



Journey Through Colorado's Social Landscape: A Chronological Memory Exhibit

Memory 1: Sculpture Relocation

My mom takes my sisters and me to Lake Loveland to look at the bronze sculptures and to walk the perimeter of the lake. I realize today that the tall, wooden Native American head sculpture is missing from the Lake Loveland view point. In all my 8 years of living in and only in Loveland, Colorado, never have I seen a cooler sculpture than that one. I wonder what happened to it. This reminds me of the bronze Native American sculpture of a warrior, pointing a spear towards the sky that greeted drivers on Eisenhower Boulevard just as they arrived at the lake. About a year ago, the sculpture was removed and replaced with a miniature bronze Statue of Liberty sculpture. Another family arrives at the view point. "Oh wow, that wooden Indian sculpture is gone," one of them observes. "Oh well, that thing was a little depressing. And really kind of creepy." I continue wondering where the wooden head might be and where that other Native American sculpture might be. I wonder if all Native American sculptures depress people and if there is a special place for depressing sculptures.

Memory 2: The Visual Impact of Football Games

A group of Cheyenne people are at my high school today to discuss how politically incorrect our school spirit is. I have always felt uncomfortable identifying as a Loveland Indian and I honestly couldn't care less if we have to change our mascot to a pine cone, or whatever alternative mascots the faculty are considering. Unfortunately, I know that many of my classmates take pride in their headdresses complete with dyed chicken feathers purchased from Hobby Lobby and glued to construction paper bands. The Cheyenne people give their presentation today at the assembly reminding us that the regalia they wear and that we appropriated, half-digested, and reduced to vapid "pre-game crafts" was at one time a sacred symbol. A student with an unusual sense of entitlement stands up in the audience at one point and tells the Cheyenne people that the Indian has been Loveland's mascot for decades and they'd be crazy to change it. The assembly becomes too difficult to witness, so I spend the rest of the time tuning out and making up fight songs for the Loveland Pine Cones.

Memory 3: It Would Be Cute if We Were All Native American...Just for a Day.

I notice an increasing interest in Native aesthetic, particularly in mediocre and affordable fashion. At parties in Boulder, where I go to college, people show up wearing face paint. I at first give these people the benefit of the doubt--maybe they're drunk and don't mean to portray the message they do--until I discover they wear face paint almost every weekend. On embarrassingly sappy fashion blogs, I see dreamy, waifish young people captured on film with feathers in their hair, wearing headdresses and staring off into the sun setting most likely on a horizon that is not even 300 miles near an Indian Reservation. At school, I see inauthentic tribal patterns on synthetic fabrics. Snowboard jackets, spandex leggings, tennis shoes, the garment does not matter. When I ask the wearers of these items where they found their clothing, they respond by mentioning a store like PacSun, American Eagle, Forever21, or Urban Outfitters. Uh-oh, I think to myself, it's just like high school all over again! Those "pre-game crafters" must have graduated from Loveland High School and at their horrific realization of no longer being a Loveland Indian, mass produced their visual ignorance to be sold by commercialized vendors across the country (though ironically, not made in the country). Do they have no shame? Who doesn't know by now that kind of appropriation pisses Native Americans off? I begin to hope that a creative entrepreneur of Tribal heritage will step up and create a textile business model that will replace these misinformed vendors. I bet some Native Americans have business degrees and connections, right?

Memory 4: Some of Colorado's Representatives

I fear for the lives of Tommy and Angela. Unable to work legally, due to the warrants out for their arrest, these two just barely get by every day. Winter should be here any day now and I bet the streets of Denver do not stay very warm during the cold months. It's been ten years since they started using heroin and they still haven't quit. Even though Angela talks enthusiastically about her six-year-old daughter, I know she won't quit using so that she may be allowed to see her child again. The one quarter Cherokee young girl will likely spend the rest of her adolescence without her biological parents. Tommy talks big about returning to Pine Ridge, where he has family and where he can work and earn money. He doesn't realize the addiction is anchoring him to Colorado. Maybe he does, and he just doesn't want to think about all the money he wasted on getting high that could have gone towards the journey back to his reservation. One full Sioux and one half Cherokee, I can't believe these two individuals are the first Native Americans I have ever met. Is the representation of Native Americans around here almost negligible?

Memory 5: System Maintenance

Taylor, Barbara, and I are sitting at our group table in French class, chatting and waiting for our instructor to arrive. Barbara, wearing her sorority's sweatshirt, confesses that she applied to universities and scholarships while claiming 1/16th Native American. Taylor reasons with her and sincerely explains to Barbara that "there are not that many of them [Native Americans]" and that schools have certain quotas to reach so therefore, Barbara's application tactics are not wrong. I never ask Barbara if she actually is 1/16th Native American, I simply assume that this would be the only case when, even if it were a true part of her family's lineage, she would ever mention this aspect of her identity. I think about applicants with Native American heritage who would have been competing with Barbara's application. Suddenly, I remember a few depressing sculptures and I begin to wish I were talking to any two people on the planet other than Barbara and Taylor.