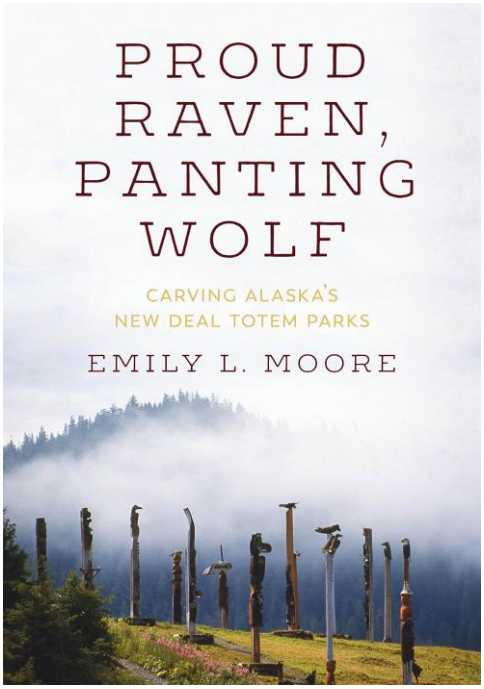
PANORAMA
Journal of the Association of Historians of American Art
ISSN: 2471-6839

Cite this article: Sascha T. Scott, review of *Proud Raven, Panting Wolf: Carving Alaska's New Deal Totem Parks*, by Emily L. Moore, *Panorama: Journal of the Association of Historians of American Art* 5, no. 2 (Fall 2019), https://doi.org/10.24926/24716839.2256.

Proud Raven, Panting Wolf: Carving Alaska's New Deal Totem Parks

Emily L. Moore



Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2019. 288 pp.; 85 b & w illus.; 1 map, 19 color illus.; Hardcover: $39.95 (ISBN: 9780295743936)

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Emily L. Moore's outstanding book, *Proud Raven, Panting Wolf: Carving Alaska's New Deal Totem Parks*, is a thoughtful and sustained study of the six totem parks in Southeast Alaska. Created between 1938 and 1942, the totem parks are a product of President Franklin D. Roosevelt's New Deal. The project was proposed and overseen by the US Forest Service, which hired Tlingit and Haida men to remove nineteenth-century "totem poles" (more accurately, "crest poles," 7) from uninhabited village sites. Tlingit and Haida carvers—employed by the Civilian Conservation Corps (CCC)—were directed to either restore or replicate poles based on their condition. The poles were then erected in one of the six totem parks, located near steamship routes that brought tourists to the region. The government hoped the parks would facilitate economic growth in the area, including through the sale of Native goods.

A crest pole marks clan lineage, documenting family stories and histories (or "crest stories"). Historically, a patron would commission a pole from a carver from the opposite moiety. When the pole was raised, the patron hosted a "potlatch," such as a dedication ceremony or memorial feast. The poles, left unprotected from Alaska's wet climate, were allowed to decompose. Therefore, the restoration and replication of crest poles, their placement in public parks geared toward tourism, and the source of funding (the federal government) for the poles all challenge traditional Tlingit and Haida protocols. As a result, the parks have been understood as shameless appropriations, inauthentic spaces, and devoid of meaning for Haida and Tlingit people (ix, 16). Moore challenges these assumptions, deftly showing how the totem parks served the needs of the United States government and the Tlingit and Haida communities and highlighting how Native communities actively shaped the government program.

Moore clearly lays out the three main arguments of her book in the introduction: the totem parks are aesthetically, culturally, and politically significant; the parks were part of a larger cultural nationalist movement that sought to identify and preserve America's heritage; and Tlingit and Haida communities played an active role in the creation and representation of the totem parks, mobilizing the project to advance broader claims of self-determination (10). This third argument offers the most important and field-shaping contribution of the book. Throughout the text, Moore provides numerous examples of how Tlingit and Haida communities used the restoration project to reassert their right to their ancestral territories, to self-governance, and to practice their culture as they saw fit (21).

Proud Raven, Panting Wolf is notable for foregrounding Tlingit and Haida perspectives about the parks and the totem poles within them. Seeking to understand how Native communities understood the totem park project and its legacy, Moore interviewed Claude Míijuu Morrison (Haida), the last living elder to have worked on the parks in the 1930s; his descendants; and the descendants of other carvers. She also spoke with Tlingit and Haida scholars, leaders, and cultural experts. These interviews happened over the course of many years. Along the way, Moore presented her ideas to Tlingit and Haida communities, taking their feedback seriously as she wrote the book. This book is therefore a prime example of the ethical import and scholarly benefits of consultation and dialogue with Indigenous communities. It also underscores the benefits of slow art history. Moore's book is the product of sustained dialogue and extensive primary research, including government records. (The appendix, for example, offers a working list of Native and non-Native people who helped build the parks, compiled from numerous sources.) The result is a multifaceted and nuanced narrative about how the parks offered Tlingit and Haida communities an opportunity, albeit a fraught one, to reassert their sovereignty and to practice, celebrate, and pass on their cultural heritage after prolonged government suppression.

Fig. 1. US Forest Service Officials at Old Kasaan Village, 1938. Courtesy of the National Archives. Photograph number 035-TA-14, Records of the Civilian Conservation Corps, 1933-1935, Record Group 35, National Archives at College Park

The nine chapters of the book offer a fascinating and prismatic history of the Alaskan totem parks: beginning with their conception, moving to their creation and reception as well as that of the poles, and concluding with their legacy. Chapter one, "Archival Claims," lays the groundwork for the argument that Tlingit and Haida communities used the parks to assert their land rights and sovereignty. The springboard for this discussion is the Forest Service's photographic record of the nineteenth-century totem poles that the agency hoped to restore for the totem parks (fig. 1). The photographs present the poles and villages in Tongass National Forest as "abandoned" and "ruins," rhetoric that has long been wielded by colonial powers to seize Indigenous spaces. Such claims were an

affront to Tlingit and Haida communities, who saw crest poles as enduring testimonies of their clan histories and who were actively asserting their right to Tongass National Forest in the face of Forest Service opposition. Moore addresses why Tlingit and Haida communities allowed the totem park project to proceed despite having an acrimonious relationship with the Forest Service. The project would employ a good number of Tlingit and Haida men, and yet Moore convincingly argues that economic relief was not the sole motivation of Native communities. Native leadership also saw in the restoration project a way to archive their crest claims, which bolstered their assertion that they had not abandoned Tongass National Forest and that the territory remained important to them. In addition, Moore explains that although the historical poles were moved from their original sites on Tlingit and Haida lands to public parks, Native constituencies insisted the totem parks be situated in contemporary Native villages, allowing Native communities to maintain some degree of control over their poles.

Chapter two, "Exacting Copies," moves from the foundations of the CCC project to the complex issues surrounding the replication of nineteenth-century poles. Moore addresses the gap between the CCC's expectations of "preservative replication" and Tlingit and Haida notions of "regenerative replication." The Forest Service placed emphasis on the exact physical replication of historical totem poles. Tensions arose when carvers took creative liberties that struck the Forest Service as too modern or inauthentic. What the Forest Service failed to understand is that for Tlingit and Haida carvers to "copy" an old pole was not to replicate its exact physical appearance but instead to preserve its meaning—namely, the pole's associated crest story. Many of the most sympathetic advocates of Native arts believed the best way to preserve "Indian" culture was to petrify it, and thus demanded static reproduction of past objects, styles, and tropes. As Moore demonstrates, for Tlingit and Haida carvers, preserving culture was a regenerative and creative act.

Chapter three, "French and English Totems," analyzes the structure of the parks themselves. The layout of the parks loosely follows two dominant paradigms of landscape design: the English garden (picturesque parks in which totem poles are set along winding pathways) and the French garden (formal parks with poles symmetrically placed along a grid or axis). Moore argues that in drawing from these two garden traditions, which were familiar to American audiences, the Forest Service sought to elevate the status of crest poles, guiding visitors to understand them as dignified national monuments rather than exotic curiosities. This is among the shortest chapters in the book and it is one of the few places where the reader is left wanting more analysis. Moore addresses which design was chosen for which park and speaks to some of the pragmatic considerations, including topography and space constraints. But one wonders if these were the only factors that account for why an English-style layout was chosen for some locations and the French style was chosen for others. What were the ideological underpinnings of these structural and design choices, and what did these choices communicate about the parks, the poles, and the governmental aspirations, beyond elevating the status of the poles in the eyes of non-Native visitors? What aspects of the government's agenda were stable across all of the parks, and what might have been the interpretive aspirations of the Forest Service for a particular park based on the politics of its location?

The next two chapters each focus on a specific pole, offering a close reading of the pole and its context of production. These chapters highlight the knowledge and skill of CCC master carvers, as well as the cultural and political meanings of the poles for Tlingit and Haida communities. Chapter four, "John Wallace's Howkan Eagle," builds on arguments made in

chapter two. Wallace, a Haida master carver, was asked to copy a nineteenth-century pole. His notion of a copy included the visual qualities of the original pole, as well as his memory and understanding of the meaning of the crest belonging to the Eagle moiety. As a result, his copy was at odds with the Forest Service expectations, which hinged on Wallace producing an exact visual copy of the original pole. The Forest Service rejected the pole, and Wallace was compelled to make a second, more accurate (in the eyes of his employers) copy.

Fig. 2. Proud Raven/"Lincoln" Pole (left) at Tongass Village, early 20th century. Photograph. William A. Langille Photograph Collection, Alaska State Library, ASL-PCA-123-36

Chapter five, "Proud Raven," takes its name from a specific pole, which was replicated under the supervision of Tlingit carver Charles Brown (fig. 2). The Forest Service's interest in this pole—popularly called the "Lincoln pole"—was linked to the misidentification of the figure at its top as President Abraham Lincoln, a myth that has long persisted in literature about the parks. Moore challenges this myth by underscoring how Tlingit people understand the figure as representing the first white man their ancestors saw on their shores. This identification is important because it asserts Tlingit primacy in Southwest Alaska, showing they had ties to Tongass National Forest long before colonial forces arrived (105). This claim was particularly potent in the 1930s, when the Tlingit were asserting their rights to this territory, which the Forest Service adamantly rejected.

The next two chapters turn from individual poles and their carvers to the presentation and reception of the totem parks. Chapter six, "The Wolf and The Raven," maps out the distance between intention and execution with respect to some of the aims of the Forest Service, illuminating how the parks and the poles were rescripted to serve dominant colonial narratives. Moore analyzes the popular guidebook *The Wolf and the Raven: Totem Poles of Southeastern Alaska*, published by the University of Washington Press in 1948. Material for the book was originally gathered beginning in 1939 as part of a Forest Service project that aimed to record the crest stories of the 121 totem poles in the six totem parks. These stories were to be published in a series of pamphlets, one for each of the totem parks, and were intended to convey to the public the Indigenous meanings and functions of the poles. In the face of gross misinformation about Alaskan totem poles, the project promised to record accurate crest stories as conveyed by Tlingit and Haida knowledge bearers, including by Tlingit carver Charles Brown, who was asked to gather information about the poles from Indigenous communities. The outbreak of World War II halted the publication of the pamphlets, as the Forest Service struggled to find a publisher. After the war ended, anthropologist Viola Garfield, who joined the project in 1940, approached her home institution's press at the University of Washington about publishing the material as a book. The press's editors wanted to broaden the audience for the book, and so Garfield extensively rewrote the text to meet this goal. In the process, a good deal of localized Indigenous

knowledge was omitted; Native participation was elided (for example, Brown's voice and participation was all but erased); and the poles were presented based on dominant aesthetic and political values that emphasized (often decontextualized) iconographic decoding, connoisseurship, and a narrative heavily laden with cultural nationalism.

Chapter seven, "Model Poles and Model Men," speaks to how the totem parks became a platform for Indigenous cultural continuance. Moore asks, if the aim of the parks was to facilitate a market for Native arts, and in particular for carving, did it work? She answers this difficult question by considering the work of George Daniel Benson (Tlingit), one of the few carvers from the totem park project who tried to make a living as an artist after the CCC closed. That so few CCC carvers tried to enter the market signals the challenges they faced. The market for Indigenous handicrafts by people of Southeast Alaska saw a dramatic increase between 1938 and 1944, and during this time woodcarving—including highly popular model totem poles—increased its market share. Nevertheless, woodcarving accounted for a small percentage (5 percent in 1938 and 12 percent in 1942) of the overall market for Native objects, which was dominated by baskets and moccasins (154). Despite the Forest Service's efforts, the gains made in elevating the reputation of totem poles among visitors and fostering a tourist market for woodcarving were decidedly modest (159). Moore reasons that the program was a success nonetheless because it ensured the transmission of knowledge about carving within Native communities. Benson shared what he knew with younger generations and therefore was instrumental in spurring a carving revival in the 1960s.

Chapter eight, "The Wrangell Potlatch," offers a lengthy discussion of what Moore deems one of the most extravagant celebrations of the totem pole restoration program. The event was organized by boosters to dedicate the city of Wrangell's new totem park on Shakes Island. The park included (and still includes) a rebuilt Tlingit community house—the historic house of the Shakes, a long line of Tlingit leaders. The Tlingit had their own motivations for participating in this celebration and for ensuring it observed Native protocol: it provided an opportunity for a Tlingit clan to restore the lineage of their leaders, which had been disrupted in 1916 owing to interference by the church and local government (161), and to assert clan governance. Native participation was also a way to assert some control over Shakes Island and its heritage (163). The vexed celebration, Moore writes, was a space where Tlingit leaders and United States officials briefly found common ground amidst battles over Tongass National Forest. These tensions heated up again in the late 1940s, when the area was commercially opened up to the pulp industry (179).

The epilogue considers the legacy of the CCC totem parks by addressing their relationship to the tourist industry and to the Tlingit and Haida communities. As Moore succinctly explains, "Americans turned to (their ideas of) Tlingit and Haida totem poles as monuments for a distinctive national past, and Tlingit and Haida people sought to channel their interest into opportunities to strengthen the claims of their ancestral crests" (180). By the 1940s and 1950s, the parks fell into disrepair, exacerbated by the United States' catastrophic "termination" policy, which aimed to assimilate Native peoples by denying the sovereignty of Indigenous nations, attempting to end government support of tribal communities, and aiming to relocate Native people from reservations to urban areas. The parks saw a revival in the 1960s, as a nationwide Indigenous rights movement challenged and ultimately upended the federal policy of termination. Moore explains that even as public interest in the parks ebbed and flowed, the parks held their potential for Tlingit and Haida communities as places where "nationhood could be proclaimed, where clans could continue to point to their

ancestor's stories as evidence of their primacy on their land" (181). Today, the New Deal totem parks are all being actively used and restored by the parks' home communities and are important cultural, economic, and educational sites (183). This is demonstrated in the opening of Moore's book, which describes a powerful moment during a week-long celebration in 2009 ,when ninety-nine-year-old Claude Míijuu Morrison watched his grandsons, who are also carvers, hoist a new pole in Hydaburg Totem Park. The 2009 pole is a replica of a 1930s pole, which itself is a replica of a nineteenth-century pole from the Haida village of Howkan. The 2009 pole is a monument to Haida resistance and resilience, testifying to the strength of community, knowledge sharing, creativity, innovation, and tradition, and proclaiming Haida continuance in the future.

Moore's book covers a lot of ground, and, as any good book, it left me wanting to know more about certain topics. For example, the totem poles in the parks were intended for public consumption. Moore acknowledges that this marked a change from the previous context of production and reception of the crest poles. As such, I wanted to know if and how carvers adapted their style and forms to the transcultural sites of installation of the poles. In other words, did the new placement of the poles in touristic totem parks change what the carvers represented and how? On a similar note, throughout the book Moore notes that carvers altered the style of poles they replicated or restored. What factors led to these transformations: skill, technology (she does touch on changes in paint technologies), tastes (individual, community, and/or public)? To be fair, this book does a lot, and no book can do it all.

Moore's narrative mode and her structural choices result in a book that is both highly engaging and accessible. The book is informed by key methodological texts and conceptual ideas in the field of Native American and Indigenous studies, as is clear from the body and the notes. Yet Moore tells the story of the parks in a way that does not foreground the theoretical. She avoids academic jargon, and when she does bring in field-specific concepts, such as "visual sovereignty" (21), she explains them with lucidity. This book was not written to flaunt the intelligence of the author, a tendency in many academic books that can lead to convoluted prose and can alienate readers. Instead, Moore tells the complex story of the parks, their carvers, and the many constituencies they serve with crisp clarity, humanity, and humility. I linger on how the book was written because accessibility is a key to democratizing knowledge. For a book to be a meaningful intervention, which this book is, it cannot simply be written for other academics. Moore's book will be of great interest to specialists, but the way it is written also makes it accessible and appealing to broader audiences.