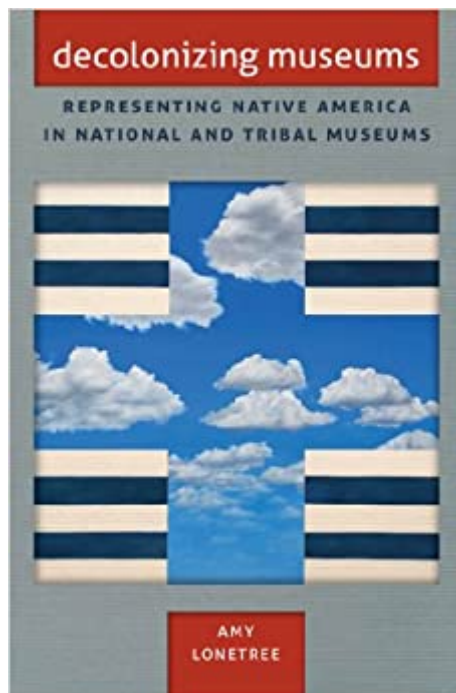




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# **Decolonizing Museums: Representing Native America In National And Tribal Museums (First Peoples: New Directions In Indigenous Studies (University Of North Carolina Press Paperback))**



## Synopsis

Museum exhibitions focusing on Native American history have long been curator controlled. However, a shift is occurring, giving Indigenous people a larger role in determining exhibition content. In *Decolonizing Museums*, Amy Lonetree examines the complexities of these new relationships with an eye toward exploring how museums can grapple with centuries of unresolved trauma as they tell the stories of Native peoples. She investigates how museums can honor an Indigenous worldview and way of knowing, challenge stereotypical representations, and speak the hard truths of colonization within exhibition spaces to address the persistent legacies of historical unresolved grief in Native communities. Lonetree focuses on the representation of Native Americans in exhibitions at the Smithsonian's National Museum of the American Indian, the Mille Lacs Indian Museum in Minnesota, and the Zibiwing Center of Anishinabe Culture and Lifeways in Michigan. Drawing on her experiences as an Indigenous scholar and museum professional, Lonetree analyzes exhibition texts and images, records of exhibition development, and interviews with staff members. She addresses historical and contemporary museum practices and charts possible paths for the future curation and presentation of Native lifeways.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

Thoughtful and compelling. . . . Recommended. All levels/libraries.--ChoiceOffers an excellent

overview of Indigenous museum representations since the late nineteenth century.--Journal of the Native American and Indigenous Studies AssociationAsk[s] provocative and important questions about how museums engage with indigenous communities, and challenges the field to think critically about ingrained behaviors and methodologies that privilege the perspectives of the colonizer.--Museums and Social IssuesLonetree offers a powerful and meditative study. . . . [It] is an uncompromising yet candid statement that no matter how far Western museums have come in their representations of Native Americans, there is still much work to be done.--Indigenous Peoples' Issues and ResourcesLonetree analyzes the complexities of developing exhibitions through collaborations between museum curators and Native communities, with the goal of telling stories that honor the Native worldview and way of knowing, challenge stereotypes, and speak the hard truths of colonization.--Minnesota Historical Society PressLonetree does an admirable job of incorporating Native American storytelling preferences into a kind of scholarly discourse that is insightful, critically astute, and a pleasure to read.--Journal of American Ethnic HistoryHer larger question is how to decolonize museums and, perhaps most poignantly, whether the form of the museum can ever truly be decolonized.--American QuarterlyLonetree generates compelling ideas for discussion and debate in the museum field, and these ideas call for practical application in museums and sites of cultural representation.--Collaborative AnthropologiesProvides the reader with an easy-to-follow breakdown of the concept of decolonization within the context of museums. . . . [and] is well written and carefully structured.--History News[An] interesting and important new book.--Anthropology Review DatabaseA challenging and, at times, heartbreaking text. . . . Should be mandatory reading, for graduate level anthropology, museum studies, arts administration, and history classes dealing with Native American cultures and representation. Working museum professionals will gain much from this book, as well.--Journal of Folklore ResearchA personalized account that is both thought-provoking and insightful.--American Indian QuarterlyThis excellent, thoughtful, and provocative book unpacks and scrutinizes, through three case studies, the current consensus that contemporary museological methods are leading to a decolonization of the museum.--Museum AnthropologyAn important new volume for understanding museum representation in different contexts.--EthnohistoryThis book is written in a clear and accessible fashion, suitable for scholars and professionals as well as undergraduate students. . . . I highly recommend this book to museum professionals, museum studies scholars, anthropologists, historians, and students of museum theory and practice.--Collaborative AnthropologiesA lucid, direct, and cogent argument for what the criteria should be for a museum to be considered decolonized. . . . An essential source for museum practitioners, both Native and non-Native.--Great

A forceful reassessment of museum and curatorial studies. Lonetree steers American art history away from its metropolitan and European underpinnings and encourages essential new directions in indigenous arts theory and practice.--Ned Blackhawk, Yale University  
Lonetree incorporates elements of memoir, interpretation, observation, and anthropology interspersed with theory and local history to make museums come alive for the reader. There are no other books like it in existence.--Nancy Parezo, University of Arizona

Decolonizing Museums discusses efforts by museums to decolonize by telling the "hard truths of colonialism," and sharing authority with Native Americans in designing exhibits that represent their history and culture. Beyond influences in exhibit design, the power to control representation of their cultures is linked to the larger movements of self-determination and cultural sovereignty. Lonetree argues that decolonizing is a lengthy process that requires more than collaboration. The decolonizing museum is one that presents the history of colonization, provides space and support for healing, and includes a narrative of survivance. Lonetree explores the experience of three museums -- The Minnesota Historical Society and the Mille Lacs Band of Ojibwe, the National Museum of American Indian (NMAI), and the Ziibiwing Center of Anishinabe Culture -- to assess how these concepts work out in practice. Lonetree's primary sources include archival records regarding exhibit development, interviews with key contributors to exhibit designs, and analysis of the exhibits themselves. Lonetree's work is strongly influenced by the methods of Patricia Pierce Erikson (Voices of a Thousand People), who uses an ethnographic approach to build a more contextual approach for understanding the Makah museum. Maria Yellow Horse Brave Heart's concept of historical trauma as a "cumulative emotional and psychological wounding over a lifespan and across generations, emanating from massive group trauma" resonates through Lonetree's assessment of the museum experience in each case study. Lonetree's case studies are a good start to understanding the decolonization process, but they are confined to museums with a strong tribal influence or ownership. I would like to see a further line of inquiry regarding the many museums with Native American artifact collections that do not have such relationships.

Very good explanation of what "decolonizing" means for museum professionals. Also how museums are listening, sometimes successfully, sometimes not, to their Native American partners.

Historically, museums and Native American communities have been at contentious cross-purposes with each other. Native American artifacts were looted to museums with the notion that these were "artifacts" of a "vanishing race" with no relevance to modern people. Prominent academics routinely robbed Indian graves. Thankfully, this state of affairs has been much altered- though not totally remedied- by NAGPRA and other legal decisions recently made in favor of American Indians. As a Native person trained in the academy and museology, Amy Lonetree has plenty to say about these topics, and may well have added a key piece to the bridge-building conversation between museums and Native communities. Lonetree visits several tribal museums around the country, examining how well they present Native history. Most notably, she criticizes the National Museum of the American Indian, saying that the post-modern ideas informing its construction will render its experiences opaque to the average museum goer, that it makes a political statement merely by attempting to be non-political, and that it shies away from discussing the "hard truths" of colonization. For Lonetree, successful Native museums must engage native communities, give equal validity to Native systems of knowledge, acknowledge "hard truths" and Native feelings of trauma, and most importantly, provide cultural training to their communities that turns museums from sites of colonization and trauma to sites of healing, cultural revitalization and pride, and socioeconomic uplift. These things were important for me to read as a non-Native person who hopes to work with Native American collections. I hope I can be of service and contribute healing in the way Lonetree describes.

Great book. Thank you.

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