

# Building Indians, Imagining Empire: Wax Figures, Race, and Colonialism in the Early American Republic

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Baroness Hyde de Neuville stepped out of the summer heat and into New Haven's Columbian Museum. The visit was likely a welcome distraction from life in a wartime city. The War of 1812 had entered its second year by the time Anne Marguérite Joséphine Henriette Rouillé de Marigny, Baroness Hyde de Neuville, traveled to New Haven. Every day, newspapers warned of the growing Royal Navy presence in Long Island Sound, and some nearby towns had even been evacuated for fear of attack.<sup>1</sup> Inside the museum, the baroness temporarily escaped the pall hanging over the community. Hyde de Neuville made her way around taxidermied animals, cases of seashells, and paintings chronicling the Napoleonic Wars—perhaps an evocative sight for the exiled French noble—until she reached the hall of waxwork. Two wax Indians at the end of the gallery evidently caught her eye.<sup>2</sup> A talented artist, she took out her sketchbook and began to draw.

Wax Indians were a common sight in the museums of the early republic. Indeed, nearly every museum in the country contained some variation of a waxen *warrior* or *chief* during this period.<sup>3</sup> Unfortunately, despite their past ubiquity, none of these models survived to the present.<sup>4</sup> Indeed, Hyde de Neuville's drawing (Figure 1) is the only known depiction of such figures from the early national era. The exhibit captured by the baroness featured two wax Indians in a dugout canoe.

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<sup>1</sup> "New London," *Connecticut Journal* (New Haven), June 14, 1813.

<sup>2</sup> This paper uses the word *Indian* when referring to wax figures. Per contemporary scholarship on the indigenous peoples of North America, it uses the words *Indigenous* or *Native* when referring to people. When possible, the names of specific tribes, nations, or communities are used.

<sup>3</sup> The figures were found in big-city institutions and small country towns alike. In 1817, for example, wax Indians were exhibited by Charles Willson Peale in his Philadelphia Museum and by J. Thurlo, an itinerant showman who roamed the Cumberland Valley. "Peale's Museum," *Aurora for the Country* (Philadelphia), March 28, 1817; "Elegant Museum of Wax Work," *Democratic Republican* (Chambersburg, Penn.), April 7, 1817.

<sup>4</sup> Countless sculptures fell victim to the fires, unruly spectators, and short institutional lifespans that plagued early national museums. The diaries of Ethan Allen Greenwood, transcribed by Georgia Brady Barnhill, contain a wealth of information on the daily upkeep of wax figures during this era. Greenwood, an artist and museum proprietor in Boston, regularly noted damage caused by visitors who either grabbed or knocked over his life-sized models. Georgia Brady Barnhill, "Extracts from the Journals of Ethan A. Greenwood: Portrait Painter and Museum Proprietor," *Proceedings of the American Antiquarian Society* 103 (April 1993): 91–178.

This article focuses on the construction and exhibition of the model on the left, described in the Columbian Museum catalog as a “Male...of Prince William Sound on the North West Coast.”<sup>5</sup> In its construction, meaning in its possession of a waxen body adorned with Indigenous material culture, the figure was typical of the Indian models found in American museums. However, the model was exhibited with an unusual amount of detail—most curators simply framed their sculptures as *Indians*, without any cultural or political specificities. On one level, then, the figure serves as a vehicle to explore how wax Indians shaped popular ideas of Indianness more generally. On another, it sheds new light on the place the Northwest Coast occupied in the early national imagination.



Figure 1. *Sauvages en cire du Museum de Mr. Mix* (1813) by Anne-Marguërite-Joséphine-Henriette Roullé de Marigny, Baroness Hyde de Neuville. Watercolor, graphite, and black chalk with touches of black and brown ink on paper, 7  $\frac{3}{4}$  in. x 11  $\frac{1}{8}$  in. Acc. no. 1953.287c. The New York Historical, New York.<sup>6</sup>

Indian waxworks were produced by multiple actors and processes. Their bodies were built and arranged by American artists and curators, while associated material culture like clothing often came from Indigenous communities. These latter

<sup>5</sup> John Mix, *A catalogue of a part of the curiosities, both natural and artificial, contained in the museum in New-Haven...* (New Haven: Joseph Barber, 1812), 3.

<sup>6</sup> The New-York Historical has produced a high-resolution scan here: <https://emuseum.nyhistory.org/objects/38148>.

items were routinely given to early national museums by American mariners, traders, and soldiers. In the case of the Northwest Coast figure, the owner of the Columbian Museum obtained its body from the East Haven, Connecticut workshop of Reuben Moulthrop. The mannequin was then customized with a woven hat and labrets from the institution's collection. These items were likely donated by parties involved in the maritime fur trade, which drew dozens of American ships to the Northwest Coast in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries.

Wax Indians were designed and posed in ways that supported developing, nominally scientific notions of Indianness—namely, the belief that Native peoples were part of a physiologically distinct, inherently primitive race that was in the process of dying out. These views helped justify and encourage colonial ambitions throughout North America.<sup>7</sup> Indeed, by the early nineteenth century, waxworks were one among numerous popular culture media that presented the American subjugation of the entire continent as an inevitability.<sup>8</sup> A close analysis of the materiality of these figures, however, reveals how wax Indians also had the potential to challenge such fantasies of innate human difference and preordained conquest. Mannequins like those sketched by Hyde de Neuville were made using the same molds and materials as those representing white subjects, and some Indians were dressed in items that spoke to the limits of American political power. For example, the hat and labrets attached to the Northwest Coast figure, as well as the circumstances of their acquisition, alluded to the control that Indigenous nations had over the maritime fur trade, and to the young republic's relative lack of clout in the region.

Despite being staples of early American museum culture, wax Indians have only been subject to serious scholarly attention for the past few decades. Curator and art historian David R. Brigham's *Public Culture in the Early Republic* (1995)

<sup>7</sup> There is an immense body of scholarship on non-Native constructions of Indianness. For more general examinations of this phenomenon, see Robert F. Berkhofer, Jr., *The White Man's Indian: Images of the American Indian from Columbus to the Present* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1978); S. Elizabeth Bird, ed., *Dressing in Feathers: The Construction of the Indian in American Popular Culture* (Boulder: Westview Press, 1998); Philip J. Deloria, *Playing Indian* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1998); and Paul Chaat Smith, *Everything You Know about Indians is Wrong* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2009). For books on the colonial implications of casting Indigenous peoples as a physiologically distinct, innately primitive group in the process of going extinct (specifically in early national New England, where so many wax Indians were built and exhibited), see Daniel R. Mandell, *Tribe, Race, History: Native Americans in Southern New England, 1780–1880* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2008) and Jean M. O'Brien, *Firsting and Lasting: Writing Indians Out of Existence in New England* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2010). For works that interrogate how print and visual media helped disseminate racist ideas about Indigenous peoples, see Steven Conn, *History's Shadow: Native Americans and Historical Consciousness in the Nineteenth Century* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2004); Marcia Crosby, "Construction of the Imaginary Indian," in *Vancouver Anthology: A Project of the Or Gallery*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed., ed. Stan Douglas (Vancouver: Talonbooks, 2011), 267–91; Stephanie Pratt, *American Indians in British Art, 1700–1840* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2005); and William H. Truettner, *Painting Indians and Building Empires in North America, 1710–1840* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2010).

<sup>8</sup> James David Drake, *The Nation's Nature: How Continental Presumptions Gave Way to the United States of America* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2011), 313–14.

was the first substantial study to draw attention to these objects. Art historian Ellen Fernandez-Sacco likewise examined the models in her doctoral dissertation three years later. Brigham and Fernandez-Sacco mainly discussed wax Indian figures in relation to their contributions to the construction of a white, American national identity.<sup>9</sup> More recent works by historian Catherine E. Kelly and art historian Ianna Recco have elaborated this interpretation of the sculptures. Kelly's *Republic of Taste* (2016) briefly explored how the exhibition of wax Indian figures helped naturalize hierarchical, white supremacist understandings of race.<sup>10</sup> Recco's article "In the Flesh at the Heart of Empire" (2021), meanwhile, examined the construction and exhibition of three models in eighteenth-century London. These sculptures had a direct impact on later American productions, like those exhibited in New Haven. While Recco provided vital, long-overlooked information on the modeling process, she mainly focused on the exhibition of wax Indian figures and the objectification of Native people.<sup>11</sup> This article takes a more material-focused approach toward wax Indian figures to uncover how they could also challenge developing, nominally scientific understandings of white supremacy.

Because this article relies so much on an image of a wax Indian figure, it is worth briefly examining the background of its creator. A self-taught artist, Anne Marguérite Joséphine Henriette Rouillé de Marigny was born into the French aristocracy in March 1771.<sup>12</sup> She and her husband fled to New York in 1807 after being implicated in a plot to assassinate Napoleon.<sup>13</sup> The Hyde de Neuilles' American exile was relatively comfortable. In fact, the couple spent much of their time traveling. Their tour of North America brought them to New Haven in August 1813.<sup>14</sup> Along with Yale College, the Columbian Museum was one of the city's most popular tourist destinations at the time.<sup>15</sup> The baroness was evidently impressed by the institution; she toured the museum at least three times during the several weeks that she and her husband spent in New Haven.<sup>16</sup> It was during one of her September visits that Hyde de Neuville brought along her art supplies and

<sup>9</sup> David R. Brigham, *Public Culture in the Early Republic: Peale's Museum and its Audience* (Washington, D.C.: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1995), 127–30; Ellen Fernandez-Sacco, "Spectacular Masculinities: The Museums of Peale, Baker, and Bowen in the Early Republic" (Ph.D. diss., University of California, Los Angeles, 1998), 108–9.

<sup>10</sup> Catherine E. Kelly, *Republic of Taste: Art, Politics, and Everyday Life in Early America* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2016), 189.

<sup>11</sup> Ianna Recco, "In the Flesh at the Heart of Empire: Life-Likeness in Wax Representations of the 1762 Cherokee Delegation in London," *British Art Studies* 21 (November 2021), <https://dx.doi.org/10.17658/issn.2058-5462/issue-21/irecco>.

<sup>12</sup> Roberta J. M. Olson, *Artist in Exile: The Visual Diary of Baroness Hyde de Neuville* (New York: New-York Historical Society, 2019), 14.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, 17–22.

<sup>14</sup> Olson, *Artist in Exile*, 186.

<sup>15</sup> "Communication," *Connecticut Herald* (New Haven), September 5, 1809.

<sup>16</sup> There are three works in her sketchbook dealing with the Columbian Museum; each piece bears a different date.

sketched the two wax Indian figures; the watercolors were likely added at a later date.<sup>17</sup> The work was simply titled “Sauvages en cire,” or wax Indians.<sup>18</sup> Art historian Laura Auricchio observed that Hyde de Neuville’s work was characterized by “objectivity and attention to detail.”<sup>19</sup> Based on this assessment, we can reasonably assume that her drawing showed a generally accurate depiction of the wax Indians in the Columbian Museum.

The labrets and hat worn by the Northwest Coast figure were given to the Columbian Museum sometime between 1806–1812.<sup>20</sup> These items were part of the institution’s larger collection of clothing and tools belonging to the “Savages of the North-West Coast.”<sup>21</sup> Removed from their cultural contexts and put on display—whether in a glass case or on the body of a wax model—such objects were used to support contemporary racist notions about supposed Indian primitiveness. The interpretation found in the Columbian Museum erased not only the meaning that items like basket hats and labrets held in communities along the Northwest Coast but also obscured the ways in which they were acquired. The donors of the basket hat and labrets drawn by Hyde de Neuville are unknown, but the objects likely came from ship’s officers, sailors, or merchants involved in the maritime fur trade. American ships had ventured to the Northwest Coast since the late 1780s in search of pelts to trade in Canton (Guangzhou).<sup>22</sup> By the early nineteenth century, traders routinely cruised a 900-nautical-mile arc stretching from the mouth of the Columbia River to the Russian outpost of Sitka in present-day Alaska.<sup>23</sup>

Unfortunately, it is unknown from where in this vast region the labrets and hat in the Columbian Museum came. Basket hats and labrets were worn all along the Northwest Coast but differed in shape and form depending on the region. It is worth noting that the items attached to the Northwest Coast figure may have come from different areas and been collected at different times. According to John F.C.

<sup>17</sup> According to curator Roberta J.M. Olson, Hyde de Neuville had an “enduring curiosity” about Indigenous peoples. She copied several contemporary prints that depicted Native subjects and sketched several Native people from life during her exile in North America. Olson, *Artist in Exile*, 168–78.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, 188. For a discussion of the French term “sauvage” and its approximate English equivalent, see Olive P. Dickason, “The Concept of *l’homme sauvage* and early French colonialism in the Americas,” *Revue française d’histoire d’outre-mer* 64 (1977): 5–32.

<sup>19</sup> Laura Auricchio, “The Baroness Hyde de Neuville and the Sidewalks of New York, 1807–14,” in *Women, Femininity, and Public Space in European Visual Culture, 1789–1914*, eds. Temma Balducci and Heather Belnap Jensen (New York: Routledge, 2014), 36–37.

<sup>20</sup> This estimate is based on when the museum opened and the first reference to the figure in question. For more on the history of the Columbian Museum, see Arthur W. Bloom, “Science and Sensation, Entertainment and Enlightenment: John Mix and the Columbian Museum and Gardens,” *Performing Arts Resources* 21 (1998): 33–49.

<sup>21</sup> “Mix’s Museum,” *Connecticut Journal* (New Haven), October 5, 1809.

<sup>22</sup> Mary Malloy, *“Boston Men” on the Northwest Coast: The American Maritime Fur Trade, 1788–1844* (Kingston: Limestone Press, 1998), 28.

<sup>23</sup> Malloy’s *“Boston Men” on the Northwest Coast* provides a detailed overview of the American ships that traded along the Northwest Coast during this era. For more on this subject, see F. W. Howay and Richard A. Pierce, *A List of Trading Vessels in the Maritime Fur Trade, 1785–1825* (Kingston: Limestone Press, 1973).

Johnson, Vice President of Cultural Resources at the Chugach Alaska Corporation, the articles were not from Prince William Sound (as Mix claimed in his 1812 museum catalog), as their designs were inconsistent with items made or worn by the region's Chugach people during this era.<sup>24</sup> The labrets drawn by Hyde de Neuville likely originated well south of Prince William Sound. Given their probable date of acquisition, the piercings may have come from the Tlingit people, whose territory straddled the present-day border between southeastern Alaska and British Columbia. The locus of the maritime fur trade had shifted to the Tlingit nation by the early nineteenth century, where Americans emerged as their main trading partners.<sup>25</sup> The shape of the labrets further suggests a possible Tlingit provenance, as circular piercings of the sort drawn by Hyde de Neuville were common among the Tlingit.<sup>26</sup> The hat may have had Tlingit origins as well, but there is not enough detail in Hyde de Neuville's sketch to know for certain.<sup>27</sup> The acquisition of hats and labrets was of secondary importance to the fur trade. American and European ships flocked to the Northwest Coast during the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries in search of otter pelts—some of the only goods that Chinese merchants were willing to accept for commodities like tea and porcelain. Indigenous peoples like the Tlingit largely controlled the terms of this trade. In exchange for pelts, Native traders demanded goods like metal tools, clothing, and especially firearms. In 1808, Captain John Suter wrote to his employers in Boston, recommending that future ships bound for the Northwest Coast be loaded with literal tons of powder and shot, as well as hundreds of muskets.<sup>28</sup>

While fur trading was typically a formal affair handled by designated members of a ship's crew, exchanges of hats and labrets were more spontaneous. Almost as soon as they anchored off the coast, American vessels were approached by canoes full of people looking to trade. As noted by curator Mary Malloy, these "casual" encounters were characterized by Native men and women offering items they had on hand, like fishing gear and clothing. Mariners often found themselves frustrated by the terms of these meetings. For example, while Natives were typically willing

<sup>24</sup> John F.C. Johnson, email correspondence with author, March 20, 2018.

<sup>25</sup> For more on the shifting locus of the fur trade, see James R. Gibson, *Otter Skins, Boston Ships, and China Goods: The Maritime Fur Trade of the Northwest Coast, 1785–1841* (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1992), 135. For information on Tlingit trading relationships, see Andrei Val'terovich Grinev, *The Tlingit Indians in Russian America, 1741–1867*, trans. Richard L. Bland and Katerina G. Solovjova (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2005), 113–14.

<sup>26</sup> Grant R. Keddie, "The Use and Distribution of Labrets on the North Pacific Rim," *Syesis* 14 (1981): 65–66; Marina La Salle, "Labrets and their Social Context in Coastal British Columbia," *BC Studies*, no. 80 (Winter 2013–2014): 130–35.

<sup>27</sup> An earlier draft of this article speculated that the hat may have been made by Haida craftspeople. The Haida Nation encompasses Haida Gwaii and the southern portion of the Alexander Archipelago. However, according to Sean Young, curator and archaeologist at the Haida Gwaii Museum, the style of the hat was not consistent with those made by the Haida during this period. Sean Young, email correspondence with author, June 8, 2021.

<sup>28</sup> Letter from John Suter to James and Thomas Lamb, July 15, 1808, John Suter Papers, Ms. N-49.50, Massachusetts Historical Society, Boston, Mass.

to trade articles like hats in exchange for woolen fabric or metal tools, they usually refused to part with items deemed more valuable, like the whaling equipment desired by many a Yankee souvenir-seeker.<sup>29</sup> Despite negotiations that were at times tense or strained, the acquisition of Native items along the Northwest Coast was not typically characterized by the levels of violence found elsewhere in North America.<sup>30</sup> Instead, objects were usually obtained through transactions.

Woven hats had long been used as trade goods along the Northwest Coast. Tlingit traders, for example, sold them to customers in neighboring nations for centuries.<sup>31</sup> The hat sketched by Hyde de Neuville was likely made from the roots of spruce trees. According to Tlingit weaver Teri Rofkar, these roots were harvested in the spring, using techniques that did not damage the trees.<sup>32</sup> The roots were then split and woven into hats. As with other types of weaving in Tlingit society, this work was done by women. The plain, conical hat atop the Northwest Coast figure resembled the most common type of Tlingit headwear, a type that was made to handle “bad weather, rain, and canoe travel.”<sup>33</sup> It was likely offered to an American mariner in exchange for some type of personal item, like a pocketknife.<sup>34</sup> Labrets also typically changed hands through interpersonal, spontaneous transactions. While there is some scholarly debate over the cultural meanings of labret-wearing during the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, it is generally accepted

<sup>29</sup> Mary Malloy, *Souvenirs of the Fur Trade: Northwest Coast Indian Art and Artifacts Collected by American Mariners, 1788–1844* (Cambridge, MA: Peabody Museum of Archaeology and Ethnology, 2000), 41–42.

<sup>30</sup> This is not to say, however, that violence between American mariners and Indigenous peoples resulting in the collection of objects did not occur. In 1798, for example, John Boit, Jr. donated “several articles of Dress and Weapons” from the Northwest Coast to the Massachusetts Historical Society. Considering Boit’s history in the region, some of these items were likely acquired through violent means. In 1792, Boit led a party of mariners from the *Columbia* that burned down the Nuu-chah-nulth village of Opitsaht after hearing rumors of a planned attack on their ship. This destruction recalled similar actions undertaken during the Sullivan Expedition of 1779, during which American soldiers collected many souvenirs that later wound up in American museums. Three years later, Boit captained the sloop *Union* on another voyage to the Northwest Coast. According to Boit, he and his crew killed over forty members of a Haida boarding party off Kunghit Island when they tried to take over his ship. For a description of the raid on Opitsaht, see John Boit, “Remarks on the Ship *Columbia’s* voyage from Boston, (on a Voyage, round the Globe),” in *Voyages of the “Columbia” to the Northwest Coast, 1787–1790 and 1790–1793*, ed. Frederic W. Howay (Boston: The Massachusetts Historical Society, 1941), 390–91. For Boit’s account of the Kunghit Island attack, see George F. MacDonald, *Haida Monumental Art: Villages of the Queen Charlotte Islands* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2002), 105. For more information on the items Boit donated to the Massachusetts Historical Society, see *Proceedings of the Massachusetts Historical Society* (Boston: Massachusetts Historical Society, 1879), 1: 116.

<sup>31</sup> Rosita Worl, “Standing with Spirits, Waiting,” in *The Harriman Alaska Expedition Retraced: A Century of Change, 1899–2001*, ed. Thomas S. Litwin (Piscataway: Rutgers University Press, 2005), 34.

<sup>32</sup> *Proceedings: Hidden Forest Values* (Washington, D.C.: United States Department of Agriculture, 2003 [PNW-GTR-579]), 11–12.

<sup>33</sup> George Thornton Emmons, *The Tlingit Indians*, ed. Frederica de Laguna (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1991), 219.

<sup>34</sup> Such an arrangement would have been consistent with practices found elsewhere along the Northwest Coast. Frederick H. White, “Was Spain Really First? Rereading Juan Perez’s 1774 Expedition to Haida Gwaii,” *The Canadian Journal of Native Studies* 26, no. 1 (2006): 14.

that they functioned as a type of gender-specific bodily ornamentation.<sup>35</sup> Only Tlingit women wore labrets during this era, which was consistent with cultural norms found in neighboring nations on the Pacific coast. A single labret—made from materials like wood or stone—was worn beneath the lower lip.<sup>36</sup> The gauge of one’s piercing gradually increased over time. At a young age, girls wore what outsiders described as “needle[s]” beneath their lower lips. By adulthood, these piercings could encompass the entire area below a woman’s mouth.<sup>37</sup>

The Northwest Coast figure in the Columbian Museum—with its trio of circular facial piercings—was apparently constructed with labrets from three different women. The size of these piercings suggests that their wearers were relatively young when the objects were acquired by American collectors. According to British fur trader Nathaniel Portlock, who did business with the Tlingit in the 1780s, labrets of the depicted diameter were typically worn by teenagers.<sup>38</sup> Unlike hats, piercings were not treated as commodities prior to Tlingit contact with Europeans and Americans, and it was typically foreign visitors who instigated the exchange of these highly personal items. George Dixon, a British officer who visited the Northwest Coast in 1786, left behind an especially detailed account of such a transaction. Dixon hoped to acquire labrets for the collection of his friend, the English naturalist Sir Joseph Banks. When he approached an elderly Haida woman about buying her piercing, Dixon was frustrated by her unwillingness to trade. One by one, she rejected all his offerings—a hatchet, basins, and numerous other trade items—“with contempt.” Finally, the woman named her own price and traded the labret for a set of metal buttons.<sup>39</sup> Native women were willing to give up their piercings but carefully dictated the terms of exchange.

Labrets were incredibly popular with sailors and officers of the maritime fur trade. Malloy argued that these men probably viewed the items in terms of gender relations and sexuality. Lower lip piercings were mocked as “ugly” and associated with gender norms that shocked American sensibilities. Native women all along the Northwest Coast took an active part in the fur trade. The prospect of dealing with female business partners—not to mention the sight of wives publicly rebuking their husbands during trade negotiations—made many a mariner uneasy.<sup>40</sup> Brian Rouleau argued that mariners “read” women’s bodies in order to make sense of the various places in which they traded.<sup>41</sup> Along those lines, labrets—so closely associated with the bodies of Indigenous women—may have functioned as tangible reminders about the workings of their respective societies. The objects may have also

<sup>35</sup> La Salle, “Labrets and their Social Context,” 128.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*, 148–49.

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*, 125.

<sup>38</sup> Quoted in Emmons, *The Tlingit Indians*, 246–47.

<sup>39</sup> Malloy, *Souvenirs of the Fur Trade*, 36.

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*, 10–12.

<sup>41</sup> Brian Rouleau, *With Sails Whitening Every Sea: Mariners and the Making of an American Maritime Empire* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2014), 139.

served as personal mementos of sexual encounters. Sex between Native women and American men was not uncommon, despite the fear and disgust that often shaded how the latter group viewed the former. In some societies, women directly exchanged sex for foreign commodities. In others, Native enslavers offered the bodies of young women and girls that they held in bondage for trade goods like copper.<sup>42</sup> Disturbingly, it is possible that the labrets drawn by Hyde de Neuville had once belonged to individuals trafficked to American mariners.

By the early nineteenth century, mariners regularly obtained labrets and basket hats with the intention of giving them to museums. Months before the Columbian Museum opened in July 1807, its proprietor ran a series of advertisements requesting donations from “persons in seafaring business.” John Mix, an entrepreneur who transformed his own home into a museum, offered cash or admission tickets in exchange for any items.<sup>43</sup> Interestingly, no ships from New Haven traded along the Northwest Coast prior to Hyde de Neuville’s visit in 1813.<sup>44</sup> Most vessels involved in the region’s maritime fur trade sailed out of Boston, and the mannequin’s adornments probably came to the Columbian Museum by way of that city.<sup>45</sup> At least one of these Boston-based ships, the *Caroline*, was owned by a group of New Haven businessmen who may have given the hat and labrets to their local collecting institution.<sup>46</sup> It is also worth noting that some of the Indigenous items in Mix’s collection were on permanent loan from a museum associated with Yale College. Although more or less defunct by the early nineteenth century, the institution had once benefitted from a large network of donors, including those involved in Pacific trade.<sup>47</sup> Clothing, weapons, and tools from all over North America filled the collections of institutions like the Columbian Museum. Some of these objects were tucked away in glass display cases, while others were attached to the bodies of life-sized models.<sup>48</sup> Regardless of how Native items were displayed, they were commonly removed from the cultural contexts in which they were made or used, as well as the circumstances in which they were acquired. Past meanings were erased as objects were cataloged or exhibited, although there were some rare exceptions.

<sup>42</sup> Colin G. Calloway, *One Vast Winter Count: The Native American West before Lewis and Clark* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2003), 412.

<sup>43</sup> “Museum of Natural and Artificial Curiosities,” *Connecticut Herald* (New Haven), December 23, 1806.

<sup>44</sup> Detailed maritime records for the Port of New Haven were regularly published in marine lists carried in the *Connecticut Herald* and *Columbian Register*. From the 1790s through the 1810s, most of the city’s maritime activity was tied to direct trade with the Caribbean and the South Seas sealing industry.

<sup>45</sup> Malloy, “Boston Men” on the Northwest Coast, 23–25.

<sup>46</sup> The *Caroline* sailed for the Pacific in 1803 and returned two years later with a cargo of tea and porcelain. Logbook of the *Caroline*, 1803–1805, Phillips Library, Peabody Essex Museum, Rowley, Mass., Log 1357, OCLC no. 830832574.

<sup>47</sup> Christine DeLucia, “Fugitive Collections in New England Indian Country: Indigenous Material Culture and Early American History Making at Ezra Stiles’s Yale Museum,” *The William and Mary Quarterly* 75, no. 1 (January 2018): 141–43.

<sup>48</sup> In the Columbian Museum, for example, “five canoes, from different Tribes” cluttered its exhibition space, along with smaller Native items in display cases or attached to wax models. Mix, *A catalog*, 10.

For example, an 1803 catalog entry from the museum attached to the East India Marine Society correctly described a labret as a “Lip Ornament worn by the Women on the N.W. Coast [of] America[,] an incision being made...in the under lip to receive it.”<sup>49</sup> More often, however, Native objects were interpreted in terms of American nationalism or developing notions of race, including those in the Columbian Museum described as having “savage” or “Indian” origins.<sup>50</sup> As in peer institutions, cultural and political specifics were often omitted from Mix’s interpretation. Such policies were emblematic of attitudes that increasingly flattened Native identities into the monolithic, racialized figure of “the Indian.”

To a certain extent, Europeans and Euro-Americans had always viewed Native peoples as a type of alien bloc; however, these attitudes were historically based more on cultural factors than physical attributes.<sup>51</sup> Europeans deemed Indigenous peoples *uncivilized* or *primitive* based on criteria like political structures, religious practices, and technology.<sup>52</sup> Within such a framework, perceived differences between Europeans and Native peoples were, theoretically, impermanent: Indigenous peoples could reach European levels of *civilization* by abandoning their cultures and embracing those of colonizers. But these older prejudices took on new, nominally scientific forms in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. In the course of organizing the natural world, Enlightenment theorists divided humanity into set racial categories based on physiological criteria. These hierarchies of humanity were often based on skin color.<sup>53</sup> Such was the case with the racial taxonomy developed by Samuel Latham Mitchill, one of the early republic’s best-known naturalists. Minimizing the political and cultural differences between the continent’s Indigenous nations, Mitchill classified them all as members of the “Tawny” race, along with “the Tartars, Malays, Chinese, [and] Lascars.”<sup>54</sup> Crucially, new understandings of Indianness rested only partly upon such visual traits. William Robertson, the best-selling Scottish historian whose work remained popular well into the nineteenth

<sup>49</sup> Malloy, *Souvenirs of the Fur Trade*, 67.

<sup>50</sup> Mix, *A catalog*, 10–11.

<sup>51</sup> For a material-culture focused study on how early modern Europeans otherized Indigenous people through material culture, see Daniela Bleichmar, “Seeing the World in a Room: Looking at Exotica in Early Modern Collections,” in *Collecting Across Cultures: Material Exchanges in the Early Modern Atlantic World*, eds. Daniela Bleichmar and Peter C. Mancall (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2011), 19.

<sup>52</sup> Michael Adas, *Machines as the Measure of Men: Science, Technology, and Ideologies of Western Dominance* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1989), 5–7.

<sup>53</sup> Kelly, *Republic of Taste*, 188; Thierry Hoquet, “Biologization of Race and Racialization of the Human,” in *The Invention of Race: Scientific and Popular Representations*, eds. Nicolas Bancel et al. (New York: Routledge, 2014), 28–30.

<sup>54</sup> “Zoological Disquisition,” *The American* (Hanover, New Hampshire), May 1, 1816. In building his “zoological” model, Mitchill also considered non-physical criteria, albeit secondarily. For instance, he argued that the languages of various “Tawny” nations shared certain words. Interestingly, he also maintained that the other two races, “the white man” and “the Black man” both diverged from the “Tawny” group at some distant point in history. For an in-depth look at the “birth of racial classifications,” see Joan-Pau Rubiés, “Were Early Modern Europeans Racist?,” in *Ideas of ‘Race’ in the History of the Humanities*, eds. Amos Morris-Reich and Dirk Rupnow (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2017), 33–87.

century, argued that Indians were inherently primitive due to the “feeble” nature of their bodies and minds.<sup>55</sup> In the words of historian Jean M. O’Brien, such fantasies boiled down to the belief that Indians could “never be modern.”<sup>56</sup> Native peoples were deemed physically incapable of cultural change. No amount of contact with European civilization would alter their allegedly primitive state.

Early national modelers unsurprisingly focused on the more physical traits associated with Indianness when building their wax Indian figures. Shops like the one owned by Reuben Moulthrop churned out generic model Indians during this period. The two figures drawn by Hyde de Neuville would have looked nearly identical when they were bought by the Columbian Museum; it was only after purchase that they were customized with objects from the institution’s collection and took on the distinctive appearances recorded by the baroness. Replicable, batch-produced Indians reflected the Enlightenment’s new notions of racial homogeneity. Once assembled and displayed in museums, wax Indians contributed toward the racist fantasy that Native peoples were frozen in history or, to use the terminology of anthropologist and art historian Ellen Fernandez-Sacco, trapped in a state of “temporal stasis.”<sup>57</sup> On the one hand, they encouraged such notions through functioning as anthropomorphic display cases. Wax Indians were covered with Indigenous items that curators interpreted in terms of supposed Indian primitiveness. On the other hand, the exhibits froze Indian bodies in time, often in scenes that white audiences would have understood as uncivilized or backward. The belief that Native peoples were incapable of cultural change over time fed into myths about their inevitable extinction and helped justify American colonialism.

American wax modeling had its roots in European artistic traditions. Life-sized models of human subjects had long been cast and exhibited in Europe. Some of these figures were intended for anatomical study, while others were meant for public amusement.<sup>58</sup> Audiences could come face-to-face with subjects from popular culture, like European royals or characters from folklore. Indeed, these latter figures were among the first to tour North America. In 1733, a Boston showman imported a model of “Margaret Countess of Heninburg [sic].” This medieval Dutch noble

<sup>55</sup> British editions of the text were common in the early United States, and its contents were serialized in American newspapers. The first American edition of Robertson’s work was published in 1812, a year before Hyde de Neuville visited the Columbian Museum.

<sup>56</sup> O’Brien, *Firsting and Lasting*, 4–5; S. Elizabeth Bird, “Introduction: Constructing the Indian, 1830s–1990s,” in *Dressing in Feathers*, 4. Bird, an anthropologist, described this mindset as the belief that Indians were “frozen in history.”

<sup>57</sup> Ellen Fernandez-Sacco, “Framing ‘the Indian’: The Visual Culture of Conquest in the Museums of Pierre Eugene Du Simitiere and Charles Willson Peale, 1779–96,” *Social Identities: Journal for the Study of Race, Nation, and Culture* 8, no. 4 (2002): 584–85.

<sup>58</sup> For more on the history of anatomical waxworks in Europe, see Lucia Dacome, “Women, wax, and anatomy in the ‘century of things,’” *Renaissance Studies* 21, no. 4 (September 2007): 522–50.

allegedly “had 365 children at one birth” after being cursed by a beggar.<sup>59</sup> Historian Peter Benes speculated that these sculptures may have been made by Mary Salmon, who ran one of eighteenth-century London’s most popular waxwork galleries, the Royal Wax-Work.<sup>60</sup> This same gallery exhibited in 1762 some of the first wax Indians on record: a trio of Indian figures representing Utsidihi, Kunagadoga, and Atawayi, three Cherokee leaders then on a diplomatic mission to London. This delegation captured the imagination of the British public and inspired ballads, plays, and paintings, in addition to Salmon’s waxworks.<sup>61</sup> According to Timothy J. Shannon, public fascination with the Cherokee at this moment was shaped by the recent conquest of New France, which dramatically changed how Britons thought about their overseas possessions. Empire was increasingly being understood in terms of subjugating territory rather than the strategic control of coastal entrepôts. Within this new context, Indigenous peoples—regardless of nationality—were viewed as curious objects of imperial conquest more than true diplomatic partners.<sup>62</sup>

The techniques used to build the Indians in Salmon’s gallery were identical to those later used in the United States. First, an artist made a series of plaster molds. It is important to note that only a wax figure’s head, neck, and hands (or sometimes arms) were actually made of wax; the rest of the model usually consisted of a concealed wooden framework or sacks stuffed with straw or rags.<sup>63</sup> Thus, artists only needed two or three types of molds to produce a given figure. Sometimes, these molds were taken from life. An individual’s head and extremities would be brushed with oil, then covered with plaster; this method gave subjects at least a degree of control over how they were depicted. More often, however, modelers relied on stocks of premade molds to cast their figures’ body parts.<sup>64</sup> The continual reuse of such molds for a variety of mannequins, including those of different races, reveals

<sup>59</sup> “This is to give notice,” *The Boston Weekly News-Letter*, December 13, 1733. For more on the legend of Margaret, Countess of Henneberg, see Jan Bondeson, *The Two-headed Boy, and Other Medical Marvels* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2000), 64–93.

<sup>60</sup> Peter Benes, *For a Short Time Only: Itinerants and the Resurgence of Popular Culture in Early America* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 2016), 274. Special thanks to Dr. Laura Earls for uncovering Mary Salmon’s first name.

<sup>61</sup> Recco, “In the Flesh at the Heart of Empire.” For more on Indigenous visitors to London during this period, see Kate Fullagar, *The Warrior, the Voyager, and the Artist: Three Lives in an Age of Empire* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2020), and Coll Thrush, *Indigenous London: Native Travelers at the Heart of Empire* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2016).

<sup>62</sup> The 1762 Cherokee mission to London was not the first Indigenous delegation to visit Britain. Earlier visits attracted the public’s attention, but their participants were viewed more as political allies than “human curiosities.” For an in-depth study of how British understandings of Indianness changed during the mid-eighteenth century, see Timothy J. Shannon, “‘This Wretched Scene of British Curiosity and Savage Debauchery’: Performing Indian Kingship in Eighteenth-Century Britain,” in *Native Acts: Indian Performance, 1603–1832*, eds. Joshua David Bellin and Laura L. Mielke (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2011), 221–47.

<sup>63</sup> “New Wax Figures in the Western Museum,” *Cincinnati Advertiser*, March 7, 1827.

<sup>64</sup> These molds were often cast from heads and hands sculpted out of clay. Mary Hillier, *The History of Wax Dolls* (Cumberland: Hobby House Press, 1985), 126.

how little artists thought of race in terms of physiognomy during this period.<sup>65</sup> The Cherokee models were likely cast from the generic type of molds—exhibitors usually trumpeted any figures taken from life, and such was not the case with the Indians in Salmon’s gallery.

With their molds complete, artists began casting wax body parts. These heads and extremities were made from bleached beeswax.<sup>66</sup> Also known as white or virgin wax, the substance was formed by exposing thin layers of raw beeswax to direct sunlight. The blanched sheets were then melted down and formed into cakes. Most uses for white wax were medicinal; it was found in numerous ointments and used in the production of bandages.<sup>67</sup> In North America, this meant that it was mainly sold by druggists, most of whom likely purchased it from local beekeepers.<sup>68</sup> On its own, virgin wax was a poor modeling material. To prevent cracking, and in the words of one eighteenth-century manual, “make it tough,” artisans mixed their melted beeswax with turpentine before pouring it into plaster molds.<sup>69</sup> The turpentine used in the Salmon models was likely imported from British North America.<sup>70</sup> Interestingly, the likenesses of the Cherokee—themselves considered products of empire—were partly made of materials extracted from Britain’s American colonies. In fact, there is a fair chance that the turpentine in the Cherokee figures came from either the Carolinas or Georgia, where enslaved people spent the summer harvesting and barreling the resin from pine trees.<sup>71</sup> Ironically, this work took place in regions bordering the Cherokee Nation.

Race-making mostly occurred during the casting and finishing stages of production. All wax bodies started out as the same pallid material and were given complexion through one of two means. During the casting process, some modelers added ground pigments to their liquid turpentine-wax mixtures to control the subject’s skin color.<sup>72</sup> Others cast bleached heads and appendages, then used oil-based paint to create skin tone during the finishing process.<sup>73</sup> This latter method was apparently the one preferred by Salmon and her successors at the Royal Wax-Work,

<sup>65</sup> Recco, “In the Flesh at the Heart of Empire.”

<sup>66</sup> Nancy Carlisle, *Cherished Possessions: A New England Legacy* (Boston: Society for the Preservation of New England Antiquities, 2003), 119.

<sup>67</sup> John Mason Good et al., *Pantologia. A New Cabinet Cyclopaedia* (London: J. Walker, 1819), 4.

<sup>68</sup> Reuben Moulthrop, for example, likely bought his white wax from the New Haven firm of Goodwin & Clarke. “Oliver Goodwin & Peter Clarke,” *Connecticut Journal* (New Haven), February 22, 1797.

<sup>69</sup> R. G. *The Accomplished Female Instructor: or, A very useful Companion for Ladies, Gentlewomen, and Others* (London: James Knapton, 1704), 161.

<sup>70</sup> Thomas L. Purvis, *Colonial America to 1763* (New York: Facts on File, 1999), 83. Parliament had encouraged the development of the North American turpentine industry in the early eighteenth century in order to move away from British dependence on foreign imports.

<sup>71</sup> Robert B. Outland III, *Tapping the Pines: The Naval Stores Industry in the American South* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2004), 19–22.

<sup>72</sup> Carlisle, *Cherished Possessions*, 119.

<sup>73</sup> Stacy C. Hollander, “Reuben Moulthrop: Artist in Painting and Waxworks,” *Folk Art* (Fall 1994): 38.

as well as by Reuben Moulthrop.<sup>74</sup> Regardless of method, the Cherokee figures were left with what one spectator described as a “copper” complexion, a description that recalled contemporary racial categorizations based around the “tawny” skin of Indigenous peoples.<sup>75</sup> It was also during the finishing stage that empty sockets were fitted with glass eyes, and hair was pressed into waxen scalps.<sup>76</sup> Although some less-reputable artisans fitted their models with “horse-hair,” most tried to top their mannequins with actual human hair.<sup>77</sup> Modelers generally turned to barbers and other sellers of “hair work” when seeking out this material.<sup>78</sup> Given the reputation of Salmon’s gallery, the Cherokee figures were almost certainly adorned with the locks of various Londoners. This raises an interesting contradiction. At the same time that racial science began to classify Europeans and Indians as members of distinct racial groups, wax Indian models were being built with materials taken from European bodies.<sup>79</sup>

Around 1775, a second group of wax Indians debuted in London. These were the first such figures by an American modeler, Patience Lovell Wright. Wright had found success in the American colonies but relocated to London in 1772 with the hopes of furthering her career as an artist.<sup>80</sup> The move paid off. Wright modeled some of London’s most prominent residents, and her gallery proved popular. By January 1775, she added two Indian models to her collection. Historian Charles Coleman Sellers argued that Wright had several motivations for sculpting the figures. For one, she wanted to appeal to contemporary interest in all things Indian. Her other motives related to the ongoing colonial crisis in North America. The Indian figures spoke to Wright’s American identity and alluded to her support for the colonists in their fights against Parliament.<sup>81</sup> This was consistent with more abstract ideas of Indianness typical of the pre-war era. As noted by numerous

<sup>74</sup> Recco, “In the Flesh at the Heart of Empire”; Hollander, “Reuben Moulthrop: Artist in Painting and Waxworks,” 38.

<sup>75</sup> Ibid.

<sup>76</sup> Hollander, “Reuben Moulthrop: Artist in Painting and Waxworks,” 38.

<sup>77</sup> In 1823, an irate Nantucketer condemned the appearance of a waxwork exhibition that recently passed through the island. One of their complaints involved a figure who was customized with “horse-hair.” “Advice, Gratis,” *Nantucket Inquirer*, July 1, 1823.

<sup>78</sup> An 1828 article from Boston reveals the connection between barbers and wax modelers. “Administrator’s Sale,” *Boston Intelligencer*, June 28, 1828. The personal papers of American museum proprietor Ethan Allen Greenwood include a receipt for “hair work” purchased of Boston merchant and hairdresser Luke Richardson. Account between Ethan Allen Greenwood and L. Richardson, April 2, 1825, American Antiquarian Society, Worcester, Mass., Ethan Allen Greenwood Papers, Bib. ID no. 271599.

<sup>79</sup> As noted by Sharon Block, Europeans and Euro-Americans increasingly believed that Europeans and Indigenous peoples had innately different hair. The hair of Indigenous peoples was described in terms more commonly used with animals than human beings. Sharon Block, *Colonial Complexions: Race and Bodies in Eighteenth-Century America* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2018), 79.

<sup>80</sup> Linda K. Kerber, “I have Don...much to Carrey on the Warr’: Women and the Shaping of Republican Ideology after the American Revolution,” in *Women and Politics in the Age of the Democratic Revolution*, eds. Harriet B. Applewhite and Darline G. Levy (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1993), 249.

<sup>81</sup> Charles Coleman Sellers, *Patience Wright: American Artist and Spy in George III’s London* (Middletown: Wesleyan University Press, 1976), 89–90.

scholars, European and American artists had long used images of Indians as allegories for the Americas. The continents were frequently depicted as half-naked men and women wearing feather headdresses.<sup>82</sup> However, this trend declined in the postrevolutionary period, as raids carried out by Indigenous allies of the British made the figure of the Indian an increasingly unappealing allegory for the new nation. Instead, citizens of the newly independent nation gravitated toward the Roman goddess Liberty.<sup>83</sup> Accordingly, modelers and exhibitors of the early republic eschewed metaphorical pretenses and framed their Indians as ethnographic objects.

Wright's Indian models were likely sculpted with the assistance of her daughter, Elizabeth Wright Platt, who had joined her mother in London in 1773 and soon took up the modeling trade.<sup>84</sup> It was she who first built and exhibited Indian models in the United States. Platt returned to North America in 1778 and set up her own waxwork gallery in Lower Manhattan.<sup>85</sup> In her studio, Platt cast and exhibited an eclectic lineup of figures that included biblical prophets, British royalty, heroes of the American Revolution, and "an Indian Chief of the Mohawk Tribe."<sup>86</sup> It is unknown exactly who this latter model was supposed to represent, but Platt's specification of its nationality was lost once her waxworks changed hands. After its purchase by Daniel Bowen—who popularized the exhibition and adornment of Indian wax figures in America—Platt's model was simply known as an "Indian Chief."<sup>87</sup> This set the template for how most model Indians were presented in the early republic: not as likenesses of any particular individual or even representations of a given nation, but rather "stock racial types."<sup>88</sup>

<sup>82</sup> For an in-depth examination of Indian allegories of the Americas, see Pratt, *American Indians in British Art*, 12–29.

<sup>83</sup> Megan Scallan Melvin, "Invoking America: Representation, Revolution, and Republican Motherhood in Eighteenth-Century American Iconography" (M.A. Thesis, University of Alabama in Huntsville, 2014), 22–37.

<sup>84</sup> Sellers, *Patience Wright*, 90. Unlike her predecessors, like Salmon, or the American artisans that followed in her wake, it appears as though Wright sculpted (rather than cast) at least some of her waxworks. In a move that scandalized some British observers, she would use the heat from her body to shape blocks of wax. For more on Wright's work, see Wendy Bellion, "Patience Wright's Transatlantic Bodies," in *Shaping the Body Politic: Art and Political Formation in Early National America*, eds. Maurie McInnis and Louis Nelson (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2011), 17–18. Sellers, *Patience Wright*, 90.

<sup>85</sup> Sheldon S. Cohen, "The Odyssey of Ebenezer Smith Platt," *Journal of American Studies* 18, no. 2 (August 1984): 270–73.

<sup>86</sup> A biblical tableau based on an obscure story from the Book of Daniel, "Bell and the Dragon," debuted in 1785. "Wax-Work," *The Daily Advertiser, Political, Commercial, and Historical* (New York), October 19, 1785. An advertisement from 1787 revealed models of George Washington and the "Indian Chief of the Mohawk Tribe." "Wax-Work," *The Connecticut Journal* (New Haven), September 5, 1787.

<sup>87</sup> The model was referred to as such in one of Bowen's earliest known advertisements for his exhibition. "Wax-Work, as Large as Life," *The Georgia Gazette* (Savannah), March 26, 1789.

<sup>88</sup> Kelly, *Republic of Taste*, 189.

Originally from Bristol County, Massachusetts, Bowen ran a printshop in New Haven in the years following the American Revolution.<sup>89</sup> After seeing Platt's waxworks, probably when she toured New Haven with them in late 1787, he became enamored with the medium and its potential profitability.<sup>90</sup> Bowen bought Platt's gallery, began making his own figures, and taught the craft to other artisans, including Reuben Moulthrop.<sup>91</sup> Bowen and his protégés flooded the early republic with waxworks. Some of these individuals doubled as wax modelers and exhibitors.<sup>92</sup> Others, like Moulthrop, specialized in manufacturing.<sup>93</sup> Indeed, his was among the most prolific wax modeling shops in the nation. The manufactory was set up in a lean-to addition behind Moulthrop's house. In 1903, an aged East Haven resident recalled that it "gave employment to many in different capacities, both male and female."<sup>94</sup> Among these workers were members of Moulthrop's family and wage workers from all around the state, including a pair of sisters named Rachel and Lucinda Shailor, who boarded in Moulthrop's home and specialized in making clothing for the wax figures.<sup>95</sup> The reliance on kinship networks and the prominent role of women were consistent with earlier traditions of wax modeling as practiced by artists like Mary Salmon and Patience Wright.<sup>96</sup> These types of conditions remained common throughout the early national period. Moulthrop's establishment stood apart, however, in terms of its near-industrial output. His models were exhibited all over the country and as far away as the Caribbean.<sup>97</sup>

<sup>89</sup> "To Be Sold, by Daniel Bowen," *The New-Haven Chronicle*, May 15, 1787; "Elegant Paper Hangings," *The New-Haven Chronicle*, May 23, 1786.

<sup>90</sup> Platt brought her waxworks to New Haven in September 1787. "Wax-Work," *The Connecticut Journal* (New Haven), September 5, 1787.

<sup>91</sup> Bowen also jumpstarted the careers of William M. S. Doyle, Phillip Woods, and Charles Packard after resettling in Boston. Benes, *For a Short Time Only*, 274–76.

<sup>92</sup> Such was the case with Bowen. The former printer started out as a showman, but eventually taught himself the art of wax modeling. For a detailed biography of Bowen, see Loyd Haberly, "The Long Life of Daniel Bowen," *The New England Quarterly* 32, no. 3 (September 1959): 320–32.

<sup>93</sup> Judging by newspaper advertisements, there was a period when Moulthrop built and exhibited waxworks, but he apparently shifted to more of a manufacturing role by the early 1800s.

<sup>94</sup> Leverett S. Bagley, quoted in Sarah E. Hughes, *History of East Haven* (New Haven: The Tuttle, Morehouse, & Taylor Press, 1908), 135.

<sup>95</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>96</sup> Richard Daniel Altick suggested that Mary Salmon may have learned the trade from her husband, a "famous waxwork man." Richard Daniel Altick, *The Shows of London* (Cambridge: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1978), 52. These types of conditions remained common throughout the early national period. Justin W. Street, who began his career with Moulthrop and was his brother-in-law, was in business with his daughter by the 1820s. See "Miss Street," *Connecticut Journal* (New Haven), October 16, 1821, and Hughes, *History of East Haven*, 134–35. Henry Williams, who learned the modeling trade from another former Bowen apprentice, William M.S. Doyle, ran a Boston workshop with his wife, Cecilia, see "Croaker," *Boston Courier*, March 9, 1850.

<sup>97</sup> For example, an inventory of the Western Museum in Cincinnati (the westernmost museum in the United States as of its opening in 1820) revealed models from Moulthrop's shop among its collection. "Important to Capitalists," *The Liberty Hall and Cincinnati Gazette*, September 10, 1835. A detailed table compiled by Peter Benes recorded all of the places where Moulthrop and/or his models turned up from 1793–1803. Benes, *For a Short Time Only*, Table 15.1.

Unfortunately, the exact division of labor in Moulthrop's shop is unknown. Given his training with Bowen, it was likely Moulthrop who made most of the wax body parts. Peter Benes found that Moulthrop put a great deal of care into his likenesses of early national celebrities. The molds used to cast his sculpture of Yale President Ezra Stiles, for example, were completed only after Moulthrop spent three days studying the old man's hands and face.<sup>98</sup> Moulthrop probably used pre-made molds for casting the more generic characters found in museums and traveling shows across the country. Among these figures were likenesses of George Washington, anonymous beautiful young women, and—of course—Indians.<sup>99</sup> Nearly every modeler in the early republic, starting with Elizabeth Platt, made some variation of these figures.<sup>100</sup>

When it came to models of Indigenous people, the circumstances of their construction fed into white supremacist fantasies of Indian homogeneity. Workshops like the one owned by Moulthrop produced batches of what Catherine E. Kelly termed "undifferentiated Indians."<sup>101</sup> For decades, Moulthrop and his peers provided exhibitors with a steady supply of replicated Indian figures. Moulthrop's shop apparently produced three types of Indian models: a man (often described as an Indian chief), a woman, and a child. The latter two varieties were much less common than the first. This supports Paul Gilmore's argument that white Americans had a particular interest in the male Indian body during this period, whose likenesses represented an alluring type of primitive, "authentic" masculinity that their middle-class, white counterparts had supposedly lost.<sup>102</sup>

Interestingly, an advertisement from Moulthrop's earliest days as a wax modeler revealed the source material for his line of Indian men. In 1793, Moulthrop claimed that this figure was based on the appearance of a "Cherokee, who was at Philadelphia." It is unknown whether the artist saw this man himself or relied on someone else's description.<sup>103</sup> It is also unclear exactly *how* Moulthrop's models resembled the anonymous Cherokee. Did he design his molds with this individual in mind, or was Moulthrop referring more to his sculptures' skin color or hairstyle?

<sup>98</sup> Benes, *For a Short Time Only*, 279. Stiles also recorded the incident in his diary. Ezra Stiles, *The Literary Diary of Ezra Stiles, D.D., L.L.D.: President of Yale College*, vol. 3, ed. Franklin Bowditch Dexter (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons: 1901), 503.

<sup>99</sup> "Wax-Work," *The Diary, or Loudon's Register* (New York), December 7, 1797. Models of "beauties" were especially popular in the early United States. Oftentimes they were framed in terms of cities or states ("the Philadelphia beauty," the "Rhode-Island beauty," etc.).

<sup>100</sup> Interestingly, these were the three figures that Platt brought on her visit to New Haven that likely sparked Bowen's interest in waxwork. "Wax-Work," *The Connecticut Journal* (New Haven), September 5, 1787.

<sup>101</sup> Kelly, *Republic of Taste*, 189.

<sup>102</sup> Paul Gilmore, *The Genuine Article: Race, Mass Culture, and American Literary Manhood* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2001), 77–80.

<sup>103</sup> "Reuben Moulthrop, Artist in Painting and Wax-Work," *Connecticut Journal* (New Haven), September 4, 1793. The Cherokee "at Philadelphia" may have been a reference to a 1791 Cherokee delegation that visited the American capital hoping to amend the controversial Treaty of Holston. For more on this topic, see Charles H. Faulkner, *Massacre at Cavett's Station: Frontier Tennessee During the Cherokee Wars* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 2013), 37–40.

In any case, Moulthrop's take on the mysterious Cherokee visitor to Philadelphia served as the template for countless near-identical Indian figures. However, it is worth noting the slight facial differences between the two figures drawn by Hyde de Neuville; the Northwest Coast figure's mouth was open, as if speaking, while the mouth of the figure to the right was shut. These details were likely added after the sculptures emerged from their molds.<sup>104</sup> Tailored faces added at least some variety to an otherwise indistinguishable stock of wax Indian figures.

Mix apparently bought his first group of wax Indians from Moulthrop in 1809, two years after opening his museum in New Haven.<sup>105</sup> Based on contemporary descriptions of Mix's gallery, he customized one of these mannequins with the basket hat and labrets around 1812.<sup>106</sup> By that point, curators had been covering undifferentiated Indians with objects from their collections for over twenty years. Bowen, for example, had attached "natural" Indigenous items to his "Indian Chief" (Platt's one-time "Mohawk") as early as 1789. He dressed the model in a genuine "war habit" and placed a "real Scalp" in one of its hands.<sup>107</sup> A broadside from this period described the figure in more detail, claiming that the six-foot-three-inch-tall "chief" was the "largest Indian in Columbia."<sup>108</sup> Bowen was much more active in collecting "curiosities" than his predecessors in the wax modeling trade. While Wright and Platt mostly exhibited their respective artworks, Bowen displayed a wide variety of items. By the early 1790s, Bowen's patrons encountered cases of taxidermied birds, massive history paintings, and a marble bust of Benjamin Franklin, in addition to Native material culture and dozens of waxworks.<sup>109</sup> Such an eclectic collection was common for the era and represented an early national museum culture that sought to balance education and entertainment.

The nation's first publicly accessible museums emerged around the close of the American Revolution. These were essentially businesses, owned and operated by individuals who acted as artists, naturalists, and entrepreneurs. With their sprawling collections of natural and man-made objects, museums were promoted as a

<sup>104</sup> For more on this type of finishing work, see Recco, "In the Flesh at the Heart of Empire."

<sup>105</sup> Wax Indians were first listed in a description of the Columbian Museum in September 1809. "Mix's Museum," *Connecticut Herald* (New Haven), September 5, 1809.

<sup>106</sup> The figure was not mentioned in an inventory of the wax figure gallery that was published in September 1809 and was first listed in the 1812 Columbian Museum catalog. "Mix's Museum," *Connecticut Herald* (New Haven), September 19, 1809; John Mix, *A catalog*, 3.

<sup>107</sup> "Wax Work, as Large as Life," *The Georgia Gazette* (Savannah), March 26, 1789. For more on the importance that exhibitors placed in dressing their waxworks in "real" items (albeit during a later time period), see Mark B. Sandberg, *Living Pictures, Missing Persons: Mannequins, Museums, and Modernity* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2003), 59–60.

<sup>108</sup> "Bowen's Columbian Museum," broadside, n.d., MS Thr. 479, Harvard Theatre Collection, Houghton Library, Cambridge, Mass.

<sup>109</sup> A broadside from September 1792 listed the waxworks, paintings, and marble sculpture. "A Descriptive Catalogue of Bowen's Exhibition of Wax-Work & Paintings," broadside, September 4, 1792, American Antiquarian Society, Worcester, Mass.

The case of birds was mentioned in a subsequent newspaper advertisement. "Wax-Work and Painting," *Dunlap's American Daily Advertiser* (Philadelphia), August 21, 1793.

means for shaping an educated citizenry.<sup>110</sup> In practice, this meant that museum proprietors arranged their institutions with white audiences in mind, especially those in the middle and upper classes.<sup>111</sup> However, this did not necessarily mean that admission was restricted along racial lines. African Americans and Indigenous peoples also patronized the republic's museums, albeit in lesser numbers.<sup>112</sup> Museum keepers sought to make a profit and had little reason to completely exclude any potential customers, especially given the competition they faced from less reputable leisure venues, like the theater. As such, Bowen and his peers assured the public that their collections were both educational *and* entertaining. American museum pioneer Charles Willson Peale described this guiding philosophy as "rational amusement."<sup>113</sup> Waxwork galleries were well suited for this amusing pedagogy. Visitors were entertained by likenesses of popular literary characters or celebrities, while they also ostensibly learned about Indigenous peoples by encountering wax Indians dressed in *authentic* artifacts.<sup>114</sup> A critical analysis of how these figures were interpreted sheds light on the shallow nature of their educational value.

In 1797, Peale followed Bowen's lead and added wax Indian figures to his collection. His sculptures were initially treated with a level of care that was uncommon for the era. They were described as "real portraits" of "Musquacanokan (or Red Pole)" and "Weyapiersenwaw (or Blue Jacket)." Peale even provided his patrons with biographical information on the two men, noting that they were both Shawnee chiefs who once attended a peace conference at his Philadelphia museum.<sup>115</sup> This amount of supporting information was unusual, but also short-lived. Within a year, Peale was simply referring to the figures as "North American Savage[s]."<sup>116</sup> Ellen Fernandez-Sacco argued that such vulgar revisions were done with the intent of broadening the exhibition's appeal. Potential patrons may have found the prospect of seeing *savage* Indians more interesting than the likenesses of two Shawnee leaders.<sup>117</sup> Interestingly, as noted by David R. Brigham, the model of Blue Jacket had the potential to destabilize fixed understandings of racial difference, as he was believed to be "white by birth" and adopted by the Shawnee.<sup>118</sup> Such potential was diminished when Peale rebranded the figure and showed that even he—

<sup>110</sup> Kelly, *Republic of Taste*, 160–61.

<sup>111</sup> Brigham, *Public Culture in the Early Republic*, 8.

<sup>112</sup> For information on Indigenous visitors to early American museums, see DeLucia, "Fugitive Collections," 109–11.

<sup>113</sup> Brigham, *Public Culture in the Early Republic*, 20.

<sup>114</sup> Bloom, "Science and Sensation," 39.

<sup>115</sup> "Additions to Peale's Museum," *Claypoole's American Daily Advertiser* (Philadelphia), August 17, 1797.

<sup>116</sup> "Peale's Museum," *Aurora General Advertiser* (Philadelphia), March 12, 1798.

<sup>117</sup> Fernandez-Sacco, "Spectacular Masculinities," 109. As pointed out by Catherine E. Kelly, even the original iteration of Peale's exhibition dehumanized the models of Musquaconoh and Weyapiersenwah to a degree. The figures were not included with his other (painted) portraits of political leaders, but rather placed among Peale's sculptures of people from *savage* nations. Kelly, *Republic of Taste*, 189.

<sup>118</sup> Brigham, *Public Culture in the Early Republic*, 129.

one of the more outwardly intellectual museum keepers of the early republic—was not above reducing wax Indians to racial types.

Visitors to these collections were prompted to consider Native objects not in relation to their cultural or political meanings, but rather in relation to an abstract, distant past. Peale believed that ethnographic mannequins were a creative means for exhibiting any foreign material culture in an institution's collection.<sup>119</sup> Wax Indians thus functioned as extensions of more traditional exhibition strategies based around glass display cases. The interpretation attached to such displays supported the racist notion that Indians were stuck in a prehistoric stage of social development. The guidebook of New Haven's Columbian Museum, for example, described its cases of contemporary Native tools as analogous to those used in "ancient days."<sup>120</sup> When considering the intended audience of the Columbian Museum, the vague appeal to "ancient days" was likely meant to evoke thoughts of prehistoric Europe. Other institutions reached even further into the past when framing their Indigenous collections. Charles Willson Peale and his fellow curator and son, Rubens, both exhibited cases of Native objects alongside prehistoric fossils.<sup>121</sup> Edward Savage took a similar approach in his New York City institution. The painter-turned-museum-proprietor set up a pair of wax Indian figures, dressed in Native objects, beside a to-scale painting of the elder Peale's famous mastodon skeleton. Savage claimed that this set-up helped his audience better understand the size of the ancient beast, but it also underscored fantastical associations between Indians and prehistory.<sup>122</sup>

Ultimately, museumgoers were only presented with a narrow, selectively curated view of Indigenous material culture. As stated by New York museum proprietor John Scudder, collecting institutions only wanted "savage" items that "savage nations actually made."<sup>123</sup> Scudder and his contemporaries had no interest in anything that showed how Indigenous cultures changed over time—they sought only objects they could equate with antiquity. Ironically, many of the people who provided them with Native materials were intimately aware of such changes. For example, mariners who traded along the Northwest Coast witnessed firsthand how

<sup>119</sup> Quoted in Fernandez-Sacco, "Spectacular Masculinities," 95.

<sup>120</sup> Mix, *A catalog*, 10. As noted by Christine DeLucia, many of Mix's Indigenous items had previously been on display in a museum affiliated with Yale overseen by its president, Ezra Stiles. Mix presented the objects with less care for detail than their bookish former curator. DeLucia, "Fugitive Collections," 143–44.

<sup>121</sup> For more on Charles Willson Peale and his treatment of Indigenous objects, see Fernandez-Sacco, "Framing 'The Indian,'" 601. Rubens Peale specified the location of his Native objects in a circa 1831 catalog of his museum. Rubens Peale, *Guide Through Peale's New-York Museum, and Gallery of the Fine Arts*, Patricia D. Klingenstein Library, New-York Historical Society, New York, New York.

<sup>122</sup> "To the editor of the Daily Advertiser," *The Daily Advertiser* (New York), October 14, 1802. Thomas Jefferson likewise exhibited his collection of Indigenous items alongside the remains of a "mastodon." For more on the arrangement of his private cabinet of curiosities, see Joyce Henri Robinson, "An American Cabinet of Curiosities: Thomas Jefferson's 'Indian Hall at Monticello,'" *Winterthur Portfolio* 30, no. 1 (1995): 24–25.

<sup>123</sup> "American Museum," *New-York Daily Advertiser*, June 12, 1817.

people in the region selectively adopted foreign goods, such as firearms, into their respective societies. These were realities absent from early national museum interpretation. For instance, in describing his collection of “Indian manufactures,” the elder Peale once described their makers as “uninformed wild people, having very little knowledge of the arts, and being ignorant even of the existence of iron and steel.”<sup>124</sup> Such statements revealed the cultural reach of fantasies about Indians and temporal stasis.

There was a marked change in how painters depicted Indians around the start of the nineteenth century. By then, European and American artists had depicted Indigenous subjects for hundreds of years. These earlier images were characterized by classical imagery and the celebration of Indian nations becoming *civilized* through their adoption of European material culture. For example, the well-known *Four Indian Kings* paintings, completed in 1710, depicted four Indigenous leaders (three Mohawks and one Mohican) dressed in a blend of European and Native clothing, and posed with a variety of European and Indigenous goods. Curator William H. Truettner argued that the works showed the British public a group of supposedly savage political allies who were in the process of becoming civilized.<sup>125</sup> Such sentiments were no longer appealing in the post-Revolutionary period, especially in North America. The devastation of eastern Indigenous communities—compounded by the American Revolution—and the influence of the Enlightenment caused artists to look west when seeking Indian subjects by the late eighteenth century. Nations like the Mohawk and the Mohican, the latter of which allied with the American colonists but nevertheless experienced high mortality and territorial displacement, were no longer viewed as sufficiently Indian. If a painter wanted to see *traditional* Indians, supposedly untouched by contact with European and American outsiders, they needed to find people from beyond the frontier. Truettner described the style of Indian painting that developed during the first two decades of the nineteenth century as ethnographic in nature. This did not, however, mean that images of Western peoples were accurate. Material evidence of contact with non-Natives was minimized, for example. Instead, they were ethnographic in the sense that they backed up contemporary racial science and presented spectators with “real” Indians fixed in time. Popular fantasies about Indians being stuck in the past influenced how non-Natives thought about their future. As one editorialist argued in stark terms:

The Indian delights in ignorance, his prejudice against civilization is invincible, and his attachment to a wild, unrestrained, savage, barbarous manner of living is not to be overcome. Extinction is the inevitable fate of this race. It appears destined by the God of nature, that they should yield to the

<sup>124</sup> “Peale’s Museum,” *Gazette of the United States & Evening Advertiser* (Philadelphia), February 5, 1794.

<sup>125</sup> Truettner, *Painting Indians and Building Empires in North America*, 31–39, 61–62.

superior genius and intelligence of the whites...we can have no regret in perceiving a race of men become extinct.<sup>126</sup>

The supposed inability of Indigenous peoples to change their “barbarous manner of living” was used to predict their ultimate disappearance. Philip J. Deloria described this ideology, later known as the “myth of the vanishing Indian,” as grounded in the conviction that “less advanced societies should disappear in the presence of those more advanced.”<sup>127</sup> According to Deloria, the myth of the vanishing Indian came to dominate white American conceptions of Indianness during the opening decades of the nineteenth century. Plays, novels, textbooks, and newspapers inundated the public with stories of dying Indians, many of whom were described as the “last of” their respective nations. Some even included a trope that Deloria described as the “Indian death speech,” where the “last” Indian bequeathed their lands to the United States.<sup>128</sup> Such an artistic device may have helped assuage any feelings of sadness about the supposed disappearance of Native peoples. It also hinted at why fantasies about Indian primitiveness and their resultant disappearance were so popular, namely, because they excused the dispossession of Indigenous peoples. Acts of theft, coercion, and violence were more acceptable if Indians were doomed to die out.<sup>129</sup>

Such actions were distressingly common during the Revolutionary and early national eras. Indeed, the Columbian Museum likely contained Haudenosaunee items plundered during the infamous Sullivan Expedition.<sup>130</sup> In 1779, American troops under Generals John Sullivan and James Clinton carried out a scorched earth campaign against the Haudenosaunee Confederacy. The Americans slashed their way through the Confederacy’s heartland, burning villages and crops, skirmishing with Haudenosaunee warriors, and displacing thousands of people.<sup>131</sup> Veterans of this campaign filled the nation’s earliest museums with plunder, and pioneered the macabre trend of giving Native body parts to American curators.<sup>132</sup> In 1790, Charles Willson Peale announced that his Philadelphia museum had received the “DRESSED skin of the leg and thigh of an Indian, killed in the march of General Sullivan.”<sup>133</sup> This trend continued through subsequent wars against

<sup>126</sup> “Creek Indians,” *Lancaster Journal*, September 9, 1818.

<sup>127</sup> Deloria, *Playing Indian*, 64.

<sup>128</sup> *Ibid.*, 192–93.

<sup>129</sup> Kariann Akemi Yokota, *Unbecoming British: How Revolutionary America Became a Postcolonial Nation* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011), 18.

<sup>130</sup> The aforementioned museum at Yale College that loaned so many of its Indigenous items to the Columbian Museum held several mementos from the Sullivan Expedition among its collection. DeLucia, “Fugitive Collections,” 124–25.

<sup>131</sup> Much has been written on the history of the Sullivan Expedition. For a book-length study that considers the campaign in terms of American empire, see Max M. Mintz, *Seeds of Empire: The American Revolutionary Conquest of the Iroquois* (New York: New York University Press, 1999).

<sup>132</sup> Fernandez-Sacco, “Framing ‘The Indian,’” 581; DeLucia, “Fugitive Collections,” 124–26.

<sup>133</sup> “The following donations have been lately made to Mr. Peale,” *Pennsylvania Mercury and Universal Advertiser*, July 1, 1790. For a focus on the bodily violence that characterized this campaign, see Zara Anishanslin, “‘This is the Skin of a Whit[e] Man’: Material Memories of Violence in Sullivan’s Campaign,”

Indigenous peoples, like the Northwest Indian War. In 1791, an officer in the U.S. Army presented Peale with a “human Scalp” taken while on campaign in the Ohio Valley.<sup>134</sup> Indeed, the scalp attached to Bowen’s first wax Indian figure was also apparently a grim trophy from the Old Northwest. Years after the model debuted, he claimed that it gripped a “real Scalp of an Indian Chief, lately taken at the Westward.”<sup>135</sup>

The violence behind museum donations like scalps was a popular topic among waxwork exhibitors. By the second decade of the nineteenth century, particularly following the campaigns of the War of 1812, frontier scenes were found in museums across the country. Most followed a loose formula, wherein an Indian figure sank a knife or hatchet into the waxen head of an American soldier or settler. Usually, the likeness of another American was present, rushing to the aid of their stricken countryman.<sup>136</sup> Mix unveiled his own version of the scene, which showed a “a Savage attacking a defenceless and innocent Family,” about a year after Hyde de Neuville’s visit. In a testament to the popularity of such exhibits, a nearly identical tableau was already on display in a new, rival institution just a few blocks away.<sup>137</sup>

However, while spoils of war may have been among the most alluring items in an institution’s collection, not all Native objects were acquired through violence or processes of settler colonialism. Some materials were acquired under more amiable circumstances. In her examination of Ezra Stiles’ Yale Museum, Christine DeLucia identified Indigenous objects that may have been obtained through diplomatic gift giving, as well as possible “tourist” goods that Native craftspeople “intended for use among faraway peoples rather than for internal community use.” Museums were also full of materials that DeLucia described as products of “relatively equitable economic exchanges.”<sup>138</sup> This latter category best describes items like labrets and basket hats from the Northwest Coast. The earliest known models to be adorned with these items—those owned by Phillip Woods—appeared just a few years before Mix’s exhibit and appealed to contemporary interest in American trading activities and British travel literature. Woods was a Boston tavernkeeper and pupil of Reuben Moulthrop who embarked upon a new career as a mannequin showman in 1803. Among his waxworks was a model of the Nuu-chah-nulth chief

in *The American Revolution Reborn*, eds. Patrick Spero and Michael Zuckerman (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2016), 187–204.

<sup>134</sup> “Late Donations to Mr. Peale,” *The General Advertiser and Political, Commercial, Agricultural, and Literary Journal* (Philadelphia), May 26, 1791.

<sup>135</sup> “Bowen’s Columbian Museum,” *Courier* (Boston), December 12, 1795.

<sup>136</sup> These types of scenes may have traced their origin to a tableau assembled by Moulthrop while he was still a wax modeler and exhibitor. In 1795, he unveiled an exhibit depicting the death of General Richard Butler at the hands of a tomahawk-wielding Indian. Butler died four years earlier during the Northwest Indian War. “Wax-Work & Musick,” *Connecticut Journal* (New Haven), December 23, 1795.

<sup>137</sup> “Don’t Fail of Visiting Mix’s Museum,” *Connecticut Journal* (New Haven), September 5, 1814; “Don’t give up the Ship,” *Connecticut Journal* (New Haven), June 7, 1814.

<sup>138</sup> DeLucia cautioned that even if not outright violent in nature, it is still worth bearing in mind that amiable transactions often occurred within “larger structure of expansionist colonialism.” DeLucia, “Fugitive Collections,” 127.

Callicum.<sup>139</sup> At the time, Callicum was well known for his inclusion in the best-selling book *Voyages Made in the Years 1788 & 1789, From China to the North West Coast of America* (1790), an account of Pacific travels made by British trader and navigator John Meares. Within a decade, American readers could find Meares' text in port cities all over the East Coast.<sup>140</sup> Those unable to afford their own copy could read excerpts from the travelogue in local newspapers.



Figure 2. *Callicum and Maquilla, Chiefs of Nootka Sound* (1790), by Robert Pollard, after Thomas Stothard. Printed in *Voyages Made in the Years 1788 and 1789, From China to the North West Coast of America...*, after p. 108.<sup>141</sup>

<sup>139</sup> "Never Before Exhibited," *New-England Palladium* (Boston), August 26, 1803.

<sup>140</sup> John Meares, *Voyages Made in the Years 1788 and 1789, From China to the North West Coast of America...* (London: Logographic Press, 1790). Woods may have purchased a copy of the text from the Boston booksellers E. & S. Larkin, who carried the text among their British imports around this time. "E. & S. Larkin," *The Independent Chronicle and the Universal Advertiser* (Boston), July 23, 1801. The earliest known newspaper to print a section from Meares' book was *The Pennsylvania Mercury, and Universal Advertiser* (Philadelphia), November 22, 1791.

<sup>141</sup> The British Library has produced a high-resolution scan of its copy of the print (Museum no. 1881,0312.26), viewable here: [https://britishmuseum.org/collection/object/P\\_1881-0312-26](https://britishmuseum.org/collection/object/P_1881-0312-26).

Meares encountered Callicum after landing at Friendly Cove (Yuquot) on Nootka Island. He included a good deal of information about his Nuu-chah-nulth trading partner, but Woods's attention was likely drawn to the text's accompanying print by Thomas Stothard (Figure 2). Callicum was shown on the right-hand side of the image shaking hands with a fellow chief named Maquinna.<sup>142</sup> Although no detailed description of the Callicum figure survives, it probably resembled the man in Stothard's print. Indeed, Woods not only boasted that his model was dressed in garments from the Northwest Coast, but also went so far as to claim that it wore the actual garments in which Callicum greeted Meares in 1788.<sup>143</sup> While this latter assertion was almost certainly untrue, the figure was likely cloaked in Native garb from the Northwest Coast, perhaps even Nuu-chah-nulth. Numerous American traders ventured to Nootka Sound (Mowichat) during this period and returned home with souvenirs like the "spear, two arrows...cap or bonnet...[and] feathered necklace" given to one New York institution.<sup>144</sup>

Mix, too, turned to a popular book on Pacific exploration when building his Northwest Coast figure, likely basing its appearance on a print that appeared in *A Voyage to the Pacific Ocean*, a chronicle of the final expedition of Captain James Cook (Figure 3). The image depicted a Chugach man, as drawn by expedition artist John Webber. Its caption—"A man of Prince William's Sound"—was nearly identical to the description of the Northwest Coast figure in Mix's catalog.<sup>145</sup> The desire to recreate a print from a well-known book and capitalize on public interest in all things Cook helps explain Mix's careless use of probable Tlingit material culture.<sup>146</sup> After all, the completed figure presented spectators with a vague imitation of Webber's drawing and it is unlikely that most would have noticed the differences between Chugach and Tlingit basket hats and labrets.

At least one other curator assembled a figure based on Webber's print, but not all models of Indians from the Northwest Coast were drawn from British travelogues.<sup>147</sup> For example, a Philadelphia museum proprietor named Jesse Sharpless put together his own Northwest Coast figure sometime between 1810–1812. The

<sup>142</sup> Alan D. McMillan, *Since the Time of the Transformers: The Ancient Heritage of the Nuu-chah-nulth, Ditidaht, and Makah* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 1999), 199.

<sup>143</sup> "Never Before Exhibited," *New-England Palladium* (Boston), August 26, 1803.

<sup>144</sup> For a comprehensive list of American ships that called on Mowichat, see Howay and Pierce, *A List of Trading Vessels*, 6–52. For the donation in question, see "Late Additions to the Museum in this City," *The American Minerva* (New York), April 7, 1794.

<sup>145</sup> Mix, *A catalog*, 3; James Basire, after John Webber, *A Man of Prince William Sound*, 1784, in James Cook, *A Voyage to the Pacific Ocean. Undertaken, by the Command of His Majesty, For Making Discoveries in the Northern Hemisphere*, ed. James King (London: W. and A. Strahan, 1784), plate 46.

<sup>146</sup> For more information on the contemporary popularity of such adventure and travel literature, specifically in early national New England, see David Jaffe, "West from New England: Geographic Information and the Pacific in the Early Republic," in *Global Trade & Visual Arts in Federal New England*, eds. Patricia Johnston and Caroline Frank (Durham: University Press of New England, 2014), 58–59.

<sup>147</sup> The other likeness of someone ostensibly from Prince William Sound was exhibited by John Scudder at the American Museum in New York City. Scudder quoted the book on Cook's final voyage when describing the figure. "The American Museum," *Spectator* (New York), July 20, 1811.

model was shown “preserv[ing] the life” of a shipwrecked American sailor.<sup>148</sup> This scene was likely inspired by the sinking of the *Eclipse*, which struck a reef off the coast of present-day Alaska in 1807. Most of the crew survived with the help of local Aleuts, and word of the ordeal reached the United States in mid-1809.<sup>149</sup> Interestingly, this scene of Native benevolence was located just feet away from a tableau that depicted an Indian killing General Richard Butler, an American officer who fell in the Northwest Indian War.<sup>150</sup>



Figure 3. *A Man of Prince William's Sound*, by James Basire I, after John Webber. Printed in *A Voyage to the Pacific Ocean...*, Plate 46.<sup>151</sup>

<sup>148</sup> “Museum of Wax Figures and Natural Curiosities,” *Relf's Philadelphia Gazette*, February 29, 1812.

<sup>149</sup> For more on the wreck of the *Eclipse*, see Howay and Pierce, *A List of Trading Vessels*, 73. For an early notice of the wreck, see “The Palladium,” *New-England Palladium* (Boston), June 6, 1809.

<sup>150</sup> “Museum of Wax Figures and Natural Curiosities,” *Relf's Philadelphia Gazette*, February 29, 1812.

<sup>151</sup> The British Museum has produced a high-resolution scan of its copy of the print (Museum no. 1957,0705.21); viewable here: [https://britishmuseum.org/collection/object/P\\_1957-0705-21](https://britishmuseum.org/collection/object/P_1957-0705-21).

While exhibits featuring Northwest Coast figures lacked the violent content and plunder of frontier scenes, they were nevertheless marked by colonial undertones. In framing the region's people as a race frozen in time (and, thus, doomed to extinction), exhibitors helped fuel visions of the Coast's eventual colonization. Such visions were consistent with Samuel Truett's definition of "settler fantasy," i.e., "the ways Americans imagined westward expansion."<sup>152</sup> The far reaches of the continent were eyed for settlement as early as the 1780s. John Ledyard, a Connecticut native who visited the Northwest Coast while serving with Captain Cook, returned home with tales of its abundant furs and the prices they fetched in Canton. Ledyard called for the establishment of a fortified American settlement in the region. According to historian Edward G. Gray, his imagined outpost would ensure American control of the fur trade and serve as a "western foothold for a new, continental empire."<sup>153</sup> Despite the interest of figures like Thomas Jefferson, Ledyard's scheme never moved past the planning stages.<sup>154</sup> Nevertheless, his description of the Northwest Coast and its abundant pelts encouraged American merchants to send ships to the area.<sup>155</sup> As the number of American vessels calling on the Coast grew, so too did fantasies about its absorption into the United States. On the one hand, such fantasies reflected the fact that American ships in the region soon outnumbered those from competing European powers.<sup>156</sup> On the other hand, they spoke to a general enthusiasm for empire that flourished in the post-Revolutionary period.

Numerous early American artists, authors, and politicians promoted a future where the republic stretched from the Atlantic to the Pacific. The subjugation of the continent was presented as an inevitability, perhaps best summed up by a line in one of the nation's first textbooks: "we cannot but anticipate the period, as not far distant, when the AMERICAN EMPIRE will comprehend millions of souls, west of the Mississippi."<sup>157</sup> One of the more creative works of settler fantasy produced during this era was a widely serialized article, printed in 1818, that presented a look at the "speculative" future of the United States from the perspective of a newspaper editor living in September 2000. Among the stories about flying

<sup>152</sup> Samuel Truett, "Settler Colonialism and the Borderlands of Early America," *The William & Mary Quarterly* 76, no. 3 (July 2019): 438.

<sup>153</sup> Edward G. Gray, *The Making of John Ledyard: Empire and Ambition in the Life of an Early American Traveler* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2008), 120.

<sup>154</sup> Strangely, Jefferson encouraged Ledyard to make his way to the Northwest Coast by way of Europe and Asia. Ledyard would cross through Russia, cross the Bering Strait, and then explore western North America before trekking east to Virginia. He was deported by the Russian government nearly a year into his journey and made his way back to London. From there, he joined an exploring expedition to Egypt, where he accidentally poisoned himself and died. Larzer Ziff, *Return Passages: Great American Travel Writing, 1780–1910* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2000), 32–52.

<sup>155</sup> Eric Jay Dolin, *Fur, Fortune, and Empire: The Epic History of the Fur Trade in America* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 2010), 147–48.

<sup>156</sup> Gibson, *Otter Skins, Boston Ships, and China Goods*, 35.

<sup>157</sup> Jedidiah Morse, quoted in Drake, *The Nation's Nature*, 313–14.

carriages and the Nicaragua Canal was an article on the government's purchase of the Kamchatka Peninsula in Siberia. The move was praised because of the territory's proximity to the United States.<sup>158</sup> By 2000, the republic would evidently encompass all of North America, including the Northwest Coast. There was no mention of Indians in this speculative future. Presumably, they were all thought extinct by the start of the new millennium.

Early national fantasies about colonizing the Northwest Coast had little basis in reality. Indeed, figures like the one in the Columbian Museum embodied the republic's lack of political clout in the region. Behind many a basket hat and labret were stories that demonstrated the balance of power along the Coast. Americans needed to meet the demands of their Native trading partners in order to leave with the souvenirs (and pelts) they desired. Those who offended their Indigenous hosts risked severe consequences. In 1803, for example, Maquinna and a group of his men attacked the *Boston* after its captain insulted the Nuu-chah-nulth leader. Most of the crew were killed and the survivors enslaved. According to Robin Fisher, this was a carefully calculated decision. Maquinna knew that the Americans were in no position to punish him militarily and that the most he risked was a loss of business. He was correct. Ships avoided Maquinna's territory for a few years, but no other action against him was taken.<sup>159</sup>

Of course, few museumgoers knew the details of how woven hats and labrets were obtained. Apart from those involved in the maritime fur trade, most Americans were ignorant of the power dynamics in the Pacific Northwest. Even well-known incidents like the destruction of the *Boston* were viewed more as individual acts of Indian "treachery" than evidence of political realities.<sup>160</sup> While the storming of the *Boston* was in direct response to a personal slight, Fisher also pointed out that tensions were already high around Nootka Sound because of economic factors. By

<sup>158</sup> "Anno Domini 2000, Anticipated," *New-England Galaxy* (Boston), March 27, 1818.

<sup>159</sup> Robin Fisher, *Contact and Conflict: Indian-European Relations in British Columbia, 1774–1890*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 1992), 16–17. The failure of John Jacob Astor's settlement of Fort Astoria further demonstrated that the United States was at a disadvantage when it came to European rivals in the Pacific Northwest. The fort, located near the mouth of the Columbia River, was seized by the British during the War of 1812 after less than two years of operation. For more on the history of Fort Astoria, see Peter Stark, *Astoria: Astor and Jefferson's Lost Pacific Empire, a Story of Ambition and Survival on the Early American Frontier* (New York: Harper Collins, 2015). Russia was the most militarily involved foreign nation on the Northwest Coast during this era, and Russian colonial ambitions were likewise frustrated by Native political power. After colonizing Kodiak Island in the 1780s, Russian traders and settlers turned their attention to the North American mainland. A series of military defeats at the hands of the Dena'ina (1797) and the Tlingit (1802) permanently stunted the growth of Russian America. The colony was largely restricted to the coast and depended on the goodwill of its Native neighbors for survival. For more on this topic, see Alan Boraas and Aaron Leggett, "Dena'ina Resistance to Russian Hegemony, Late Eighteenth and Early Nineteenth Centuries: Cook Inlet, Alaska," *Ethnohistory* 60, no. 3 (2013): 485–504, and Ilya Vinkovetsky, *Russian America: An Overseas Colony of a Continental Empire* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011), 19–22.

<sup>160</sup> Fisher, *Contact and Conflict*, 16. For more on the dangers faced by mariners along the coast, see Dane A. Morrison, *Eastward of Good Hope: Early America in a Dangerous World* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2021), 222–23.

the first decade of the nineteenth century, the Nuu-chah-nulth economy was under increasing strain as the otter population in the region began to decline.<sup>161</sup> As this situation was repeated elsewhere along the Coast, the maritime fur trade began to collapse, a development that may explain why curators suddenly stopped exhibiting models of Indians from the northwestern reaches of the continent. Mix's "Male...of Prince William Sound" was the longest surviving of the Northwest Coast figures that emerged around the dawn of the nineteenth century. After Mix's death in 1821, it was purchased by Ethan Allen Greenwood and installed in his Providence Museum.<sup>162</sup> The model was last mentioned in 1824, after which time it was presumably destroyed or transformed into another type of model.<sup>163</sup> The disappearance of Northwest Coast figures by the mid-1820s roughly correlated with the decline of the maritime fur trade.<sup>164</sup> As American economic activity along the Northwest Coast slowed, so too may have interest in its inhabitants. Simply put, museum keepers likely phased out their Northwest Coast figures to keep up with public tastes.

In a more general sense, wax Indian figures remained popular long after those associated with the Northwest Coast faded into memory. Museumgoers all over the country, from major cities to rural hamlets, continued to encounter anonymous chiefs and warriors adorned with Native material culture. These generic, batch-produced sculptures played a key role in perpetuating the nascent fantasy that Indians were part of a homogenous, inherently backward race that was not long for this world—a fantasy Euro-Americans widely accepted as fact by the time racialized mannequins fell out of fashion around midcentury. Ironically, the materiality of wax Indian figures subtly hinted at the absurdity of scientific racism. The models were cast from the same molds used to make white subjects, and oftentimes dressed in items whose provenances demonstrated the ability of various nations to mediate their interactions with European and American outsiders.

<sup>161</sup> Fisher, *Contact and Conflict*, 16–17.

<sup>162</sup> Greenwood was best-known for his New England Museum in Boston, but he also operated smaller institutions in Providence and Portland, Maine. Barnhill, "Extracts from the Journals of Ethan A. Greenwood," 96.

<sup>163</sup> "Great and splendid additions to the Providence Museum," *Rhode Island American* (Providence), October 5, 1824.

<sup>164</sup> For more on this decline, see Gibson, *Otter Skins, Boston Ships, and China Goods*, 177–82.