

Bridging the Divide:

First Nations History at Black River Falls High School

The field of Native American history, and by extension American history, will only be enriched by the inclusion of differing perspectives and in the process will broaden and expand the definitions of history. -- Angela Cavender Wilson, Wahpetunwan Dakota¹

History educators continually confront the question of what to include within their courses. Interpreting and framing the American story remain central to how emerging citizens define themselves, their society, and their place in the world. Indeed, debates surrounding history are frequently tangled in contemporary political arguments signifying an apparent awareness of the power of historical knowledge.

In 2010, Dr. J.P. Leary of the UW-Green Bay First Nations Studies Department challenged me with the idea of implementing a stand-alone First Nations History course at Black River Falls High School.² Though an exciting challenge and logical extension of previous work within our school, I reacted with skepticism as to our ability to make this happen.

Would we have enough students who would opt for such a class, both native and non-native? Would I be able to credibly teach the story of First Nations people in a community with an adjacent tribal nation? Could we develop a curriculum that would be both challenging and accessible to many first-generation college students? Would the School Board sanction a class of this nature in a time of tight budgets? Would the broader community accept the idea of this being added to our school's history curriculum? These questions, in hindsight, appear to be an overreaction on my part, but at the time they loomed largely. Leary's challenge, however, resurrected an early 1990s conversation with champions of First Nations Studies Charity Thunder and Nancy Lurie, and in February of 2014, the Black River Falls School Board approved the new class by a 6-0 vote, one



Dr. JP Leary (Cherokee) of UW-Green Bay's First Nations Studies and Paul Rykken

of the proudest moments of my long teaching career.³ In September of that year, I walked into a mixed-race classroom and welcomed twenty-five students with the following phrase: *Hqap pi hije* (“this is a good day”), a greeting suggested to me by Ho-Chunk elder Gordon Thunder. It truly was a good day.

In the following essay, I will describe the process of implementing our First Nations History course by providing a theoretical foundation, describing the challenges we encountered, and the initial lessons learned. I will conclude with reflections on the role that non-native allies play in the educational setting. My hope is that this narrative will be instructive for others that take up a similar challenge in their schools. Change is difficult, but the rewards have been far-reaching, and I remain convinced that adding the class changed important conversations in our school and opened a door that for too long was closed.

PART 1: CONTEXTUAL FACTORS: THEORY TO PRACTICE

The central challenge for teacher-historians is to help students contemplate who we are within the collective story of “who we were” in earlier times. By its nature, history is selective and often at the expense of those whose story does not fit within the dominant narrative. It is only in the past 50 years that we have begun to delve more deeply into the story of those that lived on the edges of our nation’s narrative for too long – African Americans, Native Americans, women, and other marginalized groups. This has led to a richer and deeper understanding of the American experience but has also shattered the one-dimensional view of our past. How do we oversee this in our classrooms and in our broader communities that support our work?

First, some background. As one of Wisconsin’s original tribal Nations, the Ho-Chunk people once controlled an area encompassing the northern third of Illinois and southern third of Wisconsin. Black River Falls is situated on the northern edge of the Nation’s third and final land cession, resulting from the Treaty of 1837. Signed with the Van Buren Administration, the controversial treaty caused divisions within the Ho-Chunk Nation, notably between the “treaty-abiding” faction and those that chose to resist their prescribed removal from Wisconsin.⁴ Between 1837 and 1874, the HCN faced a series of removals at the hands of the US and Wisconsin governments to Iowa, Minnesota, South Dakota, and eventually Nebraska. Driven by greed and occurring within the paradigm of manifest destiny, the brutal and inhumane removals became tangential to the grander narrative of the American story.

The village of Black River Falls, established in 1839 and named for its unique location in the Black River Valley, became home to land speculators and lumbermen responding to the opening of newly acquired territory by the government. Those initial second-wave New Englanders encountered Ho-Chunk people facing yet another existential crisis.⁵ And like any number of frontier communities in the region soon to be known as the Old Northwest, this clash between settler-colonists and those being colonized forever changed both communities. More than 180 years later, those of us who live here are the inheritors of that early and complex interaction. How should we frame this story?

If the goal of history education is to develop informed and reflective citizens, we must remain steadfast to the truth, wherever it may lead us. We owe that to all our students. From the outset, U.S. history has been filled with dramatic contradictions that challenge the notion of a single, agreed-upon narrative. While extolling the grand accomplishments of the Founding generation, for example, historian Joseph Ellis reminds us that these men of sparkling brilliance had two major flaws; their refusal to confront the issue of slavery and their unwillingness to deal justly with indigenous people.⁶ These original sins continue to haunt our nation in the first third of the 21st Century and we must be willing to acknowledge that in our history classes. While acknowledging these flaws, however, we need to reconnect our students with the three great ideas that embody the American experiment in governance – political equality, natural rights, and the sovereignty of the people. Yale historian Jill Lepore in the introduction to her recent voluminous exploration of the American past, These Truths: A History of the United States, suggests the central questions of our national story are derived from those great ideas:

Can a political society really be governed by reflection and election, by reason and truth, rather than by accident, violence, prejudice, and deceit? Is there any arrangement of government – any constitution – by which it's possible for a people to rule themselves, justly and fairly, and as equals, through the exercise of judgment and care? Or are their efforts, no matter their constitutions, fated to be corrupted, their judgment muddled by demagoguery, their reason abandoned for fury?⁷

Within our history classes, then, active inquiry toward truth must be paramount. The *American Idea* must be held up as a mirror through which past and present are judged and presented as the worthy goal they have always been.⁸ And clearly, all our students must see themselves in the

larger story of America, challenging as that may be. We must let history do the work. Truth is often uncomfortable, but always essential and worth the effort.

Approaching history this way means facing challenges within our communities – we do not teach in isolation. The current political atmosphere promotes division bringing Orwell’s famous passage to mind: “Who controls the past controls the future. Who controls the present controls the past.”⁹ Orwell’s axiom reminds us that the tension over which version of our story we should promote – the celebrative, simple view or the more complex and nuanced one, remains fluid. But we cannot let that debate deter us from pursuing truth in our classrooms, though some will feel threatened by it. Educators Diana Hess and Paula McAvoy suggest that schools are political sites, though not partisan. Their use of the term *political* applies to “the role of citizens within a democracy: We are being political when we are democratically making decisions about questions that ask, ‘How should we live together?’”¹⁰ This question is at the forefront of my thinking as I gaze out at my multi-cultural students. How do I guide them in that direction? How do I help them contextualize the community in which they have been raised? And how does our approach to history shape the future of that community?

In the introduction to his epic biography of Frederick Douglass, historian David Blight recounts President Obama’s speech at the 2016 opening of the National Museum of African American History and Culture in Washington, D.C. Framing his remarks in the “extraordinary and contradictory” story of Black Americans, Obama made the following observations about history and authentic patriotism:

The best history helps us recognize the mistakes that we’ve made and the dark corners of the human spirit that we need to guard against. And, yes, a clear-eyed view of history can make us uncomfortable and shake us out of familiar narratives. But it is precisely because of that discomfort that we learn and grow and harness our collective power to make this nation more perfect . . . It is in this embrace of truth, as best as we can know it, in the celebration of the entire American experience, where real patriotism lies.¹¹

PART 2: ESTABLISHING A FIRST NATIONS HISTORY COURSE

My arrival at Black River Falls High School in August of 1990 coincided with the prescribed implementation of the legislation known as Act 31. Roughly 25% of our students have Ho-Chunk heritage and their presence within the district's schools goes back to the middle 1930s. By the early 1960s, and due to the closure of a county school at the Ho-Chunk Mission seven miles east of town, the presence of Ho-Chunk students in the district schools dramatically increased.¹² The District, therefore, has a long and winding history with the Ho-Chunk Nation, including moments of success and episodes of failure, a history I grew to better appreciate in more than a generation of service. While being interviewed by Principal Roger Sands as a prospective history and politics teacher, it was clear to me that Act 31 was on the mind of the district's administration. Charity Thunder, in fact, was part of the interview team. A great champion for the inclusion of Ho-Chunk awareness within the school system, she served as a liaison between the district and the HCN and brought a unique skill set to that role. Her persistent efforts in this regard, along with other educational leaders within the Nation, proved invaluable to our evolution.

In response to the racially charged treaty-rights debates occurring in northern Wisconsin in the late 1980s, my predecessor, history teacher Ron Perry, took steps to integrate an introduction to Ho-Chunk history within the broader World History curriculum. Though a promising start, we struggled with the notion of relegating this to one portion of one class. Along with a number of changes in our Social Studies curriculum during the early 1990s, and as a result of ongoing discussions with Ms.



Charity Thunder (1946-2017), Ho-Chunk educational leader, visited our class during the first week in 2014.

Thunder and ethnohistorian Nancy Lurie, we took small steps toward integrating Native American history and contemporary issues within several of our classes that warranted a more natural fit.¹³ In hindsight,

these early efforts on our part seem sporadic and minimal, but we started an important journey, an organic process that continues



Ethno-Historian Nancy Lurie (1924-2017) provided inspiration and resources for the development of the class.

more than 30 years later.¹⁴ The vision of Thunder and Lurie, among others, continues to inspire the reform efforts. In a memorable conversation in 1992, both women challenged me to take the bold step of implementing a Ho-Chunk history class as part of this process. Looking back, their question – *What’s stopping you?* -- planted a seed and my only regret is that we did not act on it at the time. Thankfully, both unique educators lived long enough to collaborate with me in the development of the class in the lead-up to 2014.¹⁵



Dartmouth historian Colin Calloway's research and writing in the field of First Nations Studies continues to provide inspiration for the work we are doing.

The ongoing work in our department over many years provided the context for the new class but developing a new course from the ground up was easier said than done. In 2013 we established a Committee for Culturally Responsive Teaching within the District, and several meetings were held with faculty representatives and HCN educational leaders on a variety of topics. HCN Education Director Adrienne Thunder continued to champion the development of a First Nations Studies class and

offered support and guidance for the endeavor. In the summer of 2013, I had the unique opportunity to attend a seminar at Dartmouth College in Hanover, New Hampshire with historian Colin Calloway that focused broadly on Native American History. Sponsored by the Gilder-Lehrman Institute of American History of New York, the experience with Calloway was empowering. His scholarly work and approach to First Nations History showed me that a non-native person could navigate such an endeavor, an important mental barrier for me to cross. Frankly, the depth of his knowledge, his humility, his accessibility, and his fearless respect for truth inspired me to take what we were doing in Black River to the next level.¹⁶

Going into the fall semester of 2013, then, more active planning continued. It was at that point I began to have more frequent discussions with Dr. Lisa Poupart, head of the First Nations Studies Department at UW-Green Bay and her colleague Dr. Leary concerning the development of the dual-credit offering. This involved becoming familiar with the broader framework of their courses and the process of qualifying as a lecturer through their department. Especially

instructive was their suggestion that many aspects of the macro story of First Nations history could be accomplished by focusing on the story of one tribal nation. In our case, for example, the history of the Ho-Chunk people, though unique, provides a window into the broader themes of American Indian history. Simultaneously I consulted with my Principal Tom Chambers and Curriculum Director Stephanie Brueggen concerning the organization of the class from the district's perspective. Throughout the process, it became clear to me that the class would need to appeal to both native and non-native students to be acceptable to the board. In an important conversation with HCN Education Director Adrienne Thunder, it was decided that we would pursue a dual purpose in the course setup. While Ho-Chunk history would remain our focus, we would also guide each student in the exploration of their own ethnic heritage. This duality would facilitate an exploration of local and regional history, particularly related to the complex relationships between the original people and the Euro-American settlers that arrived in 1839 and beyond. This decision was critical to both Board approval and attracting students. By early 2014, I finalized a proposal for the class to be presented to the Board of Education. As mentioned earlier, approval for the class came in February and I began to work in earnest on writing the curriculum.



*Ho-Chunk Education Director
Adrienne Thunder was instrumental in
supporting the new class.*

PART 3: INITIAL CHALLENGES AND LESSONS LEARNED

The process of developing a coherent curriculum worthy of the topic and in line with the parameters set forth by UW-Green Bay's FNS Department proved to be as challenging as anything I had done in my career. There was no definitive source of information for me to use and no one could hand me a completed template for the class.¹⁷ My many years of working with local history prepared me for this difficulty as the same dynamic is at play there. Additionally, however, Ho-Chunk history, like that of any other tribal Nation, is inherently complicated, particularly for a non-Ho-Chunk person. First and foremost, any understanding of it requires a great deal of ongoing reading and research. I began by developing a working historical timeline and what I considered to be the essential vocabulary for the class. As I did this, I vetted

information through HCN experts as much as possible. Bill Quackenbush of the Heritage and Preservation Department, for example, proved invaluable in the initial stages. Gordon Thunder, Charity Thunder, Andy Thundercloud, Woodrow White, and Barb Blackdeer-Mackenzie, Elders within the HCN, provided insights that helped immensely in the initial stages of course development. UW-Green Bay liaison professor, Dr. Lisa Poupart helped me better understand culturally responsive pedagogy, another unique component of the class. BRFHS colleagues Eli Youngthunder and Henning Garvin, provided expertise on a variety of topics, particularly regarding language. Teacher-historian Jeff Ryan, a colleague who offers a similar course in Prescott, Wisconsin, functioned as a sounding board for various aspects of the work. And for broader issues related to American Indian studies in Wisconsin, I relied on David O'Connor, American Indian Consultant at the Department of Public Instruction for advice. In hindsight, the class was and remains a *collective effort*.



Dr. Lisa Poupart (Ojibwe) directs UW-Green Bay's First Nations Studies Department and has served as my liaison professor throughout the process.

Ultimately, I wanted to create a class that approached the Ho-Chunk story within the context of the broader story of First Nations people, and as a parallel story, often dramatically intersecting, with the history of the United States. Due to the context in which the class was offered, it was also important to me that the history of Black River Falls be integral to the class. Local history is often lost on our students and this class offered a doorway into that arena. Suffice to say, I have been on a steep learning curve for several years and a course of this nature will remain forever a work in progress. Now in our eighth year, more than 230 students have completed the course and since the fall of 2020, it has been offered through UW-Green Bay's Dual Credit Virtual Academy to schools that have traditional connections to the Ho-Chunk story. The following five observations reflect the lessons I continue to process going forward.

1. Because I am a foreigner teaching other people's history, it took time for me to *find the story*, and develop the narrative. The deep and complex roots of First Nations history can

be framed in multiple ways. I was not prepared, for example, for the emotional impact the tragic story of the Ho-Chunk people would have on some of my students, especially the overwhelming history of the removal period. To walk through that history in a culturally mixed classroom is painful and cannot be sugarcoated. This is challenging, moreover, in a community where most people have no part in the removal memory – it’s not part of their reality. As I continue to offer community presentations regarding this history, for example, elderly white residents often voice a genuine feeling of sadness at what they learn. Such reactions remind me that the racial divide we experience often stems from our lack of knowledge of each other’s stories.

2. It is important to approach the students, both native and non-native as if none of them know anything about their past. Assume no knowledge on their part. As a descendant of settler-colonizers, for example, it is wrong to assume that American Indian children have been steeped in their heritage. Many have, but my experience has shown me that many have not. They are no different than their non-native counterparts in that regard. Anecdotally, I can point to several examples of Ho-Chunk students who have chosen NOT to take the class for that reason – they are uneasy because they “don’t know enough” and feel self-conscious about this. A non-threatening solution to this dynamic is to have each student explore their heritage while taking the class. They learn about their own history in parallel with other students doing the same, prompting terrific discussions and opening students to an authentic learning experience.

3. The involvement of Ho-Chunk people in the class is critically important. As a teacher-historian, I make no assumptions about my understanding of Ho-Chunk *culture*. I need to leave that to the experts and my students need to hear directly from them. As alluded to earlier, teaching Ho-Chunk history in a school and community that have a significant Ho-Chunk population, is at times daunting. It is easy to feel scrutinized at every step, whether that is happening or not. I have and



Barb Blackdeer-Mackenzie and Charity Thunder, educational leaders within the HCN, contributed mightily to the new class in 2014.

will continue to make mistakes and it is important that I don't overreact when criticized. It is also important to be straightforward with my students about this and to maintain a culture of intellectual humility within the classroom.¹⁸

4. Though challenging, the survival of the class indicates that it can be done. No doubt, some of the students sign up because of the dual-credit opportunity, but my sense is that the class could continue without that. It will evolve and succeed by becoming part of the “woodwork,” and losing its novelty. There are no givens in the changing world of high school programming, but the goal with First Nations Studies must be to establish a foothold and continue to foster the development. Beginning in September of 2021, we established a preliminary and companion course to the dual credit offering, something we hope will pay dividends going forward.

5. Along with other developments, instituting First Nations Studies at BRFHS energized new and changing conversations for our students and staff, an exciting thing to witness. The word *empowerment* comes to mind, particularly related to our Ho-Chunk students. First Nations History, along with Ho-Chunk language classes, helps them see themselves within the curriculum. In addition, I cannot overstate the significance of having our American Indian students conversing with their non-native classmates regarding the history of Indigenous people. Witnessing discussions of this nature is empowering for me as a history educator and affirms my initial motivation for pursuing the teaching profession. We have had several instances since 2014 where the class operated as a natural forum for contemporary issues surrounding race in America. Such discussions, in my estimation, are tremendous growth experiences for all our students and prepare them better for life in an increasingly diverse world.

CONCLUSION: AUTHENTIC ALLIES AND THEIR ROLE

On a warm summer day more than one hundred years ago, Thorvald and Alma Rykken, children of Norwegian immigrants, arrived at Bethany Evangelical Lutheran Indian Mission in Wittenberg, Wisconsin to begin work among a diverse mix of students. A recent graduate of Luther Seminary in St. Paul, my grandfather intended to go to the African mission field, but Alma was not enthused about that idea. Instead, they were assigned to the “home mission” of the Norwegian Lutheran Church which meant work among Indigenous people. Established by Norwegian immigrant Evan Homme in 1883 as a home for orphans and the elderly, Bethany soon included another vulnerable population, First Nations people who had suffered from land loss, removal attempts, and ongoing economic hardship.¹⁹

An increasing body of research affirms the meta-narrative that boarding schools were culturally destructive. Designed to promote assimilation of native children into the American mainstream through separation from families and language loss, it is hard to over-estimate the impact the boarding school movement had on generations of indigenous children and families, an impact still being felt in the first third of the 21st Century.²⁰ Historian Betty Bergland’s research into the role of the Norwegian Lutheran Church at Bethany Mission, however, adds a complicated layer to the story. While not disputing the efforts to both Americanize and Christianize Wisconsin Indians, she suggests that settler-colonizers who worked at Bethany, also “mediated between the states and the tribes, mitigating the harsher effects of Indian Policy.”²¹ Among other things, she argues that Mission personnel were often first-generation immigrants who were themselves



TM Rykken and his wife Alma, my grandparents, served at Bethany from 1920-1930. They are pictured here with my Aunt June and my father Thor in 1926.

“marginalized within the nation-state and part of a relatively small, immigrant church.”²² My grandparents, for example, experienced language loss as they entered the public schools as



children, perhaps fostering empathy for that experience among the students at

TM Rykken and Ho-Chunk, Oneida, and Brothertown students at Bethany Mission in Wittenberg, Wisconsin, c. 1925. As the photographer, he was rarely “in the picture,” so this photo is unique.

Bethany.²³ Though complicit in the assimilationist vision of the era, I am certain that Thor and Alma arrived at Bethany with limited knowledge of indigenous people, and simply saw it as part of their Christian duty to help children and families in need. It is clear from extensive discussions with my father who was born at Bethany and spent the early years of his life there, that my grandfather, in particular, experienced acculturation during his ten years in Wittenberg.²⁴ Through both anecdotal and documentary evidence, that much is clear. By the middle 1920s, he was learning to speak Ho-Chunk and Oneida. He regularly visited the homes of his student’s parents in the Wittenberg area, took extensive photographs, was genuinely interested in their history, and invited Native elders to serve as baptismal sponsors for the Rykken children born on the Mission. When my 7-year-old Aunt Beatrice died of diphtheria in 1926, necessitating a middle of the night, torch-lit funeral officiated by my grieving grandfather, it was a crowd of Ho-Chunk, Oneida, and Brothertown adults that gathered to surround the grave and offer their prayers, a powerful and persistent story within my family.²⁵ In addition, as he traveled the state seeking funds for the work at Bethany, he spoke to white audiences in blunt terms about the horrific Ho-Chunk removal stories he had learned first-hand from the grandparents of his students, themselves young adults during the final removal attempts in the 1870s.²⁶

The inclusion of my grandparent’s story is not offered to rationalize or somehow assuage white guilt associated with the boarding school experience. Rather, it illustrates something important we often forget when exploring native-white relationships on the American frontier. That the acculturation process inflicted dramatic and destructive changes on First Nations people is beyond dispute, and the traumatic impact of the schools continues to be felt today. But there was a reverse and intense dynamic as well. Settler-colonizers were changed through contact with Indigenous people, and we have inherited that world in our communities. The fierce resilience of American Indian people to survive against all odds is centrally important to the American story. But what about those of us whose Euro-American ancestors moved into and participated in that frontier world? *What is our responsibility to that shared history?* As descendants of settler-colonizers, we must confront this question and work to develop creative responses. Minimizing the story is destructive and irresponsible if we genuinely care about the education of all children.

The law known as Act 31 has been part of our reality in Wisconsin education for more than thirty years. In hindsight, the vision of Alan Caldwell and those collaborating with him in those early efforts are remarkable. In August of 2012, I had the good fortune of asking Alan about that vision and whether he was discouraged about the progress toward a greater understanding of American Indian history within our schools and among the public. “We had to start somewhere,” he said, and the “point is to keep moving forward.”²⁷ His matter-of-fact response spoke



Alan Caldwell (1947-2016), Menominee Tribal Member, was the primary architect of Act 31 in Wisconsin.

volumes to me about the nature of reform in education – it is never easy, but the idea is to stay at it, to stay the course. Over time, circumstances have changed and there clearly has been progress to celebrate. If we spend too much time bemoaning what is not happening, we will miss the progress that is in front of us.

That said, the next steps are important and must be deliberate and persistent. As we enter the second generation of reforms related to Act 31, too many students in Wisconsin and

nationwide continue to leave our doors with a lack of knowledge concerning the original inhabitants of North America and this is unacceptable – we must do better. Those of us involved in this work can foster change. As they have always done, Native leaders and activists must guide the journey forward. In addition, however, due to the nature of our public education system, white allies are essential to the process. This is, after all, a shared story. Integration of First Nations history within all classes where it naturally has a footing is one way to approach the work. This is clearly what is best for all students and will help emerging citizens leave our public schools with a richer understanding of the American story. Beyond that, it is my belief that every high school in Wisconsin should include a First Nations History course that focuses on the tribal Nation nearest to them, a realistic and manageable goal. The effort toward that end would change the conversations within our schools and provide further impetus toward realizing the goals of Act 31.

NOTES

¹Wilson’s quote is taken from a 2000 article titled “Educating America: The Historian’s Responsibility to Native Americans and the Public.” <https://www.historians.org/publications-and-directories/perspectives-on-history/may-2000/educating-america-the-historians-responsibility-to-native-americans-and-the-public>

² The class was originally part of UW-Green Bay’s “College Credit in High School Program,” and is now offered through the Dual Credit Virtual Academy. The class fulfills the “diversity” requirement within the UW system and may be transferred to other schools.

³ The course was originally called *Ho-Chunk and Ethnic Studies*, but in 2017 the name was changed to *Introduction to First Nations Studies: The Tribal World* to more closely align it with UW-GB’s First Nations Department offerings. Our focus remains on Ho-Chunk history within the broader themes of First Nations Studies, including Pan-Indian movements and cultural revitalization. I also frame the course in local history with an emphasis on the interactions between Euro-American settlers and the Ho-Chunk people, an area of ongoing research for me.

⁴ There are several useful sources describing the Treaty of 1837 and the controversies surrounding it. Ethno-Historian Nancy Lurie provided insightful research on it as part of a lecture she delivered in Black River Falls in 1968. I have a copy of that lecture and can provide a copy if interested.

⁵ The well-documented resilience of the Ho-Chunk people is astounding. By 1670, because of both warfare and disease, the Nation was reduced to roughly 500 people.

⁶ Ellis points out five major accomplishments along with the two “dark shadows.” His framework provides a reasonable and historically accurate approach for history educators to utilize with emerging citizens. For further explanation, go to the prologue of his book, *American Creation* (2007).

⁷ Lepore, Jill. *These Truths: A History of the United States*. New York: WW Norton and Company, 2018. Page XIV.

⁸ My use of the phrase “The American Idea” references an 1850 speech by abolitionist Theodore Parker whose ideas were echoed in Lincoln’s “Gettysburg Address” in November of 1863. Read Parker’s landmark speech here: https://en.wikisource.org/wiki/Discourses_of_Slavery/Speech_in_Boston,_May_29,_1850,_on_Slave_Power_in_America

⁹ The quote from Orwell comes from his classic book, *1984*, published in 1948. I use it with my history students as a discussion starter concerning the politicizing of history.

¹⁰ Hess, Diana, and Paula McAvoy. *The Political Classroom: Evidence and Ethics in Democratic Education*. New York: Routledge. 2015. Pages 4-5.

¹¹ Blight, David. *Frederick Douglass: Prophet of Freedom*. New York: Simon and Schuster, 2018. Pages xiii-xiv.

¹² In 2008, we documented the integration story in the Falls History Project, a compendium of research projects that focus on local and regional history. The projects can be accessed at <https://fallshistoryproject.com/>.

¹³ David O'Connor, Native American Consultant at the Wisconsin Department of Instruction, reminded me in a 2019 conversation, that he uses three "I-words" when talking to educators about bringing greater awareness of the Native American story into the curriculum: Including, Integrating, and Infusing. In the 1990s, we were in grappling with those discussions in our school and our goal, from the start, was to move beyond inclusion and toward a fuller integration. We have yet to reach full "infusion," but it remains a worthy goal.

¹⁴ I have documented those early efforts more thoroughly in the following paper: "Transcending Barriers: Black River's Journey with Act 31 and Curriculum Evolution." The paper can be accessed at: <https://pstrykken.com/first-nations-studies/>

¹⁵ Dr. Lurie, though failing in health, offered her expertise to me as I began writing the curriculum and granted permission for me to utilize materials, both published and unpublished, she had shared with me over the years. Ms. Thunder, along with HCN educational leader Barb Blackdeer-Mackenzie, visited the new class during our first week sharing information about Ho-Chunk history and culture with the students, a memorable moment for all involved.

¹⁶ It has been my great fortune to maintain correspondence with Dr. Calloway for several years and his advice and support have proved invaluable. I use several of his books for background as I teach the class and students read significant portions of his groundbreaking book, New Worlds for All: Indians, Europeans, and the Remaking of Early America (1997, 2013) during the second half of the course.

¹⁷ Of any class I have developed in my career, First Nations Studies that focuses on the Ho-Chunk story remains a work in progress and I have only scratched the surface six years later. Prior to his untimely death in 2006, Dr. Ronald Satz, whose incredible work with various aspects of American Indian history was well-known in Wisconsin and beyond, told me that he planned to undertake a history of the Ho-Chunk people. Unfortunately, that did not happen.

¹⁸ Intellectual humility fosters an openness to ideas different from our own and a willingness to entertain the possibility that something we believe to be true might (actually) be wrong. The following website offers an excellent discussion of the concept: <https://digest.bps.org.uk/2018/01/23/something-we-could-use-a-little-more-of-studies-link-intellectual-humility-with-openness-to-other-viewpoints/>

¹⁹ Bergland, Betty Ann. "Settler Colonists, "Christian Citizenship," and the Women's Missionary Federation at the Bethany Indian Mission in Wittenberg, Wisconsin, 1884-1934," pp. 172-73. Bergland's work is part of a compendium of related works comprising Competing Kingdoms: Women, Mission, Nation, and the American Protestant Empire, 1812-1860. Duke University Press, 2010.

²⁰ Historian Roxanne Dunbar-Ortiz, in her 2014 book An Indigenous Peoples' History of the United States, provides excellent background on the impact of the boarding schools, especially their impact on familial dysfunction and historical trauma, pages 211-214.

²¹ Bergland, page 168. The author offers an extensive discussion of her assertion throughout the chapter and describes the complex relationships that developed among the missionaries, the native children, and their parents.

²² Ibid.

²³ While I did not have the opportunity to ask this question directly of Thor and Alma Rykken, my maternal grandmother, Josephine Wambheim, recounted the experience of being punished in elementary school for speaking Norwegian in a conversation with me prior to her death. The experiences, of course, are not exactly parallel, but noteworthy.

²⁴ I am using the term acculturation to mean cultural modifications that occur when individuals or groups adapt to or borrow traits from another culture. This process is an ongoing phenomenon and increasingly relevant for our understanding of history considering demographic changes we are experiencing today on a global scale.

²⁵ To add to the grief, my grandmother was unable to see Beatrice during the last hours of her life because she was pregnant and the fear of the dreaded sickness. Subsequently, they lost a second child who was stillborn several months later, our Aunt Edith.

²⁶ While speaking to a civic organization in Wausau in 1927, he made the following comments: "*Really, the white man's attitude to the Indians in general tended to make them skeptical over against all approachings of the whites. But the treatment the Winnebagoes of Wisconsin had received made them particularly averse . . . In 1872 Congress made an appropriation for the removal of the Winnebago. And in 1873 the Wisconsin Winnebago were forcibly removed to their Nebraska reservation – but many of them returned to the State. Some of the old Indians now living in the vicinity of Wittenberg recall this terrible deal. Under a pretext of friendliness, the Winnebago were invited to Madison for a grand celebration. Some few chiefs, without authority of the tribe, had entered into an agreement with the Government, selling the fertile lands for 10 cents an acre. While the Indians who had arrived at Madison, whole families, and member of families, were enjoying their feast, the soldiers suddenly rounded them up as they*

would cattle, boarded them on box cars and shipped them bodily to Nebraska. There was great lamentation and dissatisfaction over this, and many returned, some walking, some on horse-back, some in wagons and some riding the blinds on trains, many perishing on the way.”

²⁷ This conversation took place in Madison during an event celebrating Act 31. I had the opportunity to talk with Alan on a few occasions and was always struck by his hope and optimism for the work that was being done in Wisconsin schools.

Information About the Author

Paul ST Rykken, MA, is a lecturer with the First Nations Studies Department at UW-Green Bay, teaching through the Virtual Academy. A graduate of Concordia College (Moorhead, MN), he retired in 2020 after 41 years of teaching high school in Minnesota, North Dakota, and Wisconsin. In 2000, he initiated the Falls History Project at Black River Falls High School and served as director for twenty years. In 1997, he was recognized as the “Friend of Indian Education” by the Wisconsin Indian Education Association (WIEA), and in 2014 was selected as Wisconsin History Teacher of the Year through the Gilder-Lehrman Institute of American History of New York. He is an ongoing contributor to Wisconsin First Nations, a website devoted to American Indian Studies. He and his wife Mary Beth reside in Black River Falls, Wisconsin.

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