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## “The Friendly and Flowing Savage, Who Is He?": Manifest Destiny, Native American Stereotypes, and How American Print Culture Closed the Western Frontier, 1865-1890

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## **“The Friendly and Flowing Savage, Who Is He?”: Manifest Destiny, Native American Stereotypes, and How American Print Culture Closed the Western Frontier, 1865-1890**

### **Abstract**

This article examines how 19th Century American print culture shaped white American perceptions of Amerindians. Between the close of the Civil War and the Wounded Knee Massacre, the American press, Indian captivity narratives, and fictional accounts reflect diverse white perspectives on and attitudes towards Native Americans' past and future in a continental United States.

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**"The Friendly and Flowing Savage, Who Is He?":  
Manifest Destiny, Native American Stereotypes, and How American Print Culture Closed  
the Western Frontier, 1865-1890**

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Dr. Christopher Smith  
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Throughout the late 19<sup>th</sup> century, expansion, urbanization, and technological development utterly transformed the American landscape, and, with this infrastructure in place, the rise of mass media fostered the spread of ideas and information like never before. Mirroring the idea of Manifest Destiny, print culture linked Americans from Atlantic to Pacific. The sheer accessibility of a wide variety of print mediums fostered an extensive, contentious conversation over the consequences and byproducts of progress and expansion. Chief among the results of Manifest Destiny was the so-called “Indian question.” As politicians and reformers deliberated nationwide, 19<sup>th</sup> century print culture fostered academic and political discourse on this issue, delivering it into the hands of the common man.

Print culture also perpetuated evolving Native American stereotypes. Especially prevalent was the imagined dichotomy between the “bad” or “savage” Indian and the “noble” or “good” Indian.<sup>1</sup> As historian Patricia Nelson Limerick points out, these stereotypes have formed a pillar of Western history and memory, where the theme of adventure, not conquest and subjugation, dominates. Tellingly, she inquires as to why 21<sup>st</sup> century children play “cowboys and Indians,” not “slaves and masters.”<sup>2</sup> Scholars argue that these stereotypes, which developed in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, heightened a sense of foreignness between white and native cultures, leaving room to radically manipulate the relationship between these people groups. In the words of Jennifer Dyar, “This divorce of Indianness from the reality of Indians themselves allowed white society to define Indianness according to white cultural preferences and resulted in both a skewed understanding of Indian identity and a loss of voice for Indians creating that identity.”<sup>3</sup> Studying

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<sup>1</sup> Robert F. Berkhofer, Jr., *The White Man’s Indian: Images of the American Indian from Columbus to the Present* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1978), 28.

<sup>2</sup> Patricia Nelson Limerick, *The Legacy of Conquest: The Unbroken Past of the American West* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1987), 19.

<sup>3</sup> Jennifer Dyar, “Fatal Attraction: The White Obsession with Indianness,” *The Historian* 65, no. 4 (2003): 817.

print culture’s role in promoting these complex, evolving stereotypes and relationships sheds light not only on the larger social history of late 19<sup>th</sup> century America, but how ordinary individuals crafted their opinions about “the Indian question.” Between the close of the Civil War and the Wounded Knee Massacre, the American press, Indian captivity narratives, and fictional accounts reflect diverse white perspectives on and attitudes towards Native Americans’ past and future in a continental United States.

In the decades following the Civil War, the press reigned as a key mouthpiece through which Americans absorbed ideas about not only a providential expansionist ideology, but its repercussions on the native population it displaced. In fact, the notion of the United States’ conquering of land from Atlantic to Pacific originated in *The Democratic Review*, a New York newspaper. In an article celebrating the annexation of Texas in 1845, editor John O’Sullivan criticized “other nations” who exerted themselves by “limiting our greatness and checking the fulfillment of our manifest destiny to overspread the continent allotted by Providence for the free development of our yearly multiplying millions.”<sup>4</sup> In the following decades, the press continued to produce and engage with rhetoric inspired by Manifest Destiny. Concurrent developments in American journalistic practices actively facilitated this trend. For example, as the 19<sup>th</sup> century wore on, the United States saw a massive uptick in literacy and technology. As author Ted Curtis Smythe explains, newspaper circulation reached hundreds of thousands of readers due to unprecedented technological advancements like “the web-fed rotary press, electronically run machinery, [...] typesetting, and halftone engraving.”<sup>5</sup> In short, post-Civil War newspapers exemplified the type of modernization synonymous with the era of their creation: the Gilded

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<sup>4</sup> John O’Sullivan, “From the Democratic Review: Annexation,” *The Mississippi Democrat*, Carrollton, MI, September 10, 1845, 1.

<sup>5</sup> Tim Curtis Smythe, *The Gilded Age Press, 1865-1900* (Westport, CT: Praeger Publishers, 2003), 123.

Age.

The nature of *what* was being printed also shifted in post-war newspapers. Throughout the 19<sup>th</sup> century, American media became increasingly sensationalistic, in part because of the aforementioned availability, marketability, and profitability of news. Karen Roggenkamp explains, “Facing growing rivalries with one another and within a burgeoning print marketplace more generally, urban newspapers felt pressure to create prose that entertained, and the urge to spin attractive and popular tales sometimes came at the expense of factual information.”<sup>6</sup> This phenomenon, called “New Journalism,” is defined as “an innovative, commercialized, sensationalistic, and above all dramatic style of reportage.”<sup>7</sup> The drama of the American West naturally found a home in the sensationalist press, appealing to a readership that quickly grew accustomed to excitement in their daily newspapers.

Between 1865 and 1890, both Eastern and Western newspapers engaged in “new journalism” practices. Sensationalism was not strictly relegated to large, urban newspapers. On the contrary, in his monograph on frontier newspapers’ reportage of the Indian Wars, Hugh J. Reilly points out that Western journalists exaggerated the facts in print even before the coining of the term “yellow press” in the 1890s. By extension, they applied these practices to Native Americans. These frontier editors, “a rare combination of adventurers and journalists,” generally treated peaceful tribes with “apathy” and instead gravitated toward more “warlike” tribes.<sup>8</sup> This focus on violence, sometimes to the point of exaggeration, painted an erroneous view of the tribes, but it sold papers. As Barbara Cloud affirms, “Publishers also knew that sensationalism and controversy sold newspapers. Stories about deaths, violent or otherwise, crime, Indian raids,

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<sup>6</sup> Karen Roggenkamp, *Narrating the News: New Journalism and Literary Genre in Late Nineteenth-Century Newspapers and Fiction* (Kent, OH: Kent State University Press, 2005), xii.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>8</sup> Hugh J. Reilly, *The Frontier Newspapers and the Coverage of the Plains Indian Wars* (Santa Barbara, CA: ABC-CLIO, LLC, 2010), xvii.

and allegations of corruption did not get big headlines because nothing got big headlines, but they mingled with items about visitors to town and plans for the library and provided the reader with both information and titillation."<sup>9</sup>

Furthermore, journalists' use of specific language or descriptors reflected the complexity of Indian representation in newspapers following the Civil War. Newspapers eagerly reprinted accounts of Indian traditions and ways of life, protracting the idea of "foreignness." For example, the White Earth, Minnesota *Progress*, a reservation newspaper, printed serialized accounts of Ojibwa traditions and beliefs, detailing courtship, marriage, and burial practices, which served to indulge white curiosity.<sup>10</sup> Another example to this end can be found in an 1873 article printed in an Orangeburg, South Carolina newspaper. The article reads, "Indians are strange people in many ways, and one of the strangest things about them is their power of following the slightest track left by man or beast, however lightly or carefully they may have trodden to avoid pursuit."<sup>11</sup> Therefore, ideas that Native Americans were culturally inferior, possessed strange traditions, and lived radically differently than whites became cemented in the popular imagination. Print mediums kept these stereotypes alive, even once Native Americans had been subdued on reservations. *Judge*, a New York wit and humor magazine, frequently published caricatured sketches of Indians (often modeled after Plains Indians, whose image became synonymous, in the minds of Americans, as the typical Native American) with fringed animal-skin clothing, big noses, and piercings. In 1890, it jokingly quipped, "The Chickasaw Indians tax white farmers five dollars a head for the privilege of working in [*sic*] their reservation. Give the

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<sup>9</sup> Barbara Lee Cloud, *The Business of Newspapers on the Western Frontier* (Reno, NV: University of Nevada Press, 1992), 150.

<sup>10</sup> "The Ojibwas: Their Customs and Traditions, As Handed Down for Centuries from Father to Son, etc., etc.," *The Progress*, White Earth Agency, MN, December 1887, 1.

<sup>11</sup> "The Flying Arrow," *Orangeburg News*, Orangeburg, SC, January 25, 1873, 1.

red man a chance and see how rapidly he civilizes!”<sup>12</sup>

Newspapers also engaged the debate as to how to solve the “Indian question.”<sup>13</sup> On the federal level, as author Henry E. Fritz explains, United States Indian Policy shifted over time, undergoing the most radical changes throughout the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Beginning in the Jacksonian Era, “the government had less motivation to woo the Indians as an auxiliary and more reason to clear the tribes from land needed for national development.”<sup>14</sup> Because of the dilemma created by Manifest Destiny three decades before, *The New York Herald*, pointing to the effects of railroad construction and the discovery of precious metals in the West, opined in 1879, “Now, the whites cannot be driven back; that is the central fact in the Indian problem. However, we sympathize with the hard fate of the wild warriors of the Plains[;] *they* have now got to make a radical change in their lives [...]” (emphasis added).<sup>15</sup> The federal government had already implemented its policy, it was reasoned, so they might as well follow it through. The question, of course, was what to do with the conquered tribes. Thus, newspapers not only reported on this greater conversation among politicians, judges, reformers, and everyday Americans, but actively and convincingly contributed to it.

It was believed that assimilation via boarding schools, the destruction of tribal leadership, and the introduction of new ways of making a living, notably farming, might foster, as *The Portland Daily Press* termed it, “the progress of the Indians from savagery to civilization.”<sup>16</sup> This idea is exemplified by the motto of Henry Pratt, the headmaster of an Indian boarding school in Carlisle, PA: “[A]ll the Indian there is in the race should be dead. Kill the Indian in

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<sup>12</sup> “Hum of the Court,” *Judge* 17, no. 436 (February 22, 1890): 334. HathiTrust Digital. <https://babel.hathitrust.org/cgi/pt?id=mdp.39015023538708&view=1up&seq=379>.

<sup>13</sup> “The Indians,” *The Charlotte Democrat*, Charlotte, NC, August 7, 1876, 1.

<sup>14</sup> Henry E. Fritz, *The Movement for Indian Assimilation, 1860-1890* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1963), 16.

<sup>15</sup> “The New Indian Outbreak,” *The New York Herald*, October 9, 1879, 8.

<sup>16</sup> “The Indian Question,” *The Portland Daily News*, Portland, OR, December 9, 1884, 2.



him, and save the man.”<sup>17</sup> 19<sup>th</sup> century journalistic language is sometimes equally placating and patronizing. A prime example is found in another *New York Herald* article, published in light of the Ute campaign of 1879. The article reads,

To place a petty Indian tribe on a reservation as large as Massachusetts, in these days when plains and mountains are filling with miners and farmers, is to deliberately prepare the way for assassination of the peaceful whites, and for a just feeling among the Indians that the government deals treacherously with them. The honest way is to show the Indians that the hunting days are past for them; that they must conform themselves to the general customs of the whites and to the necessities of a new and to them intensely disagreeable life; [...] The notion that we may tide the Indians over gradually from savagery to civilization by placing them for a period on vast reserves, where they may raise and herd stock, is nonsense in the face of the great rush of westward.<sup>18</sup>

Again, with the changing American landscape and the gradual disappearance of the frontier, journalists’ language and descriptors maintained the foreignness or distinct “Indianness” of native peoples. As author Robert F. Berkhofer Jr. points out, “Since whites primarily understood the Indian as an antithesis to themselves, then civilization and Indianness as they defined them would forever be opposites.”<sup>19</sup> The “ahistorical and static” nature of Native Americans, then, did not easily mesh with white culture, causing a “sense of helplessness and futility” that consumed late 19<sup>th</sup> century Native Americans as they realized they “were no longer Indians but not yet whites; indeed, they did not know who they were.”<sup>20</sup>

Overall, 19<sup>th</sup> century American journalism—coming into its own as a sensationalistic means of rapidly spreading information throughout the North American continent and, indeed, the world—reflected not only contemporary stereotypes of Native Americans and protracted a the perceived divide between “savage” Indian culture and “civilized” white culture, but engaged

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<sup>17</sup> “‘Kill the Indian, and Save the Man’: Capt. Richard H. Pratt on the Education of Native Americans.” History Matters. George Mason University. <http://historymatters.gmu.edu/d/4929/>.

<sup>18</sup> “The New Indian Outbreak,” 8.

<sup>19</sup> Berkhofer Jr., *The White Man’s Indian*, 29.

<sup>20</sup> Robert M. Utley, *Frontier Regulars: The United States Army and the Indian, 1866-1891* (Lincoln, NE: University of Nebraska Press, 1973), 401.

the question of federal Indian policy and means of assimilation. Obviously, reportage of Native Americans in the 19<sup>th</sup> century was not all demonizing, nor was it all supportive. Nonetheless, when examining such nuance, it is impossible to deny that American newspapers in large Eastern cities and smaller Western outposts alike mirrored their environments, specifically an idealistic, trans-continental nation increasingly hostile to native tribal culture and traditions.

In addition to newspapers, late 19<sup>th</sup> century captive narratives demonstrated complicated white attitudes toward Native Americans, reflected contemporary gender roles, and evolved from propaganda piece to literary device. Between the colonial period and the late 19<sup>th</sup> century, scholars argue that Native Americans took tens of thousands of captives, and while an exact number is impossible to determine, the practice was common enough to validate the creation of this lucrative print genre.<sup>21</sup> Admittedly, captive literature was far less prevalent by the close of the 19<sup>th</sup> century than in previous centuries. Nonetheless, its long transformation followed shifting frontier lines and reflects American culture at large in several candid ways.

First, late 19<sup>th</sup> century captive narratives speak to the evolution of white perspectives on Native Americans.<sup>22</sup> The first American captivity narrative was published in 1682 in Massachusetts. The narrative's principle figure, Mary Rowlandson, was not the first to be captured by natives; one of the titillating aspects of the narrative's publication was the fact that its subject matter was a very real fear for colonial Americans. To apply Frederick Jackson Turner's frontier thesis, as the frontier line moved East to West across the expanding United States, the fear of Indian captivity went with it, reinforcing the print medium as an expression of white fears, desires, goals, and prejudices. In the words of Colin G. Calloway, "From

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<sup>21</sup> Kathryn Zabelle Derounian-Stodola and James Levernier, *The Indian Captivity Narrative, 1550-1900* (New York: Twayne Publishers, 1993), 2.

<sup>22</sup> Darlene E. Fisher, "The Captivity Narrative as Propaganda in the Black Hawk War," *OAH Magazine of History* 2, no. 3 (1987): 16.

seventeenth-century Massachusetts to twentieth-century Hollywood, Indian captivity has been regarded as a fate worse than death, and western frontiersmen advocated saving the last bullet for oneself to prevent it."<sup>23</sup> Upon abduction, captive men, women, and children could be killed outright, abused, sold to other people groups, or adopted into a tribe. Thus, captivity narratives typically followed a general story arc: after describing the attack and abduction, the captive usually described his or her captors and reflected on their customs, appearance, and ways of life. At the heart of the narratives was a stark contrast between white and native cultures. Annette Kolodny notes that captives "provided their readers with intimate glimpses into the workings of an alien society, all the while trying to make sense of their special experience."<sup>24</sup> Usually, captivity narratives ended—somewhat heroically, like a fictional story—in one of three ways: the captive was ransomed, rescued, or escaped.<sup>25</sup> The authors, despite their traumatic experiences, were obviously not free of the bias of their day. David Monical puts it more harshly: "The authority a captive could claim in discussing the nature of the Indian was so clouded by his own ethnocentricity that it usually resulted in a diatribe against the Indian position."<sup>26</sup>

Captivity narratives were still being published into the late 19<sup>th</sup> century, though far less frequently than in centuries past. Nonetheless, between 1865 and 1890, the stories of captives José Andrés Martínez, Col. John Ketcham, Gertrude Morgan, William Filley, Mary Nealy, Clara Blynn, Sarah Larimer, Mary Barber, Josephine Meeker, Isaac P. Rose, Peter Milet, Cynthia Ann Parker, Theresa Gowanlock, and Theresa Delaney, among others, appeared—either printed for the first time or reprinted for an attentive audience—as standalone autobiographical or

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<sup>23</sup> Colin G. Calloway, "An Uncertain Destiny: Indian Captivities on the Upper Connecticut River," *Journal of American Studies* 17, no. 2 (1983): 189.

<sup>24</sup> Annette Kolodny, "Among the Indians: The Uses of Captivity," *Women's Studies Quarterly* 21, no. 3/4 (1993): 186.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>26</sup> David G. Monical, "Changes in American Attitudes Toward the Indian as Evidenced by Captive Literature," *Plains Anthropologist* 14, no. 44 (1969): 134.

biographical books, in magazines, and in newspapers. White captives perceived their captors in a variety of different ways. For example, Theresa Delaney viewed Native Americans in a more positive light. In her 1886 narrative, which detailed her captivity in Canada among the Crees, she opined, “There may be, here and there, a bad man amongst them; but as a people they are submissive, kind, and, if only from curiosity, they are anxious to learn.”<sup>27</sup> Interestingly, Delaney’s fellow captive, Theresa Gowanlock, described the same captors very differently. She wrote, “The Indians are in their habits very unclean and filthy. They will not in the least impress anyone to such an extent that they would be willing to forego the restrictions of civilized life, and enter upon the free life of the red man,” obviously ignoring the accounts of individuals, like Cynthia Ann Parker, who willingly adopted native ways.<sup>28</sup> Gowanlock proceeds to outright scoff at the “noble savage” stereotype: “It might sound musical in the ears of the poet to write of the virtues of that race,” she writes, “but I consider it a perversion of the real facts. During the time I was with them I could not see anything noble in them, unless it was that they were *noble* murderers, *noble* cowards, *noble* thieves.”<sup>29</sup>

Other accounts, such as those by William Filley and Fanny Kelly, are far more nuanced in their portrayal of Native Americans. Filley, while living in Michigan with his parents, was kidnapped at age five and sold or traded to seventeen tribes over the course of his twenty-nine year captivity. By the time of his return to white civilization in 1866, he could speak eleven different native dialects in addition to English and Spanish.<sup>30</sup> His narrative, compiled by family members, and friends, and interspersed with Filley’s own words, is a curious mix of describing

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<sup>27</sup> Theresa Gowanlock and Theresa Delaney, *Two Months in the Camp of Big Bear* (Parkdale, Toronto, Canada: Times Office, 1885), 100.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*, 20.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibids.*, 43.

<sup>30</sup> *Life and Adventures of William Filley, Who was Stolen From His Home in Jackson, Mich., By the Indians, August 3d, 1837, and His Safe Return from Captivity, October 10, 1866, After a Period of 29 Years* (Chicago: Filley & Ballard, 1867), 39.

cultural differences and butchery and clear admiration for his captors. To the latter point, Filley recounts, "Some people here may think me very tenacious in my habits. I am, and well I might be, as I was raised, except the first five years of my life, among the red men of the mountains. I hold to just the same principles and dispositions as the red men and squaws who raised me."<sup>31</sup> Filley's praise for the natives sometimes startled his contemporaries. One of the book's publishers, J.Z. Ballard, commented, "[H]is friendship for them is of that enduring kind which time, even, cannot change or efface. The slightest insinuation against their honesty or friendship, is resented by him as a personal insult. In fact, his long residence among them, HAS MADE HIM AN INDIAN."<sup>32</sup> During his captivity, Filley eventually rose to the ranks of medicine man and, later, second chief. In his book, he aligns himself with his Native American captors. He refers to the group as "we," not "they," intoning closeness, not separateness or foreignness, though he makes the distinction between "civilized" and "savage" tribes.

*Harper's Weekly's* 1867 review of Filley's narrative reflects the account's popular reception, not to mention the climate of contemporary print culture. The reviewer opined, "The facts of the story, which are well-verified [...] are as strange as any thing in fiction."<sup>33</sup> The *Harper's* article tends to highlight the shock-factor of the narrative, Filley's relatives' prolonged and frantic search for him, and the fact that, having no memory of his life in Michigan, Filley did not know he was white until 1860, when a dying chief told him.<sup>34</sup> Because of Filley's personal identification with his captors, his reviewer assigns the sense of foreignness usually reserved, in print, for Native American subjects a step further— to Filley himself. Thus, the review does not reflect a sense of pity, but strangeness.

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<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*, 79.

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*, 101.

<sup>33</sup> "The Lost Jackson Boy," *Harper's New Weekly Magazine* 31 (June-November 1867): 631.

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*, 632.

Fanny Kelly, too—kidnapped by a band of Oglala Sioux in 1864—displayed an awareness of contemporary print culture when describing her captivity, an account of which she published in 1871. Kelly eventually came to view her captors as “civil and harmless” and praised the native women as “gentle and faithful.”<sup>35</sup> Nonetheless, like Theresa Gowanlock, she saw the “noble savage” stereotype as a farcical notion. She explains,

I had read of the dusky maidens of romance; I thought of all the characters of romance and history, wherein the nature of the red man is enshrined in poetic beauty. The untutored nobility of the soul, the brave generosity, the simple dignity untrammelled by the hollow conventionalities of civilized life, all rose mockingly before me, and the heroes of my youthful imagination passed through my mind in strange contrast with the flesh and blood realities into whose hands I had fallen.<sup>36</sup>

In short, Kelly, when writing her own narrative, was distinctly aware of the type of “exotic primitivism” commonly infused with print accounts—fictional or true—since the 17<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>37</sup> By perpetrating the “good Indian” or “bad Indian” stereotypes, which complement the noble savage stereotype, various print mediums cemented “[t]he view of the Indian as Other, albeit a highly enticing Other, [...] inaugurating a seemingly endless dance of simultaneous attraction and repulsion.”<sup>38</sup> By both denouncing her captives’ “moral pollution” and documenting their seemingly bizarre habits, customs, and mannerisms, Kelly framed her narrative in a manner perfectly marketable for her late 19<sup>th</sup> century American readership.<sup>39</sup>

In addition to perpetuating Indian stereotypes and foreignness, late 19<sup>th</sup> century captivity narratives highlighted breeches in white gender norms. Captivity narratives often recounted violence, which was part of their draw. However, by portraying death, pillaging, rape, and overall “Gothic horror,” they paradoxically clashed with Victorian conservatism and notions of

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<sup>35</sup> Fanny Kelly, *Narrative of My Captivity Among the Sioux Indians* (Hartford, CT: Mutual Publishing Company, 1871), 77, 78.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*, 77.

<sup>37</sup> Dyar, “Fatal Attraction,” 825.

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>39</sup> Kelly, *Narrative*, 187.

ideal white womanhood.<sup>40</sup> On one end of the spectrum, their language is reflective of a Victorian trend that masked violent or sexual content with prim euphemisms. On the other extreme, some authors view these publications as purposeful "violence pornography."<sup>41</sup> This dichotomy is more understandable when viewed in light of the centuries-long American discourse over sensation and censorship in print. Since the 17<sup>th</sup> century, captivity narratives catered to a society in which "[t]ales of barbarity and bloodshed, however true at base and however 'serious' in intent, were everywhere the thing."<sup>42</sup> By the 19<sup>th</sup> century, many print mediums became more graphic and explicit, eventually ushering in criticism and calls for reform. Progressive Era anti-vice crusaders like Anthony Comstock got their start criticizing the Civil War's flourishing print pornography industry, which complicatedly portrayed and objectified women. Many scholars agree that the content and reception of captivity narratives speaks volumes about white women's experiences in late 19<sup>th</sup> century America.

As Kathryn Zabelle Derounian-Stodola and James Levernier note, female captives were victimized physically, sexually, and spiritually.<sup>43</sup> Because of the common ways Native Americans approached attacks and abductions, female captives had a unique experiential role. If they returned to white society, they often carried with them a stigma of degradation. American readers were horrified by the idea that natives had compromised their white female captives' traditional gender roles as wives and mothers. First, the very act of abduction destroyed the white concept of the family and, further, the woman's role within it.<sup>44</sup> Because Native Americans favored killing men at an attack site and taking women alive, "women captives were torn from a

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<sup>40</sup> Calloway, "An Uncertain Destiny," 190.

<sup>41</sup> Dyar, "Fatal Attractions," 828.

<sup>42</sup> Roy Harvey Pearce, "The Significances of the Captivity Narrative," *American Literature* 19, no. 1 (1947): 10.

<sup>43</sup> Derounian-Stodola and Levernier, *The Indian Captivity Narrative, 1550-1900*, 119.

<sup>44</sup> *Ibid.*

cohesive family unit” and often witnessed the deaths of family members.<sup>45</sup> This idea is reflected in several late 19<sup>th</sup> century captivity narratives. For example, Gowanlock and Delaney both watched their husbands die at the hands of their Cree captors. Mary Nealy, taken as a young girl, fainted after watching her father fall dead of a rifle shot. Native Americans disrupted these white women’s traditional lives as daughters, mothers, and wives with male protectorates, and, once those protectorates were slain, female captives were left alone to endure hardship and deprivation. This fact emphasized their victimization for the reader. A sense of physical depravation is exemplified by the account of Josephine Meeker in 1879, a survivor of the Ute Massacre. She recalled, “Just think of our being driven and dragged for a month over mountains in dust, and heat, and bitter cold alternatively sometimes [*sic*] drenched with rain, fainting under the noonday sun or pierced to the heart with the icy winds at night!”<sup>46</sup> Her sensationalist language was perfectly suited to contemporary American print culture, and her readers would have been shocked that this woman and her children—weak as they were regarded to be, by Victorian standards— were torn from their family to endure the rugged Western landscape utterly alone .

Aside from female captives’ physical trauma, sexual trauma was a far more delicate topic to discuss in Victorian print. Some captives attempted to self-consciously preserve their purity in their accounts, or at least express a dedication to fighting for it. For example, Meeker maintained, “[...] I made up my mind that I would fight the moment there was any insult offered me, and that I would keep up the fight until they killed me.”<sup>47</sup> Meeker’s resolve for preserving her virtue no doubt appealed to her Victorian audience. Derounian-Stodola and Lenernier explain

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<sup>45</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>46</sup> Josephine Meeker, *The Ute Massacre* (Philadelphia, PA: Old Franklin Publishing House, 1879), 4-5.

<sup>47</sup> *Ibid.*, 9.



another way female captives deflected sexual stigma. They note, "As might be expected, many Victorian women in the West were loath to admit that they themselves had been sexually abused; instead, they tried to claim that while other women had been harmed, they had been (miraculously, inexplicably) spared."<sup>48</sup> Because Victorian wives, daughters, and mothers were praised for their chastity, any sexual encounter with Native American captives further entrenched "a renewed image of the Indian as inherently bestial and depraved" in the American imagination.<sup>49</sup> It is no wonder that readers of Cynthia Ann Parker's account of wholeheartedly adopting Comanche culture, marrying a Native American man, and bearing three mixed-race children was so perplexing to readers of her captivity narrative, which was reprinted in 1886. As author S.C. Gwynne notes, the newspapers that took up Parker's story framed it "in delicate Victorian code" and inaccurately asserted that "she was forced to have sex with greasy, dark-skinned subhuman Indians because she could not possibly have chosen to do so on her own."<sup>50</sup> Late 19<sup>th</sup> century readers continued to find the idea of adopted white captives, especially women with children, foreign, as it did not align with the prevailing political ideology that saw Native Americans as an inferior people to be swept aside as Manifest Destiny took its course. Female captivity narratives served as fodder to this end because readers associated female virtue with national virtue. "Outraged virginity" thus became "a powerful propagandist tool, and [rape] gained added dimensions from the underlying belief that the American Indians were despoiling the future mothers of a generation of whites [...] that were supposed to be peopling the West."<sup>51</sup>

While many of the most popular, wide-circulated captivity narratives in the United States between 1865 and 1890 featured white subjects, native groups had taken captives of multiple

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<sup>48</sup> Derounian-Stodola and Lenernier, *The Indian Captivity Narrative, 1550-1900*, 128.

<sup>49</sup> Kolodny, "Among the Indians," 192.

<sup>50</sup> S.C. Gwynne, *Empire of the Summer Moon: Quanah Parker and the Rise and Fall of the Comanches, the Most Powerful Indian Tribe in American History* (New York: Scribner, 2010), 103.

<sup>51</sup> Derounian-Stodola and Lenernier, *The Indian Captivity Narrative, 1550-1900*, 129.

racess—such as Africans, Spanish, and Mexicans— for centuries on the North American continent, and secondary scholars have increasingly sought to explore these minority voices in recent decades. Since the 16<sup>th</sup> century, for example, Spanish captives in modern-day Mexico were quite common. 61.5% of Spanish captives between 1600 and 1835 were women, and though captives were taken well into the 19<sup>th</sup> century, their stories did not receive the type of sensationalism of their white, American counterparts.<sup>52</sup> Susan Migden Socolow suggests that the abduction of Spanish captives by Native Americans did not receive “dramatic reaction” for many reasons, chief among them prevailing illiteracy and the fact that the majority of captives were taken from rural and comparatively politically insignificant areas.<sup>53</sup> While the 19<sup>th</sup> century American press showed an awareness and recognition of Spanish and Mexican captives, it is more difficult to discern to what extent their stories were marketed or dramatized.<sup>54</sup> Seminoles and Creeks captured Africans as well, especially in the 18<sup>th</sup> century, but accounts of their captivities are even more difficult to locate. Though the captivity narrative as a literary genre is often associated with European or Anglo-American captives, secondary scholars may continue exploring the accounts of minority voices as well. Overall, late 19<sup>th</sup> century white female captivity narratives promoted in American print mediums were rooted in Victorian assumptions about traditional female roles, though when placed in print, they were useful to a readership seeking to justify the subjugation of Native Americans.

Gradually, Indian the captivity narrative transformed from propaganda piece to literary trope that perpetuated Native American stereotypes in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century. The post-Civil War

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<sup>52</sup> Susan Migden Socolow, "Spanish Captives in Indian Societies: Cultural Contact along the Argentine Frontier, 1600-1835," *The Hispanic American Historical Review* 72, no. 1 (1992): 93, 99.

<sup>53</sup> *Ibid.*, 99.

<sup>54</sup> Examples can be found in: “Captivities of the Indians,” *The Perrysburg Journal*, Perrysburg, OH, March 7, 1854, 413. “The Apache Raid,” *Press and Dakotian*, Yankton, Dakota Territory, August 7, 1883, 1. Note reference to Mexican captives who adopted tribal customs in “Notes of a Trip through Arizona in the Summer of 1866,” *The Weekly Butte Record*, Oroville, CA, February 23, 1867, 1.

period saw the relegating of Native Americans to supporting roles in novels, adventure stories, and horror tales, which mirrored their physical relegation onto reservations.<sup>55</sup> The commercialization of fictional serials and novels, among other mediums, marked another crucial shift in white perception of Native Americans. Print mediums transformed the image of natives from a very real and strange enemy of Manifest Destiny to an almost mythical, though still inferior, race.

19<sup>th</sup> century newspapers were among the first to capitalize on this burgeoning literary genre. Many of the "Indian adventure stories" that appeared in newspapers between 1865-1890—like those printed in *The Democratic Enquirer* and *The Dodge City Times*—reimagined historical figures or events in florid, fictional retellings.<sup>56</sup> Author Sophie Swett ran a serialized column in various papers in the 1890s titled "Flying Hill Farm," which included stories from various contributors and often featured Native American characters. Periodicals like *Frank Leslie's Illustrated Monthly* and *Harper's Monthly* published similar stories during this period, and authors like Mary Catherine Crowley made lengthy careers out of Indian adventure tales.

A prime example of these sensational, fictional accounts was published in several newspapers from the *New York World* to the *Wahpeton Times* in Dakota Territory between 1889 and 1890. The short story, laced with literary devices like dialogue, vivid descriptions, and romance, opens with a description of a white captive named Helen Prescott bound with ropes before chief Tomo Chici, who may have been inspired by Tomochici, an 18<sup>th</sup> century Yamacraw chief who deeded lands that eventually comprised the Georgia Colony to James Edward Oglethorpe. Expecting her lover, Captain Henry Waller, to rescue her, Prescott snaps at her

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<sup>55</sup> Berkhofer Jr., *The White Man's Indian*, 96.

<sup>56</sup> Examples can be found in "Select Story: An Indian Adventure in Ohio," *The Democratic Enquirer*, M'Arthur, OH, March 21, 1867, 1. "Captain Hardy: The True Story of an Indian Trader's Adventure," *The Dodge City Times*, Dodge City, KS, June 21, 1888, 2.

captor, “Do you fancy you will ever tame me?”<sup>57</sup> The dramatic exchange proceeds as follows, beginning with Tomo Chici’s reply:

‘We hope to do so.’  
‘Then you hope in vain. I never can tolerate you or your barbarous customs.’  
‘You will feel differently after a time. You will find many charms in our wild, free life, and when you become my wife—’  
‘Your wife!’ shrieked the girl, something like a shudder passing over her frame.  
‘Yes, my wife. You must forget this Capt. Henry Waller, for by the Great Spirit I have sworn that you shall be mine.’<sup>58</sup>

At the end of the story, Captain Waller sweeps in to rescue Prescott, and “the savages” are left behind to ponder the practicality of entering into a treaty with the whites, “for [the chief’s] broken faith had cost him dearly.”<sup>59</sup> The story is one of many that filled newspaper columns, a tradition that persisted in the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Elmo Scott Watson’s syndicated “Stories of Great Indians,” serialized in the 1920s, exemplifies the fact that Native Americans gradually became literary tropes in adventure stories, and readers, at a distance, continued to display curiosity about their lives.<sup>60</sup>

The advent of the dime novel in 1860 also had a profound effect on the portrayal of Native Americans, which coincided with the standardization of the Western literary genre. In the words of author Robert F. Berkhofer Jr., “In short, the Western perpetuated the traditional white images of the Indian.”<sup>61</sup> Newspapers regularly advertised these cheap forms of entertainment, which commonly featured Native American stories and fashioned the “Indian fighter” into a

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<sup>57</sup> “Altamaha’s Reward,” *The Wahpeton Times*, Wahpeton, ND, August 21, 1890, 6.

<sup>58</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>59</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>60</sup> Miranda J. Brady, “‘Stories of Great Indians’ by Elmo Scott Watson: Syndication, Standardization, and the Noble Savage in Feature Writing,” in *American Indians and the Mass Media*, Meta G. Carstarphen and John P. Sanchez, eds. (Norman, OK: University of Oklahoma Press, 2012), 20.

<sup>61</sup> Berkhofer Jr., *The White Man’s Indian*, 98.

standardized, heroic literary trope.<sup>62</sup> Indian fighters or frontiersmen increasingly became vehicles through which to highlight stereotypically desirable traits of Native American life and culture—such as a spiritual connection to the land, hunting abilities, physical prowess, etc.—while rejecting others. Author Jennifer Dyar offers the example of the literary frontiersman's ability "to outdo the Indian in everything, whether that be hunting, running, shooting, tomahawk throwing, or lovemaking. In essence, he became a better Indian than the Indians were themselves but, at the same time, remained white to the core."<sup>63</sup> Dyar identifies 19<sup>th</sup> century novelist James Fenimore Cooper's character Hawkeye in *The Last of the Mohicans* (1826) as a crucial example. Though Cooper's literary career preceded the Civil War, he set a powerful example for later novelists. Eleven of Cooper's novels featured representations of Native Americans that reflected white "confusion of one tribe with another in customs, names, and languages."<sup>64</sup>

Several 19<sup>th</sup> century novels reflected Americans' varied attitudes of Native Americans. At opposite extremes, Mark Twain's works represent a sort of ambivalence to Indian affairs, while those of Helen Hunt Jackson denotes activism. The fact that Twain chose to voice his personal prejudices against Native Americans through literature is telling. However, his beliefs must not be interpreted anachronistically. In the words of Elizabeth I. Hanson, Twain's "anti-Indian writings reflect the attitude of his wider audience in the last half of the nineteenth-century."<sup>65</sup> Nonetheless, his general perceptions of Native Americans were negative ones. For example, in his short story "The Facts Concerning the Recent Resignation," published in 1867, Twain wrote, "Soap and education are not as sudden as a massacre, but they are more deadly in

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<sup>62</sup> Examples can be found in "Glad Tidings," Forrest City, AK, *The Forrest City Times*, April 7, 1893, 2. "Was a Great Indian Fighter," Red Cloud, NE, *The Red Cloud Chief*, May 6, 1899, 3.

<sup>63</sup> Dyar, "Fatal Attractions," 831-832.

<sup>64</sup> Berkhofer Jr., *The White Man's Indian*, 93.

<sup>65</sup> Elizabeth I. Hanson, "Mark Twain's Indians Reexamined," *Mark Twain Journal* 20, no. 4 (1981): 12.

the long run; because a half-massacred Indian may recover, but if you educate him and wash him, it is bound to finish him some time or other. [...] [I]t strikes at the foundation of his being.”<sup>66</sup> Literary scholars have ascertained how devices in a variety of Twain’s short stories and novels—to the latter point, chiefly *The Adventures of Tom Sawyer* and *A Connecticut Yankee in King Arthur’s Court*—reveal his ambivalence or outright antagonism toward American Indians. Further, some scholars note that Twain’s novels promote a type of “new Manifest Destiny,” which expand upon principles defined in the 1840s to include global American imperialism.<sup>67</sup> With the added influence of Social Darwinism that promoted the idea of a hierarchy of races, Twain’s writings bridge the ideological gap between subduing Native Americans in the continental United States and, in the 20<sup>th</sup> century, a more globalist perspective of subjugating other people groups. Frederick Jackson Turner’s viewpoint on “primitive Indian life” in terms of American “progress [away] from savage conditions” can be explained with the added context of Social Darwinism, and Twain—Turner’s contemporary—undoubtedly had the same ideological influence.<sup>68</sup>

Alternatively, some novelists sought to use their literary gifts to advocate for Native American rights and protest their poor treatment. A key example to this end is Helen Hunt Jackson’s *Ramona* (1884), which was intended to do “what *Uncle Tom’s Cabin* had done for the antislavery crusade before the Civil War” for Native Americans.<sup>69</sup> By 1884, Jackson had already gained popularity for her non-fiction critique of federal American Indian policy, *A Century of Dishonor* (1881). *Ramona* appealed to an audience that craved sensationalistic, romantic,

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<sup>66</sup> Mark Twain, “The Facts Concerning the Recent Resignation,” in *The Writings of Mark Twain: Sketches New and Old* (New York: Harper & Brothers Publishers, 1903), 350.

<sup>67</sup> Nancy S. Oliver, “New Manifest Destiny in ‘A Connecticut Yankee in King Arthur’s Court,’” *Mark Twain Journal* 21, no. 4 (1983): 29.

<sup>68</sup> Frederick Jackson Turner, *The Frontier in American History* (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 1921), 13, 75.

<sup>69</sup> Berkhofer Jr., *The White Man’s Indian*, 106.

fictional plotlines while promoting Jackson's activist goals. She wrote to a friend in 1885, "You have never fully realized [...] how, for the last four years, my whole heart has been full of the Indian cause—how I have felt, as the Quakers say, 'a concern' to work for it."<sup>70</sup> Jackson wrote a commentary on race and Indian relations through the dramatic story of her Catholic, Irish-Native American heroine who faces discrimination due to her mixed-race parentage.<sup>71</sup>

Hunt faced vicious backlash for her work. In November 1885, the *Indianapolis Journal* wrote a scathing critique of her two published works, associating her with other "champions of the red man" who "bemoan his fate" and charging her with ignoring Indian atrocities committed against whites.<sup>72</sup> "Her style is pungent and sarcastic," the reviewers commented. "Such writing sells a book or a newspaper tremendously, but it plays sad havoc with the exact truth."<sup>73</sup>

Upholding the idea that the United States government had done all it could under the circumstances and admitting that it fell short in its treatment of Native Americans, the *Journal* criticized the quality of *Ramona*'s romantic plotline, argued that the book did not accurately represent the plight of Southern Californian natives, and termed the heroine's husband "plainly no average Indian," due to his Christian beliefs and characterization as "a man of education and refined tastes, with a poetic temperament and exquisitely delicate sensibilities."<sup>74</sup> Not all Americans took such a pessimistic view. Others praised Hunt's work and found common ground with the idea that the government had, in fact, failed Native Americans in profound ways. Jackson died the year after publishing *Ramona*, prompting an outpouring of more positive remembrance. *Harper's Weekly* termed her "the foremost champion of the red man's rights, and

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<sup>70</sup> Lord Houghton, "Helen Hunt Jackson," *Harper's Weekly* 8, no. 22 (1885): 555-556.

<sup>71</sup> Nina Baym, *Women Writers of the American West, 1833-1927* (Urbana, IL: University of Illinois Press, 2011), 191.

<sup>72</sup> "Treatment of the Indian: A Review of the Sentimental Theories of Mrs. Helen Hunt Jackson," *The Indianapolis Journal*, Indianapolis, IN, November 22, 1885, 11.

<sup>73</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>74</sup> *Ibid.*

the most statesman-like of American women.”<sup>75</sup> Therefore, with Twain and Jackson at the extremes, American novels represented a full range of conflicting attitudes towards Native Americans at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Blending fact and fiction, novelists fostered the development of the Western genre and Native Americans’ roles within it.

Between the end of the Civil War and the closing of the western frontier in 1890, American print culture—notably newspapers, Indian captivity novels, and fiction—shaped and represented conflicting white ideas of Native Americans’ past and future in the United States. Limerick makes a strong case for the influence of stereotypes on historical memory, especially when studying the American West. She also argues that 21<sup>st</sup> century scholars must “look both ways” and understand the image of “the white man’ in the Indian mind.”<sup>76</sup> Though imbued with contemporary assumptions and ethnocentrism, 19<sup>th</sup> century print culture is far from one-dimensional. As the idea of Manifest Destiny fueled a continental United States, Americans reacted to the consequences of expansion, chiefly “the Indian question, differently. Thus, print mediums reflect a diverse spectrum of white fears, perceptions, desires, and goals in terms of their relationships to native peoples during the subjugation process. Walt Whitman saw something poetic in the American march Westward and contemplated on the consequences of expansion. In “Song of Myself,” he writes, “The friendly and flowing savage, Who is he?/ Is he waiting for civilization, or past it and mastering it?”<sup>77</sup> Throughout the late 19<sup>th</sup> century, conflicting images and interpretations of the Native American experience between book-bindings and newspaper folds reflect a population begging the same questions.

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<sup>75</sup> Houghton, “Helen Hunt Jackson,” 555-556.

<sup>76</sup> Limerick, *The Legacy of Conquest*, 181.

<sup>77</sup> Walt Whitman, “Song of Myself,” Poetry Foundation, <https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poems/45477/song-of-myself-1892-version>.



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