

**mostos-awasis asiniy:
Iconoclasm in the Age of Settler Colonialism**

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Abstract:

Indigenous pedagogy includes the interplay between physical, visual, spiritual, and intellectual components of an experience to develop knowledge, spirituality, wisdom, and ontology. Ceremony is central to this method. As many Indigenous ceremonies are tied to sites in Indigenous territories, the land thus creates human life (Wildcat, 2016). In this theoretical application, Grandfather Rock (mostos-awasis asiniy) a 400-tonne rock sacred to several Indigenous nations on the Great Plains of Turtle Island (an area of what is now known as c/a/n/a/d/a [Stewart, 2015: xiv]¹), is imbued with power beyond that of any state-sponsored monument. Therefore, its 1966 destruction demonstrates an unexamined component of Canadian iconoclasm. While contemporary Canadians wring their hands over the supposed violence towards and loss of colonial monuments, they overlook the historical and ongoing destruction of sacred Indigenous places and spaces. Indigenous monuments such as mostos-awasis asiniy shape Indigenous belief, relationships, and societies. The physical and written treatment of mostos-awasis asiniy over the past several decades, is indicative of its ongoing centrality in Indigenous life and pedagogies, and a settler imagination that denies Indigenous history, presence, and futurity.

Keywords: mostos-awasis asiniy; iconoclasm; Indigenous monuments; settler colonialism; Indigenous pedagogy

I believe in inclusivity. Some kids are weird, and I was one of them, and that is probably how my commitment to all began. In 2000, 19-year-old Omeasoo, wearing her tan-coloured golf shirt, *Wanuskewin*, in brown, emblazoned on the chest, led a group of school children on the “Trail of the Bison” (*Wanuskewin*, 2022). The “Trail of the Bison” featured a “Bison Rubbing Stone,” where bison, the massive-shouldered, furry brown boulders on the landscape that fed my people for centuries and pounded the landscape with their thunder, sidled up to the stone and gave themselves a nice scratch. Must have felt good up there on that prairie mesa, the hot sun beating down and the flies finding sweet meat under layers of locked fur. These are the kinds of thoughts I enjoyed on these excursions and was probably telling the weird kid with long blonde hair, when they looked at me with enormous sparkling green eyes and said, “You must love that you get to walk every day in the footsteps of your ancestors.” I heard the sounds of buffalo² pounding around me as their ghosts rushed over the edges of small cliffs at *Wanuskewin*, but until that moment, had not felt that exact connection with my ancestors. Weird.

But, of course, I did walk that connection with my ancestors, smell it, see it, and, importantly, learn it. This insightful child connected the space around them immediately to themselves and then to me. We are all connected to the spaces around us, and we are formed by them. When we form these spaces (classrooms, homes, parks and so on), we are also forming ourselves and our relationships. That is the purpose of taking school children on the Trail of the Bison. A current, longer tour “focuses on the history and the relationship between bison and Indigenous People of the Northern Plains, the cultural and spiritual significance of bison, and the longstanding relationship between people and animals” (*Wanuskewin*, 2022). Why would the trail itself be a part of the pedagogy, if individuals were only required to read these sentences? The trail itself becomes the lesson, both taught and learnt.

One might consider this type of pedagogy land-based, place-based, experiential, or Indigenous (Wildcat et al., 2014). Each term has its own history and purpose. In all forms these educational approaches are contextual, historicized, and for many, invisible (Goeman, 2013: 5-6). Decades-long debates around colonial monuments or those celebrating empire rage around the world and brush past the pedagogical value of built space. The visual and spatial messages we create and that create us are powerful. The denial does not change their force. Scholars who discuss the role of monuments on Turtle Island have not yet cast their eyes on the monuments kept by Indigenous peoples, hidden in plain sight, across the country. These monuments, and their continued destruction, include the land itself, when we understand that the land creates us. In this article, I focus on the iconoclasm of *mostos-awasis asiniy*³, a powerful rock that sat on the Saskatchewan prairie long before it became Saskatchewan, and helped define the many nations that came to celebrate it for thousands of years. On a cold day in 1966, *mostos-awasis asiniy* was blown to pieces.

During my short-lived habitation of Epekwitk (Prince Edward Island), protestors in Montreal pulled down a statue of Canada’s first prime minister, Sir John A. Macdonald (JAM) (CBC News, 2020). As an Indigenous academic with perspectives on the symbolisms of place and space, I was asked by media outlets and other thoughtful organizations for my insights. At the time, I primarily emphasized the meaning of space-making as people-making and the concept of protest action on colonial statues as public art. I view and privilege this interpretation as an Indigenous or even, specifically *nehiyawan*, understanding. In this, I find myself in solidarity

with Black Lives Matter (BLM) Toronto organizer, artist, activist and thought-leader Syrus Marcus Ware (Ware, 2021). Ware is explicit about the artistic approaches (.DWG, 2020) the BLM movement took to the streets during protest, including interactions with significant statues.

JAM and other statues of figures implicated in cultural genocide across Turtle Island (Canada, the United States of America, and parts of Central America) are magnets for protestors and vandalism. Turtle Island is not alone in this phenomenon. Veerle Poupeye (2020), a Belgian-Jamaican art-lover, curator, and historian, collected a list of iconoclastic events in 2020. Poupeye's list described statues in England ("slaver Edward Colston" and imperialist Cecil Rhodes), Belgium (Congo Free State colonizer King Leopold II), and throughout the Caribbean in the 20th century that all met with activist intervention (2020).

Within this international milieu of colonialist critique, in the years following I was asked often, if not these monuments, what monuments? Firstly, while I have informed opinions, the Indigenous nation who represents the land should make that decision. Secondly, from my own perspective, the land is a monument, and it teaches us, just as a fabricated statue does. Finally, I considered that there are multiple Indigenous monuments, and most of them are sacred and secret. The one example I could think of in my own memory was the story of *mostos-awasis asiniy*, an Indigenous monument I had never seen, but that loomed large in my memory for the tale of its dramatic destruction.

With *mostos-awasis asiniy* (Soggie, 2012) in mind as an Indigenous monument, and an office loaned to me at the University of Saskatchewan for a month over summer 2022, I began to find out what I could in that short time, about the rock and its significance. Steven Thair, non-Indigenous lawyer, writer, and diver was the first person I contacted. In articles and interviews (Shaw TV Saskatoon, 2015), I could tell that he had done a lot of the research I would likely need to do. Thair was interested in all kinds of commemoration for this important rock, and he was kind enough to share his extensive collection of facts and interviews with me. I requested the insights of Indigenous academics, and fellow *nehiyaw iskwewak* Winona Wheeler and Tasha Hubbard, both versed in *nehiyaw* epistemologies and important Indigenous-Saskatchewan places. Dr. Hubbard, a filmmaker and literature scholar devoted to sites like *mostos-awasis asiniy*, directed me to the Saskatchewan Indigenous Cultural Centre (SICC), where I learnt more of the history of the relationship between the rock, its Indigenous visitors, and settlers in Saskatchewan. I also consulted with Doug Cuthand, *nehiyaw* historian, journalist, and filmmaker, who wrote about *mostos-awasis asiniy* in *Askiwina: A Cree World* (2007). These inquiries and the following secondary-source research do not thoroughly reflect the significance of *mostos-awasis asiniy*, and they are not meant to. Rather, the process of my introduction to *mostos-awasis asiniy* is meant as a commentary on how sacred Indigenous land, sites, and monuments are treated, physically—and as sites of public consciousness.

mostos-awasis asiniy (Old Man Buffalo Stone, *mistusini*, or *mostos-awasis asiniy*) was a massive, 400-tonne (400 male bison weigh about the same) rock or erratic (Yanko, 2012). An erratic (Dale, 2006) is the technical term for a large boulder set down by moving glaciers, several of which covered what is currently called Saskatchewan (Christianson, 1979; Kulig, 1996). The rock was climbable and sat, as you might imagine a buffalo would, having a rest. For hundreds of years, *mostos-awasis asiniy* hosted sacred meetings in the rolling, sunny prairie clefts now

called the Qu'Appelle Valley. The Nakoda and nehiyaw people, amongst others, recognized its sacred origin and included it in their epistemologies. Like mostos-awasis asiny's various names, stories shared by Elders from these nations differ significantly. Their stories offer a whole other level of study and importance given that they could recreate the worldviews, values, and teachings of each nation at a particular time in history. Together, mostos-awasis asiniy and its extensive library of knowledge kept within these nations, are a type of monument with invaluable importance. Despite its importance, in 1966, mostos-awasis asiniy was stuffed with dynamite and blown up. Its pieces are now in many hands, at memorial and sacred sites, and—its largest—beneath the cold waters of Lake Diefenbaker.

Monuments become stamps of place-creation by their makers. In this time and place, those that hold space have the authority and power to construct memorials and monuments and are supported by institutions that continue to participate in various forms of settler colonialism. Historian Nancy Shoemaker describes settler colonialism succinctly in a 2015 online article, “A Typology of Colonialism.” Shoemaker describes settler colonialism as it is generally known:

Large numbers of settlers claim land and become the majority. Employing “logic of elimination,” as Patrick Wolfe put it in the *American Historical Review*, they attempt to engineer the disappearance of the original inhabitants everywhere except in nostalgia. (2015)

The theory developed in the 1970s as scholars discussed African and Middle Eastern politics, and gathered steam through to the early 2000s, particularly with the work of Australian anthropologist Patrick Wolfe who focused his eye on Australian settlers (Veracini, 2022). Post-colonial and decolonial studies scholar, Gurminder K Bhabra's online project *Global Social Theory* provides the most thorough description of settler colonialism, tying many theorists' work into a logical whole:

First, settler colonisers “come to stay”: unlike colonial agents such as traders, soldiers, or governors, settler collectives intend to permanently occupy and assert sovereignty over indigenous lands. Second, settler colonial invasion is a structure, not an event: settler colonialism persists in the ongoing elimination of indigenous populations, and the assertion of state sovereignty and juridical control over their lands. Despite notions of post-coloniality, settler colonial societies do not stop being colonial when political allegiance to the founding metropole is severed. Third, settler colonialism seeks its own end: unlike other types of colonialism in which the goal is to maintain colonial structures and imbalances in power between coloniser and colonised, settler colonisation trends towards the ending of colonial difference in the form of a supreme and unchallenged settler state and people. However, this is not a drive to decolonise, but rather an attempt to eliminate the challenges posed to settler sovereignty by indigenous peoples' claims to land by eliminating indigenous peoples themselves and asserting false narratives and structures of settler belonging. (Barker & Lowman)

Settler colonialism has met with a few changes, but primarily is useful in understanding the momentum that comes to be driven by settlers, as relative newcomers on Indigenous soil, in

order to create legitimacy around their arrival, modes, and existence. Settler colonialism can be seen in many positive actions of the liberal state, where perception becomes more important than structural change. Indigenous peoples call for Land Back (Pasternak & King, 2019) to begin a discussion on restitution and redress of the genocidal actions of the past and present. In return, the federal government has made superficial and symbolic gestures such as the National Day for Truth and Reconciliation, National Indigenous Peoples' Day, monuments to missing and murdered Indigenous women, girls, and two-spirited individuals, and land acknowledgements ("Opening Words," 2022). Métis architect and academic David Fortin recently shared in an online professional development seminar for architects, the haunting words of Hawaiian activist and scholar, Poka Laenui, who writes of the last stage of colonization:

The traditional culture that simply refuses to die or go away is now transformed into the culture of the dominating society. A Christian church may now use an Indigenous person as a priest, permitting the priest to use the Indigenous language and to incorporate some Indigenous terms and practices within the church's framework of worship. Indigenous art that has survived may gain in popularity and form the basis for economic exploitation. Indigenous symbols in print may decorate modern dress. Indigenous musical instruments may be incorporated into modern music. Supporting Indigenous causes within the general colonial structure may become the popular political thing to do, exploiting the culture further. This exploitation may be committed by Indigenous as well as non-Indigenous people.
(2000: 80-81)

Laenui sets this stage as the next after "surface accommodation/tokenism," suggesting that this "transformation/exploitation" is more violent and final (2000: 80). An approach to monuments that favours more Indigenous monuments over a reckoning with Indigenous epistemologies through land and its ownership could also be seen as transformation/exploitation in Laenui's assessment.

To buttress the legitimacy of the Canadian state, Canadian statues and monuments deepen the settler nation's ties to its colonial history and, by extension, individual Canadians. Through monuments, the "truth" of Canadian belonging is stamped on the landscape. Historian and educational scholar Timothy J. Stanley describes how "banal patterns of cultural representation ... constantly repeat themselves" and are "woven into the material, symbolic, and embodied spaces ... that make up the Canadian state" (2019/2020: 90). Canadians walking purposefully—or not—down any particular Canadian street are inundated with the forms of what Canadian life is and means. This pedagogical creation includes symbols of a created past, such as statues of Canadian historical figures, mostly white and mostly men. Of the approximately 157 statues identified for an upcoming book project on monuments and memorials in the National Capital Region, about 55 are of men and perhaps five of these are men of colour.⁴

These artistic representations of what it means to be Canadian do not reflect the lived experience of Canadians and, further, limit the possibilities of community recognition in this way for most people. In Canada in 2016, "up to six ancestral origins per person were retained" (Statistics Canada, 2017), meaning, Canadians come from a lot of ancestors from many corners of the globe. If Canadians (and by extension, other settlers in other colonized states) are taught,

through these monuments, that to be white, male politicians is the only way to express power, the range of how to be an important Canadian is one-dimensional, restrictive, and unimaginative.

For those who seek monuments to belonging, meaningful connection, and an “eco-cultural restorative” (Wildcat, 2016) identity, such “stamps” exist beneath, besides, and around each step we take. Steven Thair recalls seeing a photo of mostos-awasis asiniy, the day after it was destroyed; Thair was a high school senior at the time. Much later in life, he used the story (Postmedia News, 2014) of mostos-awasis asiniy to coax himself into the cold, murky waters⁵ of diving in Saskatchewan. Thair wanted to find mostos-awasis asiniy, now over 70 feet underwater. Thair’s work included civil engineers, multiple archives, freedom of information requests, consultations with Elders such as Barry Ahenakew and the late Tyrone Tootoosis (James, 2017), and a “sidescanner” to capture sonar images beneath the water and horizontally (S. Thair, personal communication, August 12, 2022). Thair is so close to mostos-awasis asiniy that today he considers himself “part of the rock, and the rock is part of me” (S. Thair, personal communication, August 12, 2022).

Thair may be one of the few people who might know the whole story of mostos-awasis asiniy’s destruction, but Thair himself had only “rumours” to tell me one hot prairie day. He shared that one excuse used for its ruin was that it posed a risk to safe water navigation beneath the new lake created by the development of the Gardiner Dam (S. Thair, personal communication, August 14, 2022). A *Maclean’s* article states that the province could not or would not front the \$200,000 needed to remove mostos-awasis asiniy (Mitchell, 1967). Whoever made the final excuse does not change the fact that mostos-awasis asiniy was obliterated in violent fashion. The spectacle became its destruction. Articles and stories shared about mostos-awasis asiniy’s explosive end help locate the rock within a Canadian context of iconoclasm.

Thair found, in his travels, several small pieces of mostos-awasis asiniy, each with their own story attached. One piece was within the home of a man who had worked on the Gardiner Dam. The small rock was mounted, “like a sports trophy,” and polished on one side (S. Thair, personal communication, August 12, 2022). This partial and performative treatment of the body part of mostos-awasis asiniy, far from where it once lay, is a multi-pronged assault that magnifies the violence it experienced. The trophy aspect of mostos-awasis asiniy renders it akin to the spoils of war, something kept by a warrior or soldier. This piece of mostos-awasis asiniy is kept by an ostensibly ordinary Canadian, a man performing regular labour on a piece of infrastructure. This man is no fighter, and yet, the trophy turns him into one, an agent of state-led destruction and dominance in order to secure a settler future.

nehiyaw writer and producer Douglas Cuthand calls mostos-awasis asiniy “Old Man Buffalo Stone,” the name he heard from his father. Cuthand told me on another sunny August day, “There are a lot of stories of these things being desecrated” and immediately described the bulldozing of a full medicine wheel on top of a small-town hill for the local TV station transmission tower (personal communication, August 16, 2022). Douglas affirmed the loss of culture, history, pedagogy, and place-making with each one. As with many other stories in oral history, for mostos-awasis asiniy, “the story [of its origin] would be told right there, and that will never happen again. And that’s sad” (D. Cuthand, personal communication, August 16, 2022). At the time, “First Nations people were devastated as [the Prairie Farm Rehabilitation

Administration] did not understand that the stone is alive and its significance was not considered in their decision” (Saskatchewan Indigenous Cultural Centre, 2021). Today, and through many yesterdays, nehiyawak and others have mourned the event of mostos-awasis asiniy’s demise.

While Thair was on one quest, Hubbard was on her own buffalo rock pilgrimage. Hubbard traversed Turtle Island (Robinson, 2018), visiting Buffalo Stones in Great Plains locations, seeing Elders, praying and making offerings, and sharing stories as well as filming the sites and people she found (T. Hubbard, personal communication, August 14, 2022). mostos-awasis asiniy is a deeply important (destroyed) rock and site, but it is only one of many that tell fundamental stories about the places and spaces inhabited by Indigenous peoples, and now, many others. It is only one amongst the many that have had to be hidden for their protection or outright destroyed in the name of Euro-Canadian national expansion.

For nehiyawak, the trophy treatment of mostos-awasis asiniy is insulting for its appearance as a symbol of supposed defeat. More importantly, mostos-awasis asiniy’s body is no longer able to perform its work. The pedagogical “stamp” it made for fundamental Indigenous ceremonies, a physical reminder of the specific stories it held about how to conduct key relationships: human and bison, men and women, men and men, grandfathers and grandchildren, nation and nation, and all other sacred and other powers that mostos-awasis asiniy possesses. If nehiyawak are unable to access this central figure of nehiyaw ontology, any other comers, including settler Canadians, are even less so. Without physical being, and without a basic appreciation for nehiyaw places or stories, the transformative power of mostos-awasis asiniy is inaccessible.

Despite this complete blank where settler Canadians may have gained holism, wisdom, or relationship, the effort to destroy mostos-awasis asiniy reveals its own logic. The destruction indicates a desire to dismiss the visuals that continually remind settler Canadians of our existence. More stories were uncovered by *Maclean’s* reporter Ken Mitchell in a 1967 article, “The Great Rock Has Gone and No Cree Cries.” The title refers to the devastation of a central and sacred being in nehiyaw life; however, Mitchell denies the contemporaneous relevance of mostos-awasis asiniy to any living nehiyaw person with the derisive, “no Cree cries.” Given that the research Mitchell conducted at the time included no apparent nehiyaw person, it was impossible for the author to know the emotions or reactions of any “Cree.” In this way, Mitchell undermines mostos-awasis asiniy immediately. Because no one that Mitchell saw “cried,” mostos-awasis asiniy must not be so “great.” In Mitchell’s rendering, nehiyawak do not hold any sadness or care for its destruction. The title primes the reader for the apparent logic of mostos-awasis asiniy’s erasure.

The next paragraph of Mitchell’s article glosses over the many efforts that were taken to ensure mostos-awasis asiniy’s continued existence. These include the collective activism of settler Canadians including a University of Saskatchewan anthropologist, Zenon Pohorecky; African American activist, writer, and comedian Dick Gregory; music star Buffy Sainte-Marie; the Prairie Farm Rehabilitation Administration; and John G. Diefenbaker himself (Mitchell, 1967). There is no mention in Mitchell’s article of the work that the late Tyrone Tootoosis’ late father, Wilfred Tootoosis (“Wilfred Tootoosis,” 2008) or Douglas Cardinal’s late father, historian, reverend, and scholar Stan Cuthand (Ogg, 2016), did to protect and continue to nurture

mostos-awasis asiniy through ceremonies and stories. Mitchell and *Maclean's*, "Canada's magazine since 1905," erased central nehiyaw heroes in this colonial tale, with the exception of the popular Buffy Sainte-Marie, from their own land, stories, sites, and emotions.

Mitchell's journalistic bias appears with the paragraph opener "then skeptics appeared" (1967). Mitchell's "skeptics," people skeptical of those who wanted to save mostos-awasis asiniy, include a local farmer and eye-witness, unnamed historians and anthropologists, and "disgruntled taxpayers" (1967). Obviously, Indigenous peoples did and do pay taxes, as if continued access to our territories is not tax enough. "Disgruntled taxpayers" in this list of mostos-awasis asiniy naysayers, supposedly complaining about "that mangy old rock" (Mitchell, 1967), is a trope meant to differentiate the "contributing" masses from the mythical non-tax paying peoples of Indigenous ancestry.

Cuthand explains further the power differentials at the time between Indigenous peoples and settlers in Saskatchewan: "Our people didn't amount to a hill of beans back in the 1960, the rural population was much bigger, and the dam was meant for irrigation. Our people were not part of the future plans of this province, and still aren't" (personal communication, August 22, 2022). Cuthand attributes the lack of public support for the preservation of mostos-awasis asiniy to politics, as opposed to the completely misinformed connection between Indigenous peoples and their physical contributions to Canada at large. Politics, settler colonialism, agriculture, racism, or ignorance, each of these reasons demonstrates a dismissive, if not destructive, attitude towards Indigenous peoples' existence.

While Cuthand sees this lack of political will and power as one of the contributing factors in mostos-awasis asiniy's destruction, he summarized the cold reality of its loss: "This is a sacred rock and it is destroyed. I would have been happier if they just left it to sink to the bottom of the lake. That dam isn't going to be there forever, but the rock could have been" (personal communication, 2022). Cuthand then described how mostos-awasis asiniy was meant to be blown up into three large pieces to make it easier to move to safety, but the stone was intentionally stuffed with too much dynamite. "They were smart," Cuthand suggested. Their, too, agreed that the intent was annihilation: "I did some blasting myself at INCO in Thompson, Manitoba, and the amount of explosive at mostos-awasis asiniy was out of all proportion if the goal was to crack the rock and move it in several large pieces" (personal communication, August 24, 2022). If the explosive experts stuffing mostos-awasis asiniy with explosives were "smart," then their mission was to obliterate the rock, rather than move it respectfully elsewhere. This use of force against mostos-awasis asiniy is a more dramatic way for those workers to "get 400 tons of rock off [their] back[s]" (Mitchell, 1967).

The final affront to my nehiyaw sensibility in Mitchell's article is certainly that the "rock's religious importance has declined" (1967). Mitchell cites as evidence:

A Rosetown farmer who lived 30 years in sight of the rock said he had never seen an Indian near it. Some historians and anthropologists refuse to give Mistaseni the significance Pohorecky claims for it. They point out that Mistaseni, unlike many other rocks in the province, has no Indian markings. While some of the older Cree chiefs recall stories about a huge rock told by their forebears, none had been to

visit Mistaseni—at least before Pohorecky’s discovery. The hundreds of Indian artifacts he found there were said to be perfectly natural (on the bleak Prairie, such a large rock would be an obvious meeting place for wandering bands) and didn’t make it a shrine. (1967)

Firstly, a farmer who failed to see Indigenous peoples on land adjacent to their own means Indigenous peoples were “law abiding” and physically safer. The pass system, instated following the 1885 North-West Resistance, ensured Indian Affairs officials and the Royal Canadian Mounted Police (RMCP) knew where all Indigenous peoples were at all times and no “threatening” groups of Indians could form. Although used intermittently, without a pass to leave the reserve, Indigenous individuals could be at risk of apprehension and jail time, at least up until 1932 as demonstrated by historian Kenton Storey (2022: 156). Certainly, the use of the pass system physically and mentally drew tight boundaries around Indigenous mobility well into the 20th century. This method of both psychological and physical control could easily result in the paucity of individuals visiting the rock, much less than the large gatherings it was used to hosting.

It has already been mentioned that the Indigenous actors in the race to save mostos-awasis asiniy are nowhere visible in this account, and so there is no Indigenous perspective accessed or used to discuss its “religious significance.” There were likely more than knowledge keepers Wilfred Tootosis and Stan Cuthand at work ceremonially and orally memorializing mostos-awawis asiniy. Elders from many nations around what is now called Saskatchewan contributed to an interpretive booklet focused on mostos-awasis asiniy, developed in 2021 by the SICC. The Nakoda speaker and Elder Rose Weasel, whose story is used in the booklet, also provided Nakoda stories for the American Indian Studies Research Institute at Fort Belknap, Montana, in 1985. If it is not enough that Indigenous families, including my own, casually mention the story of mostos-awasis asiniy, surely the existence of these long-held oral histories throughout the 20th and 21st centuries do.

Finally, the “hundreds of Indian artifacts” that were found in and around mostos-awasis asiniy are evidence of the site’s significance. Thair described how he learnt of local settler families picnicking at the rock, where part of the festivities was fishing for artifacts in the cracks of mostos-awasis asiniy (personal communication, August 12, 2022). These events, as well as the well-known existence of “hundreds of Indian artifacts,” legitimate mostos-awasis asiniy as a special site, under any reading, by any human. The lack of “Indian markings,” based upon the above discussion on the pedagogical force of the living environment, is irrelevant. The unnamed anthropologists were either uneducated or remained willfully ignorant of the reality of the artifacts found around and within mostos-awasis asiniy.

Supporters of this destruction did not ask themselves the questions formulated by architecture and historical preservation scholar, Paul Hardin Kapp (2021):

In North America, is society prepared to obliterate historic monuments for political reasons? ... If we are motivated to remove the built patrimony by a current political point-of-view, are we deliberately destroying it for the greater good of society in the future or a rejection of the past and what these monuments

represent? Also, by removing it, do we risk that future generations will forget the past? Finally, although our current motives may be for the good, in the end, will they be misguided? Will iconoclasm only lead to deeper antagonism among all North Americans? (101)

Through a focus on the colonial boundaries of North America, Kapp and many others fail to recognize the iconoclasm that has already taken place on Turtle Island, and within living memory. Perhaps mostos-awasis asiniy's foes would answer, in the drive to monetize Indigenous lands, yes, we want to "obliterate historic monuments for political reasons." Do we reject the Indigenous past (and present)? Yes, we wish it was not so, for it delegitimizes our existence. We do hope that "future generations will forget the past" and wonder, why have they not yet? Will smashing mostos-awasis asiniy "lead to deeper antagonism among all North Americans"? No, as we all become one settled Canadian citizenry.

What to make of the destruction of mostos-awasis asiniy in 1966? Is its preservation, in pieces, as trophies, underwater (Ogg, 2014), on a plaque, evidence of the "violent upheaval" of colonialism? A comprehensive appreciation of settler colonialism recognizes the experience of mostos-awasis asiniy as one of a great many acts of on-going violence. Instead of one act of discontent, settler colonialism remains unabated in school-yard taunts, random beatings (Risom, 2022), state-sanctioned murders (battlefordsNOW, 2022), missing and murdered Indigenous peoples (*National Inquiry*), rising incarceration of Indigenous peoples (Major, 2021), as well as the number of Indigenous children and youth in "care" ("Reducing," 2023).

Director of the National Indigenous Research and Knowledges Network (NIRAKN) in Australia and Goempul scholar Aileen Moreton-Robinson describes another logic at play in the violence of settler-colonialism; *The White Possessive: Property, Powers, and Indigenous Sovereignty* (2015) thoroughly dismantles settler-colonial fictions. Moreton-Robinson explains, "The omnipresence of Indigenous sovereignties exists here too, but it is disavowed through the materiality of these significations, which are perceived as evidence of ownership by those who have taken possession" (2015). Read in this way, the presence of mostos-awasis asiniy was evidence of "Indigenous sovereignties." Since mostos-awasis asiniy was located on what came to be understood as the owned property of a farmer and, later, a provincial dam, Indigenous sovereignties were "disavowed." The violence to mostos-awasis asiniy was legitimized by the "white possessive."

The list of continued harm is exhausting to read. An end result, in regard to the availability and accessibility of Indigenous pedagogies around space and place, is silence. Indigenous peoples do not want to be harmed, emotionally or physically, and we do not want the obliteration of our world as we know it, including sacred places, spaces, and monuments. This is the silence noted by Mitchell's "Rosetown Farmer" and contained in the current arrangements that the SICC has with various bodies. An SICC partnership with the provincial Ministry of Parks, Culture, and Sport offers an educational commemorative site for a portion of mostos-awasis asiniy and a more private ceremonial site. The SICC does not publicize the location of mostos-awasis asiniy's bones. The SICC consistently reminds potential partners that "silence is not consent," and a meeting does not constitute an agreement to proceed in any method of work on or with an Indigenous space (Melody Wood, personal communication, August 29, 2022). The

work for and love of mostos-awasis asiniy continues, quietly, and softly. Thair wants to ask the public, “Would this happen today?”

Inclusive as I am, the child of a nehiyaw iskwew and a settler Canadian, the question is painful and the answer confusing. If settlers chose to respect mostos-awasis asiniy, it would include the repatriation of mostos-awasis asiniy, the funding of an archive devoted to the stories of mostos-awasis asiniy in all of its forms and languages, and access to the archives completely controlled by Indigenous Elders, such as those at the SICC. It would mean the end of beer bottle shards at and around any sites related to mostos-awasis asiniy. It would not prevent anyone from learning from or visiting with mostos-awasis asiniy. The concept of Indigenous control (The First Nations Principles of OCAP[®]) over knowledge and sites, including our own bodies, is antithetical to how settlers have seen Turtle Island to date.

If settler colonialism is seen as an effort by Canadians and their government to create legitimacy and assert dominance over all of its subjects in what is now Canada, the destruction of mostos-awasis asiniy was a symbolic way for Saskatchewan’s residents to deny the existence and persistence of Indigenous peoples’ pedagogies, ontologies, and spiritualities. The attempted obliteration of mostos-awasis asiniy is in itself an important moment in history, an unrecognized iconoclasm that harms and haunts all peoples, while we search for connection and meaning, drifting further away from the land that creates us.

Notes

- ¹ Patrick Reid Lugigyoo Stewart uses this formation of c/a/n/a/d/a to visually indicate the incongruity of the state with Indigenous realities.
- ² Tasha Hubbard (2016) describes that the term “buffalo” is preferred by Indigenous peoples.
- ³ The Elders at the SICC chose mostos-awasis asiniy for their 2021 interpretative booklet, and so I use mostos-awasis asiniy.
- ⁴ Isabella Redgate, personal communication, n.d.
- ⁵ Thair notes in his dive log on August 14, 2014: “Water temperature 16 C, 61 F, and a maximum depth of 72 feet.” Thair barely saw mostos-awasis asiniy, but touched it by mistake as he put his hand out for a rest.

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