source making the claim for John Hunt Morgan, we should easily dismiss the possibility. Moreover, this Morgan was from Alabama and lived in a much later (american civil war) era.

<sup>31</sup> See Iliff archives, Abeyta-Tinker digital file: "Book.Rocky Mtn News.2-13-1934," page 4. The perpetrator here is identified as General David Morgan, but David Morgan never held the rank of general, although he did serve with British forces in the British-French War, wrongly called the French and Indian War. But romanticizing the narrative accords David Morgan a nice, if undeserved, promotion, much like the romance of Lt. Col. (aka general) George Armstrong Custer.

West Virginia and presented to my father, William Barns  
M.D. by the hand of General Morgan himself.<sup>32</sup>

The naming of “General” Morgan here would definitely imply Daniel rather than David Morgan, since he was the one who carried that formal military rank in the continental army, but neither Morgan was from Morgantown. Daniel, in fact, was from much further east in Virginia. The typewritten copy of this inscription continues with a further explanation, including clarification offered by the son of the donor some years later:

The Volume was donated to the school by the Rev.  
R.M. Barns, a methodist minister who came to Colorado in  
pioneer days and was chaplain at the state prison in Canon  
City.

The late Horace M. Barns, son of the minister, gave  
a history of the book when he visited Denver many years  
ago. This was the story:

The book was part of the private library of Gen.  
Daniel Morgan, a Virginian, officer of the Revolution, and  
Indian fighter.

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<sup>32</sup>The text is taken from the inscription on the inside cover of the book, and is dated Sept. 16, 1893. Iliff archives, Abeyta-Tinker digital file: BOOK.Continued history.Letters.pdf.

Indians, fearful of fighting Morgan directly, plotted to raid his home when it was unguarded. An Algonquin warrior killed his beautiful young wife and infant daughter.

Morgan trailed the killer for three years. But when he met the killer unexpectedly, Morgan was unarmed. The Indian carried a tomahawk and a gun. Morgan was first shot in the neck, but managed to close in and wrested the tomahawk from the Indian and killed him with it.

The enraged general ordered the skin stripped from the Indian and tanned. Later, the gruesome trophy was fashioned into a cover for a sacred book titled *Institutionum Historiae Christianae Compendium* (History of Christianity).<sup>33</sup>

The *Rocky Mountain News*, a Denver newspaper with a long history of anti-Indian racism dating from its founding editor William Byers and the paper's celebration of the Sand Creek Massacre,<sup>34</sup> retold this same story in a news item dated 1934, some 40 years after the book was gifted to the Iliff School of Theology. The headline announces, "Skin of Indian Makes Rare Book Binding." It includes a romantic pictorial, showing a smaller, older (if far nobler and better

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<sup>33</sup> Iliff archives, Abeyta-Tinker digital file: BOOK.Continued history.Letters.pdf. Although the exact date is not included in the archive, this must have been in the 1930s.

<sup>34</sup> The *News*' anti-Indian racism extended into the late 20<sup>th</sup> century with contemporary editors like Vincent Carroll and his anti-Colorado AIM rhetoric.

dressed) White man besting a much younger, larger, and stronger Indian man along with a portrait of a young University of Denver student admiring the volume, and reciting the inscription accompanying the library display. Elizabeth Kuskulis' news article, "Iloff Library Has Old Book Bound in Slain Indian's Skin," recounts the book's preciousness to Iliff in a glowing, romantic retelling of the events involved in the legend of the book. "An Indian warrior's skin, finer than the finest vellum, forms the binding of an ancient book, 'The History of Christianity,' one of the most treasured relics in the library of the Iliff School of Theology...." After a short recounting of the General Daniel Morgan version of the legend, Kuskulis concludes, the book...

...was presented ... to the Iliff School of Theology, where it now reposes in state, viewed thru the sanctity of its glass cabinet by hundreds of students and visitors annually. In spite of the age and wanderings of the book, it is remarkably well preserved. The skin is not broken or cracked; its smoothness and texture equal those of the finest parchment; its color has mellowed to deep ivory mottling into saffron, and by an ironic quirk of fate, it endures as a priceless vestment for the teachings of brotherly love."<sup>35</sup>

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<sup>35</sup> Kuskulis, "Iloff Library Has Old Book Bound in Slain Indian's Skin," *RMN* (February 12, 1934). Iliff archives: Abeyta-Tinker digital file: Book.Rocky Mtn News.2-12-1934.pdf. Interestingly enough, the 1827 *Woodville Republican* article repeats much of the mythic narrative that has been attached to both

I suspect no further comment is needed.

The exotic and treasured nature of the book continued to fascinate residents of Denver. Twenty years later the *Rocky Mountain News* followed up with another news item (in 1955) that reported an entirely different version of the legend. Martin Rist, a faculty member and librarian at the time, gladly recounted this variant but equally colonialist romantic version, this time predicated on a more recent communication from a Morgan descendent.<sup>36</sup> In this version it is “General” David Morgan who, the story claims, was attacked in the fields by two Indians. He kills both, is wounded in the process, and the two Indians are skinned by other settlers and tanned for use on this book—along with belts, shot pouches, and razor strops.<sup>37</sup> The narrative seems a classic example of euro-christian frontier mythologization with all the familiar tropes and images.

Both variants are pure colonialist fantasy. If all american colonialist history is substantially imaginary in most respects, these tales are completely fabricated romance tales,

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Daniel and David Morgan and seems to provide much of the language used by Kuskulis in her *RMN* article. “Skin of Indian Binds Old Book,” *Woodville Republican*.

<sup>36</sup> See the letter written to Iliff by Haze Morgan. Morgan identifies a printed version of the story, which he calls a “true account.” Daniel W. Kauffman and William O. Hickock, *Early History of Western Pennsylvania and of the West* (Pittsburg, 1846), 196f. The Haze Morgan letter is in the Iliff archives, Abeyta-Tinker digital file: Book.Continued history.Letters.pdf. As we shall note in Part Two of this essay, there are several other accounts in print, but this one has some claim to a certain authenticity as the earliest version recorded.

<sup>37</sup> Jack Foster, with research by Frances Melrose, “A Book Bound in HUMAN SKIN? Ah, Yes! Iliff School’s Rare Volume Dates from Indian Battle in 1779,” *Rocky Mountain News*, Sunday, Sept. 25, 1935. Iliff archives: Abeyta-Tinker digital file: Rocky Mtn News.2-12-1934.pdf.

helping christian invaders and conquerors feel somehow justified in their perpetration of murder and even further atrocities. Under close analysis, it is clear that Daniel Morgan, the general, can certainly not have been the perpetrator of this crime. For all the atrocities that Daniel Morgan may have perpetrated during this period of the so-called revolutionary war, this could not have been one of them.<sup>38</sup> Indeed the perpetrator must have been David Morgan, a quaker settler in the Monongahela river valley and not a holder of any military rank. Secondly, it matters little who did the killing or why, in this case either David or Daniel Morgan. The inhumane and uncivilized flaying of another human being's skin is always an atrocity in and of itself, even when it is perpetrated by self-justifying christian militants. For the sake of this initial essay, it will be enough to trace how a christian graduate school of theology came to finally realize that they had been wilfully participating in a particularly macabre and ostensibly un-christian act of gruesome colonial glorification of a human death. The question remains, of course, why it took 80 years to come to this realization.

### **Display Finally Removed**

The final removal of the book from public display occurred in the larger context of social discourse and action in the U.S. This was the era of the Black civil rights movement and the

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<sup>38</sup> I will trace this history more analytically in a projected essay on the actual 1779 event. West Virginia continues to honor the heroism of David Morgan to this day. The City of Fairmont, Marion County and West Virginia Archives and History have erected a monument in this Morgan's honor as recently as 2008 in Fairmount WV in 2008. Pictures are posted on-line at:

<http://www.hmdb.org/marker.asp?marker=21307>. Accessed March 2014.

height of Indian activism marked by the work of the American Indian Movement.<sup>39</sup> Moreover, the post second world war context of global decolonizing movements put increasing pressure on american people to deal with the claims for equal treatment by people of color in the U.S.<sup>40</sup> The public visibility of such a celebratory display of an act of human torture, especially in a christian school of theology, was becoming increasingly untenable. Thus, in 1974 this gory display of a treasured rare book was finally removed by library staff, perhaps only days before protesting students informed the American Indian Movement of its existence. Jerry Campbell, the assistant librarian, who brokered negotiations between the administration and student protesters and AIM, remembers that he would finally no longer allow the book to be displayed. It was, he recalled

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<sup>39</sup> The denouement of Iliff's Indian fetish book came only fourteen months after the 73-day occupation of Wounded Knee by protesting Oglala Lakota folk and AIM allies, about 300 miles northeast of Iliff's location, and sixteen months after the Denver Police Department's armed assault on the offices of the Crusade for Justice, only miles from Iliff and the killing of Luis Martinez. The Crusade was Denver's manifestation of the national Chicano protest movement. The Crusade was connected with the national pan-latino political party, La Raza Unida and was always strongly allied with Denver AIM. The protest of people of color in Denver must have been palpable, particularly on a liberal school of theology campus. For a short discussion of the Crusade for Justice, see Amy Goodman's interview with journalist Roberto Rodriguez on the occasion of the 2005 death of Crusade leader Corky Gonzalez: Chicano Leader Rodolfo "Corky" Gonzales 1929-2005: "He Was the Fist. He Stood For Defiance, Resistance," on-line at: [http://www.democracynow.org/2005/4/15/chicano\\_leader\\_rodolfo\\_corky\\_gonzales\\_1929](http://www.democracynow.org/2005/4/15/chicano_leader_rodolfo_corky_gonzales_1929).

<sup>40</sup> Mary L. Dudziak presents a very tight argument that the global politics of the Cold War virtually compelled the U.S. to act decisively and quickly on issues of Black Civil Rights in ways that politicians might not have for decades yet to come. *Cold War Civil Rights: Race and the Image of American Democracy* (Princeton, 2001/2011—with a new preface by the author). Also, Dudziak, "Brown as a Cold War Case," *Journal of American History*, 91 (2004); Dudziak. "Desegregation as a Cold War Imperative," *Stanford Law Review* (1988).

recently, “just too gruesome.”<sup>41</sup> So, Iliff’s eventual surrender of this grisly human trophy began with student protest, with the attention evidently of only a precious few among the faculty, including Campbell in particular, almost as if few had noticed the horrific nature of its presence until that moment.<sup>42</sup> In a letter preserved in the Iliff library archives, three students addressed Iliff President Jameson Jones in 1974 to protest the shameful display as radically incongruent with Iliff’s professed values.<sup>43</sup> Students applied enormous pressure from within Iliff to rectify what they saw as an increasingly shocking embarrassment to the school, an embarrassment that once again needs to be put into the larger societal context of political protest and struggles for civil rights and ethnic recognition. Furthermore, they urged the administration to make a public press release on the issue “even though the situation is embarrassing to the School’s sense of pride....”<sup>44</sup> While students protested the book’s presence internally, they also made contact with the Denver Indian community through the Denver Indian Center and the Denver American Indian Movement chapter.<sup>45</sup> Mr. Vincent Harvier (Quechan Nation), affiliated with both AIM and the Indian Center, returned the call and began the proceedings to repatriate the “human

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<sup>41</sup> As per my telephone conversation with Campbell on October 23, 2013.

<sup>42</sup> The one faculty member whom the president credits with having “mentioned” the book in the classroom was evidently Clarence Snelling, the faculty colleague who approached me in 1985.

<sup>43</sup> The three students who signed this letter were Dave Randle, Mike Hartman, and Mike Hickcox, dated May 30, 1974. Iliff library archives, Abeyta-Tinker digital file: denouement 1974.pdf.

<sup>44</sup> Student letter to president Jones, “Request of the American Indian Movement,” p. 2.

<sup>45</sup> It was Mike Hickcox who actually made this phone call—as per my conversation with Rev. Hickcox on February 26, 2014.



remains” of this Indian ancestor and to finally resolve this euro-christian fantasy of triumphalism in a way more respectful to Indian people and to the person murdered.

On May 27<sup>th</sup> Indian community representatives Mr. Harvier and Mr. Wesley Martel visited Iliff to see the book for themselves. Harvier was Director of the Denver Chapter of the American Indian Movement and also on the board of Denver Native Americans United (the formal name of the Denver Indian Center at that time).<sup>46</sup> Martel, a citizen of the Wind River Shoshone, was another influential member of the Denver area Indian community during this period.<sup>47</sup> What followed within Iliff was what appears to have been a relatively short but intensely conflicted internal debate over whether or not to comply with the request of the American Indian Movement and the Iliff students involved to return the human remains. The president of Iliff tried in vain to present his misgivings on the proposal to return the human remains in terms of historical preservation. Yet it seems clear from the archival evidences that the protection of Iliff’s base of financial support and the avoidance of offending key constituent supporters (i.e., financial supporters) of Iliff were paramount in his considerations.

The Iliff library archives include an internal Iliff administrative memorandum written after May 27 but before decisive action was taken by the Board (May 31) to repatriate the book’s cover. This memorandum, undoubtedly written by president Jameson Jones, recounted the basic

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<sup>46</sup> Mr. Harvier has since passed away at his home on the Ft. Yuma Reservation in Arizona. To begin to grasp the importance of Mr. Harvier to the Indian world, please do notice his 2006 obituary:

[http://www.yumasun.com/obituaries/obituaries/article\\_3ad1893d-370c-536f-8efd-f8d7745436b0.html](http://www.yumasun.com/obituaries/obituaries/article_3ad1893d-370c-536f-8efd-f8d7745436b0.html).

<sup>47</sup> Martel is mis-identified as Mantel in Iliff archival records, Iliff library archives: Abeyta-Tinker digital file: denouement 1974.pdf.

colonialist fantasy narrative before reporting AIM's request for release of the human remains.<sup>48</sup> The writer continues by reporting, presumably to the Board of Trustees: "An Iliff faculty member mentioned this book in a class this spring and a student on his own initiative took the information to the American Indian Movement people in Denver."<sup>49</sup> What is not clearly discernible in this archival snippet is whether the student is being praised or vilified. One would like to think that this administrative person (president Jones?) had the depth of commitment to justice that the student is being commended for showing such initiative and not blamed for embroiling Iliff in distasteful public scandal and for being unfaithful by calling in the Denver Indian community. But given the context, I rather suspect that Jones was identifying the students here in order to distance himself from the distasteful choice being dictated by people outside of Iliff or at least outside of Iliff's administrative structure. The students did it! The president is innocent.

After delineating four possible courses of action, the document concludes that the writer's personal recommendation: "with agony over my sense of history, a heavy heart, and yet a recognition of the mood of the present day, would be number 1 above." That is: "That we give the skin to Mr. Harvier as he asks, and that we request no publicity of any kind," even though the memo notes that publicity, "perhaps unfavorable, is always a possibility."<sup>50</sup> It is deeply

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<sup>48</sup> The memorandum is an un-signed and unaddressed document that is clearly an internal administrative document, most likely written by the president. From the Iliff library archives, Abeyta-Tinker digital file: denouement 1974.pdf, page 3.

<sup>49</sup> Ibid.

<sup>50</sup> "Request of the American Indian Movement Concerning a book bound in the skin of an American Indian," p. 2. Iliff library archives: Abeyta-Tinker digital file: denouement 1974.pdf.

disconcerting, of course, to read that the president of Iliff, with an air of dismissal, put the surrender of this egregious book cover into the relativistic context of “the mood of the present day.”<sup>51</sup> His comment, however private, could only serve to minimize both the violence inherent in Iliff’s possession of this human skin bound book and minimize the voiced concerns of the American Indian community as well as the socially sensitive students who had initially pressed for the cover’s release. One wonders if he could possibly conceive of some future time when the mood towards the grotesque violation of the bodies of those whom one has managed to kill would be, in fact, not seen as acts of utter inhumanity. Other options considered in this memorandum included denying the request outright and keeping the volume with its cover as “an historical archive;” or returning the gift to descendants of the original donor and letting Barns’ descendants deal with AIM, which in retrospect seems a kind of a coward’s option. In any case, Jones’ letter did insist on “no publicity” of the transaction and that insistence was written into the contractual agreement that put the book’s cover in the hands of Denver AIM. This alone might explain Jones’ reluctance to include the students in the process or to report directly to them as to the settlement of the matter.

The Iliff board of trustees decided relatively quickly, in a matter of days, to transfer possession of the cover from Iliff to the American Indian Movement. One month after the board of trustees took action, Jones simultaneously delivered his letter to Mr. Harvier, and the

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<sup>51</sup> By acknowledging “the mood of the present day,” the writer (undoubtedly president Jones) is reminding us of the larger socio-political context and excusing his own bending to public opinion. The civil rights struggle and Indian activism had become part of daily public conversation across the U.S. and even within Iliff. A graphic illustration titled “Youth in Protest” even made its way into *The Iliff School of Theology 1973/74 Catalogue* tucked among the pages of course descriptions (Iliff Library: Ref BV4010 .142 C37 1973-74).

transaction took place.<sup>52</sup> “We understand that you will not give the matter any publicity, but will act with reverence according to your beliefs.” Jones goes on to report to Harvier the formal vote of the Iliff board of trustees on May 31, 1974,

...to give the cover of the book to you, with the understanding that it would be properly buried according to Indian tradition, and with the request that no publicity of any kind be given. The Board acted out of respect for the Indian brother whose body was tragically mutilated many decades ago, and with genuine respect for the religious beliefs of Native American people.<sup>53</sup>

Jones’ letter made no mention of Iliff’s failure to treat the human skin cover of this book with the reverence that christian beliefs and faith might have mandated during its eight decades of proud public display as a trophy of christian triumphalism. In retrospect, his naming of the victim as a “brother” seems an incongruous act of disingenuity.

Vincent Harvier signed his acknowledgement of Jones’ letter and took custody of the human remains that same day, July 1, 1974. It should be noted, however, that Harvier balked when he was asked to sign Iliff’s document on behalf of the American Indian Movement that acknowledged his taking possession of the human remains, insisting that as an American Indian

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<sup>52</sup> Letter from President Jones (having been emended and vetted by Iliff attorney Victor Quinn) to Vincent Harvier, July 1, 1974. Iliff library archives: Abeyta-Tinker digital file: denouement 1974.pdf. Jerry Campbell reported to me that he was the actual author of the first draft of Jones’ letter.

<sup>53</sup> Ibid.

his word carried more integrity than any signature or any document. Campbell reports that Jones became fairly pleading, insisting that he needed the document to take back to his trustees demonstrating that the transfer had taken place. Harvier finally relented and agreed to sign the document but instructed Jones to report back to his trustees that Harvier's signature was certainly no better than the signatures of all those US government representatives who signed countless (now broken) treaties with Indian nations across the continent. At the same time, with respect to potential publicity, Harvier insisted, "If word about this gets out into the public, it will have to come from people on your side and not on ours!"<sup>54</sup> And it seems only appropriate that a member of the Iliff faculty should publish this account, even belatedly, in 2014.

On that day Harvier signed for and took possession of the book's cover for appropriate interment by the Indian community. According to members of the local metro Denver Indian community who remember or were part of this transaction, the human remains were transported, as were many other Native human remains reclaimed by Indian people around the continent in those years, to a medicine man on the Rosebud Lakota reservation for proper ceremonial interment.

## CONCLUSION

This, at least, is the denouement of the story of Iliff's self-dispossessing of this wicked trophy of American exceptionalism. But the question remains as to who did what to whom and under what circumstances. My hope is to publish a follow-up essay answering these questions later this year, but that task has required both considerable sleuthing around old texts and a

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<sup>54</sup> Again, this conversation was reported to me by Dr. Campbell in our phone conversation.

complex reading of colonialist histories against the grain in a postcolonial modality. Nevertheless, we can, from the facts already presented, suggest here that it does not matter what the historical circumstances may have been surrounding the killing. The flaying of a dead person's skin and using that skin to produce trophy trinkets (including this book cover) is an act of inhumanity that floats far afield from any professed confession of the salvific grace of a deity. Regardless of the circumstances, the flaying and tanning of human skin as a religious/theological battle trophy is an outrageous atrocity, and not merely in our late modern, hyper violent world. Yet, the truth of the matter is hidden behind the foggy gun smoke of lingering colonialist romance. The euro-christian colonizer fantasies will not simply go away; even in a significantly amended version, the old mythic romanticism continues to cloud the narrative and to obscure a true telling of history. Placing a book of christian history into a binding made from the skin of a slaughtered Indian artfully concealed the wrongness and immorality of christian invasion and conquest—at least for a long moment of colonizer history.

Still, the critical task remains to find some explanation as to how a methodist school of theology, a christian school, could have possibly found this strange and eerie gift of a human skin bound book even minimally appropriate, let alone important, valuable, and even honorable gift, one that they gladly accepted and proudly displayed in their library for more than eighty years. It is disconcerting that it was not until 1974 that students, and not the faculty, began to ask embarrassing questions about Iliff's possession of the book and its binding of human skin. We should note in fairness that one faculty person, at least, did make note of the book in his lectures and that the library's assistant director did take steps to remove it from the display. It is equally disconcerting to read archival papers that show the president of Iliff wrestled mightily with how

to deal with the sudden public exposure of their institutional ownership of the atrocity. Why would fund-raising and the calming of constituents take precedence over “doing the right thing?”<sup>55</sup> And finally, why has Iliff kept silent about this book and its history all these years since 1974, except for Dr. Loring Abeyta and myself who have together persistently raised the issue?

Moreover, we must note that the president was intently serious about his insistence that there be no publicity around Iliff’s surrender of the book cover / body part. Though they had initiated the action as principal actors, the students were not allowed to take part in any of the subsequent activities around returning the human remains to AIM. And it seems that any further knowledge of the events was restricted to private communication with the sympathetic assistant librarian. The secrecy which seems to have surrounded the process may account for the inability or lack of willingness of my colleagues to discuss much about the event with me in 1986. As one of these courageous students reflected back after forty years, “What a better story this could have been, if Jones and the trustees had celebrated the fact that someone of appropriate credentials and authority from the Native community was ready to work with them toward a resolution. They could have taken a look at the horrible history, apologized for what had gone before, held a service asking for forgiveness and guidance, and held their own cleansing of the grounds.”<sup>56</sup> But the subsequent actions are preserved in the Iliff archival documents and must continue to generate misgivings over the genuineness of Iliff’s institutional motives.

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<sup>55</sup> Eventually, of course, we should press the concern as to why the surrender of such an object of horror would be perceived as an affront to these donors in the first place. What does this say about such people and their money?

<sup>56</sup> Email communication from Mike Hickcox, March 28, 2014.

Any reluctance, however, on the part of Iliff to relinquish its trophy dare not overshadow the reality that the school finally did do the right thing. At least, they did the first right thing; they repatriated the remains of this Indian ancestor to the caring custody of American Indian people who were able to ceremonially properly inter what had been the utterly disrespectful cover of a book of christian history. This, however, was only the initial part of the cleansing of a christian / methodist school of theology. The utter fear of White christian backlash among funding constituency meant that Iliff felt forced to compromise its confessional act, strangely requesting that no publicity accompany the transfer of the book's cover to representatives of the American Indian Movement. At a very important level, this perpetuated the erasure of the american / christian history of violence and genocide, allowing the american christian romance of exceptionalism and triumphalism to continue unabated. My hope is that this essay can begin a genuine healing and cleansing process that reaches out beyond this small christian community, a school of theology, to a much larger euro-christian community of folk who more or less naively occupy this continent as rightfully their own.

People in the Denver Indian community who remember the incident have reported to me that the ancestral remains were respectfully transported to a medicine man affiliated with AIM in South Dakota who interred the remains with ceremonial respect. The murder has not been justified in any way; the mutilation of the body(ies) continues to violate any and all human protocol; the time that it took to rectify the incident was still inexplicably and unjustifiably long. At the same time Iliff did finally do what was needed to begin a process of healing from its participation in this atrocious act of inhumanity. Iliff's healing is not over by any means. Over the past forty years of a new kind of silence and erasure has meant that the conscience has to be



pricked again, memory has to be restored, and any tendency towards historical myth-making and collective amnesia vigorously resisted. Healing for Iliff must begin with making sure that its history with this book and its nefarious human binding is never forgotten.<sup>57</sup>

In retrospect it seems that students are almost invariably a step ahead of school administrations in pointing toward solutions in the matter of owning one's own history of violence. This was true in 1974 and continues to be so yet today. In 2013 the Iliff graduating class raised a significant amount of money, their own contributions, to build a public memorial to this horrific past so that it might not be forgotten. I agree with those students, now alumni, that remembering the past is the only possibility for beginning real healing and that the story of this book and its ghastly cover should be always remembered by future faculties, staff, and students of Iliff. Unfortunately, the current version of Iliff's administration chose not to act on that student gift, and indeed chose rather to quietly criticize it, if somewhat benignly ("They shouldn't be telling us what to do..."), while seeming to ignore the student gift publicly. So in spite of Iliff's new proclaimed posture of transparency, there is still a resistance to engaging students in resolving what is a long history of Iliff's participation in the euro-christian history of violence.

Iliff is not alone on this continent, obviously, in having an anti-Indian, pro-colonialist past that needs to be acknowledged and owned. There are countless atrocities across the continent that blot this land and cry out to White euro-christian occupiers of the land for

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<sup>57</sup> In this regard, we can recall the United Methodist Church's call for acts of repentance in their relationships with Indigenous Peoples at their General Conference in 2012. See T. Tinker, "No Apologies. Just Repent. Seriously!" UMC Act of Repentance Keynote Address, *Proceedings of the UMC General Conference*, Tampa (2012).

acknowledgement and restorative justice. The American landscape is filled with dangerous places, home to many sites that portend spiritual disruption and imbalance for all people who inhabit this continent today. While these places affect Indian people deeply, they are just as dangerous for the colonial settler population, except that most Euro-Christian folk are much less open to experiencing or recognizing the lingering spiritual energies that reside in those places even as they are profoundly affected by them. Outrageous massacres have marked the whole continent from Mystic, Connecticut, and Jamestown, Virginia, south and west to Washington, Oregon and California.<sup>58</sup> Today we would recognize this history as one of ethnic cleansing and genocide as the Euro-Christian invasion swept aboriginal inhabitants aside with little respect to life or property. The infamous murders committed here in Colorado, known as the Sand Creek Massacre, perpetrated by John Chivington, a Methodist minister, and in which the Methodist territorial governor John Evans was circumstantially involved, has certainly left a palpable negative energy on the land, and not only in the geographical location near Eads, Colorado.<sup>59</sup>

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<sup>58</sup> See, for instance, Ward Churchill's important volume: *A Little Matter of Genocide: Holocaust and Denial in the Americas, 1492 to the Present* (City Lights Press, 1995), especially the long chapter titled, "Nits Make Lice," pp. 129-288. Also Barbara A. Mann, *George Washington's War on Native America* (Praeger Publishers, 2005).

<sup>59</sup> The most recent and by far the finest book length discussions of the Sand Creek Massacre is Ari Kellman, *A Misplaced Massacre: Struggling over the Memory of Sand Creek* (Harvard Univ. Press, 2013). An older volume worth noting for his inclusion of eyewitness accounts is Stan Hoig, *The Sand Creek Massacre* (Univ. of Oklahoma Press, 1974 (1961)). The most dramatic publication of the past decade and a half is: Gary L. Roberts and David Fridtjof Halas, "Written in Blood: the Soule-Cramer Sand Creek Massacre Letters," in *Colorado Heritage* (2001), reprinted in *Western Voices*: 320-337. Halaas and Roberts published the then recently discovered letters of two eyewitnesses. Also note Ward Churchill, "It Did Happen Here: Sand Creek, Scholarship, and the American Character," in *Fantasies of*

The history of this book, *A History of Christianity*, is mired in precisely this history of christian violence and denial. The romanticized narrative histories seem to serve to give some psychological comfort to christian people who need to find some way to rationalize their own history of violence. Yet in this one instance, there is a minimal satisfaction that this aboriginal owner of the land was finally permitted the dignity to continue his journey to among Indian people the spirit world and to return to his ancestors.

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*the Master Race: literature, Cinema and the Colonization of the American Indians* (City Lights, 1998), 19-26.