

# Colonial heritage metaphors used in US military conflicts

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The historical reference to "Indian Country" presents a complex metaphor. For many Native Americans it signifies home, family, and territory; however, for others the term can refer to colonialism and Native American land under siege. Through the years the term has evolved to apply to contemporary events and has taken on additional and often contradictory meanings. In the latest issue of *American Anthropologist*, Stephen W. Silliman explores the reinterpretation of "Indian Country" in the 21st-century U.S. and the application of this metaphor to the armed conflicts in Iraq and the Middle East.

"Indian Country" terminology remains pervasive and appears with great frequency in military discourse. The term is employed by U.S. military personnel to refer to hostile, unpacified territories in active war zones. From the Vietnam War to the occupation of Iraq by U.S. forces beginning in 2003, the notion of "Indian Country" offers a powerful heritage metaphor for the armed forces.

The phrase "Indian Country" does not need to be defined for most U.S. soldiers. The metaphor is so frequently used in military discourse that it has become seemingly transparent. Soldiers draw on their collective, national memory to remember that United States military forces have faced supposedly similar situations before, thus providing a "training ground" the military has already explored.

The terminology can serve to make the outcome of conflict in "Indian Country" predictable, and therefore more acceptable. The standard story

is that Indians never won the war, and history has established a legacy of the United States Army as the victors.

However, the metaphor doesn't simply draw on a static view of the past and its values for today but remakes the story we tell. Calling a current context by a past reference, "Indian Country" draws on a presumed collective memory at the same time that it contributes to memory making today. That is, Native American histories and struggles are reframed in light of contemporary terrorism.

Source: Wiley

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