

ROV PANEL - ALICE KEHOE

**Session ID: 924972**

**Session Title: Representing the History of American Anthropology**

**Session Date: Thursday, November 12th**

**Session Time: 5:00 PM - 6:00 PM ET**

KEYWORDS:

American Indians/First Nations

"salvage ethnography"

James Mooney

Ghost Dance

Frank Speck

REPRESENTING THE PAST -

TALKING POINTS ON AMERICAN INDIANS AND ANTHROPOLOGY

- American anthropology initially focused on ethnographies of American First Nations (a.k.a. American Indians) in order to rescue their "cultures" (ways of life, histories) from total oblivion.
  - TIME was post-Civil War when, after Andrew Jackson's 1830s clearance of First Nations from east of the Mississippi, in 1870s President (General) U.S. Grant carried out his "Peace Policy" of Indian Wars: after U.S. military conquered all the resisting nations, there would be peace --enforced through agents on all reservations.
- Era of Manifest Destiny propaganda pushed U.S. into the Mexican War (1846-1848) and following takeover of the U.S. Southwest and California. "Manifest Destiny" ideology continued after the Civil War with added slogans of "Progress" seen as Social Darwinism, a unilinear cultural evolution with Anglo White Men the most evolved.
- Smithsonian's Bureau of American Ethnology was founded ,as extermination of bison herds forced Western First Nations into surrender, and Grant's policies not only sent agents to rule reservations, but portioned reservations out to Christian missionaries to school Indians and, with the agents, force abandonment of Indian ways of life.
- The purpose of the BAE was SCIENTIFIC, to objectively record all data descriptive of "tribes" ways of life, parallel to scientific botany, geology, etc, recording all data of other features of aboriginal America.
  - In spite of this objective, BAE founder-Director J.W. Powell allowed considerable freedom to his employees to work as they thought best. Anthropology was NOT a

- profession yet. James Mooney an Irish immigrants' son who radically supported Irish nationalism, saw American First Nations as similar to his conquered Irish people, and worked to support Cherokee, Kiowa, and others against U.S. assimilation policy. His BAE report on the Ghost Dance religious movement of late 1880s on (persisting until 1970s) was a major study favorably comparing the religion to Christianity and others led by prophets.
- Along with the BAE producing substantial records of elders' descriptions of their societies, in New York Professor Franz Boas himself worked tirelessly to preserve such records of British Columbia nations and to lead and assist students and other researchers to work similarly in other regions. Boas aimed to find and facilitate literate members of First Nations and assist them to themselves interview and record their people's elders, histories, customs, and languages. For this he was honored by First Nations and also Black colleges that he assisted. Frank Speck was one of Boas's first generation of students. Speck persisted for decades, against disdain for what was termed naïvetè, to recognize and support the remnants in Eastern America of the nations overcome before U.S. treaties were prepared (beginning 1790s). These communities were not federally recognized as tribes and lived precariously. As a result of Speck's work and of later anthropologists and ethnohistorians building on his work, some of these communities are at last getting federal recognition and assistance in retaining and restoring their homelands.
  - CONCLUSION: Anthropologists' "salvage ethnographies" have been critical to First Nations' efforts for retention and restorations of their communities and homelands. Far from "erasing" them, anthropologists supported them against obliteration and recorded immense amounts of information now used by their descendants.

#### *RELATED BOOKS*

- Kehoe, Alice B. 1981, revised editions 1992, 2006 *North American Indians: A Comprehensive Account*. Upper Saddle River NJ: Prentice-Hall Inc.
- 1989 *The Ghost Dance: Ethnohistory and Revitalization*. Second edition, 2006, Waveland Press, Long Grove IL.
- 2012 *Amskapi Pikuni: the Blackfeet People*. In collaboration with Stewart E. Miller [Blackfeet Nation THPO] based on manuscript by Clark Wissler. Albany: SUNY Press.
- 2017 *North America Before the European Invasions*. New York: Routledge.

