Depictions of Native Americans on Currency and Medals: Cultural appropriation by the U.S. Federal Government

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DEPICTIONS OF NATIVE AMERICANS ON CURRENCY AND MEDALS: CULTURAL APPROPRIATION BY THE U.S. FEDERAL GOVERNMENT

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Introduction

This thesis will discuss three numismatic artifacts depicting Native Americans issued by the United States federal government in the late 19th and early 20th century: coins, banknotes and Indian Peace Medals. This research aims to provide insight into why the decision was made to depict Native Americans on currency and medals at that time and to determine the meaning of culturally appropriated symbols of Native cultures, like feathered headdresses.

In the historical context of U.S. federal policies toward Native Americans, the depictions of Native Americans on U.S. currency and medals may seem paradoxical to those familiar with this history. These policies included violence and forced displacement from their lands, which had a significant impact on the lives of Native Americans. The ideal of freedom played a significant part in building the United States of America. In his book *Nationhood, Migration and Global Politics, Raymond Taras argues* that during the American Revolution, the colonies fought against Britain to expand the freedoms they had already acquired. He claims that new Americans created a new identity, distinct from their European past. This would be the mythical foundation of the birth of the United States.[1] Taras further argues that the wars against Britain, the annexation of the Republic of Texas in 1845, and the US–Mexican war of 1846–8, strengthened nationalism further. He belief that different from European nations, the United States arose from an ideal.[2]

Manifest Destiny was also a significant ideological concept in of 19th-century America. This concept helps to explain many of the motivations behind the federal government's actions during that time, including the drive to acquire more land. It reflects the attitudes and beliefs of the time in which the coins, banknotes, and medals discussed in this thesis were produced. According to Robert W. Johannsen in *Manifest Destiny and Empire: American Antebellum Expansionism,* John Louis O'Sullivan, a New York journalist, first coined the term in 1845.[3] Johannsen argues that Manifest Destiny refers to the belief that the United States had a preordained mission from God to fulfill through territorial expansion. He elaborates on this and states that this belief played a significant role in American Romantic thought. For many reformers and

[1] Raymond Taras, *Nationhood, Migration and Global Politics*, *Edinburgh University Press eBooks*, 2019, 125, https://doi.org/10.1515/9781474413428.
[2] Ibid., 130-131, https://doi.org/10.1515/9781474413428.
[3] Robert W. Johannsen, "Manifest Destiny and Empire: American Antebellum Expansionism," *Journal of the Early Republic* 18, no. 3 (January 1, 1998): 7, https://doi.org/10.2307/3124696.

utopians, Manifest Destiny had racial motivations. Johannsen states that some abolitionists opposed territorial expansion because they feared slavery being extended but supported it for what they believed were higher goals, like spreading the Anglo-Saxon race, which they regarded as "the most formidable and powerful." Theodore Parker, an influential clergyman, believed that so-called inferior races, like Mexicans and Native Americans, would be driven out, and that America would be ruled by the "superior race with superior ideas and a better civilization." [4]

The Wounded Knee Massacre (1890) is a significant example of one of the governmental actions against Native Americans, in which at least 150 Lakota Sioux were killed in South Dakota. In his book *The Heartbeat of Wounded Knee: Native America from 1890 to the Present,* David Treuer argues that this massacre symbolizes the suffering of Native Americans and the brutality of the federal government. He elaborates on this and claims that Wounded Knee also embodies the end of Native American life, the end of the frontier, and the beginning of modern America.[5]

Depictions of Native Americans on European maps during and after the Renaissance may have influenced later representations on U.S. currency and medals. This could show a pattern of cultural appropriation. In *Bodies and Maps: Early Modern Personifications of the Continents,* Maryanne Cline Horowitz and Louise Arizzoli discuss that Renaissance European intellectuals and scholars centered their worldview around their own civilization, which was gaining importance during that period. They argue that the printing press revolution strengthened this frame of reference, resulting in the distribution of maps with personified images representing different continents.[6] *Theatrum Orbis Terrarum* (1570), the first atlas ever published, personified five continents. This popular book depicted America wearing only jewelry, with a club, a severed head, and a bow and arrow.[7] In *Miss America and Her Sisters: Personifications of the Four Parts of the World, Clare Le Corbeiller* noted that other maps from this century depicted the continent America as a "scantily dressed fierce savage," wearing a feather skirt, headdress, ankle jewels, and long hair.

[4] Robert W. Johannsen, "Manifest Destiny and Empire: American Antebellum Expansionism," *Journal of the Early Republic* 18, no. 3 (January 1, 1998): 15, https://doi.org/10.2307/3124696.
[5] Treuer, David. *The Heartbeat of Wounded Knee: Native America from 1890 to the Present*. New York: Riverhead Books, 2019,1.
[6] Maryanne Cline Horowitz and Louise Arizzoli, eds., *Bodies and Maps: Early Modern Personifications of the Continents,*Intersections 73 (Leiden and Boston: Brill, 2021), 40.
[7] Horowitz and Arizzoli, *Bodies and Maps*, 41.

They also added one of the "venomous beasts," such as crocodiles, to symbolize American fauna.[8]

Pauliina Raento and Stanley D. Brunn state that nations emphasize visuals to communicate their identity, location, and mission to their population and other countries. Raento and Brunn also argue that using visuals in a politically strategic way can also fuel nationalism during times of political change.[9] In *Stamps as Messengers of Political Transition*, Brunn argues that nations use currency and its symbolism to carry political messages. He explains that nations use visuals as tools to be recognizable as sovereign countries. He also notes that research shows images on banknotes and coins create and sustain a national narrative shaped by the national elite. Brunn states that familiar icons on currency promote a sense of collectiveness because money is present throughout the whole society. According to Brunn a "hidden nationalism" can be found in things such as flags and anthems. He argues that political iconography forms an "everyday nationalism".[10]

In *Designing the Nation: Banknotes, Banal Nationalism, and Alternative Conceptions of the State*, Jan Penrose explores the connections between national iconography, everyday nationalism, and ideas about the state. Penrose observes that many scholars believe the state holds full responsibility for designing and producing banknotes, including their symbolic representations of the nation. This indicates that the state's power influences the banknote design process. Definitions and depictions of a nation may place people either equally or unequally within the state. Those who experience inequality have limited access to a nation's symbolic and material resources.[11] Penrose argues that when citizens use their nation's currency, they strengthen the imagined national community. Citizens reinforce this community by trusting in the value of their currency and identifying with the images the state promotes through it.[12]

The history of interactions between Native Americans and the U.S. government also has another side, where the American government attempts to make

[8] Corbeiller, Clare Le. 'Miss America and Her Sisters: Personifications of the Four Parts of the World'. *The Metropolitan Museum of Art Bulletin* 19, no. 8 (April 1961): 209. https://doi.org/10.2307/3257853, 210.

[9] Brunn, *Stamps as Messengers of Political Transition*, 9.

[10] Idem., 20.
[11] Jan Penrose, "Designing the Nation. Banknotes, Banal Nationalism and Alternative Conceptions of the State," *Political Geography* 30, no. 8 (November 1, 2011): 432, https://doi.org/10.1016/j.polgeo.2011.09.007.
[12] Penrose, "Designing the Nation," 429.

alliances with various tribes. One way, they attempted this was through the so-called *Indian Peace Medals*, which included depictions of Native Americans. However often used, the practice of using peace medals did not originate in the United States. In *Peace Medals: Negotiating Power in Early America*, F. Kent Reilly III notes that as early as the 17th century, the British, French, and Spanish governments were distributing medals among Native American tribes. The images on these medals often depicted flags, monarchs, and certificates of friendship between the colonial powers and Native Americans. Reilly III further argues that, from a European perspective, peace medals were a tool to symbolize their alliances with Native Americans against competing colonial powers. Additionally, peace medals were used to facilitate the exchange of raw materials, such as feathers and furs, for European trade purposes.[13]

Francis Paul Prucha wrote in his article *Early Indian Peace Medals* that the U.S. government often gave silver medals to Native American chiefs and warriors as a gesture of friendship and as a symbol of allegiance. Prucha also discusses how peace medals are both part of the historical and artistic heritage of the United States since the government made sure that the carefully designed peace medals showed a high level of artistry. Native Americans valued Indian Peace Medals, passing them down from generation to generation. They even buried the medals with the chiefs after they passed away. During the early years of the United States, Indian Peace medals were made in high quantities, but nowadays, collectors and historians find them to be interesting artifacts.[14]

Today in the United States, there continues to be use of names and symbols originating from Indigenous tribes or referring to Native Americans. Colleges and universities, for example, have used nicknames such as “Savages,” “Chiefs,” and “Braves.” They also incorporate symbols derived from Native Americans in their logos or mascots or depict Native Americans in insulting ways. Critics argue that this reduces Native Americans to caricatures and stereotypes.[15] Supporters, including students, alumni, and sports teams of these educational institutions, believe that using such nicknames and logos is simply a tradition. They also argue that it serves as a way

[13] F. Kent Reilly III, “Displaying the Source of the Sacred: Shell Gorgets, Peace Medals, and the Accessing of Supernatural Power,” in *Peace Medals: Negotiating Power in Early America* (Tulsa, Oklahoma, United States of America: The University of Tulsa, 2011), 9.
[14] Francis Paul Prucha, *Early Indian Peace Medals*, Wisconsin Magazine of History 45 (1962): 279.
[15] Mark R. Connolly, "What’s in a Name?: A Historical Look at Native American-Related Nicknames and Symbols at Three U.S. Universities," *The Journal of Higher Education* 71, no. 5 (September 2000): 515, https://doi.org/10.2307/2649258..

to honor and remember Indigenous tribes that, they believe, would otherwise be forgotten.[16]

In short, the depictions of Native Americans on U.S. currency and medals are complex, particularly because of the historical violence they experienced. The Wounded Knee Massacre, a significant event in this history, represents both the suffering endured by Native Americans and the transformation from frontier to modern America. Personified images of continents on European Renaissance maps may have influenced Native American representations on American banknotes, coins, and medals. These images reflected colonial attitudes and may have shaped later American iconography. These early visual representations set a precedent for cultural appropriation that continues to appear in Native American depictions centuries later. Scholars argue that nations use visual symbols on banknotes to illustrate their identity and spread political messages. Currency imagery reinforces national narratives and unity while reflecting state power and inequality. Indian peace medals, on the other hand, symbolized alliances and trade. Out-of-context Native American symbols remain visible today and continue to fuel debates about cultural appropriation. Supporters view these symbols as honoring Native cultures, while critics argue that these representations reduce Native Americans to stereotypes. Therefore, it is crucial to investigate the origins of these depictions and examine the images on objects like banknotes, coins, and medals embedded in society and collective memory. The story of money is the story of humanity. This thesis will use the following definition of cultural appropriation: the taking of something produced by members of one culture by members of another.[17] In this context, cultural appropriation refers to the use of depictions of Native American bodies, clothing, and animals on U.S. banknotes, coins, and medals.

As previously mentioned, existing research explores how governments use imagery on banknotes and examines currency depictions in other countries, with conclusions that may apply to the United States. While some literature on American currency is available, academic research remains limited. More attention has been directed to American medals, especially Indian Peace Medals. However, there is a

[16] Ibid., 516.

[17] James O. Young, "Profound Offense and Cultural Appropriation," *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 63, no. 2 (March 2005): 136, https://doi.org/10.1111/j.0021-8529.2005.00190.x.

noticeable gap in the literature concerning depictions of Native Americans. There is a lack of in-depth analysis that critically examines these images in the context of cultural appropriation and their relation to federal government actions. To fill this research gap, this thesis focuses on three numismatic objects: the Indian Head cent, the Indian Chief Note, and the Abraham Lincoln Indian Peace Medal.

Dr. Jesse Kraft identifies three periods of Native American representation: Nameless Androgynous Native, Nameless Realistic Native, and Named Native. The first depictions of Native Americans on numismatic objects fall into two subcategories: the Native as "the Other" and the Native as "American." In the 17th century, the early colonists had not yet adopted or identified with the Native American identities. In the 18th and 19th centuries, depictions of Native American figures remained nameless but began to be portrayed as "American", reflecting the perspectives of the colonists. The second category features realistic depictions from the 20th century. In the final category, named Natives begin to appear on American numismatic objects in the 21st century. This thesis will examine the numismatic objects within these periods.[18]

To provide a more comprehensive overview of banknotes depicting Native Americans, this thesis will examine those issued during the Free Banking Era (1837-1863) by state banks, which were allowed to issue banknotes without federal regulations. After this period, the national banking system (1863-1913) emerged.[19] While analyzing the numismatic objects, this thesis will also consider contemporary critical perspectives of these objects. Additionally, this thesis will investigate how people involved in the decision-making and design of U.S. currency and medals chose to depict Native Americans, and it will explore whether these depictions honor the country's original inhabitants or instead reflect a more complex narrative that intersects with federal policies and the suffering experienced by Native American communities.

The methodology in this thesis consists of three parts: the first part analyzes the depictions and visual symbolism of the artifacts; the second part ties the identified symbolism and the time of issuance of banknotes, coins, and medals depicting Native

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[18] Jesse Kraft, "Building a National Identity through 'The Noble Savage': Native American Representation in United States Numismatics," *Sundman Lecture Series*, 2023 American Numismatic Association World's Fair of Money, filmed August 9, 2023, video of lecture, 49:41, https://nnp.wustl.edu/library/book/631331.

[19] Arthur J. Rolnick and Warren E. Weber, "New Evidence on the Free Banking Era," *The American Economic Review* 73, no. 5 (1983): 1, 1080–91, https://www.jstor.org/stable/1814673.

Americans to relevant historical events; the third part places the visuals within the broader context of cultural appropriation by the US federal government. This leads to the following research question: What is the significance of depictions on American currency and medals for processes of Native American cultural appropriation by the federal government of the United States of America during the late 19th and early 20th century?

Several types of data will be used to answer this research question. First, contemporary quotes from engravers and others involved in the decision-making and design processes of the objects will be analyzed. These quotes, retrieved from numismatic collector guidebooks, will help understand the engraver's intentions and perspectives. Additionally, data on minting, printing, and circulation numbers from these guidebooks will be reviewed to measure the social impact of these artifacts. The website *Numista*, an online numismatic catalog, is regularly consulted for photographs and basic information about banknotes and coins. Second, this thesis will examine U.S. federal legislation and key events regarding Native Americans from around the time the objects were issued to gain insight into the societal context in which these objects were created and circulated. Thirdly, this thesis will also use literature about Native American life in the 19th century to contextualize the historical experiences and perspectives of Native Americans during the period in which these numismatic objects were produced.

Lastly, this thesis will use information from the American Numismatic Society (ANS) collected from June and July 2024 during The Eric P. Newman Graduate Seminar. Founded in 1858, the ANS has an extensive collection with over 800,000 coins, monetary objects, medals, and related items, as well as an archive and library with approximately 100,000 books and documents. The Seminar at the ANS provided the opportunity to examine key objects relevant to this thesis in person and offered training in numismatic methods and theories.

Numismatics is the study of currency and includes banknotes, coins, and coin-like objects.[20] Two numismatic tools will be used to analyze the objects: visual linguistics and *imaginario*. Visual linguistics involves reading coins and banknotes like Western texts, moving from obverse to reverse, top to bottom and left to right. While examining the images, this thesis will focus on their size, placement,

[20] Emma Pratte, "Introduction to Numismatic Terms and Methods," *American Numismatic Society* (blog), May 10, 2022, https://numismatics.org/introduction-to-numismatic-terms-and-methods/.

embellishment, and denomination. The second tool, *imaginario*, approaches images as a group of visual, textual, or verbal elements that project a shared or desired association, like a photo mosaic.[21]

The first chapter sets the thesis in a historical frame where the cultural, and especially economic shifts caused by European colonization are being examined. This section discusses the early use of wampum, a significant item of value in Native American societies, which was later transformed into a currency-like object by European influence. Chapter 1 argues that European settlers, by introducing trade, new monetary systems, and devaluing wampum, disrupted Native American economies and contributed to their impoverishment. Furthermore, colonists' prejudiced views of Native Americans as "people without property" worked as a self-fulfilling prophecy and reinforced these economic changes. This chapter continues by discussing two significant federal policies: the Indian Removal Act and the Dawes Act. These policies, aimed at assimilation and land redistribution, are reflected in the imagery found on the numismatic objects discussed in the upcoming chapters of this thesis.

Chapter 2 is a critical examination of a selection of U.S. federal coins featuring depictions of Native Americans. First, the Indian Head cent is discussed. A comparison with a 3-dollar piece follows, discussing the gender and the engraver's intentions. This chapter also previews a medal that may have inspired the engraver of the Indian Head cent and 3-dollar piece. The myth of the 'vanishing Indian' and the use of Native American feathered headdresses on these numismatic objects is a common aspect of the argumentation. This chapter argues that the depictions on these coins and medals contribute to the shaping of Native Americans into types and symbols that contribute to the construction of a national identity. Finally, the Buffalo Nickel is examined. This coin carries both a Native American representation and an animal that was of great importance to the existence of plain tribes.

The third chapter of this thesis examines early representations of Native Americans in numismatic imagery on banknotes and elaborates on the concept of the use of Indigenous figures to establish a distinct American identity. The chapter starts with a discussion of early Native American representation on the Massachusetts Bay Colony seal colonial currency. Chapter 3 further analyzes pre-federal bills from the

[21] *Imagining America: Native American Icons and National Identity on Early American Coins.*, 2019, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KbPGaIuzZ1U.

Free Banking Era. This chapter argues that these depictions, often symbolic and simplified, contributed to a visual narrative that contrasted Native Americans with white settlers, particularly in terms of education and territorial expansion. Finally, these banknotes will be compared to the choices made regarding the only central Native American representation on a federal banknote; the Indian Chief Note.

The final chapter argues that shell gorgets, which Native Americans had used for thousands of years, were precursors to Indian Peace Medals in terms of their symbolic and political significance. Parallels with the later distribution of Indian Peace Medals by European settlers are being presented. Next, the concept of the Native American as a perceived violent threat by the settlers is discussed. This belief and the earlier mentioned assimilation are significant aspects depicted on the medal. The Abraham Lincoln medal and the one previously issued tell a story about the assimilation of Native Americans, particularly about farming methods. This analysis relates to the federal policies discussed earlier in Chapter 1.

Chapter 1

Numismatics into Context

Before analyzing a selection of coins, banknotes, and medals depicting Native Americans, this chapter will discuss the evolution of items of value and colonial payment methods in America. Following that, it will present two key federal policies that were part of the government's broader strategy of westward expansion, relocation of Native American tribes and assimilation. This chapter offers context for understanding the historical background in which the numismatic objects analyzed in the coming chapters were produced.

Different Economic Cultures and Wampum

Robert Beverley (1667 - 1722), a historian of early colonial Virginia, examined the differences between the economic culture of the colonists and Native Americans. He found that Virginia natives valued rare and hard-to-find shells.[22] These shells held little value to the English, meaning that considerable Indian wealth was put at risk during intercultural exchanges that emerged after the English colonization.[23] In 1636, European settlers adopted seashells as legal tender and were extensively used between Native Americans and European settlers. Shells were possibly the most valuable goods in North America at the time.[24] A little cylindrical shell, also known as wampum, was not only used as a token of exchange between Native Americans and Europeans but also as a social and political tool by Native Americans long before the first Europeans set foot on the continent.[25] Algonquian nations living on the Atlantic coast produced these shells. They were mainly used by indigenous people of high status as jewellery and for trade. Wampum held value due to its scarcity and the time and work that went into producing the beads.[26] Europeans faced a disadvantage, because no two shells were the same, making it not easy to measure prices and ratios. When more British gold and silver coins flowed into North America, Europeans

[22] Margaret Ellen Newell. 'Alexandra Harmon. Rich Indians: Native People and the Problem of Wealth in American History. Chapel Hill : University of North Carolina Press . 2010 . Pp. x, 388. $39.95.' *The American Historical Review* 117, no. 1 (February 2012): 149–51. https://doi.org/10.1086/ahr.117.1.14917.
[23] Ibid., 18.
[24] Jamil Civitarese, "Saifedean Ammous, *The Bitcoin Standard: The Decentralized Alternative to Central Banking* (Hoboken, New Jersey: John Wiley & Sons, 2018), 304 pages,"*The Review of Austrian Economics* 33, no. 3 (September 2020): 403–6, https://doi.org/10.1007/s11138-019-00446-z, 20.
[25] Paz Núñez-Regueiro and Nikolaus Stolle, "Wampum. Beads of Diplomacy in New France," *Gradhiva*, no. 33 (February 2, 2022): 6–21, https://doi.org/10.4000/gradhiva.6173.
[26] Ibid., 8.

preferred these means of payment because of their uniformity. In addition, due to technical development, the harvest of seashells became easier which led to inflation. By 1661, shells stopped being used as legal tender in North America and lost all monetary functions.[27]

According to Beverley, the English colonists taught the Natives how to trade, but they did not thrive alongside the colony because the colonists had taken a large part of their land. In addition to taking land, the English colonists introduced a completely different lifestyle to the Native population, including drunkenness and luxury. Beverley believed that this new lifestyle created a desire for abundance among Native Americans. John Lawson (1674 - 1711), another British writer, drew attention to the economic contrast between the colonists and the Native population. In 1701, when Lawson traveled through North Carolina he observed the wealth of the colonists. The Native people he encountered seemed pitifully poor. He concluded that all indigenous peoples who encountered Europeans faced the same fate. Lawson not only stated a point of view shared by many of his peers, but he also argued that Native Americans may not have been poor when Europeans arrived, they became poor afterward.[28]

British colonists held a prejudice against the Native American population; they were seen as people without property. This belief acted as a self-fulfilling prophecy. The new residents of Virginia perceive the Indigenous people as poor.[29] Treaties and letters in Colonial Office files frequently refer to territories within the Americas and West Indies as "not possessed by any Christian prince of people."[30] The British used this as a justification to disrupt the Indigenous population's economy while claiming that the fate of the Native Americans was caused by their so-called culture of "savages".[31] It remains unclear whether the colonists genuinely believed this or acted with intentional intent.

In summary, European colonists changed the use of wampum, a significant object of value for Native Americans, placing Indigenous wealth at risk. Native Americans were not poor before the arrival of Europeans but became so afterward.

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[27] Civitarese, 'Saifedean Ammous, The Bitcoin Standard', 20.
[28] Ibid., 17-18.
[29] Ibid., 19.
[30] Lisa Lowe, *The Intimacies of Four Continents* (Duke University Press, 2015), 9.
[30] Ibid., 7.
[31] Margaret Ellen Newell, "Alexandra Harmon. *Rich Indians: Native People and the Problem of Wealth in American History*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2010. x + 388 pp.," *The American Historical Review* 117, no. 1 (February 2012): 149–51, https://doi.org/10.1086/ahr.117.1.149.

Viewing them through a prejudiced lens, colonists regarded Native Americans as people without property and with a "wrong" culture. Paradoxically, Native Americans whose wealth and property were seized by Europeans appear on coins, banknotes, and medals. Europeans approached Native Americans and their culture in a manner similar to how they managed the land, making changes that aligned with their own interests. This approach to Native Americans and their culture set the stage for later federal policies that further marginalized Indigenous people, such as the Indian Removal Act and the Dawes Act.

The Indian Removal Act

On May 28, 1830, President Andrew Jackson signed the Indian Removal Act, which required Native American communities to give up their land east of the Mississippi River in exchange for land in the West. This area, known as "Indian Territory", is now Oklahoma.[32] The Indian Removal Act was the result of decades of tension between whites and Native Americans over control of Native lands. Wealthy Southern planters, in particular, sought after the fertile land occupied by Seminoles, Chickasaws, Creeks, Choctaws, and Cherokees for growing valuable crops like cotton. President Andrew Jackson argued that if Native Americans stayed in existing states, they would be regarded as a foreign group, which conflicted with the Constitution that prohibition of states within other states found in Article IV, Section 3, of the Constitution. He also claimed that the Indian Removal Act would replace "savage hunters" with a "dense and civilized population," reflecting the racial attitudes of that time. Supreme Court decisions could not protect Native rights in cases like Cherokee Nation v. Georgia (1831) and Worcester v. Georgia (1832) from state, presidential, and congressional opposition. The Indian Removal Act resulted in the forced displacement of thousands of Native Americans from their ancestral lands.[33]

The Dawes Act

On February 8, 1887, Congress passed the Dawes Act, to urge Native Americans to farm and assimilate into white society. Through this act, which was an extension of federal control over reservations, Native Americans could become landowners.

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[32] James R. Arnold and Roberta Wiener, *Understanding U.S. Military Conflicts Through Primary Sources*, vol. 2 (Bloomsbury Publishing USA, 2015), 126.
[33] Arnold and Wiener, *Understanding U.S. Military Conflicts Through Primary Sources*, 2:187.

However, they mostly received inferior land, which made it difficult for many Natives to be successful farmers.[34] It is noteworthy to mention that on paper, the U.S. president was allowed to divide reservations into 160-acre estates with the approval or agreement of Native tribes. Native Americans living outside reservations could apply for estates outside of reservations. [35]Advocates for assimilation generally believed that Native American's dependence on hunting was the main reason for ongoing violence. To hunt, they had to leave their reservations, which led to direct conflict with white settlers. When the buffalo was nearly extinct in the 1870s, Native tribes had to move even farther from their reservation. Assimilationists aimed to stop dependence on hunting and the conflicts by encouraging farming and a more settled life. Through the Dawes Act, the federal government could extend its jurisdiction over reservations, undermine tribal authority, and make Native societies more like white societies. These changes significantly disrupted Native cultural practices. Additionally, the Dawes Act was very detailed, which made it complicated for many Native Americans to understand all its legal terms. This made them vulnerable to fraud and caused them to lose around two-thirds of their total land by selling it to white speculators. In the end, the legislation led Native Americans into greater poverty. In 1934, a new legislation replaced the Dawes Act and restored tribal structures.[36]

[34] Ibid., 2:129.
[35] Ibid., 2:239.
[36] Ibid., 2:242.

Chapter 2

Native American Representation on Coins: Feathered Headdresses and the Myth of the Vanishing Indian

This chapter examines the Indian Head cent, the Buffalo Nickel, and other related numismatic objects in-depth, which feature iconography reflecting attitudes toward Native Americans during the late 19th and early 20th centuries. Other These attitudes align with U.S. federal policies of the time which were discussed in the previous chapter.

The Indian Head Cent and the 3-Dollar Piece

The Indian Head cent, designed by James Barton Longacre, was minted from 1859 until 1909.[37] According to the 2019 *Standard Catalog of World Coins*, the obverse of the coin as can be seen in Figure 1 shows an "Indian head" depicted with a headdress, left above the date. On the reverse, as shown in Figure 2, the denomination of one cent is within a wreath. The nation's shield is depicted above the reverse of the wreath (1860-1864 and 1864-1909 series).[38] The Indian Head Cent from the 1859 series was minted without a shield.[39] The Indian Head Cent was minted for 50 years in large numbers. In the first year (1859) 36,400,000 pieces were coined for circulation**.**[40] The highest mintage was in 1907. That year 108,138,618 coins were struck.[41] The coins from the first two series were made from copper-nickel.[42] The Indian Head cents from the 1864-1909 series were bronze.[43]

The name of the coin does not specify the gender of the 'Indian' depicted. It appears that the engraver aimed to make the headdress the central feature of his design. Interestingly, as can be seen in Figure 3 the portrait on the Indian Head cent looks a lot like Lady Liberty depicted on the three-dollar piece made by the same designer in 1854. [44] Coin designs often follow a classic pattern, which could explain

[37] Heritage Auctions, *1 Cent "Indian Head Cent"*, jpeg, Numista, https://en.numista.com/catalogue/photos/etats-unis/1282-original.jpg
[38] Michael, Thomas, and Richard Giedroyc. *2020 Standard Catalog of World Coins. 1901-2000*. Edited by Tracy Schmidt. 47th edition. Standard Catalog of World Coins. Stevens Point, WI: Krause Publications, 2019, 2257.
[39] '1 Cent'. Accessed 15 January 2024. https://en.numista.com/catalogue/pieces4567.html.
[40] Richard Snow, *A Guide Book of Flying Eagle and Indian Head Cents: Complete Source for History, Grading, and Prices* (Whitman Publishing, 2009), 27.
[41] Michael and Giedroyc, *2020 Standard Catalog of World Coins. 1901-2000*, 2257.
[42] "Search the Catalogue," Numista, n.d., accessed January 15, 2024.
[43] Michael and Giedroyc, *2020 Standard Catalog of World Coins. 1901-2000*, 2257.
[44] Heritage Auctions, *3 Dollars "Indian Princess Head"*, jpeg, Numista, https://en.numista.com/catalogue/photos/etats-unis/1321-original.jpg

the resemblance. The following letter from Mr. Howard, about whom no background information can be found, was sent to the United States Mint Director Snowden on April 12, 1858: “I have learned that a new pattern piece for the cent has been struck off at the Mint, having upon the obverse a head resembling that of the three-dollar piece and on the reverse a shield at the top of the olive and oak wreath.”[45]

Figure 1 Obverse Indian Head cent, 1862. Engraver: James B. Longacre © Heritage Auctions.

Figure 2 Reverse Indian Head cent, 1862. Engraver: James B. Longacre © Heritage Auctions.

[45] Snow, *A Guide Book of Flying Eagle and Indian Head Cents*, 25.

Figure 3 Obverse 3-dollar "Indian Princess Head", 1878. Engraver: James B. Longacre © Heritage Auctions.

Figure 4 Reverse 3-dollar "Indian Princess Head", 1878. Engraver: James B. Longacre © Heritage Auctions.

Looking at the three-dollar piece, two things stand out. First, the head on this coin does resemble that of the portrait on the Indian Head cent. Secondly, the figure is wearing a headdress of a Native American princess. The three-dollar piece was designed in 1854, while the Indian Head cent was created in 1858, both by James B. Longacre. This indicates that Longacre was aware of the existence of different types of Native American headdresses. This makes his choice to depict a headdress intended for a Native American man, on a European woman even more interesting. This may suggest that, as the designer of the coin, Longacre applied creative liberty to use an item from another culture. His designs had to be different to avoid confusion between coins. Still, this choice may suggest that the cultural background of the headdress has not been considered and that the visual aspect was more important. Furthermore, Longacre may have been inspired by the Diplomatic Medal, which also features a Native American wearing a headdress as can be seen in Figure 6.

The feathered headdress: A Comparison With The Diplomatic Medal

The Diplomatic Medal was designed by French engraver Augustin Dupré and commissioned by Secretary of State Thomas Jefferson. The medal was minted in 1792, commemorating the Declaration of American Independence. It owes its name to the fact that it was intended as a present to allies of the United States, especially those who had helped the colonies in gaining their independence. This suggests that Native American imagery was already part of the iconography and part of what the federal government wanted to project to other countries. One of the interesting things about the Diplomatic Medal is that the engraver likely did not know how to correctly depict any Native American because he never met one and may not have been aware of the different Native American cultures.[46]

The Diplomatic Medal was reissued in 1876 to commemorate the 100th anniversary of the United States of America, suggesting that the federal government did not take the opportunity to update the depiction. This perpetuated an inaccurate representation of Native Americans, which is reflected in Longacre's design of the 3-dollar piece.

Figure 5 Obverse Diplomatic Medal, 1790-1791. Engraver: Augustin Dupre. Collection: Comitia Americana Medals © National Museum of American History

[46] Cornelius Vermeule, *Numismatic Art in America: Aesthetics of the United States Coinage*, 1971, 11-13.

Figure 6 Reverse Diplomatic Medal, 1790-1791. Engraver: Augustin Dupre. Collection: Comitia Americana Medals © National Museum of American History

As shown in Figure 6, "TO PEACE AND COMMERCE" is written on the top of the reverse of the medal and the text on the bottom says "IV JUL. MDCCLXXVI". The latter refers to the 4th of July, 1776. On this date, the United States Declaration of Independence was adopted. The Native American, portrayed as a queen on the left side personifies America. She is holding a horn with grains and fruits in her left hand. Around her images of bales, a barrel, and an anchor. On the right side of the medal Mercury.[47]

Vermeule Cornelius, the author of the book *Numismatic Art in America*, described the Native American depicted on the Diplomatic Medal as a "curious mixture of noble savage and seated Artemis."[48] This suggests that similar to the Indian Head cent, the depicted woman, representing a Native American, has European characteristics. The label "Indian," is applied to a figure that is not an accurate reflection of Native people but rather arbitrarily designed according to European ideas. Vermeule's use of the term "noble savage" may indicate that he thought that Dupré chose a stereotypical way of depicting Native Americans. The medal shows elements often associated with being "Native American", such as the grass skirt and feathered headdress. Furthermore, it is noteworthy that the headdress worn by the "Indian Queen" is described by Vermeulen as un-Indian.[49] The headdresses in U.S. iconography seem to have taken on a more homogeneous representation.

According to Sonja Dobroski, the homogenization of a wide range of Indigenous peoples and tribal identities reflects settler-colonial thinking.[50] Dobroski further argues that the broad categorization of the headdress as both Indigenous and

[47] Ibid., 12.
[48] Ibid., 13.
[49] Ibid.
[50] Benjamin Abrams and Peter Robert Gardner, *Symbolic Objects in Contentious Politics* (University of Michigan Press, 2023), 104.

American, as seen in the design of the Indian Head cent, was possible through an icon that was easily recognized. As a result, any depiction that resembles a feathered headdress worn by a figure will be interpreted as American. She further argues that colonial powers are using visual images like the feathered headdress as a communication tool to connect their political ideas about territory, land, and nation to these images.[51] The Indian Head cent can be regarded as an attempt to portray Native Americans as distinct. As mentioned earlier, the feathered headdress is placed on a European woman, which can be interpreted as a symbol of replacement or dispossession. Just like Longacre's effort to express a unique American identity, this identity was in fact new, since Native Americans already lived on the land long before any European set foot on the soil.

Jean M. O'Brien examined local histories of Europeans in New England, which included Massachusetts, Connecticut, and Rhode Island between 1820 and 1880. These histories primarily focused on how European Americans achieved modernity, while Native American developments were overlooked. O'Brien argues that European Americans not only overlooked the stories of Natives but also erased and memorialized them, this was done to dispossess Native land and rights. Furthermore, she argues that these local histories contributed to the myth of the "vanishing Indian'', a belief that is still present in American society. O'Brien found that most local historians of the past witnessed a process of decline and extinction of Native American populations. This process of narrative extinction facilitated the idea of replacing Native Americans with European Americans.This could be one of the reasons that the feathered headdress of the Indian Head cent was depicted on a European figure instead of a Native American one. In her argument, O'Brien uses the terms "traditional" and "modern", referring to Native Americans and Europeans respectively. By this frame and the belief of the extinction of Native Americans, European Americans could be portrayed to be modern and advanced. Native Americans served as a contrast and to highlight European American progress.[52]

The believe of Native Americans as an extincted people emerged from the collective process of storytelling at a local level. These narratives were part of beliefs about Native American blood purity and cultural stagnation. European Americans who learned about these stories were convinced that Native Americans had

[51] Ibid., 109.
[52] Jean M. O'Brien, *Firsting and Lasting: Writing Indians Out of Existence in New England* (U of Minnesota Press, 2010), 2.

vanished.[53] Longacre could be influenced by these stories. The quote from Longacre has a poetic tone, and his mindset is formulated in such a way that it could lend itself to storytelling that perpetuates the myth of the 'vanishing Indian'. His description of his motivation for the design certainly aligns with the thinking of that time.[54] American historian Frederick Jackson Turner, for example, claimed that despite the adaptions Native Americans made, their disappearance was inevitable. He stated: "The stage of civilization that could make a gun and gunpowder was too far above the bow and arrow to be reached by the Indian".[55]

Ned Blackhawk also discussed the 19th-century belief in the United States regarding American history, which he called "mythological visions of history". He mentioned that American achievements and the narrative of a "great American history" were celebrated with monuments, parades, and books. Progress seems to be a central theme in this narrative of American history.[56] The Indian Head cent, particularly the meaning and symbolism given by the engraver to the feathered headdress, might be part of this mythological vision. The quote below comes from a letter from the United States Mint Director Snowden to Secretary of the Treasury Howell Cobb (November 4, 1858):

> The obverse ... presents an ideal head of America - the drooping plumes of the North American Indian give it the character of North America ... and that so far from being modeled on any human features in the Longacre family, or any Indians, these were based squarely on the classical profiles on ancient sculpture ... In any event, the feathered headdress was certainly intended in at least two instances to be that of the Indian, the artists at the Mint evidently not realizing the absurd incongruity of placing this most masculine attribute of the warrior brave on the head of a woman…[57]

Snowden seems critical of Longacre's design. The Indian Head Cent was minted to replace the Flying Eagle and Snowden had suggested replacing the Eagle with the head of Columbus. Longacre wanted to consider the proposal but reminded Snowden of the objections that had previously hindered the minting of George Washington's

[53] Ned Blackhawk, *The Rediscovery of America: Native Peoples and the Unmaking of U.S. History* (Yale University Press, 2023), 367
[54] O'Brien, *Firsting and Lasting: Writing Indians Out of Existence in New England*, 5.
[55] Blackhawk, *The Rediscovery of America*, 367.
[56] Ibid., 366-67.
[57] Ibid.

head on a coin.[58] Ultimately, Longacre chose the Indian Head design. Longacre's approach reflects that the headdress depicted on the Indian Head cent has been taken out of its cultural context and has become a new symbol for North America.

Longacre also indicated that he wanted to create something that was not inspired by the Greeks or Romans because he believed that the Native American cultures were unique and fascinating. He explained: "From the copper shores of Lake Superior to the silver mountains of Potosi, from the Ojibwa to the Araucanian the feathered tiara is a characteristic of the primitiveness of our hemisphere, as the turban is of the Asiatic."[59]

Headdresses have been used and altered by U.S. settlers since the start of colonial contact in the Americas.[60] Longacre, who was not the first who make such a deliberate design choice, was looking for a symbol that he believed would best represent the nation of America. He aimed to use distinctive elements of Native American culture. Longacre argues that the feathered headdress would be a more fitting and meaningful symbol for Americans than other symbols like the Phrygian cap, which might be associated with emancipated slaves. He stated: "Regard then this emblem of America as a proper and well-defined portion of our national inheritance, and having now the opportunity of consecrating it as a memorial of liberty, our liberty, American liberty, why not use it?"[61] In this context, the feather headdress became a symbol of American identity and American freedom. However, this freedom did not apply to all people living in the United States, including the Indigenous population, whose cultural object was being appropriated. Longacre also noted objections from others to the design of The Indian Head Cent. The point of criticism, which he does not think is strong enough, would be that it deviates from the European coats of arms. Nevertheless, Longacre seems to be aware that the headdress has a history that goes back further than the history of European settlers on the continent and encourages others to embrace it as a distinctive part of America's heritage.[62]

To conclude, James B. Longacre aimed to design a coin that represented the identity of America by depicting a feathered headdress, commonly worn by Native

[58] Don Taxay, *The U.S. Mint and Coinage: An Illustrated History from 1776 to the Present* (New York, N.Y.: Sanford J. Durst, 1983).
[59] Quentin David Bowers and Richard Bagg, *United States Gold Coins: An Illustrated History* (Bowers and Ruddy Galleries, 1982), 222–23.
[60] Abrams and Gardner, *Symbolic Objects in Contentious Politics*, 103.
[61] Ibid., 223.
[62] Ibid.

American warriors. He intended to design a typical American coin but may not have considered that it would later also be regarded as an example of cultural appropriation. Considering Native Americans' earlier objects of value, such as wampum, one can argue that although The Indian Head cent depicts an item from the original inhabitants of the United States, it is unlikely that it held much value to them in terms of symbolism. In addition, the aspect of freedom, which Longacre intended to express through the feathered headdress is a contradiction, as Native Americans were subject to oppression. This contradiction is also reflected in the way Native Americans were represented on the Indian Head cent: androgynous and, above all, nameless.

The Buffalo Nickel

The Buffalo Nickel, issued in the early 20th century, not only reflects the U.S. federal government's complex relationship with its Indigenous population and culture but also serves as a tool for shaping national identity while perpetuating the myth of the 'vanishing Indian'. In the late 19th century, the U.S. government employed different methods to reduce the Native American population. One of those methods was financing the large-scale destruction of the buffalo herds, which were essential for the survival of Plain tribes.[63]

The Buffalo Nickel engraved by James Earle Fraser, also known as the Indian Head Nickel, was in circulation from 1913 to 1938 and had a composition of copper-nickel, with a 5-cent denomination. In its first year of circulation, the U.S. Mint produced 29,857,186 coins, with the highest mintage occurring in 1936 when 118,997,000 coins were produced. As seen in Figure 7, the obverse of the coin features the profile of a Native American, with the word "LIBERTY" inscribed in the upper right, and the year of minting at the lower left. On the reverse, as shown in Figure 8, the design depicts a standing American bison facing left, accompanied by the inscriptions: "UNITED STATES OF AMERICA," "E PLURIBUS UNUM", and the denomination "FIVE CENTS."[64]

[63] Abrams and Gardner, *Symbolic Objects in Contentious Politics*, 3.
[64] "5 Cents 'Buffalo Nickel' Flat Ground," Numista, n.d., https://en.numista.com/catalogue/pieces1109.html.

Figure 7. Obverse Cupronickel 5 cent of The United States, 1913. Engraver: Augustin Dupre. Collection: American Numismatic Society © American Numismatic Society.

Figure 8. Obverse Cupronickel 5 cent of The United States, 1913. Engraver: Augustin Dupre. Collection: American Numismatic Society © American Numismatic Society.

Although not specifically chosen for this coin, the phrase "E PLURIBUS UNUM," meaning "Out of many, one," adds to the paradox of the Buffalo Nickel. The phrase has been a standard element of U.S. currency since 1795. It appeared in the Journals of the Continental Congress on June 20, 1782, where it was used to describe the Great Seal of the United States. The phrase became legally required on all U.S. coinage after February 12, 1873, and appeared on the back of U.S. $1 notes since 1935. The juxtaposition of this unifying motto with imagery that commemorates Native Americans while also contributing to the myth of the 'vanishing Indian' further complicates the meaning of the coin.[65]

On the Buffalo Nickel, both human and animal come together. Considering how the federal government treated buffaloes, animals important to survival of Native Plains tribes, the Buffalo Nickel might initially seem like a commemorative coin. Fraser said the following about the two sides of the coin: ".. perfect unity of theme. It

[65] United States Department of the Treasury and Henry M. Paulson Jr., "E Pluribus Unum: Out of Many, One," U.S. Department of The Treasury, July 2007, accessed September 20, 2024, https://home.treasury.gov/system/files/266/strategic-plan2007-2012.pdf.

has pertinent historical significance, and is in line with the best tradition of coin design, where the purpose was to memorialize a nation or people."[66] This approach may seem positive, but the paradox lies in the fact that Native American tribes still existed, so there was nothing to commemorate in that regard. Another important point from this quote is that Fraser acknowledged the significance of Native Americans and buffaloes, indicating that he intended the Buffalo Nickel to be a meaningful coin in American history. Although Fraser engraved the Buffalo Nickel in the early 20th century, his design process appears similar to Longacre's in the 1850s. Fraser aimed to create a coin that distinctively represented America. In an interview, he said the following: "Well, when I was asked to do a nickel, I felt I wanted to do something totally American – a coin that could not be mistaken for any other county's coin. It occurred to me that the buffalo, as part of our western background, was 100% American, and that our North American Indian fitted into the picture perfectly."[67]

Fraser claims the buffalo to be a Western symbol while overlooking its historical and cultural significance to various Native tribes. He also fails to acknowledge the wrongdoings committed by Westerners against Native Americans. Both Native Americans and the buffalo appear to be appropriated by Fraser, treated as objects that can be categorized as American and therefore depicted on a coin. This suggests that Fraser prioritized the coin's aesthetic over the risk of perpetuating the myth of the "vanishing Indian".

It is also possible that Fraser was influenced by this myth himself. Born on November 4, 1876, in Winona, Minnesota his father was a railroad engineer and contractor. Before Fraser turned one year old, his family moved to the Dakota Territory, where the railroad was expanding westward. While growing up on the prairie near Mitchell, South Dakota, Fraser encountered Native Americans and frontiersmen. These figures would later inspire the subjects in his sculptures.[68] The quote above suggests that the Native American and the buffalo were used to express a national identity through the coin's imagery. Fraser aimed to make the Buffalo Nickel unique and easily recognizable as American. This nationalistic approach aligns with the idea that visuals are important tools for nations to be

[66] Roger W. Burdette, *Renaissance of American Coinage, 1909-1915*, 2007, 216.
[67] Ibid., 224.
[68] "James Earle and Laura Gardin Fraser Papers: An inventory of their papers at Syracuse University," Syracuse University Libraries, n.d., https://library.syracuse.edu/digital/guides/f/fraser_je_lg.htm#d2e129.

recognized as sovereign and maintain a national narrative. [69] The inclusion of Native Americans on coins could be seen as a positive development. However, it is noteworthy that no Native Americans were involved in the design or decision-making process. While the Native American depicted on the Buffalo Nickel is represented realistically, it is not a portrait of a specific individual. In a letter to Mint Director George Roberts wrote: "I have your letter asking whether or not the Indian head on the new nickel was a portrait or a type. It is a type rather than a portrait. Before the nickel was made I had done several portraits of Indians, among them Iron Tail, Two Moons, and one or two others, and probably got characteristics from those men in the head on the coins, but my purposes was not to make a portrait but a type."[70]

The fact that Fraser could not name the other Native Americans he used as references indicates a lack of focus on the individuals themselves and an emphasis on creating a type or generalized representation, as he acknowledged. Interestingly, Fraser, as previously mentioned, also designed the coin as a commemorative piece. Even though only one Native American is depicted, it's clear that this portrait was meant to represent an entire population. Fraser likely intended to create a figure that symbolized America, but in doing so, he reduced Native Americans, who come from many different tribes to a single stereotype. In another letter, which had been made public by the Bureau of Indian Affairs, Fraser referred to Irontail as "the best Indian head I can remember".[71] This suggests that, in this case, Native Americans are utilized as representatives in the narrative the federal government seeks to convey through its currency.

Instead of including Native Americans in the design process, the influential Commission of Fine Arts supported Fraser's innovative designs for the Buffalo Nickel, guiding the decision-making process, and marking a significant collaboration between artists and government officials in American coinage. This kind of support helped treasury officials feel confident in their decisions. Fraser was the first coin designer to benefit from the support of the U.S. Commission of Fine Arts. This organization would later have significant influence over both circulating and commemorative coins. [72]

[69] Brunn, *Stamps as Messengers of Political Transition, 20.*
[70] Quentin David Browers, *The Official Red Book a Guide Book of Buffalo and Jefferson Nickels: Complete Source for History, Grading, and Values* (Whitman Publishing, 2007), 38–39.
[71] Browers, *The Official Red Book a Guide Book of Buffalo and Jefferson Nickels*, 39.
[72] Burdette, *Renaissance of American Coinage, 1909-1915*, 162.

The Commission was established by Congress in 1910. This permanent Commission provided advice to the U.S. federal government on arts and national symbols. It also guides the architectural development of Washington, D.C. The U.S. government claims that establishing the Commission aligned its artistic goals with its emerging status as a global leader in economics, politics, and culture. Initially, the Commission of Fine Arts was given the authority to offer advice on where to place statues, fountains, and monuments in public spaces across the District of Columbia. However, with the issuance of Executive Order 3524, its role was further extended to cover not just buildings and monuments but also the design of parks, as well as the creation of coins and medals.[73] As an independent federal agency, the Commission of Fine Arts gave expert advice to the President, the Congress, and the federal and District of Columbia governments on matters of design and aesthetics. The Commission aims to ensure that the art projects align with the federal interest and values. The Commission consists of seven people, expert in different disciplines including art, architecture, landscape, and urban design. who are appointed by the President of the United States.[74] The Commissioners, highly skilled in fine arts, have served without compensation. The four-year terms of membership have been regarded as a patriotic service to the nation.[75] In short, the decision-making process behind the Buffalo nickel and the role of the Commission of Fine Arts, which ensures that coin designs align with federal interests, suggest that the Commission's support positions the coin as a tool to reinforce the U.S. national narrative.

Fraser's design process included rough sketches, life studies, finished drawings, plaster models, and electrotypes in various sizes.[76] According to Mint Director Roberts, Assistant Secretary Andrew initiated the negotiations for the new nickel piece in 1911. His interest in the project led Fraser to independently create several small wax models, featuring the Indian head and buffalo in a similar form to how they appear on the Buffalo Nickel.[77]

[73] "History of the Commission of Fine Arts," U.S. Commission of Fine Arts, accessed October 13, 204AD, https://www.cfa.gov/about-cfa/history.
[74] "About CFA," U.S. Commission of Fine Arts, accessed October 13, 2024, https://www.cfa.gov/about-cfa.

[75] "The commission of fine arts: a brief history prepared on its thirtieth anniversary," *Landscape Architecture Magazine* 30–30, no. 4 (July 1940): 177–78, https://www-jstor-org.ezproxy.leidenuniv.nl/stable/pdf/44659706.

[76] Burdette, *Renaissance of American Coinage, 1909-1915*, 162.
[77] Ibid., 167.

In summary, by this realistic and nameless Native American representation on the Buffalo Nickel the federal government, turned Indigenous people into types and symbols rather than reflecting their diverse cultures. Furthermore, the depictions on this coin, of both the Native American and the buffalo, allow the U.S. federal government to construct a national identity that overlooks the realities of Native American life and the challenges they face.

Chapter 3

Native American Presence on Paper: From Colonial Currency to Federal Banknotes

This chapter will examine Native American representation on paper numismatic objects, including seals, colonial currency, banknotes from the Free Banking Era, and the only federal banknote featuring a portrait of a Native American chief, whose design contrasts with other notes that depict U.S. presidents or historical figures.

Native Americans on Seals and Colonial Currency

The images of Native Americans on U.S. currency indicate a paradox that can be observed from the earliest depictions. Figure 9 is an example is a 20-shilling banknote from 1690.[78] This banknote is the first authorized banknote in Western society. Although a Native American was not intentionally chosen to be depicted, one can still be seen since it is part of the Massachusetts Bay Colony seal that has been used since 1629. The figure holds a bow and arrow, with the downward-pointing arrow signifying peace. The text "COME OVER & HELP US" comes from his mouth. Given the historical context in which Native Americans had to experience systematic marginalization and attempts at eradication, this phrase may be interpreted as the depicted Native is asking for help. However, this phrase was directed at the colonists still in England.[79]

[78] Smithsonian Institution, "20 Shillings, Massachusetts, 1690 | Smithsonian Institution," Smithsonian Institution, n.d., https://www.si.edu/object/20-shillings-massachusetts-1690%3Anmah_472657.
[79] William L. Pressly, *America's Paper Money: A Canvas for an Emerging Nation*, 2023, https://doi.org/10.5479/si.24871410, 7.

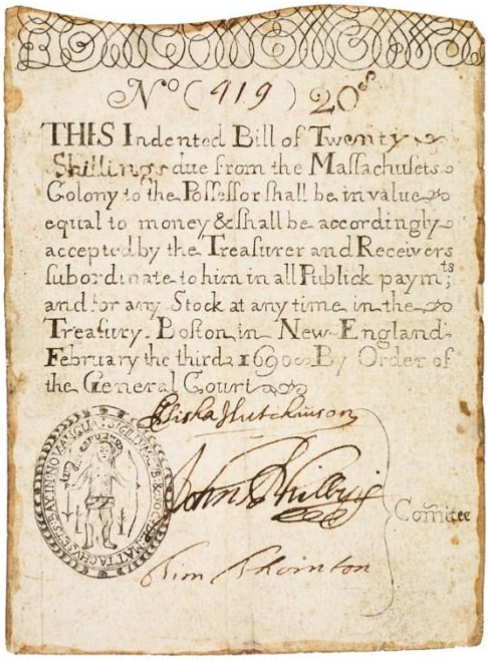

Figure 9. 20 Shillings, Massachusetts, 1690. Collection: The National Numismatic Collection © Smithsonian National Museum of American History.

The text directed at former countrymen overseas may clarify why images of Native Americans appeared on seals and banknotes. The entire seal, including the image, could be a message directed to other nations. One possibility could be that the colonists aimed to make a clear distinction between "us", referring to the colonists, and "them," referring to the English. In this context, the image of the Native American illustrates the difference between the two. Unlike the people in England, the colonists used the bodies, clothing, and objects of Indigenous people, to form a new identity, which they presented to others through this seal. This image suggests that the cultural context of the Indigenous population was not considered when placing Native Americans on currency. In this example, the figure representing a Native American is depicted simplistically, potentially falling into the category of "Nameless Androgynous Native" and the subcategory "the Native as American."[80] However, there are also examples of Native Americans on banknotes that are depicted more realistically, as seen on banknotes from the Free Banking Era. The size of the United States makes it inevitable that, in addition to a national identity, local characteristics emerged and were depicted on banknotes issued during that period.

[80] Kraft, "Building a National Identity through 'The Noble Savage'," 49:41.

Pre-federal Banknotes Depicting Native Americans

Before U.S. currency was centrally regulated by the federal government, a significant number of banknotes were issued featuring Native American representation. During the Free Banking Era, banks had strong relationships with security-engraving firms. These firms created patterns on banknotes to prevent counterfeiting. They worked closely together in the decision-making process for banknote vignettes. There is little documentation regarding conversations between engravers and bankers, which might would reveal how and why certain design choices were made. What is known is that security-engraving firms drew inspiration from mainstream American artists, and illustrations from books, journals, and magazines. European old masters also influenced their work, but instead of continuing their art traditions, the engravers Americanized their designs. In addition, security-engraving firms created their own content and expanded the collection of American vignettes.[81] These vignettes also included depictions of Native Americans. A notable aspect of these banknotes is the frequent reuse of the same vignettes on different banknotes because bankers could choose from a selection of stock images. This repeated use of the same vignette is illustrated in the banknotes below. All these banknotes only have an obverse.

On the following banknotes, Native Americans are depicted in the center of the banknote but seem not to be the focus. Instead, the figures seem to illustrate a contrast. At first glance, it may seem two similar family situations are depicted, but significant differences can be noted. The Native Americans are depicted without any attributes. This may reflect the earlier mentioned myth prevalent at the time, suggesting that Native Americans had no possessions. In contrast, a young white girl sits on the ground with her hand placed on a globe, while the others seem to study a book suggesting education and the ability to expand their territory, in contrast to the Native Americans from whom land was being taken. The Bordentown Banking Co. in New Jersey issued a 10-dollar banknote as seen in Figure 10, from 1850 until 1859.[82]

[81] Pressly, *America's Paper Money*, 34.
[82] "10 Dollars, Verenigde Staten," Numista, n.d., https://nl.numista.com/catalogue/note410678.html.

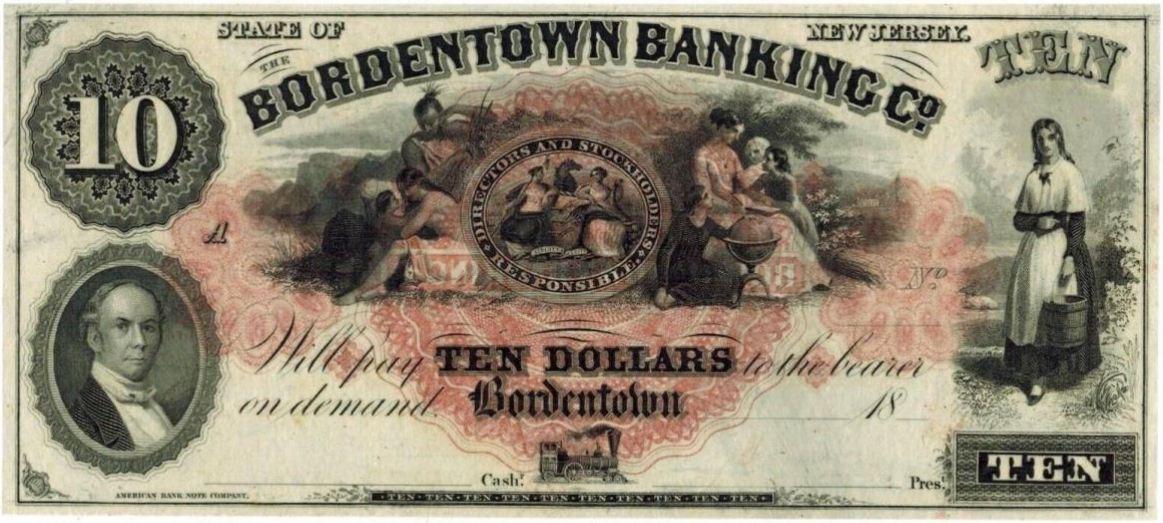

Figure 10. Obverse 10 Dollars Bordentown Banking Co. New Jersey, 1850-1859. Maker: American Banknote Company. © Mattsman60.

Figure 11 displays, a 4-dollar bill printed by the American Bank Note Company and, issued by The Bank of Washington from 1851 to 1864. [83] The banknote below features the same vignette in the center as the previous one, but the two scenes are divided by a shield. A portrait of George Washington appears on the left side of the banknote.

Figure 11. Obverse 4 Dollars The Bank of Washington North Carolina, 1851-1864. Maker: American Banknote Company. © Mattsman60.

[83] "4 Dollars, United States," Numista, n.d., https://en.numista.com/catalogue/note411401.html.

The 1-dollar bill as seen in Figure 12, was commissioned by Mr. Dayton from Danforth, Wright & Co and issued in St. Paul, Minnesota, from 1853 to 1859. [84] The Dayton Bank's banknotes are unique because it is unclear whether the bank ever opened. Despite this uncertainty, the images on this banknote are characteristic of the 19th century. Similar images are mainly found on banknotes from Western banks. These banknotes predominantly present white culture, and racial and ethnic stereotypes are common. [85] Unlike the two banknotes mentioned earlier, this bill features two vignettes depicting Native Americans. On the left side of this 1-dollar banknote, two Indigenous men are portrayed: one stands with a bow in front of a wigwam, and the other kneels next to a small bush. The center vignette on this banknote is like the banknotes mentioned above. The image between the Native Americans and the white people has also been customized to the client's specifications. Another difference is the absence of a male Native figure. During the analysis of this banknote, the question arose whether this absence was done intentionally to create a balance in representation and prevent the Native American depictions on the banknote from dominating the white figures. Another possibility could be that the American Banknote Company may have used a slightly different vignette than Danforth, Wright & Co. and that the vignettes were unrelated.

Despite the absence of a central bank, a national framework emerged, since different banks were using similar vignettes. However, regional differences could still be distinguished. Banknotes depicting Native Americans were, for example, more common in the states of the Great Plains.[86]

[84] "1 Dollar, United States," Numista, n.d., https://en.numista.com/catalogue/note412119.html.
[85] "1 Dollar, Dayton Bank, Minnesota, United States, 1853," n.d., https://americanhistory.si.edu/collections/nmah_1201038.
[86] Pressly, *America's Paper Money*, 34.

Figure 12. Obverse 1 Dollar The Dayton Bank Minnesota, Maker: Danforth, Wright & Co, 1853-1859. © Mattsman60.

To conclude, the banks from the Free Banking Era made image choices for their banknotes in consultation with security-engraving firms. Similar to the design of the Indian Head Cent, the concept of portraying a "typical American" image seemed to be an essential part of the thought process of the security-engraver firms. This might be the reason why banks chose vignettes of Native Americans. These images may have functioned to build customer trust by projecting an American identity. Therefore, the choices to depict Native Americans on these pre-federal banknotes appear to have been made intentionally. What is known, is that security firms in the Free Banking Era featured Native Americans on their banknotes as part of the country's proud heritage. [87] These images contributed to the formation of a 'new typical American' identity.

Native Americans frequently appeared on banknotes before the centralization of U.S. currency. These depictions on the banknotes from the Free Banking Era can be categorized as "Nameless Realistic Natives".[88] Although the U.S. federal government did not issue these banknotes, they provided insight into the development of Native Americans' representation of currency throughout the years. After the federal government took over currency regulation in 1863, it took 36 years before another Native American appeared on a banknote again.

[87] Pressly, *America's Paper Money: A Canvas for an Emerging Nation,* 79-80.
[88] Kraft, "Building a National Identity through 'The Noble Savage'," 49:41.

The Indian Chief Note

The main difference with the Indian Chief Note, which can be seen in Figures 13 and 14, is that it shows the bust of a Native American, unlike the full-body depictions of "nameless" figures from the Free Banking Era. In 1878, Congress gave the United States Bureau of Engraving and Printing the monopoly on the production of United States currency. The BEP replaced private companies that had produced banknotes for years.[89] The Blank-Allison Act of February 28, 1878, allowed the Treasury to exchange the deposit of silver coins for Silver Certificates. This was allowed to provide another option than to carry silver dollars. In 1886, Silver Certificates of 1, 2, and 5-dollar denominations were issued. These types of banknotes became popular and were used for much of the late 19th and 20th centuries.[90] The Indian Chief Note is a 5-dollar Silver Certificate.[91] This paper bill is part of the series of 1899. Other banknotes in this series include a 1-dollar Silver Certificate and a 2-dollar Silver Certificate. The 1-dollar banknote depicts an eagle standing on a United States flag with the Capital Building in the background at the center of the banknote. At the bottom, below the eagle, two small busts of Abraham Lincoln and Ulysses S. Grant are depicted.[92] On the 2-dollar Silver Certificate, the bust of George Washington is in the center bottom of the banknote.[93]

Figure 13. Obverse 5 Dollars Silver Certificate "Indian Chief Note." Engraver: George F.C. Smille, 1899. © Sonny Darko.

[89] Franklin Noll, "The United States Monopolization of Bank Note Production: Politics, Government, and the Greenback, 1862–1878," *American Nineteenth Century History* 13, no. 1 (March 1, 2012): 15, https://doi.org/10.1080/14664658.2012.681942.
[90] Bureau of Engraving and Printing Department of the Treasury, Historical Resource Center, Barbara Bither, Arthur Friedberg, and Ira Friedberg, "Silver Certificates," *BEP History Factsheet*, April 2013, https://www.bep.gov/media/1051/download?inline.
[91] "5 Dollars, United States," Numista, n.d., https://en.numista.com/catalogue/note314419.html.
[92] "1 Dollar, United States," Numista, n.d., https://en.numista.com/catalogue/note212835.html.
[93] "2 Dollars, United States," Numista, n.d., https://en.numista.com/catalogue/note220515.html.

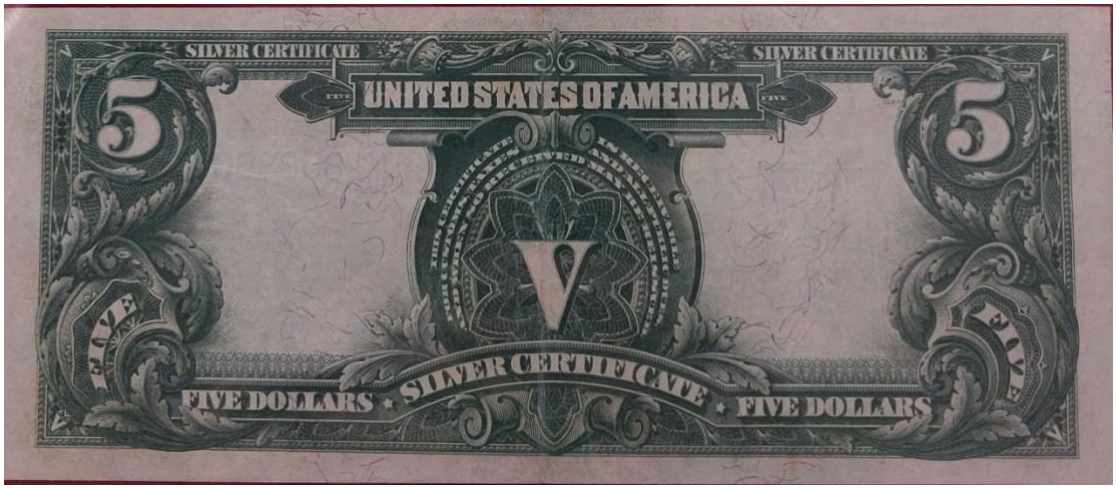

Figure 14. Reverse 5 Dollars Silver Certificate "Indian Chief Note." Engraver: George F.C. Smille, 1899. © Sonny Darko.

The Indian Chief Note, also known as Chief Onepapa (or Oncopapa, Hunkpapa), depicts the Chief Running Antelope (Ta-to-ka-in-yan-ka) of the Sioux tribe. The Indian Chief Note therefore fits in the category "Named Native."[94] George F.C. Smille, the engraver, made his design based on a photograph taken in 1872. In this photo, chief Ta-to-ka-in-yan-ka wore a headdress with three feathers. However, The Bureau of Engraving and Printing thought that the feathers were too high for the banknote and made artistic changes. Smillie, unfamiliar with the Sioux tribe, replaced the original headdress with a Pawnee headdress. This modification is significant considering the historical rivalry between the Pawnee and Onepapa Sioux and indicates the continued use of Native depictions, in particular the feathered headdress, for practical purposes in numismatic objects.[95]

Another Native American on the Indian Chief Note

Another significant aspect of The Indian Chief Note is that some editions technically feature two Native Americans, although not in the form of an image. One of the 13 different signatures on the banknote is that of Cherokee Register of the Treasury Houston Benge Teehee seen in Figure 15.[96]

Figure 15. Signature Houston Benge Teehee, Register of the Treasury.

[94] Kraft, "Building a National Identity through 'The Noble Savage'," 49:41.
[95] Paul Green, "Interesting story surrounds 'Indian Chief' note," *Numismatic News*, September 30, 1997.
[96] "5 Dollars, United States," Numista, n.d., https://en.numista.com/catalogue/note314419.html.

Teehee was born on October 14, 1874, in Sequoyah County. He was the son of Stephen Teehee and Rhoda Benge. He grew up with a father who only spoke Cherokee and went to Cherokee schools before he went to Fort Worth University. In 1906, after university, he became the Cashier of the Cherokee National Bank of Tahlequah. By 1914, under President Woodrow Wilson, Teehee became the Registrar of the United States Treasury. His signature appeared not only on the Indian Chief Note but also on all Federal notes and bonds during WWI. Teehee was also responsible for the Liberty Loans and other financial measures of the war. In short, Teehee's role as both Registrar of the United States Treasury and a member of the Cherokee tribe is significant, raising questions about his perspective on the Indian Chief Note.

Chapter 4

Indian Peace Medals: Representing Perceived Threat and Assimilation

Due to the lack of documentation regarding Native American opinions on the numismatic objects discussed, this thesis aimed to identify significant objects or practices from before European contact. With numerous tribes involved, the goal was to pinpoint generalizable or common aspects. While exploring Indian Peace Medals, questions emerged about why Native Americans would wear these medals and whether objects with similar functions, cultural significance, and appearance already existed in their cultures. This chapter sets Indian Peace Medals within a historical frame but also delves further back in time, examining how Native Americans interacted with similar objects to those known in Western society. A similar approach was applied in the chapter on Native American representation on coins, where wampum was explored. In this chapter, shell gorgets have been identified as significant objects for further exploration in relation to Indian Peace Medals.

Shell Gorgets: predecessors of Indian Peace Medals

Native Americans have made shell gorgets, a symbolic round object, for at least 4,000 years, as exemplified by the one shown in Figure 16. These objects are either undecorated or extensively carved and still play a significant role in ceremonial clothing and jewelry.[97] Native Americans made gorgets from freshwater or ocean shells, piercing them, like Indian Peace Medals, to wear as a necklace.[98] Shell gorgets can be categorized into different groups based on the engraved designs: the cross, bird, serpent, scalloped disk, spider, frog and human figure, and human face. The latter group of gorgets was not always perforated, suggesting that these gorgets functioned as masks.[99] Besides cutting holes in the shell, very few tribes carved the shell gorgets. They engraved the designs with a sharp flint tool, a hard type of

[97] Reilly, "Displaying the Source of the Sacred,"10.

[98] Ibid, 11.
[99] George Grant Maccurdy, “Shell Gorgets from Missouri,” *American Anthropologist* 15, no. 3 (July 9, 1913): 395–96, https://doi.org/10.1525/aa.1913.15.3.02a00020.

stone.[100] Other analyses suggest that political and kinship associations from the designs on shell gorgets have a similar purpose as those that later appear on European and American peace medals. Forensic and archaeological investigations have found that in certain tribes, individuals regarded as important wore gorgets in specific styles and themes, similar to how significant Native American figures wore Indian Peace Medals. Both objects identified the wearer as an elite within their tribe and connected him to the power of the person depicted on the object.[101][102] Finally, shell gorgets and the later Indian Peace Medal represent a political order, kinship relation, and power source. [103] While Native Americans created and wore shell gorgets, European colonists, possibly influenced by philosophers, viewed them as a violent threat to be eliminated.

Figure 16. Snake Monster, Brakebill South variety, A.D.1400-1600. © Jon Muller.

Native Americans as a Violent Threat

European colonists justified actions against Native American communities by viewing them as a threat to their colonial society and as part of nature to be managed or eliminated. British philosopher John Locke (1632 – 1704) argued that a liberal citizen had the right "to destroy a man who makes war upon him." At that time, the indigenous population was regularly portrayed as a threat.[104] Locke's political philosophy may have influenced the colonists, the founding fathers, and eventually the U.S. Federal Government, who reasoned that Native Americans could be destroyed. Colonists viewed America's native inhabitants as a violent, uncivilized,

[100] Edgar Burke and Central States Archaeological Societies, Inc., "Engraved Shell Gorgets," *Journal of the Illinois State Archaeological Society* 1, no. 1 (July 1950): 9.
[101] Ibid., 13-15.
[102] Ibid., 17.
[103] Ibid.
[104] Lisa Lowe, *The Intimacies of Four Continents* (Duke University Press, 2015), 9.

non-Christian threat that needed to be eliminated. Native Americans were described as "infidels" and "savages," whom the settlers were frequently in conflict with.[105] In addition, settlers considered Indigenous peoples as part of nature and the land they inhabited, which could be removed, extinguishable, or were part of the past. This implies that the complexities of the culture of Native Americans were overlooked and their connection to the land was not regarded as significant. Native opposition to European settlement was often portrayed as an imminent threat to colonial sovereignty, which justified oppression and violence.[106] As previously discussed, the complex relationship between Native Americans and the federal government also had another side, where the government formed alliances with Indigenous tribes. Giving medals was one way to shape this relationship.

Farming and Scalping: Abraham Lincoln Indian Peace Medal

Official U.S. Indian Peace Medals were given to Native American leaders by the Office of Indian Trade and the Bureau of Indian Affairs.[107] Native Americans had significantly more agency with peace medals compared to coins and banknotes. Indian agents on the frontier also distributed the medals following established norms. From the start, the United States government worked to obtain medals to satisfy the chiefs.[108] Some of these medals were awarded for behavior that was regarded as civilized according to white society standards.[109] On the Abraham Lincoln Indian Peace Medal, a combination of the perceived violence threat and assimilation is depicted. This medal visualizes federal legislation such as the Dawes Act.

From the second half of the 19th century, efforts from the federal government to assimilate Native Americans into American society increased, which is visualized on the Indian Peace Medal displayed in Figure 20. The Abraham Lincoln Indian Peace Medal, made by the United States Mint is engraved by Salathiel Ellis and Joseph Willson.[110] The scalping scene on the reverse was first used on peace medals issued during the presidency of James Buchanan (1857–1861) and continued to

[105] Ibid.
[106] Ibid.,7-9.
[107] Reilly, "Displaying the Source of the Sacred," 9.
[108] Prucha, *Early Indian Peace Medals*, 279-280.

[109] Reilly, "Displaying the Source of the Sacred," 9.

[110] "Bronze Medal of Lincoln, Abraham, United States, 1861–1865. 1940.100.230," n.d., https://numismatics.org/collection/1940.100.230.

appear on medals under his successor, Abraham Lincoln (1861–1865) seen in Figure 19. A recurring feature of the Indian Peace Medals is the various symbols that can be associated with both the Native American population and white society.[111] The Abraham Lincoln medal depicts a tomahawk, bow, and arrows in the outer ring, symbolizing the Native American population. In the inner ring, a farming scene illustrates the effort to assimilate Native Americans into white societal standards.

Examining the Indian Peace Medals, the "Labour, Virtue, Honor" medal shown in Figures 17 and 18, issued during the presidencies of Millard Fillmore (1850-1853) and Franklin Pierce (1853-1857), appears closely related to the later Abraham Lincoln Indian Peace Medal.[112][113] Together the medals seem to tell a narrative where Native Americans are taught "civilization" by the white man.

Figure 17. Obverse American Indian Peace Medal, President Millard Fillmore, 1850 (replica). Collection: Numismatics & Philately © Museums Victoria.

Figure 18. Reverse American Indian Peace Medal, President Millard Fillmore, 1850 (replica). Collection: Numismatics & Philately © Museums Victoria.

[111] Francis Paul Prucha, *Peace and Friendship: Indian Peace Medals in the United States*, 1985, 22–23.
[112] "Medal - American Indian Peace Medal, President Millard Fillmore, United States of America, 1850," Museums Victoria Collections, n.d., https://collections.museumsvictoria.com.au/items/1374022.
[113] "Bronze Medal of Pierce, Franklin, United States, 1853–1857. 1974.156.13," n.d., https://numismatics.org/collection/1974.156.13?lang=fr.

In the scene on the Abraham Lincoln medal as can be seen in Figure 20, the house in the background, children playing baseball, and the farming methods suggest that the assimilation was successful; the Native American man has become a farmer, adopting a lifestyle that fits into white society. The presence of the church in the background also indicates that Native Americans have embraced Christianity. It is likely no coincidence that the children are shown playing baseball. Around the 1850s, baseball emerged during a significant rise in political and cultural nationalism into a national pastime activity in the United States.[114] In contrast to the assimilated lifestyle of the Native American in the central medallion described above, the outer border depicts a lifestyle regarded as violent according to white society standards, which he has left behind. A Native American warrior holds a knife to scalp another Native. Below the head of a female Native American is depicted, surrounded by a bow, arrows, and a peace pipe.

Figure 19. Obverse American Indian Peace Medal, President Millard Fillmore, 1850 (replica). Collection: Numismatics & Philately © Museums Victoria.

Figure 20. Reverse American Indian Peace Medal, President Millard Fillmore, 1850 (replica). Collection: Numismatics & Philately © Museums Victoria.

[114] George B. Kirsch, *Baseball in Blue and Gray: The National Pastime during the Civil War* (Princeton University Press, 2007), 16.

A noteworthy aspect is that the Native American in the inner circle is wearing a feathered headdress, which would not fit the assimilated lifestyle. This was also noticed by the president and the head of the Bureau of Indian Affairs, who had to approve the design of the medal. After reviewing the medal, they suggested that the war bonnet had to be removed from the depicted Native Americans working the land because it seemed inappropriate. It can be regarded as attention-worthy that there were no comments about the scalping scene from government officials. However, no changes could be made without redesigning the whole medal, because the dies were already engraved.[115]

Through associations based on stereotypes, war bonnets have often been linked to leadership positions. However, only a few Cheyenne chiefs have worn similar war bonnets as depicted on the Abraham Lincoln medal around the time of the Plain Indian Wars. As mentioned before, warriors wore these types of feathered headdresses during battles or ceremonies. The headdresses were valued because of their spiritual significance and not for their aesthetically appearance.

Historically, non-Indians have often linked war bonnets to leadership roles. However, few Cheyenne chiefs wore this headpiece before, during, or after the Plains Indian Wars. Traditionally, warriors, not chiefs, wore war bonnets, and they only used them in battle against worthy opponents or during ceremonies. Wearers placed great spiritual significance on their headdresses, valuing them more for their spiritual meaning than for their appearance.[116]

Documentation of contemporary Native American opinions is scarce. However, one version of the Abraham Lincoln Indian Peace Medal features a significant story that reveals the perspective of its Native American wearer. The 19th-century Ute leader Honkapkna possessed a large Lincoln medal that saved him from a gunshot to the chest during a conflict with Cheyenne warriors in 1873. The medal stopped the bullet as shown in Figures 21 and 22, and Honkapkna was unconscious for a short time. He expressed dissatisfaction with the incident because he believed the medal had supernatural powers that should have prevented him from being shot.

[115] Lawrence J. Lee and Stephen E. Nash, *Indian Peace Medals and Other Medals at the Denver Museum of Nature & Science*, *Denver Museum of Nature & Science eBooks*, 2022, 70, https://doi.org/10.55485/krth5393.
[116] Leo Killsback, "Crowns of Honor Sacred Laws of Eagle-Feather War Bonnets and Repatriating the Icon of the Great Plains," *Great Plains Quarterly* 33, no. 1 (April 29, 2013): 3, https://asu.pure.elsevier.com/en/publications/crowns-of-honor-sacred-laws-of-eagle-feath-er-war-bonnets-and-rep.

Honkapkna later sold the medal to a gunsmith named John P. Lower in Denver, referring to it as "bad medicine."[117]

Figure 21. Obverse Silver Medal of Lincoln, Abraham, United States with crater from impact of bullet (embedded bullet still intact), 1862. Engraver: Joseph Willson. Collection: American Numismatic Society © American Numismatic Society.

Figure 22. Reverse Silver Medal of Lincoln, Abraham, United States with crater from impact of bullet (embedded bullet still intact), 1862. Engraver: Joseph Willson. Collection: American Numismatic Society © American Numismatic Society.

Indian Peace Medals at the end of the 19th Century

By the late 19th century, many Native Americans began to distrust white settlers, which caused a decline in the symbolic value of peace medals. Many medals were melted down, sold, or exchanged for alcohol. At the same time, coin and medal collecting grew in popularity in the United States and some peace medals, specifically those that were not given to Native Americans ended up in the hands of collectors. The U.S. Mint produced bronze copies of the medals specifically for this target audience. Larger medals typically went to important chiefs, who were more likely to keep and preserve them. The smaller medals on the other hand often went to young

[117] Oliver Hoover, "Indian Peace Medals at the American Numismatic Society," American Numismatic Society, April 8, 2022, accessed October 7, 2024, https://numismatics.org/pocketchange/peace-medals/.

Native warriors and men of lesser status. These medals were more likely to get lost or to be melted down.[118] The embedded bullet is still visible in the medal.[119]

[118] Michael Schulman, "Given in the Roman Tradition: Lincoln and the Indian Peace Medals," *The Rail Splitter* 9, no. 3-4 (2004): 3-4.

[119] "Silver Medal of Lincoln, Abraham, United States, 1862–1862. 1917.161.1," n.d., https://numismatics.org/collection/1917.161.1.

Conclusion

To conclude, the arrival of European colonists in the area that is now the United States of America significantly changed the lives of Native Americans, also regarding the economic landscape. The wealth of Native Americans came into jeopardy with the colonists' introduction of a monetary system. The colonists' perception that Native Americans lacked property had an impact on the lives of Native Americans. This belief reinforced European trade and land seizure practices, which left Native communities disadvantaged. The treatment of Native land, economy, and culture was later institutionalized through federal policies like the Indian Removal Act and the Dawes Act, with the main goal of assimilating Native Americans.

The Indian Head cent and the Buffalo Nickel both reflect broader cultural processes in which Native American culture was appropriated, reinforcing the national identity of the United States. The depictions on these coins, created by engravers James Barton Longacre and James Earle Fraser respectively, aimed to depict something distinctly American, using aspects of Native American culture and Native representation as a symbol of national identity. In addition to the portrait, which was inspired by several profiles of real Native Americans, the feathered headdress and the buffalo were adapted and incorporated as symbolic representations of America. Furthermore, the designs on the Indian Head cent and the Buffalo Nickel not only reflect the intention to create a coin that could function as a carrier of a typical American identity. They also reflect simplification and misrepresentation of Native American identities or cultural appropriation. The depictions on the coins, the feathered headdress, the buffalo, and the portrait of the Native American, were taken out of their cultural contexts and were recreated into general representations of the United States of America. This may caused stereotypes to continue, but also contributed to the myth of the ‘vanishing Indian’, where it was believed that the Indigenous population of the United States belonged to the past. At the same time, a significant number of tribes were still present in America, although they were not included in white society.

Besides circulating coins for everyday use, the federal government also issued commemorative coins that marked specific historical events. Some of these commemorative coins depicted Native Americans. These depictons suggest symbolic references to a new and modern America. One early 20th-century example is the

Providence, Rhode Island Tercentenary Half Dollar, issued to commemorate the 300th anniversary of the city's founding. The obverse, designed by Augustus Lukeman, shows a Native American welcoming the founder of the colony of Rhode Island Roger Williams at Slate Rock in a canoe, symbolizing the early interactions between Native peoples and European settlers. The reverse features Rhode Island's state shield. Another example is the Daniel Boone Bicentennial Half Dollar, which commemorates the 200th anniversary of Boone's birth. Designed by Arthur Graham Carey, the obverse presents a portrait of Daniel Boone. The reverse shows the frontiersman, holding a chart and a rifle, facing a Native American with a tomahawk.[120] [121] This imagery, often seen on other numismatic objects featuring Native Americans, contrasts the 'old' Indigenous lifestyle with the "new" American frontier. A common element in both designs is the sun on the horizon, which could symbolize the contrast between the so-called old America, represented by Native Americans, and the modernizing America of the settlers.

The inclusion of Indigenous people in these designs fits into the narrative, which contributed to the construction of a national identity by contrasting Native Americans with settlers While these commemorative coins highlighted specific events, the Indian Head cent and the Buffalo Nickel played a different role. Their designs tend to lean more toward shaping a national narrative and identity rather than truly commemorating the people depicted. The concept of the 'vanishing Indian' became embedded in the national narrative, with Native American bodies and symbols used to represent a past that was perceived as gradually disappearing yet still considered significant enough to memorialize. This perspective may have made it easier and may have been perceived as logical to incorporate Native imagery into American culture

The government, in essence, used these numismatic objects to reinforce the idea of a modernizing nation, while Native American depictions served to illustrate a past that was being left behind. The Indian Head cent and the Buffalo Nickel were different than other coins issued during this time, examples are the Liberty Head Nickel (1883-1913) and the Lincoln cent (1909). [122][123] The intentional choices made

[120] "Providence, Rhode Island Tercentenary Half Dollar," United States Mint, December 21, 2016, accessed October 16, 2024, https://www.usmint.gov/coins/coin-medal-programs/commemorative-coins/providence-rhode-island-tercentenary-half.
[121] "Daniel Boone Bicentennial Half Dollar," United States Mint, December 21, 2016, accessed October 16, 2024, https://www.usmint.gov/coins/coin-medal-programs/commemorative-coins/daniel-boone-bicentennial-half.
[122] "5 Cents," Numista, n.d., https://en.numista.com/catalogue/pieces3683.html.

by engravers in these coin designs, such as James Fraser's decision to depict a "type" on the Buffalo Nickel rather than a portrait of a specific historical or mythological individual, reflect a belief that elements from Native American culture could be used again for a new purpose. These elements were Americanized, as it were, to fit the narrative and national identity that the federal government aimed to construct. Ultimately, the Indian Head cent and Buffalo Nickel may serve as examples of how U.S. federal currency illustrates and shapes perceptions of American identity in a broader sense or places Native American culture within the narrative of the United States as a unique nation.

The depictions of Native Americans on seals and colonial currency reflect a paradox in early indigenous representation. While Native Americans were frequently depicted simplistically, which suggests a symbolic approach, these images may played a significant role in shaping a new identity for the early colonists. This would allow them to differentiate themselves from the English and would emphasize that they were a new nation in the making. The English had, after all, nothing that was comparable to the Indigenous population and their culture.

This representation of Native Americans, although less simplified than during early colonial times, continued in the pre-federal banking era. During this period security-engraving firms played a significant role in the designs of banknotes and the depictions of Native Americans. Security engravers often reused vignettes of Native Americans, which led to the widespread use of Native depictions across different states. In these vignettes, Native Americans were portrayed in a manner that emphasized differences with white settlers, westward expansion, and modernization. The transition to federal control of currency in 1863 marked a change in the depiction of Native Americans on banknotes, as it took over 30 years before a Native American was prominently featured on a banknote. An exception that was found is that an engraving of the 'Baptism of Pocahontas' appeared on the reverse of the First Charter $20 National Bank Notes issued in 1863 and 1875. This engraving was based on a painting by artist John Gadsby Chapman.[124] The Indian Chief Note from 1899 represents an example of a representation of a "named Native", Chief Running Antelope. The artistic changes made to Chief Running Antelope's headdress shows the practical use of depictions of Native objects in U.S. currency design. This kind of

[123] American Numismatic Society, "The United States in the 20th Century - American Numismatic Society," May 13, 2022, https://numismatics.org/exhibits/the-united-states-in-the-20th-century/.
[124] "Baptism of Pocahontas," Architect of the Capitol, n.d., https://www.aoc.gov/explore-capitol-campus/art/baptism-pocahontas.

artistic liberty was seen earlier with the depiction of the headdress on the Indian Head cent. These designs overlooked the cultural meaning and significance of the Native American aspects and the people they represented. In the case of the Indian Chief note, it specifically concerns the inaccurate depiction of the correct feathered headdress. This banknote, along with the presence of Houston Benge Teehee's signature, Register of the Treasury, and a member of the Cherokee tribe, adds an exceptional aspect to the paradoxical representation of Indigenous people on American numismatic objects.

Native Americans used shell gorgets long before the arrival of Europeans. These significant objects from Native culture can be regarded as predecessors of Indian Peace Medals, although they did not replace them since shell gorgets are still used today. While shell gorgets and Indian Peace Medals came from different cultures, they both had similar purposes. Both of these items were used to display a person's high status and were connected to political power. The most significant difference is that Indian Peace Medals became a tool for the U.S. federal government's policies aimed at assimilating Native Americans into European ways of life. These strategies were also depicted on some of these medals, such as the Abraham Lincoln Indian Peace Medal. These depictions included narratives of Native Americans who were taught and had adapted European ways of living, especially regarding farming, alongside images that depicted their earlier lives as violent or uncivilized. The differences between white culture and Indigenous cultures were highlighted and depicted on pre-federal banknotes. This theme continued on the Indian Peace Medals. A noteworthy aspect is that the Native Americans who were seen as behaving well in the eyes of the government received these medals as a reward for their good behavior. The federal government aimed to motivate them with the imagery on the medals to adopt a lifestyle they had essentially already embraced while being confronted with their old way of life. Colonial beliefs about this old lifestyle include seeing Native Americans as a violent threat. Additionally, colonists believed that the land should be used in a way that aligned with European views, which aligns with federal legislation of that time and is also depicted on Indian Peace Medals.

There is one significant critical point regarding the absence of indigenous perspectives on the designs of coins, banknotes, and medals depicting Native Americans. Documentation of their opinions, especially concerning the imagery on

these numismatic items, is scarce or entirely missing. This raises important questions: Was there any criticism from Native American communities regarding the imagery? Why were these perspectives not preserved? And if not, can this lack of response be interpreted as agreement? This silence was more likely the result of the suppression of Native American voices, the lack of resources to speak out, and the power dynamics at the time. Moreover, Native Americans may have had other priorities, such as survival and preserving their communities, which made protesting the imagery on coins and medals less of a central concern. One key figure who might have provided valuable insights is Native American treasurer Houston Teehee, whose unique position offered him a dual perspective. As a Native American treasurer, Teehee was directly confronted with the depiction of an Indigenous man, yet his voice seems absent from the historical record. The federal government, through advisory committees, treasurers, and even presidents, was involved in the decision-making processes of the engravers of these numismatic objects. While Native Americans were generally excluded from the design process, they had more agency when it came to Indian Peace Medals. However, not when it came to the imagery.

There was a notable difference in the use of coins and banknotes on the one hand and Indian Peace Medals on the other. Indian Peace Medals became part of the daily lives of Native American leaders, who often wore them as necklaces. They were regarded as valuable items by a few tribes, and these were passed down through generations. In some instances, they were also buried with the owner of the medal. Coins and banknotes, in contrast, circulated through American society, from which Native Americans were largely excluded. The designs of these objects, including the ones with Native American depictions, were meant to communicate a national narrative of the United States. This difference in usage also influenced the impact of these numismatic objects on both Native tribes and white society. While coins and banknotes were integrated into daily transactions, Indian Peace Medals were distributed purposefully and given to a selected group of Native Americans. This distinction meant that the messages conveyed by these different objects did not reach everyone in America. These three different numismatic objects thus had different functions; however, they all reinforced the national narrative that the federal government wanted to tell, where the myth of the ‘vanishing Indian’ also occupies a significant place. They contributed to the illustration of a national identity and aligned with federal legislation aimed at restraining Indigenous tribes.

The depictions on coins, banknotes, and Indian Peace Medals can be compared to the numerous photographic portraits taken of Native Americans in the late 19th century. These photographs can be interpreted as part of a federal initiative to document and scientifically catalog Native Americans whose existence was perceived to be at risk, aligning with the narrative of the myth of the 'vanishing Indian'. The U.S. Geological Survey is an agency within the Department of the Interior of the United States aimed to make a descriptive catalog of native Americans. By 1877 the USGS had gathered more than 1,000 photographs of Indigenous people.[125]

Ultimately, this thesis argues that the federal government's use of Native American imagery including the romanticized and often stereotyped portrayals of Indigenous peoples on numismatic objects reflected cultural appropriation, while significant in shaping national iconography, disregards the voices and lived experiences of Native Americans. Moreover, these depictions further reinforce their marginalization.

[125] Lisa Falk, "Native American Portraits: Points of Inquiry," *Journal of American Folklore* 129, no. 512 (April 1, 2016): 240-241, https://doi.org/10.5406/jamerfolk.129.512.0240.

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