



## NATIONAL ENDOWMENT FOR THE HUMANITIES

DIVISION OF RESEARCH PROGRAMS

### **Narrative Section of a Successful Application**

The attached document contains the grant narrative and selected portions of a previously funded grant application. It is not intended to serve as a model, but to give you a sense of how a successful application may be crafted. Every successful application is different, and applicants are urged to prepare a proposal that reflects their unique project and aspirations. Prospective applicants should consult the Research Programs application guidelines at <https://www.neh.gov/grants/research/public-scholar-program> for instructions. Applicants are also strongly encouraged to consult with the NEH Division of Research Programs staff well before a grant deadline.

The attachment only contains the grant narrative and selected portions, not the entire funded application. In addition, certain portions may have been redacted to protect the privacy interests of an individual and/or to protect confidential commercial and financial information and/or to protect copyrighted materials.

**The application format has been changed since this application was submitted.** You must follow the guidelines in the currently posted Notice of Funding Opportunity (see above link).

Project Title: How the West was Won--and Lost--during the American Civil War

Institution: None (Independent Scholar)

Project Director: Megan Kate Nelson

Grant Program: Public Scholars

Megan Kate Nelson, PhD

NEH Public Scholar Award 2017

Project Narrative: *Path of the Dead Man: How the West was Won – and Lost – during the American Civil War*

The blanket: made of wool, large enough to wrap around your shoulders and fasten at the waist with a belt. Its horizontal stripes: alternating colors of dark brown, white, and blue. The blue is not indigo – that particular dye was not available at Bosque Redondo, the New Mexico reservation on which Navajos were imprisoned between 1864 and 1868. Instead, it is the blue of Union soldiers' coats, the threads unraveled, re-raveled, and woven into the blanket's pattern. At the center and the edges: large red diamonds and triangles, designs inspired by the Hispaño Rio Grande blankets that the Union Army distributed to the Navajos in the reservation's first years. Designs created with synthetically dyed Germantown yarns, spun in the mills of Pennsylvania and transported to Bosque Redondo on the Santa Fe Trail.

These materials were inferior to the long, silky wool strands of *churro* sheep that the Navajos had herded for hundreds of years in Diné Bikéyah (the homeland). But the weavers did what they could with the materials at hand. The blankets they made served several purposes at once: they kept family members warm and dry in the exposed flatlands of the reservation; they contributed to a subsistence economy at Bosque Redondo, helping Navajos to retain a sense of independence within a landscape of confinement; and they were – and continue to be – forms of active remembering. Through the blankets, Navajo weavers told the stories of who they had been before the Union Army defeated them and drove them to Bosque Redondo, and who they became afterwards. They are material evidence of the most traumatic experience in Navajo history, a moment that is also part of a larger national history of the American Civil War.

The majority of academic books and articles depict the Civil War as a series of battles and other events that took place entirely east of the Mississippi River: Gettysburg; Sherman's March; Appomattox. But what most Americans do not know is that the war also took place far west of the Mississippi, in running battles over snowy mesas and through parched deserts. Both the Union and the Confederacy had designs on the region; they wanted it for its gold and its access to California's Pacific ports. The battles in the Southwestern territories – involving Union and Confederate soldiers but also Navajos, Apaches, and Hispaño soldiers and civilians – were vital to both the outcome of the Civil War in the East and to the history of conquest and conflict over resources in the West.

*Path of the Dead Man: How the West was Won—and Lost—during the American Civil War* is a narrative history of the Civil War West. In it I argue that the Confederate loss of the West in the summer of 1862 weakened them financially, making them even more vulnerable to Union blockades. In the long term, this meant fewer food supplies and weapons for the Confederate army, all but guaranteeing their defeat. Once the Union regained full control of the West, it became clear that the Civil War was not a lull in the expansionist history of the nation but rather, an event that made an American empire possible. U.S military control in this theater allowed Republicans to pass legislation (including the Homestead Act and the Pacific Railway Act) to “settle” the West. These acts helped bring about the Republicans' vision of a continental nation full of enterprising free laborers.

The achievement of this Republican vision of the Union rested not only on the defeat of Confederates but also on the extermination or removal of the West's Native Americans. *Path of the Dead Man* argues that the Union Army's campaigns against Navajos, Apaches, Kiowas, and Comanches were part of its national war effort, as important to the Union's goals during the Civil War as the military's marches through southern territory. By focusing on the Civil War as an Indian

War, *Path of the Dead Man* also complicates the common notion of the Civil War as a “just war” for racial equality. It exposes the fact that at the same moment at which the Union began to fight for African-American emancipation in the East, it worked for Indian eradication and land seizures in the West.

It was the land itself – a huge expanse of high desert and jagged, volcanic mountain ranges – that brought Anglos, Hispaños, and Native Americans into conflict with one another during the 1860s. *Path of the Dead Man* details how the desert environment determined the nature of the battles between these groups, forcing them to rely on well-known thoroughfares with access to water, and well-stocked wagon trains. This made all of them more vulnerable to attack. It was the Union Army’s ability to control resources that explains their victories over both the Confederates and Native Americans in the Civil War West.

*Path of the Dead Man* begins in the summer of 1861 as Confederate forces invaded New Mexico and ends in 1868 as the Navajos returned to their homeland after four years of imprisonment at Bosque Redondo. It tells this little-known story through the experiences of nine charismatic individuals: *John R. Baylor*, a Texas legislator and lieutenant colonel of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Texas Mounted Volunteers, who established the Confederate Territory of Arizona and installed himself as governor; *Louisa "Lou" Hawkins Canby*, the wife of a Union colonel who nursed wounded Confederate soldiers in her Santa Fe home; *James Carleton*, in command of the Union's Department of New Mexico beginning in the summer of 1862, who engineered campaigns against Navajos and Apaches; *Kit Carson*, the famous frontiersman who led a regiment of New Mexico Volunteers against an array of enemies – Texans, Navajos, Kiowas, and Comanches; *John A. Clark*, an Illinois lawyer who became the Surveyor-General of New Mexico Territory in 1861, mapping its lands for the Union cause until 1868; *Bill Davidson*, a Sibley Brigade soldier who fought in all of the Confederacy's major battles in New Mexico before retreating to San Antonio in the summer of 1862; *Alonzo Ickis*, an Iowa-born gold miner who fought against Confederates and Indians until 1864; *Mangas Coloradas*, the revered Chiricahua Apache chief, who exploited the Civil War to expand his power and territory in Arizona; and *Manuelito*, a Navajo headman and warrior, who fought against Kit Carson's New Mexico Volunteers and who subsequently led protests against the dire conditions at Bosque Redondo.

All of these people shaped the course of the war in the West. They made their mark in the historical record, leaving behind letters, diaries, battle reports, and oral histories. My chapters give voice to each of them, ultimately creating a web of perspectives through which the reader witnesses and understands the contours and significance of the Civil War West.

The book's chapters are divided into three parts. In Part One, "Those Whom the Gods Would Destroy," we meet most of the protagonists in this Civil War story, and follow them as they converged upon the Rio Grande Valley in 1861 and 1862. Part Two, "Trail Men," examines the Battle of Glorieta Pass and its consequences, as the Sibley Brigade retreated to Texas and the Union Army turned to face Navajos and Apaches, who were now the Union's primary adversaries in this theater of war. Part Three, "Land of Suffering," explains how the Civil War became an Indian War between 1862 and 1868, as Bosque Redondo and the gold mines of Arizona became sites of struggle between the Union military and Native Americans over the future of the West.

*Path of the Dead Man* reconfigures three of America's epic narratives – the American Civil War, the Indian wars, and westward expansion – through the personal histories of individuals. As such, it will appeal to both general and academic readers. It will also help us understand more recent conflicts over natural resources, such as the protest actions by the Standing Rock Sioux against the Dakota Access Pipeline in the summer and fall of 2016. Examination of the Civil War West contextualizes this current fight over oil and water in North Dakota, illuminating the motivations

and strategies of the groups engaged in these ongoing struggles. As such it connects the study of the humanities to the current conditions of national life, one of the goals of the NEH's Common Good project.

As a book that explores war and its aftermath, *Path of the Dead Man* also contributes to the NEH's Standing Together initiative. It is a story about how harsh natural environments create peculiar conditions of warfare. Veterans who have served in America's wars in the Middle East will find the challenges that Civil War soldiers faced in desert battles familiar. The book also contextualizes a long history of debates about the nature of war and its purpose. The history of the Civil War West reveals that those who appear to be fighting for "right" often destroy more than they create. But it also shows that those who seem to have lost a war have gained important victories in other ways.

Only a handful of academic historians have studied this theater of the Civil War. Most of them, including Ray Colton, Jerry Thompson, Donald Frazier, and Alvin M. Josephy, Jr., have published valuable military histories of the Civil War West. In the past few years, however, historians such as Elliott West, Ari Kelman, and Stacey Smith have examined this place and time more fully, focusing on labor, politics, and cultural memory. *Path of the Dead Man* is innovative within this emerging field. It is the first book to bring together military, cultural, and environmental histories to explain the importance of the Southwest in the military and political plans of both the Union and the Confederacy. It helps us understand that the Civil War was a truly national conflict, one that involved many different racial and ethnic communities living across the continent. It also situates the Civil War era in western and Native American studies, arguing that the 1860s were a significant moment in the history of settler colonialism and federalism – and Native Americans' resistance to these forces – in the West.

### **Work Plan**

Because the Union-Confederate military conflict in the West involved only around 6,000 soldiers, the traditional source base on which Civil War historians rely (diaries and letters, official correspondence) is small and scattered across the region. Thus, my research for *Path of the Dead Man* has necessitated a broad-minded approach to the archive.

In addition to print and manuscript sources I have examined oral histories and textiles like the Bosque Redondo blankets, which provide important evidence of Navajo and Apache movements and actions in the 1860s. Photographs, lithographs, and engravings portray the Southwest's built and natural landscapes, which illuminate both the events of this period and the written texts that depict them. Although nature is always changing, important Civil War sites in the desert Southwest have survived due to unique patterns of use and settlement. In the fall of 2014 I hiked up mountain passes to reach the ruins of U.S. military forts. I stood on the rim of Cañon de Chelly in Navajo Nation, and wandered along the shimmering edges of the Jornada del Muerto. These places are the material archives of the region's many histories. Seeing these landscapes for myself has helped me to situate and understand the other sources I have gathered in libraries, archives, and museums. I have used all of these materials to put together a richly detailed account of the lives of my nine protagonists and the important events in which they played a part.

### **Competencies, skills, and access**

*Path of the Dead Man* will be my third book. My first, *Trembling Earth: A Cultural History of the Okefenokee Swamp*, was published in 2005 and is still in print. My second, *Ruin Nation: Destruction and the American Civil War*, has been an academic bestseller for the University of Georgia Press since it was published in 2012. Several of my academic articles on the Civil War West were recently published, including essays that examine the environmental factors shaping the Confederate

campaign for New Mexico in 1861-1862, and the role that Apaches played as guerrilla fighters in the battles in this region. I have also written essays and columns for public audiences as a contributor to the *New York Times* Disunion blog in addition to the popular magazines *Civil War Times*, *Civil War Monitor*, and *Preservation*.

Like my first two books, *Path of the Dead Man* is a cultural and environmental history of nineteenth-century America. It diverges from these works, however, by turning from the swampy Southeast to the desert Southwest. Growing up in Colorado, I learned about silver miners and Anglo ranchers, and the Cheyennes and Arapahos killed at Sand Creek, but I never learned that all of these communities were connected to one another, and to the Civil War. As I began to research the West and its environmental, community, and military histories, I realized that I had the opportunity to tell a new story about the vital role that struggles over western resources played in the making of America in the 1860s.

### **Final Product and Dissemination**

*Path of the Dead Man* is under contract with Scribner (Simon & Schuster). I have already written Part One and by fall 2017, I will have drafted Part Two. With the support of an NEH Public Scholar Award, I would finish the book, writing Part Three and editing the entire manuscript.

In the spring of 2018, I will submit *Path of the Dead Man* to my editor at Scribner, Kathy Belden. I have included a letter from her with this application, which confirms my contract with the press and notes that I bring “an historian’s chops and a strong narrative voice to this timely and important project.”

Thank you for your consideration.

**Megan Kate Nelson, PhD**  
**NEH Public Scholar Award 2017**  
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