

# WHICH PLACE, WHAT STORY? CULTURAL DISCOURSES AT THE BORDER OF THE BLACKFEET RESERVATION AND GLACIER NATIONAL PARK

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Among every known people, places are named, and in every known place, stories are told. Yet as one place, Jerusalem, makes so abundantly clear, the meanings of the place and the variety of stories attached to it can derive from a variety of traditions and can lead in many different directions. Just as various pilgrims are

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drawn to some sacred places, so do all people, in all places, come to know the meanings of at least some places through names, with the stories about them capturing their deeper significance, from the sacred to the mundane. Yet for each such place, it is possible for its names and stories to vary. Names for places change; stories about them get revised, discarded, or created anew. At times, this variation (“Are we now in the Old or the New Jerusalem?”) can be a source of stress and strain, as a single place can be identified in different ways, each with its own story to tell, with each story advancing different ways of living there. And thus, as places are identified through their names and stories, they become known, sometimes in very different ways, carrying various meanings about proper living, from the peoples of the Middle East, to the Great Plains of America.

This article examines how the two communication practices of place-naming and storytelling work together to create senses of place, including ways of living within a particular geographic landscape. Past explorations of these practices have demonstrated how powerful each practice can be in situating people in places. Perhaps the most celebrated study has been Keith Basso's in

which he demonstrated a complex communicative process: When Western Apache people want to comfort someone present, or speak indirectly of a proper course of action, they can express a place-name. This expression carries with it an unspoken but commonly known story, and that story is a morality tale that suggests implicitly what can and should be done given the current social situation; that suggestion provides comfort and/or guidance to someone present. This complex process brings together an explicit naming of place, with an implicit story as the means of situating people in places and giving them moral guidance for living there.<sup>1</sup>

A related study by David Samuels has explored how place-names can convey complex and ambiguous messages that tap into diverse histories, thus carrying many meanings about places. For example, the sound of *two-saans* can be heard, among those bilingual in English and Western Apache, to refer both to Tucson, the English meaning for the city in Arizona, and to “two old ladies,” the Western Apache meaning. As a result, specific utterances of the sound *two-saans* may, in a given specific context of use, create a variety of meanings, becoming at times a source of play, as when a Western Apache asks friends, “You going down to two old ladies today?” As the sound *two-saans* expresses both an English place-name and an Apache sound and meaning, it becomes expressively entwined in multiple linguistic and cultural worlds. An earlier work has shown similarly how different place-names can be used to refer to the same physical site, with each suggesting different histories about that site, with dramatically different courses of moral action being advocated for living there.<sup>2</sup>

This dynamic—that is, the ways place-names and stories get entwined in multiple cultural worlds—holds our attention in this essay. Specifically, we are exploring these dynamics within one genre of talk, “tour talk,” with special attention to the way place-names and stories are used within it. What we have found is that place-names, as well as the histories and stories they make relevant, provide a productive focus for understanding the complexities of places, peoples, and the ways they are situated in the world.<sup>3</sup>

Our general approach is, like that of the works being discussed, an ethnographic one that explores communication in all of its varieties, as variable according to its cultural scenes, forms, and meanings. The general theoretical stance for this research has been discussed and reviewed elsewhere.<sup>4</sup> Here, the primary phenomena are being investigated by raising these questions: When people identify places, what does this identification construct symbolically? If part of the symbolic meaning is a story about a place, what is that story (or stories)? In turn, if a story is told in a place, how does it identify that place (or places)? How do these place-names and stories situate people in their places? Pursuing the genre of tour talk with these questions leads us to examine the construction of meanings about specific natural landscapes in tour talk as places are being named and as stories are being told (or implied).

The specific geographic context for this study is the eastern Rocky Mountain front of the Great Plains in northern Montana. This is a large parcel of land originally inhabited by Blackfeet people (identified in the Blackfoot language as “Nizitapi” or “real people”) but was in stepwise fashion ceded to the U.S. government and/or established as a reservation. One part that was ceded (or sold, depending on your story, as we will see below) by the Blackfeet eventually became what is now called, in English, Glacier National Park. This was part of the original Blackfeet territory and is called by Blackfeet people, among other things, “the backbone of the world.” Today, under the auspices of governmental bodies, Glacier National Park and the Blackfeet Reservation share a border, with the eastern border of the park being the western border of the reservation. Within this one geographic place, then, there have been two political entities created, the reservation and the park, each with its own senses of place and its own stories to tell.<sup>5</sup>

This borderland is given expression by Native and non-Native guides. For example, Glacier Park Incorporated, a private concessionaire for the National Park Service, is housed in the park’s lodges and serves the park’s visitors through its central tour service. Visitors to the park notice

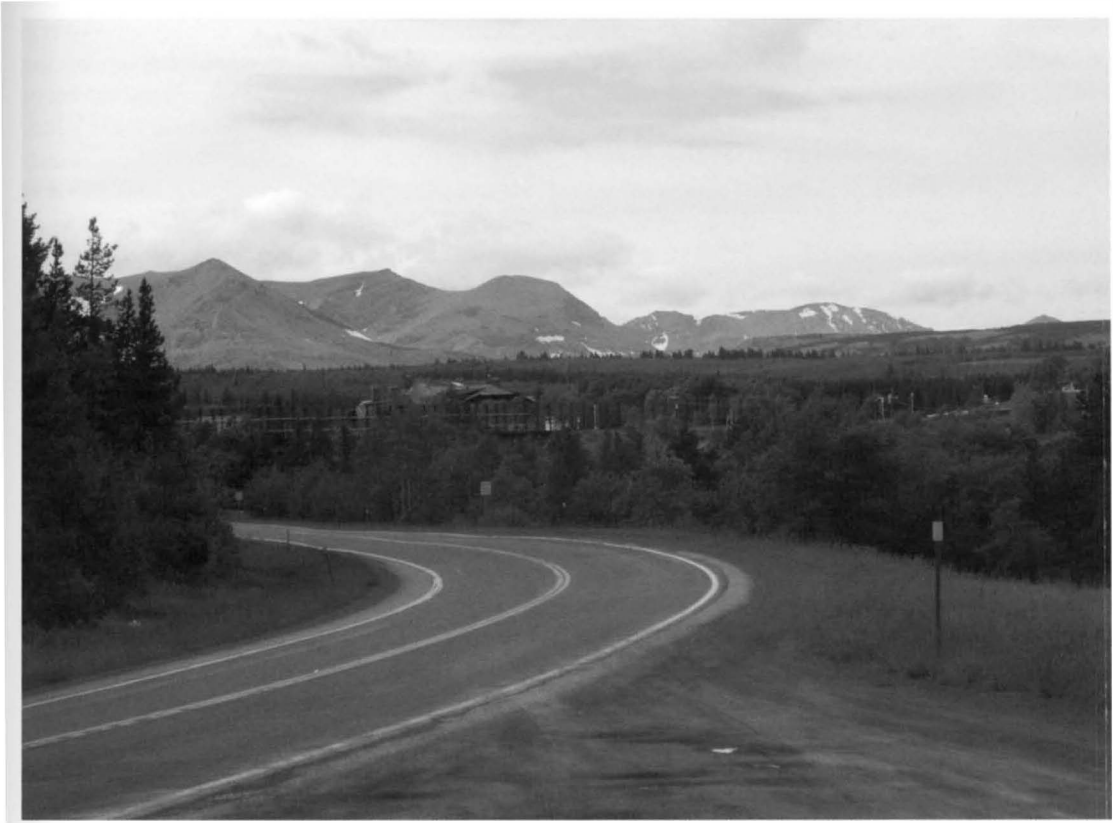


FIG. 1. *Eastern Rocky Mountain Front, northern Montana; Blackfeet Reservation (in the foreground) and Glacier National Park (in the background)*. Photograph by Mark Halligan.

and, after visiting, recall this tour service's distinctive "red tour buses" built specially in 1936 for park tours. The buses were attractively renovated (in 2002) and are prominent throughout the park. Other Park Service personnel also guide tours on boats in several of the park's lakes and from several park campgrounds. While the National Park Service offers programs called Native Reflections, Native America Speaks, and Blackfeet Drumming and Dancing, and despite intensive efforts to recruit Native guides to the tour service, most but not all of its guides are non-Natives. Native guides are available through other tour services. Some of these are well known and can be found by word of mouth. Others are available through a second tour service, Sun Tours, which is also "authorized by the National Park Service" but owned and operated by Blackfeet people. These tours occur

in air-conditioned buses and are guided—as the touring pamphlet advertises—by "all native guides from the legendary Blackfeet Indian Reservation." While Glacier Park Incorporated advertises "interpretive scenic tours," Sun Tours advertises "Blackfeet interpretive tours." Both travel the same roadways.

The data for this study were generated over the past decades from tours guided by Natives and non-Natives. During the summers of 1979 and 1980, Donal Carbaugh served as a tour guide in Glacier National Park. Since then, he has observed for purposes of this analysis many of its tours. Since 1995, when the Sun Tour service was first established, several Sun Tours have been attended. These tours, and others guided by Blackfeet people, provide a Native narration at several specific sites. During the summers of 2001 and 2002, both authors gave special

attention to the way Native and non-Native guides identified, narrated, or commented upon several sites, only two of which are analyzed in this report. Primary data, then, for this report are segments of tour talk produced when guides used place-names and/or stories at specific geographic sites. Secondary data include commentary in tour guide manuals, recordings of some of the Native America Speaks programs at Glacier National Park, and other public presentations by Blackfeet and non-Natives about the park. These supplementary data help us understand more deeply the variety of ways these places are being identified and narrated.

The procedures we followed in our analyses were threefold, with the following data being used from each of the sites: First, we observed tour talk at each site in which place-names and stories were being used; second, we identified which place-names were being used and which stories were told at each site; third, we interpreted how the place-names and stories situated tellers and tourists in these places. Our report begins with two contrasting ways of identifying the general place of concern (e.g., “the park” or “the reservation”), which is followed by detailed analyses of “tour talk” at or about two specific sites, and then we conclude by discussing the theoretical, practical, and political consequences of the study. Our objectives are to present tour talk as a cultural performance, to understand two different cultural discourses that coexist in the talk about these places, and to develop further our understanding of place-naming and storytelling as cultural forms of communication.

#### SOCIAL CONTEXT OF THE TOUR

Typically, Park Service tours attract visitors from elsewhere in Montana and from other states and nations. These tours involve twelve to eighteen visitors and are typically but not exclusively given by tour guides who are hired as seasonal workers. The most popular of these tours lasts about eight hours and costs (in summer 2002) about sixty-five U.S. dollars. Most of the guides are not from the northern Great Plains, although recently some guides have been. All are given

training and a manual of materials for constructing their tour. The Native-guided tours, on the other hand, especially those offered by Sun Tours, cover the same routes, are also about eight hours, and cater to as few as five or as many as twenty visitors. The Sun Tours cost about forty-five dollars (in summer 2002) and are always offered by Blackfeet guides who live in the immediate area. From our casual discussions with tourists, we have found most visitors want a tour of the area and its features, which both tours provide, albeit in different ways.

#### TWO INTRODUCTIONS: SITUATING THE GUIDE AND TOURIST IN A PLACE

The following report was given by a non-Native guide at the beginning of a tour. These words serve as an introduction to “the place.”

Glacier National Park was established in 1910. It is a part of the National Park System and famous for its glaciers and scenery. It was called “the crown of the continent” and is home to many wild animals including grizzly bears, elk, moose, bighorn sheep, and mountain goats. The main road in the park is the Going-to-the-Sun Road, which crosses the Continental Divide at Logan Pass. The road goes through unbelievably beautiful country of alpine meadows, mountain peaks, and lakes.

Note in this introduction how the place is described as a “national park”: this story begins typically in 1910 and its main features are big game animals and visual scenery. A key site is also characteristically mentioned, this being the main road that passes through the park. The introduction occurs in an idiom of natural splendor and is thus addressed to those seeking a visual treat as they pass through the park.

A second introduction is provided by a Blackfeet who is describing “the place” to predominantly white tourists:

Right out here on this flat, there’s a favorite camping area of our ancestors—an area where they could come, relax, and spend summers.



FIG. 2. “Blackfeet Reservation Sentries” (west of East Glacier) by Jay Laber (Blackfeet), one of four sets of sculptures on permanent display at the north (at the U.S./Canada border), south (on Highway 89 north of Dupuyer), east (on Highway 2 west of Cut Bank, and west (west of East Glacier) boundaries of the Blackfeet Indian Reservation. The sculptures are constructed from recycled and found metal. Photograph by Mark Halligan.

From there, they would go out and have vision quests or just camp and gather berries and roots and other things in the park. We owned the park and all the land back in those days. Things started going bad. The buffalo started to disappear in the 1870s. Eighteen seventy-seven saw the end of the buffalo from the Great Plains. By 1887 the Blackfeet were on the reservation. Our agency was here at Badger Creek south of Browning. And in that winter, we had what was called the “starvation winter.” Our people, who were once the greatest Indian warriors in the Northern Plains, had been decimated by two smallpox epidemics, one caused by the goods we received from Fort Benton up the Missouri River. So the Indians wouldn’t eat the rations that were given out to them. All their cattle had died. They were buried up on the hill

there—they call it Ghost Ridge. The next year, in 1888, we sold the eastern edge of our reservation, which includes the Sweet Grass Hills. The Sweet Grass Hills are considered the heart of Blackfeet country—a spiritual place for us. But our leaders knew that we needed resources. About eight years later, we moved north from there to Browning where the current agency is. There were only about three hundred tribal members left then. And Chief White Calf and other members were approached by the government to sell the land on the western edge of the reservation. And after several days of negotiations in September of 1895, the negotiations broke down and the tribe didn’t want to sell. Then something happened and the real story of what happened is still subject to some controversy. Older tribal members, who were told by

their grandfathers who were alive then, said what was promised then was a fifty-year lease. Others say that we sold, but reserved indefinitely, all of these rights. The agreement that we ultimately signed does reserve unto us various rights that we can exercise over here in the park, for example, the right to cut wood and take timber, the right to hunt. All of which would be inconsistent with the notion of the park as you see it today. And early on I think that the federal government worried that we would do exactly that. And they didn't understand that our relationship with the land was such that we viewed the park the same way that they viewed the park, that we wanted it kept the way it was, that it represented who we were and what we were for all time. And so, for that reason, we didn't exercise these rights and we don't exercise those rights today in any appreciable manner. We do go in and we are allowed under very special circumstances to pick roots and other things that are necessary for our religious purposes and our medicines. But other than that, we don't push those rights because, again, the park represents what we are and who we are, and we want it to stay that way. And so again we ask you to keep in mind as you visit the park over the next few days that we were the first stewards of the park and the park is as you see it in large part because of our efforts.

This Blackfeet guide's introduction to the place is quite elaborate and admittedly we include it in detail because it helps us introduce features of Blackfeet history not often mentioned in the tours given by non-Native guides.<sup>6</sup> Note, for example, how the cultural stage is being set by the Blackfeet guide as he refers to an immediate place (the "flat"), its past characters (Blackfeet "ancestors"), and the traditional actions done there (questing, gathering berries and roots). This rather idyllic portrayal is followed by a story of difficult times of contact with "the white man" (the disappearance of the buffalo, starvation winter, smallpox epidemic), which were addressed partly, and reluctantly, through the selling of Blackfeet land (includ-



FIG. 3. Sign at entrance to Blackfeet Indian Reservation. Photograph by Mark Halligan.

ing the sacred Sweet Grass Hills and, in 1895, a controversial "sale" or "lease" of lands that now form part of the park). An outcome of the sale, lease, or disputed treaty was distrust of the Blackfeet by the government, fearing they would not honor the mission to preserve the park (by inappropriate hunting or logging there), but the narrator reminds his audience of the Blackfeet values of honoring nature's resources, and that for centuries the Blackfeet were, after all, "the first stewards of the park," which "represents what we are and who we are, and we want it to stay that way."

While the introduction to this place by non-Native guides is couched in a discourse of natural splendor, focusing on parklike lands, wild animals, visual scenery of an unoccupied territory, and is addressed to those moving through the park,<sup>7</sup> the Blackfeet introduction is couched in a discourse of a people's history, their traditional places, a troubling history of contact with settlers, and an enduring relationship of distrust because of their past contacts with "white men" and government officials. The former places people in the mountains viewing its natural resources; the latter places people in the valleys and plains as a witness to idyllic natural places and their considerable offerings, as aware of the cultural history of traditional people and their ethic of stewardship, as informed about cultural encounters and their contact with "the white man."

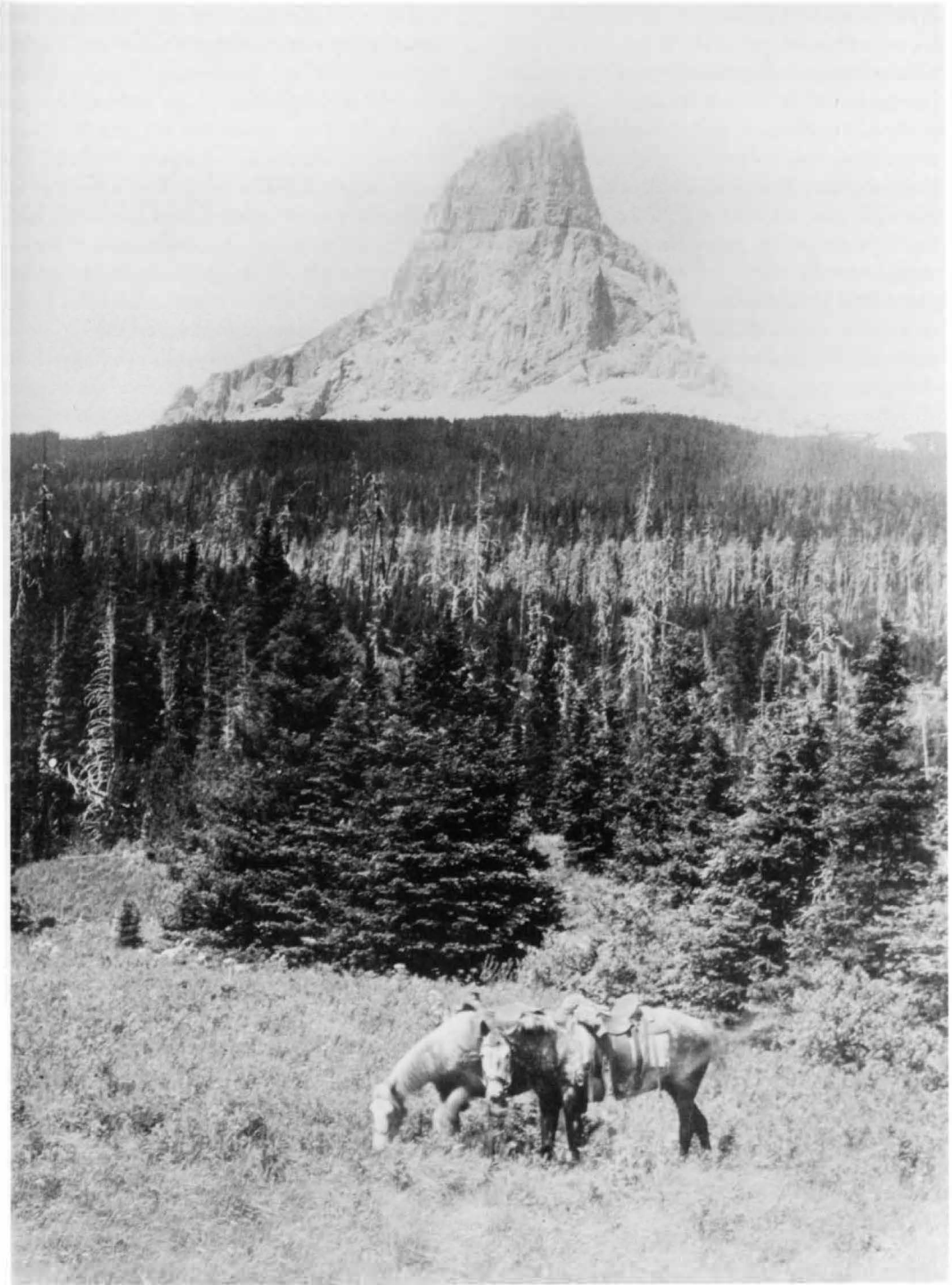


FIG. 4. *Chief Mountain, Glacier National Park, from north fork of the Kennedy Creek Mountain.* Photograph created between 1909 and 1932. Library of Congress, Prints & Photographs Division, [LC-USZ62-100877 (b&w film copy neg.)], National Photo Company Collection.

## TWO PLACES AND CULTURAL DISCOURSES

One prominent site visited by most park tours is Chief Mountain. Let's listen to the different guides' commentaries at and about this place.

*A Non-Native Tour of Chief Mountain*

As we drive about six miles north of Babb, Montana, on the east side of Glacier Park, we can see Chief Mountain to the north and west of us. It stands alone and is a spectacular peak. As it comes clearly into view, the non-Native tour guide says:

The prominent peak you see here is Chief Mountain. It is 9,080 feet tall. As you can see, there was a fire on its south slope in 1935. About 3,000 acres burned. The fire was started by careless campers.

About another three miles up the Chief Mountain Highway, as we come to the part of the road closest to the peak, we pull over at the Chief Mountain Overlook. The guide tells us this story:

According to legend, Chief Mountain had once been scaled by a young brave seeking a sacred vision. He fasted for four days and nights on the summit using a bison skull for a pillow. In 1891, Henry Stimson, later secretary of state under Hoover and secretary of war under Franklin Delano Roosevelt, climbed the east face with two companions. When they reached the top, Stimson was intrigued to find an ancient, weathered buffalo skull resting there.

About seven miles farther up the road, the guide points out a unique geological formation that is visible on Chief Mountain. "On this [east] face of Chief Mountain the effects of the Lewis Overthrust can be clearly seen. The old Precambrian rocks can be seen resting on the younger Cretaceous rock of the plains. The line of division lies just above the talus slopes."

This kind of commentary about Chief Mountain is most typical. Non-Native guides use a Native American place-name to refer to this place, Chief Mountain. There is the mention of the height of the mountain, a forest fire caused by careless campers, and similarly, there is a brief lesson in geology. The focus here is on the facts of nature, narrating mountain names, heights, and ecological and geological events.

Chief Mountain also provides the opportunity for telling a story. We learn about the mountain as a site where young braves sought visions, even sleeping on a "bison skull for a pillow." The story about Native America receives implicit verification from no less than presidential cabinet secretary Henry Stimson. If there was doubt about the Native American story's veracity, Stimson squelches it, for he found the buffalo skull! The focus here is on cultural history that brings Native America and representatives of the government together. Designed for a perhaps skeptical non-Native audience, this story introduces a Native site of questing for visions. To anticipate and address any doubt about the tale, Stimson is introduced to add to the story's credibility. Cultural history here, then, tells non-Natives about a Native activity and legend and its verification by a prominent white ancestor.

*A Blackfeet Tour of Chief Mountain  
(Ni-na Us-tak-wi)*

In the summer of 2001, we were driving with a prominent Blackfeet guide to Chief Mountain. As we approached the peak he told us of a recent tragedy:

Did you hear about the white guy who had climbed up and fallen off of Chief Mountain [and died]? The [Blackfoot] confederacy wondered what to do. Each sent some people to hold a ceremony. I never go up there. You shouldn't go up there without a reason.

A few miles south of Chief Mountain, on another occasion, a different Blackfeet guide was talking to tourists about this eastern side of the



“backbone of the world.” His verbal treatment of this place was couched in history, with the significance of the place being central to Blackfoot people. Here’s the way he told it:

White Calf, one of the leaders of our tribe who signed the agreement of 1895 that gave up the land that is now called Glacier National Park, he was an old man at the time. A man that had lived through the buffalo days, who had lived through the starvation winter, who had seen his people decimated by smallpox, but yet had a relationship with the earth and maintained his value system, and was in favor of the sale because he knew his people needed resources. After the sale and the agreement was done, and the commissioners were there and the tribal people were there, White Calf got up and addressed the people. He turned to the treaty commissioners and he said: “Chief Mountain is gone. You have cut off my head.” . . . When the agreement was reached, the boundary line was drawn from peak to peak, around certain peaks and along certain rivers. And part of the boundary line was drawn right across the top of Chief Mountain. And if the Sweet Grass Hills are the heart of Blackfoot Indian country, Chief Mountain is the spirit of Blackfoot country. Chief Mountain is probably the most sacred place in the universe. It’s where life begins. And here was this man, and even though he was giving up the most important thing in his value system, he was saying, I want to keep it the way it is. And that’s what we’d like you to think about as you enjoy your experience here in the park. That the park as you see it is the way we kept it there, that it represents our values and our people’s values and we hope at some point it represents your values.

These portrayals of Chief Mountain create a sense of it as a sacred place, a place to be highly respected. For these Blackfoot guides, there is at play here a landscape of sacred geography, with “Chief Mountain” mentioned along with “the Sweet Grass Hills” as the “spirit” and “heart of

Blackfoot Indian country.” According to this latter guide, and implicitly from the previous one, it is “probably the most sacred place in the universe.” As the narrator makes clear in his story, “the agreement of 1895” was signed in order to feed and clothe Blackfoot people, yet in so doing, “the head” had been cut from, and the “spirit” cut out of, Blackfoot country. As a result, we, the tourists, are put before a most sacred place of the Blackfoot people, one now occupied by the government. The guide explains that the park as you see it is “the way we kept it,” and expresses the hope that “at some point it represents your values”—presumably of preserving sacred, resplendent places.

Identified and narrated this way, Chief Mountain also becomes a symbol of an occupied place, a sacred place now run by the government, a peak in another’s park. Once and now still a Blackfoot “most sacred place,” it stands not in the Blackfoot reservation, but as a result of a questionable treaty is part of “land that is now called Glacier National Park.” Standing there, it symbolizes how Blackfoot people and sacred sites were taken when they were most vulnerable, that this was done by questionable means, with this still being our “most sacred place in the universe.” Even as it was “given up” to others in a time of need, it continues to stand majestically for where and who we are, regardless of how people draw boundaries, and we “want to keep it” the way it always has been. What is being referred to here is the preservation of the sacredness of the place, not its political status as a park, with the former overriding the latter in this Native discourse.

Given this story, a comment by a Blackfoot guide at this place takes on special meaning. He was reflecting upon the recent climbing accident mentioned earlier. “White people play in our sacred places for no apparent reason, so we pray for them.” From this, his view, as others come and occupy our places, “we pray for them.”

#### *Hybrid Tales of Chief Mountain*

Seasoned guides of this area can artfully craft a tale about Chief Mountain in a way that

integrates the above discourses. For example, we can hear about the facts of nature related to the place, a bit of cultural history, a landscape of sacred places. Listen, for example, to these segments from a non-Native guided tour, mentioned on Route 89 between East Glacier and Browning:

They had gone on a vision quest up to a mountain called Chief Mountain, which you'll see. I'll point it out in a second. It's still considered a sacred mountain by the Blackfeet, and they go on what they call vision quests. These are spiritual journeys where basically they take a blanket, a pipe, they smoke a peace pipe, and sit out in a very isolated area, pray, and they take no food or water with them. They sit out as long as three or four days hoping to get a vision or to get an answer for their prayer. Most of them do go up to Chief Mountain because they consider that a sacred area . . .

I'm going to show you a mountain over here, with the flat top. That's Chief Mountain. I had been telling you about the vision quests, and where the Indians go for their vision quests. That's the mountain. When you see it from a different angle it's very wide. When you get around on the other side it looks real different, very wide.

You can see that Chief Mountain was literally pushed out on the plains. It pretty literally sits there by itself. It is a sacred mountain. The Blackfeet people go there for their vision quests, taking a peace pipe and blanket, and hoping to get an answer to their prayer or vision, or get an answer for what they should do.

Most non-Native tour guides mention the story of Stimson, with the questing tribe's name sometimes changing from the Blackfeet (Native Plains people from the east) to Kootenai (Native people across the Rockies to the west). Consider this one instance:

There are true stories, true stories about the mountain. Initially it was told as a legend

about a Kootenai Indian who was looking for a place to do one of his vision quests and you can climb that mountain pretty close to the top on the other side. Anyway, he climbed the mountain for his vision quest and took a buffalo skull with him, and used it as a pillow or whatever. Took it up there and had his vision quest and disappeared. Nobody ever saw him again. Indians are very superstitious in the sense that they didn't really know quite how to interpret that, not knowing if the place was unfriendly or would kill you if you went up there or whatever. But they continue to go to worship there.

A fellow named Stimson and his wife were avid climbers and they came out here, if I remember correctly, around 1920 or so. They climbed to the top of the mountain and found a buffalo skull. The fact that there's no way a buffalo could get up there they pretty much verified the legend about the Indian was true. They left the skull up there. A couple years later, they were out here and met some people who had just gone up to the top and they had the buffalo skull with them, and when they heard the story by Stimson and his wife, told them that they had found it earlier. They gave the buffalo skull to Stimson and his wife, and from what I understand they took it back up to the top and buried it near the top.

While non-Native guides and Blackfeet guides might mention Chief Mountain as a site for questing, and some facts about its height, only Blackfeet guides have mentioned the sacredness of the larger landscape of which it is a part, its unique history regarding treaty "agreements," and its implicit symbolism of an occupied place and people.

#### A SECOND PLACE: A NON-NATIVE TOUR OF MARIAS/BEAR PASS

A second site we have selected for special attention is identified by multiple place-names. The most frequently used name for the place by non-Natives is "Marias Pass," this being what is announced with a large green and white sign



FIG. 5. *Marias Pass sign*. Photograph by Mark Halligan.

upon entering the area on the southern boundary of the park, to the west of official Blackfeet country. Here is how this pass was described by a non-Native tour guide: “This is the lowest crossing of any highway over the Continental Divide in the continental United States.”

As we drive to the pass, we can see a large obelisk that looks like a miniature version of the Washington Monument:

The monument is for Teddy Roosevelt and his works in forest conservation. Other monuments are on this site. One is for Morrison, an early mountain man who lived here. Another is for Stevens, an engineer who surveyed this pass for the railroad.

As we park at the pass and walk around, we can read about President Roosevelt’s devotion to the outdoors generally, and the park system in particular. We notice a boulder with a plaque on it commemorating William Morrison, an early

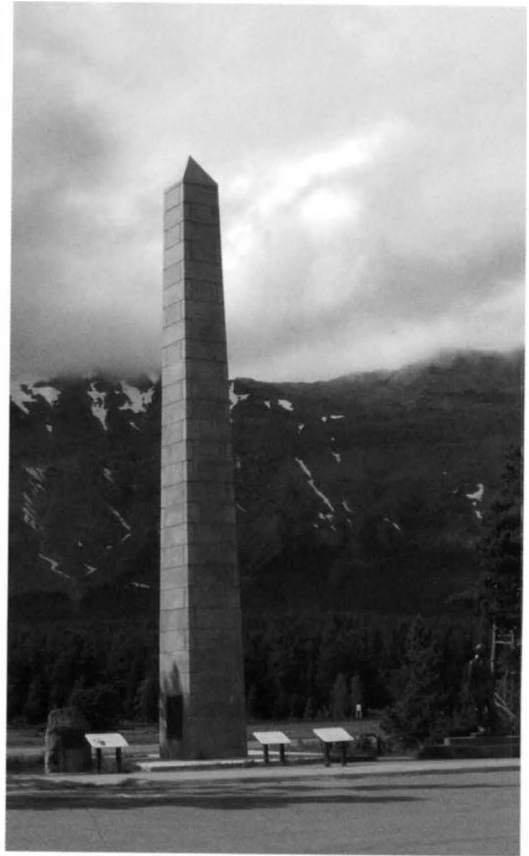


FIG. 6. *Theodore Roosevelt Memorial Monument (center), Morrison Memorial (stone to the left of the Monument), and Stevens Memorial Statue (to the far right of the Monument) at Marias/Bear Pass*. Photograph by Mark Halligan.

trapper and prospector who lived here. We find that he donated his land and homestead here for a memorial to President Roosevelt. At another site close by, we can read about John Franklin Stevens, who explored this area in bitter winter weather for its suitability as a railway passage. There is a statue of his likeness here, celebrating his efforts.

Occasionally, on some non-Native guided tours, there is a mention that this pass was named by Meriwether Lewis for his cousin, Marias Wood, who lived in Saint Louis.

Through a geographic reference to this as the lowest pass in the northern Rockies, and



FIG. 7. *John F. Stevens Memorial Statue*. Photograph by Mark Halligan.

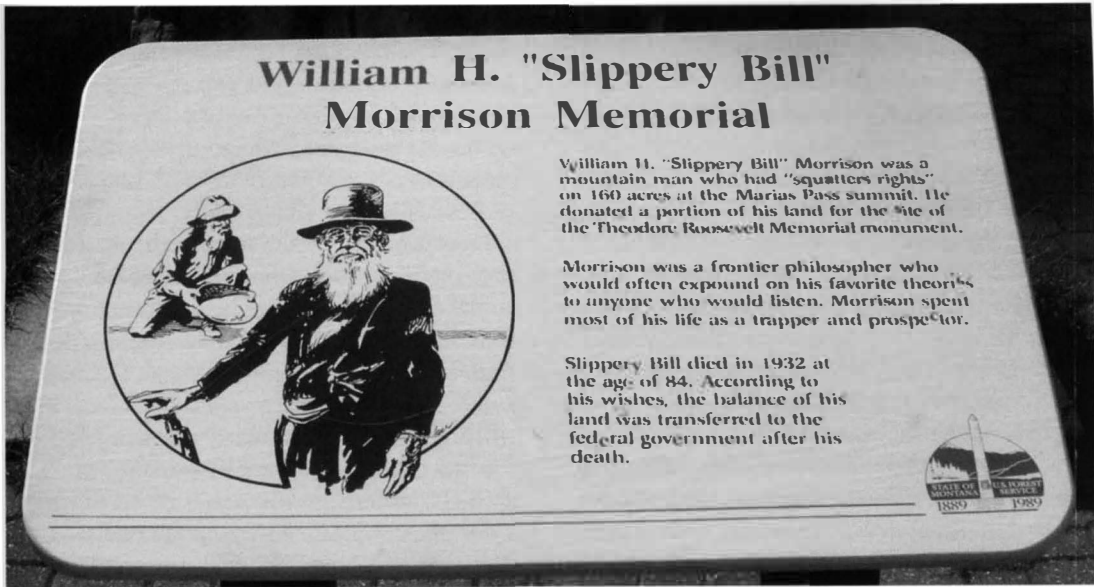


FIG. 8. William H. "Slippery Bill" Morrison Memorial. Photograph by Mark Halligan.

brief vignettes about white ancestors, including Roosevelt, Morrison, Stevens, and Lewis, we have been introduced to Marias Pass. The often-implicit plot of the story is familiar through a nation-building ethos, a movement westward, manifest destiny to fulfill.

*A Blackfeet Tour of the Same Site: Bear Pass and Running Eagle Trail*

Upon approaching the pass, the big green and white sign announces "Marias Pass" before us, but our Blackfeet guide tells us, "Indians refer to this pass as Bear Pass. There was lots of bear traffic here along the riverbank, back and forth. The path through here was called Running Eagle Trail, named after a female Blackfeet warrior. Running Eagle (Pi'tamakan) accompanied and led many parties of Blackfeet warriors through this pass on successful raids of horses from the Flathead."<sup>8</sup> Historically, Blackfeet traveled this way on raids to the west, capturing horses from the Flathead and the Kootenai as well. This place, so named, takes on significance for its natural features, and for its access to other tribes' goods.

When asked about the name Marias Pass, some Blackfeet guides, with a twinkle in their eye, sometimes relate Meriwether Lewis's efforts to find a way through these lofty mountains. As one Blackfeet put it:

Lewis was wandering around out on the plains east of here, and not sure where he was going. We helped him out, told him where to go, showed him how to get through the mountains that we'd been using all along.<sup>9</sup>

The portrait here of an Indian people helping the explorers along is amplified in another tale, told by another Blackfeet. In this case, he talks about the colorful Indian guide, Koonska, who not only helped the surveyor, Stevens, find his way to this pass, but also helped himself to a mayor's wife.

Koonska was a Kootenai who had relations with the mayor's wife of Kalispell. So he was chased out of Kalispell by the cronies of the mayor. He ended up being a guide. He was tapped to show Stevens the way over Marias Pass. Now there's a big memorial up there to

Stevens, but there should be one to Koonska. Stevens never would have found it without Koonska. Lewis and Clark never would have made it without the Indians.

At this site, we find Blackfeet guides using a different name for the place, with different tales that are significant and important to that place. In fact, we should note that we have been on Blackfeet tours of this site that do not mention anything about the obelisk, nor the statue or memorial.

At Marias Pass, perhaps more so than at any location in the Park, there is a dramatic difference in the place-names used and the stories being told. The non-Native guide identifies the pass by the name of Lewis's cousin and mentions three white men, a president, a passage seeker, and a prospector. Each is part of a tale of exploration, of manifest destiny, of nation building, and settling a "new" world. People are put in a particular place in time, affiliated with white people, feeling the difficulties of settling the wild west from the settled east, experiencing a hostile environment, with the story told from a dominant eastern view of those coming west. Not far removed from this tale is the implicit suggestion that Indian country was as socially hostile as this mountainous country could be. (Perhaps to dispel this suggestion, there are a few small words, way across the large parking lot from the obelisk and monuments, about the Blackfeet being friendly people.)

The Blackfeet guides' tours of this site are different, beginning of course with the name for the place, Bear Pass, which identifies a key wild feature of this area. By identifying the path through this area as Running Eagle Trail, Native guides further identify a history of activities in this place. The tale is largely a story about a female Blackfeet warrior, about raids on neighboring tribes, about the encroachment of white settlers who were given assistance by Indians, and at times, about monuments put up to these new settlers with little recognition to those who assisted them or were already here. The tale is of a place that has been with us from the beginning, with some of the newcomers being more

visible than those of us who have been here all along. The tale, then, is at least implicitly of an invaded homeland, and perhaps even a colonized people.

An extreme incident can develop this point through a tragic confrontation. A horrific sense of "our Blackfeet place being occupied by or taken over by outsiders" is sometimes, although very rarely, mentioned by Native guides in relation to Marias Pass. Here is that troubling story. It is relevant here because flowing to the east from Marias/Bear Pass is the Marias River.

In 1870, Colonel Baker was sent to find and arrest Owl Child, a Blackfeet warrior who had murdered a white settler by the name of Malcolm Clark. By mistake, Baker fell upon the camp of Heavy Runner and friendly Indians. Seeing that Baker was ready for warfare, Heavy Runner ran toward him waving papers of commendation and Washington medals he had received. Paying no attention, and despite being warned by a Blackfeet guide that Heavy Runner was friendly and not who his platoon was seeking, Baker ordered his men to fire, resulting in the massacre of 217 old men, women, and children. Not one shot had been fired by the Indians in defense. As many lay wounded and dying, the soldiers collected their lodges and belongings onto a pile, and set them on fire. Then they departed.

This horrific event happened along the bank of the Marias River, about seventy miles to the east of Marias Pass. It provides yet one more difficult-to-tell tale of an invaded homeland.<sup>10</sup>

#### SAME PHYSICAL SITES, DIFFERENT PLACES AND STORIES

We could summarize the kinds of tour talk produced at these sites as follows. The non-Native tours identify the peak and the pass through a discourse of discovery and development. The isolated peak, "Chief Mountain," is rendered through facts of nature and cultural history (about "Indians") from a "white man's" view.

“Marias Pass” is identified with Meriwether Lewis’s cousin’s name and is discussed through geographic references and a mention of white explorers. From a non-Native view, the tour of these sites consists mainly of geographic facts and white characters. The principal action in this version of the story is one of “manifest destiny” and nation building, to use Frederick Jackson Turner’s famous phrase, of people moving from east to west. Through this discourse, we have recreated the larger narrative of exploring and developing the west through different kinds of actions including homesteading (Morrison), transportation (Stevens), and the political activities of park services and interior development (Stimson and Roosevelt). At each site we are reminded that people came here from the east in order to expand the nation, to explore and settle “new” territory.

The Blackfeet guides, on the other hand, identify the peak and pass through an indigenous discourse about their homeland and its places. What makes this discourse indigenous is its deep historical sense about dwelling in these places. For example, at Chief Mountain the peak is narrated as “the most sacred place in the universe.” Surrounded by others in this geographic region—typically the Sweet Grass Hills, Heart Butte Mountain, and Ear Mountain by Choteau—we become emplaced in a spiritual landscape where sacred events were, and are, held. Chief Mountain, then, is part of a larger cultural scene that has been a part of Blackfeet lives “since the time before time.” In a related vein, the places identified in Blackfeet tours are places where traditional activities—questing, encampments, gathering berries, herbs, roots, raiding neighboring tribes—have always occurred and continue to get done. The depth of the indigenous discourse is displaced by the activities of others who unnecessarily climb these peaks, erect mysterious monuments at traditional places, sometimes to undeserving people, ignore Native American Indian roles in the processes of discovery and development, take over Blackfeet territory, and at worst, murder innocent Blackfeet people. While we have never heard this latter story told in this

explicit a way by Blackfeet guides, we have heard it told by Park Service personnel twice. Thus, rarely on tours and more frequently in writing is the discourse about the massacre added to that of displacement.

#### CHALLENGES OF TOUR TALK: PRACTICAL IMPLICATIONS

Putting together a several-hour tour is difficult work. In so doing there is play among several competing objectives. For example, guides must somehow balance sellable entertainment and factual information. In the tours examined above, we noticed several ways in which this was done and will discuss those as at least five distinct challenges for creating tour talk. First, it is crucial to create a tour that is affecting to an audience in the sense that the tour is an attraction that creates an audience for itself. After all, effective tours do not chase people away! We have noticed that the non-Native tour, Blackfeet Heritage Tours, attract few, if any people. Why, we wonder? Perhaps people, as tourists, come here to see the mountains and the pretty scenery (the non-Native discourse), not to hear about Native Americans (the Native discourse). How does one tell historical tales in ways that people want to hear, that is, as Edmund Burke put it, as “affecting to the imagination,” especially when this can involve acts of massacre and murder? Who wants to pay to hear that?

A second challenge for tours is their historical accuracy. This is part of the reason, we think, that Stimson’s confirmation is added to the recounted tale of the buffalo skull on the summit of Chief Mountain—that and the benevolence of the government agent who is looking out for the welfare of the Native American. Both add a kind of credibility, a confirmation of facts, to skeptical audiences who doubt their veracity. Implied is the statement “White men have confirmed this, therefore there is truth to it.”

The difficulty of creating factually based tours cannot be overestimated. For example, with regard to Chief Mountain, the warrior seeking the vision is sometimes portrayed as Kootenai, sometimes Blackfeet. Many sites, as the Marias/

Bear Pass site amply illustrates, include contradictory information in their names and tales, especially in the “Lakes Inside” (Saint Mary Lakes) region. There is rarely one story to tell and rarely one way to tell it. Narrative fidelity is, then, in this sense, an ever-present challenge to tour guides and momentarily resolved in ways the present audience permits.

A third challenge is the coherence of the story that one tells at a site. Stimson’s tale serves as a useful example here again. Is it plausible for some to believe a warrior climbed that sheer cliff of a mountain carrying a buffalo skull? Well, some surmise, if Stimson indeed found the skull up there, that it is! Tremendous skill is required in creating narratives about Native traditions, early settlements, contacts between tribes (as is recounted in Running Eagle’s exploits), and contacts with white people. The challenge to get the story right and then make it believable and appealing is considerable.

A fourth challenge is the very difficult task of managing multiple perspectives in the telling of these stories. Moving through Marias Pass, how can one talk respectfully about white pioneers, prospectors, and presidents, while also talking respectfully about female warriors and the misdeeds (to put it mildly) of the cavalry? This is a difficult task. Yet from our experience, we know, even if difficult, it is achievable. Much of the work can be done simply by acknowledging there are different perspectives from which places are named, each with different stories to tell, from Kootenai Casanovas to English engineers.

Finally, the practices of place-naming and storytelling themselves evolve, changing over time. The naming of Marias Pass is a useful case in point. When one reads the history of this region, one quickly notices how the places have a history of names available for their expression, with a wealth of stories available for the telling. Of this rich historical reserve, which can and should be used today? Of all the names that could be used, and of all the stories that could be told, why these now? This hinges largely on one’s objectives and the demands of one’s audience. Again, playing the multiple senses of a place between sellable objectives and entertainment, offering accurate

information, coherent tales, and multiple perspectives is the considerable task of these tours.

How are these challenges being met? We have been working along these lines. First, we are creating place-based knowledge—talking points linked to places—and, when asked, making some of this material available to guides. In the process, we insist that Blackfeet experts be consulted concerning places and stories. Sacred stories and sites, after all, are cultural resources, to be used (and sometimes sold) in ways they deem appropriate. Second, we are linking stories about cultural histories to specific places. In this process, we have noted that one non-Native tour manual lists “Cultural History” as its last “core topic” and covers it very briefly, mentioning the Blackfeet in the last sentence. We are responding to this by linking Blackfeet cultural history explicitly to places like “Marias/Bear Pass.” Third, we are trying to bring cultural history up to parity with natural geography, rendering tales about “culture contacts” along with the “facts of nature.” We are doing this, for example, by elaborating the contacts between “white men” and Blackfeet around Chief Mountain, and between Blackfeet and the Kootenai via Bear Pass. Finally, we are trying to put this type of information into a form that is easily used by guides. One dynamic that enables this, we think, is a kind of dueling structure between place-names and stories, as between Marias/Bear Pass, and William Morrison/Running Eagle. Designing tour talk through a dueling structure can help keep multiple histories and perspectives in view through a form we hope is affecting to an audience. From experience, we have found some success in this. And there is much more work to be done!

#### THEORETICAL IMPLICATIONS

Building on the earlier works of Keith Basso and David Samuels among others, we have found the following points need amplified in our theories of talk, place-naming, and stories.<sup>11</sup> First, to name a place, or to refer to a place, is to make a move in a cultural political game.

For example, one cannot simply refer to Marias Pass as such without already stepping



into the place, situating it in some ways over others. Means of referring to places, and the meanings they foreground, thus create or affirm a particular view of the place, the activities it has supported, and the characters it has seen. Place-naming is, at least in this scene to some degree, a massively deep symbolic expression. Each name brings some grand significance with it as a way of saying where we are, what we are seeing, from where we are seeing it, and at what point in time.

Second, any reference to a place is inevitably, in many scenes, partial. To say “this is Marias Pass” is one thing; to say “this is Marias Pass, also known as Bear Pass” is another. To talk about Running Eagle Trail is yet another. Place-names can create openings for discourses into multiple worlds, activities, characters, and scenes. Places like these have rich traditions of reference and many stories that could be told. Knowing the range of names and stories in the repertoire and how to select from among them is at the heart of a culturally informed, critical communication practice.

Finally, any place-name may carry ambiguous references. So at Chief Mountain we learn about fires and quests, with some history about at least one quest, some contacts between Native People and others, with some people climbing around for unknown reasons. What to say and how to speak about these places is difficult and further illustrates the ambiguity in identifying and talking about them.

The theory at the base of our inquiry has treated a genre of communication, tour talk, with special attention to the role of place-names in them, and the stories attached to these names. Given our objectives, this has been a rich and productive stance to take. Even by limiting this report to two sites, we have found a complicated and deep use of these practices in this context. Further study and additional reports will help us understand what more should be said about these sites, this kind of scene, and how so.

In conclusion, we want to mention yet another cross-cultural dynamic, for it suggests the need for deeper reflections upon the cultural status of naming places and telling stories. We

were chatting with a knowledgeable and prominent Blackfeet figure about these places and issues. As he spoke, he shook us to our core, reorienting us to our study and its focus on place-names and stories:

The elders tell me we had names for significant features like Chief Mountain, or the Sweet Grass Hills, but for all the peaks, we just called them *miista'kistsi* [the Blackfoot name for mountains]. We didn't have names for every peak. That was a white man thing when they came out here, to name every peak. When you read about it, Schultz just started naming all these peaks. We didn't do that.

Opened to us here, then, are other ways of knowing places, if we can, beyond names and their stories. How we form our sense of places is crucial to understand, for we bring to such formulations ways of living there, among various peoples.

## NOTES

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1. Keith Basso, *Wisdom Sits in Places: Landscape and Language among the Western Apache* (Albuquerque, NM: University of New Mexico Press, 1996).

2. David Samuels, "Indeterminacy and History in Britton Goode's Western Apache Place-names: Ambiguous Identity on the San Carlos Apache Reservation," *American Ethnologist* 28, no. 2 (2001): 277-302. Also see Charles Braithwaite, "Sa'ah naaghai bik'eh hozhoon [Navajo Philosophy for Living]: An Ethnography of Navajo Educational Communication Practices," *Communication Education* 46 (1997): 219-33; Donal Carbaugh, *Situating Selves: The Communication of Social Identities in American Scenes* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1996), 157-90.

3. See, for examples, Stephen Feld and Keith Basso, eds., *Senses of Place* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1996); Tamar Katriel, *Performing the Past* (Manwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, 1996); Gerry Philipsen, *Speaking Culturally* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1992), 21-42; and Kathleen Stewart, *A Space on the Side of the Road: Cultural Poetics in an "Other" America* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1996).

4. For recent examples, see Donal Carbaugh, *Cultures in Conversation* (Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, 1995); Gerry Philipsen, "The Prospect for Cultural Communication," in *Communication Theory: Eastern and Western Perspectives*, ed. L. Kincaid, 245-54 (New York: Academic Press, 1987); Gerry Philipsen, "Cultural Communication," in *Handbook of International and Intercultural Communication*, ed. W. Gudykunst and B. Mody, 51-67 (New York: Sage, 2002). For seminal statements of the approach, see Dell Hymes "Models of the Interaction of Language and Social Life," in *Directions in Sociolinguistics: The Ethnography of Communication*, ed. J. Gumperz and D. Hymes, 35-71 (New York: Holt, Rinehart, and Winston), 1972; and Dell Hymes, *Ethnography, Linguistics, Narrative Inequality* (London: Taylor and Francis, 1996).

5. See Mark Spence, *Dispossessing the Wilderness: Indian Removal and the Making of the National Parks* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999). For a related work on Blackfeet communication and culture, see Donal Carbaugh, "The People Will

Come to You": Blackfeet Narrative as a Resource for Contemporary Living," in *Narrative and Identity: Studies in Autobiography, Self, and Culture*, ed. J. Brockmeier and D. Carbaugh, 103-27 (Amsterdam: J. J. Benjamins Publishing Company, 2001).

6. A Blackfeet reader of this essay said about this particular "introduction to the place": "This transcript of the Blackfeet Guide . . . is distinctly familiar with the ' . . . out here on this flat,' and ' . . . we had what was called the starvation winter,' as well as the entire narrative ringing of the colloquial style of English-speaking Blackfeet. It is good to hear there are individuals speaking from this perspective today." He made a similar statement about the Blackfeet guide's comments concerning the sacredness of Chief Mountain.

7. The phrase "unoccupied territory" is used with great irony, for the discourse explicitly focuses on a wilderness without people, while masking the historical government process of dispossessing the place (of its Native people) that was and is necessary for this portrayal. See Spence, *Dispossessing the Wilderness*, 86-89.

8. Various detailed accounts are written about Running Eagle. For examples, see James Willard Schultz, *Blackfeet Tales of Glacier National Park* (1916; reprint, Helena, MT: Montana Historical Society Press and Riverbend Publishing, 2002), 11-21; and James Willard Schultz, *Signposts of Adventure: Glacier National Park as the Indians Know It* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1926), 20-21.

9. A superb DVD has been made about the encounter between Meriwether Lewis and the Blackfeet. Titled *Two-Worlds at Two Medicine*, directed by Curly Bear Wagner and Dennis Neary, the story is told through the voices of Native American spokespersons and elders (Browning, MT: Going-to-the-Sun Institute and Native View Pictures, 2004).

10. See Schultz, *Blackfeet Tales of Glacier National Park*, 141-43; Schultz, *Signposts of Adventure*, 102-25.

11. See especially Keith Basso, *Wisdom Sits in Places*; and David Samuels, "Indeterminacy and History in Britton Goode's Western Apache Place-names," 157-90.