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# Past Traumas, Present Grievs: Exploring the Effects of Colonialism, Microaggressions, and Stereotyping from Wild West Shows to Indigenous Literature

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Past Traumas, Present Grievs: Exploring the Effects of Colonialism, Microaggressions, and Stereotyping from Wild West Shows to Indigenous Literature

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment  
of the requirements for the degree of  
Master of Arts in English

by

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University of Arkansas – Fort Smith  
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This thesis is approved for recommendation to the Graduate Council.

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## **ABSTRACT**

Native Americans have long been, and continue to be, victims of racism, microaggression, and stereotyping. This continued exposure to violence, degradation, belittling, and discrimination work in the forefront to historical trauma and unresolved grief which has led to an increase in the numbers of individuals suffering from mental illness within the Indigenous population. Colonization created a long history of trauma and genocide that effects generations of Native American people, not just the individuals on which the horrific sins were committed. Using the lens of disability studies, this project will examine the ways in which portrayals of Native American people in popular culture have served to further this historical trauma.

Beginning in the nineteenth century and moving into the twenty-first century, it will examine representations of Native American people in George Catlin's Indian Gallery, Buffalo Bill's Wild West Show, film, and literature. Establishing the foundation of continued Euro-American and European racism, microaggression, and stereotyping in popular culture and examining the ways in which contemporary Native American authors respond to these issues in their literature and the patterns that evolve in their search for narrative answers, it hopes to draw attention to the effects of colonialism, racism, stereotyping, and discrimination on Native American people.

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## **DEDICATION**

This thesis is dedicated to my wonderful husband, Jason, and my daughter, Taylor. Without their constant support, love, and encouragement, this project would not have been possible.

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## Introduction:

### Past Traumas, Present Grievs: Exploring the Effects of Colonialism, Microaggressions, and Stereotyping from Wild West Shows to Indigenous Literature

The field of disability studies examines disability as a social, cultural, and political experience. Unlike its medical, clinical, and therapeutic counterparts, it seeks to explore how society represents and defines disability. Disability studies examine diverse groups of people including those who use wheelchairs, are blind, deaf, learn at a slower pace, have chronic pain, or suffer from mental anguish or illness. The field of disability studies does not belong to any single field of academia, but is instead, informed by scholarship from various disciplines, incorporating history, sociology, literature, political science, law, policy studies, economics, cultural studies, architecture, and the arts. However, until recent years, disability studies within Native American populations, even in the medical and clinical fields, has been startlingly scarce. This work explores the narrative ways in which stereotypes and racist views have been perpetuated by non-Natives adding to the trauma and anguish that has led to an increase in mental illness among Native Americans. Racism in this work refers specifically to the views of many Euro-Americans of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries who believed whites were mentally, physically and spiritually superior to other races. They based these views on the prominent scientific studies of the time written by Charles Darwin, Karl Vogt, and Arthur de Gobineau. Stereotypes will refer to widely held beliefs of non-Native populations in regards to Native Americans.

Following the form of disability studies it will combine historical analysis, film studies, and literary analysis to explore the way Native Americans have been portrayed within popular culture, the stereotypes and microaggression that has resulted from those portrayals, and how



Native American authors are addressing these concerns within literature. Microaggression refers to a form of racism and stereotyping that is more subtle than blatant racial discrimination and hatred. The acts committed under microaggression are subtle and ambiguous, often even unintended, but still hold hints of racism. It can be performed in acts of microassaults (name calling, avoidance behavior, and discriminatory action), microinsults (rudeness and insensitivity to racial and ethnic groups, and subtle snubs), microinvalidations (words or actions that negate, nullify, or exclude the thoughts, feelings, or experiences of another person), and microrape (non-physical assaults or penetration of a victim's emotional security) (Hill and Williams).

Beginning with George Catlin's Indian Gallery and moving into Buffalo Bill's Wild West Show, it will trace the rise of Natives being placed upon display where their bodies are surrendered for the gaze of a non-Native population, playing upon patriarchal and colonial ideals of conquest and domination, perpetuating stereotypes, and acting as a form of microaggression. Moving from Wild West shows to film, I will continue to trace the ways Native Americans continued, and continue to be stereotyped, in popular culture. Drawing from films beginning in the early Twentieth-century up to the present, I will explore the ways in which harmful myths, microaggressions, and stereotypes continue to be placed before the non-Native gaze. Finally, this work will draw upon contemporary Native American authors to examine the ways in which the anguish from historical racism and trauma are enacted upon in Native American communities.

The basis for this argument is grounded in the idea of historical trauma, the "cumulative emotional and psychological wounding, over the lifespan and across generations, emanating from massive group trauma experiences," as well as, the historical trauma response which may include mental illness, substance abuse, domestic violence, sexual violence, and self-destructive behaviors (Brave Heart 7). Native Americans, whose treatment at the hands of Euro-Americans

meets the United Nations criteria for genocide, are haunted with historical trauma and unresolved grief that continues to play out in the background of other psychosocial issues.

According to the 2010 U.S Census 5.2 million people in the United States identified as American Indian or Alaskan Native, either alone or with a combination of one or more other races. Of this total, 2.9 million identified as American Indian or Alaskan Native alone, showing an increase in population of 39 percent since 2000 (U.S Census Bureau 2010). These American Indians and Alaskan Natives, whether they identify as that alone or with a mixture of other races, “are the indigenous people of a land now occupied by the United States” (Grandbois 1002). Prior to occupation, it is estimated that Native Americans on the North American continent totaled between 8 and 12 million. However, after contact they were exposed to diseases including smallpox, influenza, measles, bubonic plague, leprosy, and numerous other diseases never before encountered by Native peoples. Subsequently, historians estimate that the Native population experienced a decrease of somewhere between 75 and 95 percent, whether by disease or conquest (Page 105). Amidst disease and conquest, native nations “ceded vast amounts of land and resources to the United States Government in exchange for a commitment to provide health services and other legally binding obligations (Grandbois 1014). The United States government’s inattention to the signed treaties and failure to honor them “has helped to create significant health disparities” among the native nations within the United States (Grandbois 1014). One of the most underfunded areas of Native health care is that of mental health services.

Placing mental illness under the umbrella of disability studies, I argue that mental illness functions in a similar way to a painful, physical disability. We are unable to tolerate pain and use any means available to avoid or rid ourselves of its presence. While some pain may be visible in the bent or broken body, how do we deal with a deep pain, a pain that is real but cannot

be seen? Sean Kicummah Teuton states in “Disability in the Indigenous Americas” that “human bodily pain or mental anguish is intolerable . . . and has no place in the perfect body and mind” (575). We seek any method available to prevent or alleviate physical pain, but mental anguish is not so easily cured. Society’s “extreme attachment to ability makes citizens disregard and even fear those with disabilities,” and this holds even more truth for those with mental illness/anguish who must carry a stigma far greater than those with a physical disability (“Disability in the Indigenous Americas” 575).

The stigma attached to mental illness often causes individuals to be feared and isolated from those around them. It also causes people to delay seeking treatment. However, while this stigma applies to any racial group, at interest here is not only the stigma attached within Native American communities, but also the historical trauma and historical trauma response of individuals within those communities. Stigmas towards mental illness can vary widely within Native groups often depending on the amount of deculturation and reculturation that has taken place.

Along with stigmas attached to mental illness, there is also a lack of funding for mental health programs in the Indian Health System. Native Americans “are plagued by disproportionately high rates of suicide, homicide, accidental deaths, domestic violence, child abuse, alcoholism, and mental health problems (Belcourt-Dittloff 1166). The Indian Health System was established in 1955 to serve the native population, yet “only 1% to 2% of the Indian Health Service’s budget was allocated to mental health services, and only 3% of the staff were mental health providers” (Belcourt-Dittloff 1166). With little budget allocated to this area, it is no wonder that so little help can be received.

Joseph P. Gone found in “Mental Health Services for Native Americans in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century United States” that “the prevalence of psychiatric disorders – especially mood and substance abuse disorders – are atypically high in these Native communities” and that “native American adolescents were at increased risk for a host of psychological problems when compared with non-Indian adolescents, including substance abuse, clinical depression, and suicide” (12). While reports focusing specifically on native populations are rare, what is available continues to “support the conclusion that American Indian and Alaskan native communities contend with higher rates of psychological dysfunction than do their mainstream counterparts, especially in the areas of substance abuse, clinical depression, posttraumatic stress, domestic violence, and suicide” (Gone 12). With a community in obvious need of assistance, Gone attempts to determine why these communities remain underserved and why those within these communities fail to utilize what services are made available to them. In an interview with a tribal elder concerning the relationships between history, culture, the problem of drinking, and depression, he asked under what circumstances the tribal elder would consider referring a loved one to a behavioral health program at the IHS. The tribal elder, under the pseudonym of Winston, had a telling reply:

That’s kind of like taboo. You know, we don’t do that. We never did do that. If you look at the big picture – you look at your past, your history, where you come from – and you look at your future where the Whiteman’s leading you, I guess you could make a choice: Where do I want to end up? And I guess a lot of people want to end up looking good the Whiteman [sic]. Then it’d be a good thing to do: Go [to the] [W]hite psychiatrist in the Indian Health Service and say, “Rid me of my history, my past, and brainwash me forever so I can be like a Whiteman.” I guess that’d be a choice each individual will have to make (14).

Since many Native American tribes often had little to no concept of mental illness prior to European contact it is imperative to incorporate traditional beliefs and healing practices into

mental health treatment. However, this can be difficult when, of the twenty psychiatrists and sixty psychologists employed at the IHS, “only 2 of the psychiatrists and 17 of the psychologist are Indian” (Gone 12). The majority of the psychiatrists and psychologists working for the IHS may not understand or accept culturally relevant practices that include disturbances of balance and harmony. They may not accept diagnosis such as soul loss, “pibloktoq (arctic hysteria), chidnoh (a form of ghost sickness), windigo (melancholia and delusions), schwas (spirit intrusion), and iich’aa (taboo breaking)” which are all conditions listed by American Indian and Alaskan Natives as concerns (Grandbois 1007). It is also necessary, and one of the purposes of this work, to understand the conditions that cause such higher rates of psychological disorders within Native American and Alaskan communities.

Annjeanette Belcourt-Dittloff and Jera Stewart argue that historical racism has played a profound role in the mental trauma of Native American people. Historical racism is an “outgrowth of the fact that American Indian people have long experienced racism and oppression as a result of colonization and its accompanying genocidal practices” (Belcourt-Dittloff 1166). The tremendous loss of lives, lands, cultures, and traditions as a result of colonial conquest has fostered a lingering legacy of historical trauma and unresolved grief. This history of trauma and grief, a history of racist acts and microaggression suffered by Native Americans has become a part of the basis of Native life and experience. Native Americans have a higher morbidity rate than other U.S. populations and Belcourt-Dittloff and Stewart argue that racism may be a stressor with “negative biopsychosocial ramifications” that aids in explaining why the Native American population is marked by high morbidity and mortality rates (1166). For many Native Americans the historical racism and trauma, “the atrocities and mistreatment, such as broken treaties and attempted genocide” have fostered a great deal of mistrust for the government and non-Indian

people (Belcourt-Ditloff 1166). Historical racism, trauma, and microaggression also serve to further socio-economic factors that lead to further trauma within Native communities.

Native American scholars and historians have detailed the destructive history of colonialism on Native Americans, a destruction that remains in the form of historical trauma and grief. That trauma is continually perpetuated upon Native Americans in the form of microaggression, racism, and stereotyping by non-Native society and popular culture. There is not sufficient space within this study to examine all aspects of historical trauma and racism that have contributed to the mental anguish of Native Americans, instead, it will reveal the rise of anti-Native views and images by a non-Native public and how those understandings continue to disseminate historical trauma and grief upon Native American populations.

Chapter One will begin with a historical analysis of George Catlin's Indian Gallery and Buffalo Bill's Wild West Show. While Catlin and Cody were not the only individuals to place Native Americans on display for the consumption of a non-native audience, they are the most significant for the purpose of this work. Catlin, whether knowingly or not, set the ground work for Wild West shows when he dressed as and used Native American people in the display of his artwork. While Catlin was considered sympathetic to Native Americans during his time, his lectures and portrayals of Native Americans were clichéd and based upon a non-Native interpretation of Native life and culture. Catlin based his Natives on the "noble savage," playing upon Romantic sentimentality, he portrayed an image of Native Americans as innocent and childlike, untouched and uncorrupted by progress, yet fading into extinction in the wake of Manifest Destiny and progress. William F. Cody's Wild West Show played on the opposite side of this archetype. Cody's Natives were warlike and brave. They were the savage warriors conquered by Manifest Destiny and subjugated to a superior society. The Native Americans in

Cody's show were to be viewed as worthy advisories, but only because they had been conquered and subdued. In both shows Native Americans were displayed and talked about in the past tense; in the eyes of these showmen, Native Americans had no future in Western society.

Chapter Two will take up where the Wild West Show ends. At the turn of the century, Wild West Shows faded and in their place came film. Wild West Shows had a profound impact on film in the twentieth century, especially in the genre of Westerns. Western films continued to play on the stereotypes propagated by Wild West Shows. The films, like Wild West Shows, continued to reenact crippling defeats and played upon the idea of Native as a brutal, animalistic savage. This chapter will trace the evolution of Native American portrayals through films like *Stagecoach* (1939), *The Searchers* (1956), *McLintock!* (1963), and *The Lone Ranger* (2013). Each of these films, whether portraying Native Americans as noble or savage, placed them squarely in the realm of the past. It looks at the ways these portrayals have shifted or remained stagnant over the past two hundred years, and the effects that popular culture has had in preserving the historical trauma of Native Americans.

Chapter Three will turn to contemporary Native American authors to look at the ways that historical trauma and grief are utilized within their work. Analyzing works like Sherman Alexie's *Indian Killer* (1996), Linda Hogan's *Solar Storms* (1994), LeAnne Howe's *Shell Shaker* (2001), Thomas King's *Truth and Bright Water* (1999), Leslie Marmon Silko's *Ceremony* (1977), and James Welch's *Winter in the Blood* (1974), it hopes to draw out the effects of historical trauma, grief, racism, and microaggression on Native Americans and how the authors utilize these themes within their narratives. Establishing popular culture as one of the primary culprits in the history of trauma and grief for Native American populations, this work hopes to draw attention to beliefs and expressions commonly held by Euro-American and European

society and how those microaggressions coupled with racism and historical trauma have become the foundation for the high instances of mental illness within Native American populations.



## CHAPTER ONE

### Bodies on Display: Native American Representation in Wild West Shows

Robert Berkhofer points out in *The White Man's Indian* that while “Native Americans were and are real,” the idea of the “Indian” is a “White invention that remains largely a White image” (3). From the moment of Western contact, European Americans have often identified Native Americans as a collective whole, undistinguished for their own unique cultural and linguistic differences. Modern estimates divide Native Americans at the time of discovery into “at least two thousand cultures and more societies,” who “practiced a multiplicity of customs and lifestyles, held an enormous variety of values and beliefs, spoke numerous languages mutually unintelligible to the many speakers, and did not conceive of themselves as a single people” (Berkhofer 3). By identifying Native Americans as a collective unit<sup>1</sup>, Europeans disregarded the cultural diversity of Native Americans for their own purposes. In so doing, the descriptions of Native Americans that reached Europe were filled with stereotypes and set the groundwork for the perpetuation of those stereotypes alongside new stereotypes that non-Natives continue to place on Native Americans to this day.

This chapter analyzes historical examples of George Catlin's Indian Gallery and Buffalo Bill Cody's Wild West show totalizing assertions about Native Americans. It interrogates their

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<sup>1</sup> Collective assumptions are predominately a nineteenth century phenomenon. Columbus, William Bradford, and John Smith all distinguished between different groups. The term Indian became the general term for Native Americans in the seventeenth century, and by the nineteenth century, Natives were commonly referred to as Indians instead of by their tribal affiliation.

motives to produce often misleading portrayals of Natives such as financial gain, public demand, and sometimes their own idealized or stereotypical views of the Natives in their shows. Whether intentional or not, these men often portrayed images of Natives that were out of place with modernity, savage or innocent (depending on the showman's needs at the time), approaching extinction, or subdued and subjugated by white civilization. It will also look at the way these misrepresentations of Natives functioned socially. Catlin utilized the idea of the noble, innocent savage to garner public sympathy to the "plight" of the Natives. However, as his need for finances increased, he was not opposed to present more savage or mystical images to entice patrons to his show. The images from Buffalo Bill's Wild West show served to interpret the frontier for the general public unable to live the life that these Natives and frontiersmen had experienced. Cody's show supported progress, Manifest Destiny, and depicted frontier violence in a way that justified the white expansion across the plains. Each man had differing views of Natives and Native culture, but both provided misrepresentations of Natives that became accepted and consumed by a non-Native public.

Despite knowledge gained from exploration that allowed Europeans to differentiate between the numerous tribes of the American continent, early explorers and colonists would frequently acknowledge the different tribes but continued to lump all Native Americans together as "Indians." Describing them in terms of their religious and cultural differences to Western society allowed colonists and Europeans to utilize Native Americans for their own ends creating the still present "noble" and "ignoble" savage. According to the "noble" savage image, the Natives "lived a life of liberty, simplicity, and innocence" that the urbanization and industrialization of Europe had lost long ago (Berkhofer 28). The "ignoble" savage, on the other hand, was promiscuous, filthy, warlike, superstitious, and cruel, allowing Europeans to justify

genocidal practices against them and proclaim their “Christian” duty to cleanse the land of these devilish beings.

Despite centuries of contact with Native Americans, the image of the “noble” and “ignoble” savage remains, as well as an idea of the “real Indian” being one from pre-contact or from early contact, before he was contaminated by European civilization. Even today, most non-Natives conceive of Native Americans as they once were, not as they are now, and expect to see them “out of the forest or a Wild West show rather than on a farm or in a city” (Berkhofer 29). Anthropologists and historians continue to describe Natives’ ancient culture rather than the ways they live today, and omitting their histories “entirely after the colonial period or the last battles on the Plains” (Berkhofer 29). By firmly placing Native Americans in a historical and anthropological past the idea of the “Vanishing American” came to life. Americans bolstered these ideas throughout the nineteenth century, because of the visibility of Native Americans to the public gaze through venues like George Catlin’s Indian Gallery and Buffalo Bill’s Wild West show, which seems to have enforced the views that most non-Natives held of Native Americans.

George Catlin was not the first non-Native to paint and chronicle his experience with Native Americans, nor was he the first to place Native Americans on display. Records indicate that as early as Leif Erikson’s landing at the northern tip of Newfoundland in Canada, Native Americans were taken, probably against their will, to Europe. While little record of Erikson’s adventures remain outside of Icelandic sagas, evidence suggests that in 1009 CE two Beothuk boys were taken captive, taught Norse, and baptized before being transported to Norway, making them, most likely, the first Natives of North America to travel the Atlantic to Europe and be placed on display for a European audience. There is also some evidence that around 1420 “Inuit captives were taken to Scandinavia” and “their kayaks were displayed in the cathedral at

Tromsø, Norway” (Weaver 37). However, after Columbus accidentally discovered the “New World” in 1492, he and other conquistadors frequently sent Native Americans to Europe, first as captives and slaves and later as political delegations and ethnological exhibits. It was George Catlin's use of Native Americans in his Indian Gallery that established one paradigm for the Wild West shows in the late nineteenth century.

### GEORGE CATLIN AND HIS INDIAN GALLERY

As stated above, George Catlin was not the first to paint Natives, nor was he to the first to display Natives for profit, but it is his use of Native Americans that helped establish the model of portraying Natives for public consumption. Catlin helped create and perpetuate many of the ideas held as accurate representations of Natives and their cultures. These misrepresentations were carried into Wild West shows and later films, and many are still held today. It is the goal of this section to analyze the ways Catlin misrepresented Native Americans, why he did so, and the effects that those misrepresentations had on future portrayals of Natives, the Native Americans they were supposed to represent, and the public that viewed them.

In 1796, George Catlin was born in Wilkes-Barre, Pennsylvania. George Catlin received a classical education from the Wilkes-Barre Academy, and later at the Litchfield Law School. It was during his law training that Catlin became fascinated with art. Catlin tried to follow his father's wishes and joined his brother's law firm as a partner, where “for almost three years he labored at the law, drawing, and possibly painting, whenever he could find or steal the time” (Eisler 29). Catlin finally admitted that he could not be happy in a law profession and gave up steady employment to pursue his artwork.

After marrying in 1828 Catlin settled for a short time in Washington, D.C. There he became inspired by Charles Bird King's paintings of tribal leaders displayed in Thomas McKenney's Indian museum. Catlin determined that he must "head for Indian country, where, unlike King's studio portraits, he intended to paint the natives in the quotidian existence, from life" (Eisler 66). Catlin wrote to Peter B. Porter, secretary of war under John Quincy Adams, requesting an assignment as an Indian agent on the Missouri. It was apparent from his letters that he had no idea as to the role of an Indian agent; he was simply looking for a means to pay for his trip to paint the Natives. There is no evidence that Porter ever responded to his request. Finally, despite lack of support, Catlin made up his mind and went west.

Catlin set up his base in St. Louis, Missouri. There he accompanied General William Clark on a diplomatic mission up the Mississippi River to visit Natives in the territory. While hosted by Clark: "George observed firsthand . . . that William Clark had acquired the first great collection of Indian artifacts in America . . . . [T]he expedition's leaders shipped to Monticello examples of native weaponry, baskets, beadwork, and feathered bonnets, robes, cradleboards, calumets – even entire painted tipis" (Eisler 84). Clark's collecting had not ended with the Corps of Discovery, and by the time Catlin arrived in St. Louis, Clark had established an informal Indian museum. Between 1830 and 1838 Catlin made several voyages into Native territory. He visited around forty eight tribes during his entire stay; he spent several weeks with the Mandan, Delaware, Shawnee, Kickapoo, Potawatomi, Kaskaskia, Wea, Peoria, Piankashaw, Pawnee, Ponca, Omaha, Crow, Cheyenne, Assiniboine, Hidatsa, and Blackfeet. Altogether, historians estimate Catlin to have painted close to six hundred portraits of Native Americans and their lifeways. Catlin also began collecting "Indian artifacts" while visiting the tribes. Catlin wanted not only to paint and write about the people he met; he planned to furnish his Indian gallery with

not only portraits but artifacts. He bargained and traded for “the best examples of native craft, such as the white buffalo-skin robe worn by the Mandan chief Mah-to-toh-pa, or Four Bears” which he planned to display alongside his paintings. Catlin viewed collecting these artifacts as scientifically necessary evidence to prove the legitimacy of his work.

While he painted and collected artifacts, Catlin also wrote letters that he sent to the New York Commercial Advertiser, an evening newspaper, which provided him with some funding. In 1841 he independently published the letters as *Letters and Notes on the Manners, Customs, and Condition of the North American Indian*. In these letters and his later publications, Catlin criticized the government and white society for the destruction and removal of Native Americans and their cultures. Playing into stereotypes, Catlin maintained the idea of the “noble” savage, untouched by progress, and quickly vanishing in its approach. At the same time that he lamented the loss of Native Americans and their culture to the wave of approaching Western civilization his “writing often indulges a patronizing – even mocking – view of the Indian” (Eisler 106). Often contradicting himself, Catlin “could be sharply prosecutorial, assigning blame for the destruction of the Indians to white greed, but just as often he reverted to airy platitudes about the inexorable march of history, to which he was a bystander who ‘contemplated the noble races of red men . . . melting away at the approach of civilization’” (Eisler 108). Catlin held a romanticized view of Natives as innocent and untouched, living an almost Edenic existence. Yet, he also realized that white civilization would need to spread out across America and claim the land held by Natives. Catlin’s firm Christian beliefs also spurred his opinions. While he viewed Native life as idealized, he also felt that it was a Christian duty to bring Christianity to the Natives. Catlin urged the need of Native Americans to see the moral and spiritual values of

Christianity without which he believed they “would be doomed as much by their failure to be saved as by the white man’s iniquity” (Eisler 109).

Catlin, realizing that white settlers and the government would continue to encroach upon Natives and their lands, determined that the government should redeem its confiscation of Native lands through a preservation system:

where the world could see for ages to come, the native Indian in his classic attire, galloping his wild horse, with sinewy bow, and shield and lance, amid the fleeting herds of elks and buffaloes. What a beautiful and thrilling specimen for America to preserve and hold up to the view of her refined citizens and the world, in future ages! A *nation’s* Park, containing man and beast, in all the wild and freshness of their nature’s beauty! (qtd. in Eisler 109)

As Benita Eisler, Catlin’s biographer points out; his idea was more in line with a zoo or theme park in which Native captivity is merely masked by clever landscaping (Eisler 109). Catlin, even in his respect for Natives, saw them as attractions. They were objects to be viewed by the non-Native public.

The authenticity of his artwork has also been called into question. Catlin admittedly staged events, costumes, paid Natives for to sit for their portraits, and to perform dances or games for him. Catlin did not want his sitters to be “tainted” with any marks of white civilization. He wanted them dressed in what he viewed as traditional or authentic Native dress. Much like Edward Curtis later did with his photography, any hint of not being “untouched” by civilization was erased from the portraits. Today, modern viewers question his decision to paint the Sauk and Fox leaders, Black Hawk and Keokuk, after they had been captured in 1832. Catlin’s decision to paint the men when they had no ability to refuse can be seen as an exploitation of their “subjugated condition for gain” (Eisler 156). These accusations became

especially true when he later rushed to Fort Moultrie, South Carolina to paint Seminole leader Osceola after his capture in Florida. In both instances Catlin did not paint the men as prisoners, but “felt the need to idealize the captives, transforming wretched native prisoners into social Roman statesmen” (Eisler 157). If Catlin’s only goal was to gain public sympathy for Native Americans it seems that painting Osceola, Black Hawk, and Keokuk in the shackled and subdued state in which he encountered them may have been more effective. There is no evidence of the chains that forced them to sit for their portraits, nor is there any evidence of Osceola’s illness in his portrait despite the fact that he died just hours after his last sitting with Catlin. Catlin was not only motivated by his desire to promote awareness and sympathy to the Natives and their situation, he also needed to make money. Catlin was also driven by his desire to paint Natives in their “original” or “authentic” everyday life and attire, but this desire often drove him to stage the clothing and adornments of those sitting for him to meet the idea of what he viewed as authentic, erasing every visage of white culture and civilization from his images.

Catlin may have been sympathetic to the “plight” of Native Americans, but he still participated in, and perpetuated, colonial attitudes and microaggressions that were common during the nineteenth century. He easily violated sacred Native sites and traditions when he wanted something. In 1836 he traveled to the Pipestone Quarry in Minnesota, a sacred site to the Santee Sioux as well as other tribes. The site was one to which “Native Americans from many tribes had made a pilgrimage to the source of the pipestone, traveling hundreds of miles to quarry for the famous mineral to be carved into calumets” (Eisler 209). Catlin had no doubt as to the significance of the land; he was arrested by Santee Sioux keepers of the site and told that: “No white man has been to the red pipe and none shall go” (qtd. in Eisler 210). They even explained to Catlin that the stone was part of their flesh and “it would be sacrilegious for white man [sic] to



touch or take it away' – 'a hole would be made in their flesh, and the blood could never be made to stop running'" (qtd. in Eisler 211). Despite their explanations, Catlin still went to the quarry. While that act in itself was disrespectful enough, Catlin went further by taking a hammer to the rock wall and smashing sections of it to take back east with him. Catlin "found himself crowned with that familiar Eurocentric distinction, that of "discoverer" of the mineral, now named catlinite in his honor" even though the red pipestone had been carved, traded, and smoked for centuries (Eisler 211).

Catlin may have loved the Natives he encountered, but perhaps it was more the idea of the Natives and their way of life. He condemned the government and progress for destroying Natives and their cultures, but it did not stop him from performing the same acts when it suited his needs. By disrespecting the Santee Sioux when he ventured to the Pipestone Quarry and then breaking away pieces of it for his own use, he became no better than the government and settlers he condemns. His act implies that his destruction and violation is acceptable because he loves the Natives. His love does not, however, necessarily come with respect. Catlin ultimately sees the Natives as a consumer good. They are a product for him to sell, even if the cost of his fortune is the violation of Native culture. With the pipestone, Catlin saw an opportunity for publicity, for his name to be honored for the discovery of a mineral unknown to the non-Native population, and possibly wealth. Whatever Catlin's other motives, his primary goal was always to make money.

After seven years in the west, Catlin returned to New York and opened his Indian Gallery in 1837. The gallery contained not only his nearly six hundred paintings and drawings, but included "cabinets containing painted robes, fringed scalp shirts, headdresses, shields, bows and arrows, and Comanche lances" lining the walls beneath the portraits (Moses 15). Catlin also

erected "a twenty-five-foot-high Crow tipi, made from the hides of twenty buffalos" in the center of the room (Moses 15). From a raised platform Catlin would deliver evening exhibitions and lectures, displaying his paintings and related artifacts one by one as he described their significance in Native life. To add to his "authenticity" he would often dress in his most prized possession, "the regalia of a Blackfoot medicine man" (Reddin 13). When not dressed in this costume he brandished tomahawks or other items to demonstrate their use. While Catlin meant for his actions to add authenticity to his lectures, they lent an air of playacting and performance that actually undermined his intentions.

In an attempt to draw in larger audiences in 1838 Catlin began advertising "his Indians" as "'exotic,' savage, and almost extinct" (Eisler 217). Using this approach, Catlin saw an opportunity to add to his show when Keokuk and twenty chiefs and warriors from the Sauk and Fox tribes passed through New York. The Natives had a full schedule so Catlin must have booked them well in advance, however, he only announced their appearance "just in time to double the prices of tickets" (Eisler 221). Tickets sold out within an hour, and the show proved a success. Keokuk and others interacted and performed for the crowd. While Catlin claimed their roles in the show were spontaneous, they were very clearly staged.

Catlin believed that his lectures and portraits would be enhanced and the viewers could better understand the Natives and their culture if he included Native tools, weapons, clothing, and actual Natives into his presentations. Catlin quickly noted that audiences were drawn to the more exotic examples of Native dress, tools, and culture. They were fascinated by "savage" dances and war, while little attention was paid to activities and tools that resembled white culture. Heeding audience demands, Catlin played up the exotic other, leaving the examples that Native culture was not entirely different from non-Native behind. While the images Catlin portrayed are

the images audiences wanted to see, they also became to be understood by many as truthful representations of Native peoples and their cultures. Catlin's performances and displays of Native culture presented Natives and their way of life as artifacts. The performers became something to be viewed in a museum. His lectures argued that Natives were quickly disappearing, and by dressing up as, and displaying Natives and their culture, he helped to establish the idea that Native Americans were a product for consumption, to be owned, displayed, and viewed by a non-Native society.

When Catlin failed to sell his collection to congress in the fall of 1838, he began to make plans to take the gallery abroad. At first he hoped that his threats to take the exhibition to England and possibly sell it there would be motivation for Congress to agree to his \$65,000 price tag. Finally, tired of waiting for Congress and pressed for money, Catlin sailed to England with his entire collection, some eight tons of crates and boxes and live grizzly bears. The grizzly bears he took as proof of his exploration into the uncharted territories of the Rocky Mountains, an area where he in fact had not travelled. In late January 1840, Catlin opened his gallery in London.

In England Catlin began to impersonate Natives more than he had in the United States. He began to adorn himself with:

“the costume of an Indian Chief,” which included “a magnificent headdress of the war-eagle's feathers,” a bow and arrows, spear, and “deer-skin habiliments, profusely ornamented with scalp-locks, beads, porcupine quill, and various other decorations.” And sometimes he put on that old standby - the Blackfoot medicine man's regalia. He became an actor and demonstrated the use of Indian weapons, sounded the battle cry, and illustrated the stalking and shooting of buffalo. Dances became a specialty (Reddin 32).

He received such a good response from the audience that he quickly hired an entire troop of London actors to dress as Natives and perform for crowds nightly. Catlin “apparently saw no contradiction between promoting the authenticity of everything in his show and role-playing” as the content quickly moved from educational to theatrical (Reddin 32). For Catlin, and many nineteenth century Euro-Americans, Native things, and even Native indigeneity, became something they sought to own. It did not matter to Catlin, or Euro-Americans, that these were white men dressed in Native regalia, with dances and acts being interpreted not by Natives, but by another white man. In this way, Native Americans and their culture are further portrayed as a commodity, something to be owned and displayed. If Native Americans were, as Catlin believed, doomed to extinction, their culture becomes the property of the conquering nation, something to put on and take off as desired.

Just as Catlin was preparing to return home in 1843 a group of Ojibwas arrived with Arthur Rankin. Catlin postponed his return to the United States and started touring his gallery again without his artwork. The act became the art as the Ojibwas performed war and medicine dances, mimicked buffalo hunts and games, demonstrated marksmanship and horsemanship, and yelled war whoops. When the Ojibwas returned to America Catlin quickly replaced them with a group of Iowa that had just arrived in England.

The change in Catlin’s gallery was one “deployed to garner public exposure” and the visual spectacle Catlin provided for his audience “was itself a performance in so far as Catlin projected an idea of the American Indian to European audiences via a stage presentation of images and artefacts [*sic*]” (Pratt 273). Catlin advertised the Ojibwa and Iowa as pure and untouched by civilization while in actuality they had long been in contact with Western civilization. Catlin may have started with good intentions, but those intentions were also to make

money. His desire to gain his fortune ultimately undermined the positive aspects of his Indian Gallery and instead:

restricted the audience's exposure to Ojibwe and Iowa Indians to images and activities that signaled Indian Otherness: their exotic appearance, their incomprehensible language, their use of weapons and their religious rituals. The employment of real Indians cannot therefore be seen as advancing Indian perspectives in place of Catlin's initial simulated presentation; rather, it exaggerate the tendency toward the spectacular that was always already present in the Indian Gallery (Pratt 284).

Catlin presented his images to an audience that already viewed Native Americans as inferior. These images were also clouded by Catlin's interpretation of Native American culture as vanishing. These radical images also served to assure Americans that they had not destroyed a civilized people. It is difficult to justify the genocide of a civilized people, but by portraying them as radically different and uncivilized, American audiences did not have to face guilt over the destruction that Manifest Destiny was causing. Americans and Europeans also seem fascinated with bodies that are different from their own. Gazing upon a body that differs from the Euro-American body can create an emotional response from viewers. That response can vary from repulsion to lust, but that response drives the need to gaze upon something or someone.

Catlin could not envision any form of assimilation without the total destruction of Native culture. By continuing falsely to present his Native performers as untouched by civilization and doomed to become extinct in the wake of progress, he continued the myth of the "vanishing Indian." Catlin hoped to make a fortune with his Indian Gallery and raise awareness to the "plight" of Native Americans, but in the end he did not accomplish either one. He did draw attention to Native Americans, but not in the ways he desired. Instead, he provided misrepresentations that created and perpetuated stereotypes about Natives that would last for

years to come. Catlin played to audience demands for sensationalism over truth and in doing so established the future of Wild West shows.

## BUFFALO BILL'S WILD WEST SHOW

Williams F. Cody was born in 1846 in Iowa and grew up in Kansas. After the Civil War Cody “worked on short-term contracts as a civilian scout for the army, guiding troops through unmapped terrain, hunting for meat, carrying messages, tracking Indians, and participating in military encounters” (Kasson 12). It was this career as a frontiersman that eventually entrenched Cody’s name in the public imagination.

Edward Zane Carroll Judson wrote dime novels under the pseudonym Ned Buntline. In 1869 Judson met and based on Cody a character named “Buffalo Bill.” At first, Buffalo Bill served as a sidekick for a fictionalized James Butler “Wild Bill” Hickok, but soon Buffalo Bill became the hero of his own stories. When Judson wrote *The Scouts of the Prairie*, a screenplay based loosely off of his novels in 1872, Cody agreed to star as himself in the productions. Like dime novels, the play “led its characters through captivity and danger, chases and battles,” but did not win praise for its literary qualities (Kasson 22). The play included absurd special effects like red flannel scalps and anti-Native lines like: “We’ll wipe the Red Skins [sic] out,” and “I’ll not leave a Redskin to skim the Prairie” (Kasson 23). Despite the play’s lack of literary adulation; audiences appreciated Cody’s physical appeal and his claims to authenticity, the idea that Cody was one of the real frontiersmen, and he had fought Natives, hunted buffalo, and experienced life on the Plains while they were still wild. It was this blending of dime novel and stage production that Cody brought to his Wild West show.

In 1883 Cody and his partners opened the first Wild West Show. Cody's Wild West "was immediately recognized as a remarkable theatrical innovation, bringing the stage play together with other entertainments such as the circus and sportsmen's exhibitions" (Kasson 41). According to Paul Reddin, part of Cody's success lay in his timing "[A]nxiousness existed in the 1880s because of a growing perception that America's free land was gone or nearly gone and that its disappearance would change society" (60). Cody provided a glimpse of what life was once like on the frontier. With the country's view that the frontier was closed or rapidly closing, Cody provided American and European audiences a chance to see what they had missed. He provided them a visual representation of the frontier that they had only read about in dime novels and newspapers. Cody's show blended education and entertainment, fact and fiction, and met America's need for a grand, national history in which they had conquered a savage world for European civilization.

The first season of the show employed thirty-six Pawnees who participated in six of the twelve events of the show. The show was broken into six acts which depicted life in the West:

1. Grand Introductory March
2. Bareback Pony Race
3. Pony Express
4. Attack on the Deadwood Mail Coach
5. 100 Yard Race between an Indian on foot and an Indian on horseback
6. Capt. A. H. Bogardus [shooting exhibition]
7. Cody and Carver - shoot exhibition
8. Race between Cowboys
9. Cowboy's Fun
10. Riding Wild Texas Steers
11. Roping and Riding Wild Bison
12. Grand Hunt - including a battle with the Indians (Moses 22-3)

From the beginning Cody cast the Native Americans in his show as aggressors. When not performing as spectacles (such as the race between the Native on foot and the Native on

horseback), they were displayed as warlike and aggressive. In the Deadwood Mail Coach scene they chased down the coach with flaming arrows and war whoops, only to be repelled by the heavily outnumbered Buffalo Bill and his cowboys. In the Grand Hunt they viciously turn on the cowboys once the hunt is complete. A realistic battle ensues in which the Natives capture, torture, and scalp one of the cowboys. Their victory does not last long as the cowboys and scouts are not far behind. A final battle occurs with the outnumbered cowboys and scouts winning, recovering the dead body, and sometimes scalping the fallen enemy. Cody based his program on Manifest Destiny and the white frontiersmen as the American hero. This required a depiction of the frontier as dangerous, the Native Americans of the plains provided the danger. The dangers presented by the Native Americans in the show were parallels of reports and stories of Native attacks on white settlers. To present the white frontiersmen as heroic these attacks were portrayed as unprovoked violence on white settlers. The Natives represented a danger, but a danger that had been, or would soon be, overcome. With news reports of Native victories and evasions of the U.S. Cavalry in the west, it was important for the show to deny Native military competence. They may win a few battles, and escape for a time, but the overall message was that they would be overcome.

Cody employed Pawnee people in his show until 1885, when he turned his attention to the Sioux because, thanks to recent frontier battles, audiences recognized the names of Lakota warriors and tribes. In 1885 for example Cody employed the Hunkpapa Lakota holy man Sitting Bull (Tatonka Iyotanka). The Sioux had recently fought with the U.S., their name and the names of their leaders were familiar to Cody's audience. Cody rightly assumed that people would be interested in seeing people that they had recently read about. Americans had read about the battles the Sioux engaged in with the U.S. Army, and they remembered the defeat of Custer at



Little Bighorn. Since Cody's show promoted Manifest Destiny and the closing of the west, what better people to employ than the last Native enemy of the U.S. The choice represents a nineteenth-century sexism that celebrates and enjoys the spectacle masculine violence. For a non-Native audience, the Sioux embodied the idea of the pure, nature-based, savage culture based on war and hunting instead of farming, gathering, and weaving. The scantily clad bodies of Sioux men add another element of voyeurism and sexual appeal. The image presented by the Lakota entrenched the image of the "Indian" in the white imagination as those who lived in tepees, rode horses, and wore long feathered headdresses. It is interesting that southern audiences did not question these images. The Indian Removal Act is only about fifty years old by the 1880s, so many in the area would have remembered the Cherokee, Choctaw, Seminole, Muscogee (Creek), and Chickasaw that had lived alongside in the not so distant past. Perhaps their refusal to acknowledge the differences and accept the portrayals placed in front of them as representative of all Natives hints at their desire to deny a past that reflected badly upon white civilization and the U.S. government.

Spectators' reception of the show's Natives varied. Audiences cheered them as they rode in the parades and introductory marches, but saved that more enthusiastic applause for Cody and the other white performers. Crowds hissed and booed Sitting Bull yet crowded his booth outside the arena to buy his portraits. Sitting Bull had been treated with a similar mix of awe and hatred as a prisoner of the U.S. Army. His transfers from Fort Buford to Fort Yates, and finally Fort Randall appeared more like a celebrity tour than a military transport. Sitting Bull did not act in the show, instead, he rode in parade and appeared on the show grounds. Sitting Bull recognized the spectacle that his presence aroused. Cultural tourism prompted those same people who booed Sitting Bull while he rode in the parade, to purchase the picture of a Native celebrity.

Since Buffalo Bill Show audiences already knew Sitting Bull for his role in the Battle of Little Bighorn, Cody responded by reenacting the battle in his show. Billed as “Custer’s Last Stand” or “Custer’s Last Charge” the reenactment was the only one that the Natives emerged from victorious. Their victory, however, served to further views of Natives as uncivilized and savage and Custer as a martyr of Manifest Destiny. The scene ends with Cody riding to the battlefield “too late to rescue Custer but poised to continue the work of conquest” (Kasson 113). Reenacting the scene almost ten years after the battle reminded the audiences why Native Americans and the west had to be conquered. By adding this reenactment when Sitting Bull joined the show, and four years after his surrender, Cody reminded audiences that in the end, Manifest Destiny and civilization had prevailed.

Cody changed the scenes in his show as interest in national or global events shifted. The show added a Native attack on a settler’s cabin and wagon train as what happened in the real world. In Europe he added “Phases of Indian Life” an exhibit that “demonstrated a village on the move and women setting up tepees” (Reddin 91). Demands in England for more gory depictions of battles and Native encounters encouraged Cody to add his duel with Yellow Hand back into the program. The scene recreated an event from Cody’s past in which he and his party encountered a group of Cheyenne in Nebraska. Cody and Yellow Hand were the only two in the unexpected meeting that remained calm. The two men began firing at each other with Cody killing Yellow Hand (Yellow Hair). Cody then reportedly dismounted, drove a knife through his heart, and scalped him (Reddin 58). Cody said he claimed the scalp for Custer, however, Cody was known for blurring fact and fiction, and the fight with Yellow Hand “became a battleground in the controversy over Cody’s historical truthfulness” in later years (Kasson 35). Many claimed that Cody did not kill Yellow Hand but instead either scalped a long-dead Native or bought the

scalp. The truth remains ambiguous although most modern scholars and biographers of Cody accept that he did shoot Yellow Hand. As Cody's biographer Joy Kasson points out: "The significance of the killing of Yellow Hair lies not in what "actually" happened but in the uses that Cody made of it and the way the event advanced his claims to historicity throughout his career" (35-6).

Of Cody's many dubious representations of Natives, his claims to historical accuracy within his show perhaps most damaged images of the Lakota he employed and of Native Americans as a whole. Cody's portrayal of Native Americans as the conquered foe, now safe to view due to their subjugated status, firmly locked Native Americans in the realm of an inferior race doomed to extinction in the eyes of spectators. Promoting the Western frontier as won and the Native inhabitants as subdued presented ideas to a non-Native public of a disappearing culture. Cody's Native actors seldom performed in his modern cowboy and sharpshooter acts, or in Cody's Congress of Rough Riders. Instead, with the exception of Custer's Last Stand, they reenacted their lost battles before non-Native audiences. No hint was ever provided for the audience that European-American settlement provoked Native attacks on non-Native people; rather Cody's show always displayed Native attacks as unwarranted savagery in the face of civilization.

Even though they were often portrayed as the conquered savage, Native performers participated in the shows willingly. Cody's show, and others like it, paid relatively well for the time. When faced with a choice between life on the reservation where food and money were often scarce, participation in the Wild West shows provided an opportunity to earn a living for their families. The shows provided a degree of freedom not allowed to Native Americans on the reservations. At home, their dances were outlawed, but with the Wild West show they were

allowed to perform them almost nightly. In a way, the Wild West shows helped keep alive aspects of Native culture that reservations and assimilation policies sought to destroy. Traveling with the show also provided a platform for the performers to speak out against the injustices faced by their people.

Cody's show changed more frequently in Europe. In Manchester in the winter of 1887, the audience viewed "A Depiction of American Pioneer History" which included seven episodes tracing the development of the frontier. This portion of the show followed the development of America from a "Primeval Forest, peopled by the Indian and Wild Beasts only, to the triumph of civilization" (Reddin 95). It also contained Native American dances and battles, the landing of the pilgrims, Captain John Smith's rescue by Pocahontas, the Battle of Little Bighorn, an attack on an immigrant train, and the attack on the Deadwood coach (Reddin 95). News accounts in Europe, especially France, "praised scenes such as wagon trains going west, called cowboys 'forerunners of civilization' and said that when Indians attacked, everyone knew 'each bullet must hit a man or it is death and pillage' at the hand of Indians (Reddin 98).

The arena was not the only time the Native performers were on display. Non-Natives were fascinated by the Native in the American camp. In France, "couples found it chic to marry there and then touch Indian children, an action that supposedly ensured fertility" (Reddin 99). The ritual, of course, was most likely fake, and many Native performers admitted to being offended by the actions of the visitors. However, the French participation in a Native "ritual" hints at the Western desire to own Native spirituality. It did not matter to them if the ritual was not Native and actually offensive to the Natives; the desire to view, participate in, and consume another culture drove the need to infringe upon personal and cultural boundaries. Ethnologists visited the campground, measured skulls, and recorded physiographic features of Native

Americans to advance knowledge of “primitive peoples.” Since the campground was almost always open for visitors to walk about, it was not uncommon for non-Natives to walk up to Native babies and children and touch them, walk into tepees during meals or cooking, or interrupt any other aspect of the Natives daily lives. In this way, non-Natives came to view Natives as a commodity, just like the land that had been taken from them.

Cody was quick to capitalize on Sitting Bull’s assassination on December 15, 1890, and the following Wounded Knee Massacre on December 29, 1890. Cody had given a show horse to Sitting Bull after he left the show following the 1885 season. Legends arose that when the horse heard the gunfire from Sitting Bull’s cabin “it took this as its cue and started performing its show act of sitting and lifting a hoof” (Reddin 116). The horse somehow survived the crossfire and the next season joined the Wild West show. Cody used the horse, Sitting Bull’s death, the Wounded Knee Massacre, Ghost Dance, and Sitting Bull’s bullet riddled cabin (several others shows also claimed to have the actual cabin) to add to the show’s publicity.

At the Columbian Exhibition in 1893, three years after Sitting Bull’s death, Cody and several others at the exhibition claimed to have the actual cabin of Sitting Bull available for fairgoers to walk through. Cody set up his show directly outside the fairgrounds while inside the fairgrounds various depictions of Native Americans and their culture could be found. The Department of Ethnology and Anthropology set up exhibits that depicted the way “Native Americans lived at the time of European contact” (Rinehart 405). Another exhibit featured the progress achieved by the boarding school project where Native children performed schoolwork, sewing, farming, and other skills. On the boardwalk displays varied even more. There, along with “trained pigs and lions riding horseback” fairgoers experienced around forty -three Native American exhibitions (Rinehart 411). These Native exhibits provided everything from Native

crafts to dancing to rituals (some developed solely to provide a spectacle for non-Native viewers) to housing and clothing. At the same time that fairgoers viewed various displays of Native culture, Frederick Jackson Turner gave his Frontier thesis in which he declared the frontier closed. Turner's thesis, the voyeurism of Sitting Bull's cabin, and the differing portrayals of Natives left fairgoers unsure of the current status of the Native American population and questioning which depiction was reality.

Cody's blurring of historical fact and fiction, his willingness to cater to a non-Native audience, and his celebration of Manifest Destiny all worked as a microaggression against Native identities which led to larger stereotypes within the public imagination. The Native performers in Cody's Wild West show had to replay their traumatic past in front of an audience that applauded their defeat and booed their victories. Despite Cody's and the Native performer's intentions the show portrayed Natives as either warlike savages who stood in the way of progress or as exotic others who no longer challenged Manifest Destiny and European civilization. When portrayed with long braids, war paint, feathers, horses, and bows and arrows, they became viewed as symbols of the past, a vanquished, mythic foe that could not civilize. When portrayed without braids, war paint, feathers, and horses, the public considered them assimilated, not really "Indian," and therefore extinct and no longer a threat to expansion. Cody's Wild West show "created vivid images of Indians - as in their ambushes on wagon trains or attacks on settlers' cabins - which persist to this day; but it was never Cody's intention to offer the public only this history lesson" (Moses 64). However, for many non-Natives, the only information they received outside of news reports on the Indian Wars came from Wild West shows and dime novels. Native Americans were, and continue to be, mostly invisible in the history books of America.

The depictions of Native Americans in Wild West shows created a fictional demonization of them which non-Native people held to. These views would have profound effects on Native lives in the future as they faced racism, further acts of aggression by the U.S government, and discrimination; some of which continues into the twenty-first century. The fictional, demonized Natives would move from the Wild West show onto the silver screen with the invention of Thomas Edison's kinetograph, or motion picture camera. While, like Cody, it may not have been the film industries intention that viewers looked at their films as their only history lesson on Native Americans, non-Native viewers looked at the films as historically accurate and based their limited understanding of Native Americans on what they saw before them.

## Chapter Two

### A New Arena: Native Americans in Film

Thomas Edison produced the first motion pictures in 1894. The first films Edison produced for the public included titles such as *Sioux Ghost Dance* (1894), *Parade of Buffalo Bill's Wild West* (1898), *Procession of Mounted Indians and Cowboys* (1898), *Buck Dance* (1898), *Eagle Dance* (1898), and *Serving Rations to the Indians* (1898). At the turn of the century, most non-Native viewed the remaining Native populations to have assimilated into mainstream America, through the transformation of tribal governments and the forced schooling of Native children at boarding schools far from their parents and tribal traditions. This perception of a disappearing race led to the nostalgic yearning for the “nostalgic image of the historical noble savage” (Kilpatrick 17). Thus the first silent films provided for the public included visions of real and invented Native people.

Much like the Wild West shows before them, film portrayals became one of the primary sources on which non-Natives based their knowledge and opinions of Native Americans. Films are not only a “product for consumption and an art form, movies were - and are - very powerful social agents” (Kilpatrick 18). Early films about Natives incorporate images of Native people from “literature, dime novels, and wild west shows. [T]he stereotypes crystallized on the early screens are those with which we still live” (Kilpatrick 18). The images provided for audiences may have been mere literary inventions by authors of dime novels or screenwriters, but the public viewed them as representing the true character of Native Americans and their ways of life. As Jacquelyn Kilpatrick argues in *Celluloid Indians*:

Most audiences of the turn of the century did not have the historical or personal experience to question the reality of the screen images; seeing for oneself had



always before been the litmus test for reality. Immigrants, the poor, and rural dwellers were going to the movies for escape and to experience places and situations that were far beyond their economic, social, or cultural grasp; they were going to learn about the world. Moving pictures were persuasive. They were seen on the same screen as News reels that told of world events, and while most viewers presumably understood the made-up stories to be fiction, they trusted the images (18).

The images presented of Native Americans in early films became locked into the non-Native imagination as the way Natives lived in real life, if viewers considered them to exist outside a historical past at all.

The films of the silent era sometimes presented friendlier portraits of Native Americans than the successive sound pictures that arose later in the twentieth century. By the turn of the century, many non-Natives viewed the boarding schools and assimilation policies of the U.S. government as taking positive steps to successfully assimilate Native Americans into mainstream American society. A sense of nostalgia for the historic noble savage developed allowing filmmakers to celebrate the Native American of the past. Many Natives who had participated in Wild West shows continued their roles in silent films. Director and producer Thomas Ince “had a Sioux settlement” called “Ince Indians” set up on the California coast (Kilpatrick 12).

Winnebago actress and filmmaker Lillian St. Cyr, known as Princess Redwing, Yakima Chief Yowlache, and other Natives played several major roles in films. These films did not always focus on a Native evil, but just as often white actors played the antagonists, and Native performers acted as protagonists. Unlike later films, miscegenation in early film did not always demand a plot in which one character must die, and in many cases several mixed-blood character couples actually remained active and shaped the plot through the duration of the film. There were

even Native producers and directors during the early film era such as Nanticoke filmmaker James Young Deer who directed *White Fawn's Devotion* (1910).

As Jacquelyn Kilpatrick points out, what is most interesting about portrayals of Native Americans in film is not that there were negative and positive portrayals, but that it is the negative portrayals that remained (Kilpatrick 19). As the political climate in America changed, so did the images provided by film. With America preparing for World War I filmgoers no longer responded to nostalgic, favorable portrayals of Native Americans. Instead, it was the “all-American hero on the screen” that began to capture filmgoers’ imagination (Kilpatrick 19). This hero became the conqueror of the frontier with Native Americans as the enemy standing in his way. The nostalgic, somewhat positive portrayals of Native Americans gave way to more negative, savage portrayals became the staples of Westerns by the middle of the century.

### *Stagecoach* (1939)

John Ford’s *Stagecoach* was the first of many westerns starring John Wayne and shot in Monument Valley. Ford may be considered one of the most influential directors of the mid-twentieth century for establishing the “Hollywood Indian” image. Between 1939 and 1964, ten of his films would “involve Native Americans as significant elements of the plot” (Nolley 74). Ford also based his films loosely on historical people and events, specifically surrounding the Indian Wars. In blending historical events and people with fictional stories, Ford created a myth of the west which takes on the characteristics of an epic. Because of the rare and “scattered accounts of Native American life that were known to the general public during Ford’s lifetime” many viewers consumed his films as historical truth. (Nolley 76).

The plot of *Stagecoach* is fairly simple. A group of strangers boards a stagecoach heading from Tonto, Arizona Territory to Lordsburg, New Mexico Territory. Before they depart they learn that Geronimo and his Apache warriors are on the warpath and the army will provide them with an escort until they reach Dry Fork. Along the route to Dry Fork they come upon the fugitive Ringo Kid (John Wayne). Though they see no sign of Geronimo or his Apaches, they become increasingly frantic about the possibility of an impending attack, especially as, at future stops, the military escort promised for each leg of the journey fails to arrive. Dr. Boone (Thomas Mitchell) informs the newcomers to the stagecoach that: “We’re all going to be scalped . . . Massacred in one fell swoop.” Dr. Boone then explains just who will be performing the upcoming massacre: “Geronimo, that’s the name of our butcher. He’s jumped the reservation. He’s on the warpath.”

At one stop Ringo notices puffs of smoke coming from some nearby hills. Marshal Wilcox (George Bancroft) asks Ringo if it is Apache. Ringo nods, replying “War signals. Terror mounts as the stage coach moves on. One passenger remarks that this is a trap, while another questions him, saying: “You mean Apaches? There’s been no sign of them.” The other passenger laughs and says: “You don’t see signs of them! They strike like rattlesnakes.” As the stagecoach approaches a river the passengers find the ferry engulfed in flames, surely attacked by Geronimo who here does nothing but burn and pillage. Using ingenuity, the men fashion some logs around the stagecoach to float it across the river and they are off again for Lordsburg. As the stagecoach again heads out across the desert the camera pans to a canyon wall, showing a band of Apaches, with Geronimo (role uncredited) sitting on his horse in the middle.

The film builds up a sense of suspense, operating as a classic horror film in which Geronimo and the Apaches are the horror. All the suspense comes to head at the end of the film

with Geronimo's attack. The stagecoach is heavily outnumbered, but attempts to hold its own against the advancing attack. Finally, at the last moment, the cavalry rides in to save the stagecoach.

The point of Ford's film according to Jacquelyn Kilpatrick is "not to show a realistic altercation but to show the stagecoach as a microcosm of civilized society (with its paradoxes and contradictions) saved by the classic western hero" (54). Viewers see Ford's Apaches portrayed in stark opposition to the advancing white civilization. We need not consider why Geronimo and the Apache attack the stagecoach and settlements along the route. For the characters in *Stagecoach*, and the audience watching, the attacks are unprovoked. Geronimo is portrayed as a burning, pillaging savage who refuses to accept his place on the reservation and is intent upon maliciously attacking innocent whites.

The film makes no mention of the fact that the U.S. army has forced Geronimo and the Apache onto a reservation in order to take their land. Ford references none of the cruelties acted upon the Apache and other Native American tribes by the cavalry and settlers as they claimed Native lands for themselves and the United States government. Ford makes no effort to contextualize this attack as justifiable retribution.

By using fictional white characters and the historical Geronimo in the film, Ford gives *Stagecoach* a hint of historical accuracy. Many of Ford's viewers would have knowledge of Geronimo's name, but most likely little real knowledge of Geronimo as a person. Knowing that Geronimo was a real person could cause filmgoers to view the image they see on screen as a historically accurate portrayal of Geronimo, but also of Native American life.

*The Searchers* (1956)

Critics often view another Ford film, *The Searchers*, as his most influential. Based on the Alan Le May novel of the same name, the film stars John Wayne and is set after the Civil War during the Texas Indian Wars. While many “see this film as Ford’s first attempt to straighten out the distorted portrayal he had helped create” of Native Americans, the attitudes perpetuated about Natives by the film are still far from positive (Kilpatrick 61). We see the Comanche in typical western fashion as ruthless murderers who attack, rape, and pillage with no provocation.

The film opens in 1868 as Ethan Edwards (John Wayne) returns to the home of his brother Aaron in West Texas. Ethan had fought for the Confederates in the Civil War and after three years he still wears his Confederate uniform. Where Ethan has been for the last few years remains a mystery, but it is possible that he has been fighting in the Mexican revolutionary war as he gives his niece, Debbie, a medallion from the Mexican campaign. Ethan is also carrying a large sack of gold and refuses to reveal where he got it.

As Ethan gets reacquainted with his family he is reintroduced to Martin Pawley (Jeffrey Hunter), the Edwards’ adopted son. On seeing Martin Ethan remarks: “I could have mistook you for a half-breed.” Martin responds with: “Not Quite . . . One-eighth Cherokee. The rest is Welsh . . . So they tell me.” Aaron then tells Martin that it was Ethan who saved him after his parents had been massacred. Ethan looks at Martin as if, had he known Martin was “One-eighth Cherokee” he might not have rescued him. Ethan’s treatment of Martin is the first sign to the viewer of Ethan’s racist views and opinions of Natives.

The next day the Comanche lure the men away from the farms so that they can attack their homes. When the men realize what has happened they race back to the farms, the majority

going to Jorgensen's farm while Ethan, Martin, and Mose return to the Edwards. When Ethan and Mose arrive at the farm they find what is left of the home still smoldering in flames. They find no bodies lying in sight, but when Ethan enters the remains of the house we see in the reaction shot that he has found them. We never see the condition of the bodies, but Ethan refuses to allow Martin to enter the house to see them. . Ethan knows at once that the Comanche have abducted Lucy and Debbie.

After the ensuing funerals, Ethan and the Texas Rangers set off in search of the girls. As they ride away, Mrs. Jorgensen sighs to her daughter: "I almost hope they don't find them!" The implication is clear; their Native abductors will taint the girls. Debbie, being a small child, may remain unharmed; but everyone assumes that the Comanche will rape Lucy, leaving her at best an outcast from white society, and at worst driven mad. What Ethan has not told the other members of the party is that he intends to find the girls not to bring them back but to kill them, saving them from the shame and disgrace of rape by the Comanche.

Ethan operates as a parallel to Scar throughout the film. Both men have been driven to madness and acts of revenge by the wrongs inflicted upon their families by the hands of the other. It is Martin that becomes the true hero of the film. He is the one that saves Debbie, he is allowed to return home and be part of the continued civilization the settlers are building while Ethan is excluded. Ford's decision to portray Martin as part Cherokee (he is white in LeMay's book) is interesting and problematic at times. The change allows Ford to portray a favorable depiction of Native/White relations and miscegenation. Martin is accepted by the white settlers of the area, taken in as one of their own, allowed to marry one of their daughters, and produce more mixed-blood children. The problem with this depiction is that Martin barely remembers his parents, if he remembers them at all, and has no connection with his Cherokee ancestry. For the

white settlers, Martin is more white than Native. Martin is also depicted as one-eighth Cherokee, one of the “civilized tribes,” not as one of the apparently “bad” Comanche.

For the most part, many of the Comanche in the film are portrayed in favorable light, it is only Scar’s band that is truly savage. The Comanche encountered by Ethan and Martin on their journey are helpful and friendly, nothing like the brutal band that has captured Debbie. Ford’s attempt to portray more favorable depictions of Natives also has its problems. The Natives may be friendly, humanized, and non-savage, but only as long as they are providing assistance and service for the white settlers.

### *McLintock!* (1963)

*McLintock!* is probably one of the least discussed John Wayne films. It is a decided shift from the typical western genre leaning more towards the realm of romantic comedy. Directed by Andrew McLaglen and starring John Wayne and Maureen O’Hara; *McLintock!* is a loose retelling of William Shakespeare’s *The Taming of the Shrew*. Filmed in Arizona, the territory over which George Washington McIntock (John Wayne) serves as cattle baron is never stated; however, there are references to the Mesa Verde which would imply Colorado.

The primary plot of the film is simple. McIntock is estranged from his wife, Kate (Maureen O’Hara), who suspects him of adultery. McIntock is usually either playing chess with the local store owner or trying to beat his own record of tossing his hat on the weather vane on top of his house when he comes home drunk. He frequently butts heads with the local Indian agent and the governor of the territory who is attempting to sell off the territory and move the Comanche to Fort Sill, Oklahoma. The film is filled with typical elements of a romantic comedy:

laughs, fights, misunderstandings, and a happy ending. However, it is the use of Native Americans in the film, around which the plot does not necessarily center, that is most interesting. The film operates as a commentary on race relations while masquerading as a romantic comedy.

The first time we meet a Native in the film is when we encounter Davey at Birnbaum's Mercantile Store. Davey Elk, whose tribal affiliation we never learn, is played by Puerto Rican actor Perry Lopez. In Davey we see a prime example of assimilation. He dresses in suits, cuts his hair short, and speaks perfect English. Davey also resents being judged for his Native heritage. When McLintock remarks that Davey's hat could start a fight, Davey replies that he doesn't need a hat for that:

Davey: All I got to do is walk down the street and some wiseacre will call me an Indian, and just like that, the fight's on.

Birnbaum: Davey, the letter. It's for you (referring to McLintock). And you are an Indian.

Davey: Yes, I know I'm an Indian. But I'm also the fastest runner in town. I've got a college education, and I'm the railroad telegrapher. But does anybody say, "Hello, college man," or "Hello, runner," or "Hello, telegrapher?" No, not even, "Hello, knothed."

Birnbaum: Davey.

Davey: It's always, "Let the Indian do it."

Birnbaum: Will you go out in the store and help the ladies?

Davey: All right. I'm also a bookkeeper, part-time clerk. Always, "Let the Indian do it."

Davey's commentary touches on the fact that no matter what he has done to assimilate and civilize, others judge him for the color of his skin, and the traits they assume accompany it. Non-Natives view Davey as a stereotype, not a person. Davey does seem to be more or less



accepted by the majority of the townspeople, but mainly because he has worked so hard to become just like them.

The first Comanche we meet is Running Buffalo, played by Mohawk actor Chief White Eagle (Basil Heath). He and some other Comanche have come into McLintock to meet the chiefs who have just been pardoned and are returning home. They don't know when to expect the chiefs so they plan to wait in town until they arrive. Unlike Davey, who is proficient in English, Running Buffalo uses "Tonto" speak. He is unable to fully say McLintock, as he approaches we hear him yell "Oh-ho, MacLin," which he repeats multiple times while waving his arm in the air. As McLintock approaches Running Buffalo exclaims: "Oh-ho, MacLin. Long time we not get drunk together." Later in the film, a fight breaks after the homesteaders attempt to hang Running Buffalo after accusing the Comanche of stealing one of their daughters. As the townspeople and the homesteaders are engaged in an all-out brawl, Running Buffalo walks around laughing and saying "Nice party, MacLin" and "Where's the whiskey?." The rest of the Comanche stand on a ledge watching the fight in typical Hollywood Indian style: flat footed, arms crossed, grim looks upon their faces. At the end of the fight Running Buffalo, using dramatic hand gestures yells: "Oh-ho, MacLin. Good party, but no whiskey. We go home." Running Buffalo's character is different from the portrayals of Natives as cruel and savage, but it is just as damaging. Running Buffalo is utilized for comedic relief. His character plays upon the stereotypes of the "drunken Indian." He is safe, friendly, and harmless, but he also likes to drink the "white man's" whiskey and remains trapped in the past.

When the chiefs finally return home we are introduced to Puma, played by Australian actor Michael Pate. Puma, like Running Buffalo, speaks broken English. There is some effort to use Native language in the film; however, instead of the Comanche greeting "marúawe" Puma

greeted McLintock with “yá'át'ééh” which is actually a Navajo greeting. Filmmakers had already been criticized for using incorrect language for the tribal groups they were portraying; however, the common view seemed to be that a non-Native audience wouldn't know the difference so it didn't matter what language they used (Kilpatrick 34).

Puma and the other chiefs have returned just as the governor of the territory is trying to send the Comanche to the reservation at Fort Sill, Oklahoma. McLintock has a long history with Puma. They fought against each other when McLintock and others were first trying to settle the territory. Puma shot McLintock in the chest and then dropped him on the doorstep of his house. They are now friends and ‘blood brothers.’ In a shift from foe to friend, it is McLintock that Puma turns to for help:

Puma: We return with news. Our people have more trouble. You see, I learned good English now, Big McLintock. Learned in the white man's jail. But we would have you talk our cause at the Government hearing.

Puma feels that McLintock will get them a fair judgment. It is implied that McLintock's status in the territory, along with his white skin, will have a better chance of being heard. McLintock does not offer his own argument to the governor, but Comanche:

The Comanche say: We are an old people, and a proud people.

When the white man first came among us we were as many as the grasses on the prairie. Now we are few, but we are still proud, for if a man loses pride in manhood, he is nothing. You tell us now that if we will let you send us away to this place called Fort Sill, you will feed us and care for us. Let us tell you this, it is a Comanche law that no chief eats unless first he sees that the pots are full of meat in the lodges of the widows and orphans. It is the Comanche way of life. This that the white man calls charity is a fine thing for widows and orphans, but no warrior can accept it, for if he does, he is no longer a man, and when he is no longer a man he is nothing and better off

dead. You say to the Comanche, 'You are widows and orphans, you are not men.' And we, the Comanche, say we would rather be dead. It will not be a remembered fight when you kill us because we are few now and have few weapons. But we will fight and we will die Comanche.

The moving words of Puma recited by McLintock have no effect on the governor and he orders that the Comanche be detained until the cavalry can move them to Fort Sill. Puma asks McLintock to convince the white people to give them guns to fight with, to let them have "one last remembered fight for the end of the Comanche." McLintock replies that he wishes he could arrange that.

It is convenient that a boxcar is sitting at the railroad full of guns and ammunition. McLintock conspires with the town drunk, Bunny, to free Puma and the Comanche and help them steal the weapons. During the town barbeque Bunny breaks the Comanche out of jail, leads them to the railway, and helps them steal the weapons. The Comanche, many wearing long, feathered headdresses (something that was not traditionally worn by Comanche), mount their horses and race through town firing the guns off in the air. The cavalry give chase, and the people of McLintock declare that they won't let something like a "little ole Indian raid" ruin their party. The Comanche are forgotten for the remainder of the film.

*McLintock!* varies from many traditional westerns in its portrayal of Native Americans. Running Buffalo and Puma actually receive some elements of character development and humanization. The viewer is supposed to like these characters and cheer for them as they make their escape from the cavalry. What is not said is that, once off screen, the Comanche will most likely be chased down and a good majority of them killed by the cavalry. Puma and his band of Comanche represent the typical portrayal of Native Americans being stuck in the past. They are

portrayed as having no room in the future of white civilization. Davey is the only one that stands a chance, but it is only because he has conformed so much to white standards and ignores his Native heritage.

The racial aspects of the film become somewhat murky when examined closely. A first glance it seems that the director wanted to portray a more sympathetic portrait of Natives. However, the political climate of the 1960s and the shift of filmmakers who utilized Native Americans to represent all oppressed people, calls upon the viewer to question this portrayal. The governor of the territory, Cuthbert H. Humphrey, was intentionally named to make a pointed reference to Hubert Humphrey. John Wayne strongly disliked Humphrey and his political views; he saw Humphrey as a socialist liberal. In the film *McLintock* describes Humphrey as the “side-saddled governor” and a cull:

Cuthbert H. Humphrey, Governor of our territory is a cull. Do you know what a cull is, ma'am? A cull is a specimen that is so worthless that you have to cut him out of the herd. Now, if all the people in the world were put in one herd, Cuthbert is the one I would throw my rope at. Natural-born cull.

Wayne's commentary is a pointed dig at Humphrey who argued tirelessly for legislation dealing with civil rights and nuclear disarmament and with whom Wayne greatly disagreed. In 1963 he won bipartisan support for the Nuclear Test-Ban Treaty, and in 1964, despite southern filibusters, he did the same for the Civil Rights Act.

The film's commentary on Humphrey and the fact that it was filmed in 1963 during the Civil Rights movement calls into question the racial aspects of the film. The “images and stereotypes of native Americans during this period made them ideally complex, sympathetic subjects” who became metaphors for social and political issues (Kilpatrick 71). When the film is

looked at this way, it can be viewed as a criticism against civil rights. The Comanche are portrayed as trapped in a past way of life and there is no room for them in the future, they may fight, but they will not win. Davey is the only racial other that has even a slight chance of surviving in the white world, but that is only because of his assimilation. Still, he is not judged by his accomplishments but by the color of his skin. In this way, the film is relegating Native Americans and African Americans to a place in history with no hope for the future.

This trend of using Native Americans as metaphors lasted through the 1970s. Native Americans became stand-ins for commentary on the Civil Rights movement and the Vietnam War. In films like *Cheyenne Autumn* (1964) and *Tell Them Willie Boy is Here* (1969) the Native Americans were symbols of the oppressed. Both films were based on historical events and were meant to not only offer commentary on the oppression faced by racial minorities in the United States, but to provide a sympathetic view of Natives and reverse some of the harmful stereotypes that the film industry had perpetuated.

In films like *Soldier Blue* (1970), *A Man Called Horse* (1970), and *Little Big Man* (1970), Native Americans were used as metaphors for the Vietnam War. In these films depictions of battles between the U.S. Army and Native Americans were meant to “sensitize the American public to the ‘plight’ of the Vietnamese by relating similar atrocities committed by the U.S. government ninety years before” (Kilpatrick 77). The problem with using Native Americans as metaphors is that it distorts and diminishes their own traumas and disparages their reality.

The 1980s and 1990s made an attempt to reverse stereotypes by portraying decidedly more sympathetic images of Natives. *Stagecoach* was remade in 1986 and attempted to change the way Ford represented Native Americans in 1939. In Ford’s version the Natives are “a real

and present danger” that brings his group of characters together. In the 1986 version, the “sympathy expressed for the Indian plight” left the film’s character without an enemy to fear, and the tone of the film changed from “fearful to patronizing” (Kilpatrick 103-4). These attempts to undo stereotypes that developed over hundreds of years and that were firmly entrenched in the non-Native imagination only gave rise to newer stereotypes.

The films of the 1980s and 1990s often ladled out white guilt for atrocities committed upon Native Americans by whites and the U.S. government. In films like *Dances with Wolves* (1990), the Lakota that John Dunbar (Kevin Costner) encounters are fully humanized. There are no white actors chosen to play the prominent Native parts; instead, Kevin Costner chose Native American actors to play the roles of all Native parts in the film. The Lakota characters are interesting, likeable, and most importantly believable. The white world is given a one dimensional, negative portrayal.

However, despite attempts to dish out white guilt for the Lakota situation and portray the Lakota people as more than stock characters, the film cannot quite escape old stereotypes. The Lakota are firmly placed in the role of the noble savage. They are peaceful, happy, loving, innocent people who only fight when they have too. The Pawnee do not receive the same treatment. There is no character development provided, and they become the ignoble/bloodthirsty savage of the film. They are portrayed as vicious and cruel. The film also places the blame for white atrocities against Native Americans squarely in the laps of a few crazy men. In “relating violence and cruelty to the madness of a few, it releases the general public from responsibility” (Kilpatrick 128).

As with their predecessors, most film portrayals of Native Americans in the 1980s and 1990s took places within the safety zone of a fifty-year period of history. Jacquelyn Kilpatrick quotes *Indigenous Thought* editor, Jan Elliott, as stating:

Indians are the only minority group that the Indian lovers won't let out of the 19th Century. They love Indians as long as they can picture them riding around on ponies wearing beads and feathers, living in picturesque tee-pee villages and making long profound speeches. Whites still expect, even now, to see Indians as they once were, living in the forest or performing in the wild west shows rather than working on the farm or living in urban areas (129).

The refusal to allow Native portrayals to move into the present or future continues to perpetuate the idea that Native Americans are vanishing or vanished.

### *The Lone Ranger* (2013)

Gore Verbinski's remake of the radio series, *The Lone Ranger*, does something that the original series did not do by providing Tonto with a backstory while portraying him as more than just a sidekick to the white lead. However, that is about as positive as this modern film gets in relation to its Native American portrayals. There are points in the film where the viewer wonders if it is meant to be a parody of westerns, a criticism of past Native American portrayals, but for the most part it seems to be building off of the style of those films and continuing on with the stereotypes.

The film opens in 1933 at a Wild West sideshow at a San Francisco fair. There, a young boy encounters an elderly Tonto (Johnny Depp) encased in an exhibit marked "THE NOBLE

SAVAGE IN HIS NATURAL HABITAT.” Tonto awakens and begins to relate his adventures with the Lone Ranger. Tonto’s story follows the trail of John Reid to Colby, Texas in 1869. The train that Reid is on also carries Tonto and Butch Cavendish, an outlaw on his way to Colby for his hanging. The train is ambushed by Cavendish’s gang, the train derailed, and Cavendish freed. Tonto is jailed in Colby while Reid, his brother, and a band of Texas Rangers head out to track down Cavendish.

The Cavendish gang attacks the Rangers, all of them appear to be dead. An escaped Tonto comes across them and buries the bodies. While he is in the process of burying John Reid, a startled Reid bolts upright until Tonto knocks him out with a blow to the head. He continues with the burials until a white horse he calls the “spirit horse” arrives. The horse shows interest in Reid and Tonto tries to convince him to select another ranger to become a spirit walker. Since Reid was only shot in the shoulder during the attack, and had been awake only moment before, it is doubtful that he is actually dead. Regardless, Tonto goes through the necessary steps to bring Reid back as a “spirit walker.”

When Reid awakens, Tonto is talking to the spirit horse. When Reid questions why, Tonto replies: “My grandfather spoke of a time when animals would speak. When you get them alone, some still do. But, I cannot decide if this horse is stupid or pretending to be stupid.” While the film is working with Native American traditions of people and animals communicating, it does it in such a way that is mocking. Tonto is portrayed as being unbalanced and a little crazy, he wears a dead raven on his head that he continually feeds, and he is apparently getting no response from the horse. The film may be trying to speak to Native mysticism, but by portraying it in the form of an unbalanced Tonto, demeans the Native tradition as unbelievable and silly.



Tonto also explains to Reid that Cavendish is a wendigo. While the film does get some of the facts of wendigo mythology correct, it appropriates a piece of Algonquian oral tradition and places it in a Comanche. The appropriation furthers the stereotypes that Native Americans are all the same and non-Natives will not notice that a different Native language, dress, culture, or tradition is being used by a Native American group with a completely different culture. He also tells him that the only way to kill the wendigo is with a silver bullet. Most Algonquian traditions say that the only way to kill the wendigo is with burning, so one has to wonder if this part of the legend was just another appropriation to meet the needs of the story.

In a change from the original series, Tonto is not just a loyal sidekick. He fights with Reid when it is beneficial to him, but has made it clear that he is on his own mission to kill Cavendish. He has no problem against doing what he wants, even if it doesn't match Reid's ideas. The viewer is also given an understanding of Tonto's mental state and why he is tribe-less. When Reid and Tonto visit a Comanche village, Reid is told that Tonto had rescued two white men when he was young. He took those men back to his people to heal. While there, the men noticed silver in the river and asked Tonto to show them where it came from. Tonto takes the men to the mouth of the river, an area of land full of silver. The men then kill all of Tonto's people, including his pet raven which he now wears on his head, leaving Tonto alone. The trauma unbalanced Tonto and the Comanche tell Reid that Tonto is crazy, but it does provide an understanding of Tonto's motivations.

There is also the issue that in 2013 the film industry still clings to white actors to play leading Native roles. Depp defended his role by claiming to be of Cherokee descent, a belief he grounded in stories passed down from his family in Kentucky. He is not enrolled with the Cherokee nation, nor has he ever approached them about tracing his ancestors records back to his

Cherokee descent. Depp's story is a common one, especially in the South. Many people have been told that they have a great-great-something, usually grandmother, that was Cherokee. His claims, just like his role as Tonto, become just one more example of cultural appropriation and microaggression. Depp's portrayal of Tonto is troubling. He speaks in broken sentences, his accent strange. It is even more noticeable when presented alongside the Comanche, none of whom speak the way Depp's Tonto speaks. Tonto keeps his face covered in black and white paint at all times, this typically would have only been done for certain occasions such as war, religious ceremonies, and festivities. The end result is that the viewer see Tonto as Johnny Depp walking around in war paint, not an accurate portrayal of a Comanche man.

Not much has really changed since the Wild West shows first began placing Native Americans on display. In April 2015, nearly a dozen Native American actors walked off the set of Adam Sandler's *Ridiculous 6*. The actors claimed that the "satirical western's script repeatedly insulted native women and elders and grossly misrepresented Apache culture" (Schilling). The actors listed examples of disrespect which included "Native women's names such as Beaver's Breath and No Bra, an actress portraying an Apache woman squatting and urinating while smoking a peace pipe, and feathers inappropriately positioned on a teepee" (Schilling). Brian Klinekole, the film's Apache Native American cultural consultant, also walked off the set. In an interview he stated that "not only did the film openly mock Native American culture, they also repeatedly rebuffed him when he attempted to point out the insults" (Nguyen). Klinekole went on to say while many of the changes were subtle, and would not have been noticed by non-Natives, they would be offensive to Apache viewers. Again, the film industry still seems to be functioning under the idea that no one will know the difference so it doesn't matter if the material is culturally accurate.

The film industry managed to take what the Wild West had created and placed it in a format that would reach millions. The films themselves work as microaggressions, intentionally or unintentionally, promoting traumas against Native peoples who are constantly subjected to portrayals of themselves as others. They are images for non-Native consumption, they are to be viewed with everything ranging from sympathy to contempt. For non-Native viewers, Native Americans are repeatedly lumped together as a collective cultural entity, an act that works as a form of cultural genocide in popular culture. Films are persuasive and can be extremely damaging. Hitler used films prior to WWII to subtly place negative portrayals of Jewish people before a German public in an effort to create negative views of Jews and create an environment in which the German public would support his plans for the future.

By the Twentieth-century, Native Americans had faced genocide and were forced to watch it play out repeatedly in Wild West Shows and then film. The negative portrayals in the film industry, the refusal to adhere to cultural distinctness, their erasure into the realm of the past, all work in a way that perpetuates and exacerbate past traumas. These films feed incorrect information to a non-Native public, creating a view of the Native American that is misunderstood, hated, and derided, or viewed with a nostalgic guilt that creates an idea of them as mystical, naive, and in need of rescue. For many Native Americans who continue to struggle with historical trauma, the continued trauma of racism, discrimination, and microaggressions portrayed in popular culture only adds to that struggle.

## Chapter Three

### Reclaiming the Past: Overcoming Historical Trauma and Unresolved Grief in Native American Literature

In her efforts to explain the “high rates of suicide, homicide, accidental deaths, domestic violence, child abuse, and alcoholism, as well as other social problems” faced by many Native Americans Dr. Maria Yellow Horse Brave Heart explores problems of historical trauma and unresolved grief. (Brave Heart and DeBruyn 56). She defines historical trauma as a “cumulative emotional and psychological wounding, over the lifespan and across generations, emanating from massive group trauma experiences” (Brave Heart 7). These traumas faced by many Native Americans, the “loss of lives, land, and vital aspects of Native culture promulgated by the European conquest of the Americas,” along with racism, oppression, and microaggressions, create historical unresolved grief that plague many Native American communities (Brave Heart and DeBruyn 56).

Many of the first Native Americans to experience these losses may have suffered from Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD). According to the Mayo Clinic, symptoms of PTSD include intrusive memories, avoidance, and negative feelings about yourself or others, hopelessness, emotional numbness, aggressive behaviors, overwhelming feelings of shame or guilt, and self-destructive behaviors. The historical legacy of government policies prohibiting Native ceremonies denied Natives their “cultural grieving practices,” many Native Americans have been faced with historical unresolved grief (Brave Heart and DeBruyn 63). This historical unresolved grief leaves many Native Americans with “a pervasive sense of pain from what happened to their ancestors and incomplete mourning of those losses” (Brave Heart and

DeBruyn 64). This historical trauma response and unresolved grief often presents itself with symptoms similar to PTSD including alcoholism, violence, and self-destructive behaviors.

While social workers, psychiatrists, and psychologists like Dr. Brave Heart research and treat these traumas from a clinical perspective, contemporary Native American authors address these issues in their own ways. Native American authors use their literature to portray not only the historical traumas faced by their people but the lingering effects and current traumas that continue to plague Native communities. Their narratives depict the racism, microaggressions, and stereotypes that non-Natives continues to inflict upon Native Americans, the traumas of alcoholism, domestic violence, rape, and suicide on those communities, and offer their own resolutions to these problems. These resolutions vary, often depending upon the person to find their own method of healing, but each draws attention to the need for tribal kinship, history, and culture to fully overcome the past.

The patterns that emerge within the different texts fall into two categories. The first offers healing and salvation with a return to tribal identity, history, and family ties. They develop a circular method of healing which encompasses past, present, and future. Through this circular method of recovering and remembering the anguished person is able to find healing. Others, however, seem to reject this theory as nothing more than a myth. For these texts, it does not matter if there is a tribal identity, family, or history to reconnect with.

Leslie Marmon Silko's *Ceremony* follows the first pattern in which it is a return to tribal identity, family, and history that provides healing for Tayo. We follow Tayo's return to his Laguna Pueblo reservation from WWII. Tayo is battling PTDS or, what during WWII, would have been termed shell shock. He recuperates in a VA hospital until he is deemed well enough

to return to his family. The VA doctors, however, are not able to actually cure Tayo. Tayo is continuously plagued by his war experiences and becomes consumed by his pain.

For a long time he had been white smoke. He did not realize that until he left the hospital, because white smoke had no consciousness of itself. It faded into the white world of their bed sheets and walls; it was sucked away by the words of doctors who tried to talk to the invisible scatter smoke. He had seen outlines of gray steel tables, outlines of the food they pushed into his mouth, which was an outline too, like all the outlines he saw. They saw his outline but they did not realize it was hollow inside (Silko 13).

Tayo's feelings of hollowness and emptiness are typical of PTSD. Tayo also wakes up crying and vomiting from his nightmares where he sees the dead face of his cousin and Josiah. Despite his struggle, Tayo cannot escape the trauma he has been exposed to. He slips into depression, and begins to withdraw into himself. He almost desires to return to the white smoke he was becoming at the VA, but his family realizes that the army doctors have not, and cannot, help him.

The family first attempts to get help from Ku-oosh, a medicine man, who they believe may be able to help Tayo heal. Ku-oosh is able to slightly help Tayo, but he is not able to cure him. Ku-oosh recommends that Tayo travel to Gallup and meet Betonie, a medicine man more familiar with the evils associated with the contact of white and Native cultures. Betonie tells Tayo he must create and perform a new ceremony that will stop the destruction that the white world has created; only then will he truly be healed. The traumas of WWII suffered by Tayo become representative of the traumas faced by Native Americans at the hand of the U.S. government. His PTSD represents the lingering grief and trauma of Native Americans subjected to the genocidal practices that sought to erase them from the American continent.

In his quest to create this new ceremony Tayo realizes that he is not alone in his grief. His friends also struggle with the same traumas and PTSD but use alcohol as a coping mechanism. Tayo and his friends faced discrimination against prior to the war, however, once enlisted they find themselves consumed by mainstream culture and welcomed by a population that had once looked down upon them. When they return from war they quickly realize that this acceptance lapsed once the U.S. no longer needed them to fight. They risked their lives for a conquering nation, and once that society no longer needed their services, it no longer welcomed them. Tayo and his friends, typical of PTSD victims, blame themselves for their conditions. They try to bring back the “feeling they belonged to America the way they felt during the war,” and they “blamed themselves for losing the new feeling,” the same way they, and other Native Americans often “blamed themselves for losing the land the white people took” (Silko 39). They do not place the blame where it belongs, on the white people that forcefully took the land, the white people that sent them to war, that gave them a feeling of belonging then ripped it away.

Tayo must decide if he wishes to complete his ceremony or drown himself in alcohol like his friends. In the end, the doctors cannot cure Tayo, nor the medicine men who point him on his path to healing, it is only Tayo himself who creates his own ceremony and finds a way to make peace with his trauma. Tayo’s ceremony allows him to mourn not only his grief from the war but also the unresolved grief from past and present traumas that follow him and his people. Tayo’s ceremony works as a form of cleansing that allows him to free himself from his grief and guilt. Tayo’s reconnection to his “cultural identity brings meaning to an otherwise incoherent world” and allows him to finally come to peace with his past and his future (*Red Land, Red Power* 153). Tayo withstands the temptation to give in to alcoholism and violence that he feels he would be fully justified in pursuing. He refuses to allow the trauma of the white world, their

genocide of his people, their theft of the land, and the traumas of their war to define him. All around him he sees the destruction of these events and resolves to overcome them.

Like Tayo, the Anishnabe man from Joy Harjo's "there are as many ways to poetry as there are to God" must also come to terms with the trauma of war. The man:

When he landed on the West Coast after leaving the world of fire and ash he could not stop fighting. He fought his way from one city in Indian country to another, one bar to another; he could not stop. One morning he awakened in a field of corn in the middle of the prairie, weary with the struggle of the fight that had not ended when he left Vietnam. It had rooted itself in him and he had to admit he could not control it and worst of all could not make sense of the huge monster of violence. . . . (Harjo 62-1).

The struggles of both men to come to terms with their trauma represent the traditional view of many Native Americans that health, whether mental or physical, depends upon balance and harmony. To achieve this balance or harmony, one must grieve over the traumas and accept their own and others' actions.

The traumas both men face in war metonymically evoke the historical traumas faced by Native Americans. By coping with their present traumas and griefs, the men must also come to terms with, and mourn, the past traumas and griefs of their people. Both men participate in self-destructive behaviors like alcoholism and violence until they can finally mourn their traumas and griefs, past and present.

Like Tayo and the Anishnabe man, the narrator of James Welch's *Winter in the Blood* also finds his healing through a reconnection with his tribal history. The narrator is a perfect example of a modern Native American dealing not only with racism and microaggression, but the historical traumas and grief of his people. The narrator, living on the Fort Belknap



Reservation in Montana, grieves not only for the tragic, untimely deaths of his father and older brother, but the devastation and trauma wrought upon his people. He has become emotionally detached from his family, he feels “no hatred, no love, no guilt, no conscience, nothing but a distance that had grown through the years” (Welch 2). He is as detached from himself as he is from his family and attempts to fill his hollowness with alcohol and women.

He speaks of racism and discrimination from the whites in the nearby town of Harlem. The white priest in town “refused to set foot on the reservation” and he would not bury “Indians in their family graveyards, instead, he made them come to him, to his church, his saints and holy water, his feuding eyes” (Welch 4). The priest refuses to acknowledge the Natives’ beliefs or culture. He is the embodiment of assimilation policies that want to force Native Americans to adapt to a non-Native, Western worldview, belittling and demeaning their cultural traditions, and attempting to erase them from history.

The narrator’s personal trauma from watching his brother get hit by a car still haunts him as does his damaged knee. He went to a clinic in Tacoma for treatment and was offered a chance to work in the rehabilitation clinic. They told him that they liked him and he was “smarter than practically anybody they had ever seen,” and at first he had believed them (Welch 17). It was a nurse, “who hated Indians” that told him the truth. The clinic “needed a grant to build another wing and [he] was to be the first of the male Indians they needed to employ in order to get the grant” (Welch 17-8). This information marks the beginning of the narrator’s internal struggle and detachment. The decision of the clinic works as a form of microaggression, it wasn’t meant to injure or harm, but it did just the same. The narrator realizes that he wasn’t truly valued because of his intelligence, but because of his racial identity, he was needed to simply meet a quota.

His downward spiral with alcohol and women comes to a head when he almost rapes a woman. The woman is under him sobbing when he feels that everything had gone out of him. He feels a “kind of peace that comes over one when he is alone, when he no longer cares for warmth, or sunshine, or possessions” (Welch 99). He slides off her, dresses, and leaves. Finally he has had “enough of walking home, hung over, beaten up, or both,” he is done with “the people, the bartenders, the bars, the cars, the hotels” (Welch 100). He has had enough of himself and what he has become.

He returns home to find his grandmother has died. Of course, the priest won't come onto the reservation to bury her, but the family will not bury her with a Christian ceremony in town. While she does not receive a traditional ceremony, she is buried at home. The family dig the grave themselves, say some words over her coffin, and the narrator tosses her tobacco pouch into the grave with her. The narrator gives up alcohol and determines to do right the next time he meets the girl who stole his gun and electric razor.

The near rape of the woman in a way serves as his cleansing ceremony. It was that moment that he realized what he had become, what further traumas he was perpetuating on a person already suffering enough, that spurred him to resolve his grief. He realizes that he cannot undo the past injustices and that he will continue to face racism and discrimination, but he has also realized that the path he was on was leading to the creation of further traumas. He finds his own way to mourn and come to terms with his trauma and grief before he became the perpetrator of someone else's trauma. His ceremony is not one that instantly corrects his struggles. Instead, it is his determination to each day do better, to not become a statistic, a perpetrator of trauma that bring his healing. He determines to work through each day as it comes. He never forgets the past traumas of his people, or the traumas suffered by himself, but works daily to overcome those

traumas. He refuses to be defined by or dwell on the past. He accepts the past for what it was, what it can teach him, and takes that knowledge to make his future a better place.

The narrator's journey to self-discovery and healing has led him down a path of memories. These are not just memories of the narrator's trauma, but also memories of the trauma of his people as related to him by Yellow Calf's tales. The narrator, "recursively working through memories... discovers who he never thought he was: his seemingly pointless visits to Yellow Calf are perhaps motivated by a deep and unknown drive to know himself through an encounter with his heritage" (*Red Land, Red Power* 109). This reconnection allows the narrator to obtain individual decolonization, to see himself and his people in a new way, and finally achieve his own healing.

Like the narrator of *Winter in the Blood*, Angel, in Linda Hogan's *Solar Storms* also finds her healing through a reconnection with her tribal heritage and identity. Angel, in Linda Hogan's *Solar Storms* is a victim of physical violence. She has spent her life passed from foster home to foster home. Her life is "on paper stored in file cabinets," she has been "lost from [her] own people, taken from [her] mother" (Hogan 26). The history of Angel's trauma begins with her grandmother, Loretta. Loretta is from the Elk Islanders, the "people who became so hungry they ate the poisoned carcasses of deer left out for the wolves" (Hogan 38). No one is certain how Loretta survived, or what exactly is wrong with her, but they knew that "when she was still a girl, she'd been taken and used by men who fed her and beat her and forced her," and it is this trauma that starts a cycle that continues to Angel (Hogan 39). When Angel's mother, Hannah, washed up at Adam's Rib, Agnes and Bush know immediately that something is not right with her. Hannah has the same iciness as her mother, the people are afraid of her.

When Bush is finally able to get Hannah to take a bath she is horrified by the scars she sees. Hannah's "skin was a garment of scars" with "burns and incisions" (Hogan 99). Everyone tried to name what is wrong with Hannah, "Dora-Rouge said it was memory," she is plagued by what she cannot forget, the trauma exacted upon her body and her people (Hogan 99). Hannah would bring this same trauma upon Angel before she was taken away by the social workers.

Angel grapples with her inherited trauma, with the scars forced upon her skin by her mother, and her new found place among her people. She embarks on a journey of self-discovery along with the women that love and teach her, and she begins to view her scars, not as wounding and trauma, but as proof that there is healing. Angel determinedly refuses to let her past trauma and scars define her future and attempts to accept the past for what it is, reconcile it to the present, and move on with her life. In her poem, "A Map to the Next World," Joy Harjo writes: "Crucial to finding the way is this: there is no beginning or end. / You must make your own map," and this is what Angel does (21). Angel finds a way to come to terms with the historical trauma and unresolved grief of her people and the trauma and grief that has been inflicted upon her body. She finds her own way to mourn and restore herself; breaking from her grandmother and mother's cycle of alcoholism and abuse. She realizes that her mother and grandmother experienced horrible traumas. Her mother hated herself and because Angel was a part of her she hated her and hurt her as well. For Angel, healing lies in love. She learns to love herself, scars and all. She learns to recognize the value of learning from the past but not dwelling on it. Angel's healing is a path to self-discovery, self-respect, and self-love. It is a regaining and understanding of tribal customs, of keeping them alive even in the face of destruction. It is a reversal of history, a claiming of the past, and the knowledge that despite the traumas faced by her people they and their culture are still here, still living, and still resisting.

In LeAnne Howe's *Shell Shaker* the historical trauma and unresolved grief of the Choctaw people and the Billy family are resolved in a series of events that blend past and present. The Billys are descended from the first shell shaker, Grandmother of Birds. Her granddaughter, Shakbatina, sacrifices her life to save her daughter and prevent war. Shakbatina's daughter, Anoleta, is in love with Red Shoes, a man once believed to be the one who would reunite the Choctaw people. Red Shoes is corrupted by greed, and the people began referring to him as an osano, a horsefly or bloodsucker, and Anoleta determines that she must be the one to kill him. The trauma of the eighteenth century remains frozen in time, only to replay itself in a cyclical pattern in the twentieth century.

Auda Billy, a Choctaw historian, is accused of murdering her boss and lover, Redford McAlester, Chief of the Choctaw nation. Auda begins being visited by the spirits of her ancestors after she is raped by Redford. The dreams and spirits begin to slowly reveal the truth about Auda's own past and her family's history. The morning after Auda is raped by Redford she dreams of the spirits calling out to her:

Auda Billy, do you hear? Do you understand? We have returned. You can use any fire. Use them all. There are woods stripped and burned for you. There are dead leaves to feed the flames. There are words burning inside the wood. Amid the fires and more fires, amid woods and rivers, amid wind there are voices. The copper-gilt medals of the foreigners have lost their luster forever. Inside this turmoil we have slept. This day we branch our antlers and dress. Your time has come. Black time becomes red (Howe 25).

The spirits tell Auda the time has come for resolution. She must reconnect with the ways of her ancestors to bring closure to her people. The time for peace and death is passed, it is time for war, and Auda must lead this war.

The events that unfold afterwards appear to happen without Auda's consent or knowledge. She is spurred by something bigger, something more powerful than herself. The past traumas of her ancestors are replaying themselves to finally bring closure to the grief her people suffer. Their chief and tribal government are corrupt, consumed by greed and power. Many of those that challenged Redford's administration moved out of the community to avoid retaliation while others found their voter registration revoked and received letters informing them they were no longer enrolled in the tribe. While the community struggles in poverty, Redford and his administration are feeding money to the IRA and mafia.

As Auda's dreams and visits from spirits begin, her sisters begin to experience similar events. Tema, an actress, is in the middle of a play when she begins to hear the word "*Hatak abi*," or man killer (Howe 32). This "bodiless voice calls to her in Choctaw and the sound resonates in her ear" as she searches for the source of the voice (Howe 32). The voice continues to call out, "*Your hands killed Red Shoes!*" and Tema panics (Howe 32). It is only when she responds with "*Wishia cha ... go away*" that the voice retreats and she returns to her play (Howe 33). Tema attempts to explain the experience to her British husband, but he is unable to understand what has her so frightened. He never heard the voice so he assumes she is tired and imagining things. Tema, confident in what she heard, resolves to go home to Oklahoma.

Adair Billy, the youngest sister, is a stockbroker in New Orleans. Adair is known for hearing voices that lead to good decisions. Adair "does hear voices," but "the hard part is determining whether or not they are talking to her" (Howe 40). Adair also has an obsession with the macabre, clipping newspaper articles about gruesome murders and

accidents. She is standing in her office when she hears a “muffled pop go off like a toy gun” and the sound of “something heavy being dragged across carpet” (Howe 49). When Adair opens her door she finds nothing but a fax envelope that contains a message: “*McAlester dead. Auda and Susan arrested. Come home. Uncle Isaac*” (Howe 50).

As the Billy family reunite and begin their search for the truth, they find their lives becoming increasingly parallel to their ancestors. The tale that unravels is one of embezzlement, rape, trauma, money laundering, and contributions to the Irish Republican Army and Mafia. Moving between past and present, the Billy women are destined to trace their history through the circular events of time and nature to solve the murders of Red Shoes and Redford McAlester. Enough evidence is finally provided to point the blame for the murder at the IRA. It is assumed that the murder was staged to frame Auda. Along the way, the Billys are aided by the spirit of the shell shaker. It is in the final chapter that the shell shaker finally tells her story. She tells how she entered into Auda’s body, how she and Auda together they held the gun, whether Auda and the shell shaker are the ones that killed Redford is never acknowledged.

It is only when the truth is revealed that the spirit can rest. The circular nature of the events, the replaying of history, allows the Billys and their ancestor to finally come to terms with their historical trauma and unresolved grief. By accepting their role in the events that unfold, the Billys are able to bring themselves, and the spirits of their ancestors, resolution. They face their own traumas, along with the trauma of their ancestors, and are finally able to bring balance back into their world. Auda and her family realize that to come to terms with the trauma of their people, past and present, one person alone is not enough,

it takes the efforts of the community, their ancestors, and their young people to build a better future.

Unlike the novels discussed above, Sherman Alexie and Thomas King seem to reject the idea of a mystical healing power being found in this reconnection to tribal identity, heritage, and family. In Alexie's *Indian Killer* and King's *Truth and Bright Water* there is no magical healing to be found, no reconnection with family, identity, or past that can save the characters from their anguish. For these texts the above solutions are presented as fraudulent myths that do not work in the real world.

John Smith, the ironically named character of Sherman Alexie's *Indian Killer*, grows up with a trauma that is not easily identified. John suffers from the historical traumas and unresolved grief of his ancestors, but he is uncertain exactly who those ancestors are. John is orphaned as an infant, taken from his mother at the hospital; whether she intended to give him up for adoption or was viewed as unfit because she was an unwed, Native teenager is never made clear. John is adopted by Daniel and Olivia Smith who try, unsuccessfully, to instill a Native identity into John. Unsure of what tribe John comes from, they provide him with a mixture of cultural influences. John's identity is confused from an early age. He feels he does not belong to the white world he is raised in and he longs to be a part of the Native world, but he doesn't know where in that world he belongs.

John clearly has an unidentified mental illness that presents itself when he is a teenager. The presentation of John's mental illness may have been brought on by his continued sense of not belonging, of realizing the traumas faced by his ancestors as well as the trauma suffered by his mother and himself when he was ripped away from her as a baby. John tried to swallow his



anger, but often felt the need to “run and hide” (Alexie 19). He had to “lock himself inside a stall and fight against his anger,” he would “bite his tongue, his lips, until sometimes he would bleed” (Alexie 19). John’s lack of tribal identity blended with his adopted parents’ attempts to provide him with a Native heritage that mixed various cultures served further to confuse his identity and trauma.

John is also the victim of racism and microaggressions. The fathers of the white girls he attends school with do not want their daughters to date an Indian. Native by birth, but raised by whites, John is constantly surrounded by the white world that labels and stereotypes him based on his physical appearance. The girls desire him for his dark, exotic skin, as well as the idea of a forbidden love. As he grows into adulthood people often refer to him as “chief.” While it is clear that “chief” is not intended with malice or in a necessarily demeaning way by these white men, it is a microaggression, a casual form of racism that serves as one more source of trauma which pushes John further into his grief and anger.

John feels the need to “kill a white man,” but he does not know “which white man was responsible for everything that had gone wrong” (Alexie 25, 27). John’s need to kill the white man responsible for what has gone wrong implies that he is struggling not only with his own traumas, but also with the larger historical traumas and unresolved grief of Native peoples. The fact that John does not know his tribe does not necessarily mean he cannot feel the historical traumas and unresolved grief of his people. John realizes that while he lives in the non-Native world of his adopted parents, it is not the world he was born into. When asked what tribe he’s from he tells white people Sioux, “because that was what they wanted him to be,” but when asked by Natives he told them Navajo which is what he wanted to be (Alexie 32). Both tribes that John acknowledges to those that want to know his heritage have distinct and traumatic

histories with the white world, histories and traumas that John can identify with, even if they are not truly his own.

Not knowing which tribe he belongs to his parents provided him an assortment of cultural influences, all of which suffered traumas at the hands of the white world, therefore, John's unresolved grief may be seen as that for many Native nations, not just the tribe he should have belonged to. He is taken to events where he witness "so many tribes, many sharing similar features, but also differing in slight and important ways" (Alexie 21). John sees these differences, but also the ways in which he differs from the Native peoples he encounters. He doesn't understand their happiness, their laughter, and their joking. John only knows the historical traumas faced by these Natives, with no connection to his or another tribe, he has no access to their methods for dealing with that trauma and is unable to recognize their jokes and laughter as "a ceremony used to drive away personal and collective demons" (Alexie 21). John's knowledge that he is Native drives his desire to connect, share, and grieve with other Natives, but his lack of tribal identity denies him access and understanding of tribal practices that will allow him to do so.

Throughout the novel white men are found dead throughout Seattle: scalped with owl feathers left on their bodies. Alexie never allows the reader to witness John committing the murders, and he never actually says that John is the murderer, but the reader is led to believe that John's mental state, the result of historical and present traumas, racism, and microaggressions, has pushed him into a homicidal spiral. John's adoptive parents, afraid of what is happening to him, attempt to offer assistance. They come to check on him but he will not open the door. In his paranoia he believes that "five different sets of Olivia and Daniel came to visit him, and he suspected there were many others, just waiting to weaken him" (Alexie 74). John believes that

the pills his parents bring him are slowly poisoning him, so he refuses to take them, preferring to “live with the music in his head” (Alexie 74). Rejecting the white medicine, but having no access to his own cultural identity, John is left without any recourse to deal with his growing anger and anguish over his traumas.

At the end of the novel John kidnaps Jack Wilson, a former Seattle police officer turned crime writer. Wilson is the one white person John believes he needs to kill. Wilson tries to convince John, as he has convinced himself, that he is not white but Native American. For John, and many Native Americans, Wilson is the embodiment of the typical non-Native who thinks that cultural appropriation is the ultimate sign of affirmation and respect, while in truth it operates as a microaggression. It is extremely disrespectful and hurtful. Wilson’s status as a Native author and expert within the non-Native world works to silence actual Native voices. It belittles Native cultures and identities by placing them in the realm of a product for consumption by the non-Native world. Wilson’s actions and cultural appropriation in general, works as a power dynamic in which a dominant culture takes on elements of an oppressed culture. These actions often trivialize historical oppression and trauma of Native Americans. It creates an environment in which Native culture is available for purchase and consumption by a non-Native society, a society that wants to purchase Native indigeneity for themselves while deriding actual Native peoples.

John only disfigures Wilson, marking him with his sin, before jumping off the skyscraper to his own death. For John, his death serves as the only release he has for his anger, grief, and trauma. John does not have access to a tribal heritage or community able to provide him with the tools needing to find healing. He does not have a connection to a kinship base that can guide him on his way to healing. John only has access to the trauma and grief of Native Americans, not the

healing practices they employ. Alexie points out the trauma and effects of the loss of tribal customs and affiliation. While John did not choose to be separated from his Native community, the larger picture echoes the same for those who make those choices. Alexie seems to be arguing for the importance of maintaining tribal connections, traditions, and culture. Without these connections John becomes another statistic in the number of Native American suicides. Suicide offers the only solution John can see before him. John's experience with white medicine did not provide the healing he needed and he has no access to his unknown tribal customs to seek healing. Out of place in the white world with no access to the Native world, John views suicide as the only method left open to him. Unable to bring balance and healing to the world he lives in, he finds the only way to achieve that balance is to remove himself from that world.

Thomas King's *Truth and Bright Water* is full of the social ills most stereotypically associated with Native Americans and reservation life. Poverty, alcoholism, and child abuse are seen as commonplace among the inhabitants of the town of Truth in Montana and the Bright Water Reservation across the river in Alberta. Tecumseh and his cousin Lum are often left on their own, looking for odd jobs to earn some money, or hanging out along the banks of the river. Lum's mother died when he was younger and he struggles to come to terms with her death and his with his abusive father. Tecumseh struggles with his feelings over his estranged parents who he wishes would reconcile, as well as over his Native identity.

As the Indian Days festival approaches, Lum's behavior begins to border on explosive. Tecumseh knows Lum's father hits him, but he is still shocked by his bruises, some "little more than abrasions" while "others are yellow, the result of glancing blows," but Tecumseh is most disturbed by the one running down his hip that is "the colour of blood, dark purple, and black" (King 152). Tecumseh tries to talk to Lum about the bruises but gets no response. He watches

over the next few days as Lum continues into a reckless spiral. Lum's unresolved grief over his mother and the continuous trauma of his father's beatings, and being thrown out of the house all contribute to Lum's downward spiral. Tecumseh finds Lum by the river bank and questions his mental state when Lum begins talking to a human skull:

Solider and I hear the danger at the same time, but it's too late. Lum wheels around and grabs my shirt and pulls me in close. "Can you hear it?" he says. His eyes are black and slitted. His mouth trembles. I nod, but I don't say anything. Lum smiles and presses the skull against my ear. "Have you seen my mummy?" he says in his tinny voice and gently rocks the skull against my neck.

I don't think Lum is going to hurt me, but there's always the chance of an accident, of something happening when he's not paying attention (King 176-7).

Tecumseh realizes the fragile mental state that Lum has slipped into. Lum's loss of his mother, the abuse from his father, and the continued discrimination and racism faced by the Native community force him into a downward spiral quickly spinning out of control. Lum is at risk of continuing the violent cycle of abuse carried out by his father. While Tecumseh recognizes that Lum would not intentionally harm him, it is the unintentional that scares him, the actions that Lum may take while his mental capacity is fractured. A few days later when Tecumseh returns to Lum's camp he finds him with his hair cut short and his face painted red and black. Lum is preparing himself for battle, a battle that he must ultimately fight with himself.

Tecumseh is distressed by the gun in Lum's hands. Lum asks Tecumseh if he knows "what's wrong with this world?" but Tecumseh doesn't answer. Lum responds with "Bullets ... There aren't enough bullets" before placing the gun under his chin and pulling the trigger. When the hammer hits the empty chamber Lum laughs and says he was only kidding. Tecumseh leaves but he is extremely concerned with Lum's condition.

When Tecumseh encounters Lum again it is clear that his mental state has not improved. The boys are walking across a partially finished bridge when Lum pulls up a piece of rebar and starts beating himself across the chest with it, yelling “Useless!” “You’re pathetic!” “Where’s your pride, son?” (King 257). When Tecumseh finally gets him to stop, Lum takes off running along the girders of the unfinished bridge before disappearing over the edge. Tecumseh hopes this is just one of Lum’s jokes, but he quickly realizes that Lum is gone; his body is pulled from the water a few days later.

Whether Lum intentionally runs off the edge of the bridge or falls by accident is not clear, but his death is another tragedy brought on by a life of repeated traumas and unresolved grief. Lum can find no way to come to terms with the trauma of his mother’s death and the repeated trauma of his father’s beatings. These beatings are mostly ignored by the community, they are frowned upon but no one steps up to stop the violence. Lum can find no way to deal with the historical trauma that continues to haunt his community, like the unfinished bridge, the grief has never been resolved.

These novels show depictions of trauma, grief, healing, and death in the modern world, but they are all connected to the past. Each character is facing his or her own trauma while also attempting to come to terms with trauma and grief of their ancestors. However, it is easy to abolish the trauma and grief of a fictional character in the idealized world of narrative; it is much more difficult to find the same healing in reality. Some authors seem to offer no hope that the trauma and grief of the past can ever be resolved, while others look for ways to come to terms with the trauma and find healing.

For clinical professionals like Dr. Brave Heart, the answer lies in a blending of clinical and traditional healing methods. She suggests that individuals can heal through “individual, group, and family therapy as well as attending to their own spiritual development” (Brave Heart and DeBruyn 66). In these strategies kinship networks are important as well as recognizing and understanding tribal history. These kinship ties do not have to be traditional, those passed down matrilineally or patrilineally, they just have to be a sense of family and belonging to a family group within a community. While kinship often refers to a blood relation, it can also be understood as sharing a common ancestry, characteristics, and origins. While each person may not have access to the blood ties of kinship, they can access the kinship granted by sharing a common ancestry and heritage which will allow them the bonds need to share their grief. By not limiting access to tribal history to blood kinship but to kinship in general they can gain access to important tribal history that will aid them in their quest for healing and understanding.

Dr. Brave Heart’s arguments do not address how individuals like Sherman Alexie’s John Smith are to deal with historical trauma and unresolved grief. What is to be the answer for those that have no connection to their tribes or family? Some groups, like the Cherokee Nation, are taking steps to ensure that children are not dispossessed of their heritage by taking steps to ensure that Native children are adopted by community members instead of into non-Native society where their heritage will, most likely be lost. These efforts will ensure that future generations of Native Americans will not be separated from their Native heritage and culture. Individuals that have no connection with their tribes or family members can undertake the arduous task of tracing their ancestry back to a certain tribe. In

some cases, the task is easier than in others. Many may have just been separated by time and place from their tribes, while others only know that they have a Native heritage.

What about those that do not follow their traditional cultural practices but are still haunted by the historical trauma of their people and the continued microaggression, racism, and discrimination of the non-Native community? For these the answers may come a little easier. Some may find healing in a combination of modern medicine, therapy, and interaction with other tribal members. Some may decide to reconnect with traditional tribal practices and healing ceremonies to be incorporated in with modern medical practices. While others may find it preferable to use only modern medicine or return to only tribal practices to obtain healing. Whatever the choice, it has to be the individual's own. There is no one method for solving historical trauma and unresolved grief, different methods work for different people. Just as no two people experience trauma the same, no two people experience healing the same. The key is to find what method works for each individual, whether modern, traditional, or a combination, and allow them to heal in a way that is effective for them.

The answers are not easily identified. Because the stereotyped images portrayed by popular culture only reinforce dehumanization of Native Americans it is simple enough to say that the non-Native community should be more understanding, more empathetic, and less discriminatory to Natives. Awareness must be raised of the harmful effects of microaggressions which have taken over as the new form of racism. These often unintentional, subtle comments and actions are just as harmful, and sometimes more so, than the blatant racism of the past.



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