

UNIVERSITY OF OKLAHOMA
GRADUATE COLLEGE

DECOLONIZING THE CONCRETE WAVE:
VISUAL SOVEREIGNTY IN NATIVE AMERICAN SKATEBOARDING CULTURE

A THESIS
SUBMITTED TO THE GRADUATE FACULTY
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the
Degree of
MASTER OF ARTS IN ART HISTORY

By
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Norman, Oklahoma
2017

DECOLONIZING THE CONCRETE WAVE: VISUAL SOVEREIGNTY IN NATIVE
AMERICAN SKATEBOARDING CULTURE

A THESIS APPROVED FOR THE
SCHOOL OF ART AND ART HISTORY

BY

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Acknowledgements

Many thanks to my thesis committee: Dr. Robert Bailey, Dr. W. Jackson Rushing, III, and Dr. Alison Fields. Your expertise, encouragement, and mentoring throughout my program have been invaluable and are much appreciated. I would also like to thank my partner, Sarah M. Bess, for her continual patience, support, and understanding throughout the thesis writing process.

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Introduction

This thesis focuses primarily on skateboard deck graphics and the cultural and political implications of skateboarding within the context of settler colonialism in the contemporary United States. It examines the intersection of skateboard deck graphics, appropriation, and the expression of Native American visual and geographical sovereignties. In the past decade, three important art exhibitions have highlighted the innovative ways in which Native American artists and skaters are combining art and skateboarding. These exhibitions were *Remix: New Modernities in a Post-Indian World*, curated by the staff at the National Museum of the American Indian in New York, *Ramp it Up: Skateboard Culture in Native America*, which ran from December 2009 until June 2010, also at the National Museum of the American Indian in New York, and *Beat Nation: Art, Hip Hop and Aboriginal Culture*, which opened at Vancouver Art Gallery in 2012. Artworks included in each of these exhibitions drew direct connections between skateboarding and Native American visual sovereignty.

Compared to other topics in art historical scholarship, careful studies of the visual and cultural aspects of skateboarding, and of skateboarding's connection to Native American visual sovereignty, are relatively rare. Scholarly studies of skateboarding do exist, but their focus typically is not art historical, but rather medical, architectural, or sociological in scope. Iain Borden's monograph, *Skateboarding, Space and the City: Architecture and the Body*, as well as scholarship by Becky Beal and Lisa Wiedman, interrogates contemporary constructions of the urban environment and authenticity in American skateboarding subculture, respectively. My thesis draws upon this scholarship, and incorporates the concept of visual sovereignty from the field of

Native American art history. This concept, *visual sovereignty*, was first articulated in 1995 by Tuscarora artist and scholar Jolene Rickard to describe the intersection of political and geographical sovereignties and representations of Native peoples.¹ I apply this concept to my own research in order to discuss the history of skateboarding, beginning with the Indigenous Polynesian origins of surfing, and the political and cultural valences of skateboarding within the context of contemporary settler colonialism in the United States. The issues, conflicts, and controversies surrounding land use and ownership in North America are always influenced by the history of settler colonialism: the entirety of the North American continent is by rights Indigenous land, and ongoing issues of political and geographical sovereignty are freighted with the history of genocide and dispossession that are the mechanisms of settler colonialism. These issues remain both relevant and urgent, and yet these issues are not thoroughly addressed in the current scholarship on skateboarding in the United States or in art historical discussions of skateboard deck graphics.

In this thesis, I argue that the cultural and artistic practices surrounding skateboarding – specifically the design of skateboard deck graphics by contemporary Native American artists, the creation of skate parks on reservation land, and the support of skateboarding among Native American youth by organizations such as The Stronghold Society – both expresses visual sovereignty and enacts land-based sovereignty within the context of North American settler colonialism. To contextualize this claim, I begin with a discussion of skateboarding’s immediate precursor: surfing.

¹ Jolene Rickard, “Sovereignty: A Line in the Sand,” in *Strong Hearts: Native American Visions and Voices*, ed. Peggy Roalf (New York: Aperture, 1995), 51.

Chapter 1, “The Ancient Polynesian Origins of Surfing, Colonial Influences on Surfing in North America, and the Development of Skateboarding,” provides historical background in support of my arguments. In this chapter, I reiterate the Indigenous Polynesian origins of surfing through a brief discussion of the circumstances that lead to the practice of surfing in the Hawaiian Islands. I also discuss the early colonial influences exerted by European and Euro-American missionaries on surfing, specifically the ways in which missionaries and other colonizers discouraged this cultural practice among Native Hawaiian communities. As part of this discussion, I examine Wallace Mackay’s 1874 print, *Maids on the Waves*, for the way in which this image presents Native Hawaiian women surfers for colonial consumption during a period when Protestant missionaries were actively suppressing surfing in the Hawaiian Islands.

Following this, I discuss the spread of surfing culture to California in the early-to mid-twentieth century. I argue that during the mid-twentieth century, the popular image of surfing that spread throughout the United States and internationally was dominated by images of young, predominately white Californians, rather than Native Hawaiians and Indigenous Polynesian people. As evidence, I examine images from American popular culture, specifically Bruce Brown’s 1966 documentary film, *The Endless Summer* and album covers from quintessential surf-rock band The Beach Boys. The first chapter concludes with a discussion of the invention of skateboarding in mid-twentieth century California, making clear the cultural and technological connections between surfing and skateboarding.

Chapter 2, “Race, Gender, Appropriation, and Visual Sovereignty in Skateboarding Visual Culture,” begins my discussion of skateboard deck graphics, with examples taken from the broad popular culture of the mass-produced North American skateboarding industry, as well as decks designed by contemporary Native American artists as works of art and expressions of visual sovereignty. Specifically, I examine Jamie Thomas’s *Native*, *Chief*, and *Dark Ages* signature decks, Torey Pudwill’s signature *Lady Luck* deck graphic for Plan B Skateboards, Crystal Worl’s *Emerging Octopus* deck graphic, and Chad Nish Earles’ *Tah’-nah-ha Skateboard*. I take these graphics applied to the bottom surfaces of skateboard decks as primary documents and works of contemporary visual culture, and I compare these decks in order to discuss the intersections of cultural appropriation and Native American visual sovereignty within the contexts of contemporary settler colonialism and North American skateboarding culture.

The final chapter, Chapter 3, “Skateboarding as Resistance and Revitalization: Wounded Knee Skateboards, the Four Directions Skatepark, and Decolonizing the Concrete Wave,” looks at the development and support of skateboarding culture among Native American youth communities, particularly the communities of young people skating at Pine Ridge Indian Reservation in Pine Ridge, South Dakota. In this chapter I discuss the development and creation of the Wounded Knee Four Directions Skatepark by The Stronghold Society, an organization that exists to promote skateboarding within Native American youth communities to reduce isolation and substance abuse, and ultimately, to counter the epidemic of Native American youth suicide.

In this chapter I also discuss contemporary scholarship by Iain Borden, whose monograph *Skateboarding, Space and the City: Architecture and the Body*, represents one of the most thorough scholarly works on skateboarding and contemporary culture to date. Borden's work carefully applies the theories of French Marxist philosopher and sociologist Henri Lefebvre to the intersections of the modern urban environment and skateboarding practice and culture. This scholarship offers many interesting and valuable contributions to the understanding of human interactions and the built environment. However, I argue that Borden's analysis of human/architectural interactions fails to fully consider the politics of land use and tenure within the settler colonial society of the contemporary United States. I examine Wounded Knee Skateboard Manufacturing and Propaganda's *Progression of Land Loss* skateboard deck graphic and I propose that the use of skateboard decks that express Native American visual sovereignty to skate on *any paved surface in the United States* could in fact be interpreted as a political statement and expression of land-based sovereignty. I situate contemporary street skateboarding as an inherently political act that dramatically, if temporarily, challenges the authority of settler colonial institutions such as the state and private corporations. This discussion of decolonization through the combined expression of visual sovereignty and politicized land-based actions, then, concludes my thesis.

Chapter 1: The Ancient Polynesian Origins of Surfing, Colonial Influences on Surfing in North America, and the Development of Skateboarding

The focus of my research for this thesis centers on skateboarding. However, in order to contextualize my discussion of skateboarding as a technological and cultural practice with strong ties to Indigenous cultures, I must first address skateboarding's immediate precursor: surfing. As will be discussed below, surfing is an Indigenous Polynesian cultural innovation that spread throughout the many inhabited islands of the Pacific Ocean, and much later to what is now the mainland United States. From there, surfing as both a practice and a lifestyle spread to the rest of the world. Throughout this process, surfing maintained close ties to California and Hawaii through the visual and material culture surrounding the sport.

The Indigenous Polynesian Origins of Surfing and Early Colonial Influences on Surfing in the Hawaiian Islands

Most surfing lore holds that the Hawaiian Islands were the singular birthplace of wave riding.² However, this oversimplification erases the complex and multi-faceted history of surfing and, in doing so, serves primarily the desires of colonial powers. These powers, as various as the United States' government and international surfing commercial interests, seek to present early surfing as a simple and uncomplicated pastime, associated more with the leisure pursuits of Euro-American tourist athletes in a

² Matt Warshaw, *The History of Surfing* (San Francisco: Chronicle Books LLC, 2010), 18.

tropical paradise than the cultural and technological innovations of Indigenous Polynesians. However, the contemporary sport of surfing originated thousands of years ago with the ancient Polynesian peoples occupying the many islands of the central and southern regions of the Pacific Ocean.³ The material culture of surfing, with the surfboard itself holding pride of place, reflects a rich history of Indigenous Polynesian and Native Hawaiian technological and cultural innovation.

Surfing first spread to Hawaii – the world’s most isolated archipelago – through the migrations of Polynesian peoples, likely from the Marquesas Islands, around 300 CE. Hawaiian culture, including practices surrounding surfing, was further reinforced when the Hawaiian Islands were colonized by Tahitians around 1100 C.E. Two of the innovations introduced by Tahitian colonizers were the use of full-length surfboards and the practice of riding while standing.⁴ Surfing, though now associated most strongly with the Hawaiian Islands and with California, draws its rich and complex history from a number of different cultures, and its practice in Hawaii has, since its inception, been both instigated and influenced by processes of colonialism and cross-cultural exchange.

Surfing in Hawaiian society prior to European contact was a multi-faceted endeavor, practiced across boundaries of gender, age, wealth, and social standing, and the complex activities associated with surfing – from the carving of the surfboard to wave riding itself – “represented a ritualized set of practices at the core of what it meant to be Hawaiian.”⁵ Despite the long-established importance of surfing within Hawaiian

³ Ibid., 22.

⁴ Ibid., 23.

⁵ Scott Laderman, *Empire in Waves: A Political History of Surfing* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2014), 9.

culture, the practice of wave riding decreased dramatically following colonial contact with the West. Many factors contributed to the decline of surfing culture and practice in Hawaii, but all were related in some way to the influence of European, and later, Euro-American colonists.

The first Western European expedition to encounter the Hawaiian Islands was that of British Royal Navy Captain James Cook, whose ships first sailed past the Islands in 1778.⁶ This contact with Europeans later resulted in catastrophic economic and demographic changes for the Hawaiians. Hawaiian communities were decimated by the introduction of European diseases. A population estimated to be about 800,000 people prior to European contact was reduced, “to approximately 135,000 by 1823. By the 1890s, the number of Hawaiians stood at fewer than 40,000.”⁷ Those who survived were pressed into the service of the sandalwood, whaling, and sugar production industries – enterprises that often served colonial needs at the expense of Hawaiian lives, communities, and culture.⁸ Surfing, along with all other aspects of Hawaiian life, was changed significantly by colonial contact with European powers as these powers reshaped Hawaiian society in ways that reduced the time and resources available for surfing.

It was not only medical and economic forces that influenced surfing in the Hawaiian Islands following Western colonial contact – religion, specifically Western Protestant Christianity, played a major role in reshaping surfing culture in the Hawaiian Islands in the nineteenth century. As soon as they arrived in the Hawaiian Islands,

⁶ Ibid., 10.

⁷ Ibid., 10.

⁸ Ibid., 10.

Protestant Christian missionaries from the United States began to discourage the practice of surfing on religious grounds. Valuing modesty and economic productivity, the missionaries were dismayed to find that both women and men surfed together and in the nude. Additionally, surfing provided an opportunity for Hawaiians to court and compete with one another openly, a practice often accompanied by gambling.⁹ As if this were not already enough reason to make the missionaries uneasy, the very fact that surfing distracted Hawaiians from the constant work and spiritual self-improvement that the missionaries prized above all else was sufficient to discredit the practice in the eyes of the Christian colonists. While the Protestant missionaries never formally outlawed surfing, they made it abundantly clear that they believed the activities surrounding wave riding constituted a direct threat to Indigenous souls.¹⁰ The efforts of nineteenth-century missionaries to discourage surfing were conceived of as, “part of a general Western effort to ‘civilize’ the barbarous residents of the [Hawaiian] island chain while, at the same time, dispossessing them of their native lands.”¹¹ By the end of the nineteenth century, the number of people actively pursuing surfing in the Hawaii Islands had fallen precipitously due to colonial pressures.¹²

Despite their disapproval of surfing, however, Western colonists did produce visual depictions of the practice. Wallace Mackay’s 1874 print *Maids on the Waves* represents thirteen figures variously surfing and swimming among the waves off the

⁹ Ibid., 10.

¹⁰ Ibid., 12.

¹¹ Ibid., 3.

¹² Laderman notes that the effects on Native Hawaiian people and culture following contact with white, European and Euro-American missionaries and colonists was similar to that experienced by many Native American peoples on the North American mainland. Ibid., 10-11.

coast of Hawaii (Figure 1). The five most prominent figures occupy the foreground, positioned atop surfboards along the crest of a gentle, rolling wave. Three of these women surf standing up on small, narrow surfboards, each with one foot positioned slightly in front of the other. The other two women kneel and sit on their boards. Two silhouettes at the bottom of the picture plane suggest women swimming below the surface of the ocean, submerged beneath the waves and passing beneath the surfers above. In the background the remaining figures ride waves further from the shore, their diminished size suggesting distance. All the figures are represented in the nude, their brown skin suggested by tight lines of hatching that show the figures as darker than the waves.

This image is important for the ways in which it highlights the complex interactions between Native Hawaiian and European and Euro-American communities in the late nineteenth century. The technology of printmaking used by Mackay was imported from Europe, but here used to represent Native Hawaiian women. *Maids on the Waves* packages and presents nude, Indigenous, female bodies for colonial consumption. The bodies of these women are simultaneously morally chastised and visually consumed, and a complex relationship is established in which European and Euro-American colonizers romanticize the image of surfing while simultaneously seeking to diminish the practice of surfing itself.

Despite the efforts of Protestant missionaries, surfing as a cultural practice continued to develop in the Hawaiian Islands, and the sport as practiced in North American today derives most directly from the practices of Native Hawaiians. Since the first European contact in 1778, the history of colonization in Hawaii, along with

marketing practices related to tourism, has sustained a strong cultural association between surfing and the Hawaiian Islands across several centuries. However, despite this strong visual and cultural connection between surfing and the Hawaiian Islands themselves, the popular image of surfing within American popular culture became synonymous with predominately white Californians during the mid-twentieth century, in large part erasing or obscuring the surfing contributions of Hawaiian people in favor of allusions to the Hawaiian landscape.

The Spread of Surfing to California and the Colonization of Surfing Imagery

During the early twentieth century, surfing was brought to the mainland United States in an effort to both promote tourism to the Hawaiian Islands and to cement colonial control over the archipelago. Hawaiian boosters sought, “to transform Hawai’i into a ‘white man’s state,’ turn Waikiki into a beckoning paradise for the growing number of Pacific tourists, and establish the islands more broadly as a crucial outpost of American global power.”¹³ Hawaii, which operated under a Native Hawaiian monarchy until Queen Lili’uokalani was overthrown in 1893, was viewed as a key strategic location by the United States’ government, which annexed the Hawaiian Islands in 1898.¹⁴ The interplay between leisurely tourism and military control remains evident in the World War II Valor in the Pacific National Monument, which today memorializes the December 7, 1941 attack on Pearl Harbor and draws large crowds of tourists each

¹³ Ibid., 3.

¹⁴ Gavan Daws, *Shoal of Time: A History of the Hawaiian Islands* (Honolulu, HI: University of Hawaii Press, 1968), 264-270.

year. This memorial complicates the relationship between the exercise of military power and civilian tourism in the Hawaiian Islands.¹⁵

The complexities of military and settler colonialism in Hawaii lead to both the establishment of American communities in the Hawaiian Islands and to the spread of Hawaiian culture to the mainland United States. Scott Laderman notes that American, “popular magazines and promotional literature, in the process strengthening the grip of the haole¹⁶ class over the native population with whom the sport originated,” specifically used surfing to promote white settlement of Hawaii.¹⁷ In addition to actual white settlement in the Hawaiian Islands, American popular culture of the mid-twentieth century appropriated surfing material and visual culture and began propagating an image of surfing that increasingly blurred the lines between Hawaii and California and replaced representations of Native Hawaiian surfers with white surfers.

Surfing history holds that surfing was, in large part, introduced to the mainland United States by Native Hawaiian and legendary athlete Duke Kahanamoku (Figure 2).¹⁸ However, shortly after the introduction of surfing to the mainland United States, it was quickly adopted by predominately white Californians. A California-centric surf culture quickly developed and spread both nationally and internationally. Popular

¹⁵ National Park Service, “Description of the Monument,” *U.S. Department of the Interior*, accessed January 30, 2021, <https://www.nps.gov/valr/learn/description-of-the-park.htm>.

¹⁶ *Haole* is a term in Hawaiian Creole English that refers primarily to white people and carries the connotation of being foreign to the Hawaiian Islands. Isaiah Helekunihi Walker, *Waves of Resistance: Surfing and History in Twentieth-Century Hawaii* (Honolulu, HI: University of Hawaii Press, 2011), 2.

¹⁷ Scott Laderman, *Empire in Waves: A Political History of Surfing* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2014), 3.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 3.

culture productions, such as Hollywood movies, played a large role in this process. By the 1950s and 1960s, Californian and Hawaiian surfing culture had become a staple fascination of Hollywood, and therefore, of American globalizing popular culture.¹⁹ Surfing movies, of which Bruce Brown's 1966 *The Endless Summer* is an iconic example, spread an image of a white Southern Californian surf culture to the United States and, beyond that, to the rest of the world.

The Endless Summer presents itself as a documentary, narrated by Bruce Brown and starring surfers Robert August and Michael Hynson (Figure 3). The film follows August and Hynson, two young white Californian men, on a globe-trotting quest for perfect and previously-undiscovered ocean waves. The narrative begins in Hawaii and follows August and Hynson's travels to cities in Hawaii, California, Senegal, Ghana, Nigeria, South Africa, Australia, New Zealand, Tahiti, and back to Hawaii.

Throughout the film, Bruce Brown narrates the action, providing commentary on both the nature of surfing and on the various people whom August and Hynson encounter on their voyage. The structure of the film's narration ensures that the audience is provided with only one perspective, that of Brown narrating through voice over throughout the entire film. The two stars of the film have no speaking lines, and neither do any of the other people represented in *The Endless Summer*. Instead, Brown interprets this international surfing quest as a type of "surfing safari" in which the imperial underpinnings of the project go completely unchallenged. Particularly during the middle of the film, during stops in several African countries, the biases and imperial attitudes of the filmmaker are painfully evident. Brown refers repeatedly to "primitive

¹⁹ Ibid., 3.

Africa” and wonders if the two white surfers will be, “speared by a native?”²⁰ Over imagery of August and Hynson surfing off the coast of Accra, Ghana, Brown claims that the residents of the “primitive village” – a city which, in actuality, is the capital of Ghana – have never seen white people or surfing before. Such attitudes erase the colonial history of Ghana, and of Africa more broadly, and set the stage for Brown’s claim that August and Hynson were the first to surf the waters along the African coast.

This colonial attitude continues throughout *The Endless Summer*, with Bruce Brown claiming that two white Californians discover “virgin coastlines” and “places that don’t even have a name”²¹ in their efforts to follow the summer sun around the planet. After leaving Africa and flying to Australia, pejorative mentions of “natives” end and, instead, white Australians are identified as the first real surfers that August and Hynson encounter on their trip. In New Zealand, Tahiti, and Hawaii, Indigenous Polynesian peoples are erased completely and the Polynesian origins of surfing are never mentioned. Brown even claims that Wai’anea Beach, Hawaii has only been surfed since 1958.²² In this way, *The Endless Summer* established a California-centric view of surfing in which young, white, Californian men are surfing’s preeminent cultural innovators and the Indigenous Polynesian origins of surfing are largely erased.

Other American popular entertainment industries mirrored this whitewashed version of surfing. American visual and popular culture of the mid-twentieth century continued to exoticize images of California and Hawaii while simultaneously presenting

²⁰ Bruce Brown, *The Endless Summer*, 35 mm, directed by Bruce Brown (1966; New York City, NY: Bruce Brown Films/Monterey Media.), digital.

²¹ Ibid.

²² Ibid.

images of surfing and surfing-related material culture in an All-American – that is, a white American – light. The promotional materials and music of quintessential twentieth-century surf-rock band The Beach Boys are another excellent example of this. Formed in Hawthorne, California in 1961,²³ The Beach Boys quickly parlayed a “singular West Coast story”²⁴ into international stardom and economic success within the musical subgenre of surf rock. Their first single, “Surfin’,” resulted in a contract with Capital Records in 1962.²⁵ Their first album, “Surfin’ Safari,” remained on the Billboard charts for thirty-seven weeks and broadcast a California-centric version of surfing to national and international audiences alike.²⁶ According to the Rock & Roll Hall of Fame,²⁷ “The Beach Boys embodied the sun-kissed dream of California, courtesy of their buoyant surf-rock vibe and heavenly harmonies.”²⁸ From the beginning, The Beach Boys marketed themselves as both surfers and Southern Californians, typically eliding differences between the two identities. They developed an image as a, “fresh-faced quintet [that] sang about an idealized version of California where the waves were perfect, the girls were pretty, the cars were revved-up and the sun was always shining.”²⁹ The Beach Boys, then, were a white American pop culture group

²³ David Wild, “The Beach Boys: A West Coast Story, Continued...,” *Universal Music Enterprises*, accessed January 30, 2017, <https://www.thebeachboys.com/content/about>.

²⁴ Ibid.

²⁵ Rock & Roll Hall of Fame, “The Beach Boys,” *Rock & Roll Hall of Fame*, accessed January 25, 2017, <https://www.rockhall.com/inductees/beach-boys>.

²⁶ David Wild, “The Beach Boys: A West Coast Story, Continued...,” *Universal Music Enterprises*, accessed January 30, 2017, <https://www.thebeachboys.com/content/about>.

²⁷ The Beach Boys were inducted into the Rock & Roll Hall of Fame in Cleveland, Ohio in 1988. Ibid.

²⁸ Rock & Roll Hall of Fame, “The Beach Boys,” *Rock & Roll Hall of Fame*, accessed January 25, 2017, <https://www.rockhall.com/inductees/beach-boys>.

²⁹ Ibid.

that assumed prerogative for the use of surfing imagery in the interest of selling both records and an idealized image of Southern California life.

In keeping with their California cool image, the covers of several of The Beach Boys' numerous full-length albums and singles represent beach scenes, water, and images of the band members with surfboards. The cover of the band's first album, *Surfin' Safari* (Figure 4), released in 1962, features the five members of the band in and on top of a yellow and light blue pickup truck. The truck is decorated with dried palm fronds and parked in the sand as though it was driven westward toward the coastline that occupies the middle left of the image. Each of the men wear long-sleeved, blue and white plaid shirts, light tan-colored pants, and no shoes. The two men on top of the truck hold a blue and white striped surfboard with their left hands, while their right hands are raised as though shading their eyes from the sun. Each of the men faces the left-hand side of the image, variously gesturing or looking out over the water at a focal point outside of the image itself. The effect suggests that the band members are explorers, parked at the coastline of Western California, discovering a perfect surf spot on an equally perfect sunny day.

In the upper left quadrant of the image, text appears that identifies the album and track titles. "surfin' safari" appears, in blue lowercase letters, at the very top, with darker blue wavy lines underneath. Below this "THE BEACH BOYS" in all capital letters appears. Track titles are listed in smaller font below, and overall the text forms a block that occupies the space of the sky in the image. This placement of the text over the portion of the image representing the sky further highlights the relative importance of the coastline in the overall image. The image as a whole suggests a Western

coastline and a mostly-deserted beach perfect for surfing. The landscape is non-specific and references to Native Hawaiian culture are mostly absent. Even the surfboard itself is being held by two white men who, the image suggests, are about to embark on a musical “safari” that apparently unselfconsciously includes the song “Ten Little Indians.”

The image of The Beach Boys literally upholding the central image of surfing – a surfboard – was recreated on several other album covers as well. To promote the singles *Ten Little Indians/County Fair* (Figure 5), the bandmates line up, wearing the same outfits as on the cover of *Surfin’ Safari*, each man with his left arm over the familiar blue and white surfboard, all smiling or apparently laughing. The cover of The Beach Boys’ 1963 release, *Surfer Girl* (Figure 6), recreates a very similar image, utilizing the same outfits and surfboard. Their 1963 *Surfin’ U.S.A./Shutdown* EP (Figure 7) again represents the five members of the band – Brian Wilson, Mike Love, Dennis Wilson, Carl Wilson, and David Marks – pictured in a black and white image, against a white background, and bordered above and below by text. The figures are arranged in order of descending height from left to right, each positioned with their shoulders perpendicular to the picture plane and each facing the viewer over their left shoulder. They smile slightly and seem to engage the viewer with eye contact. The five men again wear identical long-sleeved plaid shirts over white t-shirts. Each band member wears dark colored pants, and their legs are cropped at the lower edge of the image, which stops abruptly over the words “The Beach Boys” in a playful, curvilinear red font along the bottom edge of the album cover. Their left arms drape casually over a surfboard, each doing their part to hold the board aloft and aligned with the center of

their bodies. The surfboard itself is long, symmetrical, and carries a simple and geometric design composed of contrasting stripes that run along the length of the board.

What is common throughout all of these album covers is that visual references to Native Hawaiian identity and culture have been replaced by the bodies of five young, white, Californians who literally uphold the central symbol of surfing culture: a surfboard. In the images that followed the release of *Surfin' Safari*, even specific representations of coastline are replaced by non-specific, romanticized coastline and the figures of the five men. In this way, The Beach Boys' earliest album covers utilizes the images of five white men to represent surfing culture. Given the popularity of The Beach Boys, as well as their tenure within American and international popular culture,³⁰ it's difficult to overstate the influence that this band, and their album covers, had and continues to have on the popular image of surfing within American and international cultures. According to the band's website, The Beach Boys hold the record for Billboard/Nielson SoundScan's top-selling American band of all time for both albums and singles, as well as the record for the American band with the greatest number of Billboard Top 40 Hits, at thirty-six songs. In a very real sense, the popular image of surfing in the mid-twentieth century United States was dominated by a whitewashed version of surfing imagery that obscured the Indigenous origins of surfing culture and technology even as it celebrates the sun, the surf, and the culture of Southern California.

³⁰ Their twenty-ninth full length album, *That's Why God Made The Radio*, and the accompanying tour marks the 50th anniversary of the release of their album *Pet Sounds* in 1966. Over five decades of influence on American and international music and popular cultures has spread The Beach Boys' idealized version of Southern California surf culture to several generations, and around the globe. David Wild, "The Beach Boys: A West Coast Story, Continued..." *Universal Music Enterprises*, accessed January 30, 2017, <https://www.thebeachboys.com/content/about>.

Thus the colonization of surfing imagery changed over time from the representation of nude Native Hawaiian women reproduced for colonial consumption to images of young white Californian men holding up surfboards.

This visual and geographical colonization, though pervasive, has not gone completely unchallenged. Throughout the twentieth century and continuing today, surfing has gained in popularity and practice among Native Hawaiians interested in active resistance to the colonial influence of Euro-American culture in the Hawaiian Islands. Scholar Isaiah Helekunihi Walker's³¹ book, *Waves of Resistance: Surfing and History in Twentieth-Century Hawai'i*, explores issues of colonial violence in the Hawaiian Islands and specific responses by Native Hawaiian surfing communities. Of central importance to these communities is the identification of the landscape, and specifically the ocean surf zone, as Indigenous geographies. Walker establishes that:

Ka po'ina nalu, the surf zone, constitutes a Native Hawaiian realm, an overlooked space extremely significant to Kānaka Maoli (Native Hawaiians). While surfing was a thriving aspect of Hawaiian culture in ancient days, in the twentieth century it served as both a refuge and a contested borderland for many Native Hawaiians. In other words, it was a place where Hawaiians felt free, developed Native identities, and thwarted foreign domination.³²

Walker asserts that the preservation of Indigenous space in the form of Native Hawaiian-controlled surf spots has constituted resistance to, “colonial encroachment in the po'ina palu (surf zone) since the early 1900s,” and that this process continues today

³¹ Isaiah Helekunihi Walker currently serves as the Department Chair and Professor in the History Department at Brigham Young University – Hawaii. Per his faculty page, he “studies Hawaiian history and colonialism from a unique perspective, from the vantage of Hawaiian surfers.” “Isaiah Walker,” last modified 2014, https://history.byuh.edu/History/Faculty/Isaiah_Walker.

³² Isaiah Helekunihi Walker, *Waves of Resistance: Surfing and History in Twentieth-Century Hawaii* (Honolulu, HI: University of Hawaii Press, 2011), 2.

as an expression of Native Hawaiian agency.³³ As I will discuss in the remainder of this thesis, similar trends carried over into the visual and popular cultures of skateboarding, beginning in the mid-twentieth century, during skateboarding's first boom of popularity in the United States.

From Surfing to Skateboarding

Many historical, cultural, and aesthetic connections exist between surfing and skateboarding, particularly in mid-twentieth century American culture. I do not intend here to detail a full history of developing skateboarding technology,³⁴ but a discussion of the origins of skateboards will provide historical and geographical context and illustrate the ways in which the contemporary practice of skateboarding relates to the far older practice of surfing invented by Indigenous Polynesian and Native Hawaiian peoples. During the mid-twentieth century in the United States, both surfing and skateboarding formed part of a California-centric visual and material culture that privileged white experiences and practices over those of Indigenous peoples. Today, contemporary skateboarding visual and material culture exists at the intersection of many different cultures, including Indigenous and Euro-American cultures, and raises important questions about appropriation, colonization, land use and ownership, and cross-cultural exchange within settler colonialism.

³³ Ibid., 2-3.

³⁴ For a more detailed overview of developments in skateboarding technologies, see Chapter 2, "Devices," in Iain Borden, *Skateboarding, Space and the City: Architecture and the Body*, (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2001), 13-28.

During the mid-twentieth century, skateboards were invented as inexpensive toys to amuse Californian surfers on days when the waves were flat. Initially, skateboards were little more than small-scale surfboards with roller skate wheels attached to the bottom. Early skateboard deck designs and skateboarding styles sought to replicate the aesthetics and styles of Californian surf culture. The technology and culture of skateboarding developed directed from surfing culture and many of the earliest skateboards were homemade contraptions built by the surfers who rode them.³⁵ Commercial manufacturers began to produce skateboards beginning in the mid-1950s. As was the case with the earlier homemade skateboards, commercially-produced skateboards initially rolled on small steel roller skate truck and wheel assemblies. These steel wheels were later supplanted by so-called “clay” wheels, which were actually formed from a composite of clay, polymer plastics, and various other industrial materials. According to scholar Iain Borden, the primary benefit of the improved clay wheels was, “increased control in turning and hence the emulation of a great Californian occupation: the burgeoning surf culture of the late 1950s and 1960s.”³⁶

During the period of skateboarding’s infancy, similarities and conventions in representation and material culture continually blurred the boundary between surfing and skateboarding, between the ocean and the pavement. Early skateboard designs, both in terms of structure and decoration, were explicitly based on earlier surfboard designs. Skateboards were “overtly shaped like ‘miniature surfboards’ with curving sides and pointed noses.”³⁷ Additionally, skateboards and skateboard components were

³⁵ Ibid., 14.

³⁶ Ibid., 15.

³⁷ Ibid., 16-17.

advertised in surfing magazines beginning in the late 1960s.³⁸ These early commercial skateboards were conceptualized as surfboards with wheels attached to facilitate “sidewalk surfing.” Boards such as the *Sidewalk Surfboard* by Champion (Figure 8), produced in the 1960s, drew explicit connections between surfing on water and skating on land.

Champion’s *Sidewalk Surfboard* skateboards feature a flat wooden deck rounded at both the nose and tail ends. The nose of the skateboard is oval in shape, and the tail end is similar, with the oval being bisected and flattened at the back of the deck. Attached to the bottom of the deck are two roller-skate trucks, each with two small steel wheels (Figure 9). Unlike contemporary skateboards, which typically feature graphic designs on the bottom of the deck, the *Sidewalk Surfboard* was decorated with a graphic on the top of the deck. This graphic represents a male figure surfing, arms outstretched and feet firmly planted on a surfboard. The man wears board shorts and has close cropped hair. He surfs goofy, with his right foot positioned in front of his left on the top surface of his surfboard. Waves curl away from the surfer into the background. Above this image is the word “Sidewalk” in casual, semi-cursive script, and “Surfboard” appears below the image. A logo and the words “by CHAMPION” appear at the very bottom of the image. Both the image and the accompanying text appear in dark blue against the lighter background of the wooden deck.

Champion, in the design of the *Sidewalk Surfboard* skateboard, drew explicit connections between the ancient activity of surfing and the new pastime of skateboarding. Not only is the graphic of this board an explicit depiction of surfing, and

³⁸ Ibid., 18.

the name of the skateboard *Sidewalk Surfboard*, but the blue color of the image recalls the waters of Hawaii and California. Additionally, the fact that the graphic for this skateboard appears on top of the deck, rather than on the bottom, is significant for drawing connections between surfing and skateboard in mid-twentieth century North America. Surfing, as an aquatic pursuit, is typically practiced barefoot. The same was true in the early days of skateboarding – skaters simply transposed the techniques and moves of surfing onto dry land, often skating barefoot. For this reason, early skateboard designs, such as *Sidewalk Surfboard*, featured graphics on the top of the skateboard, as it was then assumed that skaters would be barefoot.³⁹

The close association between surfing and skateboarding appeared also in popular American media of the mid-twentieth century. Some of the earliest photographs of skateboarders were captured by famous surf photographers such as LeRoy Grannis. His photograph *Robin Calhoun, Laguna Beach, 1964* (Figure 10), represents award-winning surfer Robin Calhoun executing a surfing maneuver atop a small wooden skateboard. In this photograph, a series of parallel elements draw the viewer's sight from the flat pavement in the foreground, to the skateboard itself, to the low white barrier separating cement from surf, to Calhoun's outstretched left arm, and finally to the horizon line of water and sky approximately in the center of the image.

³⁹ To maintain traction with their surfboards, surfers commonly apply wax to the top surfaces of their surfboards, which they then rub with sand before surfing. This rough, waxy textured surface is in direct contact with the bottoms of surfers' feet. Contemporary skateboard designs, however, feature graphics on the bottoms of decks because the tops of decks are covered in griptape. Griptape is essentially self-adhesive black sandpaper and it provides traction between a skater's shoes and their board, which is essential for the street and skatepark skating styles popular today. It's not a good idea to skate barefoot on contemporary skateboards – griptape can be hell on human skin.

Calhoun rides her skateboard barefoot, in emulation of surfing, and compresses and balances her body as if on the ocean. These elements and photographic conventions make explicit the ideological resonances between representations of surfing and early representations of skateboarding in 1960s California.

Over time, however, images of skateboarding would begin to reflect a gradual divergence from surfing as skateboarding established itself as a popular activity in its own right. The cover of the May 14, 1965 LIFE Magazine (Figure 11) illustrates an early incidence of this. This cover photograph features Pat McGee, the 1965 National Girls Skateboarding Champion, performing a handstand on a moving skateboard. The cover photograph represents McGee, a white teenage girl, wearing white pants and a red sweatshirt, against the background of a clear blue sky and a very low, flat horizon. McGee, is barefoot, with the toes of both feet pointed toward the sky and the upper margin of the magazine cover. Her hands are positioned at either end of a short, flat wooden board with her fingers curled around and under the skateboard's deck. Her eyes are alert, focused on the space where her skateboard connects with the pavement beneath it, and her light blond hair is tied back so as not to obscure her vision. The red and white LIFE graphic appears in the upper left-hand corner of the magazine, near McGee's outstretched left leg, and text in the lower left of the cover advises the reader that this issue addresses "the craze and the menace of SKATEBOARDS," and identifies McGee as a resident of San Diego, California.

This image, then, represents a transitional phase in skateboarding's visual history, a time when skateboarding's debt to surfing – and hence to the cultural and technological innovations of Indigenous Polynesians and Native Hawaiians – gradually

receded from the foreground of popular representations of the activity. To be sure, connections between surfing and skateboarding cultures remained significant in mid-twentieth-century American popular culture, as evidenced by the famous (and infamous) Zephyr Skate Team. This team of teenage skateboarders, popularly known as the Dogtown Z-Boys, operated out of Jeff Ho's Zephyr Productions Surf Shop in Venice Beach, in Santa Monica, California in the early- to mid-1970s, and their aggressive, surf-inspired approach to concrete is now the stuff of skateboarding legend.⁴⁰

In addition to operating out of a surf shop, the Z-Boys popularized pool riding among young Southern Californian skateboarders in the late 1970s, due in large part to the fact that a sustained drought left the backyard pools of wealthy homeowners completely dry.⁴¹ It was during this period that the *absence* of water, rather than the proximity of the California coastline, began to define the cutting edge of skateboarding. Thanks, in part, to the aerial maneuvers first seen in drained Southern Californian backyard pools, during the 1980s skateboarding communities in North America began to develop their own cultural and visual conventions entirely separate from

⁴⁰ The importance of the Z-Boys to the development of skateboarding in the United States is hard to overstate. The Zephyr Skate Team, which originally included twelve teenage members, helped to innovate the aggressive sliding and aerial maneuvers common in skateboarding today. Several of the Z-Boys, such as Tony Alva, Jay Adams, and Stacy Peralta, went on to become giants in the world of skateboarding. The Z-Boys, and the aggressive attitude they brought to skateboarding, are legendary. Stacy Peralta and Craig Stecyk, *Dogtown and Z-Boys*, 35 mm, directed by Stacy Peralta (2001; Park City, UT: Agi Orsi Productions/Sony Pictures Home Entertainment, 2010.), DVD.

⁴¹ Ibid.

skateboarding's surfing origins. Skateboarding, which had begun as a localized activity among Californian surfers, began to spread to the rest of the world.

Throughout the 1980s and 1990s, the geographical point of reference for skateboarding gradually changed from the California boardwalk to the concrete waves of parking lots, sidewalks, and purpose-built skateparks across the United States, and thereafter internationally. First the concrete wave supplanted the aquatic wave, and then the definition of the concrete wave itself opened up to include other elements of the urban built environment, such as public sidewalks, benches, handrails, and staircases. Contemporary street skateboarders utilize all of these, and many more, built elements to propel their bodies and boards through public spaces in a manner wholly unintended by either architects or city planners. As scholars like Iain Borden and Becky Beal have noted, skateboarding, at its core, is about the ways in which we use land and relate to one another in the public sphere. I argue that, within the context of settler colonialism in the contemporary United States, skateboarding on *any paved surface* can potentially be interpreted as a political act. As I will discuss throughout the remainder of this thesis, settler colonialism effects the entirety of the North American continent and ongoing conflicts over land use and geographical sovereignty remain both relevant and urgent. Having established the Native Hawaiian origins of surfing in North America, and having illustrated the technological and cultural debts that skateboarding owes to surfing, I will now turn my attention to the ways in which settler colonialism influences the visual culture of skateboard deck graphics and contemporary skateboarding practices in the United States.

Chapter 2: Race, Gender, Appropriation, and Visual Sovereignty in Skateboarding Visual Culture

Skateboarding, Society, and Race

Skateboarding culture remains indebted to its surfing roots. However, since the 1970s, skateboarding culture has increasingly sought to distance itself from surfing and to establish a separate, unique subculture that permeates not only the visual culture of skateboarding itself, but every aspect of skateboarder's lives. Scholars Becky Beal and Lisa Wiedman, in their study of authenticity in skateboarding culture, have identified skateboarding as, "a lifestyle as opposed to a separate realm of one's life" and compared the construction of skateboarding as an identity category to similar processes within punk music scenes, which frequently overlap with skateboarding scenes.⁴² Their research indicates that skaters – those individuals who actively construct a significant portion of their identity around their engagement with skateboarding – typically adhere to subcultural values such as nonconformity,⁴³ individualism, and creative self-expression,⁴⁴ and they highly value challenges to outside authority.⁴⁵ Beal and Wiedman found that "the ability to challenge social standards" was often seen as a sign that someone was an authentic skater and not just someone who skateboards.⁴⁶ The

⁴² Becky Beal and Lisa Wiedman, "Authenticity in the Skateboarding World," in *Faculty Publications* (McMinnville, OR: Linfield College, 2003), 340.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, 341.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 342.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 343.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 344.

skateboarding subculture, then, is often understood as oppositional to the broader society and its constructs of state and social authority.

As part of this thesis project, I wondered how the “us vs. authority” mentality assumed in skateboarding subculture intersected with race and settler colonialism in the contemporary United States. I was surprised to find that most of the sources that I consulted in the course of my research either ignored questions of race entirely or actually claimed that racial tensions within skateboarding culture are minimal, or even non-existent. Beal and Wiedman’s research did not actively question intersections of race and skateboarding. Iain Borden, in *Skateboarding, Space and the City: Architecture and the Body*, claims that, “Racial and ethnic minorities are also more easily integrated into skateboarding than in many other areas of youth culture.... Consequently, there have been little or no racial tensions in skateboarding.”⁴⁷

This image of a racially harmonious skateboarding culture may at first appear to be substantiated by the visual culture produced by skateboarding media, such as *Thrasher* magazine. *Thrasher*, though heavily slanted toward male representation and male readership, has since its creation in 1981 frequently featured people of color in cover photographs and in skater interviews. This may give the impression that race is not a significant issue within skateboarding culture. However, as I argue here, race is inextricably tied to skateboarding in the contemporary United States. Regardless of the imagery presented on magazine covers, skateboarding in the context of settler colonialism is inherently tied to questions of land use, land tenure, race, sovereignty,

⁴⁷ Iain Borden, *Skateboarding, Space and the City: Architecture and the Body* (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2001), 140-141.

and power. One of my primary goals with this thesis is to raise questions of race and skateboarding in the United States, as it appears that this is topic neglected in the current scholarly literature on skateboarding culture. By examining skateboarding within the context of settler colonialism within the United States, I question this claim of non-existent racial tensions and examine the ways in which skateboarding intersects with issues of visual and land-based sovereignty. Far from being a subculture free of racial bias and conflict, I argue that in some instances skateboarding visual culture perpetuates stereotypes about Native American peoples and in general fails to acknowledge or interrogate the relationship of skateboarding to sovereignty in the United States. One of the main ways that the broader skateboarding culture in the United States perpetuates violence against Native American peoples is through the appropriation of Native American imagery and the representation of racial stereotypes in skateboard deck graphics.

Cultural Appropriation in Skateboard Deck Graphics

As discussed above, the spread of surfing from Native Hawaiian culture to Euro-American culture often occurred in a culturally appropriative manner, with the Indigenous Polynesian origins of the sport becoming obscured in favor of depictions of white Californian surfers. A similar practice of cultural appropriation developed in the visual culture of skateboard deck graphics in the United States. As skateboarding communities in the 1970s and 1980s began to establish unique visual conventions for representing the increasingly-aggressive attitude and aesthetics of skateboarding, the distance between visual depictions of surfing and skateboarding widened and some

skateboard manufacturers began producing deck graphics featuring appropriated Native American imagery to represent predominately white professional skateboarders. Examples of such visual appropriation range from the seemingly benign to the highly offensive. As skateboard deck graphics are central to the visual culture of skateboarding, and as the graphics applied to skateboards both reflect the culture of skateboarding and serve to create that culture, it is important to examine deck graphics that appropriate Native American imagery in order to gain a better understanding of the ways in which skateboarding, race, gender, and sovereignty intersect within contemporary settler colonialism in the United States.

Beginning in the 1970s, the design and release of “signature decks” has been a common industry practice among commercial skateboard manufacturers in North America. A signature deck is a customized, but mass produced, skateboard design developed by companies that promote professional skateboarders. Signature decks might feature unique board shapes or other technical specifications, and such decks always carry customized graphics that are understood to convey the unique attitude and style of the professional skateboarder for which the deck is named. It is common practice for the sponsored professional skater to be directly involved in the development of their signature deck graphics; some pro skaters even draw the graphics themselves.⁴⁸ These unique graphics are often combined with text of the skateboarder’s name and the company producing the skateboard. The concept behind signature decks is very similar

⁴⁸ Becky Beal and Lisa Wiedman, “Authenticity in the Skateboarding World,” in *Faculty Publications* (McMinnville, OR: Linfield College, 2003), 346.

to the idea of artist models of musical instruments and they function in much the same way to promote the sale of merchandise by associating a product with a famous person.

When it comes to signature deck graphics that appropriate Native American imagery, professional skateboarder Jamie Thomas is a repeat offender, and his signature deck graphics are indicative of wider industry practices within North American skateboarding. Thomas, founder and owner of Zero Skateboards,⁴⁹ has produced several signature deck graphics representing black-and-white images of men and skulls wearing feather headdresses and holding spears or tomahawks. The Jamie Thomas *Native* signature deck (Figure 12), represents a man from the waist up. The man holds a stone-tipped spear in his right hand and his left hand is obscured by a circular hide shield. Feathers are tied in the man's long hair and a bear-claw necklace is visible at his throat. The image of the man fills the entire middle portion of the deck graphic, with the skateboard oriented perpendicular to the ground. The word "THOMAS" appears in block, capital letters above the man's head, and the company's name – ZERO – and skull logo appear below the image of the man. The spear suggests a sort of primitiveness and the entire graphic is produced in black and white: this (mis)representation of a Native American man literally has white skin.

Thomas's *Chief* signature deck (Figure 13) is another example of similarly whitewashed imagery. The *Chief* graphic represents a Native American man from the chest up, looking directly out of the image at the viewer. The man represented here wears a feather headdress and several necklaces. Above the man's head, vertical black

⁴⁹ Zero Skateboards, "Jamie Thomas," *Zero Skateboards*, accessed February 2, 2017, <https://zeroskateboards.com/team/jamie-thomas/>.

and white stripes appear; “Thomas Zero” appears below. The background of the deck graphic is a glossy black and the man’s face is half white and half black, giving the impression that light is falling on the right side of his face, the left side obscured in shadow. As with the *Native* graphic, this image utilizes a depiction of a Native American man with whitened skin to represent a white professional skateboarder. This graphic takes its name – *Chief* – from Jamie Thomas’s industry nickname, “The Chief.” However, as Jamie Thomas is not in actuality associated with any Native American tribe, this presumptuous title reflects more a culturally appropriative attitude than a respected leadership position.

More problematic, however, is Thomas’s *Dark Ages* signature deck graphic (Figure 14). This skateboard deck graphic represents a closely cropped image of a skull wearing a feathered headdress. The skull has empty, but emphasized, eye sockets and a full mouth of bared teeth. The headdress is composed of many feathers, represented in white, attached to the skull by what appears to be a folded strip of cloth. Above the image, the words “ZERO THOMAS” appear in black against a white background. A depiction of crossed tomahawks appears below the skull. This image, as with the other signature decks discussed above, represents the skull and headdress as white positive spaces outlined in sketchy black lines suggestive of speed and intensity. The background of the entire image is a very light gray with sketchy white scribbled lines. This signature deck graphic, which along with the other deck graphics discussed above, is currently offered for sale on the Garage Days Collection website⁵⁰ as part of the

⁵⁰ Garage Days Collection, “Jamie Thomas Dark Ages (Personal Sample),” *Garage Days Collection*, last updated 2017,

Garage Days Collection. In addition to stereotyping and literally whitewashing images of Native American people, this graphic perpetuates the myth of the “vanishing Indian,” both through the imagery in the graphic and the design’s name: *Dark Ages*. Examined together, Zero Skateboards’ Jamie Thomas signature deck graphics suggest that all Native American cultures are reducible to a stereotyped image of a man in a feather headdress and, even more troublingly, that Native American people are dead and that Native cultures belong back in the “dark ages.” These deck graphics treat Native American people and cultures as resources to be mined for profit; that is, to be colonized for financial gain.

Gender in Skateboarding Visual Culture

The appropriation of Native American imagery also intersects with issues of gender representation and disparity in skateboarding visual culture. The contemporary culture of skateboarding in North America is extremely gendered, and masculinity is presumed to be the norm, both for creators and consumers of skateboarding visual and material culture. As mentioned above, skateboarding’s preeminent publications, such as *Thrasher*, assume a male audience. When the default skateboarder is male, women and girls are marginalized within skateboarding. This marginalization is compounded for Native American and First Nations women and girls, who face marginalization within the broader skateboarding culture because of both gender and race.

<https://garagedayscollection.com/shop/boards/jamie-thomas-dark-ages-personal-sample/>.

Previous scholarship by Beal and Wiedman has shown that gender plays a significant role in the construction and constitution of authenticity within skateboarding culture in the United States. Within skateboarding culture, masculinity – specifically young, aggressive, individualistic, heterosexual masculinity – is typically assumed to be the norm.⁵¹ Skateboarding media has historically featured mostly boys and young men, often represented alone or in small groups, and engaged in impressive (and often very risky) skateboarding tricks and maneuvers. Representations of women and girls skateboarding are far fewer, although they do exist: recall the image on the cover of LIFE Magazine in 1965 that represents Pat McGee, the National Girls Skateboarding Champion from that year. However, popular media dedicated specifically to skateboarding often fails to represent women and girls and, when images of women do appear, they are often highly sexualized and less frequently are women and girls represented in the process of skateboarding itself.⁵²

⁵¹ As discussed above, the visual culture of skateboarding initially reflected skateboarding's surfing origins. Beal and Wiedman interpret changes in skateboarding's visual culture that began in the 1970s and 1980s as reflections of a subcultural assumption of masculinity. These scholars identify images and advertisements that "appeal to masculine toughness, or the ability to tolerate unpleasant experiences" through the representation of skulls, blood, monsters, weapons, etc. Becky Beal and Lisa Wiedman, "Authenticity in the Skateboarding World," in *Faculty Publications* (McMinnville, OR: Linfield College, 2003), 349.

⁵² For more information on the underrepresentation of women in skateboarding, see *Underexposed: A women's skateboarding documentary*, directed by Amelia Brodka. While this documentary, at times, presents unquestioned essentialist views of gender, for the most part it examines several of the key issues that prevent women and girls from participating fully in the world of professional skateboarding. One issue raised by this documentary are the disparities in skate shoe advertising, in which advertisements featuring men's skate shoes represent professional skaters actually using the product, while advertisements for women's skate shoes often feature fashion models standing next to skateboards. This advertising convention sends the message that men and boys skate while women and girls stand around and watch. Amelia Brodka, *Underexposed:*

Thrasher magazine cover photographs illustrate this issue. *Thrasher* has remained a central force for the creation and dissemination of skateboarding visual culture since the first issue was published in January of 1981. According to the magazine's website, *Thrasher*, "is the longest-running, best-selling skateboard magazine of all time" and "synonymous with both skateboarding's roots and constant evolution..." Additionally, *Thrasher* claims to be "the most revered skate mag in the world" and the driving force behind the evolution and adventure of contemporary skateboarding.⁵³ Such claims seem hyperbolic, but the reach and influence of *Thrasher* on the development of the visual culture of skateboarding is hard to overstate. For this reason, the covers of *Thrasher* issues serve as an important and rich visual record of skateboarding's visual and material culture over the decades since the first issue was released. Within contemporary skateboarding culture, having one's photograph featured on the cover of *Thrasher* is a very high status marker, an indication that one has made it in skateboarding. The individuals featured on the covers are, since the inception of the publication, a who's who of skateboarding.

Given the prestige associated with the *Thrasher* cover photographs, it's clear that these cover images play an important role in influencing skateboarding's visual culture on an international scale. It's important to note, then, that the magazine cover has featured only two women skateboarders in the entire history of the publication.

Cara-Beth Burnside was featured on the August 1989 cover, pictured at the apex of a

A Women's Skateboarding Documentary, digital, directed by Amelia Brodka (2013; Denton, TX: Devolver Digital Films, 2014.), digital.

⁵³ Thrasher Magazine, "About Us," *High Speed Productions, Inc.*, last updated 2014, <https://shop.thrasher magazine.com/about-us>.

frontside air on a large vert ramp, which was popular within the larger skateboarding culture at the time (Figure 15). Lizzie Armanto will be featured on the upcoming May 2017 *Thrasher* cover. To put this in perspective, *Thrasher* has published 445 issues to date, and covers featuring professional women skateboarders account for less than half of one percent of all issues.

The relative scarcity of representations of women and girls within the larger visual culture of skateboarding does not reflect actual demographic differences in skateboarding, but rather contributes to a skateboarding culture in which women and girls are thought of and represented as fundamentally lesser than men and boys. Whenever women and girls are represented in skateboarding media, including in skateboard deck graphics, the images created are frequently condescending and sexist in nature. In some of the most egregious examples, skateboard deck graphics combine sexist images of women with stereotyped images of Native American peoples.

Professional skateboarder Torey Pudwill's recent signature deck, *Lady Luck* (Figure 16), created in collaboration with his sponsor, Plan B Skateboards, is a primary example of this. The *Lady Luck* graphic represents a Native American woman in a pin-up pose, her body on display in a compressed, uncomfortable-looking position and her smiling face tilted upwards. The woman is nude, save for dainty shoes, a large feather headdress, and strategically placed strings of feathers that barely cover her breasts and left hip. She has light brown skin and the red, black, and white headdress mostly obscures her dark hair. Her left arm bends backward, with her hand resting on her hip. Her right hand holds a long-stemmed pipe. The mouthpiece of the pipe crosses over her bare chest and a cloud of smoke wafts up from the pipe's bowl. Behind the figure, the

background is a drab, olive green color, with small circles suggesting rivets and the metal construction of military vehicles. The Plan B logo, in yellow, appears over the woman's head and "SPEC 1991 LADY LUCK OFFICIAL" appears directly below the figure in black letters that look as though they have been spray painted on with a stencil. The professional skater's nickname, "T. Pudz," occupies the lowermost portion of the image. As was the case with Jamie Thomas's signatures decks, this skateboard deck graphic misrepresents a Native American woman in the interest of selling skateboards for a white man.

In many ways, the *Lady Luck* graphic recalls the earlier image *Maids on the Waves*, discussed above, in which an image of Native Hawaiian women is represented for colonial consumption. *Lady Luck* is another, much more recent, representation of a mostly-nude Native American woman constructed, not as an expression of her personal agency, but as an object of desire for a presumed male, settler colonial gaze. This offensive image takes a piece of regalia associated with leadership and authority in Northern Plains cultures – the feather headdress – and instead presents it as a costume of stereotypical Indian-ness, along with the reduction of a ceremonial object – the pipe – into a "peace pipe" type representation.

Furthermore, the combination here of a smiling and subservient Native American woman and the suggestion of military vehicles in the background mocks the historical and ongoing use of colonial military powers to forcibly dispossess Native American peoples of their traditional land bases and natural resources.⁵⁴ The Plan B

⁵⁴ Issues of land use and ownership, and the related issues of natural resource extraction, remain relevant and urgent in the United States. Current conflict over the construction of the Dakota Access Pipeline illustrates this dramatically. A standoff between

Lady Luck deck graphic certainly does not represent the high rates of military service by female Native American Servicemembers. According to the United States Department of Veterans Affairs, Native American veterans, “have a higher concentration of female Servicemembers than all other Servicemembers.”⁵⁵ As should also be obvious, this deck graphic ignores the ongoing pervasive violence perpetrated against Native American women and girls, who face extremely high rates of interpersonal violence, sexual assault, and murder. Native American women are 2.5 times more likely than any other race to report being sexually assaulted, and one in three Native American women reports being raped during her lifetime.⁵⁶ Deck graphics such as Plan B’s *Lady Luck*, then, clearly serve colonial interests through the representation of a highly sexualized, subservient fantasy of a stereotypical “Indian” woman, while ignoring issues of military and interpersonal violence effecting actual Native American women. The issues with the Torey Pudwill *Lady Luck* skateboard deck graphic, as well as with the Jamie Thomas signature decks described above, highlight the importance of self-

corporate interests and Indigenous Water Protectors has in recent months resulted in the establishment of the Oceti Sakowin prayer camp and the Stand With Standing Rock movement, an international and intertribal effort to prevent construction of the oil pipeline. Tension and conflict between members of the Standing Rock Sioux Tribe and their supporters, the United States Army Corps of Engineers, and Dakota Access has, at times, erupted into violence and brought issues of settler colonialism to the forefront of national attention. Stand With Standing Rock, “History,” *Standing Rock Sioux Tribe*, last updated 2017, <http://standwithstandingrock.net/history/>.

⁵⁵ United States Department of Veterans Affairs, *American Indian and Alaska Native Servicemembers and Veterans* (Washington, DC. September 2012), 2, https://www.va.gov/TRIBALGOVERNMENT/docs/AIAN_Report_FINAL_v2_7.pdf.

⁵⁶ United States Department of Justice, *Findings from the National Violence Against Women Survey*, by Patricia Tjaden and Nancy Thoennes, *United States Department of Justice* (Washington, DC, November 2000), 22, <https://www.ncjrs.gov/pdffiles1/nij/183781.pdf>.

representation by Native American artists and skateboarders within the larger North American and international contexts for skateboarding visual culture.

Visual Sovereignty in Skateboard Graphics

The signature deck graphics discussed above clearly misrepresent Native American people and cultures from a colonial perspective. However, in recent decades, some contemporary Native American artists have begun creating skateboard deck graphics that express visual sovereignty and tie together issues of land use and skateboarding.⁵⁷ The concept of visual sovereignty was first articulated by Tuscarora artist and scholar Jolene Rickard in 1995: “[t]oday, sovereignty is taking shape in visual thought as indigenous artists negotiate cultural space.”⁵⁸ Visual sovereignty pertains to the rights of individuals to represent themselves within the visual cultures of which they are a part. Rickard writes that, “[s]overeignty is the border that shifts indigenous experience from a victimized stance to a strategic one.”⁵⁹ The strategy, she argues, is one of cultural and physical survival and she asserts that, “the work of indigenous artists

⁵⁷ Perhaps the most prominent Native artist currently engaged in skateboarding visual culture is Apache artist and activist Douglas Miles, founder of Apache Skateboards. His work, along with work by White Mountain Apache and Navajo filmmaker Dustinn Craig, founder of 4wheelwarpony, another skateboard company, has been featured in much popular and scholarly press. Works by both Miles and Craig were featured in the National Museum of the American Indian’s exhibit *Ramp it Up: Skateboard Culture in Native America*. Apache Skateboards, “Apache Skateboards,” *Apache Skateboards*, last updated 2014, <http://apacheskateboards.com/>; Smithsonian Institute, “Ramp it Up: Skateboard Culture in Native America, NY,” *National Museum of the American Indian*, last updated 2017, <http://www.nmai.si.edu/explore/exhibitions/item/?id=571>; Vision Maker Media, “Bios: Dustinn Craig,” *Vision Maker Media*, last updated 2017, <https://www.visionmakermedia.org/bios/dustinn-craig>.

⁵⁸ Jolene Rickard, “Sovereignty: A Line in the Sand,” in *Strong Hearts: Native American Visions and Voices*, ed. Peggy Roalf (New York: Aperture, 1995), 51.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, 51.

needs to be understood through the clarifying lens of sovereignty and self-determination, not just in terms of assimilation, colonization, and identity politics.”⁶⁰

Since 1995, the concept of visual sovereignty has been utilized in scholarship both art historical and anthropological in nature. Kristin Dowell, an anthropologist whose work addresses Aboriginal cinema in Vancouver, Canada, defines *visual sovereignty* as, “the articulation of Aboriginal peoples’ distinctive cultural traditions, political status, and collective identities through aesthetic and cinematic means.” Dowell locates the expression of visual sovereignty in the act of artistic production itself and claims that the, “the off-screen production process itself is crucial for understanding media production as an act of sovereignty.”⁶¹ In both Rickard and Dowell’s scholarship, the political and visual sovereignties held and expressed by Native American artists ultimately derive from geographical sovereignty, that is, from Native, “peoples’ ties to lands prior to colonization.”⁶² Similarly, I argue that skateboard deck graphics designed by contemporary Native American artists express visual sovereignty and that the use of such skateboards by Native skaters can be interpreted as an affirmation of land-based sovereignty within the context of settler colonialism. Visual sovereignty, then, is the insistence, through visual means, of political, social, and artistic legitimacy. In the realm of skateboarding visual culture, it is the establishment of street cred through the expression of Native American identities

⁶⁰ Ibid., 51.

⁶¹ Kristin L. Dowell, *Sovereign Screens: Aboriginal Media on the Canadian West Coast* (Lincoln, NE: University of Nebraska Press, 2013, Kindle Edition), Loc 183, 190.

⁶² Ibid., Loc 183.

and cultural values, and by using skateboarding to strengthen communities and support Indigenous initiatives.

Given the frequent misrepresentation of women and girls within the larger visual culture of skateboarding, and especially considering misrepresentations of Native American women as on the *Lady Luck* skateboard, I think it imperative to begin my discussion of Native American visual sovereignty in skateboard deck graphics with a work by a contemporary female artist. Crystal Kaakeyáa Worl Demientieff's recent *Emerging Octopus* deck graphic (Figure 17) represents a stylized octopus stretched out across the length of a standard skateboard. The overall graphic is landscape in orientation, best viewed with the board held lengthwise, with the kicktails parallel to the ground. The head of the octopus occupies the center of the board, monopolizing the space that falls between the two truck assemblies. The octopus has a face, seen in profile, with one large eye looking up and to the left at a circular shape that suggests the sun or moon. Four curling tentacles extend outward from the head of the octopus and toward the ends of the deck, with two tentacles spreading toward each of the rounded kicktails. Each of the tentacles is formed from a series of repeated, rounded forms that almost look like flower petals, each form with a small circle at its center that both recalls the suckers on an octopus's tentacles and reveal the background colors of the skateboard deck design. The octopus, represented in white formline shapes, stands out against a brightly colored background in teal, light blue, red, and orange. The background is divided in half between the teal and the orange halves, and undulating lines throughout the background suggest ocean waves.

Crystal Worl's skateboard deck graphic is significant for several reasons. It represents an aquatic creature and a stylized ocean wave on a skateboard made for the concrete waves of paved land. The octopus, in a sense, emerges from the ocean and travels on dry land, if only symbolically, and in doing so creates a sort of visual bridge between water and land that recalls skateboarding's aquatic origins. Additionally, this deck graphic expresses visual sovereignty through the use of symmetry and formline designs in the representation of the octopus. On her Trickster Company website, where the *Emerging Octopus* skateboard deck is offered for sale, Crystal Worl identifies herself as Tlingit Athabascan, from the Raven moiety, Sockeye Clan, from the Raven House. In her artist's statement, Worl describes her work as follows: "She practices the recreation and modernization of her Clan's stories and Raven stories from home. Her work explores the relationships and bonds between her people, the land, and the animals."⁶³ In *Emerging Octopus*, Worl expresses her prerogative and right to both the use of formline design and the illustration of her Clan's narrative, locating visual sovereignty on a skateboard deck.

Chad Nish Earles' *Tah'-nah-ha Skateboard* (Figure 18) is another example of a skateboard deck graphic by a contemporary Native artist that expresses visual sovereignty. The *Tah'-nah-ha Skateboard* graphic represents a buffalo facing the viewer directly. The buffalo's face dominates most of the image and the entirety of the space between the holes drilled for the truck and wheel assemblies. Crisp black lines outline the shape of the buffalo's face. The horns are diminished and cropped on either

⁶³ Trickster Company, "Artists," *Trickster Company*, last updated 2017, <https://trickstercompany.com/pages/artists>.

side of the buffalo's head by the edge of the skateboard deck. The natural, very light color of the maple skateboard deck shows through as the coloration of the buffalo's fur. However, in places this light coloration is supplemented by smears of white paint, applied by hand; the upper and lower portions of the image, situated at each of the kicktails, reveal the handprint of the artist, who dipped his hand in white acrylic paint and pressed it to the surface of the skateboard deck. In background, in registers both above and below the buffalo's head, are geometric patterns composed of black and grey lines, triangles, and dots. The artist's signature, "Chad Earles 2013," appears near the buffalo's mouth, below it and to the right.

This skateboard deck graphic expresses sovereignty in a number of ways. Perhaps most obviously, Chad Nish Earles, a Caddo artist from Oklahoma, has literally incorporated his handprint into the image. This one-of-a-kind skateboard deck graphic thus incorporates the artist's body directly into the work of art. The white handprints, along with the lightness of the maple skateboard deck, function to suggest that this buffalo is a white buffalo, a highly revered animal. Additionally, Earles, who belongs to a family of accomplished artists, has in this image incorporated traditional Caddo pottery designs in the registers of geometric patterns that appear above and below the buffalo's head. Earles' brother, Chase Kahwinhut Earles, creates pottery based on traditional Caddo techniques and forms;⁶⁴ his *Caddo Triangles* bowl (Figure 19) incorporates similar geometric shapes. Finally, Chad Nish Earles' *Tah'-nah-ha*

⁶⁴ Chase KahWinHut Earles, "Ancient & Pre-Contact Caddo Methods and Materials," *Caddo Pottery*, last updated March 11, 2015, <http://www.caddopottery.com/firing.3.0.php>.

Skateboard expresses sovereignty through its title: *Tah'-nah-ha* means “buffalo” in the Hasinai dialect of Caddo language.⁶⁵

Both of these works – Crystal Worl’s *Emerging Octopus* and Chad Nish Earles *Tah'-nah-ha Skateboard* – are excellent examples of contemporary artworks by Native American artists that express visual sovereignty within the medium of skateboard deck graphics. In addition to expressing sovereignty through the use of culturally-specific imagery and style, these graphics stand in stark contrast with culturally-appropriative mass-market board graphics and, by virtue of their placement on skateboard decks, engage with the politics of land use and land-based sovereignty. As I will discuss in the next chapter, discussions of skateboarding are inextricably tied to issues of land use and, within the context of contemporary settler colonialism in the United States, these and other skateboard deck graphics expressing Native American visual sovereignty can be understood as challenging colonial claims to geographical sovereignty through their use by Native skaters.

Chapter 3: Skateboarding as Resistance and Revitalization: Wounded Knee Skateboards, the Four Directions Skatepark, and Decolonizing the Concrete Wave

⁶⁵ Michael Sheyahshe, “Language Preservation,” *The Caddo Nation*, accessed April 28, 2017, <http://caddonation-nsn.gov/caddo-language/>.

In addition to expressions of visual sovereignty, some Native American artists, graphic designers, and skaters are utilizing the visual and material culture of skateboarding to more directly address issues of land tenure, youth culture, geographical sovereignty, and settler colonialism in North America. Through the design of websites and social media, as well as skateboard deck graphics and skateparks, companies such as Wounded Knee Skateboard Manufacturing & Propaganda draw explicit connections between skateboarding, settler colonialism, and the politics of land-based sovereignty in North America. Organizations such as The Stronghold Society link skateboarding to Native youth cultures and support the construction of skateparks in reservation communities to counter the epidemics of violence, substance abuse, and suicide that Native American youth in these communities often face. Skateboarding has, for some Native communities such as those at Pine Ridge and Manderson, South Dakota, a means of reconnecting youth with tribal cultures and enacting resistance to settler colonial control of the landscape.

Wounded Knee Skateboard Manufacturing & Propaganda's Statements and History

Wounded Knee Skateboard Manufacturing and Propaganda is a contemporary manufacturer and retailer of skateboard decks and skateboarding apparel owned and operated by Jim Murphy, who is of Lenni Lenape ancestry.⁶⁶ The company utilizes the media of skateboard deck graphics and web design to both promote skateboarding among Native American youth and to educate the broader American skateboarding

⁶⁶ Carol Berry, "Skateboarding Helping American Indians," *Indian Country Today*, last updated July 20, 2011, <https://indiancountrymedianetwork.com/news/skateboarding-helping-american-indians/>.

community about the 1890 massacre at Wounded Knee, South Dakota. The company's website opens with a statement that clearly establishes the tone and priorities of the company. The statement (Figure 20) reads as follows:

On December 28th, 1890, a band of 300 Lakota Indians were taken to Wounded Knee Creek in South Dakota by 500 Seventh Cavalry soldiers. On the morning of the 29th, the Lakota found themselves surrounded by Col. James Forsyth and his men. Assuring the Lakota their safety, soldiers then proceeded to disarm them of any weapons. Tension began to mount and a scuffle broke out between a Lakota man and a soldier. Without hesitation the military opened fire, killing over 200 men, women, and children in one hour. Those who managed to escape the massacre fled to the surrounding hills and were either captured and executed, or froze to death during the night. The U.S. Government referred to this incident as a "battle," claiming the cavalry responded in self defense despite the fact that the Lakota were unarmed, outnumbered, and starving. The 7th Cavalry was given medals for its genocidal actions at Wounded Knee. Close to 300 innocent people were murdered on December 29th, 1890 for selfish and ignorant reasons concerning imperialism, greed, and thievery. **NEVER FORGET.**⁶⁷

These words, which appear in bold, all-capital yellow text against a black background, occupy the entire center of the webpage and demand to be read before visitors click the red "ENTER" button below the text. In this way, this block of text serves as a gateway to the remainder of the Wounded Knee Skateboards website. Visitors are unable to shop for skateboards without first acknowledging, at least in passing, that the 1890 massacre at Wounded Knee remains relevant today, is rooted to the land itself, and is connected to the practice of skateboarding. This statement centers the experience and understanding of the Wounded Knee massacre from the perspective of contemporary Native American people, at least those individuals associated with this skateboard company, which takes its name from the location where the massacre occurred. By using this statement as a gateway, Wounded Knee Skateboards suggests

⁶⁷ Wounded Knee Skateboards, "NEVER FORGET," *Wounded Knee Skateboards*, last updated 2011, <http://www.woundedkneeskateboards.net/>.

that educating their customer base, rather than simply selling skateboards, is a primary motivation and objective of the company.

A second statement (Figure 21) on the website further illustrates Wounded Knee Skateboards' objectives:

Either through the medium of skateboarding or in the pursuit of knowledge, we feel that it is important for our purpose to be understood. We are not here to solely make skateboards, but to remind our country of those whose land we now reside. There are many things in the world that are not recognized or fully understood, and we feel we owe our attention to those outside the mainstream. In its brief history, skateboarding has been greeted with skepticism and labeled as an outcast form of youth rebellion. In reality, skateboarding is a freedom of expression and a break from the normalities of society that many get sucked into. So, we invite you to continue this form of resistance and learn more about what is going on around you.⁶⁸

This statement directly ties the activity of skateboarding to the ownership and use of land in North America. In other words, Wounded Knee Skateboards draws a direct connection between their products and settler colonialism in North America. To supplement and support this stance, the company includes a History section on their website. This portion of the site details several conflicts between the Lakota and the United States' government, including nineteenth-century treaties that fractured the Lakota land base and threatened Lakota peoples' physical and cultural survival. This History section of the website also describes Wovoka's prophecies and the processes that lead to the creation and spread of the Ghost Dance in the early 1890s. The historical narrative details the events that led up to the death of Sitting Bull, the United States' military suppression of the Ghost Dance, and ultimately the massacre at Wounded Knee, told from the perspective of both recorded first-hand accounts by

⁶⁸ Wounded Knee Skateboards, "Statement," *Wounded Knee Skateboards*, last updated 2011, http://woundedkneeskateboards.net/Site/?page_id=19.

Lakota witnesses and interviews with Oglala Lakota elders.⁶⁹ Wounded Knee Skateboards' company philosophy, then, is to simultaneously promote both expressions of individual identity and collective Native American sovereignty through the promotion and sale of their skateboards, apparel, and the information shared on the company's website.

Wounded Knee Skateboards' Deck Graphics

In addition to the statements and history included on the commercial website, Wounded Knee Skateboards promotes products that express Native American visual sovereignty, challenge the legitimacy of settler colonialism, and tie questions of sovereignty to the land itself through the medium of skateboard deck graphics. Unlike other commercial skateboard manufacturers that appropriate stereotyped Native American imagery (such as Zero Skateboards, discussed above), Wounded Knee Skateboards currently promotes deck graphics designed by Nakota Designs, Inc., a full-service design firm offering consultation, design layout, and graphics development. Walt Pourier, an Oglala Lakota artist and activist originally from Pine Ridge Reservation, is the founder of Nakota Designs, Inc., as well as the company's creative director. He was a 2013 artist-in-residence at the Denver Art Museum, and his artwork

⁶⁹ Wounded Knee Skateboards, "History: Wovoka & the Ghost Dance...the Wounded Knee Massacre," *Wounded Knee Skateboards*, last updated 2011, http://woundedkneeskateboards.net/Site/?page_id=13.

for Wounded Knee Skateboards both honors Lakota holy men and leaders and critiques several centuries of settler colonialism in the United States.⁷⁰

Two of the deck graphics currently for sale on the Wounded Knee Skateboards website depict specific Lakota leaders: Black Elk and Sitting Bull. The *Black Elk* deck (Figure 22) represents Black Elk's portrait from the shoulders up. The image, oriented with the board placed parallel to the ground, also includes the Wounded Knee Skateboards logo. The entire graphic is composed using red, black, and white. The portrait of Black Elk occupies the very center of the graphic, in red and black, with his headdress and other regalia represented in black and white. Directly below the portrait, two lines of text in block capital white lettering read "BLACK ELK" and, below that "OGLALA LAKOTA HEALER." To the right of the portrait, the words "Black Elk has spoken" appear in red text.

The *Sitting Bull* deck graphic (Figure 23) is oriented perpendicular to the ground and similarly represents a portrait of Sitting Bull. This deck graphic is composed in yellow, red, and black, with the portrait of Sitting Bull in yellow and black against a red background. As was the case with the *Black Elk* graphic, this skateboard deck graphic identifies Sitting Bull specifically, in text below his image. Both the *Black Elk* and *Sitting Bull* skateboard deck graphics are based on historical photographs of these two men. The addition of Black Elk's and Sitting Bull's names to these graphics ensures that these images are read as representations of specific people, rather than as

⁷⁰ Walt Pourier, "Artist in Residence at the Denver Art Museum for 3 months!," *Nakota Designs*, last updated March 8, 2013, <http://www.nakotadesigns.com/news/artist-in-residence-at-the-denver-art-museum-for-3-months>.

stereotypical representations of Native American men, as is the case with Jamie Thomas's signature decks, discussed above.

Another design, *Progression of Land Loss*, is available from Wounded Knee Skateboards both as a deck graphic and as a t-shirt design. This graphic (Figure 24) represents five outlines of the political borders of the continental United States, depicted in white against a black background. The graphic is oriented horizontally, with the skateboard's kicktails parallel to the ground, and the five maps of the United States are labeled with dates in white text below each map. The dates are 1491, 1850, 1865, 1880, and 1990. From left to right, the five maps transform from an entirely black landmass, outlined in white, to a predominately white landmass, with black specks representing Native American reservation lands. The final map, 1990, also includes the word "UNJUST" in black capital text across the field of white. Above the five United States' maps are the words "a north american progression of land loss" in red text. Below the images are the name and logo of Wounded Knee Skateboard Manufacturing & Propaganda.

This deck graphic is significant for the way in which it draws explicit connections between the skateboard and the use and control of land in North America. In this graphic, the maps, which outline contemporary political boundaries, are represented in white, alluding to the Euro-American colonial powers that created the United States through the dispossession of Native American peoples' lands.

Progression of Land Loss makes visible the history of settler colonialism in the United States: in 1491, 100% of what is now the continental United States was Indigenous land, but by the turn of the twentieth century, less than five percent of this land

remained under Indigenous control.⁷¹ This graphic, through the text that appears at the top of the image, challenges the assumed “progress” of Manifest Destiny, the Euro-American philosophy that enabled, encouraged, and continues to support, the dispossession of Native American peoples of their lands and natural resources. The addition of the word “UNJUST” on the fifth map makes clear this graphic’s critique of settler colonialism in the United States.

Flow to the Pine Ridge Reservation Skateboarding Community

As discussed above, Wounded Knee Skateboard Manufacturing & Propaganda presents itself as more than a commercial enterprise. The company makes clear that the manufacturing and sale of skateboards serves not simply to generate revenue, but to support cultural projects that are relevant to Native American youth communities, especially Northern Plains Reservation communities, such as Pine Ridge and Manderson, South Dakota. On their Facebook page, Wounded Knee Skateboards writes, “We are here to sell skateboards in order to give them away to skateboarders on the Pine Ridge Reservation to support the skateboard culture.”⁷² Their Facebook page also features many photographs of children and adolescents happily decorating and displaying skateboard decks. Wounded Knee Skateboards, then, flows merchandise to skaters at Pine Ridge as a central part of their business plan. This type of flow⁷³ directly

⁷¹ Jolene Rickard, “Sovereignty: A Line in the Sand,” in *Strong Hearts: Native American Visions and Voices*, ed. Peggy Roalf (New York: Aperture, 1995), 51.

⁷² Wounded Knee Skateboards, “Wounded Knee Skateboards,” *Facebook*, accessed February 16, 2017, <https://www.facebook.com/woundedknee.skateboards/>.

⁷³ In skateboarding culture, *flow* refers to both formal and informal sponsorships in which companies provide individual skateboarders with free merchandise in exchange for company loyalty and representation at competitive events. Merchandise varies and

encourages and sustains skateboarding as a youth activity at Pine Ridge, as many of the skaters at Pine Ridge Reservation would likely be unable to participate without flow merchandise. Wounded Knee Skateboards decks retail for \$50 each,⁷⁴ not counting wheels and truck assemblies, which easily double the price of a new skateboard. Add in the cost of skate shoes and griptape, and considering that the aggressive and repetitive nature of skateboarding means the frequent replacement of skateboard parts, and the cost of participating in skateboarding culture rapidly adds up.

This economic barrier to participation is highly significant in communities like Pine Ridge Reservation, which is frequently cited as among the poorest communities in the United States. One humanitarian organization, Friends of Pine Ridge Reservation, states that the Pine Ridge community of approximately 40,000 people faces unemployment rates over 80%, with over 97% of the population living at or below the federal poverty line, making Pine Ridge, South Dakota the poorest county in the entire United States. According to this organization, Pine Ridge Reservation residents face overcrowding, poor health care, lack of infrastructure and industry, high unemployment, extreme weather, and extremely high youth suicide rates.⁷⁵ Therefore, whereas flow sponsorships typically represent an early investment by a manufacturer or retailer in the ascendant career of a young amateur skateboarder, Wounded Knee Skateboard's flow to

includes stickers, patches, clothing, shoes, wheels, trucks, decks and just about anything else that relates to skateboarding.

⁷⁴ Wounded Knee Skateboards, "Product," *Wounded Knee Skateboards*, last updated 2011, http://woundedkneeskateboards.net/Site/?page_id=2.

⁷⁵ Friends of Pine Ridge Reservation, "Statistics About Pine Ridge Reservation," *Friends of Pine Ridge Reservation*, last updated 2016, <https://friendsofpineridgereservation.org/about-pine-ridge-reservation-and-foprr/statistics-about-pine-ridge-reservation/>.

the Pine Ridge Reservation youth communities is instead an investment in the communities of young people living at Pine Ridge and an effort to provide Oglala Lakota youth with concrete connections to community culture.

*The Stronghold Society, Community-Sponsored Skateboarding,
and the Wounded Knee Four Directions Skatepark*

The flow of merchandise to the Pine Ridge Reservation communities represents only one aspect of the support that Wounded Knee Skateboards offers to the skateboarding communities at Pine Ridge Reservation. In recent years, Wounded Knee Skateboards has worked closely with The Stronghold Society to encourage and support skateboarding among youth at Pine Ridge and Manderson, South Dakota in an effort to counter the very serious issues that Native American youth face within these communities, including violence, substance abuse, and suicide.⁷⁶

The Stronghold Society, which was founded by Walt Pourier of Nakota Designs, Inc., is a non-profit organization based in Thornton, Colorado that exists to promote skateboarding as a culturally-relevant social and athletic activity for youth of all races, but especially for Native American youth. The vision of the Stronghold Society is, “to create a future where youth of Native communities and non-Native communities will

⁷⁶ In recent years, Native American youth suicide has reached epidemic levels, with many attempted and completed suicides among youth at Pine Ridge, South Dakota and surrounding communities. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention reports that among people ages ten to twenty-four in the United States, Native American and Alaskan Native youth are at the highest risk of any cultural or ethnic group for suicide-related fatalities. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, “Suicide Prevention: Youth Suicide,” *United States Department of Health & Human Services*, last updated March 10, 2015, https://www.cdc.gov/violenceprevention/suicide/youth_suicide.html.

live a successful, healthy way of life, both mentally and physically, to become the leaders of tomorrow.”⁷⁷ The Stronghold Society seeks to promote healthy ways of life for youth through the sponsorship of language revitalization programs, food distribution, suicide prevention programs, and arts programs. The Stronghold Society has also sponsored skateboarding events, and most relevant to my discussion here, offers support for the creation of skateparks in Native American communities. The Stronghold Society promotes these various initiatives with the goal of inspiring, “confidence, creativity, hope, and ambition for the youth of Native communities and non-Native communities...while encouraging youth to take action to live a healthy life in mind, body, and spirit.”⁷⁸

The Stronghold Society, then, takes skateboarding beyond the realm of visual sovereignty and engages with actual land usage through the creation of skateparks on Reservation lands, including the Wounded Knee Four Directions Toby Eagle Bull Memorial Skatepark at Pine Ridge. Information on the Four Directions Skatepark appears on the Wounded Kneed Skateboards website. According to the site, The Stronghold Society’s “Live Life” and “Call to Action” campaigns collaborated in the creation of the Wounded Knee 4-Directions Skatepark and Toby Eagle Bull Memorial, a gift to the communities at Pine Ridge Reservation that was completed in October of 2012. The unveiling of the skatepark and memorial included important cultural activities, including a Lakota Prayer and Drum, as well as music provided by rock and

⁷⁷ The Stronghold Society, “Stronghold Society: Live Life Call to Action Campaigns – About Us,” *The Stronghold Society*, last modified November 21, 2016, http://strongholdsociety.org/?page_id=28.

⁷⁸ Ibid.

punk bands, food giveaways, merchandise flow to youth skateboarders, and of course, lots of skating.⁷⁹

This 6,000 square foot skatepark was built by Grindline Skateparks⁸⁰ and is significant for the ways in which it directly connects skaters with the landscape. Skateparks are purpose built for skateboarding and the concrete used in their construction blankets the natural landscape in a collection of features that flow seamlessly into one another in much the same way that a hill gives way to a valley. One of the most prominent and popular features of skatepark design are the bowls. These bowls, which are derived from swimming pool design, literally carve skateboarding terrain into the surface of the Earth. As with in-ground swimming pools, the upper edges of skatepark bowls are flush with the ground and demarcated by tile coping. Below the coping, the walls of each bowl descend into the ground, eventually sloping into the floor section of the feature. At Pine Ridge Reservation, this connection between skateboarding and the landscape itself is highly significant.

The Stronghold Society, along with the local Lakota community, sponsored the construction of the Four Directions Skatepark with the explicit understanding that this skatepark would connect youth at Pine Ridge with one another, with their communities, and with their land. In the Levi's Skateboarding documentary *Skateboarding at Pine Ridge*, Walt Pourier and Brian "Bubba" Sherman, a young Lakota man and local skater,

⁷⁹ Wounded Knee Skateboards, "Four Directions Skatepark," *Wounded Knee Skateboards*, last updated June 2012, http://woundedkneeskateboards.net/Site/?page_id=219.

⁸⁰ Grindline Skateparks, "4-Directions Skatepark – Pine Ridge, SD," *Grindline Skateparks*, accessed April 3, 2017, <http://grindline.com/skateparks/4-directions-skatepark/>.

discuss the significance of the skatepark to the Pine Ridge community. Pourier relates the current generation of Lakota youth the Black Elk's Seventh Generation Prophecy and states that skateboarding is one of the ways that The Stronghold Society is helping to bring this prophecy to fulfillment. Pourier and Sherman also connect building the skateparks at Pine Ridge and Manderson, South Dakota with suicide prevention programs aimed at children and adolescents. Of the Pine Ridge Reservation skating community, Walt Pourier states, "skateboarding saves lives and you literally see that here."⁸¹ Throughout the documentary, footage of skateboarders at the Four Directions Skatepark are paired with footage of dancers in regalia. Additionally, the documentary includes passages where Lakota adults and elders sing and pray for the youth who skate at the skatepark, often pictured using the flow merchandise provided by Wounded Knee Skateboards. At one point in the documentary, children with *Progression of Land Loss* decks approach the bowl of the Four Directions Skatepark in a powerful image that combines this skateboard deck graphic's visual and textual critique of settler colonialism with a direct engagement of Native skaters with Reservation land. Through the creation of the Four Directions Skatepark, as well as through the flow of merchandise to Native youth skating communities, artist/activist Walt Pourier, along with The Stronghold Society, Wounded Knee Skateboards, and the Pine Ridge Reservation community, combines images expressing visual sovereignty with the direct engagement of the reservation landscape through skateboarding. In effect, the Lakota

⁸¹ Greg Hunt, *Skateboarding in Pine Ridge*, digital, directed by Greg Hunt (2015; San Francisco, CA: Levi's Skateboarding; 2015.) digital, <http://woundedkneeskateboards.net/Site/?p=251>.

communities at Pine Ridge and Manderson, South Dakota utilize skateboarding to express sovereignty on and within their land.

Skateboarding and the Settler Colonial Landscape

Though it's hard to overstate the significance of reservation skateparks like the Four Directions Skatepark at Pine Ridge, discussed above, the political implications of skateboarding in the United States extend beyond Native-controlled reservation lands to the entirety of the North American continent. Skateboarding often travels well beyond the designated areas of skateparks and into the paved urban environments that make up much of the contemporary North American landscape. As architectural historian Iain Borden has asserted, contemporary street skateboarding is essentially an alternative mode of engagement with familiar components of the built environment, such as benches and handrails.⁸² What is common to street skating across North America, and indeed internationally, is the utilization of public spaces by skaters for purposes wholly unintended by either the state or private entities that constructed those spaces.

Skateboarding, like it's precursor surfing, is intimately connected to, and in conversation with, the landscape. Like all bodily activities, skateboarding must occur somewhere in space and relate both to that space and to the bodies acting within that space. Borden, Professor of Architecture and Urban Culture at University College London, researches the intersections of the human-built urban environment and the everyday perceptions of the people moving through and inhabiting such spaces and, in

⁸² Iain Borden, *Skateboarding, Space and the City: Architecture and the Body* (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2001), 180.

doing so, builds on the work of Henri Lefebvre. Borden's book *Skateboarding, Space and the City: Architecture and the Body* remains one of the few scholarly investigations focusing specifically on skateboarding that I have found to date. This book provides an important discussion of the intersections of the built environment and varieties of human activity within it, particularly skateboarding.

According to Borden, street skateboarding in paved public areas has increasingly gained in popularity since in the 1980s, a practice that he views as critiquing the assumptions of the city itself and, simultaneously, gesturing at future understandings of urban environments.⁸³ Borden claims that, “[t]he urban practice of skateboarding implicitly yet continuously critiques contemporary cities,” and that it does so by suggesting, “that pleasure rather than work, use values rather than exchange values, activity rather than passivity, performing rather than recording, are potential components of the future, as yet unknown city.”⁸⁴ Borden's analysis of skateboarding in urban environments is insightful and, at times, densely theoretical, and it carefully interrogates the relationship of architecture to the body in motion. However, I wish to broaden the discussion begun in *Skateboarding, Space and the City: Architecture and the Body* within the context of settler colonialism in the contemporary United States. Borden's scholarship, while thorough, fails to consider the land-use politics inherent in settler colonialism in North America. For instance, Borden identifies quotidian spaces such as paved public streets and squares as locations highly preferred by street skaters, yet he describes such locations as spaces, “not yet dominated by the state.”⁸⁵ However,

⁸³ Ibid., 176.

⁸⁴ Ibid., 173.

⁸⁵ Ibid., 187.

in the contemporary North American context of settler colonialism, I argue that *all such paved spaces*, when not constructed by Native communities on Native-controlled land, constitute spaces very dominated by the state. Seemingly neutral constructions such as sidewalks, parking lots, and other aspects of the built environment, can potentially be interpreted as settler colonial impositions on Indigenous land. Therefore, repurposing the concrete waves built by settler colonial institutions for street skateboarding directly challenges the authority of those colonial institutions and enacts dramatic, if temporary, control over the land itself.

As I have argued throughout this thesis, issues of Native American land-based sovereignty and skateboarding intersect every time a skateboarder steps on a skateboard in North America. In the wake of the historical and ongoing removals of Native American people from traditional land bases, as well as the continued dispossession of land-based resources, skateboarding becomes a politically-charged act. Whether skating reservation-based skateparks or street skating in both urban and rural areas, skateboarders stake claims to built environments and occupy space. The nature of street skateboarding – fast paced, involving multiple surfaces, and re-appropriating spaces designed for pedestrian or automobile use – inherently questions the ways in which land can be used, and in what manner, and by whom.

At stake, then, in North American skateboarding are questions of capitalism, land use, land tenure, and, ultimately, geographical sovereignty. The Native American artists and organizations that I have discussed here express visual sovereignty through the medium of skateboard deck graphics, and promote skateboarding as a positive, community-building athletic and culturally-relevant pursuit within Native American

communities. In doing so, these organizations – and the individuals that they serve – enact geographical sovereignty through the practice of skateboarding in North America.

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Figures



Figure 1

Maids on the Waves
Wallace Mackay, 1874
Print



Figure 2

Duke Kahanamoku and his surfboard
Photograph taken at Waikiki Beach, Honolulu
c. 1915

The Endless Summer

A Bruce Brown Film In Color



In Search of the Perfect Wave

On any day of the year it's summer somewhere in the world. Bruce Brown's latest color film highlights the adventures of two young American surfers, Robert August and Mike Hynson who follow this everlasting summer around the world. Their unique expedition takes them to Senegal, Ghana, Nigeria, South Africa, Australia, New Zealand, Tahiti, Hawaii and California. Share their experience as they search the world for the perfect wave which may be forming just over the next horizon. **BRUCE BROWN FILMS**



Figure 3

The Endless Summer

**Bruce Brown Films, 50th anniversary edition movie poster
1966**



Figure 4

Surfin' Safari
The Beach Boys, Capitol Records, Inc.
1962, LP



Figure 5

Ten Little Indians/County Fair
The Beach Boys, Capitol Records, Inc.
1962, 45 RPM record

CAPITOL FULL
DIMENSIONAL



STEREO

SURFER GIRL

THE BEACH BOYS



LITTLE DEUCE COUPE • SURFER GIRL • CATCH A WAVE • THE SURFER MOON • SOUTH BAY SURFER • HAWAII
IN MY ROOM • THE ROCKING SURFER • SURFER'S RULE • OUR CAR CLUB • YOUR SUMMER DREAM • BOOGIE WOODIE

Figure 6

Surfer Girl
The Beach Boys, Capitol Records, Inc.
1963, LP



Figure 7

Surfin' U.S.A./Shutdown
The Beach Boys, Capitol Records
1963, single

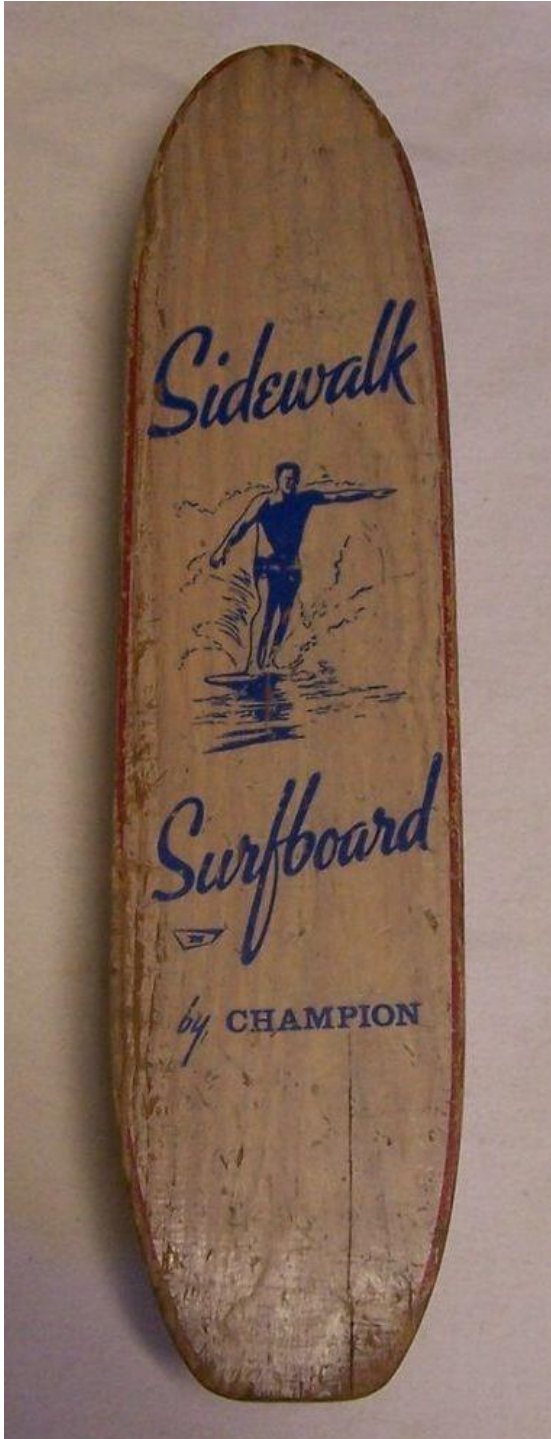


Figure 8

Sidewalk Surfboard

Champion, wood, paint, steel wheel and truck assemblies
1960s



Figure 9

**Detail of *Sidewalk Surfboard* wheel and truck assemblies
Champion, wood, paint, and steel
1960s**

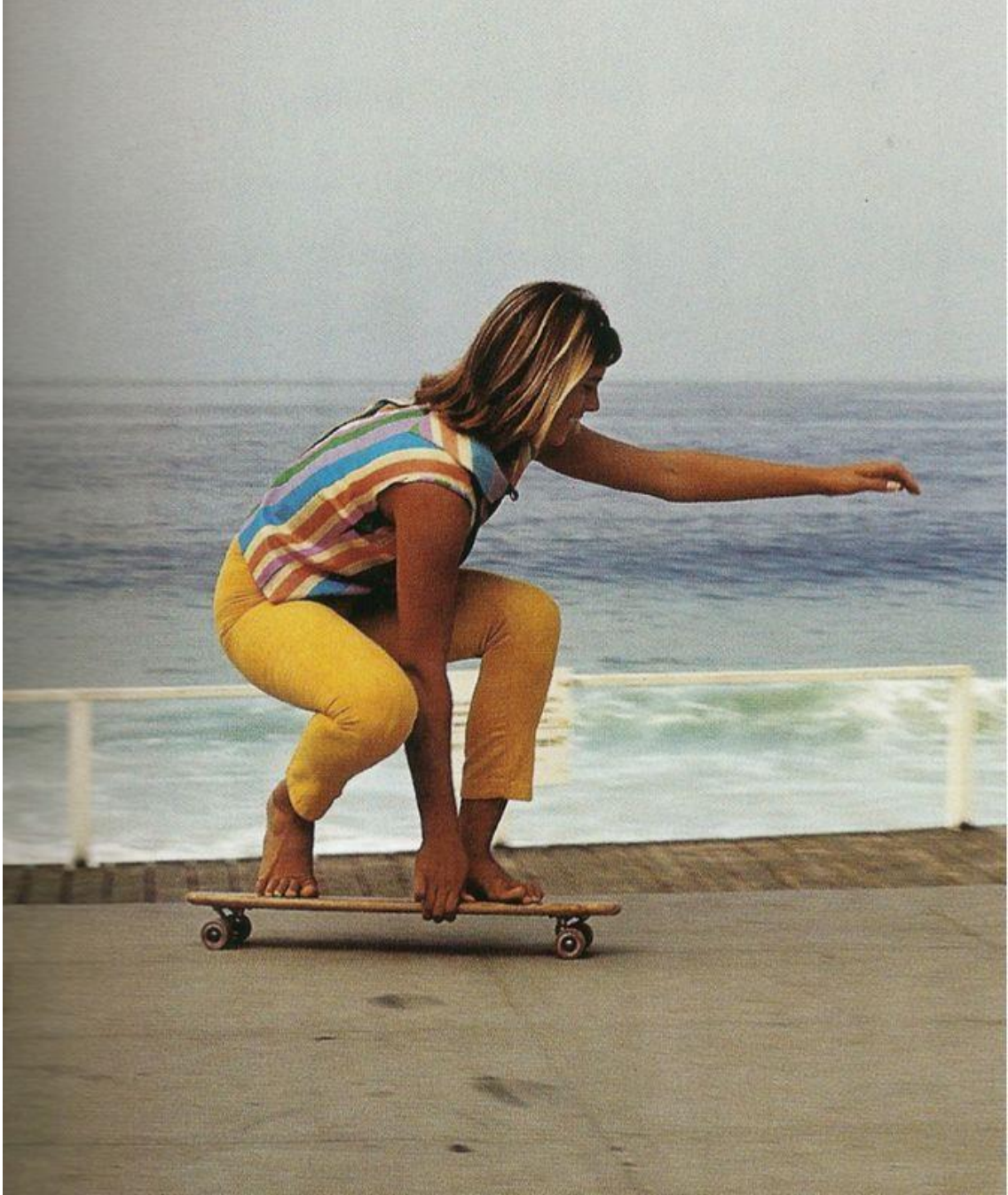


Figure 10

Robin Calhoun, Laguna Beach, 1964

LeRoy Grannis

Photograph, 1964



Figure 11

**Cover of LIFE Magazine
May 14, 1965**



Figure 12

Native

Jamie Thomas and Zero Skateboards

Canadian Maple skateboard deck with screenprint graphic, 2010s



Figure 13

Chief

Jamie Thomas and Zero Skateboards

Canadian Maple skateboard deck and scenprint graphic, 2010s



Figure 14

Dark Ages

Jamie Thomas and Zero Skateboards

Canadian Maple skateboard deck and screenprint graphic, 2010s

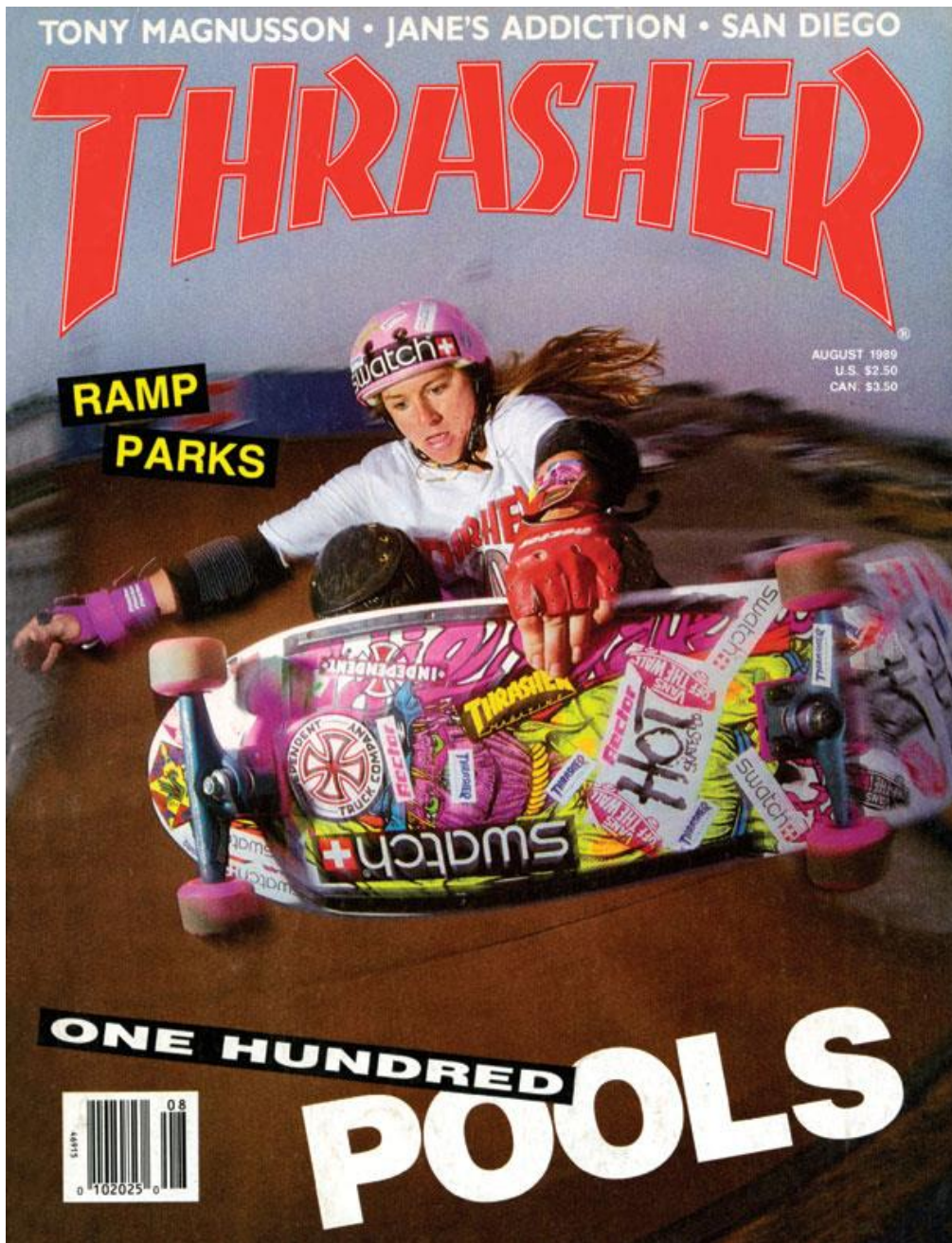


Figure 15

Cover of Thrasher Magazine, Cara-Beth Burnside
August 1989



Figure 16

Lady Luck

Torey Pudwill and Plan B Skateboards

Canadian Maple skateboard deck and screenprint graphic, 2010s



Figure 17

Emerging Octopus

Crystal Kaakeyáa Worl Demientieff

Canadian Maple skateboard deck with screenprint graphic, 2010s



Figure 18

Tah'-nah-ha Skateboard

Chad Nish Earles

2013, Acrylic on Canadian Maple skateboard deck



CADDO TRIANGLES
TERRA COTTA
KILN FIRED AND SMUDGED
8"DIA X 4" TALL
KAH-WIN-HUT 7-21-2016

PHOTOGRAPH © 2016 WWW.CADDOPOTTERY.COM

Figure 19

Caddo Triangles Bowl
Chase Kah-Win-Hut Earles
Terra cotta, 2016

ON DECEMBER 28TH, 1890, A BAND OF 300 LAKOTA INDIANS WERE TAKEN TO WOUNDED KNEE CREEK IN SOUTH DAKOTA BY 500 SEVENTH CALVARY SOLDIERS. ON THE MORNING OF THE 29TH, THE LAKOTA FOUND THEMSELVES SURROUNDED BY COL. JAMES FORSYTH AND HIS MEN. ASSURING THE LAKOTA THEIR SAFETY, SOLDIERS THEN PROCEEDED TO DISARM THEM OF ANY WEAPONS, TENSION BEGAN TO MOUNT AND A SCUFFLE BROKE OUT BETWEEN A LAKOTA MAN AND A SOLDIER. WITHOUT HESITATION THE MILITARY OPENED FIRE, KILLING OVER 200 MEN, WOMEN, AND CHILDREN IN ONE HOUR. THOSE WHO MANAGED TO ESCAPE THE MASSACRE FLED TO THE SURROUNDING HILLS AND WERE EITHER CAPTURED AND EXECUTED, OR FROZE TO DEATH DURING THE NIGHT. THE U.S. GOVERNMENT REFERRED TO THIS INCIDENT AS A "BATTLE", CLAIMING THE CALVARY RESPONDED IN SELF DEFENSE DESPITE THE FACT THAT THE LAKOTA WERE UNARMED, OUTNUMBERED, AND STARVING. THE 7TH CALVARY WAS GIVEN MEDALS FOR ITS GENOCIDAL ACTIONS AT WOUNDED KNEE. CLOSE TO 300 INNOCENT PEOPLE WERE MURDERED ON DECEMBER 29TH, 1890 FOR SELFISH AND IGNORANT REASONS CONCERNING IMPERIALISM, GREED, AND THIEVERY.

NEVER FORGET.

Figure 20

Wounded Knee Skateboards Website
Wounded Knee Skateboards
Website, 2017

EITHER THROUGH THE MEDIUM OF SKATEBOARDING OR IN THE PURSUIT OF KNOWLEDGE, WE FEEL THAT IT IS IMPORTANT FOR OUR PURPOSE TO BE UNDERSTOOD. WE ARE NOT HERE TO SOLELY MAKE SKATEBOARDS, BUT TO REMIND OUR COUNTRY OF THOSE WHOSE LAND WE NOW RESIDE. THERE ARE MANY THINGS IN THE WORLD THAT ARE NOT RECOGNIZED OR FULLY UNDERSTOOD, AND WE FEEL WE OWE OUR ATTENTION TO THOSE OUTSIDE THE MAINSTREAM. IN ITS BRIEF HISTORY, SKATEBOARDING HAS BEEN GREETED WITH SKEPTISM AND LABELED AS AN OUTCAST FORM OF YOUTH REBELLION. IN REALITY, SKATEBOARDING IS A FREEDOM OF EXPRESSION AND A BREAK FROM THE NORMALITIES OF SOCIETY THAT MANY GET SUCKED INTO. SO, WE INVITE YOU TO CONTINUE THIS FORM OF RESISTANCE AND LEARN MORE ABOUT WHAT IS GOING ON AROUND YOU.

Figure 21

Statement
Wounded Knee Skateboards
Website, 2017



Figure 22

Black Elk

Nakota Designs, Inc. and Wounded Knee Skateboards

Canadian Maple skateboard deck and screenprint graphic, 2010s



Figure 23

Sitting Bull

Nakota Designs, Inc. and Wounded Knee Skateboards

Canadian Maple skateboard deck and screenprint graphic, 2010s



Figure 24

A North American Progression of Land Loss

Nakota Designs, Inc. and Wounded Knee Skateboards

Canadian Maple skateboard deck and screenprint graphic, 2010s