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**‘RACIST, SEXIST, PROFANE, AND VIOLENT’: REINTERPRETING WWE’S
PORTRAYALS OF SAMOANS ACROSS GENERATIONS**

by

John Honey

**A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree**

of

MASTER OF SCIENCE

in

English

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**UTAH STATE UNIVERSITY
Logan, Utah**

2020

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ABSTRACT

“Racist, Sexist, Profane, and Violent”: Reinterpreting WWE’s Portrayals of Samoans across

Generations

By

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Utah State University, 2020

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Program: American Studies

This paper examines the shifting portrayals of Pacific Islanders in World Wrestling Entertainment (WWE) across three generations. As both a popular and historically racially problematic venue, WWE’s politically incorrect programming has played an underappreciated and under examined role in representing the USA. Although

many different groups have been portrayed by gross stereotypes in WWE, this paper uses the family of Dwayne “the Rock” Johnson—the Samoan Dynasty—as a case study. The WWE originally presented Pacific Islanders using the most offensive stereotypes, and the first two generations of the Samoan Dynasty had to “play Indian” or cosign onto gross representations of their people to be recognized by American audiences unfamiliar with representations of Pacific Islanders. I argue that the first generation mentored the second generation, who expanded their cultural footprint in the WWE, establishing a launching pad for Johnson’s superstar movie career. Using a “Pioneer, Settler, Opportunist” framework adopted from criminal justice, I explore how Johnson benefitted from the work of the generations of his family members that came before him. These three generations demonstrate how the WWE, as a unique venue of political incorrectness, allowed a place for the Samoan Dynasty as “persons” to create and promote harmful “personas” as part of a successful bid to slowly transition their performance away from “playing Indian.”

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“Racist, Sexist, Profane, and Violent”: Reinterpreting WWE’s Portrayals
of Samoans across Generations

Introduction

Although World Wrestling Entertainment (WWE) has historically used racist caricatures to create its narratives, in the case of one family, the Samoan Dynasty, the WWE became a venue of upward racial mobility. Across three generations, they took agency of their portrayals and utilized them to mainstream Pacific Islander bodies and culture, culminating in the historically unprecedented success of Dwayne “the Rock” Johnson. As Johnson states: “I grew up in wrestling. For a lot of you guys that don’t know, my grandfather wrestled, my dad as well, my whole family...it was funny because I credit my time and my journey in pro wrestling to getting me to where I am at today” (Meier).

WWE has consistently been a politically incorrect space, embracing minority stereotyping that uniquely caters to controversy and spectacle; what Roland Barthes called the “spectacle of excess” (Barthes 1). It presented a unique venue for Johnson’s family members who could introduce their culture to American audiences because it was politically incorrect. In “A Native American ‘playing Indian,’” Jason Edward Black and Vernon Ray Harrison explain:

Obviously, the history of the WWE remains rife with stereotypes, ethnic harm, and cultural appropriation. For the most part, the WWE has based non-American and/or non-

White characters on grossly essentialized images of nationalized and racialized identities. To say that the WWE has brokered in its own brand of neocolonialism would, indeed, be an understatement (173).

WWE established itself as a unique venue of the “politically incorrect,” often trafficking in offensive portrayals of minorities, purposefully courting the controversy that such an act brings. Brenden Maguire explained that political incorrectness manifests in pro wrestling as, “gross insensitivity, humiliation, taboo topics, anti-authority speech and action, racism, and sexism” (Maguire 167). This politically incorrect controversy appealed to a wide audience in the USA. In his piece, “Lamination as Slamination,” Bond Benton explains that audiences of professional wrestling do not have a reputation for being a sophisticated bunch, and stereotypes make for easy storytelling to a wide audience. Simply put, wrestling, as a form, “lacks the nuance of other forms of drama and performance and the spectators are typically looking for a defined narrative based on clear archetypes.... The easiest technique for facilitating this audience investment has been the employment of ritual actors... as stereotypes” (Benton 5). Summarily, WWE is a place where, “if you were memorable at all, it was as either a transcendent star or an offensive caricature” (Shoemaker 99), because audiences are not expecting nuance. They expect clear narratives of heroes vanquishing villains, and the easiest way of communicating that narrative is with the use of stereotypes.

This paper examines the dynamism of stereotypical representations across three generations of Samoan professional wrestlers, delineated into a “pioneer, settler, opportunist” perspective that demonstrates how each generation built upon its predecessors and/or symbolically cleared the path for those who would follow. This framework is adapted from

Donna C. Hale and Mark Lanier, who used it in the chapter, “The New Millennium: Women in Policing in the Twenty-First Century” from the anthology, *Visions for Change* (2005). It explains the different challenges faced by different “generations” of women entering the police force—a historically male dominated profession. Within this context, the first generation of “pioneers” was tasked with “blazing the trail” for those who followed, and had to overcome obstacles without any mentors to give them advice. The pioneers’ followers were “settlers” who benefited from the pioneers’ hard work, but still faced and overcame many significant hurdles. The third generation was labeled “opportunists” because they reaped the benefits of those who had preceded them and entered the profession when it was already established as a viable career. This framework is useful for understanding how the Samoan Dynasty has supported one another in trailblazing a hostile professional environment because their generations are often not as simple as being passed down from father to son, but a network of cousins, uncles, and nephews who had different experiences within the WWE.

Professional wrestling represents a niche interest that has risen from obscurity to represent the “face of American culture,” in part because of its longevity: Broadcast in over 162 countries, *Monday Night Raw* draws more than 500 million weekly viewers and is the longest running weekly serialized TV program in the US (Deeter-Schmelz and Sojka 1). WWE is also unique in its cultural ubiquity, as noted by Management and Organizational History scholars: “At one point in early 2000, ‘Raw’ was the top-rated cable television show, a book by a WWE performer was Number One on the New York Times bestseller list, and a record of WWE performers’ theme music was Number One on the Billboard magazine sales charts” (McQuarrie 229). Yet, as recently as 2005, Brenden Maguire argued in an article published in *Sociological Spectrum*, “Despite this popularity, sociologists have taken little notice” (Maguire 1). In other

words, WWE scholarship has lagged behind the rise in popularity of WWE as it has established itself as a permanent part of American culture.

More recently, in *A Native American 'playing Indian'* the authors specifically examine how “Tatanka, a Native American wrestler (person), assumes the identity of another tribesperson (persona) to generate both economic and social capital...an example of internal colonization and commodification, given that he had to ‘play Indian’ to pass as an authentic Native American” (1). These scholars utilize the term “person” to refer to the actor or sovereign individual who is playing a “persona,” or the character they are pretending to be on WWE programming. One example is Rodney Agatupu Anoa‘i, a “person” who wrestled as the “persona” Yokozuna and was a world heavyweight champion during the settler generation. He was honored as an example of the person/persona divide at his WWE Hall of Fame Induction ceremony in 2012. His nephews explained the difference between the person they knew and the persona they saw on TV—not only was their Samoan uncle portraying a Japanese sumo wrestler, but contrary to his personality, his persona was mean. They stated, “He looked too mean to be Uncle Rodney...what you saw on television, he was the total opposite: to the world, the mighty Yokozuna; to the family: Uncle Rodney” (Uso). Each generation of “persons” then had different tools with which to craft their “personas” in pursuit of acceptance by American audiences.

The first generation of pioneers presents a similar example as Tatanka, with one significant difference. Although many Americans are familiar with visual representations of Native American stereotypes, they were not acquainted with portrayals of Pacific Islanders, as April Henderson argues, “For many Americans, the first salient visual representations of Samoans they would have encountered in popular culture were wrestlers” (Henderson 278). The first generation pioneered offensive stereotypes brazenly because the WWE is a politically

incorrect place, where the audience expects a narrative with recognizable archetypes. Since audiences were largely unfamiliar, the pioneers had to cosign onto their offensive portrayals as an act of ‘internal colonization’:

scholars have begun to note that ‘internal colonization’ might account for the reasons that some Native folks are complicit in constructions of Indianness. Internal colonization refers to the hegemonic process through which external control becomes shifted to the shoulders of the oppressed... Internal colonization often translates into a rhetoric of ‘permission,’ whereby Native people are asked, in a sense, to cosign onto gross representations of Indianness (Black and Harrison 177).

On the surface, WWE appears to be embracing and promoting harmful stereotypes of nearly every ethnic group known to popular culture in order to capitalize upon and reinforce the hegemony. Benton recently elaborated, “Given the historic (and ongoing) target audience of professional wrestling, an easy source for heels [villains or bad guys] has been the presentation of the most base and hideous ethnic, gender, and racial stereotypes” (5). Indeed, WWE can sometimes appear to act with reckless disregard, or even open contempt for, politically correct culture, and it seems like a doubtful space for upward mobility and mainstreaming of different cultures; as Benton continues to note the scholarly omnipresence of problematic portrayals of race:

Professional wrestling's perception of the Japanese (loosely applied to all Asians) in the post World War II period, for example, was that of a ‘diabolical, enigmatic, and, of

course, inscrutable' race. Black wrestlers became stereotypes such as the 'happy, simple minded negro' in the Junkyard Dog, while "Cryme Tyme" was an African American wrestling team that stole items from their opponents to sell at a reduced price to members of the wrestling audience (Benton 6).

WWE became a space that reveled in pushing the boundaries of the politically incorrect, sometimes past their breaking point. David Shoemaker points out how Polynesians replaced



Native Americans as the WWE's cultural whipping boy, explaining that the problematic and popular portrayals of Native Americans have beneficially been eclipsed by offensive portrayals of Pacific Islanders as a "witch-doctory substratum" of "unhinged prehistorics" (Shoemaker 99). The author notes that Johnson represents a departure from that norm, one of only a few "success stories of those who escaped from the island's ghetto" (Shoemaker 99-100); The WWE represented a path of upward mobility for members of the Samoan Dynasty, but it came at a cultural cost to the first generations of wrestlers.

Fig. 1: Afa with The Headshrinkers are promoted as fearsome caricatures of Pacific Islanders.

WWE is aggressive in creating provocative content. As such, it is "often criticized for being racist, sexist, profane, and violent" (McQuarrie 229), and Bobby Newman pondered the

obvious question at the time, “whether these constant negative images may help to further some of the stereotypes we ought to be trying to eliminate” (125). The first generation of pioneers fully embraced their personas, engaging in a long list of otherwise offensive and humiliating stereotypes, which can initially seem so repugnant as to be morally unjustifiable. Yet the WWE also presents a unique vehicle which, “simultaneously depends upon the mainstream culture even as it rejects and skews the mainstream culture” (Rinehart 60); where non-white characters can both embrace and usurp their caricatures, repurposing them into a venue of upward mobility and mainstreaming.

The Three Generations:

The first generation of Samoan wrestlers would begin the process of normalizing Samoan people and culture by taking ownership and agency of Pacific Islander stereotypes in an otherwise ethnically harmful environment. This generation was tasked with, and is credited by scholars with, exposing many Americans to Samoan people and culture for the first time. The first impressions many Americans had of Pacific Islanders, “were wrestlers in the 1970s, the Wild Samoans (Afa and Sika Anoa‘i) in the 1980s, and the burgeoning younger generation who have since followed them into the ring” (Henderson 278). Before The Wild Samoans, Americans had few visual ideas about Samoan people, so the Pioneer generation established recognizable personas by displaying the offensive stereotypes Americans had about Pacific Islanders or they consented to “play Indian” (Black and Harrison 2018) in order to be recognized by audiences who most easily understood archetypes that are visually recognizable as good or evil. However, the WWE is more than just a clearinghouse or bastion for harmful ethnic stereotypes: The Samoan Dynasty worked within WWE to create a space where Samoan people, culture, and

bodies would be loved and respected. These three generations demonstrate how the WWE, as a unique venue of political incorrectness, allowed a place for the Samoan Dynasty as “persons” to create and promote harmful “personas” as part of a successful bid to slowly transition their performance away from “playing Indian.”

1. Pioneers:

The first generation, or pioneers, faced many unique hurdles to establishing themselves. One obstacle they faced was that Americans had no familiarity with Pacific Islander people or culture (Henderson). Another was that, as trailblazers, they had no cultural mentors to ask for advice, or videos of matches they could emulate. The patriarch of the Samoan Dynasty and first to act as pioneer was Fanene Leifi Pita Maivia (born Fanene Pita Anderson) who portrayed the persona “High Chief” Peter Maivia; billed as “the Flyin’ Hawaiian.” Another pioneer was Jimmy “Superfly” Snuka, who was born in Fiji as James Wiley Smith and was an uncle by marriage to Johnson. He so thoroughly embraced his persona that he changed his name to James Reiher Snuka. Debuting in 1968, he celebrated the barefoot, high flying style of wrestling that would become iconic. Arthur Anoa’i Sr. played the persona of Afa, as part of the tag team, “the Wild Samoans”. He pioneered exaggerated stereotypes that would serve the next generation of Samoans to ingratiate themselves into wrestling, and eventually American culture. They carried spears to the ring; spoke no English, only in grunts; wore no shoes; ate raw fish; picked their noses; wore grass skirts and shrunken heads; attacked with headbutts that were impervious to pain; and even added, “an implied element of cannibalism, with the team occasionally gnawing prone opponents” (Newman 123). The first generation pioneered cultural territory at tremendous cost, but established a permanent professional foothold for their family.

Arthur Anoa'i Sr. immigrated to the USA, served in the military, and established a foothold for Samoan people in mainstream American culture by becoming a professional wrestler. One wrestling factbook stresses the familial bond of the Samoan Dynasty, that Anoa'i Sr. was "trained by his uncle [High Chief] Peter Maivia and Rocky Johnson, [and] began his pro career in the early 1970's. He then trained his brother Sika, and the two became one of wrestling's first dominant tag teams, the Wild Samoans" (Shields 143).

Years later, at Anoa'i Sr.'s induction ceremony into the WWE Hall of Fame, his sons would paint a portrayal of an immigrant chasing a dream, who recognized the WWE as a venue which offered a unique chance for upward mobility and mainstreaming of different minorities. They begin their encomium by explaining his family's immigrant story, saying, "Let's not forget where our fathers came from: the island of Samoa, a very small island in the south Pacific. They spent most of their days fishing to make sure our family had food...sacrificing education...(Anoa'i)" Yet the WWE presented a unique place for Anoa'i Sr. to establish himself, as his sons continue to explain, "but the one thing they did set their goals towards when they came to the USA, was they were going to be something just a little bit better than average, and the little bit better than average came through professional wrestling" (Anoa'i). The result of this was the mainstreaming of previously obscure Samoan people, bodies, and culture. His sons credit him with establishing a foothold that transcended professional wrestling and the Samoan Dynasty, anecdotally saying, "Now more than ever there are more Samoans being active in professional sports today, and the one thing I do get from many of them, is a very hearty thank you to the great chief Peter Maivia, Afa and Sika" (Anoa'i). Anoa'i Sr.'s sons are contemporary witnesses to the end results of generations of hard work begun by the pioneer generation. Anoa'i Sr. as a person created a persona of a "Wild Samoan," as a form of "playing Indian," in pursuit

of social and economic capital, using stereotypes he knew to be false and found personally offensive. Benton recently recounted a conflict Anoa‘i Sr. faced playing Indian—that at least some fans mistook his persona for his person:

In an anecdote in his biography, Chris Jericho recounts meeting Wild Samoan Afa when Jericho was only seven. Jericho requested an autograph using broken English. The young Jericho stated, “You... here... sign... pen...” (Jericho cartoonishly demonstrates how the pen works) because Mr. Afa's performance of a savage had convinced him that he was incapable of speech, to which Mr. Afa responded, ‘Fuck you, kid’ (Benton 5)

This demonstrates that while Anoa‘i Sr. was aware of the negative effects of “playing Indian” in the ring, he was profoundly offended when a fan would mistake him for an illiterate savage in the real world. The ‘person’ of Anoa‘i drew a distinct cultural line between himself and the ‘persona’ he portrayed. Indeed, the practice of “headshrinking” has only been documented in the Northern Amazon and is a “tribal” stereotype that has no basis in Polynesia or Samoa. Yet Anoa‘i Sr. acted as a pioneer to create a foothold for his family, and his hard work laid an indispensable foundation for the generations that followed. Pacific Islander culture would also serve as the central part of the persona Jimmy “Superfly” Snuka.

Snuka’s culture was the focus of at least one feud he had with “Rowdy” Roddy Piper, when, during an episode of *Piper’s Pit*, a sort of “warped talk show” (Montgomery) segment featured on *Monday Night Raw*, Piper made disparaging remarks about Snuka and his Samoan ancestors (Shields 48). Indeed, Snuka’s heritage became the central point of his conflict with Piper, during an interview segment in June 1984, Piper opened by aggressively interrogating

Snuka about his cultural heritage: “The Fiji islands, that’s where... your folks ran up and down the trees for coconuts like monkeys... right? And big women, I know they got big women there in the Fiji Islands” (“*Piper's Pit* with Superfly Jimmy Snuka (03-18-1984)”). He was firmly rebuffed by Snuka, “They have NICE [emphasis added] women there” he stated, visibly exasperated by Piper, who retorted, “They have nice long hair under their armpits...just a little joke fella” (“*Piper's Pit* with Superfly Jimmy Snuka (03-18-1984)”).

Piper continued to explain that his understanding of Fiji is that, to crack open the coconut, they sometimes drop them directly from the tree onto the women’s heads, mentally making Islander “women a little backwards. It makes their kids a little backwards. But it is never the less handy for breaking the coconut” (“*Piper's Pit* with Superfly Jimmy Snuka (03-18-1984)”). Piper was playing the role of “racist heel,” using general ignorance of Pacific Islanders to draw the ire of the audience onto himself and to draw sympathy onto Snuka, who confronted Piper, asking “Are you trying to put my race and my...” before Piper interrupted him, defending his racism with ignorance, saying, “I don’t know nothing about the Fiji Islands, and you obviously know nothing about *Piper’s Pit*, so that kinda makes me a little superior to you” (“*Piper's Pit* with Superfly Jimmy Snuka (03-18-1984)”). Piper’s feigned curiosity about Fiji serves as an excuse for the offensive questions Piper has been asking Snuka and sets up the second meeting they had on *Piper’s Pit*, wherein Piper would transition his racial attacks from the verbal to physical.

Academic rendering does not do justice to the cultural and racial humiliation inflicted upon Snuka at the hands of Piper. CEO Vince McMahon introduced the segment with a caution for sensitive viewers. “It is not a pretty sight at all” he warned as the viewer is shown an interview segment from *Piper’s Pit* wherein Piper is berating a stone faced Snuka in what segues

from a one sided verbal to a physical thrashing, culminating in Piper smashing a coconut into the head of Snuka (“Piper’s Pit with Jimmy ‘Superfly’ Snuka (WWF 1984). In 2012 James Snuka claimed that the scene was improvised, stating

...when he hit me over the head with that coconut we hadn’t planned it; he just did it out of the blue. Roddy [Piper] was a real character, and with me coming from the Fiji Islands, he was teasing me about eating bananas, pineapples, then from nowhere he picks up the coconut and just hits me around the head. I was bleeding and everything but when I came to I looked around and he was gone. (Modaberry 1).

This demonstrates that wrestlers’ personas had the creative freedom to push the boundaries of “political incorrectness” in pursuit of the catharsis that draws an audience. Piper then knocks Snuka through the wood panels that made up the set of the interview before smashing multiple bananas in his face and spitting on him, commencing a beating more noteworthy for its humiliation than for its also shocking levels of violence. The kilt wearing Piper removes his leather belt to use as a strap with which to whip Snuka, yelling “Get up! Come on boy” (“Piper’s Pit with Jimmy ‘Superfly’ Snuka (WWF 1984)!



Fig 2: A strap wielding Piper lays a boot into the head of Snuka

The scene ends as a battered and shadowed Snuka, dressed in a traditional Fijian sulu (sarong), struggles to stand beneath an illuminated American flag, yelling in impotent agony as Piper blows his nose on him and escapes through a locked door.



Fig 3. A battered and humiliated Snuka struggles to stand after a beating from Piper.

This offensive scene demonstrates the unique relationship between the WWE and its portrayal of Pacific Islanders. First, the WWE promoted offensive stereotypes that appear to benefit from and re-enforce the hegemony, thriving on the “politically incorrect.” Furthermore, Snuka’s colonized culture played a central role in his persona, and in driving the narrative and action establishing tools for the next generation, the Headshrinkers. Samoan identity and culture could then serve as dramatic plot pieces recognizable to American audiences, earning their emotional investment.

The scene from *Piper’s Pit* also had a more substantial effect on James Snuka than a typical WWE storyline. Years later, Piper would explain that when he hit Snuka with that

coconut, he saw his eyes roll back. Piper was told that when Snuka returned to his dressing room, he just stared blankly for twenty or thirty minutes, after which he was “never the same” (Roddy Piper On Infamous Piper's Pit With Superfly Jimmy Snuka (The Coconut One)). The coconut shot also left Snuka reeling and legitimately humiliated. According to Piper, Snuka would try to start legitimate fights with Piper in the hallway at their hotel. Piper was asked whether he had discussed his racist remarks beforehand with Snuka or established with him where in the scene the coconut shot was coming. The answer to both questions was ultimately, “No (Roddy Piper On Infamous Piper's Pit With Superfly Jimmy Snuka (The Coconut One))”. Piper later expressed remorse for the ill effects the attack had on Snuka. At a 2004 Pay-per-view event for a scripted non-WWE wrestling event, the two men met in a ring where Piper explained that the confrontation had haunted him for twenty years, and eventually he would unsuccessfully try to goad Snuka to deliver a retributive blow with a coconut to ease Piper’s tortured conscience (Jimmy Snuka on Roddy Piper's "Pipers Pit" (November 7th 2004)). This act of scripted pacifism breaks the violent stereotypes that the pioneers had publicized for years, laying claim to a cultural dignity that was not available to Snuka decades ago.

Being a pioneer came with a heavy cultural cost, and the first generation had to make substantial sacrifices to establish a professional niche for their family. Arthur Anoa’i Sr. as Afa and Jimmy “Superfly” Snuka often had to “play Indian” in order to be recognized by American audiences, and the WWE was a place that was sufficiently politically incorrect to allow the gross racial abuse demonstrated by their portrayals. These otherwise harmful portrayals were repurposed to establish a foothold for the success of the Samoan Dynasty.

2. Solofa F. Fatu Jr. “Rikishi” and The Headshrinkers

“The Headshrinkers” were a tag team in the WWE between 1988 and 1996, consisting of Solofa Fatu Jr. as Fatu and Samula Anoa’i as Samu. They were managed in a literal sense by Anoa’i Sr. as Afa, who would accompany them to the ring, teaching them to navigate the cultural landscape. The Headshrinkers represented a crucial transitional generation of how the WWE portrays Pacific Islanders in that they were provided with some rudimentary opportunities to portray their culture. Yet, by transitioning away from the egregious “Pacific Islander” stereotypes, Fatu Jr. played the central role in normalizing the omnipresence of Pacific Islanders in professional wrestling. As part of the Headshrinkers, and under the counsel of his uncle Anoa’i Sr. (Pioneer), Fatu Jr. (Settler) laid a necessary cultural foundation in the WWE for his cousin Johnson (Opportunist). Fatu Jr. used different tools to transition Samoan performance away from savagery and barbarism and towards mainstream acceptance in American culture. Scholars have examined different ways that Fatu Jr. normalized Pacific Islander culture for American audiences.

As a Settler, Fatu Jr. had the benefit of mentors and trailblazers whom he could ask for specific technical advice in a niche professional space. He explained that,

Being around Afa and Sika, and Jimmy Snuka, and them back in the day taught me knowledge of this business at a young age... and so when I bring that knowledge at a young age during the ‘Attitude Era,’ I was still a young kid coming through here. But I had knowledge as if I was in the business for twenty something years, and it’s because I was around those type of gentlemen that was in the business before me that really helped me survive longevity wise in this business (Rikishi on Battling with WWE Writers).

Fatu Jr. is explaining that he entered the business with a significant advantage because of his family's heritage. He had material advantages provided to him by the pioneers that directly contributed to his career advancement.

One way that professional wrestlers assert their identities is through the design of their dress, costumes, and tights. Fatu Jr. used his tights as a subtle nod to his people and culture, and J.H. Roberts recently explained how another wrestler, Sami Zayn, uses his tights to subvert and parody Anglo-normative Western Hegemony, which has stark similarities to the persona Fatu Jr. presented in the Headshrinkers. Roberts begins by elaborating that a wrestler's costume and tights function to assert his identity and can deliver an otherwise radical message in a substantially subtle way, "Sami Zayn, undermines this [Anglo-normative Western] hegemony through subtly asserting his Arabic and transnational identities...with his tights Zayn counters mainstream Islamophobic discourse about Arabs post 9/11" (Roberts 1). Zayn expresses his unique, globalized identity with his tights, which are decorated with many national flags, demonstrating that he is "influenced by not only his ethnic heritage (Syrian) and country of birth (Canada), but every country he has visited and the cultures within them" (Roberts 1).

Wrestling tights allow even new or casual fans to quickly and easily understand basic attributes about a wrestler's persona. Fatu Jr. would make a similar homage to his family and people with his persona's tights, which sometimes alternatively portrayed the word "Samoa," palm trees, or simply the name of the capital of American Samoa, Pago Pago. While both instances of expressing cultural pride via one's tights might seem too subtle to be noticed by some audiences, it represents the unique way that Fatu Jr., as a settler, could begin to assert his cultural identity and begin a transition away from "playing Indian."

Roberts concludes that Zayn’s, “popularity and success allow a space within WWE for non-white characters to perform identities not limited to caricatures of their ethnic and racial backgrounds” (Roberts 1). This interdisciplinary article demonstrates that other wrestlers are using their costumes to make radical statements about their culture and identity, and it represents one way that Fatu Jr. could begin to assert his cultural identity and draw awareness to his people.



Fig. 4: The Headshrinkers subtly assert their identity by decorating their trunks with palm trees.

Fatu Jr. took ownership of the savage Samoan stereotypes through the WWE’s use of story, specifically that the tag team would be both feared and admired. At first, they established themselves by embracing the exaggerated barbaric stereotypes pioneered by Anoa’i Sr.: One wrestling reviewer explains the action in his own words, describing that the violence was extreme, and excessive even within the hyper violent WWE, what Roland Barthes called the “spectacle of excess” (Barthes 1). The author begins describing how the Headshrinkers shirk the rules, “The ‘Shrinkers don’t wait for the bell and just beat the shit out of the jobbers.” This

demonstrates how they establish their strength and earned respect, specifically by pushing the boundaries of violence within a simulated combat sport. The author continues to explain that the Headshrinkers began the beating before the bell signaled the beginning of the match, and they continue it well after the match should be over, saying, “[They] have it won multiple times but feel the need to carry on with the beating. Fatu isn’t satisfied with killing Stallings and walks around on the floor to kill Hardy as well... and ...finishes with the Superfly Splash. Hardy didn’t even get a tag and he still got his ass kicked” (Dixon 50). The Headshrinkers displays of ultra-violence are one of the ways they earn their respect by fear. Early on, they had to embrace many of the highly visible negative stereotypes pioneered by Anoa’i Sr., establishing viscous personas who shirk the rules of wrestling.

The Headshrinkers embraced all the negative portrayals that Anoa’i Sr. had taught them, but they were also able to begin to transform from feared, reviled foreigners to beloved, respected Americans. Scholars noted the Headshrinkers by name as a paragon of stereotypes of Polynesian wrestlers, that they, “All come to the ring barefoot, emphasize “flying” moves requiring great agility...the most blatant representation of this stereotyping can be seen in the current [WWE] tag-team, the Headshrinkers...managed by Afa” (Newman 123). Their transformation away from these stereotypes began during a “squash” match in 1992, so named because the victory is so one sided that their opponents were “squashed” without so much as landing an offensive move. As soon as the match starts, The Headshrinkers double-team one of their opponents, in clear violation of the so-called, “rules,” and to the vocal chagrin of the audience and television commentators. One commentator vociferously calls for the referee to restore order, but the other, heel commentator, defends the Headshrinkers’ barbaric attack, saying, “Well, you have to give them a little leeway. They don’t really speak English that well—

they're foreigners. You gotta give them a break" (WWE. (11/28/1992)) At this early point in their career, they were maximizing the tools they had acquired from the generation before them, establishing hyper-violent, dominant personas, "playing Indian" to meet the audiences' expectations before taking ownership of and manipulating the audience expectations.

The live audience also functions as a participant in the WWE performance, and their unscripted responses both react to and influence the story unfolding in the ring. The audience indicates their shift in cultural consciousness with their reactions to the Headshrinkers, as Roberts argues,

Wrestling, as live theater and popular culture, can respond more quickly to an audience's demands than other forms of media. Wrestling writers need to please fans to make money...so they make fan's desired changes sometimes during ongoing performances...this fluidity gives us a gauge for what personas are popular, which then tells us something about wrestling fan's cultural consciousness (Roberts 214)

The fans demonstrated their cultural consciousness during the transition of the Headshrinkers from heels to faces, which coincided with their transition from foreigner to American. Their transformation was complete by 1994, when the Headshrinkers were popular enough with the crowd to "turn" from "heel" to "face"—or from 'bad guy' to 'good guy'—and were set to win the tag team championship belts from a pair of villainous, and more importantly foreign, Canadian heels. Commentators "Macho Man" Randy Savage and CEO Vince McMahon introduced the Headshrinkers in the match, praising them with traditionally American virtues, saying, "They got a very high tolerance of pain, they're rugged, they are fearless, and they got

raw savage talent” (WWE. (5/2/1994)). Although their toughness, or savagery, had not been diminished against a pair of Canadians, their “otherness” all but disappeared during the Headshrinkers late-match rally, amid spontaneous encouragement from the audience with chants of, “USA! USA! USA!” The two commentators helpfully put the situation into its cultural context for audiences at home saying, “Listen to that capacity crowd chanting ‘USA! USA!’ obviously for American Samoa.” The audience’s unscripted reactions signifies the completion of the Headshrinkers transformation from unknown “other” to truly and uniquely American champions, a transformation that would have been unlikely just a decade before for the pioneers, but significantly easier a decade later, for opportunists in the form of Johnson.

In 1995, Fatu Jr. began the transition away from the “Headshrinker” gimmick, abandoning the offensive islander tropes completely, and wrestling as a character more reflective of his real-life personality. He was now from a ghetto near San Francisco, spoke fluent English, and his character encouraged others to “make a difference”—based on his own upbringing in an immigrant family from the inner-city, where he was once hit in a drive by shooting, and declared clinically dead for three minutes. Billed at a height of 6’ 1” and a weight of 425 lbs., Fatu Jr. utilized his giant Samoan body to take ownership of negative stereotypes. In his WWE Hall of Fame induction ceremony, Fatu Jr.’s sons alluded to the typically shocking first impression their father had on fans, admiring the “400 pound athletically moving Samoan that was in the ring” (WWE 3/28/2015). Fatu Jr. was aware of the shocking effect his body had on audiences, and he used that to glorify his Pacific Islander heritage, and he would synthesize the wrestling moves within his skill set from the generations of Samoan wrestlers who proceeded him.

Fatu Jr. continued to use his unique body to bring attention and glory to Samoan people and culture, specifically with his finishing move, the cartoonishly named and performed,

“Stinkface.” Fatu Jr. had twin sons, Joshua Samuel Fatu and Jonathan Solofa Fatu, who portray the personas Jimmy and Jey Uso, collectively “The Usos”. They also enjoyed wrestling success as tag team champions, functioning as part of the opportunist generation. The Usos explained that they watched their dad “evolve through all these different types of characters” before finding the one that would solidify his legacy. He debuted the “Rikishi” character in 1999, donning bleach blond hair and a black sumo thong. His sons go on to explain:

There was one character that stuck. He found it. It fit. It felt good, looked good... I remember the first time we were watching this character on TV, and I was like, “No...it’s not the blonde hair...it wasn’t the 400 pound athletically moving Samoan that was in the ring, it wasn’t the different moves in his repertoire that he was pulling out...” That was not what we remembered seeing Rikishi the first time on TV. **THIS** [emphasis added] is what we remember (Uso 3/28/2015).

The Usos then point to a giant picture of Fatu Jr.’s thonged rear end, alluding to the finishing move that would make him famous, the “Stinkface.” Fatu Jr.’s biography on the WWE website explains the move in detail: “When his opponent was incapacitated in the corner of the ring, Rikishi would stand over the Superstar and plant his ample buttocks on their face. This humiliating move was applied to many WWE greats, including Mr. McMahon and Johnson” (Rikishi: Bio).



Figure 5: Rikishi delivers a Stinkface.

The Usos continue to explain the significance of the move, that it is more than just a move used to humiliate opponents, but one of the single most potent factors in their father's success. They say,

What is that? Is that a thong? Is Dad wearing a thong? Look at that. This is the funny part: That right there, put us through college, and that bought us Christmas presents, birthday presents, Thanksgiving feasts, good food on our tables barbecued ribs, a roof over our head, but we are so glad THAT didn't give us the Stinkface....the ones who ain't laughin got the Stinkface (Uso 3/28/2015).

Here the Usos are straddling between ‘person’ and ‘persona’; they are at once honoring the career and legacy of their father (person), while returning to their own wrestling characters (personas) to acknowledge the undeniable humiliation of being on the receiving end of a ‘Stinkface.’ Late night comedian Jon Oliver helpfully pointed out the barrier between real and fake that the Stinkface blends, comparing the move to other moves in WWE performances: “You can fake being kicked in the face, or being hit in the head with a bed pan, but there is no faking that” (Oliver). This establishes the blurred boundary between real and fake in the WWE and that Fatu Jr. challenged that line with his unique body. The Usos explained in their own words that their father used his uniquely Samoan body to put food on their table, pay for their college, etc. This would have been more challenging during the pioneer generation, but in 1999, Fatu Jr. had acquired ample Samoan capital on which to build.

Some moves were developed and used by Samoan wrestlers to pay homage to Pacific Islander culture, like the “Samoan Drop.” However, one of the most famous moves was the “Superfly Splash” innovated by Jimmy “Superfly” Snuka. On June 28, 1982, Snuka attempted



his famous splash from, not the top rope of the ring, but from the top of the 15 foot steel cage surrounding the ring for an appropriately named, “cage match.” The splash missed, allowing his opponent to escape the

cage and win the match. The next year he attempted this feat again, this time successfully executing the move against Don Muraco at Madison Square Garden. The audience erupted in cheers, as James Snuka years later would explain, "Jumping off the cage at the Garden you couldn't even hear yourself, I loved it so much, things like that just stick in your heart" (Dilbert). The courageous leap inspired many future Hall of Famers to become wrestlers, and established a move set that paid unique tribute to Pacific Islander culture.

Fatu Jr. had a great appreciation for the powerful image created by a 400 lbs. giant Islander flying athletically through the air, and he paid homage to Snuka on July 23, 2000, when he repeated the same impressive scene, delivering a Superfly Splash from the top of the steel cage. This represents one way that Fatu Jr. was able to pay homage to Polynesian people and culture using his uniquely Samoan body, in a way that the previous generation was unable, at the same time demonstrating how in the first generation, Snuka had functioned as a pioneer to create a move that was recognizable and would thrill audiences.

In the year 2000, Fatu Jr. continued to blend real and fiction to clear the way for his cousin, Johnson. Chow et al. provides a useful framework for understanding the blend between real and fake within the spectacle of wrestling with the "entertainment-efficacy braid":

A simple illustration of this deep divide can be found in the act of "blading," wherein a wrestler will discreetly make a cut in their forehead with an otherwise concealed razor blade. The wound is self-inflicted, and the actual cutting of flesh is hidden from the audience, but the blood that flows is the wrestler's real blood (Chow et al. 2).

Fatu Jr. would also utilize professional wrestling storylines to blend real and fiction, drawing specific attention to the continual and repeated triumph by “White” wrestlers over Samoan wrestlers. The context of the situation was that the WWE’s widely beloved champion, Stone Cold Steve Austin, had been unable to compete due to a neck injury for eleven months and had to be written off the show for that time. That was executed with a storyline that saw a mystery driver run over Austin with a car. Eleven months later, the mystery driver was revealed to be Fatu Jr.’s persona, Rikishi. In his scripted speech “confessing” to the “crime,” he blends real criticism of WWE’s treatment of Pacific Islanders into the reasons he supposedly ran over Austin: to clear the path to the championship for his cousin, Johnson. He begins by accusing the WWE of pushing White wrestlers over Pacific Islanders and giving specific examples, saying,

The [WWE] has always been all about, the ‘Great White Hope,’ and I’m talking about such people as: Buddy Rogers, people like Bruno Sammartino... Bob Backlund, Hulk Hogan, and now, people like Stone Cold Steve Austin. You see the [WWE] has always let the Island Boys in, but we were always held back.... I’m talking about people like your Grandfather, a well respected man, High Chief Peter Maivia, could have become a [WWE] champion, but no, they held him back. People like Jimmy ‘Superfly’ Snuka could have been a [WWE] champion, but no, they held him back. People like Afa and Sika, Samu, and the Tonga Kid—they were all held back. So you see Rock, I ran Stone Cold over, and I did this for you (WWE Rikishi admits).

Youtube comments illustrate that the audience, normally keen to suspend their disbelief, are aware of decades of racial resentment that had been building within WWE:



Fig. 7 YouTube Comments reflect audience’s understanding of Rikishi’s criticism (WWE Rikishi admits).

Rikishi’s speech is an example of a “worked shoot.” One definition is, “when they make it look like a wrestler has completely gone off script, but actually the whole segment is planned” (Twyman). Rikishi’s speech was scripted by WWE writers in a way that drew substantial attention to a real criticism to how the WWE has exploited Pacific Islanders in perpetual mid-card role of putting over white wrestlers to the championship.

Fatu Jr. represents a critical middle generation, settlers, between pioneer and opportunist, where he at first had to play into cartoonish, exaggerated stereotypes, but after taking ownership of the same, achieves the agency necessary to move beyond that. By 2000, he was able to blend scripted and unscripted by giving this speech, clearing the way for his real-life cousin to become champion, and eventually movie star.

Although Solofa F. Fatu Jr. benefitted from the cultural capital acquired for him by his predecessors in the pioneer generation, he had to put in quite a bit of work to shift portrayals of Pacific Islanders away from the offensive and towards the normal. Fatu Jr. was asked about how

much agency he exercised in playing the character created by WWE's creative writing staff. He cited his ethnicity directly when asked how he settled backstage conflict, or if any of the writer's ever "took it too far:"

Keep in mind, I'm Samoan. Not too many people mess with Samoans. We were Samoans before we were wrestlers. If anybody knows my culture, we don't back down for shit... Just in case I ever did have a problem, or whatever, you can rest assured, it would be handled (Rikishi on Battling with WWE Writers).

He states that he enjoyed a reputation for being assertive, and if he had any objections to any of the offensive things his character was expected to do, he was never too shy to plainly say, "I'm not doing that" (Rikishi on Battling with WWE Writers). When conflicted about his portrayals, he asserted that he exercised as much creative leeway as he wanted:

I wouldn't let no writer, especially one that didn't understand our business... to come in there and try to write stuff for me...I'm the one that's in there performing...hitting that three quarter inch plywood every damn night, and I am going to be damned if I am going to let him write some silly shit for me that doesn't make sense (Rikishi on Battling with WWE Writers).

He is clear that he exercised complete sovereignty over his portrayals in WWE, and he had the agency to refuse any portrayal that he felt went too far. Some of the tools he used to achieve this include the use of his dress and costume in the form of his tights, and through mobilizing his

unique body via his repertoire of wrestling moves, from the “Superfly Splash” to the “Stinkface.” Finally, he blended reality with fiction by criticizing the WWE’s historical treatment of Pacific Islanders, symbolically clearing the path to the championship for Johnson.

3. Dwayne “the Rock” Johnson

Johnson represents the 3rd generation, the opportunists, who benefitted from the work done by generations before them, and now had a place where he would be recognized and could more easily succeed. By the time Johnson made his WWE debut, the industry had a long history of problematic stereotypes and a developed reputation as a place that is provocatively politically incorrect. Yet, it was no longer necessary for Johnson to “play Indian” to be recognized by audiences and he did not have to embrace any of the stereotypes his forefathers had represented. As a third-generation professional wrestler, both sides of his family raised Johnson with an acute awareness of the potential damage that could be done by fully embracing harmful portrayals of one’s race and ethnicity. He elaborated his own view of his ethnic identity on Twitter, saying, “I identify as exactly what I am – both. Equally proud. Black/Samoan” (@TheRock). Stereotypes were especially prominent in pro-wrestling during the 1980s (Maguire and Wozniak, 1987), and according to Johnson, it used to be the case that the leading black wrestlers were “jive-talking caricatures.... They’d eat watermelon on camera and do all sorts of degrading things, because that’s what was expected of them... My father wouldn’t do that... He was the first black wrestler to insist on being very intelligent in front of the camera” (The Rock 9) Although the WWE was no less racially problematic when Johnson arrived, his family had created a niche in which he could excel to the highest levels of superstardom.

The WWE represented a venue that allowed and encouraged superstars to be politically incorrect. Johnson demonstrated awareness of this in explaining why he was achieving more popularity than traditional mainstream athletes. He said, “They have to be P.C., The Rock doesn’t. Shaquille [O’Neill of the Los Angeles Lakers] can’t say ‘I’m going to lay the smack down on his candy ass,’ The Rock can” (Maguire 167). This demonstrates that Johnson recognized the politically incorrect atmosphere of the WWE as a place he could use to establish himself without the boundaries associated with traditional modes of upward mobility.

Johnson provides some context, establishing that he did not enter the WWE empty handed. Contrarily, because of the groundwork laid by his family, he had one of the biggest debuts one could imagine. Although normally a wrestler would have their very first match at a small venue or a non-televised event, Johnson explains,

My very first match with the WWE was at one of their biggest pay-per-views of the year called ‘Survivor Series’ in the most famous arena in the world, Madison Square Garden, where my grandfather wrestled in the 70’s for Vince McMahon’s dad, my dad wrestled for Vince McMahon in 80s, and here I came in 1996 (The Rock Reacts to His First WWE Match: 20 YEARS OF THE ROCK).

In this context, Johnson was set up to succeed, and he credits his family for establishing the pathways for that success. Like his cousin Fatu Jr. of the Headshrinkers, his ability to win over the crowd’s spontaneous, unscripted support is the real indicator of his success in being recognized by audiences: his debut match found him facing down two villainous heels by himself, after his partner was eliminated, leaving two bad guys against one good guy:

You felt an immediate shift in the tone of the crowd, 22,000 people in MSG, they looked at the two bad guys, they looked at the new rookie, and in that moment, 22,000 people... did something...that defined my career and literally changed my life in one night...(The Rock Reacts to His First WWE Match: 20 YEARS OF THE ROCK)

He stressed that the audience expressed their approval and recognition in a way cannot be planned or scripted, “It’s something in wrestling you can’t write... you can’t script it in Hollywood, because you just can’t script how people are going to react to something, and that thing that they did, those 22,000 people started chanting my name” (The Rock Reacts to His First WWE Match: 20 YEARS OF THE ROCK). He explains that this was his dream come true, and this spectacular debut at one of the largest WWE events of the year demonstrates the success of his family in establishing a place within the WWE for him to be recognized and beloved by audiences, free of any semblance of gross stereotype. Commentator and CEO Vince McMahon was acutely aware of the profound familial significance of the moment, saying at the time, “What a dream come true for this first, third generation [WWE] superstar, and how proud is Rocky Johnson and his mom...sitting at home watching on Pay-per-view” (The Rock Reacts to His First WWE Match: 20 YEARS OF THE ROCK). This objective measure of Johnson’s success demonstrates the fruits of the labor of his family for three generations. The work done by the first two generations of his predecessors created a specific and unique place for Johnson to succeed, and a clear example of that is in his debut match, where the crowd’s spontaneous reactions to Johnson mirror the experiences of his family members generations before. Paying additional homage to the pioneer generation, he used Instagram to eulogize Jimmy “Superfly”

Snuka and to acknowledge the important trailblazing role he had played, and the inspiration he took from his performances at Madison Square Garden:

Well before there was WrestleManias, PPV's, big money guaranteed contracts, the internet or pro wrestling being coined, "sports entertainment," it's hard to articulate how "on fire" [Snuka] was in the early 80's and how much he impacted and electrified the wrestling business' bottom line. His wrestling promos had a quiet intensity that made you believe every word that came out of his mouth and you just knew that you had to run down to Madison Square Garden and buy your tickets because he was going to electrify that night. Another Garden sell out (Johnson).

Johnson wrote, "Alofa atu i le aiga atoa" along with the announcement, which means "love the whole family" in Samoan. Johnson clearly has a great appreciation and understanding for the role his predecessors played in creating a space for him to succeed.

Another way that the Samoan Dynasty expresses their culture is through their tattoos. Edward Smith Fatu was a settler who wrestled as the persona Umaga and passed away in 2009. His distinctive tattoos uniquely expressed his cultural identity:



Fig 8. Umaga with culturally inspired tattoos.

Joe Anoa'i explained that Smith had introduced their family to a tattoo artist after explaining the “different prints and trying to give her the heads-up of our culture, and the customs, and the patterns, and the sequences that kind of fit and how they mold together” (Upton 1). Four years

after the passing of Edward Smith Fatu, tag team champions the Usos began painting their face in a similar way as tribute to their family:



Fig. 9: The Usos honor their late Uncle with their face paint.

Johnson also expresses his culture through his tattoos, which have long-standing traditional meaning within his family. “The story of my (chest and arm) tattoos is a very elaborate story,” Johnson once said during an interview. “It represents all the things that are important to me, that I love and that I’m passionate about” (Dwayne ‘The Rock’ Johnson’s 3 Tattoos & Their Meanings) Johnson acknowledges that his tattoos pay direct tribute to his grandfather, to whom he is grateful, acknowledging that High Chief Peter Maivia “was the first Samoan wrestler to become known on a worldwide basis” (Johnson). At the WWE Hall of Fame

induction ceremony for High Chief Peter Maivia in 2008, many of his family members elaborated their gratitude for his role as a pioneer. Johnson explained his cultural influence, saying, that his grandfather “had a warrior spirit to him... He was a paramount high chief who had tattoos from the bottom of his chest all the way down to his knees, 360 degrees, it’s very similar to what I have tattooed on my arms and chest now...” (Johnson). This is an example of how Johnson treasures his cultural heritage, yet makes his grandfather’s traditions modern and unique to his situation. Johnson’s tattoos are tangible demonstrations of his family honor, within the WWE, a place where physical performance is an integral part of the narrative.

Johnson capitalized upon the cultural landscape established by his predecessors and was able to do it in a way that maintained his dignity; Johnson did not have to wear a grass skirt, carry a spear, or otherwise ‘play Indian’ to be recognized by audiences; their expectations had changed in the years between generations such that Johnson could express himself and appreciate his culture in a more dignified manner. The tattoos represent Johnson using his body to pay tribute to his family in a completely different way than Edward Smith Fatu did with his tattoos, than “Rikishi” did with the Stinkface, or Snuka did with the Superfly Splash. The WWE was a significantly different place for Johnson than it was for his predecessors, the result of how hard they worked to establish a cultural foothold for Pacific Islanders in the WWE, and by extension, American culture. Much like Afa had to distance himself from his persona, Johnson attempted to distance himself from his persona, the Rock, to launch his movie career. He explains that his managers told him, “You know, you have to forget about your past. You can’t bring wrestling up. We have to slowly leave that behind. Let’s not refer to yourself as ‘The Rock’. Let’s make sure that everybody is calling you Dwayne Johnson” (Winifred 1). He followed this advice for a few fruitless years, eventually having a moment of clarity in 2010,

reflecting, “I just felt, yeah, this isn’t working. I need to stop, readjust, reassess, and change everything around me. I gotta take one more shot, but at least I’m gonna take a shot with me being myself (Winifred 1).” Johnson took control of his identity and persona, catapulting him to the top of pop culture success. However, that was not his end goal. As an opportunist, he not only praises his family for creating these opportunities for him, but also established pathways into the film industry for his family.

Although Johnson’s film success demonstrates the pinnacle of his family’s hard work, his legacy continues for other opportunists in his family who now have an extremely viable career path in the WWE. Current and perennial champion Roman Reigns, portrayed by Leati Joseph “Joe” Anoa’i, is also a member of the Samoan Dynasty, and briefly appeared alongside Johnson in a spin-off of the successful *Fast and Furious* movie series. The extremely limited screen time given to Anoa’i is not wasted. He is in a violent action scene in Samoa in which he delivers a Samoan Drop to a faceless enemy henchman, delivers his finishing move, a football style tackle called a “Spear,” and alongside Johnson, performs both the Haka (a traditional Pacific Islander dance), and a fearsome roar that Roman Reigns is famous for using to intimidate.



Fig. 10: Joe Anoa'i and Johnson perform an intimidating roar for the 2019 *Fast and Furious* spin off, *Hobbs and Shaw*.

Conclusion

As the face of American culture, WWE's politically incorrect portrayals have recently been the subject of scholarly debate and are worth re-evaluating in light of the historical role they have played in re-enforcing the hegemony yet giving different groups a venue to undermine the same. The WWE, as a venue of upward mobility, was dynamic across generations as portrayals moved away from 'playing Indian.' While Anoa'i Sr.'s generation was limited by its American audiences' ignorance of Samoan people and culture, Fatu Jr. was able to expand beyond the most egregious stereotypes, unto Johnson whose mainstream success is unprecedented. In three generations, Samoan people and bodies went from nearly complete obscurity to an integral part of professional sports and entertainment.

As elaborated by his sons, Arthur Anoa'i Sr. came to the USA as an uneducated fisherman, who shared the same dream as many immigrants: to build a better life for himself and his family. The WWE provided the vehicle to achieve that dream because it was a unique venue for the "politically incorrect," and it required tremendous work and sacrifice on the part of the Samoan Dynasty acting as cultural ambassadors. Jimmy "Superfly" Snuka also acted as a cultural trailblazer, establishing for audiences that Pacific Islander culture could drive the narrative as a central point of conflict in the plot, and with his "high flying" barefoot style, he created a unique niche for the next generation to take into the ring. The first generation established a foothold but was still imperfectly representing Pacific Islander culture.

Solofa F. Fatu Jr. entered the WWE as Rikishi with some cultural capital already acquired for him, but also had to 'play Indian' for several years before being accepted and celebrated by fans. During that time, he used increasingly more visible methods of asserting his cultural identity, including his tights, his unique Samoan body, and the blending of real and fake with his scripted/unscripted criticism of the WWE's historical treatment of his family. Fatu confidently asserts his agency over everything he did in the WWE, and represented a crucial transition generation.

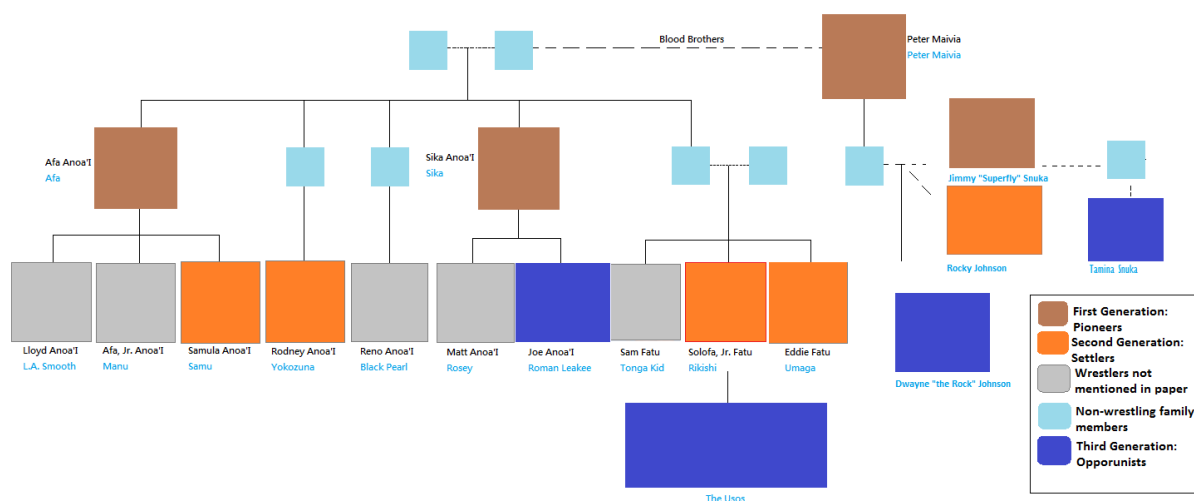
Dwayne "the Rock" Johnson is a modern superstar unparalleled in success, writing on his Instagram, "I work extremely hard but never anticipated (in my wildest dreams) I'd become the highest paid actor in Forbes' history" (Johnson). In an eight year time span, "twelve of his movies have earned more than two hundred million dollars, with two of them topping the one billion dollar mark," which sets Johnson apart as "one of the most bankable stars in Hollywood and one of the few actors who can get big budget movies not based off a popular franchise green lighted" (Rawden 1). Yet Johnson is abundant in the credit he gives to his family for their role in

establishing his success because the foundation laid for him came at a heavy cost to his predecessors.

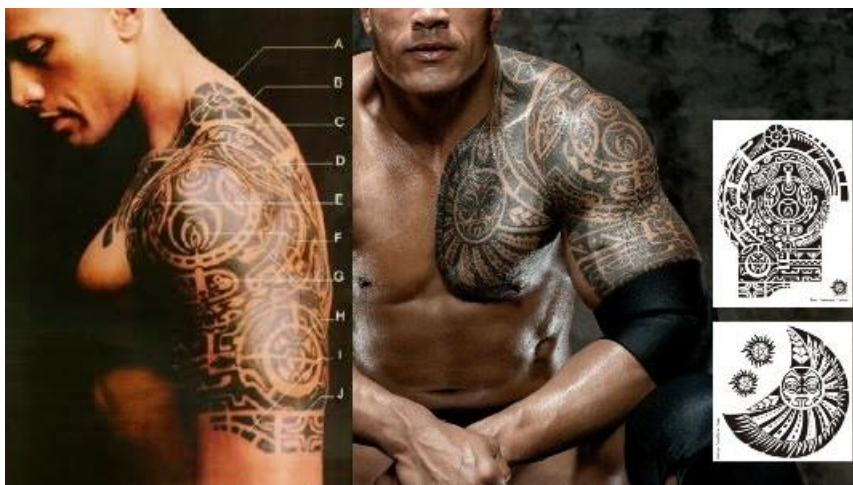
The paper limited its scope to the members of the Samoan Dynasty whose contributions were most widely documented. Their family is numerous enough to contain many champions as well as non-wrestlers who go unaddressed in this paper. Many opportunists now have a viable career path in the WWE because of their family. Current WWE superstars who continue to excel as opportunists include many women: Savelina Fanene as Nia Jax, Sarona Moana-Marie Reiher Snuka-Polamalu as Tamina, and even the daughter of Johnson, billed as the first 4th generation superstar, Simone Johnson.

Each generation of Samoans had a different experience and played a different role in the growth and success of the Samoan Dynasty, but they all achieved their dream in the same place: WWE. But the Samoan Dynasty is just one of many possible case studies within the WWE. Decades of weekly programming provide more than ample problematic minority portrayals, and further research could potentially examine specific case studies of politically incorrect portrayals of African Americans, women, homosexuals etc., and how these various groups achieved and lacked agency across time.

Appendix 1: The Samoan Dynasty Family Tree



Appendix 2: Johnson's tattoos (Dwayne 'The Rock' Johnson's 3 Tattoos & Their Meanings)



- Coconut leaves, denoting a Samoan chief-warrior
- A sun, which brings good fortune
- A/ga fa'atasi (three people in one), representing Dwayne, his wife and his daughter
- Descending swirls representing past, present and future
- Two eyes symbolizing his ancestors watching over his path

F. The Great Eye, used to distract the enemy in battle

G. A broken face marked by shark teeth, representing The Rock's spirit protector and a symbol of his struggle

H. A priest and spiritual guide, symbolizing enlightenment

I. Stones of achievement and abundance, denoting the foundation of his life

J. A tortoise shell, to deflect evil spirits

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