



## QShaman's Ragnarök: An Iconography of Extremism

Robyn Barrow · University of Pennsylvania

Recommended citation: Robyn Barrow, "QShaman's Ragnarök: An Iconography of Extremism," *Different Visions: New Perspectives on Medieval Art* 7 (2022): 1-19.

On January 6, 2021, after an inflammatory address by the outgoing U.S. president, in which he urged his supporters to march on the Capitol, a violent mob of insurrectionists entered the Capitol building and disrupted Congress's confirmation of the 2020 presidential election results. News networks broadcast the baffling visual roar of red caps, flags, and rage-filled signage. FBI Director Christopher Ray and others have regarded this mayhem, resulting in five deaths and one hundred and forty injuries, as an act of domestic terrorism.[1] Jacob Chansley, the so-called "QAnon Shaman" or "QShaman" —a reference to the far-right online conspiracy theories of "QAnon"—was among the first arrests.[2] His costuming and the American flag-topped spear he carried gained immediate attention on social media and in the press. With his face paint, fur head covering, and tattooed chest, he imposed himself upon televisions and newsfeeds, a mascot for the far-right extremism that propelled the riot. The visual argument he presents is an iconography of white dominance literally hung on the body and tattooed in the skin.

Untangling the image that is the so-called "QShaman" presents an art historical avenue of investigation into thefts from visual cultures of the past and from living Indigenous communities by modern extremists. Joseph M. Pierce, a citizen of the Cherokee Nation and professor of Hispanic languages and literature, has already published an insightful piece on *Artnet* on this topic, which he wrote shortly after the riot. His article brilliantly elucidates QShaman's native appropriation, connecting this racist performance to Romantic portraiture hanging within the Capitol building itself.[3] Indigenous and other scholars of color have long been decoding toxic whiteness of this variety, and this essay seeks to honor and amplify those contributions, as well as the work on white supremacy and medieval studies done by leaders in the field, most prevalently medievalists of color.[4] Now over a year out

from the insurrection, and following Chansley's sentencing hearing along with others, the topic bears revisiting.[5] Conscious of my own identity as a white, settler art historian of the medieval Nordic world, I first engage essential work on both harmful native appropriation and toxic medievalism and bring these important sources into conversation in this forum for medieval art. I then advance an argument considering "QShaman" in connection to the Arctic and Ragnarök, the apocalypse of Norse myth, and highlight the complicity of academia in popular misuses of the figure of "the shaman."



Figure 1. Photographed during the unlawful break-in at the Capitol building, Jacob Chansley utilized a number of visual tactics of intimidation, most notably his harmful misuse of appropriated native traditions, to stand as a mascot for QAnon and far-right extremism at the riot. January 6, 2021. © Manuel Balce Ceneta – Associated Press Photos.

### **"They Know Their History"**

"These guys are really with it. To me what it tells me is that they know their history, right?" American studies scholar Jennifer Marley (San Ildefonso Pueblo) said on *The Red Nation Podcast* a week after the insurrection. "They know what it means to 'play Indian' as a part of engaging in these white supremacist patriotic movements." [6] Historian Philip J. Deloria's foundational *Playing Indian* demonstrates that the

appropriation of pseudo-Indigenous garb has deep roots in the history of political sedition in the United States, going all the way back to the Boston Tea Party, when the self-proclaimed Sons of Liberty dressed in native-styled guises to dump tea into the Boston Harbor.[7] Dressing up in false indigeneity to protest acts of their own government, white settlers position themselves as native to the land they have stolen, reinscribing settler authority while erasing Indigenous communities.[8]

At the Capitol riots, Chansley wore hide pants and polished bison horns on a cap made of coyote fur, a disrespectful misappropriation of the traditional Lakḥóta ptehé wapháha [buffalo horn headdress].[9] Yet when asked about this a few months before the riots, he cited the Navajo Nation, rather than Plains or Lakḥóta regalia, as his source for the head covering: “According to the Navajo, the coyote is like the trickster, almost like a malevolent force, so I’m wearing the skin of a trickster.”[10] As Native American Studies scholar Cutcha Risling Baldy (Hoopa Valley Tribe) explains, Coyote First Person has long been co-opted by European scholarship and conflated with a universal “trickster.”

Coyote First Person is a cornerstone figure in the stories of the peoples of western North America, a primary agent in creation stories, a conveyor of specific cultural ideas belonging only to those enmeshed in those societies, and “a complex embodiment of Indigenous decolonizing epistemologies.”[11] Baldy refers to this oversimplification of powerful Indigenous histories, such as equating Coyote First Person with a universal “trickster,” as colonial parallelism, in which false equivalences between cultural epistemologies render Indigenous systems open to appropriation.[12] This flattening of Indigenous ways of knowing renders them compatible with European conceptions of *myth*, a term which metaphorizes or abstracts people or events which are, within Indigenous epistemologies, very much real, alive and true.[13] The visual rhetoric of “QShaman” at the Capitol plainly relied first and foremost on his “playing Indian,” marshaling a jumbled display of false indigeneity to pose as a rightful holder of land and power in the United States. He aligned himself, through deliberate choices in costume, with a history of settler appropriation as political performance.

The use of what Jonathan Hsy has termed “toxic medievalism” as a means of intimidation of marginalized communities also has a long history within United States white aggression, the most famous recent example being the alt-right “crusaders” at the Charlottesville “Unite the Right” violence of 2017.[14] With the skin of his upper body on display, Chansley shook his spear at Capitol police as he pushed his way inside. His variety of tattoos are entangled in white supremacist imageries. Inked across his stomach in a dark monolith is the silhouette of Thor’s hammer.[15] Above his hammer tattoo is a densely woven inked Yggdrasil’s Ash, the world-tree of Norse mythology, and the valknut, three interlocking triangles which appears on a

number of early medieval objects. On his shoulder is a tattoo of the *sonnenrad*, a symbol often utilized in Nazi occult practices.[16] All four of these tattoos, rather loosely derived from medieval imagery, are highly common within white supremacist or neopagan circles.

Reference to medieval belief systems of Scandinavia such as *mjölnir* and the world tree are, in the context of neo-Nazism, shorthand for the idea of pre-modern Scandinavians as the European “noble savage.” This fictional prototypical Scandinavian is often spuriously linked to the “Viking,” assigning this type of medieval piracy a racialized role. The stereotypical “Viking horned helmet” was only associated with early medieval pirates in the 1870s as part of a German co-option of Scandinavian histories to underpin their rhetoric of racial superiority rooted in a heroic past.[17] The earliest cow horn helmet of this kind was designed for Wagner’s first complete performance of *The Ring Cycle*. [18] Key to this issue, as Pierce illuminated in his *Artnet* piece, is that the “Viking horned helmet” has no precedent in actual Nordic traditions, but was actually co-opted from nineteenth-century colonial images of Native Americans in a romantic re-imagining of the European past.[19] This kind of appropriation of living Indigenous traditions to prop up or invent history for white people has been going on for centuries. And though “Vikings” have been claimed by Northern European nationalists as a white racial category since the nineteenth century, research has increasingly revealed that the marauders and traders known as “Vikings” (*vikigr*) were a racially diverse group.[20] As art historian Nancy Wicker, among others, has insisted, “Viking” is best understood as a job description rather than an ethnicity.[21]

Neopagan groups which have arisen in the United States and Northern Europe in the last fifty years often rely upon myths of white heritage, ardent nationalism and narratives of “Germanic” or “Anglo-Saxon” purity in their reconfiguration of pre-Christian religions.[22] As Haakon Forwald, spokesman for the Nordic Resistance Movement, an alt-right group, told the *New York Times* in 2018, Vikings “symbolize everything about Northern Europeans ... We are adventurous, we take risks and *settle where no man would dare to settle* (my emphasis).”[23] Here, Forwald makes reference to the brief Norse explorations from Greenland into far northern regions of North America in the *Vinland Saga*. Though the Norse were unable to sustain their settlement in Vinland, this narrative of “Vikings” as the first American settlers has become a powerful rhetorical underpinning of European supremacy and jurisdiction in North America. This harkening back to Viking settlement represents yet another attempt to rewrite history and take the place of living Indigenous communities. At the Capitol riots, Chansley drew upon two quintessential taproots of American white supremacy, both with the same intended ends. By “playing Indian,” he positioned himself as native to the landscape through his elision with Indigenous communities. By drawing on toxic medievalisms, he took up the mantle of the

imagined ultimate settler, the original, white invader of North America. To tattoo his skin with reimagined “Viking” iconography links him not only to this primordial settler narrative but also to the fantasy of premodern, “pagan,” fearsome whiteness.[24] This secondary element creates in his performance what Melanie Yazzie (Diné) calls a “double play on the nativism that is really inherent to settler identity.”[25]

Appropriation of medievalist tropes draws upon an often-imagined history, a collection of recycled and reinterpreted belief systems and images of the past, while the harmful interpretation of Indigenous beliefs is theft from many living native communities of today. Yet the ways the imagery is combined provides key insights into the ways whiteness continues to fashion itself in extremist spaces. The two have been bound together in white supremacist iconography at least since the Ku Klux Klan.[26]

“Toxic medievalism” is linked inextricably to how the “medieval” is formulated and taught within the University as an institution, and its origins, as Sierra Lomuto has written, in the colonial project.[27] Adam Miyashiro has discussed the ways that fantasies of the “medieval” and the pernicious notion of the “Anglo-Saxon” have participated in white colonization of the American landscape since the beginning: “The racialization in medievalist discourses about the Americas, and how medievalizing the Americas formed a central part of the settler colonial narrative of whiteness, need to be understood as a process of indigenous erasure, elimination, and ultimately the long history of genocide.”[28] Regarding “Viking” as a racial identity rather than a job description dangerously obscures and then reconstitutes medieval Scandinavian history as a narrative of racial purity and white global dominance. Scholarship on these topics must disrupt the destructive paradigms that underpin visual performances such as that enacted by Chansley on Capitol Hill, which continue to strengthen white supremacist tactics in monopolizing resources and disregarding Indigenous sovereignty.

## **The Mascot**

Through his own self-styling and his viral dissemination through the media, Chansley functions as a mascot for the anonymous masses of QAnon believers, both those present at the riot and the many more who were hidden and spectating behind computer screens. Quickly positioned by the news media as one of the quintessential representatives of all the people present at the riot that day, he has gathered a meaning as a symbol beyond his own personhood. In his recent sentencing, it was made clear that Chansley’s sentence of forty-one months in prison was meant to set an example as he was once again set up as emblematic of all those who invaded the Capitol building.[29] Prosecutors at the hearing noted that,

“Defendant Chansley’s now-famous criminal acts have made him the public face of the Capitol riot.”[30] Characterized as the “flag-bearer” for the rioters, Chansley wielded a megaphone, blaring out incitements to all those in the crowd.[31] The wealth of scholarship on native-styled mascots for sports teams is useful in considering his performance in that it diffuses agency for “QShaman’s” ubiquitous visibility beyond Chansley himself. The task of constructing a mascot is done communally, its meanings only resonant within a network of culturally understood signs.[32] “QShaman” makes use of mascot tactics to draw the eye, to differentiate himself from those around him in the crowd, and set himself apart from them so as to best epitomize them. This lens provides insight into the ways that this performance functioned for Chansley himself, in his goal of serving a “shamanic” leadership role in the extremist crowd. It is also a useful framework for understanding why the “QShaman” performance remained in the national consciousness long after the riot, his image widely reproduced following the events of that day. Even his prison sentence was meant to serve as an “example” among those charged.

The controversy around harmful mascots is still internationally pervasive, with college and city teams like the McGill, Cleveland, Washington and Edmonton football teams only severing their ties to slurs and harmful imagery in 2019 and 2020.[33] The mascot controversy has long been tied to universities, which had, and continue to have, offensive appropriation at the heart of their athletics, a major source of funding for their entire scholastic project. At the time of writing, “Buffalo Bill” and his sidekick, whose moniker utilizes a racial slur, are still the mascots of the Ghent team in Belgium.[34] Vikings are also a common choice for sports teams in North America and Europe, such as the Minnesota and Vienna Viking teams. Chansley’s tangling of Native American and medieval Nordic imagery functions in similar, though disproportionately harmful, ways, as misappropriating cultural signs in ways which demean Indigenous Americans, unlike the misrepresentation of medieval histories, has an immediate and intense impact on living people.[35] Chansley’s performance works within this network of signs, taking on several mascot tropes in ways undeniably designed to render himself visually iconic—ways which, as media coverage has demonstrated, were successful in drawing the international gaze. The mascot validates settler masculinity, in particular, by erasing native peoples and usurping their roles as legitimate culture bearers and inhabitants of the land. Sociologist Michael Taylor (Haudenosaunee) describes this phenomenon: “For those white men invested in Indian-styled mascots, it becomes part of the construction of their identity in what it means to be a man in American society.”[36] The stereotyped, colonial image of the “Indian” as well as the Viking emphasize a warrior-like hostility and strength, allowing such mascots to both give white men access to this imagined, racialized virility, as well as to reassert the colonial narrative of Indigenous suppression.[37]

The “QShaman” performance draws on these strains to signal Chansley’s own masculinity, as well as undergird the white hypermasculinity of the entire Capitol insurrection, which was ninety-four percent white and eighty-five percent male.[38] Mascots create a communal consciousness, separate from the individual, in which groups might invest their sense of identity external to themselves.[39] The individual himself, the person behind the mask, dissolves into the icon, to take on the communal power he represents. Chansley styled himself in this way, taking on the mascot in order to manifest his desire for a leadership role within the conspiracy circles he occupies. The combination of his appearance, amplified shouting and spear-shaking were akin to a mascot dancing before a half-time crowd. And the crowd he catered to was not only the rioters who infiltrated the Capitol themselves—those for whom he would become a visual stand-in and representative—but also everyone else forced to look on and spectate the day’s events. He reproduced on a national stage the harmful appropriations of the native-style mascot that have long occupied sports fields all over the country and world, and the world watched.

## **The Shaman**

By naming himself a “shaman,” Chansley portrays himself as a prophetic leader, claiming an essential role in cosmic spiritual conflicts between angelic and demonic forces.[40] As “QShaman,” he asserts a superiority within the dispersed yet highly formidable “Q” movement, a bizarre internet conspiracy theory turned major political player. His self-styling proclaims that he alone, through access to superior knowledge or spiritual insight, can interpret the cryptic messages “Q” posts on online message boards, and reveal those hidden “truths” to the world. The name provides a white man with a platform for authority, once again reaching for indigeneity to feign legitimacy.

The word “shaman” has a long history within both popular and academic sources attempting to engage with (and often co-opt) Indigenous epistemologies. Though he may not have a deep knowledge of this source material for his rhetoric, it is important to understand this longer history of the “shaman” as an idea when considering relationships between systems of power, the university, and white supremacy in this context. The problem does not lie in the singular extremist presentation of one individual; the problem emerges from, and is embedded in, a broader system of knowledge production and popular consumption.

“Shaman” is derived from *saman*, a word in the language of the Tungus people of the Asiatic Arctic meaning “wise one” or “sage,” and refers to spiritual elders and knowledge bearers within the community.[41] The legacy of the local practices of the *saman* is attested in Chinese sources as far back as the twelfth century.[42] The term “shaman” was first published in a chronicle recording a military incursion of exiled

Russians in Siberia against an Indigenous group in 1661. General Pashkov, the leader of the exiles, went to a local “shaman” to glean the results of the upcoming conflict, and Avvakum, an exiled Orthodox priest, narrates the divination: “[the shaman] started to jump and dance and call the demons; finally, making piercing screams, he threw himself on the ground and foam came out of his mouth ...”[43] Filtered through a seventeenth-century Christian worldview, this travel narrative, the first instance of this word’s publication, associates shamanic ritual with superstition, witchcraft, and the summoning of demons. This connection to conjuring, frenzied or manic movement, and otherness continued to inflect general conceptions of shamanism. A popular travel account published by Dutch statesman Nicolaas Witsen (1641-1717) included another description of a Tungus shaman, accompanied by an engraving already establishing the basic elements of the visual shorthand that “QShaman” would tune into more than three hundred years later.[44]



Figure 2. Engraving after Nicolaas Witsen in the 1705 edition of his geographic compendium of Siberia and parts of Asia, *Noord en Oost Tartarye*. The incendiary title given for this engraving in the book is “Tungus Shaman; or, The Priest of the Devil.” Allard Pierson – The Collections of the University of Amsterdam, [OTM: KF 61-1504-1505].

The “shaman” of the white imagination expanded far beyond the Tungus people or neighboring communities.[45] As the Tungus were known as reindeer pastoralists, shamanic practice was easily projected onto other Arctic communities associated



with reindeer, such as the Sámi peoples of Northern Scandinavia. Enthusiastically, through the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, academics began to use shamanism as an umbrella term for the belief systems of Indigenous communities living all over the world, the word becoming an effective generalization relating many disparate and diverse epistemologies and belief systems.[46] History of religion scholars taking a cross-cultural approach tracked certain shared features of rituals across communities, such as practices to initiate spiritual travel or altered states of consciousness, and grouped them under the umbrella term “Shamanism.”[47] These varying practices from across the world, now united as a common form of religion, could also be mapped onto archeology, linking contemporary practices discovered through ethnography, to older belief systems or a “widespread element of human collective heritage.”[48] In this manner, even specific rituals or practices, many involving private knowledge, were re-conceptualized as the universal form of religion called “Shamanism,” to which white people could draw ancient connections through the cross-cultural interpretation of archeological evidence. In his 1951 text, *Le chamanisme et les techniques archaïques de l’extase*, historian of religions Mircea Eliade wrote an expansive survey situating “chamanismes” of Siberia, Oceania, North and South America, and Asia through a comparative model which continues to be highly influential in “shamanology” today.[49] Eliade’s book was met with international acclaim, cementing the concept of the shaman as a viable means of cross-cultural comparison. In the decades following Eliade’s momentous success, however, significant critiques have been leveled concerning his poor research practices and ill-founded conclusions.[50]

The trajectory of academic pursuit generalizing “shamanic practice” across cultures was never universally accepted. In the nineteenth century, one of the earliest researchers invested in the concept of the “shaman” [Шаманы] was Dorji Banzarov, an intellectual trained in the Russian university system and a member of the Buryat people of Northern Siberia. In his Russian scholarship on Mongol beliefs, Banzarov was one of the earliest to reject the idea of shamanism’s origin in imported Buddhism and rather advocated for the indigeneity of Mongol religious practices: “[Mongol religions] arose from the same source from which were formed many ancient religious systems: the external world, nature, and the internal world, the soul of man.”[51] Anticipating the cultural relativism later popular among anthropologists, Banzarov argued that grouping practices together across vast distances was a reductive method for understanding culture that eliminated “those nuances and details which must have been found among each people.”[52]

What began as a term referring to the wisest members of the Tungus community in Siberia has ballooned out to encompass such a wide spectrum of beliefs and rituals that today it seems to mean very little at all, worn out by simplistic cross-cultural comparison. For instance, when analyzing the remarkable figural carved objects

fashioned by early Inuit in Greenland and Northern Canada, archeologists have funneled their interpretations through this lens of such “shamanic” practices, fashioning narratives about rituals centuries old—and older—to which they have no access. Thomas A. Dubois, who wrote the *Introduction to Shamanism*, a survey of both these shared characteristics and their history in Western discourse, argues that the categorizing of traditions in this way could be affirming for indigenous communities in making visible shared practices across cultures, and even potentially useful for communities trying to revitalize their traditions. Yet he also acknowledges that “Shamanism” can be regarded as a device of Western imperialism and colonial domination.[53]

This leads to questions about how useful the knowledge production around the word “shaman” actually is in understanding Indigenous worldviews and customs. Is this an act of colonial parallelism, to use Baldy’s term a second time, on a massive scale? As anthropologist Alice Kehoe writes, “‘Shamans’ and ‘shamanism’ are words used so loosely and naively, by anthropologists no less than the general public, that they convey confusion far more than knowledge.”[54] In his analysis of the various definitions provided for “shaman” and “shamanism” across disciplines, historian Håkan Rydving notes what vast disparity exists between the meanings and contexts the term is afforded, concluding that, when referring to the spiritual leaders and belief systems of various communities in the world, even in the circumpolar North where beliefs may be interlinked, it is prudent to set the universal “shaman” aside and use each community’s own term.[55]

Beginning in the twentieth century, “Neoshamanisms,” including the one claimed by “QShaman,” were one of the products of this cross-cultural approach. Often practiced by people who have encountered these practices via tourism, taken religion or anthropology classes, or read and/or participated in ethnography of Indigenous communities around the world, “Neoshamanisms” generally takes an eclectic approach, sampling “Shamanisms” from different native groups to create a new, individualistic approach to spirituality that often coopts private native traditions.[56] In popular western culture, the shaman has captured imaginations for hundreds of years, utilized by writers, artists, spiritual tourists, practitioners of New Age religions and even terrorists. In the ways that this figure of ever-expanding fancy has inspired colorful and elaborate descriptions of demon worship, distaste, wonder and, later, new age enthusiasms and alternative neopagan spiritual practices in the twentieth century, the idea of “the shaman” has much to tell white people about themselves. Collapsing Indigenous belief systems into one another for the sake of comparative ease has created “shamanism” as a commodifiable and deracinated global practice. As poet and scholar Billy-Ray Belcourt (Driftpile Cree Nation) warns, the notion of “simplicity,” a false grouping or abridging of beliefs and practices of Indigenous

communities, entraps and denigrates those who live beyond the Western paradigm: “We are all caught up in the Singularity of coloniality.”[57]

### **QShaman’s Ragnarök**

In February 2021, a federal judge shockingly signed an order granting Chansley organic food during his time in jail, since he claims that organic food is a key component of his “shamanic” religious beliefs.[58] This is a brazen example of racial injustice in the US prison system, when most inmates eat meals which cost \$1.20 per meal per prisoner, and there are frequent reports of Muslim detainees in U.S. prisons being forced to eat pork. Later, Judge Royce Lamberth, who oversaw Chansley’s recent sentencing, demonstrated this same over-blown sympathy, and even admiration, for the defendant, delivering less than the suggested prison term by ten months. Judge Lamberth called Chansley’s comments at the hearing “the most remarkable [he has] heard in [his] 34 years [as a judge] ... akin to the types of things Martin Luther King might have said.”[59]

A preoccupation with organic food is actually a pervasive part of Nordic fascist movements. As Helene Lööw, a forefront researcher of Nordic fascism, has commented, neo-Nazis of every age often recruit at farmers markets and “[lecture] about the dangers of fast food.”[60] The “QShaman” rhetoric has also translated into bizarre forms of environmental advocacy. White supremacist groups since the Nazis have paired their zeal for racial purity with a romanticism of the rural landscape and environmental sustainability.[61] These strains of far-right thought pair population control and racial purity with concern for the environment in a move known as ecofascism.[62] At a rally in Arizona on September 20, 2019, “QShaman,” his face painted, his familiar costuming paired with a drum, carried a sign which read, “The poles are shifting!! The icecaps are melting!! This is Ragnarok!!! Its [sic] time to wake up!!!”

Dressed up in mock native garb, he used signage to relate current polar environmental change to Ragnarök, the cataclysmic end of the world anticipated in the Old Norse sagas. In the nineteenth century, the Ragnarök of the Poetic and Prose Eddas was repackaged for modernity by Wagner’s 1876 *Götterdämmerung* (“Twilight of the Gods”), the final opera in *The Ring Cycle*—the same work which introduced the native-appropriated “Viking horned helmet” to a German audience hungry for a national identity and a “pagan,” colonial-inspired past. In the opera, as in Old Norse sources, Ragnarök leads to the world’s end through fire and flood. Chansley stages his settler move to authority within this context of impending apocalyptic catastrophe. He manipulates this environmental devastation in favor of power structures from which he benefits as a white settler, even as rapidly accelerating climate change, especially in the Arctic, reaps disproportionate harm on Indigenous



Figure 3. At a 2019 environmental protest in Phoenix Arizona, Chansley utilized his same harmful visual rhetoric, September 20, 2019. © Nicole Neri – USA TODAY NETWORK.

peoples. As environmental humanities scholar April Anson has argued, the state of emergency, underpinned by the end times narrative prevalent in the European tradition, upholds the settler capitalist nation state.[63] Conjuring the state of emergency through reference to polar destruction, “QShaman” wields Arctic thaw as yet another apocalyptic justification for an extremism that in January 2021 prompted him and the rest of the mob to infiltrate the Capitol building. A perceived stolen election, the bizarre internet prophecies of QAnon, and the realities of polar melt—funneled through the lens of neopagan mythologies—function together to create an atmosphere of imminent global destruction.

Yet the polar ice caps *are* melting, due in large part to the harmful practices of major corporations and regimes like the one that Chansley claimed to defend when he stormed the Capitol. And at nearly the year-mark since the riot, and even after he has pled guilty to a felony for his involvement in the day’s intimidation, the threats and the white panic and rage represented by that mob still loom. It is impossible to reduce the structures of white supremacy and colonialism to scapegoats like “QShaman”; rather, this example is a lens through which to see the ways that

carelessly regurgitated beliefs or histories, rooted in scholarship or university structures, propagates this iconography of extremism.[64] These white supremacist arguments often play out visually, crystalizing in images, transforming rhetoric into iconography. Art historians invested in medieval histories can try to carefully untangle threads of visual argument now consistently co-opted for extremism, to emphasize both local specificities of identities and beliefs, as well as to explore the interrelated medieval world as one of communication and long-distance trade. Yet these efforts are empty if scholars do not also contend with the ways that the “medieval” and “art history” are, and always have been, bound up in structures of power that grind down and invisibilize those without white privilege.[65]

Indigenous Studies teaches us that apocalypse is not a singular, Ragnarök-like event, but rather systems of oppression that strive to make cultural continuity or ways of life impossible.[66] As April Anson writes, “We begin to see that as whiteness spreads over landscapes, glaciers retreat.”[67] The Ragnarök foretold by “QShaman” is not coming: his apocalypse is built, like all far-right extremism, upon fear tactics to affirm white power and the settler state.

---

## References

[1] Bryan Naylor and Ryan Lucas, “[Wray Stresses Role Of Right-Wing Extremism In Hearing About Jan. 6 Riot](#),” *National Public Radio*, radio broadcast, March 2, 2021.

[2] “QAnon” is a collection of false and bizarre online conspiracy theories which have become increasingly prevalent within Right Wing circles. Originally rooted in the cryptic posts of the anonymous “Q” on toxic message boards, QAnon now encompasses a wide spectrum of extremist beliefs. For more, see Kevin Roose, “[What is QAnon, the Viral Pro-Trump Conspiracy Theory?](#)” *The New York Times*, September 3, 2021.

[3] Joseph Pierce, “[The Capitol Rioter Dressed Up as a Native American is Part of a Long Cultural History of ‘Playing Indian.’ We Ignore It at Our Peril](#),” *Artnet news*, January 18, 2021.

[4] This topic has been thoroughly and widely discussed. For some significant recent interventions on the topic of medieval studies, white nationalism and the complicity of the field itself, see Sierra Lomuto, “[Public Medievalism and the Rigor of Anti-Racist Critique](#),” *In the Middle*, April 4, 2019; Tarren Andrews, “Indigenous Futures and Medieval Pasts: An Introduction,” *English Language Notes* 54, 1 (2020): 1-17; Eduardo Ramos, “Confronting whiteness: antiracism in medieval studies,” *Postmedieval* 11 (2020): 493–502; Cord Whitaker *Black Metaphors: How Modern Racism Emerged From Medieval Race Thinking* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2019); Adam Miyashiro, “Our Deeper Past: Race, settler colonialism, and medieval heritage politics,” *Literature Compass* 16 (2019): 1-11;

Dorothy Kim, "White Supremacists Have Weaponized an Imaginary Viking Past. It's Time to Reclaim the Real History," *Time*, April 19, 2019; Mary Rambaran-Olm, "Anglo-Saxon Studies [Early English Studies], Academia and White Supremacy," *Medium*, June 27, 2018; Jonathan Hsy, *Antiracist Medievalisms: From "Yellow Peril" to Black Lives Matter* (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2021); and Geraldine Heng, "Why the Hate? The Invention of Race in the European Middle Ages, and Race, Racism, and Premodern Critical Race Studies Today," *In the Middle*, December 21, 2020.

[5] Alan Feuer, "Jan. 6 Defendant Known as QAnon Shaman Sentenced to 41 Months," *The New York Times*, November 17, 2021

[6] Jennifer Marley, "Settlers Gone Wild: Capitol Hill Edition," *Red Nation*, podcast audio, January 11, 2021.

[7] Philip Joseph Deloria, *Playing Indian* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1998), 6.

[8] *Ibid*, 14.

[9] *New Lakḥóta Dictionary: Lakḥótiyapi-English, English-Lakḥótiyapi*, 2nd edition, edited and compiled by Jan Ullrich (Bloomington, IN: Lakota Language Consortium, 2008/2011); These headdresses are adorned with eagle feathers rather than fur and are worn only by the most esteemed warriors. See, for example, the representations by Lakḥóta artist Čhetáŋ Sápá (Black Hawk) in Janet Catherine Berlo, *Spirit Beings and Sun Dancers: Black Hawk's Vision of the Lakota World* (New York: George Braziller in association with the New York State Historical Association, 2000), 40, pl 7, pl 9; Roberta Frank, "The Invention of the Viking Horned Helmet," in *International Scandinavian and Medieval Studies in Memory of Gerd Wolfgang Weber*, ed. Michael Dallapiazza, Olaf Hansen, Preben Meulengracht-Sørensen, and Yvonne S. Bonnetain (Trieste: Edizioni Parnaso, 2000), 199-208.

[10] Acee Agoyo, "Trump supporter in coyote headdress and 'war paint' indicted for role in D.C. insurrection," *Indians.com*, January 15, 2021.

[11] Cutcha Risling Baldy, "Coyote is not a metaphor: On decolonizing, (re)claiming and (re)naming 'Coyote,'" *Decolonization* 4, 1 (2015): 2.

[12] *Ibid*, 4.

[13] Vanessa Watts, "Indigenous Place-Thought and Agency Amongst Humans and Non Humans (First Woman and Sky Woman Go On a European World Tour!)" *Decolonization: Indigeneity, Education & Society* 2, 1 (2013): 20-34; Baldy, "Coyote is not a metaphor," 6.

[14] Hsy coined the term in "Antiracist medievalisms: Lessons from Chinese Exclusion," *In the Middle*, February 16, 2018, and continues to explore these issues in his book *Antiracist Medievalisms: From "Yellow Peril" to Black Lives Matter* (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2021). See also Annie Abrams, "'The miserable slaves, the degraded serfs': Frederick Douglass, Anglo-Saxonism, and the Mexican War." *postmedieval* 10 (2019): 151-161.

[15] The use of “medieval” imagery in tattooing as a way of aligning oneself with white supremacy is common and has been often analyzed by scholars. See, for instance, Sierra Lomuto, “[White Nationalism and the Ethics of Medieval Studies](#)” *In the Middle*, 2016; Miyashiro, “Our Deeper Past,” 8; Cord J. Whitaker, *Black Metaphors: How Modern Racism emerged from Medieval Race-Thinking* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2019), 158.

[16] Verena Höfig, “Re-Wild Yourself: Old Norse Myth in Trump’s America,” in *Old Norse Myths as Political Ideologies: Critical Studies in the Appropriation of Medieval Narratives*, eds. Nicolas Meylan and Lukas Rösli (Turnhout: Brepols, 2020), 211.

[17] Frank, “The Invention of the Viking horned helmet,” 202: “Germany lacked a heroic age, so borrowed that of Scandinavia, laying claim to the viking-age North as *Germania germanicissima*, or ‘Ultra-German Germany.’ Helgi’s [the saga hero’s] horned helmet was part of this take-over, calling up a subterranean politics of allusion and quotation. By 1900, it had become a stamp of approval, a disembodied smile, a floating demilune that crowned heads of value: pagan, warlike, and Nordic.”

[18] *Ibid*, 199.

[19] Joseph Pierce, “The Capitol Rioter Dressed Up as a Native American is Part of a Long Cultural History of ‘Playing Indian.’ We Ignore It at Our Peril.”

[20] Ashot Margaryan, et al, “Population Genomics of the Viking World,” *Nature* 585, 7825 (2020): 390–396.

[21] Nancy Wicker, “Canon Formation and Structural Issues of Academic Succession in Medieval Art History: The View from Scandinavia,” *Kanon und Kritik. Zur Kunst und Architektur Skandinaviens, Armeniens und Äthopiens im Mittelalter* (Forum lecture via ZOOM, organizers Aden Kumler and Martin Schwarz, April 28, 2021).

[22] Stefanie von Schnurbein, *Norse Revival: Transformations of Germanic Neopaganism* (Boston: Brill, 2016), 127.

[23] Richard Martyn-Hemphill and Henrik Pryser Libell, “[Who Owns the Vikings? Pagans, Neo-Nazis and Advertisers Tussle Over Symbols](#),” *The New York Times*, March 17, 2018.

[24] Adam Miyashiro deconstructs this myth of the “Indigenous European” in “Our Deeper Past: Race, settler colonialism, and medieval heritage politics.” *Literature Compass* 16 (2019): 1-11, 4.

[25] Melanie Yazzie, “[Settlers Gone Wild: Capitol Hill Edition](#),” *The Red Nation Podcast*, podcast audio, January 11, 2021.

[26] Kenneth Ladenburg, “[Strange costumes of Capitol rioters echo the early days of the Ku Klux Klan – before the white sheets](#),” *The Conversation*, January 25, 2021.

- [27] Sierra Lomuto, "Becoming postmedieval: The stakes of the global middle ages," *postmedieval: a journal of medieval cultural studies* 11 (2020): 503-512.
- [28] Miyashiro, "Our Deeper Past," 5. See also Wallace Cleaves, "From Monmouth to Madoc to Māori: The Myth of Medieval Colonization and an Indigenous Alternative." *English Language Notes* 58, 2 (2020): 21-34.
- [29] Alan Feuer, "Jan. 6 Defendant Known as QAnon Shaman Sentenced to 41 Months."
- [30] Quoted in Gustaf Kilander, "[Qanon Shaman sentencing](#)," *The Independent*, November 17, 2021.
- [31] Katelyn Polantz, "[Prosecutors seek 4+ years in prison for 'QAnon Shaman' in attempt to set example](#)," *CNN*, November 10, 2021.
- [32] C. Richard King and Charles Fruehling Springwood, "Introduction: Imagined Indians, Social identities, and Activism," in *Team Spirits: The Native American Mascots Controversy*, eds. C. Richard King and Charles Fruehling Springwood (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2001), 6.
- [33] See Deena Zaru, "[For Native Americans, the fight against mascots is much bigger than sports; For advocates, dehumanization of indigenous people is at the root of the issue](#)," *ABC News*, December 30, 2020; Spencer Harwood, "[Canada split on changing potentially racist team names: survey](#)," *CTV News*, June 12, 2019.
- [34] Andrew Keh, "[Tomahawk Chops and Native American Mascots: In Europe, Teams Don't See a Problem](#)," *New York Times*, May 7, 2018.
- [35] King and Springwood, *Team Spirits*, 7.
- [36] Michael Taylor, "Indian-Styled Mascots, Masculinity, and the Manipulated Indian Body: Chief Illiniwek and the Embodiment of Tradition," *Ethnohistory* 62, 1 (2015): 126.
- [37] *Ibid*, 124.
- [38] They were also proportionally older than at previous far-right demonstrations and often professional, owners of small businesses and college educated. See Richard A. Pape, "Understanding American Domestic Terrorism: Mobilization Potential and Risk Factors of a New Threat Theory." *CPost*, The University of Chicago, April 6, 2021. 7.
- [39] Jennifer Guiliano, *Indian Spectacle: College Mascots and the Anxiety of Modern America* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2015), 11.
- [40] Jacob Chansley, as quoted in Agoyo, "Trump supporter in coyote headdress and 'war paint' indicted for role in D.C. insurrection."



[41] Shuyun Guo and Yanjun Liang, "An Investigation into the Origin of the term 'Shaman,'" *Sibirica* 14, 3 (2015): 46-62, 55.

[42] *Ibid*, 50.

[43] Jeremy Narby and Francis Huxley, *Shamans Through Time: 500 Years On the Path to Knowledge* (New York: J.P. Tarcher/Putnam, 2001), 18-19; Thomas A. Dubois, "A History of Shamanic Encounters," in *An Introduction to Shamanism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 24.

[44] Andrei A. Znamenski, *The Beauty of the Primitive: Shamanism and the Western Imagination* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), 5.

[45] *Oxford English Dictionary* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), Online. "Shaman,": "A priest or priest-doctor among various northern peoples of Asia. Hence applied by extension to similar personages in other parts, esp. a medicine-man of some of the north-western American Indians. Occasionally in wider sense: an adherent of shamanism. Also more recently, with recognition of the widespread similarity of primitive beliefs, the term denotes esp. a man or woman who is regarded as having direct access to, and influence in, the spirit world which is usually manifested during a trance and empowers them to guide souls, cure illnesses, etc. Also *figurative*." OED. For further discussions of the amazing disparity in the ways "shaman" and "shamanism" have been defined, see Håkan Rydving, "Le chamanisme aujourd'hui : constructions et déconstructions d'une illusion scientifique," *Etudes mongoles et sibériennes, centrasiatiques et tibétaines* 42 (2011): 1-16, 3-6.

[46] Znamenski, *The Beauty*, 29.

[47] For a historiography of this development, see the sub-section "Academic Contexts" in Dubois, "Shamanism and the Issue of Religion," in *An Introduction to Shamanism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 4-11.

[48] Dubois, "Shamanism in the Archeological Record," in *An Introduction to Shamanism*, 40-49, 45.

[49] Mircea Eliade, *Le chamanisme et les techniques archaïques de l'extase* (Paris: Payot, 1951), 446.

[50] Fairly widespread critiques of Eliade's methodology began as early as the 1960s, but a recent and particularly condemning analysis can be found in Alice Kahoe, *Shamans and religion: an anthropological exploration in critical thinking* (Prospect Hills, Waveland Press, 2000), which opens with a searing critique and contains a chapter (Chapter 8: "The Idea of the Shaman," 37-46) contextualizing Mircea's work in a lineage of careless European thought: "Eliade uncritically accepted this ancient chestnut of Western thinking, using many secondary and unreliable sources and apparently not always grasping the conclusions of those primary sources he did not consult when they contradicted traditional western biases about 'the primitives'" (3).

[51] Dorji Banzarov, "The Black Faith, or Shamansim Among the Mongols," trans. Jan Nattier, and John R. Krueger, *Mongolian Studies* 7 (1981): 53-91, 56.

[52] *Ibid*, 54.

[53] Thomas A. Dubois, "Epilogue," in *An Introduction to Shamanism*, 372-377, 360.

[54] Alice Kehoe, *Shamans and Religion: An Anthropological Exploration in Critical Thinking* (Prospect Hills: Waveland Press, 2000), 2.

[55] Rydving, "Le chamanisme aujourd'hui," 6, 10: "J'aborderai ce que l'on pourrait appeler "le piège épistémologique," qui consiste à croire que nous pouvons mieux comprendre le *saman* des Evenks, le *böö* des Bouriates, l'*angakkoq* des Inuit, le *noaidi* des Samis, etc., en les appelant "chamanes," alors que c'est tout le contraire qui est vrai. Car en appelant "chamanes", ces spécialistes des rites, nous nous privons de la possibilité de les appréhender dans leurs contextes social, historique et culturel" (2).

[56] Dubois, "Neoshamanism," in *An Introduction to Shamanism*, 333-371.

[57] Billy-Ray Belcourt, "Fatal Naming Rituals," *Hazlitt*, July 19, 2018.

[58] Jacques Billeaud, "Man who wore horns at US Capitol to get organic food in jail," *Associated Press News*, February 3, 2021; Judge Royce Lamberth as quoted in Laura Romero and Lucien Bruggeman, "'QAnon Shaman' sentenced to more than 3 years in prison for role in Jan. 6 attack," *ABC News*, November 17, 2021.

[59] Rupert Neate, "Prison food politics: the economics of an industry feeding 2.2 million," *The Guardian*, September 30, 2019; Geneva Sands, "Muslim ICE detainees forced to choose between expired meals or eating pork, advocate groups say," *CNN*, August 24, 2020.

[60] Heléne Löow as quoted in Martyn-Hemphill and Libell, "Who Owns the Vikings?"; Heléne Löow, "Våldsbejakande extremism: begrepp och diskurs," in *Våldsbejakande extremism: en forskarantologi* (Stockholm: SOU, 2017).

[61] Verena Höfig discusses similar eco-fascist strains within the contemporary "Wolves of Vinland" alt-right group in Virginia. See Höfig, "'Re-Wild Yourself,'" 224-227; Franz-Josef Bruggemeier, Mark Cioc, and Thomas Zeller, eds. *How Green Were the Nazis?: Nature, Environment, and Nation In the Third Reich* (Athens: Ohio University Press, 2005).

[62] See April Anson, "No One is a Virus: On American Ecofascism," *Environmental History Now*, October 21, 2020.

[63] April Anson, "Master Metaphor": Environmental Apocalypse and the Settler States of Emergency," *Resilience: A Journal of the Environmental Humanities* 8, 1 (2020): 62.

[64] Sara Ahmed, *On Being Included: Racism and Diversity in Institutional Life* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2012), 150.

[65] See Eduardo Ramos, "Confronting whiteness: antiracism in medieval studies," *Postmedieval* 11 (2020): 493–502; Mary Rambaran-Olm, "Anglo-Saxon Studies [Early English Studies], Academia and White Supremacy," *Medium*, June 27, 2018.

[66] A recent discussion can be found in Alton Krenak, *Ideas to Postpone the End of the World* (Toronto: Anansi International, 2020).

[67] Anson, "Master Metaphor," 74.