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NATIVE AMERICAN TROPES AND THE WHITE SAVIOR

“THIS AIN’T DANCES WITH SALMON”: NATIVE AMERICAN TROPES IN DIME
NOVELS AND WESTERN FILM REFERENCING *DANCES WITH WOLVES*

Jennifer K. Melton

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the degree of
Master of Communication
Department of Communication

Terry Britt, Ph.D., Committee Chair

College of Arts and Sciences

NATIVE AMERICAN TROPES AND THE WHITE SAVIOR

The University of Texas at Tyler
Tyler, Texas

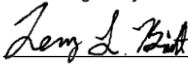
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ACKNOWLEDGMENT

I would like to thank my committee members because without them this would not be possible. Dr. Britt, my professor and chair, for his patience, support and perseverance helped me through this undoubtably extensive research. He has made me stop to think of not putting pressure on myself and to go at my own pace, it is a wonder that I did not drink my weight in coffee. Also, for the tiresome and arduous journey to repeatedly read my thesis for an overview. Dr. Day, my methodology coach, has given me so much regarding understanding a layout, a communication path, and my codebook. She was there any time I wanted to meet, like my other two members, and being supportive. To Dr. Snider, the fact checker and an Associate Professor of History, his job was to make sure that I did not sound inaccurate, since this was a historical-communication paper. He has been my professor over the subject material that I wrote in my thesis and has been a supportive member that made me become more aware on Native American history.

I would also like to thank two outside sources, Keith Secola, who is an Anishinabe musician, songwriter, and producer, and Simon Moya-Smith, who is an Oglala Lakota and Chicano reporter of NBC and an adjunct professor from the Columbia University in the City of New York. Both provided background and significant information that allowed me to be aware of certain areas that affected the identity of Native people. Mr. Secola is a thoughtful, kind, and generous man that has given me so much to carry on by looking at Native Americana from a Native perspective and to be aware of Native communities. To Mr. Moya-Smith, someone to go to about the stigmatization on Indigenous peoples, the awareness about Native self-autonomy,

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and where the best taco place is. I am thrilled and relieved to have finished this paper and to continue on with learning more about Native Americans especially in a 21st century world, where it is an active measure to be a White ally.

Abstract

Too many White Savior films are causing a loss in translation from Brown and Black people to tell their stories. Hollywood was built on systemic racism, much like the United States; however, beginning in the early 1900s was when Hollywood became a prominent film industry, it allowed Jay Silverheels and Stepin Fetchit to portray their race of character. Before Hollywood there were dime novels and Western shows, which at times did not portray these races in favorable light. Hollywood, dime novels, and Western shows from the era of Buffalo Bill are the reasons why there is White saviorism, even in the 21st century.

Defining the four tropes as the “White Savior”, “Noble Savage”, “Indian Maiden” and “Tonto Talk”, this thesis will break down scenes from *Dances with Wolves* to see if each scene depicts the tropes. My findings will cover the codebook to identify the four tropes and to apply them to the film while also using scholarly sources to show empirical data to support the claims of Native tropes. There are also limitations to my research by referencing the film in question and not others as an entire component to “Indian” tropes. Also, I did not use history textbooks for researching Native Americans because of the almost obsolete historical findings, I opted instead to use scholarly essays, interviews, and informational books. These tropes will be defined by two coders, A and B. The codebook that was created first to determine the tropes will allow the two coders to first see the trope, then have its definition to determine the accuracy and from other

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film references, and their communicative aspects from verbal and nonverbal perspectives. By the end of the paper, the codebook and chapters will determine the accuracy of each trope mentioned.

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Introduction

Native American (Native) tribes have historically been skimmed over when it comes to their identities in history. Most children's first memory of Native Americans are the Thanksgiving feasts between the Pilgrims and the "Indians", which is counterproductive with historical literature on textbooks in secondary schools; this element shows the beginning of stereotyped perception in the 21st century. The original "thanksgiving" feast took place in 1621 between September 21st and November 11th, and it was not until the Massachusetts Gov. William Bradford proclaimed a day of thanks and prayer, which was shared by pilgrims and neighboring "Indians" (History, 2018). When going further into investigating the trope aspect of Native peoples, the perceptions of being an Indigenous person in historical narrative is whether they are a "good" Indian or a "bad" Indian. This route of identification goes through what the public sees on television and how they view "what is a Native American." The non-Western ideologies that most Americans encounter is telling fact from fiction about the representations of Native portrayals. In context, historical research knows about the specificity on certain tribes, which should only disperse factual evidence for filmmakers and not the "Indian" tropes that are so prevalent in movies. When there is an accuracy in representation for Indigenous castings that denotes their cultural identity or an absence of one, then there would be an accuracy in identification (Melton, 2018).

Dating back to the birth of cinema during the silent era of the 1890s until the 1920s, actors from the likes of Charlie Chaplin, Lillian Gish, Harold Lloyd, Buster Keaton, or Mary Pickford, explicitly all White, played across theaters in genres of dramas, epics, romances, or comedies. The reels of film were between one-reelers (10-12 minutes), and later, four-reel

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feature-length films, and were completely for White viewings as well as the acting. Racism, in the form of job exclusion and racially stereotyped roles, has defined the Hollywood film industry since its birth in the early 1900s (Yuen, 2016). The studies of social dimensions of race (Hughey, ac. 2020), suggests the different perspectives about political motives and whitewashing standards developed throughout the centuries of a convoluted practice. From these sources and from history itself, film can be deemed a reliable channel with regard to understanding the political culture of North America.

Historical reenactments and the beliefs that the U.S. is stronger and more virtuous than other countries is based off an idealism that has racial groups overwhelmed by the normative race and the structural system it was built on. With this type of ideology from our American history and the film industry, the basis of how Indigenous identities are lacking establishes a way to cause stereotypes, appropriations, and the vanishing “Indian” paradigm. Collecting data about the misrepresentation on Natives signifies the cultural identity and the portrayal of Indigenous peoples in the film *Dances with Wolves (DW)* (1990). Due to the embedded tropes of “White Savior”, “Indian Maiden”, “Tonto Talk”, and the “Noble Savage”, misidentification construes the point of view by Native identities. This research investigates what the tropes are in *DW* and what is the “White Indian” trope and its significance to western cinema?

To begin with a background on how the public identifies Native Americans as one-dimensional is to show inaccuracies about the disparities of identity concerns with Indigenous people in the 21st century secondary education and below. In a 2015 study from Pennsylvania State University, researchers found that while 87% of schools were taught about American Indians are inclusive to predated 1900s context, nothing in the past 20-years about or written by a contemporary Native. Sanchez examined 15 secondary American history textbooks on their

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accuracy in depicting Natives between the years of 1991 until 2004 with a rating scale that is based upon the Five Great Values; a scale between one being the lowest and five being the highest (Sanchez, 2007). The values are generosity and sharing; respect for elders and women; getting along with nature; individual freedom and leadership; and courage (Barclay, 1996). Questions of how educators can validate cultural accuracy in history textbooks with traditional values can be an accurate depiction of Native Americans in instructional materials (Sanchez, 1997). How did society distinguish Native history as not a part of American history? This is what discrepancy gives to misrepresentation on a political standpoint, as it lessens the travesties as well as being historically inaccurate about the representations of Indigenous Peoples in U.S. history standards. Therefore, the data shows the prevalence of pre-1900 content in history standards even as Native history disappears from state standards after the turn of the 20th century (Shear, 2015).

One perspective to take into consideration aside from representation is the racism that Natives goes through to topple a patriarchal system in the 21st century. There are “566 First Nation tribes that are recognized from the U.S. Bureau of Indian Affairs” (Bureau of Indian Affairs, 2014), which sets the Navajo nation as the largest tribe in the U.S., maintaining 27,000 square miles of land (Navajo Nation Government, 2017). In July 2020, the Supreme Court ruled that about half of the land in Oklahoma is within a Native American reservation; the Court’s decision hinged on the question of whether the Creek reservation continued to exist after Oklahoma became a state (Wamsley, 2020). This type of information can be put into perspective on land reclamation and upholding treaties (Navajo-nsn.gov, n.d.). More globally, with about 370 million Indigenous people – they historically settled in and were native to a region before colonization or migration – worldwide, there are over “90 countries that represent 5% of the

world's population; However, they make up 15% of the poorest, with a third living to impoverished rural areas" (Hall & Gandolfo, 2016). These statistics show the challenges of land reclamation and how Indigenous peoples are very underwhelmed with the growing rise of poverty since post-colonialism.

For this research paper to show the misrepresentation among Indigenous peoples, it is necessary to provide expansive evidence of how a trope became a normative part of American culture, which undermines an entire race. The history of oppression of Indigenous peoples with misidentification in film roles by race statistics provokes stereotypical dilemmas. In a 2016 report over the diversity in Hollywood, only 0.5% of Native representation stood in contrast to overrepresented White percentage at "78.1%, Black at 12.5%, Latino at 2.7%, Asian at 3.1%, and Mixed at 3%" (Hunt, 2017). It is due to the depiction of impoverished Indian Reservations showing "poverty porn" among most White movies who depict a benevolence toward romanticizing a "cowboy and an Indian," specifically, the "White Savior" idealism that a White character will prevail through adversity to save the "Indian" from impending doom. Among many stereotypical images of what a Native American is, there are discrepancies among those definitions. The National Museum of the American Indian site defines "Native people [in preference] to be called by their specific tribal name (Smithsonian, ac. 2021). Furthermore, in the slew of political correctness, the question becomes who should be able to decide on who should be called Native American.

The next objective of this research paper is addressing the trope "Indian" and its sub-tropes along with a lack of stories being told from a Native perspective. Film actors by race and gender, with a total of 1,352 people in a report over Hollywood diversity, show women across different races being very underrepresented among the actors in top featured films from 2016.

However, in comparison from Whites and Natives of both genders, White males were 668 and White females were 388; Native males were four and Native females were three, in juxtaposition to Black males at 105 and Black females at 64. In scripted shows, the Whites' share all film roles at 77% in 2017, while Natives were at 0.4% (Hollywood Diversity Report, 2017). While the majority cast members for *Dances with Wolves* (1990) are Native, the film has still yet to serve a dialogue that is accurate for the Lakota and to also provide non-stereotypical Native imagery.

Literature Review

The literature review portion of this essay will incorporate scholarly journal articles, academic books, interviews, and film that will show empirical data examples over *DW*, a subjective non-authentic movie of Native Americans that was written by Michael Blake and directed by and starring Kevin Costner as the lead character and narrator. This movie starred original Native actors including Graham Greene, Tantoo Cardinal, Rodney A. Grant, and Floyd Red Crow Westerman. This movie includes both original content by a Lakota speaker and for the actors' parts in learning a specific language, while the other portion includes stereotypical imagery by non-Natives for Natives. *DW* is commonly known for the White perspective and not a Native one.

In 1990, a 60-year-old teacher at South Dakota's Sinte Gleska College, Doris Leader Charge, was a fluent Lakota speaker, and she taught both the language and the culture of Lakota on the reservation (People, 1991). The main scenes that appear to show the differences between the characters only for the benefit of the moviegoer is the woman named Stands with Fist, played by Mary McDonnell, struggling to speak English after several decades of speaking only Lakota.

From a perspective that allows Native people to speak their own language within films is something of a relief, but there are times that do not benefit this right. There is a discordance

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between non-Native producers who do not know the realities of Indigenous peoples, and unless that producer can extensively go through what most Indigenous peoples go through, there will always be a pre-defined image of stereotypes. To "...start addressing [stereotypes] through writing, films, scripts, and through Indigenous [people]..." will then make them appear hackneyed, which to most consider the "Indian" trope overused and unoriginal ("Keith Secola Interview", 2020). "The word stereotype was coined in 1798 by the French printer Didot to describe a printing process involving the use of fixed casts of the material to be reproduced (Ashmore & Del Boca, 1981, p. 1). "It was not until a century later that psychiatrists began to use the term stereotypy to denote a pathological condition characterized by behavior of 'persistent repetitiveness and unchanging mode of expression'" (Godon, 1962, p.4). Before film, there was written word and storytelling through verbal communication, which continues to this day. However, in modern times the mass public have television sets or laptops and even smartphones where they can utilize an array of interpersonal stories. The digital media platform will assemble what most people cannot understand about telling stories that they know nothing about.

Dances with Wolves was shown across the U.S. in 1990; the opening of the film showed in 14 theatres and made an initial profit of \$598,257, and the budget for the film was at 22 million dollars. Domestically, the film made a profit of \$184,208,848; internationally the film made a profit of \$240,000,000, for a worldwide total profit of \$424,208,848 (IMDB, ac. 2020). Even though this film was such a huge success and with doubt in the early stages of production, it still does not determine the accuracy of any film. With a film of three hours in length time that is a dramatized western and has a popular male actor as the lead and director, it only means for Americans and the rest of the world that *DW* shows a real depiction of Native Americans from

their timeframe. Why else would people go and watch a history film about a people who are deemed historical and no longer modern?

There is a familiar White military standard in *Dances with Wolves* that co-exists among many different White savior films that are set in nineteenth-century America. But, the “White Indian” trope is such a repetitive image in cultural studies, which provides captivity tales and stories of the “White Indian” within America, that it grants captivity of Americans as an unrealistic conception (Hopkins, 1998). An article in *Celluloid Indians: Native Americans and Film* offers a balanced, well-conceived study that explores “questions of historical and sociological ‘reality’ in the depiction of Native Americans in film” (Kilpatrick, 1999). To question the historical and sociological “reality” when Native Americans are the object, the “Hollywood Indian” is the tried and tired image of the “Savage” and the “Noble Savage” (Kilpatrick, 1999).

Speaking about phrases or words which refer to a race’s stereotypes, like using the word “wise” when referring to Natives, is what Mehta’s article, *White ‘Alliahs:’ The Creation & Perpetuation of the ‘Wise Indian’ Trope*, dictates as “Native American allies” becomes damaging. A Facebook profile copied and pasted an article featuring an Oglala Lakota Nation protestor in South Dakota by summing up the profile’s opinion with, “Let’s listen to Indigenous wisdom for once!” (Mehta, 2020). Within Mehta’s framing, this profile user is suggesting a racist or offensive comment, even if using “wisdom” or “wise” might be an attractive trait it is in a specific race trait that deems it as a “Magical Negro” trope, and these stereotypes and tropes were given by “White-owned” words (Mehta, 2020). The research questions give evidence on misrepresenting and misidentifying a race of people in television and film will only highlight the

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balancing act of treating race as a subject matter. In *DW* there are stereotypical characteristics which highlight research questions that evaluate examples from different films to show evidence.

RQ1 “What are the different tropes for Native Americans in *Dances with Wolves*?” The tropes that this research identifies with are the “White Savior”, “Indian Maiden”, “Tonto Talk”, and the “Noble Savage”. To use these creates markers to look for in the film to see if they represent a genuine trope directed toward Natives. For example, during the filming of the 2015 film *The Ridiculous 6* by Adam Sandler, 12 Native American actors stormed off the set due to several jokes that depicted Natives as dirty, animalistic backdrops. Character names such as “Beaver’s Breath” or “No Bra” are offensive and cruel. Netflix has stated the movie has “ridiculous” in the title for a reason, but this still does not make it ethical to play off someone’s race, and Natives seem to be among the racial group this affects the most (Variety, 2017). Netflix continues to argue the movie was targeting western movie tropes and not Native Americans (Time, 2015). Sandler’s movie is not a representation of tropes from *DW*, but instead shows a gross misrepresentation of Native Americans depicted as the butt of the joke and not remotely true to sense. *DW* is representative of a “White-messianic character who saves a lower or working-class, usually urban or isolated, non-white character from a sad fate” (Hughey, 2014, p.49-50). This type of trope would concentrate on the attention about the redeemers (Whites) and the redeemed (racial groups). This ideology is a separation of races in characters to only show racial groups as inferior to the Whites having a superior moral and mental capabilities (Hughey, 2014, p.50). This notion also goes into a term of “poverty porn,” where the usual character of a person of color will need the same White savior to help them with their impoverished lives.

RQ2 “What are the ‘White Indians’, a White character who saves a lower-class character from a sad fate, tropes in the *DW* film?” If the main character, Lt. Dunbar, is a representation of

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a ‘White Indian’ then this research is qualifiable data to show this trope in most films if applied using the codebook.” The 2013 movie *The Lone Ranger* cast Johnny Depp as Tonto. It is not the general idea of the movie having historical events in the 1860s that finds an ancient “Indian” in a carnival tent, but when maintaining the “White Indian” trope, any person can play an “Indian.” Another way that racism occurred throughout film history is when men appeared in blackface and one film that shows racism is *The Birth Of A Nation* (1915). It was not until after the civil war that blackface made a place in history as entertainment. In today’s politically correct climate and as a society, it has been deemed unacceptable. Even in the 21st century to use anyone to play “Indian” is still occurring and this ideology still represents a depiction of the Wild West theory (Wright, 2001). To consider the repercussions of someone wearing blackface in today’s society does not co-exist as a non-Native portraying a Native American in film. There are contradictions from Johnny Depp’s portrayal as Tonto and Sarah Silverman using blackface from a photograph in 2007. It is abhorrent when using someone else’s race as your own and with films, actors are profiting from a racist stereotype (History, Independent & Huff Post, 2021, 2019, & 2017).

The issue is over the misconception of portraying Natives in loincloth and other scant clothing to have the movie appear as dated, which most Native portrayals are, and especially in the 1990s. Hollywood needs a storyline to be interesting and the plot does not necessarily need to be accurate to sell movie tickets. What needs to be put in focus is that Indigenous people have a differentiation between tribes who have differences in their cultures which happen to be thriving in the 21st century, even if the rest of Americans do not see this. Any time a feature film, if any, is being produced and directed by a non-Native they seemingly put Native actors in loincloths or on the back of horses.

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Aside from film, speaking about historical narrative, the Native history of America and its prior historical significance has been irrefutably watered down to a background character, something of unimportance, more of an afterthought. Most Americans, when asked about Native Americans, will gather up this image of hunter/gatherers, bloodthirsty scalpers, or putting bygones aside to give thanks at dinner with the pilgrims. Somehow, Columbus sneaks into the conversation to further perpetuate a method of deception. “Knowing and the intentional transmission of information to create a false belief...to make someone believe a fact or form an impression you know to be untrue,” is what the deception strategy falls under (Ivy Tech Community College, ac. 2021). Most Americans are being educated on a one-sided history about America. In Time, an interview with a Wampanoag tribe member, Paula Peters, was detailing a mid- 1960s event in her second-grade class about Plymouth colony and the Mayflower. “[Peters] asked what happened to the Native Americans who helped the Pilgrims settle, [who were the Wampanoag tribe,] the teacher said they were all dead” (“400 Years After ‘First Thanksgiving’, 2020). This is one of the main reasons that Americans are uneducated about Native American history, which extends the misinformation about a disingenuous American chronicle. This thesis will have a focus on the *DW* film but with the background information of how the film industry got to the place that it is now. This paper is a qualitative research analysis that employs a deductive content analysis method. It will analyze how the qualitative content demonstrates the significance in observations of reviewing the film in question, taking the scenes that are most appropriate to the trope codebook, find the tropes involved and then code them with their type, provide a meaning, provide an example, and then provide a communicative aspect with a second coder.

The prospectus with a codebook of tropes provides empirical evidence of stereotyped Native American characters in movies. *Dances with Wolves* shows the characterization of a prominent number of Native American actors that displayed ancestral background as well as the major concern of the typical White Savior character. Native Americans displaying a stereotype in this film include the “Noble Savage” (Noble Indian/Noble Maiden), “Tonto Talk” (Indian Talk/Hollywood “Injun English”), and the “Indian Maiden” (Cherokee Princess/Squaw). The nonverbal cues (personal appearance, eye contact, body movements) of certain characters as well as the verbal cues (emphasis and mannerisms) will provide information for a thorough investigation of romanticizing the White Indian.

Western Literature in Dime Novels and the Assimilation Era

Dime Novels became popular and were the dominant fiction medium in the late nineteenth-century America; New York firm Beadle and Adams published the first dime novels in June of 1860, and they were rapidly imitated (Denning, 1987). This mass production shaped the attitudes against Native Americans between the Civil War and World War I, and western fiction would become the prevailing factor in how Americans viewed Native people and why a Bloodthirsty Savage became a source for eradicating the “Indian” but saving the man.

When it comes to how “Oscar loves a White Savior, ... movie[s] [are] devoted to explaining the abolition of slavery in the United States, African American characters do almost nothing but passively wait for White men to liberate them” (Masur, 2012). Oscar also loves plight of Indigenous and people of color (IPOC) to be saved by the White man; this includes Native American actors. The Academy Awards, which are known for “The Oscars”, showcases films and actors of the year by awarding their merit with a miniature gold man. Every year there will be at times controversy over the selection; will it be a woman director who wins the

nomination, or is there not enough racial diversity among the categories (Gray, 2020)? Wes Studi, who is from the Cherokee Nation, made history at the 11th Governors Awards when he became the first Native American, aside from Buffy Sainte-Marie (Canada-born Cree) who won an Oscar in 1982, to receive an Academy Award (Chisholm, 2019).

I am proud to be here tonight as the first Indigenous Native American to receive an Academy Award. It's about time! I can understand the idea of wanting to get away from leathers and feathers. But it's a double-edged sword in its own way. Westerns and or period pieces in which Native Americans are portrayed have been the starting point and the bread and butter of Native American actors. Fortunately, I've been able to cross over in a few roles over the years. Sometimes, it's a matter of two steps forward and one step back (Studi, 2019).

A film that fostered controversy and won 90 titles and has 187 nominations with a leading performance by Leonardo DiCaprio, *The Revenant* (2015), received widespread praise: "Another White man in the woods in a western archetype: the frontiersman going to fierce, heroic lengths to survive" (Odle, 2016). This is a western movie with a different take on American scalping storytelling. In an interview with the screenwriter, Mark L. Smith, states:

He's a trapper who has survived a Native American attack earlier in his life, and so he's kind of partially scalped. He's almost driven by fear in a lot of ways...because he's always worried about something bringing the next attack on him...he's not really a villain at the beginning. He's not a great guy, he's not a guy that you'd want to hang out with, but some of his logic makes sense (Smith, 2015).

This film, like many other White Savior tropes, has the lead in declaring what is an over-celebrated western accomplishment. The message, whether it is verbal or nonverbal, channels

into the public's perspective of White western accomplishment, since this is the primary focus in history classes. This is a normative way of learning about United States history; the White settler is the conqueror and the savior. When teaching the limited history of world studies, the emphasis is White and western with success; therefore, it would be natural to assume White, western countries are the most qualified to solving problems. Again, the idea of a superlative country feels normal, and even generous, to offer help and "expertise" to others, without considering that other people are already capable to help themselves (Machado, 2016).

Men like Buffalo Bill, Daniel Boone, Davy Crocket, James Bowie, and many others are the American male prototype of an "Indianized" White man, someone to be synthesized into a Euro-American male and an "Indian"; the European is for the "enlightenment", to hold intellectual capabilities, "to have the Native physical qualities and instincts, to appear rugged, a loner and an individualist who is comfortable in the wilderness and who is unencumbered by civilization and its pretenses. This is a White man who has become more 'Indian' than the 'Indian', and this is what Americans want" (Gerald, 2014).

Western fiction works as a barometer of evolving popular attitudes toward "Indians" and Mexican Americans; C.L. Sonnichsen's book *From Hopalong to Hud* shows how it mirrors the American reading audience's insatiable appetite for ever more exotic forms of violence and ever larger doses of explicit sex (Pilkington, 1979). The Bloodthirsty Savage trope is about a mythical subset that originates from the Indian trope due to Columbus' misdirection of the Indies, this trope originated as the "Indian" paradigm due to their first encounter with an explorer and improperly naming them something they were not. Novels such as *Apache Ransom* or *Apache Hostage* fueled the public's desire to create a monster out of a human, this attitude of the bloodthirsty "Indian" grew in popularity with writing "Apache novels" (Cotton, 2008).

Dances with Wolves' tropes convey a message of where the cowboy hero originated from – most scholars suggest Daniel Boone (Gerald, 2014) – and how this developed into a “White Savior” trope and how a “White Savior” developed into an “Indianized” White man (Western Literature). Additionally, modern-day Native actors are beginning to be seen and heard as someone other than a trope or stereotype. *DW* shows evidence of the “White Savior” trope among others like the “Noble Savage”, which will be discussed in Chapter one with the “White Savior” and “Indian Maiden” trope, by empirical data with the Cotton article and others with assimilation and boarding schools' causal implications.

CHAPTER ONE

The Cowboy Hero and the Noble Savage: How Stereotypes were Formed

Carlisle's Indian Boarding School (1879-1918) evoked the times of complete isolation of Native children from Native American families and their languages to an immersion of White assimilation. Between 1,500 and 1,800 Native American students from Oklahoma attended Carlisle in Pennsylvania during its "kill the Indian, save the man" agenda (Kliewer, Mahmud, Wayland, n.d.). Carlisle set the standard for cultural genocide to accomplish a racist systematic doctrine, which upheld several denominations of the Christian Church by reprogramming Native American and Alaska Native children ("Impact of Historical Trauma", ac. 2021). By 1926, nearly 83% of "Indian" school-age children attended boarding schools, with 357 boarding schools in 30 states; in 1900, there were 20,000 children in boarding schools, and in 1925 there were 60,889 children in boarding schools ("US Indian Boarding School History", ac. 2021). This was a common practice of taking children away from their parents and homes to assimilate them into boarding schools; if parents refused, they were jailed.

Such experiences were traumatic for children, endured in memory for decades. The late actor and "Indian" activist Floyd Red Crow Westerman had a haunting memory about his mother regarding what he thought of as abandonment. Westerman initially thought that he was on the bus because his mother did not want him anymore. But then he noticed she was crying. "It was hurting her, too. It was hurting me to see that. I'll never forget. All the mothers were crying" (Bear, Westerman, 2008).

The federal government sent American Indians to off-reservation boarding schools in the 1870s, when the United States was still at war with "Indians" (Bear, 2008). The infamous line of "kill the Indian, save the man" originates from an Army officer, Richard Pratt, who founded one

of the first Indian Boarding Schools in an “Indian” prison that he developed through an education program. In 1892, Pratt described his philosophy in a speech:

A great general has said that the only good Indian is a dead one. In a sense, I agree with the sentiment, but only in this: that all the Indian there is in the race should be dead. Kill the Indian in him, and save the man (Pratt, 1892).

In 1945, a Pattwin Indian, Bill Wright, was sent to the Stewart Indian School in Nevada where he and many others like him suffered the boarding school’s mistreatment. Students were forbidden at all cost to speak their language, to wear their hair long, and to express their culture. Wright did not just lose his heritage but his home language’s name.

I remember coming home and my grandma asked me to talk Indian to her and I said, Grandma, I don’t understand you. She said, then who are you (Wright, 2008).

Wright told his grandmother that his name is Billy.

Your name’s not Billy. Your name’s TAH-rruhm. And I went, that’s not what they told me (Wright, 2008).

Due to the racism in America and even after the assimilation in 1918 ended, there was still the need for educating “Indian” people. Like Black people, they had to be segregated from public schools, because those were for White people. In the 1950s, federal schools became the only option for “Indian” people. Lucy Toledo, a Navajo who went to Sherman Institute in the 1950s, stated it was not really about education:

Students did not learn basic concepts in math or English...and that carpentry are for boys and housekeeping are for girls. Saturday night we had a movie. Do you know what the movie was about? Cowboys and Indians. Cowboys and Indians. Here we’re getting all our people killed, and that’s the kind of stuff they showed us (Toledo, 2008).

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Not only were students not receiving the standard education that White people received, but for decades there are reports that students in boarding schools were abused. Malnourished students forced to perform heavy labor and endured physical beatings were a part of daily interactions with teachers. In the 1960s, a congressional report found many teachers saw their roles as civilizing American Indian students, not to educate them; the report claims the schools still had a “major emphasis on discipline and punishment” (Bear, 2008). Wright had seen firsthand of what went on inside boarding schools of severe discipline. He recalled one student whom authorities were disciplining “busted his head open and blood got all over. I had to take him to the hospital, and they told me to tell them he ran into the wall and I better not tell them what really happened” (Wright, 2008).

Growing up with discipline is a part of average family life; however, an insurmountable cause and effect of how someone will behave determines the outcome outside of an institution and is a combination of action and reaction (Goldberg, 2014). In Wright’s case, he has a higher probability of becoming violent on what his environment and education stemmed from. “You grow up with discipline, but when you grow up and you have families, then what happens? If you’re my daughter and you leave your dress out, I’ll knock you through that wall. Why? Because I’m taught discipline” (Wright, 2008).

School superintendents, “Indian” agents, and teachers give the same indication of subordination while in an active role of “Indian” care. John B. Riley, Indian School superintendent from the early 20th century, agreed that “Indians” can be educated if isolated from their families. “Only by complete isolation of the Indian child from his savage antecedents can he be satisfactorily educated, and the extra expense attendant thereon is more than compensated by the thoroughness of the work” (Riley, n.d.). The idea that most people in the assimilation

generation curtail the intelligence of “Indian” people, they still saw them as lower than chattel. John S. Ward, a U.S. Indian Agent, mirrors the “Indian” people’s intellect and to enforce a threat to non-cooperative agents. “The parents of these Indian children are ignorant, and know nothing of the value of education, and there are no elevating circumstances in the home circle to arouse the ambition of the children” (Ward, n.d.).

Not until 1924, under the Snyder Act, were Native Americans granted full U.S. citizenship, even though the Fifteenth Amendment, which was passed in 1870, gave all U.S. citizens the right to vote regardless of race, (Library of Congress, ac. 2021). A letter by Pvt. Ralph W. Anderson, a Navajo who served in the U.S. Army in World War II, expressed concerns about the U.S. policies that kept him and other Native Americans from voting (Hedgpeth, 2020).

We still have no privilege to vote. We do not understand what kind of citizenship you would call that. We feel that we should be recognized as a full citizen of the United States of America...Every [Navajo] that can read and write should have privileges to vote in all elections. That is the way it should be according to the Constitution of [the] United States of America. Hundreds of young [Navajo] boys beside us took the oath of allegiance to the flag and the country whom they are now in the armed forces and [scattered] all over the world fighting for their country just like anybody else (Anderson, 1943).

There has always been a systemic racist institution in place for non-Whites; for Native people they were kidnapped, murdered, bought or thrown off their land, forced to assimilate with a completely different culture than what they are accustomed to.

A term that shows a path of how “Indian” tropes evolved is from “western horror” and “Apache novels” were typical in pulp fiction and dime novels. This form of reading channels the way an audience member will think of stereotypical narratives. A “western horror” is termed as

having a novel that contains “a malignant... [Indian who] lurks in the background” as an “irresistible, inhuman presence endowed with almost supernatural malice and cunning” (Sonnichsen, 1978).

To define a trope as a “significant or recurrent theme, esp. in a literary or cultural context; a motif,” (Oxford English Dictionary, ac. 2021) is separate from its similar counterpart, the stereotype. From the same source, a stereotype is “a preconceived and oversimplified idea of the characteristics which typify a person, situation, etc.; an attitude based on such a preconception. Also, a person who appears to conform closely to the idea of a type” (Oxford English Dictionary, ac. 2021). Furthermore, a stereotype affects a group of people or race, which creates a dehumanizing perspective about viewing that group. Black and Native American groups are marginalized with many stereotypes; however, the Native population have more stereotypes connected to them and their tropes.

Unlike Sandler’s film, there were no stereotypical instances with *Dances with Wolves* due to portraying Natives with respect by using the Lakota language and using Native actors to portray themselves. Sandler’s film did use Native actors like Taylor Lautner, Saginaw Grant and Julia Jones; yet, Native actors walked off set due to discrimination who were Loren Anthony, from the metal band, Bloodline, and a film student, Allison Young (Indian Country Today, 2018). The cast was something to take into consideration for its large comedy actors, Rob Schneider, Terry Crews, Steve Buscemi, Jon Lovitz, David Spade, Norm Macdonald, and Whitney Cummings, to name more than a few. It is not about which side defines it a satirical western comedy or a discriminatory movie that makes racist jokes toward a racial group, but more about Sandler’s status in Hollywood. He has a defining role as a producer and actor, why does he not keep perspective of what the political climate is? Sandler’s film has more than

enough tropes that are old and unamusing, the tropes from *DW* are still out of date and not useful but the characteristics that were used in Costner's film had more merit to them compared to Sandler and other films. To take into consideration, Costner's film was produced in 1990 and Sandler's was produced in 2015, which makes it a 25-year difference. America's journey has developed during those times and to still be using stereotypes as humor in the 21st century that is geared toward ostracizing another group is lacking in creativity.

The tropes that come from *Dances with Wolves*, the "White Savior", "Noble Savage", "Tonto Talk", and "Indian Maiden", give this research a platform of decoding these tropes. Cotton's thesis, *American Indian Stereotypes in Early Western Literature and the Lasting Influence on American Culture*, researches where the "Indian tropes" came from and Chapter two talks about the "Bloodthirsty Savage" while Chapter three talks about the "Noble Savage", an in-depth approach of cancelling out interference between stereotypes and how the public views Native Americans in a historical analysis of pulp fiction:

[James K.] Folsom states that writers were not interested in obtaining a "true to life" perception of the Native American, and so "the Indian was treated more and more like 'the enemy.'" In dime novels and popular fiction, "particular Indians grew increasingly dastardly, and the Indian problem as reflected in such works became more or less straightforward statement of how 'our side' won. The Indian, in such works, plays the negative to positive American virtues which are unhesitatingly affirmed (Folsom, 1966, 147 and Cotton, 2008, 18).

Dime novels, pulp fiction, Western Horrors, the Leatherstocking Tales, and Beadle Dime Novels are all synonymous in a "classical approach to a historical western literature racial census," i.e., a classical criticism over "Indian" tropes from a historical and literary generation

from researched articles. The timeframe of the decline of dime novels did not occur until 1860, but lacked in sales until 1893, the disappearance of the cowboy hero was essentially stagnated. Between the 1840s and 1920s there was a market for a mythology of the great hero and the cowboy hero as one of the most iconic figures of all time (Untiedt, 1999). During the 1800s was the time of wagon trains carrying people to the frontier, which lasted only a few decades; this was a time of settling in new places, and for the European foreigners and second generations to conquer new lands, America's fascination was expansion, Native Americans, and pioneers. However, in advancements with technologies like railroads and the telegraph, people from around the world could follow the stories of these influencers, these advancements made it possible for the western novels as a possibility. "The first profitable mass literature in the United States was the Beadle dime novels, in 1860. Because enthusiasm for the West coincided with the technical innovations which made mass production and mass distribution possible, Westerns were the most numerous and most popular type of dime novel" (Untiedt, 1999).

The rise in popularity for Apache violence stories led to the general belief that "the Apache above all others...employs torture and takes an avid interest in the suffering of his victims. He is portrayed as the cruelest and toughest of all Indians" (Cotton, 2008), which makes the perception for mass media to endure racism as a pastime. It is either the qualms of Apache Indians, the violence, or the nobility; they cannot stand on their own merits in western literature from the 20th century and earlier. Henry Nash Smith, an American scholar, stated in 1950 that "we have known dime novels and their present-day equivalents are mirrors which faithfully reflect our assumptions and prejudices. They [must] be, or we don't read them" (Sonnichsen, 1975).

In 1990, newspaper *The Baltimore Sun* interviewed local Natives about the film *DW*. From the Navajos to the Oneidas, Randi Henderson, reporter for *The Baltimore Sun*, received a reaction from the sympathetic portrayal of “Indian” people. One Native commented, “I liked it because it got rid of all stereotypes about Indians (Simermeyer, 1990).” In the 1990s there were films and shows popular among Native people, like the films *Smoke Signals* (1998) and *Dance Me Outside* (1994); the T.V. show *The Rez* (1995) was a spinoff series based on the characters from *Dance Me Outside*, which portrays the actors and the acting for contemporary Natives instead of garnering more stereotypical imagery about a mythical “Indian” and his meek ambiguity with the White man.

By contrast, other forms of stereotype persisted in other popular culture arenas. The practice of scalping, which is another deplorable stereotype against North American Indigenous people, is perpetuated symbolically at football games around the country with Chiefs, Indians, or Warriors mascots yelling “Scalp ‘em!” There is some fraction of truth with Natives utilizing this practice in their wars and fighting routines, but it is incorrect that only Natives scalped people. Scalping can be traced back from the European region from 440 BC, when the Scythians scalped their dead enemies (Vassar, 2021). This practice of mutilation was introduced prior to Columbian contact through explorers and archeological findings of skulls (“Scalping Practices”, ac. 2021), but “scalping was not a practice traditional to North American Indigenous people until it became a retaliatory act against colonists” (Gwin, 2017), according to Mashantucket Pequot spokesman Buddy Gwin.

There are many ways to incite bigotry over Native identities, gathering research from historical western literature as in the dime novels, academic articles, western shows, and among other texts. The latter half of the 1800s witnessed the Civil War and Reconstruction. “*Uncle*

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Tom's Cabin is published and becomes one of the most influential literature to be controversial about anti-slavery sentiments; Congress passes the Kansas-Nebraska Act of 1854 to establish territories, Abraham Lincoln becomes president in 1861, there are secessions from the United States, slavery is abolished with the Thirteenth Amendment in 1865, and the last major battle of the Indian Wars occurred at Wounded Knee in South Dakota in 1890" ("U.S. History Timeline; ac. 2021). These decades produce a track record of a general idea in a timeline about bigotry. A best-selling book about slavery, the establishment of "Indian" lands, Abraham Lincoln's inauguration and Emancipation Proclamation, and the Wounded Knee Massacre killing off nearly three hundred Lakota people, can only create a formula of inventing stereotypes (Hudson, 2020).

In the film, *DW*, the war is about the American Civil War from 1861 until 1865 and shows the sentiments of the union wanting to accumulate more land. This desire is apparent with the Lakota tribe that Lt. Dunbar meets as he waits at a military post. According to the film, it depicts a strong case for the "White Savior", "Noble Savage", and "Indian Maiden" tropes, which is consistent for the character Stands with Fist (played by Mary McDonnell), a White adopted daughter for the Lakota tribe, to portray an Indian Maiden. Whereas before films in previous decades focused on "cowboy-and-Indian" Westerns with an antagonistic approach from the Native characters by "redfacing" (White actors portraying themselves as "Indian"), is a film that shows actual Native descendants portraying their likeness to their ancestors.

At the movie's preview screening in 1990 at San Francisco's American Indian Film Festival, Michael Smith, Sioux, recalled the reception as euphoric (Indian Country Today, 2015).

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We had so many people. The theater had 670 seats. It was pretty moving. I think [the film] struck people in an emotional way. I don't think *Dances with Wolves* is ever going to be topped (Smith, 2015).

This was an interview in 2015, 25 years later and the film still held an impact relatable to having so many Natives in one theater watching themselves on screen. Presently the film is 30 years old and still holds the model for a true depiction of Native America cinema. Wes Studi and other Native actors can claim this as their breakout role, due to the unimaginable reception worldwide. Grossing over \$400 million and winning multiple Oscars that includes Best Picture and Best Director, the audience and critics alike cannot help but feel bothered by a story of a White man who “goes Native” (Alter, 2020). Wes Studi, played as the Toughest Pawnee, remains proud of the movie by stating “[he] does not see [Costner’s character] as being glorified as a savior of the Lakota or anything [else]. He is a flawed character who did beneficial things, but things were done for him as well (Studi, 2020).” Considering argumentative sides of whether *DW* is a “White Savior” film, how does the depiction of Native Americans who portrayed themselves create “Indian” tropes and how is Kevin Costner’s character depicted as a White “Indian”? Cotton’s thesis, *American Indian Stereotypes in Early Western Literature and the Lasting Influence on American Culture*, highlights three major stereotypes concerning Native Americans founded between the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. There are three defined tropes that Cotton uses in her thesis and one of them includes the “Noble Savage”. Through the study of tropes in [her] thesis that is primarily historical, concentrating on works of decade representation of Native Americans in mediums such as literature or film, will supplement the fictional depictions of Native American races that [continue to] persist in media (Cotton, 2008).

Cotton's Analysis of Noble Savage: Comparative Qualitative Data

Comparing the qualitative data and the interpretation of tropes from *DW* and comparing that information with Cotton's analysis of her stereotypes in western literature draws the attention toward an intimate subject of "sub humanism." The reason behind using Cotton's analysis is for research purposes over a specific research topic about dime novels on Native tropes. Her stance on Native Americans were depicted as sub-human as history has proven, "the prejudices and assumptions that a reader has does not say something about the subject matter. In the case of 'Apache novels' or Western Horrors that depict Bloodthirsty Savages, the prejudice and assumptions tell something about the reader" (Sonnichsen, 1975).

In chapter three of Cotton's thesis, *Noblesse-Oblige: The Noble Savage in Western Literature*, "Noble Savage" term is associated with the American eighteenth century Primitivism according to Rousseau in his *A Discourse on Inequality* (Cotton, 2008). It is essentially the "description of the assumed political state of nature...of the Noble Savage;" therefore, "all men when in the "state of nature" were good, with untainted intuitions and to be civilized was to be corrupted in society" (Cotton, 2008). There is an innate ability to be wholesome, noble, and honest to be considered a "natural man." The notion of having the cake and eating it too is how the Primitivism era reacted to the "White Indian." The structural integrity of utilizing the "Noble Savage", because the "Indian" is still sub-human, society manifested a prototype that sought after the "Aboriginal Self". The idea behind a "Noble Savage" is synonymous with The "Magical Negro" trope, where the trope in literature and movies "[is] a black character [that] appears in a plot solely to help a white character- and then vanishes, much like in white savior films" (Kelly, 2019). White Savior films not only cater to endowing wisdom to the White hero for him to save the day, but he needs to prove his place in the world, and he is needed for civilization to prosper.

Not only is it the physical characteristics that are prevalent because they relate to the “Noble Savage” of being “robust in physical health,” a distinct trait that helps writing the narrative of what an imaginary “Indian” looks like, but the “Noble Savage” needs to possess a “natural wisdom.” In *DW*, Costner’s character, Lt. Dunbar, has the physical traits of a robust figure in comparison with Major Fambrough, who is a stoutly man. In James Fenimore Cooper’s *Leatherstocking Tales*, “the American Indian holds the noble descriptions of Chief Chingachgook... that the dominant American society’s view on Natives as a Noble Savage is justifiable that all Indians are bloodthirsty cannibals. Only in conjunction with the nobility context does the dominant view illustrate freedom, simplicity, and “one with nature” that is a cultural framework of America” (Cotton, 2008). It is a common feature that the “Noble Savage” plays in pulp fiction during the 19th century, typically in a way to somehow “prove” the desirability of that [White] civilization which, it was alleged, [the Noble Savage] would accept with open arms (Folsom, 1966). For Indigenous peoples of North America, this is false.

To refer to the integrity of the “Indian” and having the intuitive honesty of early westerns gives the supernatural ability and mystical connection to the earth (Cotton, 2008); the audience sees this reference in *DW*. Costner’s character, Lt. Dunbar, in his narration by writing in his journal of his daily activities or general questioning, insists his surroundings and meeting the Lakota turns into mysticism. Dunbar in his western adventure and has fully developed characteristics with a clear mental, spiritual, and romantic needs that the Lakota do not reciprocate because of shallow depth to how they are portrayed compared to Lt. Dunbar. (Vassar, 2020). The first Lakota meeting with Lt. Dunbar has the Lt. mimicking a buffalo by scuffing his hands into the dirt with padding under his dress shirt, all the while placing both index fingers upright to represent horns near his head. Some viewers can see this strictly as a communicative

aspect that is nonverbal. However, because he is enacting an animal in the first scene after the incoming Lakota, this derails fact from fiction. This scene sets up a route of contradicting evidence between the Lakota tribe and the one White soldier at his post, the Lakota were in retaliation mode with the cavalry. This is referenced in the beginning of the film and throughout, it is unlikely of a casual meeting with no hostility.

In the next section of providing evidence in nobility and barbarism, how did western literature and cinema conclude the “Imaginary Indian”? What implications led to the American Indian Movement (AIM) of the late 1960s and 1970s? Why did adoptions of “Indian” children from White people create a nobility trait?

The Noble Indian: Nobility or Barbarism?

Having nobility is the quality of being integral to one’s character, and this characteristic has been stamped onto Indigenous people for the public to understand their disposition to not be threatening. Unlike its opposite descriptor, barbarism creates bloodthirsty, ignorant, and savagery; it is a contradiction based on racism. When Christopher Columbus arrived on what he thought was the “Indies,” which is now an obsolete word for Asia, he described in a letter about the Tainos tribe as “Los Indios.” In a letter by Columbus in 1493 states his perception between him and the natives of the island: “I have found no monsters, nor heard of any except on an island here which is the second one as you approach the Indies...which is inhabited by people who are... to be very ferocious and who eat human flesh...and they wear their hair long like women and they carry bows and arrows.” This not only connects to Columbus’ views on the natives, but he connects nativity with barbarism. Another dichotomy that Columbus has with the Natives at that time is the characteristics that he gives them in his letter. They are “ferocious”, “monsters”, and people who “eat human flesh” gives the identity of what appears to be a savage,

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which is to reiterate the focus on where the “Noble Savage” came from (Christopher Columbus, “Santangel letter”, 1493). It was in 1580, Michel de Montaigne’s *Des Cannibale* portrayed Indigenous people as “Noble Savages”, but it would not be until 1670 that John Dryden formalized the term in his *The Conquest of Granada* (Cotton, 2008).

Another misidentification was in 1590, when Governor John White returned to his Roanoke colony in Virginia to discover his townspeople missing and suspecting Natives were involved with the disappearance; this is another inspired fear of Native Americans in early America. Around the time of late 1600s to the early 1700s, captivity novels rose in popularity; *A Narrative of the Captivity and Restoration of Mrs. Mary Rowlandson* (1682) and *Narrative of a Shipwreck in the Gulph of Florida* (1699), achieved more than 30 editions printed to satisfy the widespread demand (Cotton, 2008). Those titles suggested the propaganda against American Indians during that time; this led to an increase of violence and death for Indigenous Americans. There were bounties from scalps commissioned by the Massachusetts General Court in 1744, which announced that 250 British pounds on “every Indian scalp produced” was causal for elimination, but governors found another way to conform without killing (Cotton, 2008).

The late 1720s was when miscegenation became a popular solution as the British colonial approach for dealing with “Indian” tribes. From the novel by William Byrd’s *History of the Dividing Line Run in the Year*, suggests intermarriage as a solution, this is around the time of taking barbarism and turning the “Indian” into a “Noble Savage”. There was so much conflict among White Americans and Native Americans in the 1770s that the next step would be to employ a “one with nature” and “wise” approach to a “Noble Savage” to help the “White Savior”. He was the sidekick, an afterthought. By the 1840s, American writers offered the public plenty of ideas about “Indians”, this included, but not limited to “yellow covered romances”

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(covers that illustrated lurid hand-colored woodcuts) (Dalke, 1986) for American readers that included Native Americans in their plots. Another segment was Hack writers, some of whom became successful dime novel authors, produced adventure stories (Nichols, 1982).

Between the 1830s and 1950s, dime novels set in motion with stock characters, fast-paced action and predictable plots, this made dime novels so valuable. From the context of understanding late 19th century American public thinking about Native Americans, there was hardly a depiction that shone in a good light, which popular stories provided a wide range of “Indian” stereotypes. Going back to James Fenimore Cooper’s novels provides noble or villainous, but always doomed, tribesmen for a facile writer to copy (Nichols, 1982). The negative stereotypes that go into “making an Indian” results in lack of ideas about the tribespeople that perpetuates the causal attitudes that many Native American society sees today and will more likely than not to happen over the next several generations.

Dances with Wolves holds several tropes that not only pertains to Indigenous people but that resurrect the “White Savior” trope. Kevin Costner’s character, Lt. Dunbar, is a characteristic development due to his subjection of becoming this messianic archetype at the beginning of the movie and then evolving into the “Noble Savage”. There are four phases in which Lt. Dunbar encounters his nobility. The audience sees this throughout the film: from his mystical transformation, the first phase is a “suicide mission” at the beginning of the movie by a sacrificial attempt. The second phase is when Lt. Dunbar is journaling at his post with his wants of familial identity. The third phase is Dunbar’s meeting with the Lakota and joining their band; and the fourth and last phase is going against his comrades to fight along with the Lakota. This is continuous with Dunbar’s character which enables his traits to be shown as noble and to appear as a “White Savior”.

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This analysis over *DW* is not to find the faults with or the historical facts of the film, but to find the relevance of tropes that appear throughout the film. This way of analyzing does not deflect attention of what the paper set out to do in the first place, find the tropes and then apply them to *DW*. Cotton analyzes in her thesis about the “Noble Savage” being morally superior to the White man because of “natural goodness, untainted by tuition, he was also considered less intelligent and less human, someone expendable by American standards” (Cotton, 2008). This definition is not apparent in *DW*; however, the description allows an open discussion of what is self-reliance. According to Emerson’s *Self Reliance*, about seeking the “aboriginal self,” in his understanding of discontent is the want of self-reliance: it is infirmity of will (Emerson, 1841). His essay is consistent with giving up false claims and conformity to understand communication by the natural instincts of the soul.

White people adopting Native American children created a nobility trait since 1968, this implies why it is crucial that Natives have self-autonomy and get to keep their children. It implies evidence that the “White Savior” and nobility claim are present within these instances. AIM was formed by George Mitchell, Dennis Banks, and Clyde Bellecourt, with 200 people from the “Indian” community in attendance (MNHS, ac. 2021). This organization was to protest discrimination and to demand the government to uphold their policy when it came to federal “Indian” policies. This matter was not limited to only those two, but demanded that “Indian” land be taken back and that high unemployment, slum housing, and racist treatments be addressed, among other issues. This organization caught the attention of the FBI and the CIA, who were sent out to destroy the movement. In 1973, Russell Means and his followers took over a small “Indian” community of Wounded Knee, South Dakota, over a corrupt tribal government. When the FBI was dispatched, tragedy struck the small community with a siege that lasted 71

days; two people were killed, 12 wounded, and 1,200 were arrested. From 1968 to 1973, the movement grew in numbers and drew attention to the plight of American Indians. The AIM leaders were eventually tried in a trial that lasted for eight months, at the end of which they were acquitted of any wrongdoings (MNHS, ac. 2021).

The Natives were integral to their own character when it came to defend their land and their way of life. Something the government wanted to erase became a problem, but AIM saw a golden age between the years of 1969 and 1975 that reshaped the way Natives were perceived (UNL, ac. 2021). Another example of being noble and not from a Native community were White people who adopted “Indian” children through ICWA, Indian Child Welfare Act of 1978. This enactment was in response to a crisis affecting American Indian and Alaska Native children, families, and tribes.

Targeting Native children was ICWA’s practice to remove children by “[protecting] the best interests of Indian children and to promote the stability and security of Indian tribes and families,” taking into consideration factors such as:

1. Providing active efforts to the family;
2. Identifying a placement that fits under the ICWA preference provisions; and
3. Notifying the child’s tribe and the child’s parents of the child custody proceeding; and
4. Working actively to involve the child’s tribe and the child’s parents in the proceedings (NICWA, ac. 2021).

ICWA has been labeled “the golden standard” of child welfare policy by experts and national leading child advocacy organizations beyond Indian Country; however, Native children in relative care still occur more frequently than it does for the general population when out-of-

placement still occurs. Granted since 1978, ICWA's protections have improved, their protections are still much needed. When it comes to White counterparts, Native families are four times more likely to have their children be placed in foster homes, this can be attributed to non-compliance with the federal law itself (NICWA, ac. 2021).

In 2013, the U.S. Supreme Court decision *Adoptive Couple v. Baby Girl* highlights the context to which Congress could be clarified in contrasting ways. This case is one of misinformation on the biological father's part, because he "abandoned the [American] Indian child before birth and never had custody of the child" (NPR, 2013). The adoptive couple was the Capobiancos; the child's biological mother, Christy Maldonado, who is not Native but of Latinx descent and not affiliated with any tribe, was a single mother with two children and in an unstable relationship (Maldonado, 2013). In an article that Maldonado wrote for the *Washington Post* about her decision to not abort her daughter but put her up for adoption, she asked the child's biological father, who is from the Cherokee Nation, to text his ex-fiancé that he wanted to give up all parental rights; and this was the last she heard from the biological father. Between the Capobiancos and Maldonado, there would be an open adoption, where Maldonado can be a part of the child's life (Maldonado, 2013).

During Maldonado's delivery, the Capobiancos was in the delivery room and Matt Capobianco cut the umbilical cord and was the first to hold the baby. The baby's biological father never asked about her health, with no other acknowledgements to his daughter until the adoption papers arrived. This is when lawyers and the Cherokee tribe became involved because of his affiliation with the tribe; she had no authorization as the baby's biological mother to decide what is best for her baby, according to tribal law. After having no contact with the child's adoptive parents and Maldonado, the biological father cut them off after getting custody for his

child; this case went on for four long years until the Capobiancos were given back custody for their daughter (Maldonado, 2013).

This case is one of two recent cases when it comes to ICWA that shows empathy in Maldonado's perspective; however, the Capobianco's are not suggestive to the "White Savior" trope due to Maldonado's picking them to be the child's adoptive parents with an open adoption. In a case from 2016 in Texas, a White couple had been attempting to adopt a Navajo and Cherokee child and were wanting to "rectify their blessings" due to their "[insecurities] about their material success" (New York Times, 2016). According to Jennifer and Chad Brackeen, the child's foster parents, they did not see an issue with adopting the child because of him being uprooted several times. According to the Brackeens, the initiative was based off of the skin color. The suit was filed and the Brackeens could formally adopt him. *The New York Times* article continues with a cultural difference that concerns should outweigh a child's connection to their family and heritage- this is one of many reasons why the ICWA was established in 1978. This law recognizes the history of federal policy aimed at breaking up Native families and mandates that Native families should remain together, given their history with White's (New York Times, 2016).

The case with the Brackeen's suggests a "White Savior" trope because of them wanting to "rectify their blessings;" is the blessing only for a Native child, or for any child? An act that was signed by President Jimmy Carter, which requires state agencies to use "active efforts" to try to prevent the breakup of Native American families, notify people of pending proceedings and have the right to intervene and keep records and make them available, has the attempt to ending protections for Native American children to stay with their families" (DC Report, 2020).

Conclusion

From the boarding schools, dime novels, assimilation into White society, Natives will always be demeaned on their own land. This continues in modern development with land resources, water rights, misrepresentations in literature and film, among other issues, and from most recent data, there are over 570 federally recognized tribal nations within the U.S. that represent the Native American/Alaska Native people. They only make up 2% of the entire U.S. population, this leaves no doubt that Natives can be considered a marginalized, racial population (Brayboy & Castagno, 2011). There is also a gap in higher education enrollment and achievement for students with the total number in degree-granting institutions at 17,565,300, compare that to 76,500 who identify their race as American Indian/Alaska Native, that is only 1% (National Center for Education, 2011).

The questions arise when finding tropes in film that take Native American likeness to fit the stereotype for public viewing, “when it comes to identity development for Native Americans who live on reservations, it is mostly or completely Indigenous” (Horse, 2005). Filmmakers need to make a commitment to develop a framework that provides the understanding of racial identity based on collective and individual experiences (Winters, 2012). *Dances with Wolves* suggests evidence of the “White Savior” and the Noble Savage from the character of Lt. Dunbar, played by Kevin Costner, with little exception to Natives as being the Noble Indian. Costner’s character is seen throughout the film as an evolving character, from regiment to natural state of mind. The reader sees this from his “suicide mission” at the beginning of the film to his siding with the Lakota.

CHAPTER TWO

Indian Maiden Trope: Sexualized Maiden from the 1950s to the 1990s

The 1990s wanted to “set the record straight” by utilizing multiculturalism, and Hollywood filmmakers were beginning to see box office hits with titles such as *Thunderheart*, *Legends of the Fall*, and *Dances with Wolves*. “The Indian Maiden has been political activists, avenging ghosts, and mixed-blood Princesses, but how is the Native American woman an effective reactionary, or a traditionalist, with contradicting images” (Marubbio, 2006)? The revisionist disillusion creates a mythical frontier by societal standards and White-washed history from Canadian and American filmmakers. During the reign of the *Celluloid Indian* and in this chapter, the *Celluloid Maiden*, contrasts with the filmmaker’s narrative ideology. The *Celluloid Indian* is an informative and thought-provoking survey of the complex history of Native American representations in American films (Erben, 2001). *Celluloid Maiden* is a “paradoxical”, something that has two meanings but are contradictions, a complex symbol that manifests somewhat differently during each decade of American film, a cultural marker and stereotype for playing out whatever the nation’s cultural tensions are at the time (Marubbio, 2009). The early 1990s witnessed the end of the “cold war, the fall of the Soviet system, the ending of the Republican presidential reign, and an increase in the U.S. imperial behavior overseas” (Marubbio, 2006). In the early nineties, Native Americans and those of European descent mobilized against the celebrations of Columbus. The *Celluloid Maiden* films record this effect in debate and tensions that rose between the positive and negative. This became apparent in the film *Dances with Wolves*, where romanticizing the “Indian” remains a hallmark in cinema, if not as a person, then as the idea of becoming “Indian” (Marubbio, 2006).

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In the '50s and '60s, four films from Marubbio's book, *Killing the Indian Maiden: Images of Native American Women in Film* (2006), discusses thirty-four Hollywood films from the silent period to the present. In chapter four, *The Sexualized Maiden of the 1950s and 1960s*, there are two figures from the 1940s Sexualized Maiden: the femme fatale and the wanton "squaw." Spanning 20 years and various genres from the 1950s and 1960s, the Native femme fatale, who poses a hidden threat to White society, and the fallen Princess, who informs the character's place and role in the film and in societal hierarchy portrayed in films, is based off "sexual racism." Native women's roles were diverse in the tribes of North America; there was no universal standard regarding their status, and in many cultures, it was the women in tribes that held the right to own and control property. Among both matrilineal and patrilineal tribes, it is not uncommon to find "women warriors, stateswomen, chiefs, religious leaders, medicine women, or a shaman(ka)" (Oshana, 1982). It is of no coincidence that filmmakers produce women warriors of different races except Indigenous to North America; from entertainment, i.e., an Irish publication of entertainment, made a publication of *12 Warrior Women in Movie History*, yet there are no Native American actors.

Women warriors were found among many tribes, and the most notable of these women were found among the war-oriented Plains tribes: Crow (Apsaaloke or Absaroke), Blackfeet (Siksika Nation, Kainai or Blood Nation, Pikanii or Peigan Nation, and the Blackfeet Nation), Sioux, which is not the actual tribal name of Lakotas or Dakotas, but the entertainment website has omitted anyone of Indigenous descent. The twelfth spot is Scarlett Johansson for *Captain America and the Winter Soldier*, and the first is Sigourney Weaver for *Aliens*. The racial groups in this selection are Asians and Black; the Black actress Grace Jones was at the ninth spot for 'A View to a Kill' (Lloyd, 2020). Among specific Women Warriors are Yellow-head Woman of the

Cheyenne, who took part in a battle between the Cheyenne and Shoshoni in 1868. Other Magpie of the Crow was involved in one of the most famous confrontations, the Battle of the Rosebud, between the Crow allied with General Crook against the Sioux and Cheyenne. Then there was Running Eagle of the Blackfoot, who lost her husband when she was young and began her military career to avenge his death (Oshana, 1982).

From these Indigenous women of history, filmmakers could take their bravery and integrity when producing a movie, but it is increasingly obvious that the omission of Native American actresses in Hollywood seems to be agreeable with filmmakers. There is a systemic racism running through Hollywood's backlog and this chapter over "Indian Maiden's" will investigate the reasons behind the "Hollywood Maiden".

Indian Maiden Analysis using Marubbio's Thesis

Whiteness and the willingness to assimilate into western European culture clashes with deeply ingrained racism and results in violence enacted on women's bodies in a way that underscores the racial and ideological tensions of 1950s America (Marubbio, 2006). Whether a Native American woman is from an urban area or from a reservation, she is still seen as the Celluloid Princess and is immediately placed within a cultural, historical, and racial framework by a stranger. People are becoming more aware of political correctness that extends to racial identity, which leads the American perspective into not referring to Natives as "Indians" or in some cases "American Indian." Terminology depends on a person's identity and how they self-identify. Their identities can be distinguished as Indian, American Indian, Native American, Native, First Nations, Indigenous, or simply what their clan is; not as someone the U.S. government wants to name that fits their idea of who Native people should be identified as.

This is highly debatable in terms of European-Americans who declared North America as the United States to what North American tribes should be called. Whenever approached on this subject, if the person knows of that member's tribe, they use their tribal name. To reference back to the Celluloid Princess when using White women to portray Native women is a film from 1950:

The girl inside the wickiup is in the holiest time of her life. For these four days she becomes White-Painted Lady, Mother of Life...for this night only this girl is even more holy than most, maybe, because she has been away from us for a very long time. She is very old for this ceremony; it is very special.

This quote comes from a scene in *Broken Arrow* (1950) that depicts the audience's first encounter with the exceptional "Indian" woman who will marry Jeffords and bridge the tension between his [non-Native] culture and her [Indian] culture. Not only does the quote present the 1950s paradigm of the Celluloid Indian Princess, but she symbolizes the best of her "Indian" culture and the possibility of assimilation into Western European culture (Marubbio, 2006). It is the symbolism of having a White colonizer and a darker-skinned colonized cross paths; it is seen as cultural texts of an era, which are those objects, actions, and behaviors that reveal cultural meanings, which someone can take from a film to detect the cultural framework or text. The Celluloid Princess figure has an element between a liberal, utopian, mixed-race national image and the reality of cultural violence against those who are racially and culturally different from a national White norm (Marubbio & Du Gay, 2006 & 1997).

The figures that are affiliated with the "Indian Maiden" trope are "Indian Princess", "Celluloid Maiden", and the "Sexualized Maiden". In the 1990s, "Celluloid Maiden" characters revealed a labeled shift in their uses of the figure. The definition of maiden means a woman who

is unmarried, a girl, or a young woman. Pairing the term “Indian”, “Sexualized”, and “Celluloid” advocates toward a perverse way of looking at a woman. Bedard’s character in *Naturally Native*, Joannelle NaDiné Romero in *Powwow Highway*, and again Bedard in *Smoke Signals* identifies as some type of Maiden. Bedard has utilized her roles because of her race and from voicing Pocahontas gives the incentive from filmmakers to create more characters like her.

Broken Arrow was hailed by many critics as a breakthrough, which was telling that the 1950s was a beginning of a new era of realistic portrayals of [Native]-White relations on film (Oshana, 1981). The 1960s brought the civil rights movement, with another rise in Native American film, and there was a change in attitudes against the Natives that can be considered problematic for their identities. The “Declaration of Indian Purpose” in June of 1961 was helpful in mobilizing a generation of Native American activists, as more than 500 Native Americans from more than 90 tribes participated. This was in support of the right of a tribal community to maintain itself and develop with government money and assistance (Native American Almanac, 2017). The National Indian Youth Council was founded in 1961 and the American Indian Movement (AIM) was founded in 1968; both were movements and foundations that showed the resistance Natives had against the government and this activism continued in the 1970s and into the 21st century.

Natives were beginning to take control of their own future in the 1960s from a time that hosted tumultuous and divisive problems marked by the civil rights movement, the Vietnam War, antiwar protests, political assassinations and the prominent generation gap called “Generation X” (a generation born mid-1960s to early-1980s) (Gallup, 2019). The 1960s were sociologically diverse in a movement in rejection of the previous generation and moving forward in the equality of everyone regardless of race, class, and gender; this decade is referred to as the

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Civil Rights Era. The Black Panthers (1966) had the goal of ending police brutality. The Congress of Racial Equality (CORE) was founded in 1942, but CORE broadened its reach in 1961 by sending racially mixed groups of passengers on Freedom Rides to desegregate interstate buses. Aside from the AIM and National Indian Youth Council, there was a group of feminists that asserted their rights and strove for equality for themselves and others. The National Organization for Women (NOW) was part of a section in Title VII for the Civil Rights Act of 1964 that prohibited discrimination in employment based on gender (PBS & Khan Academy, ac. 2021).

To address the large gap of diversity in Hollywood is to first search with the keywords “*lead protagonist Native American female films.*” The 1998 film, *Naturally Native*, is among the first results. Results from keywords “*Native American lead female films*” does not disappoint, with a webpage dedicated to Women Make Movies (WMM) that viewers can find by subject matter and Native American is one of the subjects. Viewing the webpage brought several results that include *Sister’s Rising* (2020), *Conscience Point* (2019), and *Honey Moccasin* (1999), but there is still skepticism regarding only 22 results for the “Native American” subject. When clicking on “Feminism,” it has at least one film, *Without a Whisper* (2019) that is Native American and with 42 titles. However, WMM has been recognizing women filmmakers and their stories for over 45 years so it bears repeating that Women Warrior stories in films are exigencies for WMM (WMM, ac. 2021). There is an urgency when talking about storytellers to be placed in Hollywood, so the question to ask about WMM is why are there not enough Native women filmmakers? Women filmmakers in general do not see enough reward when it comes to their achievements and that suggests misogyny within that hemisphere of film and directing.

In 2010 Kathryn Bigelow became the first female director to win an Oscar for her movie, *The Hurt Locker*. Women and Hollywood, a foundation, began to educate, advocate, and agitate for gender diversity and inclusion within Hollywood and the global film industry, a site founded in 2007 by Melissa Silverstein (Women and Hollywood, ac. 2021). More than 10 years after such a historical and monumental win the recognition is beginning to pay off. “For the first time, two women are nominated for the top Directors Guild of America award” is a headline from March 10, 2021. This is coming after two consecutive years in which women were excluded from the feature film category completely; the nominees included Chloe Zhao (*Nomadland*) and Emerald Fennell (*Promising Young Woman*) (LA Times, 2021). Zhao ultimately won, becoming only the second woman (and first woman of color) to receive that honor

An article from *Indian Country Today* (ICT), “New Indigenous films by and about Native Women,” reported on the nonprofit WMM on the film *Without a Whisper*, by filmmaker Katsitsionni Fox from the Mohawk tribe:

It was important for me to make this film to honor my grandmothers that inspired a movement and were never acknowledged. It is time for Indigenous filmmakers to share our stories and break through the silence and the stereotypes. In my films, I focus on the resilience and the wisdom of our women (ICT, 2020).

There was resilience among Native women from the stigma of the “Celluloid Indian Princess”, an iconographic figure in the form of Broken Arrow’s Sonseeahray. The film was suggestive as the “innate Whiteness”, a desire for her to assimilate into western European culture, and this would have been acceptable as someone to be included into the American nation. Given the vitality to audience acceptance of themes for miscegenation and cultural

similarity, it was the qualities of goodness and innocence found in the silent-period figures but erasing the hint of “sexual racism” that was attached to her race (Marubbio, 2006).

However, in the 1990s “the celluloid ‘Indian’ was back in the saddle, literally. Multiculturalism became one of the buzzwords of the nineties, and Hollywood filmmakers were ready to be more accurate than past films.” (Jacquelyn Kilpatrick, ac. 2021) One could argue that to compare the ‘90s to the ‘50s representation is a huge leap in the right direction, but it still needs to be recognized and progressive. Tantoo Cardinal is a household name for Native women of the eighties and nineties, with films like *Smoke Signals* (1998), *Dances with Wolves* (1990), *War Party* (1988), and *Legends of the Fall* (1994), among others. According to Marubbio’s article in chronological order, the 1990s Celluloid Maiden characters reveals the activist, the ghost, the healer, and the martyr. *Legends of the Fall* confines the “Celluloid Maiden” to an extremely small though significant lens, where the “Celluloid Princess’s” narrative centers on the White hero (Marubbio, 2006).

In the film, Cardinal is a Sexualized Maiden with her mixed heritage. Her mixed-blood status diminishes her persona to that of “sexual racism” and no longer the perceived “Princess” that is grossly exaggerated throughout almost all Native films. The character Tristan is set up by the film’s coupling of him with Native America, and the wilderness references that Hollywood is seen trending in the 1970s in Celluloid Maiden films (Marubbio, 2006). This film is seen as an “American Adam and Native American Eve” through Tristan and Isabel Two’s union (Isabel Two is Tristan’s betrothed), just like the label for *Dances with Wolves* as “Dances with Avatar” through colonial invasion by “heroes” trying to “save” Indigenous people from annihilation.

The film *Smoke Signals* and *Naturally Native* are both Native-produced, Native-written, and Native-centered, and this includes the films *Powwow Highway* and *Dance Me Outside*; all

films are highlighted for the racial realities in contemporary communities (Marubbio, 2006). In *Smoke Signals*, female actors Bedard and Cardinal are noticed by their presence. Bedard's character, Suzy Song, is the female companion of Arnold Joseph, who is Victor's father. Arnold left his family by being chased off the property by Victor's mother, Arlene Joseph, played by Cardinal. The film is based on a male narrative from the author Sherman Alexie, a Spokane Coeur d'Alene-American novelist and who draws from personal experience from his stay on the Spokane Indian Reservation (Melton, "Native American Women Exiled in Hollywood as Misrepresented Indian Maidens", Summer 2020).

The issues that present themselves as stereotypes are about the female characters, played by Bedard and Cardinal. These women have no more than 10 minutes of screen time, nor do their lives or opinions become independent of their male counterparts; they only serve as references to men's lives. These scenes from the women are very short and are considered background props (Beadling, 2016). One other film that was written, produced, and centered around Native women is *Naturally Native* (1998). This film came out the same year as *Smoke Signals*, since *Naturally Native* did not receive the same viewing hits as *Smoke Signals*, Native women are still seen as an afterthought. A case in point surfaces in the mainstream recognition of Bedard's voicing the character Pocahontas in Disney's 1995 release, as a Princess figure in roles that do not utilize the figure, like in *Smoke Signals* (Marubbio, 2006).

Bedard's Princess figure is a metaphorical connection to Pocahontas because of the young and beautiful depiction and she reenacts this conflict in *Naturally Native* as the youngest of three sisters. Bedard also evokes this trope when she is teased by her older sisters for acting the part; she confronts the racism when a date calls her an "Indian Princess," and her attack

leaves her traumatized in a hospital from an attempted rape. This film demands the attention of the viewer to question the violence behind the Celluloid Maiden figure (Marubbio, 2006).

The film, *Powwow Highway*, gives an introduction of trauma as an alternative to death. A single mother raising two mixed-race children, played by Joannelle NaDiné Romero, is accused of drug running and gets sent to jail. This is another indication for connecting this character to the “Sexualized Maiden” figure; however, she is also a “Celluloid Princess” by her integrity, virtue, and dedication to her children. There is foreshadowing by the physical and psychological trauma she experiences of future Princess types: Pocahontas from Disney is left alone after her White lover leaves, and as discussed above, Bedard’s *Naturally Native* character is hospitalized. Replacing death with trauma distributes the racist and colonialist implications associated with the “Celluloid Maiden” figure, but it does not erase them (Marubbio, 2006).

There has always been a common perpetrator in identifying strangers or acquaintances when finding an intimate partner or other known persons, and strangers to commit sexual violence against Native women is almost in equal proportions (Olive, 2015). This statement is explicitly the reason most Native women actors are conveyed as nothing more than a maiden. Another reason rape, assault, and misrepresentation are so prevalent in 20th and 21st century is due to actual cases of Native women who have a higher case of experiencing a sexual assault or being raped. The TV show *Longmire* (2012-2017) has an episode of a rape that happened to a Native girl on the Cheyenne reservation by a White stranger, with no repercussions for the White man. Within this episode, the tribal officer, played by Zahn McClarnon (Hunkpapa and Sihasapa Lakota), says to the Sheriff that tribal officers cannot arrest the perpetrator because he is non-Native (Melton, “Native American Women Exiled in Hollywood as Misrepresented Indian Maidens”, Summer 2020).

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This episode is precisely why in recent years Native filmmakers are more aware of rape and sexual assault on Indian reservations and they want to show their viewers to spread awareness. The data and reports from the Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA), and in the case of Leslie Ironroad from the Standing Rock Sioux Reservation, indicated that police never followed through with investigating the men who had raped her. The report was never followed through due to an account of her not reporting the incident, it is only federal prosecutors that take cases where the victim has confessed to being raped (Quasius, 2009). Rape and assault occur and has increased as some scholars have suggested with new gambling and tourism attractions that have non-Natives in close proximities with Native women who live on reservations (Quasius, 2009).

The Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women (MMIW) is a recent movement that was founded in winter of 2018 to combat trafficking, abduction and murder of Native women statewide (WPR, 2020). This was a task force that began in Wisconsin but has become a global organization to examine root causes, systemic problems, and potential solutions to violence against Indigenous women and girls and that also includes the two-spirit community (WILDER, ac. 2021). From a source by the Cultural Survival, Jody Voice, “went from collecting names for a small, local vigil, to...leading off the Dallas Women’s March.” The reason behind so many cases is due to “remote areas where transient workers- oil workers- live in temporary housing units called “man camps” on or near Tribal lands” (Cultural Survival, 2020). A term has been circulating that is all too common with missing women and that is “runaways always come back.” In 2016, the National Crime Information Center discovered 5,712 reports of missing American Indian and Alaska Native women and girls. According to Shannon Holsey, president of the Stockbridge Munsee Community and Great Lakes Inter-Tribal Council said in a statement:

Addressing the MMIW crisis requires acknowledging that the crisis exists, understanding the deep and intricate roots underlying the crisis, providing justice to the missing and murdered and to protecting Native women and girls. (WPR, 2020).

An important and urgent call to action from the growing movement has come into recent news with the Elizabeth Smart Foundation. According to St. George News, Fox 13 Now reports that the group MMIW USA has stated about the Elizabeth Smart Foundation teaming up with their cause as excited; however, the MMIW organization has recanted their statement since the accusations of exploiting MMIW that would serve the Smart foundation to gain their own interests (STG, 2021). In a Facebook post from MMIW USA issued a warning to their supporters:

We were approached by this organization to “collaborate” with them to “find all women.” At first, of course we were excited that our Anglo counterparts were showing an interest in aiding us. Our team initially spoke with a representative of their organization [to] get a feel for what they were trying to accomplish. Unfortunately, we were greeted with a condescending tone from a man who was culturally insensitive. In short, it seemed that their interest in helping us was grounded in a desire to self-promote and from a woman who had little knowledge of the #MMIW crisis; and displayed no interest in learning more about our struggle when it comes to finding and getting justice for our people (MMIW USA, 2021).

Despite the disagreement between the two organizations, the Smart foundation explained they approached MMIW USA and several organizations to help in providing content and the people who could tell their story (STG, 2021). The shows, films, and cases arise from systemic

racism to the “Indian Maiden”, which has caused mental health problems, alcohol and drug abuse, suicides, and much more.

Conclusion

“Setting the record straight” has come a long way for racial groups in Hollywood, yet it always turns out the same. *Smoke Signals* is not necessarily a female-driven film; it still lacked the Native woman figure as progressive even if in a true representation of that storyline. *Legends of the Fall*, according to *the Baltimore Sun*, “is narrated in bogus Native-American speak, “Tonto Talk”, to give it a dimension of poetic drivel that is quite enough, thank you” (*Baltimore Sun*, 1995). *Dances with Wolves* was a blockbuster hit with significance because it marked “one of the more sympathetic portraits of Native American life ever shown in American cinema and introduced the American public to Lakota (Sioux) folklore, traditions and language” (National Film Registry, ac. 2021).

Considering the audience may not understand the Oglala Lakota language, Natives who could tell the difference between the male and female dialect. This may be a small inconvenience, but it was for a nice change when portraying Native actors with their home language. From this chapter, the greatest inconvenience is from the female perspective of not seeing themselves on the big screen. According to Ivica Radman with her thesis *Native American Stereotypes in Film and Popular Culture*, finds that “Hollywood keeps things interesting and to grab the audience’s attention, they often must put love stories in for good measure” (Radman, 2013). The idea of Lt. Dunbar and Stands with Fist was seen with criticism at the movie’s release: “This brought about much criticism at the release of the film as some felt there was a degree of racism involved and in fact this is a weak point in the script. While this could have

theoretically occurred, it is certainly less likely than Dunbar meeting a Native American woman and falling in love” (“Alan’s Reviews”, ac. 2021).

When this film portrays the “Indian Maiden” with scrutiny such as this, there is only the motivation on improving standards about racism in the film industry. Although this is in 1990, it proves the point of acknowledging the purpose of making this movie. The director, writer, and producer set out to accomplish a “setting the record straight” like no other film on Native Americans, but it was not at its best in today’s standards. There are still improvements to be made when talking about the “White Savior” and “Indian” tropes.

CHAPTER THREE

“Do you Know What Tonto Means in Spanish?”: Analyzing Tonto Talk in Film

How accurate are speaking roles in films that depict Native Americans as unintelligent sidekicks? *The Lone Ranger* from the 1949 film and TV show starring Jay Silverheels, who was the son of a Canadian Mohawk tribal chief, appears to speak in stereotypical “Pidgin English.” His dialect in the film seems to be broken with his lines of “You Kemo Sabe. Me Tonto. Me take care of you.” Tonto is the interpreter and faithful companion who helps the White man fight the bad guys, all while speaking “Tonto Talk”. Disney recently came out with its version in 2013 that starred Johnny Depp. The new movie still plays with old Hollywood tropes of Native Americans (NPR, 2013).

According to Depp, the reruns of the TV series were for pure entertainment, but he knew that something was wrong with seeing Silverheels playing the sidekick. An excerpt from the Disney adaptation shows Depp adorned with a dead black crow, headband and face paint, and considering Depp’s character Tonto, would need to go “against the grain of what had been done before, [he] knew it would require a very, very important iconic look” (NPR, 2013). Depp was digging up old tropes that have not been portrayed in recent years; there was another incident when Depp was being insensitive to Indigenous culture in a French cologne ad titled “Sauvage,” which translates to “wild.” Regardless of what the word translates to, it looks nearly-identical to the word “savage,” and in most cases from historical literature in dime novels is another word to describe someone as such, people took offense. Shuga Cain, a contestant on season 11 of *RuPaul’s Drag Race*, tweeted, “I cannot with @Dior exploiting native culture for their fragrance #sauvage...and yes that is SAVAGE! You mean to tell me that NOT ONE person in your company saw this as an issue through the tiresome ideation process?!?” Hanay Geiogamah, a

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UCLA professor from the Kiowa tribe, stated, “it’s an arrogant appropriation of imagery that is unimaginatively executed. What offends me is that they so casually appropriate imagery like that and blend it together for their own purposes” (*Washington Post*, 2019). The fashion brand who had the original concept in the ad campaign, titled “*We Are the Land*,” as “the adventure of a man who claims his rock soul and connects with his deeper nature,” (*Hollywood Reporter*, 2019) is somewhat complacent and ignorant. In the photo from Dior, it shows Depp leaning back on his heels looking into the abyss of the canyons in front of a fire, hands displayed open and palm resting on his knees. “SAUVAGE Dior” titled above a tribal symbol and “WE ARE THE LAND,” “THE NEW FILM,” sits aside Depp with a background of the Canyonlands, the ancestral land of the Utes, Apaches (Ndee, Inday and/or Abachi, Abaachi from their own orthographies) and the Navajo (Diné) people to allow for “authentic inclusion of Native American cultures” (*Hollywood Reporter*, 2019). These details appear to be fishing, meaning the director, Jean-Baptiste Mondino had to have an idea of how this would turn out in favor for Native people. It was not for “celebrating diversity” but in favor of banning stereotypical imagery and appropriation.

Depp’s depiction from *The Lone Ranger* is from an image of a Native American in a painting by Kirby Sattler, who is non-Native, suggesting more involvement that is desperately needed in Hollywood by Native actors and not their White replacements. It was creating the look of Tonto that Depp found a painting of a Native American warrior with stripes down his face. His makeup artist helped Depp put together a look like that of Sattler’s painting. Depp’s makeup artist and he went into Peter Mountain to take photographs when Depp saw the effect of seeing “[Tonto] and now he needs to be brought to life” (ARC, ac. 2021). Issues arose when getting into Depp’s lineage over his Native American ancestry:

I guess I have some Native American (in me) somewhere down the line. My great grandmother was quite a bit of Native American, she grew up Cherokee or maybe Creek Indian. Makes sense in terms of coming from Kentucky, which is rife with Cherokee and Creek... If you find out you've got Native American blood, which a lot of people do, is you think about where it comes from and go back and read the great books...I'm the product of some horrific rape. I wanted to maybe give some hope to kids on the reservations. They're living without running water and seeing problems with drugs and booze. I wanted to be able to show these kids, 'F**k that! You're still warriors, man' (Depp, ac. 2021).

Depp likely was being genuine; however, there are Native people to look up to for kids on reservations and anywhere else who do not seem to filter through Depp's perception. Examples include Wes Studi winning an Oscar for an honorary Academy Award in 2019, Amber Midthunder (Fort Peck Lakota and daughter of actor David Midthunder) playing Rosa in the hit TV show *Roswell, New Mexico*; *Wild Indian* (2021), a new film that stars Michael Greyeyes (Canadian Plains Cree) and Chaske Spencer (Fort Peck Assiniboine and Lakota). The year of Wes Studi winning an Oscar was the same year that *Blood Quantum* came out, starring Michael Greyeyes. The same actor also appeared in *Woman Walks Ahead* (2017) and starred in *Dance Me Outside*, played the infamous Sitting Bull alongside Jessica Chastain. If viewers are worried about wanting movies from a younger perspective, a Canadian-based film, *The Lesser Blessed* (2012), starring Kiowa Gordon (Hualapai Nation), Tamara Podemski (Anishinaabe), Benjamin Bratt (Peruvian Quechua), and Chloe Rose is a drama that is centered around a First Nations (Joel Evans) student trying to find his way in the modern world with difficulty in love interests (IMDB, ac. 2021).

The Lesser Blessed is just one title geared toward a younger audience that has been mentioned thus far; there are more, and there will be more to come. The problem is they are not “mainstream” like films such as *Armageddon* (1998), *Dances with Wolves* (1990), *Avatar* (2009), *The Shawshank Redemption* (1994), *Goodfellas* (1990), *Fried Green Tomatoes* (1991), *The Godfather* (1972), *Pulp Fiction* (1994), *The Lord of the Rings* trilogies (2001-2003), the *Harry Potter* series (2001-2011) , and so much more. What they do not hear are titles like *Wild Indian*, which is progressive and mainstream, just not by Hollywood standards. Relevant to Depp’s blockbuster hits, he can utilize his platform to show appreciation not appropriation with Native American characters. Whether it be in a cologne ad or a film, Depp and actors who are not Native need to understand that Natives have what it takes to portray themselves. Depp portraying Tonto is “race-swapping”, which is “a racial transformation through...sprayed-on color, wigs, contact lenses and other makeup tricks” (New York Times, 2006).

There are three keywords when talking about a person portraying a different race: “whitewashing” is “a racist practice of removing visible racial groups in popular media by making their skin appear lighter, or even replacing them altogether with white actors” (Nelson, 2016). “Race-bending” is when “a media content creator has changed the race or ethnicity of a character,” this is according to “racebending.com that established to the casting of *Avatar: The Last Airbender*’s live action adaptation” (Medium, 2016). Finally, the term “erasure” is what “whitewashing” is defined as, this terminology has become more apparent in recent years and the term “erasure” in media is “the act or instance of erasing” (Merriam-Webster, ac. 2021). It is not only in politics of “glossing over vices, crimes or scandals or to exonerate by means of a perfunctory investigation or through biased presentation of data” (Merriam-Webster, ac. 2021). This is a verbose way of stating media bias in representation is an issue, which is what the next section delineates.

Behind the Language and Behind the Acting

First, English is a foreign language, since it is European and comes from England. How does an American speak and what is “American English”? According to an article over “Speaking American” with the tag “Tonto Talk”, “to speak American is the opposite of speaking Spanish” (“Speaking American”, ac. 2021), and “to *be* American is the same as to *speak* American.” Laura Amico, a teacher in the cliffside Park school district in New Jersey, states this opposition to how American’s feel is the original national spoken language. “To speak American is to speak English, given that the language was not spoken on the North American continent until the 17th century, preceded by many Native American languages and, ironically, Spanish. The simplest definition, “American English” is not a homogenous dialect either” (“Speaking American”, ac. 2021).

Due to the association of Shakespeare with a certain English accent, “[it] has the effect of making works less accessible than they might have been, a more “rural” accent like Irish and West Country, which designates as shorthand for stupidity in common with American southern dialect, has a liberating effect on Shakespearian performances” (“Speaking American”, ac. 2021). David Crystal, author of *Pronouncing Shakespeare: The Globe Experiment* (2005), was frequently asked one question: “How do we know? How do we know what Shakespeare’s English sounded like?” When discussing the effects of dialect in *Romeo and Juliet*, Crystal suggests that original pronunciation (OP)/Early Modern English (EME), would not sound like any modern accent but would have the pronunciation of “rs” in common with rural accents, like in Ireland and the West Country (Somerset) (“Speaking American”, ac. 2021). Even if sounding “strange” at first, it suggests that Shakespeare can/should be more accessible to a wider audience.

Trying to understand “American English” to its opposition of British English can be said of watching movies that utilize “Tonto Talk”. Most Native American actors are portraying characters in another form of what is called “Pidgin English”, while their White counterparts speak English and [an Indigenous language] (or use sign language) to communicate. Native actor Jay Tavare (mixed-race) points out, “early Hollywood was not concerned with accuracy in portraying indigenous languages. *Dances with Wolves* was praised for its accurate portrayal of Lakota culture, including the Lakota dialogue which was linguistically imprecise by having the language teacher speak in the feminine form and not the male form” (“Speaking American”, ac. 2021).

Tavare, who is a contributor to Huffington Post, writes about one of the *Longmire* episodes, “Dogs, Horses, and Indians.” This title is very significant and ominous because of the history of blood quantum with Natives; there are two other ways of wanting to know how “full-blooded” someone is to signify their worth, and those are with dogs and horses. This is according to the U.S. government when categorizing to a pedigree, and it is usually “Indian Nations who make the decision on enrollment based on their percentage of Indian blood, whether they are Cheyenne, Lakota, Apache, or a member of another tribe” (Tavare, 2017). According to Tavare from his post, “blood quantum can be politically motivated with ranks in tribes to have more casino money stay in or the government benefits from keeping the Indian nations in check” (Tavare, 2017).

In another post of Tavare’s titled *Hollywood Indians*, states “American Indians were depicted as nothing more than bronzed, half-clothed savages, sporting the stereotypical double braids, screaming Ayyyyyaaaaayayaaaaaa as they got shot off their horses by the White heroes” (Tavare, 2018). In his article, he references Silverheels, Chief Dan George, and Will Sampson. In

Sampson's 1975 performance in *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest*, it "was a pivotal role for Sampson in his emoting capabilities while having almost no lines." The Hollywood press explained why Sampson was overlooked for an Academy Award nomination, with one director quoted as asking, "Why should an Indian receive an award for playing an Indian?" (Tavare, 2018).

That type of discrimination is one of the many reasons Native actors were not taken seriously in their acting careers, and among one of the prominent ways to have Hollywood be a supremacy that is a racist systemic industry, they did not want Indigenous people. Depp's role as Tonto as a character who is described as a "full-blooded Comanche" is unfortunate in that an affluent White actor is "playing a disenfranchised Native American who appears to be literally whitewashed" (Agnew, 2013). The next section will further investigate the "Tonto Talk" trope in *The Lone Ranger* and *Dances with Wolves* with other references.

"Justice is What I seek, Kemosabe"

Since 1933, *The Lone Ranger* has been a huge success with people who inspired to be actors because of the Lone Ranger character. Michael Caine from *The Dark Knight* (2008) was convinced about his future when "the first actor [he] ever saw was *The Lone Ranger*. [Caine] thought, that's what [he wants] to do" ("The Origin of the Lone Ranger", 2015). When the hit series reached movie form in 1956, it was Silverheels and Clayton Moore as the Lone Ranger that had audiences excited for the West in American history. From the stories about the Lone Ranger, its origin, and how accurate the culture's rendition is will show empirical data of "Tonto Talk" ("The Origin of the Lone Ranger", 2015).

Moore's character, the Lone Ranger, was written by Fran Striker, an American writer for radio and comics. In 1933, Striker paired with Detroit's AM station WXYZ to make a radio

show, it was a total success and grew to be very popular in the entertainment industry (“The Origin of the Lone Ranger”, 2015). “The Lone Ranger was one of six Texas Rangers (one being his older brother) who were ambushed in Bryant’s Gap canyon by Butch Cavendish and his gang of outlaws” (“The Origin of the Lone Ranger”, 2015). It was not until Silverheels, Tonto, who came through the canyons to find Reid (Lone Ranger’s character name) barely hanging on to life, that the outlaws go unnoticed. Reid takes his brother’s vest (died in the ambush) to honor his memory to makeshift a mask to “hide” his identity. “Tonto then dubs Reid “Kemosabe”, which means “trusty scout” in Tonto’s native tongue” (“The Origin of the Lone Ranger”, 2015).

“Kemosabe”, according to a word-detective (WD) blog referencing this name from the New York Public Library Book of Answers (NYPL), is known for the meaning of “faithful friend” and not “trusty scout”. There may be some different interpretations depending on location, however, the “NYPL states from the WD blog that “Kemosabe” is an actual word in two Native American languages, but WD is unsure of where NYPL is referencing this word. In Apache, it means “white shirt” and in Navajo (Diné), it translates to “soggy shrub.” Of course, Tonto being the faithful friend to the Ranger suggests a hidden meaning of “tonto” translating in Spanish to the word “stupid”, which is accurate from the Cambridge Spanish-English dictionary with words translated to “silly” or “foolish” (“The Origin of the Lone Ranger” & Cambridge, 2015 & ac. 2021).

In a *New York Times* (NYT) article from 1993, “the Navajo (Pronounced din-EH) Nation, the largest Indian tribe in the U.S., is considering a proposal to go back to its original name, Diné, which means “the people” (NYT, “Navajos Weigh Return to Old Name: Diné”, 1993). People who opposed this decision considered the expense of changing legal documents, stationary, and the tribal seal as well as the confusion after using the name “Navajo” after 300

years. Like most Natives who oppose using the name Navajo is in support of having the name change because of the name being given to the tribe by outsiders.

At the time of considering a name change, Duane Beyal, the assistant to Peterson Zah, the Navajo Tribal President stated: "...we use the name outsiders gave us or the name the Great Spirit gave us." "Diné ...is an Athapascan word for man but has been translated as 'the people' by the Navajos, who routinely use it to refer to themselves and their language" (NYT, "Navajos Weigh Return to Old Name: Diné", 1993). In 2017, the Diné College put out a policy statement for an initial survey over the "legislation would amend the Navajo Nation Code to change the name of the "Navajo Tribe" to "Diné Nation" (Diné College, 2017). There were some issues that were in favor of a name change and "cited self-identification as the reason" or the people who opposed a name change was the expenses and the "interpretation of "Diné" as "male" (Diné College, 2017). There were 195 surveys by three Diné campus sites, which allowed two questions to be asked: "Should the Navajo Nation change its name from Navajo Nation to Diné Nation" and "Why or Why not?" (Diné College, 2017). The results are below:

- Overall:
 - **65%** Support the name change, **33%** do not, and **3%** did not answer"
- Support of name change:
 - **31%** of those who support the name change stated that "Diné is our traditional name," **32%** stated that the "Navajo name was given to us by non-Navajos," **17%** stated that their language is how they identify with themselves, **11%** stated "it sounded more indigenous," **4%** stated that "it invokes stronger nationalism, and **4%** stated that "it was more representative of the people.

- No support of name change:
 - **41%** [of those who] did not support name change, stated “N/A”, **13%** stated “that Navajo sounds better,” **11%** stated that “it’s been like that for years,” **9%** stated that “Diné” translates to “men”, **6%** stated “it would be too expensive to change name,” **5%** stated that Navajo is comprehensible, **1%** stated Diné does not represent their people, and **1%** stated “the term “Diné” was only meant for Diné people to know.

The status of the Navajo Nation does not come without its dilemmas that have the non-Native American public’s attention. Their history of name change only highlights their self-identification with wanting to be identified not by invaders, but by their own people. This identity and language history correlate with having racist tendencies within Hollywood with an excerpt from *Young Guns* (1988):

Charles ‘Charley’ Bowdre: Hey, Chavez, how come they ain’t killing us?

Dirty Steve Stephens: Because we’re in the spirit world, asshole. They can’t see us.

And in a different scene between Chavez and Billy the Kid:

Billy the Kid: But if you wanna run go ahead. Just go run on ahead. Bye. You got no loyalty, Navajo.

Dirty Steve Stephens: Navajo.

The racist tone from both Billy the Kid and Dirty Steve Stephens suggests the status of Chavez as being just another Navajo who has no concrete thought. However, in a previous scene this is the complete opposite when Chavez speaks of his mother, sisters, and his tribe at Red Sand Creek massacre. The reason this chapter goes into the statistics of name changes, race-swapping, and films that are about contemporary Natives is due to the systemic racism that

Hollywood still to this day profits from. This chapter will continue with empirical data from *The Lone Ranger* and *Dances with Wolves* for evidence of using “Tonto Talk”.

Tonto Talk in *The Lone Ranger* and *Dances with Wolves*

The Lone Ranger, considering its history since the 1930s, shows lines from the 1956 film that indicate racist talk: “Tonto: *Um, that right, Kemosabe.* The Lone Ranger: *Only you, Tonto, know I’m alive. To the world, I’ll [be] buried here beside my brother and my friends...forever.* Tonto: *You are alone now. Last man. You are lone ranger*” (IMDB, “The Lone Ranger Jay Silverheels: Tonto” ac. 2021). It is no wonder why the term that is derogatory for Natives is called “Tonto Talk”, the origin story is a character from the 1950s. In the Disney version from 2013, characters stay the same. Dan Reid: *What’s your crime boy?* Tonto: *Indian!* John Reid: *Where did you get that?* Tonto: *Make trade.* John Reid: *With a dead man?* Tonto: *Hard bargain* (IMDB, “The Lone Ranger Quotes”, 2013). What the audience hears are no articles (like *the, a, or an*) being used, as if Tonto can only use adjectives and nouns. This type of language is like *DW* when Lt. Dunbar begins a relationship with the Lakota tribe. Not only is “Tonto Talk” fictional, but when having someone portray this trope in modern films and to a younger audience, they will grow up to view this as factual for a specific race group.

DW came out with a large production along with costs; it was referred to as “Kevin’s Gate” and it drew critics stating it was a story of a White man “going Native”, a derogatory term for Natives about assimilation and absorbing and integrating people, their ideas, and/or their culture (Oxford Dictionary, ac. 2021). In Lt. Dunbar’s situation he was seemingly “going Native” because of him integrating into the Lakota culture, wanting to go into battle with their rivalries, dressing in the same clothing, and learning their way of life with language and their perspective on White soldiers. In one scene with Stands with Fist to try and speak English, Lt.

Dunbar was emulating “Tonto Talk,” considering the Lakota took her when she was a child. The Lakota in this movie do not speak English, only their native language; therefore, Stands with Fist linguistically should not understand how to string together sentences to make comprehension of what she is saying. Stands with Fist: “*Hello. You hear good. Um, the soldier fort...*” Which Lt. Dunbar interrupts her by asking what Stands with Fist and Kicking Bird’s names are. This is an effective way to have flow to a storyline, but it does produce “Tonto Talk”, albeit not from a Native person, unlike past films.

Conclusion

The Tonto Talk trope is shown in both *The Lone Ranger* and *Dances with Wolves*, for Depp’s character, his speech was more pronounced and particular compared to Stands with Fist. In *DW*, the suggested trope can be misleading because of communication barriers between two languages. The reason Stands with Fist’s dialogue is considered “Tonto Talk” is the historical evidence in *The Lone Ranger* and with literature excerpts from dime novels. Natives who are portraying themselves in an accurate setting that denotes to their self-identification is seen as “Tonto Talk” when missing articles come into play, why is it that a film over the Lakota tribe is going to have complications with speech and communicating with people who they have dealt with at least 100 years prior? There is at some point in history that a tribe, at least one person, would know how to converse in English. Therefore, it is an adage and a racist one to use “Tonto Talk” to give substance to a film that involves Indigenous people.

“Tonto Talk” is outdated and should be because of its background and where it comes from, the same goes for “Ching-Chong talk”. Just as offensive and racist about a specific race, Mickey Rooney’s performance in *Breakfast at Tiffany’s* (1961) is something from cinematic history that Rooney wants to disappear. In an interview with *The Wall Street Journal* and after

four decades of defending the role, Rooney stated “that if he’d known so many people would be offended, ‘I wouldn’t have done it’” (*The Wall Street Journal*, “The Mickey Rooney Role Nobody Wants to Talk Much About”, 2014). This chapter is not about defending what is historically accurate, but it is about finding racist tropes and how those figures of speech define future descendants.

CHAPTER FOUR

Methodology

A qualitative research study “involves identifying and interpreting the meaning that individuals or groups ascribe to a social or human problem by analyzing data and building themes,” and this corresponds by presenting an audience with tropes from the film (Creswell, 2013). A particular group, such as different Native American tribes, are one of the most stereotyped and misidentified people in film. What has been proven from this research is a White Savior is present in *DW* with Indian tropes.

Using the codebook in research is beneficial because of the expectation when conducting a methodology. Watching the selected scenes for “Indian” tropes that contain a definition, example, and communication aspects, will provide a layout to look for these tropes with further evidence in scholarly articles, interviews, and scenes with comparisons to the film in question. The proposed research will employ a deductive qualitative content analysis (CA) method. A qualitative content analysis is a research method for the subjectivist interpretation of text and data through the systematic classification process of coding and identifying themes or patterns (Hsieh and Shannon, 2005). This study will analyze how qualitative content demonstrates a better understanding in observations to review the film *DW*, taking the scenes that are most appropriate to the trope codebook, a breakdown on the “White Indian”, “Indian Maiden”, “Tonto Talk”, and the “Noble Savage”, and by giving a definitions, examples along with their communicative capabilities for a second coder to identify. For qualitative content analysis, the research has numerous scans from texts about the film to identify tropes with more identifiers on coding descriptors used in the codebook as tropes. The codebook is constructed by finding the common tropes of “Indian” characters that are found in film and television. After identifying the

trope, its definition, an example, and a communicative aspect will go into watching specific scenes from *DW* and then apply tropes if they represent an accurate representation. This type of writing style is geared toward an analytical approach rather than a statistical method. This qualitative content analysis method gives the reader more contextual cues from each scene, which further establishes a relationship between the coder and the selected scenes (Capuzza, 2017). The tropes in question are the “White Savior”, “Noble Savage”, “Tonto Talk”, and the “Indian Maiden”, coders identify these tropes in the selected scenes from *Dances with Wolves*.

To conduct this research in a qualitative approach is about “analyzing the subjective meaning or social production of issues ...[and]... events instead of using number and statistics.” (Rahman, 2016, p.103) Instead of going the route of inductive reasoning where the communicator initiates the details and then the initial point, this research will use deductive reasoning to provide the research question from the start with additional details from supporting evidence about Native tropes in *Dances with Wolves* (1990) (Capuzza, 2017). There are certain aspects of an issue that can be addressed by exploring images, stereotypes, metaphors, actors, and messages that have theoretical perspectives in cognitive, constructivist, and critical framing.

The study pertains to two research questions, the first being, what are the “White Indians” tropes in *DW* and what are the different “Indian” tropes? There is countless archival evidence in film to support the tropes that perpetuate an ideology that is still being shown in the 21st century. The second research question is, what are the “White Indians” tropes in the film? Again, the research in film that show this trope as an identifiable reoccurring figure preserves a path into intellectual space for White characters. Films that allow a space for Whites to have the intellectual property in a racial hierarchy allows the stigma of other racial groups to appear in film as ignorant and not as an equal peer.

Codebook

A codebook describes “elements in a message, often mass media messages (television or film) ...[which] sets up categories...to collect data” (Davis & Lachlan, 2017, p. 383), that references with other coding materials to be used for coding the tropes. These include the codebook, coding table, and additional materials such as articles, books, and film that were researched and created by watching the movie, *Dances with Wolves*. Next, are the selected scenes that correspond with the tropes that were pulled to be inserted into a table that gives the descriptor, example, and the type of communication aspect with verbal and nonverbal cues. An important characteristic on coding in qualitative CA is to know what your codes are before applying the coding formula to research (Davis & Lachlan, 2017).

Using extant literature to develop the categories, which are the selected tropes of a “White Savior”, “Noble Savage”, “Tonto Talk”, and the “Indian Maiden”, gives an overall description of these tropes from different sources with their definitions (Hughey, 2014; Aleiss, 1991; Eskin, 1989; Churchill, 1998; Meek, 2006; Stone, 2012). The examples from films other than *Dances with Wolves*, was chosen because of it being a huge success but with inaccuracies. The wide range of “White Savior” films that depict a White man/woman coming to the rescue of a racial/urban character(s) is a reoccurring issue. By taking scenes from different films, the codebook was then created to show the readers that these tropes are apparently visible but not in a Native American image. The “White Savior” trope is within a genre in which a “White messianic character saves a lower or working class, usually urban or isolated, non-white character from a sad fate” (Hughey, 2014, p. 50). “A Noble Savage is an individual living in a ‘pure state of nature’, gentle and wise that is uncorrupted by the vices of civilizations” (Aleiss, 1991, p. 1). “Tonto Talk” is a stereotype of “Indian characters as silent, ignorant, and talking in

the same language, which is caveman talk” (Collins, 1989). The last noted trope is the “Indian Maiden”, which is the “unspoiled, innocent, exotic, beautiful, and open to engagement with White culture” (Stone, 2012, para. 2).

The way that the tropes were picked was to first watch the film and, from using previous knowledge from background on watching film and using literature, the tropes were found in selected scenes. With having a history of watching films and TV series that had either a Native American actor or used the stereotype based off misinformation or disinformation, this helped with finding stereotypes and tropes. This notion then solidified with code checking by primary sources that agreed on what to look for. From the type of trope being used, its definition, an example from a different film, and its communicative aspects is what the research will determine the validity of tropes.

Coding

“Coding is the process of labeling and organizing qualitative data to identify different themes and the relationships between them” (Medelyan, 2020, para. 1). It is used to find common themes to analyze; This research used two coders to codify the selected clips from the film and then to analyze tropes from the codebook. Using CA will help interpret the meanings of certain phenomena, especially if there are found in “Tonto Talk”. This will help the coders understand what is an appropriate form of a trope that is identified as an “Indian” and a “White Indian” and how to find those specific tropes in future viewings. The codebook consists of “White Savior”, “Noble Savage”, “Tonto Talk”, and “Indian Maiden” that details the type of trope, its definition, the example, and the communications aspect attributed to the trope. The aspect consists of providing information of the features with nonverbal and verbal cues. Nonverbal cues would be body movement, hand gestures, clothing, eye movement, grunts or

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stretches of pauses, anything to do with no talking characters. Verbal cues consist of talking and the pitch of tone. The reason behind using nonverbal cues is to match what is not being said to the tropes because of a communication aspect. Multiple categories can be used to describe a character or scene from the coding table.

| TROPE Phrase of an image that determines an oversimplification of a type of person or thing. | DEFINITION Statement of the trope’s meaning. | EXAMPLE Provide the characteristics of the trope’s kind. | COMMUNICATION ASPECTS/Verbal/Nonverbal Provide information of the features with tropes. |
|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| WHITE SAVIOR (Hughey, 2014) <i>MESSIANIC ARCHETYPE</i> <i>WHITE MAN</i> <i>WHITE WOMAN</i> | A “White savior film” is the genre in which a white messianic character saves a lower or working-class, usually urban or isolated, non-white character from a sad fate (Hughey, 2014). | Atticus Finch in <i>To Kill a Mockingbird</i> defends a black man against a rape crime that he did not commit. The ex. is from the court scene with Tom Robinson. | When the guilty verdict is stated in the form of a racist systematic oligarch, Atticus walks out of court as the colored balcony stands to see him out. Atticus is viewed as a tragic savior because he could not save the defendant, Tom Robinson. |
| NOBLE SAVAGE (Aleiss, 1991) <i>NOBLE INDIAN</i> <i>INDIAN MAIDEN</i> | The noble savage, according to 18 th century French philosopher Jean-Jacques Rousseau, is an individual living in a ‘pure state of nature’-gentle, wise, uncorrupted by the vices of civilization (Aleiss, 1991). | Jake goes to live in the alien world of Pandora among a primitive tribe of the <i>Na’vi</i> in <i>Avatar</i> . Jake is a modern man who regains his humanity by living with “savages”, however, Jake turns out to be nobler than the natives of Pandora. | Jake tames the beast and in a messianic scene, the <i>Na’vi</i> reach out to him as the sunlight bathes him. The fact that this scene is something from biblical text happens too often in White savior films. |
| TONTO TALK (Eskin, 1989; | Stereotype of Indians as silent, ignorant, and | <i>Con Air</i> (1997) shows a scene of the character | i. Pinball: what’s up Cochise? |

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|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <p>Churchill, 1998; Meek, 2006)</p> <p><i>THE TONTO SYNDROME INDIAN TALK HOLLYWOOD INJUN ENGLISH</i></p> | <p>talking in the same language, which is caveman talk (Collins, 1989). Hand-raising gesture and a deepening of voice, stoical behavior (lack of expression, lack of eye contact and lack of verbal response conforms with popular conceptions of Native American stoicism (Meek, 2006). Terms like “whooping,” “grunting,” and “primitive” along with silence used as a prominent figure for “Indian talk” is used throughout film and other media to portray American Indians as timeless, silent, savage Plains warriors (Churchill, 1998).</p> | <p>“Pinball” speaking with an unnamed character. The scene of communication aspects shows even with having no identity, the character is identified as Native American by the context used in the dialogue.</p> <p>The dialogue continues with the unnamed character speaking one sentence in the entire dialogue after Pinball sprays liquid onto him and then sets him on fire.</p> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ii. (lowers voice pitch) How! (raises hand) iii. (normal pitch) hey there man I’ze just fuckin’ with you man, don’t get all [1] iv. (lowers pitch again) Wounded Knee on me and shit [one grunt] v. Unnamed man (stares straight ahead): (silent) (Meek, 2006) |
| <p>INDIAN MAIDEN (Stone, 2012)</p> <p><i>“CHEROKEE PRINCESS” NOBLE INDIAN NOBLE SAVAGE SQUAW CELLULOID PRINCESS</i></p> | <p>She is unspoiled, innocent, exotic, beautiful, and open to engagement with White culture. In “helper” films, the Celluloid Princess or Indian Maiden will sacrifice her life</p> | <p><i>Pocahontas</i> from Walt Disney has an Indian Maiden character named Pocahontas. She is the calming force throughout the film in difficult times and falls in love</p> | <p>Before Pocahontas’s father attempts to kill John, Pocahontas flings herself on top of John to protect him. Proclaiming, “No! If you kill him, you will have to kill me too.” She is trying to create peace between European settlers and the Powhatan tribe by having a favor towards the settlers.</p> |

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|---------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------|--|
| | to warn Whites of an impending Indian attack. “Lover” films show the Celluloid Princess marrying and procreating with an Easterner seeking sanctuary in the West (Stone, 2012). | with John Smith, a White colonist. | |
| OTHER: | Scene/Character that does not fit in identified trope. | | |

The coders had a training sequence with scenes from the film *Avatar* (2009) before coding *DW*. Both coders completed coding separately, but after the first training process. To access reliability between both coders with the coding by using information from *DW*'s codebook, there was training from a different source other than the researched film. From this standpoint it showed unbiased data by creating a more applicable directive that would otherwise be favored to influential data. After the training, both coders were placed in separate locations with the outline of the codebook and watched the selected scenes. To follow directions was crucial of coherent adequacy. From the previous training in the codebook examples of the tropes will show the similarities and differences between the films mentioned. The two coders were close in finding the accurate tropes from the film during training and then after when they applied the tropes to *DW*. There were differences with both coders when Coder A specified in the “other” category from the codebook to emphasize on what they found as a “misunderstanding” trope and “modern wins” trope. Coder B did not find these tropes from the selected scenes; however, Coder A did not find “Indian Maiden” and Coder B did, along with all of the tropes from the codebook as Coder A did not have all tropes listed. This type of research is

subjective to finding what qualitative features from two people are on perspective. It allowed the researcher to find tropes that frequently occur in most films, and that the other coder could code by watching the film. The codebook allows for less bias to be present. Both coders watched three scenes from *Avatar* and then seven scenes from *DW*.

Findings

The racial typology, a categorization of different races based on their physical attributes, within films of blockbuster value that portray other racial groups as the protagonist, determines the presence of certain words, themes, or concepts within the film being used as qualitative data. Like watching scenes of “Tonto Talk” would normally go to a Native character or using “Ching Chong” speech to signal that character is of Chinese descent. The relationship between what is being said between characters and their portrayal are consistent to the codebook. The results from both coders is outlined below, labeled as Coder A and Coder B.

| CODER A | CODER B |
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| <p style="text-align: center;">Dunbar’s Suicide Attempt</p> <p>White man going against all odds and surviving, mechanistic pose as he sacrifices himself to save the others, supported by followers. Both sides are war-torn and ragged.</p> <p><i>White Savior Trope</i></p> | <p style="text-align: center;">Dunbar’s Suicide Attempt</p> <p>Christ like pose as Lt. Dunbar is sacrificing himself for the greater good.</p> <p><i>White Savior Trope</i></p> |
| <p style="text-align: center;">Timmon’s Attack</p> | <p style="text-align: center;">Timmon’s Attack</p> |

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| <p>White man is attacked by battle Natives in a savage way. The Natives are painted up and adorned with feathers and have many horses.</p> <p>The White man is dressed like a pioneer, dirty, and with mules.</p> <p><i>Other: Savages Trope</i></p> | <p>The Pawnee tribe are attacking Timmons and ransacking his wagon. Took scalp as souvenir.</p> <p><i>Noble Savage</i></p> |
| <p style="text-align: center;">First Lakota Meeting</p> <p>White man is attempting to communicate to the Natives in any way he can. Much of what is ‘understood’ by him is mere speculation or assumption. He is lonely and eager to make friends with the Natives. The White man is a soldier in uniform but reduces it to come off less formal or too serious or intimidating. The Natives are dressed in feathers, braids, beads, paint, and ‘traditional’ clothing.</p> <p><i>Noble Savage Trope</i></p> | <p style="text-align: center;">First Lakota Meeting</p> <p>Lt. Dunbar is attempting to communicate nonverbally with the Lakota tribe by acting out as a buffalo. He tells the Lakota that the animal he is portraying are buffalo’s, the Chief repeats back “buffalo” and then say’s in Lakota, “Tatanka”. The Lakota are peaceful and sit down with Lt. Dunbar to have coffee and talk by communicating in broken English.</p> <p><i>Noble Savage Trope</i></p> |
| <p style="text-align: center;">Tent Scene</p> <p>White man sits in a tent with a Native and a woman translator. It is awkward but polite as</p> | <p style="text-align: center;">Tent Scene</p> <p>Lt. Dunbar sits inside of a tent with the chief and Stands with Fist. They attempt to</p> |

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| <p>they each try to learn one another’s names.</p> <p>Many gestures are used by the woman to get her translation across to the White man. The Native and the woman are dressed in ‘traditional’ garb while the White man is dressed in casual attire.</p> <p><i>Tonto Talk Trope</i></p> | <p>converse by having Stands with Fist try to remember English as a child. Stands with Fist tries to tell Lt. Dunbar her name by acting it out.</p> <p><i>Tonto Talk Trope</i></p> |
| <p style="text-align: center;">Buffalo Hunt</p> <p>White man saves a young Native [boy] during a buffalo hunt using his ‘more effective’ gun as opposed to the arrows the Natives tried to use.</p> <p><i>White Savior Trope</i></p> <p><i>Other: Modern Wins Trope</i></p> | <p style="text-align: center;">Buffalo Hunt</p> <p>Lt. Dunbar is shooting his rifle to hunt down the buffalo, while the Lakota use bow and arrows. A Lakota boy gets knocked off his horse by an injured buffalo. The same buffalo begins charging at him while the boy stands there. Lt. Dunbar starts shooting at the buffalo to try and save the boy, he kills the buffalo and saving the Lakota boy’s life.</p> <p><i>White Savior Trope</i></p> |
| <p style="text-align: center;">Celebration in the Tent</p> <p>White man notices one of the Natives is wearing his hat. He wants it back, but this causes a tense situation. Another Native backs</p> | <p style="text-align: center;">Celebration in the Tent</p> <p>Lt. Dunbar sees his hat on a Lakota man and asks for it back, the Lakota man sees this as a “finders and keepers” situation as he found it</p> |

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| <p>the White man and explains to the other Native the situation. It is all settled with a trade. The White man is dressed in his casual clothes along with some beads that show his partial assimilation into the tribe of Natives.</p> <p><i>Misunderstanding Trope</i></p> | <p>on the hunt. Wind in his Hair stands up for his friend by telling the other Lakota man to give back the hat, he decides to give him a knife for a swap.</p> <p><i>Noble Savage Trope</i></p> |
| <p style="text-align: center;">Lakota and Pawnee Battle</p> <p>Another group of Natives attack the natives that befriended the White man. The attacking Natives are defeated mainly due to the other Natives' use of guns.</p> <p><i>Tonto Talk Trope</i></p> <p><i>Other: Modern Wins Trope</i></p> | <p style="text-align: center;">Lakota and Pawnee Battle</p> <p>The Pawnee attack the Lakota natives, as the fight begins, an elder Lakota man steps forward to smash the butt of the gun against one of the Pawnee's necks. Lt. Dunbar sees this and begins shooting at the Pawnee's, he then shouts, "Shoot the gun!" The Lakota have guns, provided by Lt. Dunbar. The same elder Lakota man with the gun earlier kills an intruder with one of the tents by bow and arrow. Another Pawnee tears into one of the tents with women and children (Stands with Fist) and begins to approach them threateningly. Stands with Fist shoots the Pawnee man out of the tipi. She begins to run through the grounds with the gun, the Lakota</p> |

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| | <p>elder man gets killed by the leader of the Pawnee. The leader of the Pawnee is surrounded by Lakota's and they begin to shoot at once and when he falls off his horse, they pummel him with the butts of their guns.</p> <p><i>Indian Maiden, Noble Savage</i></p> |
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CATEGORIES/THEMES

WHITE SAVIOR

The results determined that *DW* is a “White Savior” film. Lt. Dunbar saving the Lakota tribe from the Pawnee, giving the soldiers tools to succeed and by assimilating into the Lakota camp after meeting another White person shows a sacrificial stance. The first clip when Lt. Dunbar is sacrificing himself, dictates how the Lakota are seen and that the Pawnee are the “bad guys”, while the Lakota are the “Noble Indians”. Since Pawnee territory was the Kansas and Nebraska area while Lakota territory consisted of South Dakota, northwestern Nebraska, and the northeastern Wyoming, it asks the question why Lakota and not Pawnee?

According to the website, *Notes from the Frontier*, an award-winning author, editor, and publisher of *The Writer's Handbook* states that “*DW* was a Comanche story and not Lakota” (“Notes from the Frontier”, ac. 2021). Due to not having enough buffalo in New Mexico, which would have been the original location for shooting, and it was difficult to find Natives who spoke Comanche, it was settled on Lakota because of the large buffalo herd in South Dakota. Since the film was going to revolve around the Lakota tribe it was paramount that they have the representation, which they did and not necessarily by Natives who were from that specific tribe.

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In reference to the film about the “Noble Savage” trope are the Lakota tribe because of their friendliness and play an active role in letting Lt. Dunbar become a part of their lifestyle even knowing him as a soldier who is part of an army that wants to destroy them.

According to the film, there is a “White Savior” trope within the selected scenes. The first is Lt. Dunbar’s attempted suicide, which emphasizes the Christ like pose as he rides his horse into a firing squad. He survives this, which can seem believable that he was meant for the greater good, so his life was spared. Both coders agreed to this. Another scene was the buffalo hunt, and this also consisted of the “White Savior”, which shows a young boy from the Lakota tribe potentially being killed by a buffalo, Lt. Dunbar’s quick-thinking skills saves his life. This was another agreement from both coders.

TONTO TALK

“Tonto Talk” was sequenced throughout the clips in the scene with Stands with Fist that shows the evidence of talking in broken English, and her childhood of talking in Lakota deems that linguistically impossible. Since both coders found “Tonto Talk” within two clips of Stands with Fist and the Tent scene, that concludes what scenes are “Tonto Talk” and why they appear in the film. *DW* makes the film appear without questioning validity because it does not feature the Lakota speaking in English with Stands with Fist, and from the Tent scene speaking in broken English that the Lakota appear to understand. This way is much simpler to view film and to tell a story within a small timeframe instead of spending the time and resources for a more developed storyline.

INDIAN MAIDEN

The “Indian Maiden” trope comes from Stands with Fist because of her upbringing in the tribe after being kidnapped, she merged with the Lakota way, and she becomes involved with Lt.

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Dunbar, the other White character. Not only is she seen as the only maiden within the film, but she is the other White character that happens to be “Lakota”. The White Indian characters, which is synonymous with the Noble Savage, are Lt. Dunbar and Stands with Fist. Their characters are qualifiable by them wearing traditional clothing from the Lakota, speaking their language, and fighting against the Pawnee tribe and Lt. Dunbar’s army. It is suggestive that Stands with Fist had no choice in the matter when siding with her kidnappers after the rampage from the Pawnee tribe, who killed her parents and siblings. She grew up alongside her new siblings and “adoptive” parents and when old enough was married off to one of the Lakota men, until his death, she began to stray from the Lakota tribe.

Stands with Fist and other Lakota women are immediately seen as “Indian Maidens” due to their complacency, especially Stands with Fist because of the meeting with Lt. Dunbar and their eventual romance. The Lakota women who were played by Tantoo Cardinal (Black Shawl) and Doris Leader Charge (Pretty Shield) were the only Native cast members who had some role that ultimately led to as a background. Considering this film had little female characters with speaking parts, *DW* did not hold the “Woman Warrior” well, unless in the case of Stands with Fist. Also, utilizing the Native female characters as something more than convenience became a false presentation about Lakota living during that time with so little women.

This trope was founded by only one coder. Coder B found the “Indian Maiden” trope in the Lakota and Pawnee battle scenes. The women are in a tent taking cover from the fight when one Pawnee tears into the tent, Stands with Fists shoots him as the other women stand behind her. This research has talked about there being women warriors and this proves another point on why the “Indian Maiden” is prevalent in this scene

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NOBLE SAVAGE

Like the “White Savior”, the “Noble Savage” trope is what Lt. Dunbar emulates because of his concept as the outsider and wanting to get away from his way of life and into a simpler and more uncorrupted lifestyle. He begins to understand the Lakota’s way of life by keeping daily writings in his journal, interacting with the tribe and taking on their way of life, going against his army to protect and become part of the tribe. Even though Lt. Dunbar and his new partner, Stands with Fist, leave the tribe after going to battle with Lt. Dunbar’s Calvary. This innate goodness for Lt. Dunbar suggests that he portrays both the “White Savior” and the “Noble Savage”.

CHAPTER FIVE

Conclusion

The *Dances with Wolves* film and other references highlight what has been missing in Hollywood: A Native story. The reaction to *DW* has mixed responses, which the criticism in the case of finding tropes that indicate a “good movie/bad movie” dichotomy does not equate to the accuracy of the film. As one Native man noted, “no matter how sensitive and wonderful [*Dances with Wolves*] is, you have to ask who’s telling the story. It’s certainly not an Indian” (George Bordeaux (Blackfeet), 2016). If the coders took *DW* and the *Powwow Highway* or *War Party*, then evidence might suggest a Native voice to the films than with *DW*. It is in the name, *Dances with Wolves*, that emphasizes the romanticizing the “Indian”, being adorned in their traditional clothing, or being given an “Indian” name.

The White Savior and the Noble Savage were put into the same chapter for compatibility, due to the White Savior (Lt. Dunbar) and the Noble Savage (Lt. Dunbar and the Lakota) association, the White Savior is the Noble Savage, but not the other way around. Lt. Dunbar is shown as giving himself up for the good of the war in the beginning of the film, he does not die and is sent on to his fort because of his bravery and nobility. It is there that he is met with a wolf that looks as if it is wearing socks, he grows compassion with this wolf and starts calling him “two-socks” and at times began playing with him. This is where Lt. Dunbar’s name, “Dances with Wolves” becomes apparent. Lt. Dunbar is also seen as the Noble Savage because of him joining the Lakota ranks to battle with the vicious Pawnee and go against his commanding officers.

The Noble Savage in the case of the Lakota is considered as such because of their way of life; unfortunately that is a trope that came from the philosopher Jean Jacques Rosseau, about a

“pure state of nature-gentle, [and] wise.” The clips that were shown to the coders are consistent with the nobility in Lt. Dunbar’s character, especially when talking about his notion of becoming the savior: “...they will hunt for me and when they find me, they will find you. I will be leaving with my wife Stands with Fist as soon as possible. I must go and try to talk to those that will listen” (IMDB, ac. 2021). A White man going to communicate with the Lakota, by their ways, their language, and him wanting to go into battle alongside them, is another way of seeing someone wanting to become “Indian” to show relevancy in the viewer’s perspective. In the ‘90s, there were not too many Native films out and if they were at a mass population, the sales would be abysmal compared to *Dances with Wolves*, which it was.

To do another search for “1990 Native American Films,” Culture Trip was the top hit for the title, “10 Great Films About Native Americans.” The site went in a chronological order from the ‘70s until modern times and the “top” hit was *Little Big Man* (1970), whose budget according to IMDB was estimated to be at \$15 million and the cumulative global gross was over \$31.5 million; *Powwow Highway* (1989) does not show the budget, but it made a cumulative global gross of \$283,747. Compare those to *Dances with Wolves* and there is a reason why Native films do not have equal standards to a blockbuster hit, having a big star attached to the project and money. Those two requirements guaranteed the success to Costner’s film, because not a lot of people are going to know Native actors like Wes Studi, A. Martinez, Gary Farmer, and Tantoo Cardinal are.

The Indian Maiden was lacking in a way evoked by the question, “Where are the female actors?” This film is very male influenced and if there were scenes that showed the women, it was Stands with Fist as the front runner. The only time Tantoo Cardinal appeared was either with Graham Greene’s character or toward the end when the Pawnee start attacking. To acknowledge

an Indian Maiden was from the perspective of Stands with Fist in the scene with Kicking Bird and Lt. Dunbar. The trope within itself for this movie seems to be contradicting at times because a maiden is defined as someone who is virginal or a young woman, and there were not many of those to be seen. How can *DW* have an Indian Maiden? The Indian Maiden is associated with the Celluloid Maiden, something that fits the mold of representing a “young Native American woman who forms an alliance with a White colonizer and (dies as a result of her choice)” (Marubbio, 2006). This holds some truth considering that she is living the Lakota way and she along with the tribe form an alliance with a White colonizer, but she does not die, only a few of their tribal people.

Tonto Talk was few and far between in this film because of speaking the Lakota (feminine form) language with subtitles in English. That is commendable on Costner’s and Doris Leader Charge’s part (Pretty Shield and Lakota teacher) since having a Native language spoken in a credible sense, unlike the ‘50s Western films, that allowed to have a true representation of an Indigenous tribe on the Hollywood screen. It was such an insurmountable moment at the time and that may have something to do with the success of *Dances with Wolves*. The “Tonto Talk” was used in Stands with Fist’s part during the meeting with Lt. Dunbar, it is not a film “faux-pas” for a character to try and remember their own native language, it is still considered “Tonto Talk”. Stands with Fist did speak English in her rearing years, it was never suggested that she found someone to speak in the Lakota tribe with or met with a White colonizer before Lt. Dunbar, this type of speech is in simple terms, “easy storytelling.”

The objective of analyzing this film is to first, pick out the tropes that are consistent in movies with or about Natives and with prior knowledge from other movies or literature, and two, find those tropes in *Dances with Wolves* to match them with their identifying tropes. Two coders

were used for this project and there were instances where Coder A saw something different than Coder B and that is to be expected. Communication in a film is subjective until proven with empirical data and references that agree with the terminology and thesis. The tropes were defined with examples and the thesis was accomplished by investigating certain scenes, analyzing the tropes and their origins, also understanding why Native material makes better for storytelling rather than someone who did not come from that background is off to “setting the record straight.” Costner did well when utilizing Natives, a Lakota language in a movie with Native actors from all different backgrounds, is almost unheard of. However, there were some issues that were caused by the typical “White-savior” trope and this trope is very consistent in *Dances with Wolves* as previously mentioned.

Limitations and Future Research

This research started with a deductive approach, which allowed for more concise scenes that depicted tropes based on historical films, but allowed for *other* tropes to be listed. The *other* mentioned tropes were Modern Wins and Misunderstanding, Coder A used the *other* section for both Modern Wins and Misunderstanding while Coder B kept to the tropes provided. Providing scenes from the movie and utilizing the codebook tropes about Native American and White characters provides empirical data. The racial typology within films of blockbuster value that portray non-Whites as the protagonist determines the presence of certain words, themes, or concepts within the film being used as qualitative data. The relationship between what is being said between characters and their portrayal is consistent with the codebook. That being stated there are limitations; not using radio stations, other films in specification to all tropes used and not utilizing each trope from a different film and to compare those to *DW*, history textbooks,

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Future research entails a different film and more scholarly research on tropes that affect Native Americans.

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