

“WE WANT-UM YOUR WAMPUM!”: COLONIZING, APPROPRIATING, AND
RECONSTRUCTING NATIVE AMERICAN IDENTITIES
THROUGH POPULAR CULTURE

THESIS

Presented to the Graduate Council of
Texas State University-San Marcos
in Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements

for the Degree

Master of ARTS

by

K. Cheyenne Riggs, B.S.

San Marcos, Texas
May 2012

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Kristin Cheyenne Riggs

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To makeup and messy purses and zebra print and hugs,
to generosity, to warmth,
and to wooden whistles that wouldn't whistle.

To Karen Robertson:

I wish you could be here for all my beginnings.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

My first thanks goes to my thesis committee members, particularly Octavio Pimentel, who provided unwavering support and feedback throughout the writing of this thesis and my graduate career. Unsurprisingly, Rebecca Jackson and Nancy Wilson proved not only to be wonderful bosses but also invaluable contributors to this work.

I would like to thank my father, Christin Riggs, for showing me the path, shining the flashlight and pointing out the potholes; and my mother, Jami Robertson, for knowing when to hold my hand and when to let me stumble.

To Nicholas Sakaluk, the patience to my temper: thank you for having the grace to put up with the worst of me during this stressful and life-consuming endeavor, for accepting every apology that inevitably followed every frustrated outburst. You kept me sane, and for that I love you all the more.

To Danielle Antonetti, my sensible, down-to-earth close friend and mentor: your intelligence and independence inspire me, and your encouragement is unfailing. You've no idea how thankful I am to have you in my life.

Lastly, I would like to acknowledge Dr. Tammy Wahpeconiah and Dr. Bryan McKinley Jones Brayboy, the former for setting a ferocious example of the power of women in the academy, and the latter for his contributions to the field of Critical Race Theory. Neither is aware of this project; nevertheless, it would not, *could* not, exist without them.

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INTRODUCTION

PONDERINGS, PERSPECTIVES, AND PERSONAL INVESTMENTS

One of my earliest memories, possibly when I was seven or eight, was of watching my dad sitting in our living room making Indian “stuff.” He poured over art books, handicraft books, and films, searching for ideas about the art of a particular tribe, recreating dreamcatchers, shields, ceremonial artifacts – anything that, to him and to mainstream culture, said “Indian.” I can’t tell you how many times I’ve been made to watch *Dances with Wolves* or told, much more recently (and by pretty much everyone), “what a great film *Avatar* is.”

My earliest inklings of the focus for this thesis might have begun here, watching my dad thumb through Native American art books, learning the process of criss-crossing leather threads to form the intricacies of the center of a dreamcatcher, the details of which my father had in turn learned from a book. Really Indian stuff.

As a likely result of these early father-daughter bonding experiences, I have always identified strongly with the Native American side of me (as problematic as that later became). It seems to me now that, having been robbed of much of our Native American identities through a refusal of our ancestors to identify as such, what my father

and I did was more “playing Indian” than not, taking part in the very same activities that scholar Philip Deloria argues constituted little more than “taking up permanent native identities in order to lay claim to the cultural power of Indianness in the white imagination” (Deloria 168). We two part-Indians took up such activities as a way of reconnecting with our past, rather than our present. It is this sentiment which still lies at the heart of Native American representational issues today: a valuing of the Indian as a temporal being, one which has ceased to exist in any manner considered “authentic.”

As an English major in my senior year of college, I took a Native American literature class with Dr. Tammy Wahpeconiah. We read bad Indian fiction; we read good Native American fiction. Peppered into the readings was an in-class viewing of Kevin Costner’s 1990 neo-Western epic *Dances with Wolves*. Easy stuff, I thought. But Dr. Wahpeconiah’s reading of the seemingly familiar film threw me. She questioned the veracity, if not exactly the authenticity, of the depiction of the Native Americans when viewed through the White lens of the title character John Dunbar. If we read John Dunbar as a Christ figure, where does that place the Indians? What do we make of the romance between John Dunbar and Stands-With-A-fist, the only two Whites present in the majority of the film? Why does the story of the Sioux begin and end with John Dunbar? In essence, she pointed out to a class of open-mouthed seniors what scholars have been saying about such romanticized, sympathetic film portrayals of the Native American for decades: that they were highly, highly problematic.

So well-done is this film that it garnered multiple Oscars for filmmaker Kevin Costner. So visually rich, glossy, and attentive to detail that very few in the general population were able to spot the subtleties of the racism and the “washing away of

collective guilt,” to paraphrase film scholar Ward Churchill. And so thoroughly had it been ingrained in me that this was a gem of a film that it had never occurred to me, up until this point, why I had been surrounded my whole life with images of Native America’s past but knew nothing of its present, or to question why those statistics about Native American poverty and literacy rates I occasionally came across in textbooks were so incredibly dismal.

In that class, I wrote my final paper on images and representations of Native Americans in comic books, perhaps the first real scholarly step taken in the formation of this thesis. I found that my research connected with and supported much of what had already been written about Native Americans in films: the categories of Native American stereotypes in film, for example, and the concept of “playing Indian.” Unknowingly, my early research was supporting that of well-established scholars like Jacquelyn Kilpatrick and John E. O’Connor.

It wasn’t until my graduate studies that I started to connect this highly personal interest in such a small area of film and cultural studies with any sort of practical application. I had answered the “what?” but not the “so what?” I began to connect issues of language and group identity, how we are written and how others write us, and the role of composition in shaping identity and culture. I learned about various methods of dismantling seemingly straightforward discourses to reveal hidden power structures and agendas. In putting these ideas together, I realized that it wasn’t enough to point out stereotypes: I needed to do my part in dismantling them.

I do not wish, as have so many scholars before me, to point out the varying and blatant inaccuracies in the portrayal of Native Americans in film over the last one hundred years. These inaccuracies, while important to understanding the misrepresentation of Native Americans in Hollywood, merely scratch the surface of the subconscious revisionist ideologies of so many filmmakers. These revisionist tactics do not find their power so much in the accuracies and inaccuracies of clothing and tradition, but in the interplays of power dynamics within the creation of these films and the message of the films themselves. History is important, but what is most important to me is how the power dynamics and ideologies at play behind the very creation of character and dialogue in Hollywood mask the marginality of contemporary Natives, and the direct effects of this interplay of power, representational sovereignty and collective cultural consciousness on Native Americans.

Philip Deloria, author of *Playing Indian*, argues that the collective American cultural consciousness has appropriated Native American identities as a means of asserting our Americanness. The shift in recent years has been to take Deloria's theory of playing Indian to yet another level. Modern Native American depictions reflect a cultural desire to empathize with the Native American condition. We no longer simply turn toward Native American culture to borrow and assimilate identity, as Deloria theorizes that we have done in the past. Instead, we seek to sympathize with Native Americans, thus asserting our collective identities in a more modern sense as a caring, empathetic culture, as a means of "washing away collective guilt," as Ward Churchill puts it. The mainstream claims to understand the Native Americans as we never have before, yet we are far more interested in making ourselves feel better than in bettering Native America.

Unfortunately, the problem with this sympathetic, romanticized approach is the same problem that has existed with regard to Native American cultural assimilation for the past one hundred years. Before we as a culture can sympathize with another culture, we must first assert what that other culture is, what it is made of, how it acts and how it speaks. Here lies the underlying problem of Hollywood's "modern" representation: It is still a representation, and it still relies on the outdated stereotypes outlined by Jacquelyn Kilpatrick, originating from the cultural desires for independence described by Deloria. "Genre locks in certain images to the exclusion of others," according to Native American film scholar Edward Buscombe, author of *'Injuns!'* *Native Americans in the Movies*. Hollywood's Native American depictions certainly seem to be a genre within itself, limited to particular images from particular time periods that can readily be identified as Native American.

GOALS

This thesis lies at the intersection of composition and cultural studies. I seek to use theoretical lenses to cast a critical eye on Hollywood reimaginings of American Indians, focusing not on the factual inaccuracies but instead on power dynamics. In this thesis, I hope to use various lenses and theories to demonstrate that the deeply flawed and problematic portrayals of Native Americans in popular culture further the central tenet of Tribal Critical Race Theory: Colonization is endemic to society. Native Americans have found themselves represented more and more as "tragic, degraded figures" (Deloria 137), much of their culture absorbed by the mainstream white society who values Native American culture only as long as it is authentic, choosing to remain ignorant of the

realities of life for the modern Native American in favor of romantic images of a past ideal.

I then hope to address the “so what?” aspect of this argument: What can we do, in our rhetorical discussions and in our classrooms, to address the unique position of these, and all, marginalized groups? How can the information in this thesis be applied towards furthering Bryan Brayboy’s ideas in “Toward a Tribal Critical Race Theory in Education”? As educators, it is not only our job but also our responsibility to discuss ways of applying this knowledge in our classrooms.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

Having previously read through much of the research concerning Native American representation in film and television, my goal here is not to prove that Native Americans are misrepresented and stereotyped. It has long been established that Native American cultural inaccuracies abound, and that Native characters follow several predetermined stereotypes. I am interested to find out if these misrepresentations can be read as a form of cultural colonization, how this colonization affects Native Americans, and what we as writing instructors can do about it. Thus, my research began with a simple question: How does the dominant mainstream stereotype Native Americans in popular culture?

After identifying several misrepresentations, I researched some critical theories and methods of discourse analysis. Using these tools, I then asked, What does a critical reading of these representations in films and television shows reveal? Finally, in seeking to join the conversation with Native American rhetoric and composition scholars, I asked:

What can scholars in the field of composition do to counter colonialist thought, to give mis- and under-represented minorities their own voice?

THEORETICAL PERSPECTIVES

Tribal Critical Race Theory is a theory that has emerged in part to help address specific issues faced by Native American peoples. It grew out of Critical Race Theory (CRT), which, in turn, came from Critical Legal Studies (CLS), a scholarship that focuses on applying the law to specific groups and attempts to expose contradictions and inherent racial hierarchies within the legal system. CRT provides essentially the same function, but with a stronger emphasis on race and with an aim to move more quickly. CRT posits that “racism has become so deeply engrained in society’s and schooling’s consciousness that it is often invisible” (Brayboy, 428). However, recent theorists have noted the tendency for CRT to operate along a Black-White binary, leaving little room to address the situations and needs of other marginalized minorities.

Thus does Tribal Critical Race Theory come into play. Rather than racism, TribalCrit takes into account Native American perspectives and histories, language shifts and loss, and ways of knowing, offering a shift in emphasis towards colonialism as the primary ideology that is endemic to society. Brayboy elaborates on colonization:

By colonization, I mean that European American thought, knowledge and power structures dominate present-day society in the United States...the everyday experiences of American Indians, the indigenous inhabitants of the Americas, have essentially been removed from the awareness of dominant members of U.S.

society. These viable images have instead been replaced with fixed images from the past of what American Indians once were. (430)

Brayboy specifies the two main limitations of CRT that led to the development of TribalCrit. Firstly, CRT does not address the liminality of the Native American, i.e., their existence in the gray area between a political group and a racialized people. Native Americans have a unique status as both a federally recognized group (or, more accurately, groups) and as a distinct racial and cultural group. Though legal recognition is helpful in attaining and maintaining status, it also grants the United States government the power of deciding which groups are worthy of recognition and which are not, clearly reflecting a power system and basis of knowledge that is skewed heavily away from Native Americans. Secondly, TribalCrit emphasizes the experiences and effects of the colonization of Native American peoples, an ideology more meaningful for this particular group than racism. “The goal,” says Brayboy, “of interactions between the dominant U.S. society and American Indians has been to change (colonize or civilize) us to be more like those who hold power in the dominant society” (430).

Keeping these issues in mind, and by centralizing the concept of colonialism in our theoretical lens, this thesis attempts to apply this theory to popular culture and Hollywood representation of Native Americans. Deloria’s work explores how, culturally, Whites value traditional Native American culture and seek to either embody or memorialize it. From a legal perspective, Brayboy’s TribalCrit examines relations between the U.S. government and Native Americans, and uncovers ways in which the U.S. has sought to colonize Native America. From a cultural perspective, I seek to examine the cultural colonization of and subsequent impact on Native Americans through

popular culture. As scholar Edward Buscome puts it: “Films made by white people for white audiences will inevitably produce an image of Indians designed to serve a white agenda” (16). TribalCrit helps uncover that agenda.

Ultimately, the relationship between Hollywood “Injuns,” Native Americans and the mainstream is one of power – who has it, who has usurped it, and by what processes. The goal of this thesis is to use specific, established methods and tools to reveal some of the means by which dominant society has marginalized, depowered and devoiced Native Americans, arguing that these depictions have had serious consequences: robbing Natives of sovereignty over their own representations, masking the realities of contemporary Native struggles from the eyes of the mainstream, and directly contributing to the root of those struggles.

CHAPTER I

(RE)PRESENTING THE FILMIC NATIVE AMERICAN: HISTORIES AND SCHOLARSHIPS

In a 2000 article on Native Americans and composition, scholar Scott Richard Lyons posed this question: “What do American Indians want from writing?” His answer was what Lyons defined as “rhetorical sovereignty,” explained as “the inherent right and ability of *peoples* to determine their own communicative needs and desires” (1130; emphasis in original.) Malea Powell, author of “Rhetorics of Survivance: How American Indians *Use Writing*,” builds upon Lyons’ argument, advocating a stronger focus within the academy on Native American text as a way to de-center the rhetorical canon. I argue that the very “representation sovereignty,” or control over the most widely disseminated cultural representations of self denied to Native Americans, is an enormous roadblock to rhetorical sovereignty and serious academic, political and cultural attention.

Recognizing that the history of Native American representations in popular culture has been well-covered in previous scholarly literature, I would like to explore how we can use this information to inform our practices and become more aware of the effect that carefully constructed representations of not just Native Americans, but all marginalized peoples, reflect overarching ideologies of racism and colonization, and how we can battle the prolificacy of such ideologies in our classrooms.

JOINING THE CONVERSATION: NATIVE AMERICANS AND FILM

Many scholars root the filmic representations of Native Americans even further back than film. In *Celluloid Indians*, Jacquelyn Kilpatrick identifies the creation, or “genesis,” of central Indian archetypes and traces them back to the earliest days of White settlement, to stories of Indian savagery and occasional nobility, and to James Fenimore Cooper’s immensely popular tales of noble but vanishing savages and Whites gone native. She further theorizes that “Individual Indians could be good, but the group had to be depicted as ‘bad’ in order to justify such existing philosophies of government and religion” as White mantras of Manifest Destiny and the superiority of Christianity (2).

The earliest appearances of these Native American stereotypes in films can be read as a means by which the dominant culture reinvents the tale of “how the west was won” – and rationalizes why. Ward Churchill points out that virtually no films about Native Americans took place outside of the West between 1850 and 1880, lamenting the lack of cultural history and the Eurocentric context of the Native American perspective: “There is no ‘before’ to the story, and there is no ‘after’” (168). Early filmic representations of Native Americans existed in relation to the White presence in the Americas. Early U.S. films and the success of the Western genre cemented these myths and maintained the colonialist narrative of the American frontier. The stereotypes of the good Indian (singular) versus bad Indians (plural) and fear of miscegenation and noble and bloodthirsty savages blanketed the public, firmly situating the Native American as “Other” in the public mind.

As the century progressed, the Western genre expanded to include narratives in which Native Americans were the protagonists. In *Playing Indian*, Phillip Deloria

theorizes that “non-Indians began taking up permanent native identities in order to lay claim to the cultural power of Indianness in the white imagination” (168). Asserting individuality and authenticity, whether as distinctly separate from the British in the early days of the frontier or on the front lines of the counterculture revolution of the 1950s and 1960s, was done through cultural appropriation of Native American identities. Churchill supports Deloria’s argument about the mainstream’s utilization of Native American identities to form a collective American identity in *Fantasies of the Master Race* when he posits his theory of substitution. Churchill lists several films, including *Taza, Son of Cochise*, *Broken Arrow*, *Sitting Bull*, and *The Outsider* that cast White actors in the title Native American roles, arguing that to do so was to “play Indian,” to claim a sort of American cultural authenticity that could otherwise never be theirs. While this era, beginning in the late 1940’s, marked a significant victory for Native American protagonists in film, the cultural implications of such casting decisions proved deeply problematic. These moments in film history complicate colonialism’s self-Other binary and serve as a stepping-stone for the sympathetic and romantic portrayals of the latter-half of the century.

The first attempts at authentic portrayals of Native Americans in film coincide interestingly with a time period in which the counterculture movement was not only in full swing, but also in which Native American activist groups were in the headlines. Films such as *A Man Called Horse* and *Little Big Man* attempted to portray Native Americans as spiritual and tragic figures worthy of sympathy, although the still-racist and romanticized representations, combined with the many factual historical inaccuracies in dress, language and customs rendered these attempts as failures. This focus on a temporal

representation of the Native American effectively negated the presence of modern Native Americans. They were “rendered inauthentic through contact with modern society” (Deloria 136), and the “authentic” Indian was one that no longer existed.

These films paved the way for the romanticized portrayal of the Native American in the films of the 1980’s and 1990’s. Films such as *Geronimo*, *Last of the Mohicans* and *Dances with Wolves* all sought to achieve an authentic, sympathetic and balanced portrayal of Whites and Native Americans in the final days of the frontier. *Dances with Wolves*, in particular, was a landmark film in its attempt to portray and general success (even among Native Americans) at portraying Native Americans as fully realized human beings. However, the film still suffers from many shortcomings, including the “White Messiah” trope, viewing Native Americans through a White lens, a lack of balance between the representations of the Lakota and the Whites, the reaffirmation of the “Bloodthirsty Savage” and the “Noble Savage,” and the tendency of the White protagonist in such films to be a better Indian than the Indians themselves. Kilpatrick theorizes that removing responsibility of the Whites in the film for the condition of the Native Americans, through psychosis, ignorance or sympathy, allows for a washing away of collective guilt, and makes historical anomalies such as sympathetic Civil War soldiers seem commonplace (128).

COMPLICATING THE HISTORY

The study of the depiction of Native Americans in film may at first appear straightforward. As outlined above, there was a clear shift in the filmic treatment of Native Americans as the twentieth century progressed, beginning with blatant adherence to previously defined stereotypes, circling around to a period of Indians and Whites-

playing-Indian protagonists, and ultimately resulting in more and more sympathetic portrayals, moving seemingly in a positive direction. But the myth-making nature of Hollywood cannot be denied, and a more in-depth review of scholarly claims as to the origin and future of such Hollywood stereotyping supports my arguments about the ingrained and embedded nature of White colonization of Native American culture.

In her book *Celluloid Indians. Native Americans and Film*, scholar Jacquelyn Kilpatrick, first points out, chronologically, the genesis and perpetuation of particular Native American stereotypes, most notably the “Noble Savage” and “Bloodthirsty Savage.” She argues that these general archetypes begin as far back as the literary accounts by European explorers of the Americas. Kilpatrick argues early on that hero-making in American mythology often juxtaposed white males with their mythic counterparts, the villainous natives: “We see this American self-image repeatedly reinforced by its juxtaposition to the image of Native Americans. In that way, the challenge presented by the ‘savages’ can be interpreted as a confirmation of the dominant value structure” (Kilpatrick, xxvi).

Kilpatrick also outlines what she refers to as “thumbnail sketches of complex representations of Native Americans,” or more colloquially, the common stereotypes, listing not only the aforementioned “Noble Savage” and “Bloodthirsty Savage” but also other stereotypes existing in three categories: mental, sexual and spiritual. The first categorical stereotype is mental, she claims, because Native Americans have always been seen as beings of lesser intelligence, in connection with such terms as “innocent,” “primitive” and “unsaved.” Because Indians were seen as “more creature than human, more bestial than celestial” (xvii), uncommon exaggeration was given to their sexual

prowess, both male and female. Lastly, early depictions of Native American spirituality reveal colonialist beliefs in their inherent heathenistic, savage qualities, while later depictions spin that same heathenism into an inherent closeness with Mother Nature (xvii). These stereotypes would continue to strengthen after the invention of film and to be solidified into the representations we see today.

Philip Deloria, author of *Playing Indian*, expands upon Kilpatrick's assertion of the position of Native Americans in America's early collective consciousness. Deloria does not argue against Kilpatrick's assertion of the stereotypes, but rather for what we as Americans have used these stereotypes. Deloria argues that much of what we are culturally as Americans has been borrowed from Native culture to exist counter to the English, or to the industrial and the mainstream. He provides a culturally historical and highly in-depth analysis of America's history of "playing Indian," arguing that we have done so collectively in order to answer a very simple question: What is an American? He elaborates on how Americans have, continuously and collectively, appropriated Native American identities in order to establish various American identities throughout the decades: the Boston Tea Party rebels, for example, who dressed up in Indian garb before flinging tea into the harbor, or the Boy Scouts, a quintessentially American group that focused on survival skills and featured Native American lore and craftmaking. Counterculturalists, Deloria claims, often took up Native American identities to assert themselves as non-mainstream, by embracing and adopting Native American cultures, ways of living, medicines and crafts, often without the input or knowledge of actual Native Americans. Deloria widens Kilpatrick's focus on the film genre and its creation

of stereotypes to the purpose these stereotypes have served and an explanation of their role in building the concept of “American.”

Other scholars, such as Ted Jojola, author of “Absurd Reality II: Hollywood Goes to the Indians,” reiterate the argument that “non-Indians drew on their own preconceptions and experiences to appropriate selective elements of the Indian” (13). Consequently, the resulting images of the “exotic and primitive” Indian were revisionist ones, “corroborating the outsider’s viewpoint” rather than an authentic and informed portrayal of Native culture (13).

Jojola puts a more political spin on things by arguing that Native American representations and sympathies intertwined with twentieth-century history and Native American activist movements. Jojola’s argument cycles around to a brief but spirited attempt by Native Americans to reclaim their identities within popular culture, most notably in the film world, as a reaction to this revisionist approach to their culture. After the American Indian Movement of the 1960s, Native American film alliances and guilds, most notably the Indian Actor’s Workshop and the American Indian Registry for the Performing Arts, appeared on the scene, in what was the beginning of an attempt by working Native actors and directors in Hollywood to reclaim the pieces of their culture that had been appropriated by the mainstream. So powerful and so controlling were these images that they became the reality, Jojola argues, and the irony became that Native Americans began behaving like their popular culture counterparts in order to be recognized as Native American at all (13).

So, too, does Ward Churchill, author of *Fantasies of the Master Race: Literature, Cinema, and the Colonization of American Indians*, place the genesis of Native American literary and cinematic representation in a decidedly political locality, rather than a cultural one. Framing his arguments in the introduction of *Fantasies* by stating that the purpose of his work is “to strip away at least some of the elaborate veil of misimpression and disinformation behind which the ugly countenance of Euroamerican conquest, colonization and disinformation have been so carefully hidden,” he argues that a systematic, overt and purposeful colonization of Native Americans is ongoing (X). With a blatantly defiant and angry tone, Churchill argues for an all-out conspiracy by Hollywood and the imperialist U.S. government to slowly eradicate Native Americans, one way or another. Later in his book, Churchill goes further to state that the “emulsification of native cultural content by Hollywood amounted, in essence, to its negation” (175). While I might agree with such a sentiment (and certainly Hollywood has been at the forefront of what has ultimately become a masking of contemporary Native culture), I find many faults in both Churchill’s argument and Jojola’s.

Firstly, I would agree with Buscombe that Churchill’s argument falls short when it begins to devolve into “a pedantic listing of errors of costumes, props, or weapons in films, exercises in tedious point-scoring” (17). It is a shallow argument, on ground already covered, that does little to further his claims of misrepresentations as a systematic form of genocide sanctioned and furthered by the United States government. Furthermore, Churchill overplays the political hand while underplaying the sociological and cultural, unlike scholars such as Deloria and Kilpatrick who focus on America’s shifting collective cultural desires as the possible location from which such

representations sprang. Churchill sees little room in his arguments for the role of cultural consciousness in the creation of “Hollywood’s Indian.” And while both Deloria and Churchill argue toward a form of collectively “playing Indian,” Churchill’s arguments imply much more sinister intentions and overt agendas that border on conspiracy.

Scholars such as Buscombe, however, do not deny the role of politics; in fact, Buscombe points to the success of sympathetic films such as *Broken Arrow* in heralding a new, friendlier and more liberal age for the Western, coinciding with major changes in government policies toward Native Americans, especially in matters of tribal sovereignty (101). However, arguments such as Buscombe’s, as well as my own, recognize that the sorts of politics reflected in Native representations were not those of blatant and systematic genocide, but rather shifts in government policy concerning Native Americans that likely reflected cultural shifts in sympathies toward Native Americans in the first place.

The problem with Jojola’s argument, as I see it, is that framing Native American representational issues within a political climate implies that Hollywood’s images and stereotypes have survived solely because Native American activist movements failed. Whether or not a more sustained bout of activism could have altered the images in the mainstream’s imagination is certainly possible, but I would argue that Jojola is faulting Native Americans for not taking up cultural arms sooner or since. Furthermore, as I will argue in my final chapter, a focus on the political brushes aside the academic and cultural aspects, and it is from an intersection of these viewpoints, not one angle in particular, that changes should come. Jojola’s argument is in many ways superficial, focusing on the general depictions of Native Americans by Hollywood. He follows the film industry, as

does Churchill, decade by decade, marking changes in the plot and casting of Native American films, beginning with the tide of non-Indians as Indians and ending in the 1990s with the “multi-cultural love affair” motif. The resulting arguments reads more like a pedantic history lesson, rather than a focused, meaningful questioning of the origins, powers and influences of such representations.

Churchill, in particular, seems most concerned with the temporal placement of Native Americans, i.e., locating stories about Native Americans in the time of westward expansion (usually 1850 to 1880) when Indians were at their most “authentic,” always depicted in relation to White settlers and through White lenses. But both Buscombe and Kilpatrick have decried such criticism as slightly naïve. Buscombe, in particular, is concerned that such arguments ignore material and realistic elements of filmmaking, namely audience and genre: “I don’t necessarily accept...that no one should make historical films, only films about Indians as they are now” (18.) He calls the practice of ignoring genre “simple” and “unrealistic,” and points out the difficulties in persuading audiences that films about contemporary Native Americans “are good for them, as well as good for Indians” (18).

Indeed, much of Buscombe’s arguments center around genre as a powerful tool in the creation and sustainment of Native American portrayals. While recognizing the power of genre in modern films, and the financial dangers of operating outside it, Buscombe also states that when working with a genre, “Filmmakers are not as free as they think they are, or as critics think they are, to choose a more ‘accurate’ or ideologically ‘correct’ type of representation. Genre locks in certain images to the exclusion of others” (20). He explores the concept of genre adjacent to Kilpatrick,

focusing on ideas of temporality and geography rather than Native American sensibilities in the formation of the western. Kilpatrick's argument fits here, too, as the character outlines, or "stereotypes," of Native Americans created early on formed character archetypes within the western genre, "locking in" certain personality traits and desires. Chapter Three will largely center around the concept of genre, both the western and science fiction (a genre as rigid and prescribed in colonialist structures as that of the western).

While many scholars have focused solely on the factual inaccuracies in Native American representations, I seek to move the conversation forward, asking what part of these misrepresentations, created and sustained by colonialist tendencies, play in the perception of Native Americans, both by the dominant mainstream and by Native Americans themselves. How does a fictional film language like "Hollywood Injun English" actually *create* a false reality for Native Americans? How do sympathetic Westerns and science fictions rewrite history, collectively absolving their audiences of guilt and promoting racist and colonialist ideologies? Lastly, what can scholars in the field of rhetoric and composition do about it? The following chapters expand on these questions of power inherent in cultural representations, and continue the conversation started by whoever first pointed at a screen and remarked that plains Indians probably didn't wear war bonnets while fishing.

CHAPTER II

LANGUAGE AND AUTHENTICITY: ANALYSIS AND IMPLICATIONS OF TWO HOLLYWOOD SPEECH ACTS

In the previous chapter, I reviewed the relevant literature on the study of Native American representations and cultural appropriations, and laid the groundwork for a further discussion of Native American studies in the field of rhetoric and composition. In this chapter, I will use linguist Barbara Meek's theory of Hollywood Injun English and apply it to television popular culture. I will conduct an independent analysis of her research by analyzing the speech patterns of Native American characters in two particular television episodes, one from *Buffy, the Vampire Slayer* and the other from *Grey's Anatomy*. Meek posits the existence of an entire faux dialect of speech present in Hollywood and used by Native American actors called "Hollywood Injun English." Like their corresponding images, these aural depictions of the "authentic voice" of Native Americans rob them of their cultural capital and of a voice of their own. I then discuss how the existence of HIE can be read as a means by which the mainstream has colonized Native American speech patterns and appropriated them for their own uses, as well as how such passive acceptance of HIE supports one of the central tenets of TribalCrit: that colonization is indeed endemic to society. HIE has become a measure of authenticity in itself, endangering understandings of Native American culture through ignorance

and a heightened inability of Native Americans to relate to their filmic counterparts.

“HOLLYWOOD INJUN ENGLISH”

Most of the sociolinguistic work done on Native American speech has focused on speech patterns and grammatical forms used by individual tribes in everyday speech. Scholars have studied the American Indian English pidgins formed after contact with English settlers, as well as the contemporary American Indian English dialects formed by individual tribes.

Unfortunately, it is not these actual Native American speech patterns that the mainstream American public is most familiar with. Because Native Americans are a small, often isolated minority, it is the popular culture versions of Native Americans that the dominant mainstream is most familiar with, and that seem to have shaped the popular view of their cultural identities. Films in particular have persisted in furthering stereotypical portrayals of Native Americans, whether romanticized or villainized. For example, Native American characters in most Hollywood films are not only marked visually, with long hair or traditional dress, but they often adhere to a specific style of speech that marks them as indigenous peoples, creating a fictional dialect of Native American speech based only loosely on actual speech patterns.

To this end, linguist Barbara Meek took on a straightforward, specialized analysis of these Native American speech patterns in several films, television shows, and even greeting cards. She published her findings in an article entitled “And the Injun Goes ‘How!’ Representations of American Indian English in White Public Space.” Meek notes several particular patterns arising in the speech of Native American characters, arguing that these linguistic patterns are part of a “body of preexisting ‘Hollywood Indian racial

characterizations' that screenwriters and actors must draw upon in order to represent Native American-ness in a way recognizable in 'white public space'" (2). Meek's findings demonstrate how these speech patterns reenact and strengthen a system that racializes and romanticizes Native Americans. She refers to this group of speech markers as "Hollywood Injun English."

This chapter will test Meek's linguistic analysis, using the nonstandard identifiers she attributes to Hollywood Injun English and applying them to two Native American characters' dialogues in recent television shows. After analyzing my findings, I will then discuss the implications of the existence and reinforcement of such a fictionalized, widespread form of speech. As Meek herself states, "...these linguistic images become racialized and racializing aspects of representation that contribute to the reproduction and transformation of ideologies about languages and peoples" (119), first creating and then maintaining societal inequalities, and metaphorically continuing the colonization of Native America.

METHODS OF DIALOGUE ANALYSIS

In all of Meek's samples, dialogue served to mark the Native American as such and contributed to the stereotyping of Native Americans through film, often by calling upon previously entrenched stereotypes like the "Noble Savage" and "Bloodthirsty Savage." The Native American characters in Meek's examples, and in early films, were often silent, communicating with grunts or body language, even with each other. At other times, the Native Americans used primitive, rudimentary English, demonstrating a lack of command of the English language. As Jaquelyn Kilpatrick, author of *Celluloid Indians: Native Americans and Film* criticizes: "Use of an alien-sounding language that

was rarely a genuine native language also contributed to the distancing and Othering of Native Americans for mainstream audiences. Hollywood had its own ideas of what an Indian sounded like, and the industry went to fairly extreme lengths to get the ‘authentic’ sound” (37). Kilpatrick even notes an instance in which the makers of an early Western wrote Native American dialogue by reversing the grammar of Standard American English – writing the dialogue backwards. Though some of the markers of HIE reflect differences that were once present in American Indian Pidgin English, or AI(P)E, most of these markers have been embellished and exaggerated, and others invented completely.

To test Meek’s assertions about HIE, I took dialogue from two episodes of two popular television shows, *Grey’s Anatomy* and *Buffy, the Vampire Slayer*. Each episode from the two different programs showcases a Native American character. In *Grey’s Anatomy*, the character is an elderly, ailing Navajo male named Clay, approximately sixty years of age, and modern – that is, existing in the modern day. The character in *Buffy, the Vampire Slayer* is also male, approximately twenty-five years of age. Rather than existing as a standard modern character, he is instead a “vengeance demon,” brought into existence as a representative of his people to seek revenge on the population of Sunnydale. As such, he is an example of a temporal Native American, preserved in his tribe’s past state of being, juxtaposed with the modern character Clay from *Grey’s Anatomy*.

To analyze the dialogue, I used the following characteristics of HIE as defined by Meek:

1. Slowed speech
2. Unusual pauses or pausal lengthening (sometimes indicative of incompetence in English-speaking, other times indicating eloquence or oratorical skills)
3. Formality
4. Vocabulary

On a morphosyntactic level, the grammatical markers of HIE include:

1. Lack of or misused verb tense
2. Removal of pronouns or pronoun substitution
3. Removal of articles, prepositions, and auxiliary or modal verbs
4. Lack of contraction

The linguistic patterns present in “Hollywood Injun English” (or HIE) do not include many specific differences in pronunciation, nor are these markers only able to be produced by Native American characters. Rather, they have been associated with Native Americans for so long that they have become intertwined with, and often entirely comprise, popular conceptions of Native Americans. These patterns are so strongly associated with Native Americans that an actor portraying a Native American character without drawing upon this linguistic style would likely be labeled inauthentic.

Meek refers to these characteristics as she would characteristics of any dialect, which implies consequences for their misuse or absence: “The pattern for HIE, then, is that contraction is not a linguistic option; it is ‘ungrammatical’ for HIE” (99). The

problem here, however, is that HIE is not reflective of actual Native American speech patterns, nor has it ever been. Like the Mid-Atlantic English used by theatre and film actors before the 1960's, HIE is a learned dialect, faintly reminiscent of actual speech but ultimately based on a stereotype of a culture's linguistic patterns. Although Meek finds examples of each characteristic, it is important to note that not all characteristics are present in every Native American speech event.

I have taken three lines of dialogue from the Native American character for analysis, one set from each television episode. Meek did not provide a comparison for many of her HIE examples, and thus often fails to adequately provide a standard with which to compare the differences in HIE. She refers often to Standard American English (SAE), but provides no specifics or measurements, only generalities. In an attempt to address this problem, included are three lines of dialogue, spoken by the characters in conversation with the Native American character, taken from the scenes in each show in which the Native American character speaks (one line of Buffy is taken from the scene immediately following, as she speaks only two lines to Hoose). Though these cannot possibly be generalized to apply to all of SAE, they can provide some measure of a standard.

By analyzing and applying Meek's theory on the unique grammatical characteristics of HIE to the speech of a Navajo character, I found several correlations between her analysis and this particular example of Native American speech, as well as a few instances in which the Native American dialogue is closer to SAE than HIE would posit. I used the same techniques as Meek for measuring speed of speech (number of seconds taken to deliver each line of dialogue, divided by number of words per line, to

determine rate of articulation) and length of pauses. Each length of time was twice measured with a stopwatch, and the mean of the two measurements was used. I applied these measurements to both the speech patterns of the SAE-speaking character and the HIE-speaking character. I also counted usage and non-usage of the other HIE characteristics, in an attempt to quantify the consistency of the Native American characters' choices as compared to the SAE choices of the character opposite. Pauses of one second or longer are noted with (1), two seconds or longer with (2).

HOLLYWOOD INJUN ENGLISH AND STANDARD AMERICAN ENGLISH IN *GREY'S ANATOMY*

Izzy (SAE, in italics) and **Clay (HIE, in bold)** - *Grey's Anatomy*, "The Ties that Bind," 2008.

i. *Izzy: He's trying to say he would rather live a shorter life that's unhaunted than a longer one that is. I'm not saying I agree, I'm just (2) I'm just gonna stand over here.*

Clay: The heart that you take out of me (1), what happens to it? I need that heart back (1) for ritual.

ii. *Izzy: So what do you do with the haunted piece, do you bury it, or –*

Clay: You have your beliefs (1) I have mine. Science is a belief (1), a belief in only what you can see and touch. (1) I believe in more.

iii. *Izzy: So does the not-touching thing, does that apply to just the flesh, or –*

Clay: Burn it. Actually (1) my tribe's medicine man will burn it. I'm not allowed to even touch the smoke.

Rate of articulation – The rates of articulation for Clay's lines are 3.5, 2.5 and 2.1, respectively. The rates of articulation for the corresponding SAE (as spoken by the

character Izzy) are 4.3, 3.3 and 4, respectively. These numbers suggest that the rate of articulation in HIE is considerably slower than SAE (the lower the number, the slower the rate of articulation.) Izzy, at one point, speaks over twice as quickly as Clay. Clay's most rapidly delivered line is only a fraction faster than Izzy's slowest (3.5 versus 3.3.)

Pauses and pausal lengthening – In these examples, six pauses of one second or longer exist. Four of the six can be argued to exist in a place corresponding with SAE (where a comma or sentence break exists) and two appear to exist at random (the pause after “back” and the pause after “actually”). These two “random” pauses correspond with Meek's analysis that pauses in HIE can be placed nearly anywhere, whereas the four standard pauses exist at a phrasal boundary and are not necessarily marked. Rather than indicate incompetence or a non-native English speaker, as pauses sometimes do in HIE, Meek would argue that the atypical pauses from Clay indicate eloquence and wisdom, as if he is choosing his words carefully and for effect (Meek 98). Furthermore, it can be argued that all of these pauses are lengthened, whether they exist at a phrasal boundary or not, to better conform with HIE. Izzy's lines, by contrast, include only one pause of two seconds, arguably built into the dialogue as an awkward moment when she appears to agree with Clay and becomes embarrassed. No other pauses are present for Izzy, even at phrasal boundaries.

Formality – American Indian Pidgin English scholar Mary Miller notes that, in fiction, Native Americans are often marked either by silence or by a sophisticated and courtly style of speech, highly romanticized and unrealistic (144). Pauses and pausal lengthening contribute to the formality of everyday speech; however, also present in the above examples are parallel structure (“You have your beliefs, I have mine”), in which

the second phrase of the sentence mirrors the first in basic sentence-verb-object structure as well as type of noun (“you” corresponds structurally with “I,” both personal pronouns, and “your” corresponds with “mine,” both personal possessive pronouns), and identical verbs. Furthermore, the sentence is constructed so that the object of both phrases need only be mentioned once, so that the parallelism does not devolve into repetition.

Vocabulary – None of the particular vocabulary mentioned by Meek as existing specifically in HIE, such as “peace pipe” or “happy hunting ground,” is present in this example, although her list was not by any means exclusive. Native Americans in films often speak metaphorically of spiritual or earthy subjects, referencing animals, plants, and medicines, to highlight their perceived “closeness with the earth.”

In this example, Clay speaks of spiritual “beliefs,” mentioning some form of the word four times. His discussion of “the heart” can be argued to exist in context, because he is a heart transplant patient, although it can also be argued that this character was written as Native American because of the close association of terms like “heart” and “spirit” to Native American culture. Clay also mentions his tribe’s medicine man, a lexical choice within the vocabulary boundaries of HIE (over, say, minister or spiritual leader) that clearly marks Clay as Native American. Fire and smoke have also been associated with Native American culture, perceived to play a large role in ceremonies, rituals and communication. These types of associations with nature and spirit complete the “noble savage” motif, one of the main stereotypes of Native American depictions outlined by Jacquelyn Kilpatrick in *Celluloid Indians: Native Americans and Film*. Specific vocabulary choices in Clay’s dialogue strengthen these stereotypes.

Lack of contraction - Lack of contraction is moderate: Clay capitalizes on two of four opportunities to use contractions, whereas Izzy uses contractions in all possible places. Arguably, the end result is that Clay's speech appears more formal, and Izzy's more vernacular.

Lack of or misused verb tense – Clay misuses verb tense twice, substituting present tense for future tense (“The heart that you *take*...” and “I *need* that heart back...”) Clay's other verb tense choices are correct. All of Izzy's verb tense choices are correct.

Removal of pronouns or pronoun substitution – None.

Removal of articles, prepositions, and auxiliary or modal verbs – Clay removes one article in front of “ritual,” but leaves others, utilizing five of six opportunities for article retention.

HOLLYWOOD INJUN ENGLISH AND STANDARD AMERICAN ENGLISH IN *BUFFY, THE VAMPIRE SLAYER*

Buffy (SAE, in italics) and **Hoose** (HIE, in bold) - *Buffy, the Vampie Slayer*, “Pangs,” 1999.

i. *Buffy: You're very wrong about that.*

Hoose: I am vengeance. I am my people's cry (1). They call for Hoose, for the avenging spirit to carve out justice!

ii. *Buffy: They tell you to start an ear collection?*

Hoose: (2) You slaughtered my people (1). Now you kill their spirit (1). This is a great day for you.

iii. *Buffy: Yeah, well, it's plenty uncommon for me to freeze up during a fight. I mean, I had the guy. I was ready for the takedown and I stopped. And – Native American.*

Hoose: First people who dwell in Mesupasup (1), hear me and descend (1), walk with me upon the sup again (2). Hear me also lunashoosh, spirits from below (1), creatures of the night (1), take human form (1) and join the battle (1). Bring me my revenge!

Rate of Articulation – The rates of articulation for Hoose's lines are 2.4, 1.8 and 1.6, respectively. The rates of articulation for Buffy's corresponding lines are 4.1, 4.4 and 3.75, respectively. Given that a higher number reflects a faster rate of articulation, it is clear that Buffy's lines of dialogue are delivered at a much greater speed than Clay's. This mirrors the difference in speed in the first example from *Grey's Anatomy*.

Pauses and pausal lengthening – Hoose takes no fewer than nine one-second pauses and two two-second pauses, taking nearly every opportunity to pause at phrasal and sentence boundaries. This is compared to a lack of pauses in Buffy's speech, despite three phrasal boundaries and three sentence boundaries where pauses might appear.

Formality – Hoose's speech is extremely formal, particularly in example three. "Spirits from below" parallels with "creatures of the night," (noun- adjectival prepositional phrase) as does "take human form" and "join the battle" (command - direct object.) His style, which includes commands and the repetition of the phrase "hear me," suggests a speech, possibly recalling some of the more famous Native American speeches.

Vocabulary – Hoose mentions the word "spirit" three times in as many lines. He also alludes to a time before White expansion into North America with "first people who dwell" which, according to Meek "allude to timeless epochs like 'before the white man,'

which underscore the image of American Indians as existing in some primitive state before contact with Indo-Europeans” (108). Churchill provides a context for the phrase “you slaughtered my people,” which demonstrates an example of the temporal location of the Hollywood Indian as existing only during the period of Westward expansion, between approximately 1850 and 1880 (168). Hoose also uses what appear to be Samala names for certain people and places, although in my research only one of the words, “sup,” could be verified as a Samala word.

Contractions – Hoose uses one contraction out of a possible three, whereas Buffy uses all opportunities (two of two) for contraction usage.

Lack of or misused verb tense – Hoose largely uses present tense and command forms. At one point, however, he misuses the present tense “kill” (“Now you *kill* their spirit.”) As Buffy is in the act of trying to kill him, this tense should be present progressive (“Now you *are killing* their spirit.”)

Removal of pronouns or pronoun substitution – Hoose correctly uses all pronouns at all available times, although he once uses his proper name where he could use a pronoun – “They call for *Hoose*, for the avenging spirit....”

Deletion of articles, prepositions, and auxiliary or modal verbs – Hoose utilizes six out of nine opportunities for article retention. In his speech to the spirits (line III), three articles are deleted, perhaps to line up grammatically with HIE and to heighten the flow and eloquence of his speech. No prepositions or auxiliary or modal verbs are deleted. Buffy utilizes all opportunities for articles, although she deletes one auxiliary verb: “[Did] they tell you...”

LINGUISTIC ANALYSIS

The prevalence of a great number of aspects of HIE in these two examples seems to correlate with and support Meek's theory of the presence of a Hollywood dialect of English spoken by Native American characters. While Native American characters Clay and Hoose demonstrate most aspects of HIE, the corresponding SAE spoken by characters Izzy and Buffy reflect no HIE whatsoever. Izzy, for example, demonstrates no courtly speech or referencing of particular lexical items associated with Native American culture. Buffy uses contractions and articles at all given opportunities. Both Izzy and Buffy speak significantly faster, at times over twice as fast, than their Native American counterparts. Whether the HIE components are strongly, moderately or weakly demonstrated, it is still present in the Native American characters' speech.

Notably, Hoose's speech demonstrates more characteristics of HIE than does Clay's. The most obvious explanation for this marked difference is that Hoose's character is meant to be a representation of the Native American during the time of colonial expansion, whereas Clay's character lives in the modern day. Screenwriters may have used HIE more extensively with Hoose to mark him more firmly as "Other," as a spirit of a bygone era. Visually, Hoose is marked as a Native American far more so than Clay, with warpaint, deerskin clothing and bow and arrows, compared to the latter's traditionally long hair as the only visual indication of his background (aside from the actor's genetic differences, such as skin tone and facial structure.) Another explanation might be the difference between the publication dates of the two episodes, which would give weight to the possibility that HIE is fusing more with SAE, although this explanation seems unlikely given that the episodes are less than a decade apart.

We could also read Hoose as an example of the “Bloodthirsty Savage” violently seeking vengeance throughout the episode, and Clay as a typical “Noble Savage,” wise and well-versed in the spiritual world. Because the “Bloodthirsty Savage” stereotype is older than that of the “Noble Savage,” the “Bloodthirsty Savage” stereotype might require a stronger prevalence of HIE characteristics to mark it as such, as it has its origins in a time long before the sympathetic and slightly more nuanced portrayals of Native Americans in sympathetic Westerns.

Nonetheless, that not all aspects of HIE are prevalent in these examples may be proof in itself of the legitimacy of the Hollywood dialect, because HIE appears to be undergoing change (like any dialect) and may be converging with SAE over time. As the political climate changes and becomes more sensitive to portrayals of minorities, Hollywood screenwriters may seek to remove some of the more obvious HIE irregularities (notably, the morphosyntactic changes,) leaving only the subtle differences (courtly speech, lexical references, lack of contraction, etc.) Native American representation scholars such as Churchill, Kilpatrick, and Deloria have all noted the shifting sympathies of Hollywood toward the Native Americans, from the change in representation from villains and simpletons to civilizable savages to “vanishing races” to sympathetic and emulable figures. While such changes may appear to reflect more positive attitudes, they actually continue to empower those already in power.

IMPLICATIONS OF LINGUISTIC APPROPRIATION

The gradual emergence of HIE as a fictionalized dialect is a form of colonization in itself, a way of stripping Native Americans of power over their representations by forcing those representations to conform to prescribed expectations, thus serving the

interests of the dominant majority. Hollywood scriptwriters and actors have claimed the Native American way of speaking from the earliest outset of cinema, building upon and reinforcing preordained stereotypes. Reproducing such racializing ideologies requires a base cultural “knowledge” – I use the term loosely – of what it means to be Native American.

Scholars Jane Hill and Edward Buscombe, seemingly in conversation with one another, both posit the existence of a cultural reservoir from which representations and references are drawn. In *Injuns!’ Native Americans in the Movies*, Buscombe provides a historical explanation for Meek’s findings on the existence and rigidity of HIE, stating that “the cinema already inherited a predetermined set of ideas and images” about Native Americans from Wild West shows, dime novels and pseudo-historical first-person accounts of the New World (19). Similarly, Jane Hill, author of the article “Mock Spanish: A Site for the Indexical Reproduction of Racism in American English,” discusses the use of Mock Spanish by Whites and its role in the perpetuation of stereotypes against Latinos. Hill posits a similar theory to Buscombe’s ideas on the “predetermined set of ideas and images” inherited by cinema. She argues that negative stereotypes result from “negative residue” – that is, the negative and undesirable qualities of a minority left over after the dominant culture has assimilated and then placed value upon the desirable qualities.

Hill gives a name to the literal and metaphorical appropriation of the cultural property of minority groups by the dominant culture: “incorporation.” “By ‘incorporation’ members of dominant groups expropriate desirable resources, both material and symbolic, from subordinate groups. Through incorporation, what Toni

Morrison calls 'whiteness' is 'elevated'. Qualities taken from the system of 'color' are reshaped within whiteness into valued properties of mind and culture" (Hill, "Mock Spanish"). Hill argues that when all that is good and desirable is taken from a subordinate group and "incorporated" by a dominant one, it necessarily follows that nothing is left to define the subordinate group but the "undesirable qualities of body and nature" ("Mock Spanish").

Such a term allows us to give an all-encompassing name to the cultural appropriation of Native American identity, supporting the idea that colonization is endemic to society, while explicitly discussing the consequences of continuously reproducing such subconscious ideologies. This "incorporation," Hill and Morrison argue, elevates the status of Whiteness and lowers the status of whichever marginalized group was stripped of all its good qualities, maintaining social inequalities by sustaining cultural colonization and racism. The sustainment of these inequalities can also be achieved by "masking," which will be discussed more in Chapter Three.

Meek's argument is not that HIE elevates Whiteness by mocking and deriding Native American speech, as Hill argues with Mock Spanish. Instead, she argues that "by speaking Hollywood Injun English (when pretending to be Indian,) the performer does not mock any Native American language, but rather imbues his Indian character with a weak mind and a childlike persona, and locates this character as subordinate to a dominant White public" (120). While I agree with Meek, from one angle, from another I would argue that often the "Noble Savage" archetype, commonly coinciding with the "childlike persona" indicated by Meek, also implies a deeper spiritual understanding on the part of Native Americans. Renowned Native American intellectual Vine Deloria Jr.

captures White fascination with Native American religion: “[Native American] religions are considered exotic, primitive, and precisely the kind of spirituality that many Christians wish they could find in their own rituals” (qtd. in Warrior, xiv). So while a childlike persona might imply a mental inferiority, it also implies a spiritual superiority through a desire for a simpler, more spiritual existence, particularly in recent, sympathetic Hollywood portrayals of Native Americans such as *Dances with Wolves*.

HIE not only imbues Native Americans on screen with particular characteristics, but serves to marginalize them as well. Because everyday interactions between Native Americans and the dominant culture are extremely limited, HIE’s effect is ultimately distancing, rather than denigrating, serving to further remove Native Americans from our collective consciousness. Meek’s argument about the temporalizing nature of HIE supports this reading: “However, unlike...Mock Spanish, HIE has a historical dimension that emerges as part of and continues to reproduce the timeless, primordial dimension of American Indian representations” (118). Thus, HIE actively reproduces the ideologies of the dominant culture by marginalizing modern Native Americans, allowing those members of Hollywood writing and reproducing HIE to continue profiting from Native American misrepresentations.

It is not Native Americans themselves but their Hollywood representations, not Native Americans as they coexist with the dominant culture today but Native Americans forever imbued with the residue of primordial representation, that exist in the forefront of the minds of the dominant mainstream. It is interesting that such a position reflects yet another way in which Native Americans exist in the liminal, outside the continuum of favored-unfavored minorities, both racialized and romanticized, yet still largely hidden

from sight. Our understandings of Native Americans are as far removed from reality as the Native American identity a child assumes when she faces her palm outward and exclaims “How!” – an imitation of a representation that is itself an imitation of a stereotype that may or may not have once been based in fact. In other words, pretty far.

Kilpatrick supports such a reading of the distancing effect of HIE when she describes the cultural marginalization of Native Americans after the entrenchment of Native American stereotypes: “Native peoples would remain largely unseen, displaced now by the Hollywood Indian, a cinematic creation springing directly from the ubiquitous images of the old bloodthirsty savage and his alter ego, the noble savage” (15). She, too, recognizes the marginalizing effect of misrepresentation, especially when those misrepresentations are all that is seen.

Scholars of Native American representations and cultural appropriation such as Philip Deloria and Ward Churchill have remarked on the tendency of mainstream culture to think of authentic Native Americans as “creatures of a particular time,” relics of a past era that no longer exist. Non-Indians comprise nearly all of Hollywood’s directors and screenwriters, and thus were able to write and direct Native American dialogue as they saw fit, creating their own versions of what it meant to be authentic. The dominant culture has been trained, through Hollywood, to associate certain images like tipis and words or linguistic phrases like “peace pipe” with Native Americans, so much so that a modern Native American is quite unrecognizable as such without these markers, effectively rendering many Native Americans as inauthentic in the White imagination. Such temporal binding through linguistic restraint creates problems for modern Native Americans, who may find themselves without any means of self-expression, making it

easier to overlook modern Native American plights by implying that “real” Native Americans have long since disappeared. Without voices, or a way of asserting cultural power outside of the narrow margins of imagined Hollywood authenticity, Native Americans were placed at a strong disadvantage, and have remained there ever since.

Bryan Brayboy, who outlined the tenets of the emerging Tribal Critical Race Theory in his article “Toward a Tribal Critical Race Theory in Education,” discusses the impact of colonialism on Native Americans: “The colonization has been so complete that even many American Indians fail to recognize that we are taking up colonialist ideas when we fail to express ourselves in ways that may challenge dominant society’s ideas about who and what we are supposed to be” (431). What does it mean for a culture, if they lack cultural capital to such an extent that they can rarely speak for themselves, without being labeled inauthentic? What does it mean when their speech was long ago distorted and racialized to fit an ideal driven deep into dominant society by centuries of misrepresentation?

I have provided in this chapter an independent analysis of two speech acts to support linguist Barbara Meek’s theory of a fictional Native American dialect, dubbed “Hollywood Injun English.” I have argued that the creation and continued existence of a fictional dialect for Native American characters in Hollywood, whether overt or covert, blatant or subtle, appropriates cultural capital from modern Native Americans who are clearly not being represented on-screen with any amount of accuracy. They are continuously spoken about and spoken for by a majority population who view Native Americans as relics of a past era, a “vanishing” sort whose modern counterparts do not reflect true Indianness.

Although the absence of approximately half of the characteristics of HIE in these examples is a step forward, the fact that HIE exists at all places restraints on the cultural power that Native Americans can possess. It may not be until HIE disappears entirely that modern Native Americans truly feel freed from their fictional counterparts, able to assert their Native American-ness as they see fit, rather than being forced to operate within the confines of a perceived authenticity.

CHAPTER III

A CRITICAL DISCOURSE ANALYSIS OF THE MACRO NARRATIVE ELEMENTS IN *DANCES WITH WOLVES* AND *AVATAR*

In the previous chapter, I performed an analysis of the language utilized by Native American characters in two modern television shows. I used Barbara Meek's "Hollywood Injun English" to demonstrate the extent to which this fictionalized version of English is ingrained into the mainstream's imaginings of Native Americans, and to discuss its implications, including its role in the marginalization of Native Americans. I began to place popular culture's representation of Native Americans within the umbrella of Tribal Critical Race Studies, seeking to prove that by reproducing such racist and inaccurate portrayals of Native Americans, the dominant mainstream is simultaneously contributing to the reproduction of the physical and psychological conditions in which Native Americans live.

Hollywood Injun English demonstrated where we situate Native Americans within popular culture on a micro level, analyzing specific grammatical elements and prescribed Hollywood speech events. It is a linguistic means by which we can identify and then analyze the colonizing effects of popular culture on Native Americans,

demonstrating the colonial power of language and dialogue written by the dominant culture and placed in the mouths of a marginalized one.

In this chapter, I will attack the same problem, but from a macro level. Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA), the tool I will use here, can help us understand in much broader terms where we situate ourselves in relation to Native Americans. My aim here is not to provide an overview of the literature on CDA or to discuss the critiques of such an approach, but rather to invoke CDA as a primary method of first identifying film as a type of discourse (a predominant one within popular culture) and then tackling certain filmic elements using specific tools. I will analyze two films using CDA, Kevin Costner's *Dances with Wolves* and James Cameron's *Avatar*, to uncover how production choices, narrative structures, and genre combine to reinforce the marginalization and misrepresentation of Native Americans and to commandeer Native American historical narratives.

CRITICAL DISCOURSE ANALYSIS AND POWER STRUCTURES

Critical Discourse Analysis, or CDA, is a contemporary method of textual analysis, combining forms of analysis from various academic areas. In *Cultural Studies and Discourse Analysis: A Dialogue on Language and Identity*, authors Chris Barker and Dariusz Galasinski describe how CDA uses specific tools to argue that language and discourse form a “system of options from which language users make their choices” (65). For CDA scholars, language does not reflect an objective, outside world but is, in fact, selective and arbitrary by its very nature. If language is selective, then users of language make constant representational choices and decisions, both conscious and unconscious,

about which aspects of reality to include or exclude in discourse. CDA scholar Sue MacGregor puts it succinctly: “Our words are never neutral” (2).

CDA proponents believe that CDA itself is instrumental in revealing ways in which authors of texts establish, maintain, or even at times uproot and usurp the status quo (Barker and Galasinski 65). Because mainstream ideologies are inherent in discourses produced by the mainstream, and thus any and all inequities and power imbalances that exist with a society will necessarily be perpetuated by the narrative, language, and structural choices utilized in the production of dominant discourses, as well as the context within which the text was produced.

With the view that all reality is subjective, and that language choices are merely choices of representation, Thomas Huckin, author of the CDA how-to article “Critical Discourse Analysis,” explains that the purpose of CDA analysts is to “try to illuminate ways in which the dominant forces in a society construct versions of reality that favor the interests of those same forces” (96). The overarching purpose of CDA is to utilize textual aspects such as genre, modality, foregrounding and register to reveal the power dynamics that play out in the intersections of the text itself, the social contexts within which the text was produced, and the discursive systems that link text and context (Huckin 95).

Thus, discourse becomes crucial in the perpetuation of social inequalities and status quos. The tool-kit of CDA allows us to use as verifiable a method as possible to systematically strip away outer layers of discourses to reveal hidden “messages.” Scholars can then use a variety of theories and lenses to analyze these messages. To summarize, scholar T.A. van Dijk writes: “CDA is concerned with studying and analyzing written texts and spoken words to reveal the discursive sources of power,

dominance, inequality, and bias and how these sources are initiated, maintained, reproduced, and transformed within specific social, economic, political, and historical contexts” (qtd. in McGregor 2).

DANCES WITH WOLVES: A SYMPATHETIC WESTERN

In 1990, first-time director Kevin Costner released *Dances with Wolves*, a western epic that was lauded for its earnest portrayal of Native Americans. As arguably the apex of what many scholars have dubbed the “sympathetic western,” Costner’s film swept the Oscars that year and won the hearts of millions, White and Native American alike.

I will provide an overview of the literature of the film, peppered with my own CDA macro-analysis, in order to lay a foundation for the discussion of *Avatar*, a film released nearly twenty years later that nevertheless echoes similar themes, plot devices and romanticisms. I have chosen to focus on three macro-elements of CDA for both films: genre, framing, and agency. I hope to demonstrate that these two films utilize the Native American historical narrative not only for commercial gain, but also to alleviate White guilt and cement particular stereotypes and fetishes in the minds of the dominant mainstream. By first identifying and then analyzing the aforementioned aspects of these two films, we will see how they combine to form a picture of cultural colonization.

Set in 1863, *Dances with Wolves* is the story of injured Civil War Lieutenant John Dunbar, who is assigned to a post of his choosing after he willingly rides unarmed across a battlefield unscathed. He chooses a frontier post, and decides to stay even after finding the post abandoned. In the process of rebuilding the post, he befriends a tribe of Sioux. After staying with the people for some time, he realizes that he feels closer to the Sioux than to his fellow Whites. He marries Stands with a Fist, the only other White member of

the tribe, takes a Sioux name (thus the title, *Dances with Wolves*), and helps the Sioux defend themselves against attacking Pawnee.

Later in the narrative, after abandoning his post, he returns to retrieve belongings and is captured by soldiers now occupying the fort. Intending to try him for treason, the soldiers take him east as a prisoner. The Sioux eventually come to his rescue, and Dunbar and Stands with a Fist decide to leave the Sioux so as not to endanger them anymore. The film ends, but the closing credits let us know that it would be a mere thirteen more years before the remainder of the Sioux were subjugated by the U.S. government.

GENRE, FRAMING, AND AGENCY: THE MACRO ELEMENTS

The inclusion of Native Americans in the western cinematic genre is, historically, nearly inevitable, and thus highly problematic. In Chapter One, I provided a brief overview of the literature on Hollywood representations of the Native American. Here, I will briefly capture the beginnings and flourishings of the western genre, including what I and other scholars perceive as the problems inherent in a genre so historically centered and culturally one-sided.

As touched upon in Chapter One, scholar Jacquelyn Kilpatrick discusses the “genesis of the stereotypes” of Native American representations in *Celluloid Indians: Native Americans and Film*, tracing them as far back as early settler accounts whose descriptions of the land, flora and fauna often included the human creatures inhabiting it, laying the groundwork for James Fenimore Cooper’s romanticized representations and an entire genre in which Native Americans are eternally connected with land and place. Edward Buscombe, author of *Injuns! Native Americans in the Movies*, expands upon

Kilpatrick's discussion of these origins, citing the popularity of "Indian plays" as early as the 1830s as likely serving as a precursor to the immense popularity of traveling Wild West shows such as Buffalo Bill's, shows that used actual Native Americans who were nevertheless hand-picked based upon just how authentically "Native" they looked.

While the outlines of Native American stereotypes were in place during the era of print, cinema also played a significant role in the cementing of particular stereotypes and images of Native Americans, largely due to the near-exact overlap in the time period of the expansion into and "taming" of the Wild West and the invention of cinema. It must have felt to the people of the early twentieth century as if cinema were invented specifically to capture the "final days" of the "authentic" Indian. Not surprisingly, westerns were one of the most popular film genres for many decades.

This last point lights upon one of the problems inherent in the representation of Native Americans in the western genre. While I have discussed before the limits of locality and temporality afforded to Native American representation in genres, the temporality and location of the western means that the western itself will inevitably be set against the backdrop of the colonization of the Americas, and that the Native American does not exist in cinema but in relation to Whites during the time period in which Whites were expanding into and colonizing the West. This narrow representation serves in early westerns as a counterpoint to Whites: to define, in precise terms, what Whites are *not*. In later, more sympathetic westerns, the two cultures come closer together, often linked by a White male "playing Indian," but still the representation of the two cultures within the genre remains inseparable.

Even when a western does not feature any Native Americans, it will always feature the land through scenery and backdrop, through journeying, and through the metaphorical “taming” of the “wilderness.” Land in westerns is a concept tied to Natives not only through early settlers’ accounts of new lands inhabited by Indians but also through the Natives themselves, whose dealings with the government and settlers seldom revolved around anything but land. Thus, land becomes a trope with a Native American presence in itself, ever present yet often overlooked. Westerns, then, are essentially about the frontier, about land, expansion and colonization, Native Americans and spiritual awakenings, and the historical implication of the inevitability of a predominantly White America after the final days of the frontier.

A near-constant lament of Native American film scholars is the stubborn refusal of filmmakers to remove Native Americans from this particular historical period. Like nearly all westerns, *Dances with Wolves* is set between the years 1850-1880, creating what Philip Deloria, author of *Playing Indian*, argues is a fixed temporality for the “authentic” Native American. Ward Churchill puts it another way: “...the period embodied in such representations spans barely three decades...There is no ‘before’ to the story, and there is no ‘after’” (168). Jacquelyn Kilpatrick, author of *Celluloid Indians*, agrees, referring to this narrow stretch of decades as the “comfort zone” (129). Costner’s choice to represent Native Americans in this time period, no matter how authentically, still problematizes the very idea of authenticity and the power that such an idea gives to Whites over Native Americans. This temporal limitation provides what is arguably the biggest road block to more accurate portrayals of Native Americans: the idea that the authentic Native American vanished after 1880, forever locating and locking much of

Native American cultural capital into a heavily romanticized and fetishized era, creating a sense of nostalgia for a time period and a people who are perceived to no longer exist.

So, too, does the production of discourse within a genre provide a specific template for production and consumption. According to Edward Buscombe, “Working within a genre, filmmakers are not as free as they think they are, or as critics think they are, to choose a more ‘accurate’ or ideologically ‘correct’ type of representation. Genre locks in certain images to the exclusion of others” (Buscombe 20). In other words, a century of westerns has largely taught viewers what to expect in terms of plot, conflict, images, time frame, etc. It has also taught viewers what it means to be “Native American,” and what to expect when these “Native Americans” appear.

The subversion of the more traditional trope of the Native American as villain in sympathetic westerns is a small step forward, although the trope does not disappear, as both the “Noble Savage” and the “Bloodthirsty Savage” appear in *Dances with Wolves*. Certain conventions, such as the historical setting, the film’s backdrop, and the frame of the story work against this subversion by limiting the presence, function, depth and agency of the Native Americans in the story. Dunbar befriends and supports the Sioux in their battle against the Pawnee: a century of stories about “bloodthirsty savages” forces the western to all but necessitate bad Indians.

Framing, too, limits our perspective on the Native Americans in the film. *Dances with Wolves* is an excellent example of the sympathetic western frame. From Dunbar’s point of view, the audience follows him beginning with his injury and through his venture into wilder territories that symbolizes a spiritual journey: in this case, his movement from self-identification as a White man to his self-identification as a Sioux. While

Dunbar's encounter with the Sioux changes him irrevocably, *Dances with Wolves* is nevertheless a story about the spiritual journey of a White Civil War soldier, a story of cultural appropriation that Whites have culturally embodied since America was still a colony. It is not a story about Sioux Indians. The Sioux, while revered in the film as a nearly idyllic people and painted in direct contrast to the filth, impropriety, and at times insanity of the Whites, serve their purpose as mere catalysts for Dunbar's change.

If genre necessitates a particular frame for the western, then the framing creates a clear outline for agency. For example, it is *Dunbar's* encounter with the Sioux, not the other way around. It is Dunbar who assists the Sioux (with White weapons) in their defeat of the Pawnee. While Dunbar's story and the story of the Sioux eventually merge, more or less, it is Dunbar, and by extension all Whites, whose actions drive the immediate narrative of the story and the historical narrative of manifest destiny and eminent domain.

Framing and agency facilitate the identification of omissions – that is, what is left unmentioned or unexplained. Dunbar is awarded a medal and reassigned to his post by Major Fambrough, who rambles unbalanced about the Middle Ages and urinates on himself before committing suicide. He is guided to Fort Sedgewick by a filthy, mannerless degenerate whose own stupidity gets him killed early in the film. So why the absence of "normal" Whites in *Dances with Wolves*? Why, for example, is John Dunbar the only sane, clean, and reasonable White in the film? Why are other "everyman" characters omitted? Perhaps it is because, as Jacquelyn Kilpatrick argues, *Dances with Wolves* is so over-reaching in its desire to abolish centuries of stereotypes over the course of one film that it actually dredges up White stereotypes in response. Ward Churchill

supports this argument by contending that while sympathetic Whites did exist in the West, they were “historically anomalous in the extreme” but, through characters like John Dunbar, are “rendered normative in terms of audience identification” (189). The result is a subtle but crucial rewriting of history to assuage White guilt, a point that I will expand on toward the end of this chapter.

A COLONIALIST READING OF *AVATAR*

Nearly twenty years after *Dances with Wolves* James Cameron directed the highly anticipated, largely computer-generated, three-dimensional sci-fi hit *Avatar*. Like *Dances with Wolves*, *Avatar* was received with largely positive critical acclaim, with the general consensus that it made up for what it lacked in plot with superb art direction and filmic innovation. It garnered numerous Academy Award nominations and took home three, and broke the box-office record for highest grossing film of all time, pulling in more than \$2 billion in gross revenue. I discuss the mainstream commercial and critical success of these two films in order to demonstrate not their inherent value but their *perceived* value, the potential impact such successful films can have, not only on Hollywood but also on Western culture.

Avatar takes place on a distant planet called Pandora in the distant future. Like *Dances with Wolves*, it follows the story of a wounded war veteran, this time named Jake Sully, on his spiritual journey toward becoming a Na’vi, the humanoid tribe indigenous to Pandora. Initially, Jake is pulled in last-minute to take part in a joint operation led by humans on a remote colony on Pandora. Some of the humans are there to study the biology of Pandora, of which the Na’vi are a part. However, a mining company called RDA is also on Pandora, preparing to mine a rare natural resource called “unobtainium,”

inconveniently (or conveniently, if you're a major movie producer) located underneath the Na'vi's most sacred tree. The RDA is backed by a type of military-for-hire, with the opportunistic and bloodthirsty Colonel Quaritch as its leader. Jake is technically working for the scientists, largely because of a substantial paycheck offered to him to pilot the DNA-controlled lab-grown Na'vi body after his twin brother dies. Initially, however, Jake's real sympathies lie with the business end of the enterprise, not the scientific, after Colonel Quaritch appeals to Jake's military background and convinces Jake to report to him instead.

After becoming separated from the group while in his Na'vi body, Jake becomes a sort of honorary Na'vi when his rescuer, Neytiri, witnesses and interprets a sign from nature that Jake may be destined for more than he appears. Jake learns the Na'vi ways through Neytiri, reporting his knowledge back to Colonel Quaritch. Over time, however, he recognizes the harmony and sustainability of the Na'vi way of life, so much so that when the RDA announces that they can no longer wait for a peaceful resolution and decide to move in, Jake resists. Later, Jake is forced to choose a side and is called upon to save the day, but only after proving his worth as a Na'vi by taming an ancient dragon-type animal. A battle ensues, which the Na'vi win due in large part to the help of the forest animals dispatched by Eywa, the name given by the Na'vi to the ethereal interconnectedness of their planet. Shortly thereafter, the RDA leaves and Jake is mystically transferred fully into his avatar body.

GENRE: COLONIALISM AND SCIENCE FICTION

In his book *Colonialism and the Emergence of Science Fiction*, Jon Rieder discusses the intertwined histories of the science fiction genre and Western colonialism

and imperialism, arguing for colonialism as the central historical context for the emergence of science fiction. He cites, among many other examples, western society's shift from a geocentric to a heliocentric model of our solar system, as well as the popularity of the travelogue as a valid explanation for the literary shift in narrative toward discoveries of uncharted lands and worlds. So, too, was the West beginning to learn about and form ideas about the various races occupying Earth during the era of British imperialism, often using Anglos as the standard, even the apex, of racial development, ideas that in large part drove early evolutionary theory. While ideas about the nature of humanity are central to many types of literature, Rieder argues that "scientific accounts of humanity's origins and its possible or probable futures are especially basic to science fiction," creating an intertextuality of early anthropology and the science fiction genre that is impossible to separate (*Colonialism* 2). Early science fiction is not merely permeated by colonialist ideals, but born out of them.

Thus does the science fiction genre come with its own baggage, laden with prescribed meanings. For example, the setting of *Avatar* – a futuristic and recently discovered planet called Pandora – is an example of the "lost-race" trope in science fiction, a plot convention that can be "summarized on the whole as fantasies of appropriation in (and sometimes of) the 'virgin territory' of previously inaccessible foreign lands" (*Colonialism* 40). Lost-race fiction like *Avatar* invokes ideological debates between those who want to develop the land and bring salvation to the heathens and those who feel that this form of colonization is merely preying on the vulnerable in the name of expansion and greed.

Avatar did, to its credit, at least partially rework the conventions of more traditional, colonialist lost-race fiction. Whereas often the found race is embroiled in civil conflict, leaving it up to the colonizing adventurers to choose a side and ignite the war, in *Avatar* it is the colonizers who are on the brink of civil war. But while atypical, the protagonists' anti-colonial sentiments are what first open the door for a romanticization of the native Na'vi, a typical convention of lost-race fiction in which the adventurers encounter little resistance by the natives and attempt to separate themselves from the act of colonization, hoping to leave the Natives as pure and untouched as they found them (Rieder, *Colonialism*). *Avatar* embodies other elements and conventions of lost-race fiction, as well, including the framework of the colonial gaze, a parallel between material possession of the land's resources and a sexual possession of the princess, and even biological interest in and feminization of the found world and race. Recent sympathetic views toward Native Americans have redesigned and re-envisioned the particulars of lost-race fiction, especially in regard to the central protagonist and the literal appropriation of the found race's cultural identities, but much of the concept in science fiction remains the same.

Through this colonialist lens (and its striking plot similarities to sympathetic westerns such as *Dances with Wolves*), it is not difficult to read *Avatar* as an allegory for the colonization of Native America. The romantically uncivilized and spiritually fetishized Na'vi, the race indigenous to the planet Pandora, bear a strong resemblance to current dominant views of the temporal Native American: largely unclothed, bearing bows and spears, enjoying a deep spiritual connection with their world, protecting an untainted natural paradise that much resembles early historical accounts of the Americas.

Like John Dunbar, Jake Sully is an injured war veteran on a path to a new life. Like Dunbar, Sully becomes a better Na'vi than the Na'vi, not by introducing superior weaponry but by besting Pandora's wildest and most dangerous flying creature, Taruk. And again, like Dunbar, he becomes romantically involved with the daughter of the chief and ultimately chooses sides against his White counterparts. Film critic John Podhoretz of the *Weekly Standard* draws a nice, tongue-in-cheek parallel between *Avatar* and revisionist westerns, "only here the West is a planet called Pandora, the time is the 22nd century rather than the 19th, and the Indians have blue skin and tails, and are 10 feet tall." And while initially the most obvious difference between the two is genre, both genres (and therefore films) are steeped in the ideals of colonization.

Like *Dances with Wolves*, *Avatar* is both more easily understood and necessarily limited by the conventions of its genre. While audiences in the dominant mainstream may or may not recognize *Avatar* as a colonialist fantasy, postcolonialist film and literature scholars believe that the meaning inherent in choosing science fiction as a genre is as pivotal to the direction and ultimate interpretation of a film as "colonial" as the western is to reading westward expansion.

FRAMING: LOST-RACE FICTION AND THE "COLONIAL GAZE"

Rieder discusses what is theorized by film scholars as the "colonial gaze," initially put forward as the "male gaze" by feminist film theorist Laura Mulvey in her article "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema." Mulvey utilizes Freudian psychoanalytic concepts about man as phallic possessor and woman as phallic envier to theorize the relationship within cinema between the one who looks (the man) and the one who is looked upon (the woman). By "gaze," Mulvey is referring to specific filmic

perspectives: that of the on-screen male characters' perspective or view of the on-screen woman, that of the audience members' perspective of the woman, and the intended identification (metaphorical perspective) of the audience with the male character (Mulvey). Power thus lies with the man as the maker of meaning, receiving visual pleasure, forming a framework in which woman is the bearer of meaning and creator of visual pleasure, to be looked upon and judged accordingly.

Colonialist theorists like Rieder have revised the theory of visual pleasure to interpret the power dynamics between the colonizer and the colonized. Maintaining the dynamic of the colonizer as the maker of meaning and the colonized as the bearer, the colonial gaze "distributes knowledge and power to the subject who looks, while denying or minimizing access to power for its object, the one looked at" (Rieder, *Colonialism* 7). We gaze at the Natives from our audience perspective, we gaze through the perspective of the colonizer, and we by extension passively participate in the colonizing through the gaze of the on-screen colonizer with whom we are meant to identify. The colonial gaze, then, is a valid framework for identifying and analyzing the inscribed power and positioning of characters within certain narratives.

Similar to John Dunbar's function in *Dances with Wolves*, *Avatar*'s lead character Jake Sully creates a distinct framework for the film, privileging Jake's colonialist gaze through which the audience perceives the Na'vi. It is from his perspective that we witness the events of *Avatar*; Jake provides voice-over narration throughout the film, particularly in the beginning. Many of the Na'vi's spiritual practices are explained and partially or fully validated by voice-over, such as Jake's description of Neytiri and her people: "She's always goin' on about the flow of energy, the spirits of animals"

(*Avatar*). The colonizer-as-narrator element is necessary and logical in the context of the colonial gaze. It is common in lost-race science fiction and science fiction in general, and Jake's descriptions resemble ethnographic chapters in science fiction work, in which the narrator provides tangential information on the flora and fauna of the found land, as well as information about the cultural practices of the found race (Rieder, *Colonialism*). Other peculiarities of the Na'vi are explained to the audience via Jake, or the science team sent to study the "biology" of Pandora (of which the Na'vi are clearly a part). The biological curiosities of the scientists in *Avatar* echo the mid-twentieth-century Indian hobbyists' cultural interests in the peculiarities and differences of Native Americans described by Philip Deloria in *Playing Indian*. Negative explanations or interpretations of the Na'vi are usually given by the RDA or the security team. For example, both Colonel Quaritch and RDA's director Parker Selfridge refer to the Na'vi as "savages" (*Avatar*). Quaritch further distances himself from the Na'vi by describing them as hostiles, assuming the role of the masculine, violent colonizer when he tells Jake: "I need to know how to force [the Na'vi's] cooperation, or hammer them hard if they don't" (*Avatar*). These statements echo similar descriptions given by early American settlers and U.S. government officials, arguably to assuage guilt about Native American killings and relocations by painting them as inherently hostile and subhuman.

So, too, does the desire to return to a pure, more natural form of existence than humankind's present, a convention found both in lost-race fiction and in sympathetic westerns, become problematic with the concept of the colonial gaze. With the colonial gaze, we can read the portrayal of the Na'vi in *Avatar* not as superior to Whites but as feminized and infantilized, both a thing to want possession of and a thing whose

understanding of the world is so simple as to be desirable. The colonial gaze in lost-race fiction also allows us to read the depictions of the land as highly feminized. Colonizers in lost-race fiction are always the first outsiders to look upon the “virgin territory.” Other images of the land in *Avatar*, such as the Tree of Souls that provides the cultural and spiritual center of Na’vi culture, become feminine and womb-like in their ability to create beautiful and flourishing forms of biological plant and animal species and to, toward the end of *Avatar*, transfer Jake’s soul into his Avatar body and thus give birth to his new self. The RDA’s intention to mine the unobtainium resources under the tree then creates a clear “rape” metaphor, in which the “virgin territory” will be virgin no longer after the forced invasion and appropriation. Such a reading deepens the colonizer (masculine) and colonized (feminine) readings and helps reveal the power structure inherent in the film.

These interpretations are the privilege of the colonizer in the framework of the colonial gaze. Jake and his sympathetic science friends are free to look upon, analyze and interpret the culture of the Na’vi, but the structure and framing of the narrative dictates that the Na’vi are powerless to return the gaze. In such a dichotomized and one-sided narrative, it is impossible for the Na’vi, as it was for Native Americans and other colonized peoples, to take control of the narrative, and thus control of their own representation.

AGENCY: SUBVERSION, REVENGE FANTASIES AND SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY

As the story of *Avatar* progresses, however, and as Jake becomes more and more enamored with the Na’vi way of life, the diminished power of the Na’vi appears to strengthen. The Na’vi – led by Jake – take control of the situation after the RDA begins expanding into their sacred territory, and a battle for the future of Pandora ensues, a battle

the Na'vi ultimately win. Jake's consciousness becomes permanently implanted into his Avatar body, hinting that any future films might actually subvert the colonial gaze by telling the story from the Na'vi point of view.

While on the surface this subversion appears to shift power from the colonizer to the colonized, we must take two things into account. One is that Jake is still our narrator, still a Na'vi outsider, and any subsequent narration will still necessarily be done through him, as he is the audience's link to the Na'vi, just as the photographer or explorer functioned as the link to and lens through which colonized peoples were viewed and described during westward expansion. The film's beginning and ending still roughly corresponds to the beginning and ending of Jake's journey into the unknown and subsequent acceptance into another society, as *Dances with Wolves* did for John Dunbar, downplaying the role of the Na'vi in *Avatar* and the Sioux in *Dances with Wolves* to mere vehicles for a White man's spiritual journey.

Second, we must question the narrative choices in the final part of the film. Why, in a film that can be read so clearly as an allegory for Native American-U.S. relations and as *Dances with Wolves* in space, do the Na'vi/Indians win? And win so definitively? Rieder gives us another potential reading in his article "Race and Revenge Fantasies in *Avatar*, *District 9* and *Inglourious Basterds*." He ascertains that the film *Avatar*, particularly the violent, racialized ending, functions as a revenge fantasy for the dominant White mainstream in which the dominant mainstream and former colonizers engage in a collective cultural fantasy that satisfies a general dislike of overreaching governments and greedy corporations and, more importantly, allows for a washing away of guilt for the effects of Manifest Destiny from the collective consciousness of the audience. This

metaphorical act could never be achieved in a western, which is by convention restricted to a particular time period in history and thus limited by history's outcome. Rieder further argues that while these violent fantasies embody a general anger and desire for retribution against the status quo, the status quo is only fictionally reified. Any revolutionary content of a violent uprising like the Navi's in *Avatar* does not translate into real-world implications, and is created "not to stir the fires of rebellion or rouse the audience's political consciousness from its daydreams, but to cash in on those daydreams" (Rieder, *Race* 44). From this perspective, the planet Pandora and its people function as a vehicle for Jake's spiritual journey. The very shift in narrative, which seemingly signals a reclaiming of power, actually merely assuages White guilt about history's outcome and fantasizes about a world in which we might have chosen a less painful path.

Thus does the power not actually shift from the colonizer to colonized in *Avatar*, but instead remains within the framework of the colonial gaze, the science fiction genre allowing for a rewriting of history and an alleviation of guilt by the dominant mainstream. The sort of White fantasy that allows a sympathetic and understanding character like John Dunbar to become the norm in *Dances with Wolves* is set free in *Avatar*, transplanting the classic "cowboys and Indians" trope to a future in which the Indians actually win, partially because the historical revisionist cowboys in us feel guilty about beating the Indians the first time, and partially because they aren't really Indians, they're Na'vi.

It is possibly this last point – that, in the strictest sense, there are no "Indians" in *Avatar* – that is most crucial to the understanding of how a film like *Avatar* ultimately

reflects the endemic nature of colonization. Hollywood moved on from making films about Natives in the past to making films about “Natives” in the future. In neither of the films dissected here are Native issues ever discussed outside of a very general consensus that they were somehow “wronged,” or, to paraphrase the Na’vi religious leader Mo’at, that the colonizers suffer from “insanity” that can somehow be “cured” through a more thorough understanding of Native ways (*Avatar*). It is this very consensus that the makers of both films pander to when “cashing in on audience’s daydreams.”

By repackaging a classic western trope into the science fiction genre, *Avatar* both implicates itself as a colonial tale yet distances itself from the social responsibility that might come with actually discussing Native Americans. It is thoroughly irresponsible in its role as yet another false front that allows audiences to practice what Rieder refers to as “ideological fantasies,” ideas and beliefs that we consciously disavow but nevertheless practice, and the ways in which we come to terms with the dissonance” (Rieder, *Race* 30). While the dominant mainstream may collectively disavow mistreatment of Native Americans, films such as *Dances with Wolves* and *Avatar* provide a washing away of collective guilt that absolves viewers from the social responsibility for the state and well-being of the Native American population. Viewers are sympathetic in concept but not in practice. These ideological fantasies allow viewers to sympathize with Native Americans, and to condemn the colonizing forces, but to remain silent perpetrators of the cultural colonization in practice.

A critical discourse analysis has allowed me to break down the underlying meanings and power structures inherent in the production choices of *Dances with Wolves* and *Avatar*. While at first glance the science fiction genre seems an improvement over

the western, in reality it becomes much more dangerous by giving filmmakers access to a futuristic time period in which they can rewrite and revision “how the west was won.” The power, then, lies with the dominant forces that are able to foreground romanticized aspects of Native American cultures and the journey of the White everyman, and background Native American viewpoints and issues. Through a colonialist lens, we see that the science fiction genre and the western genre are heavily and historically framed by colonialist ideals. In *Avatar*’s futuristic fantasies, Native Americans are simply replaced by humanoid aliens, and resituating the story on a distant planet in the future allows for the playing out of a type of revenge or “White guilt” fantasy that, because of historical constraints, could not be achieved in a western.

As is typical of lost-race fiction, *Avatar* still succeeds in romanticizing and feminizing the Native American culture, only *Avatar* is able to escape much criticism from Native American groups because no Native Americans are ever actually referenced. As *Dances with Wolves* absolves viewers from social responsibility by implying that Native American sympathies were the norm for any respectable, sane person, so does *Avatar* sidestep Native American issues by surface-level distancing, swapping the western for science fiction and Native Americans for Na’vi. It is only with the concept of the colonial gaze, and the historical inseparability of colonialism and science fiction that we can reveal the underlying colonial mindset with which *Avatar* was produced, and that while our ideological fantasies may lean toward support of Native American causes, they are still only fantasies.

CHAPTER IV

CONTINUING THE CONVERSATION: CONCLUSIONS AND IMPLICATIONS FOR COMPOSITION

Throughout my research, I have peered through a colonial lens in examining popular culture's representation of Native Americans. In Chapter One, I reviewed some of the literature on filmic representations of Native Americans and laid the foundations of the theories that form the basis and structure of my research. In Chapter Two, I undertook an independent application of Barbara Meek's theoretical "Hollywood Injun English," analyzing the speech of Native Americans in two popular television shows to demonstrate the extent to which this fictionalized speech permeates dominant mainstream's ideas of authenticity regarding Native Americans. In Chapter Three, I applied several "tools" of Critical Discourse Analysis to identify and then analyze macro elements of two Hollywood films using colonial theory. In my research, by casting an eye on popular culture as a pervasive and highly influential part of society, I have attempted to support one of the central tenets of Tribal Critical Race Theory, that colonialism is endemic to society.

Rather than remaining content with identifying obvious inaccuracies in Hollywood portrayals of Native Americans, I have attempted to provide a theoretically informed analysis of the origin and purpose of these inaccuracies, as well as what they

reveal about underlying power structures. Here, in my final chapter, I will join the conversation with other Native American scholars in the Rhetoric and Composition community, discussing future directions of Native Americans, cultural studies and composition. I will provide a discussion of what the misrepresentations and power structures revealed in earlier chapters are actually *doing*, by describing the kinds of potential and actual damage inflicted on Native American communities, their self-conceptions and their cultural capital. I will then discuss implications for further research, including how composition teachers can incorporate cultural studies into their classrooms and what we as educators can do to continue the battle against institutionalized racism.

CONTINUING THE CONVERSATION: POLITICAL, ACADEMIC, AND CULTURAL INTERSECTIONS

In his article entitled “Rhetorical Sovereignty: What Do American Indians Want from Writing?,” scholar Scott Richard Lyons discusses the concept of sovereignty, particularly rhetorical sovereignty, within the frame of current Native American activism. His inverse, *Jeopardy!*-esque title provides the answer to his question even before he asks it, almost as if it was there all along. For Lyons,

The pursuit of sovereignty is an attempt to revive not our past, but our possibilities. Rhetorical sovereignty is the inherent right and ability of *peoples* to determine their own communicative needs and desires in this pursuit, to decide for themselves the goals, modes styles, and languages of public discourse. (1130, emphasis in original)

Native Americans, he argues, have been at the mercy of the federal government for centuries, an entity with immense powers to give and take land, monies, and resources,

even to establish or invalidate tribal and cultural identities. At least part of what Native Americans want, and have always wanted, is a measure of control over their textual representations, free from stereotypes, cultural appropriation and imperialism.

This desire for political repositioning is echoed in a comment made by Chief Phillip Martin of the Mississippi Band of Choctaws: “Nothing, or next to nothing, happens on an Indian reservation without it being a result of, a reaction to, an attempt to get around, or a violation of, an action or policy of the federal government or of its employees” (qtd. in Bordewich, 13). A political frame envelopes virtually all Native American communities whose histories are rich with broken treaties, corruptions within the Bureau of Indian Affairs, forced cultural reeducation, and the very literal, geographic boundaries that mark reservation lands.

While I agree with much of what Lyons has to say about the intended purpose of rhetorical action in Indian Country, his focus on the political comes with a voiced dismissal of the cultural:

Mainstream multiculturalism is not sovereignty *per se* because it abstracts its sense of culture from the people and from the land, and while it may indeed affirm the rightful and creative existence of Indian cultures and peoples among others, it tends not to discuss that other pillar of sovereignty: self-government. Mainstream multiculturalism may focus on the *people* but not the *nation* and thus isn’t necessarily the practice or honoring of Indian sovereignty. (Lyons 1137)

Lyons also both links the ideas “nation” and “people” with his discussion of what it means to be a “nation-people,” yet creates an opposition between the two concepts,

voicing concerns that “mainstream multiculturalism is not sovereignty *per se* because it abstracts its sense of culture from the people and from the land,” bringing focus away from the nation and the work of self-government (Lyons, 1137). I would argue that such an opposition should not exist, as the work of scholars such as Barbara Meek, Edward Buscombe, Jacquelyn Kilpatrick, myself and many others does not detract from the political focus of the work done by scholars like Scott Richard Lyons and Elizabeth Cook-Lynn. Lyons himself identified, and even emphasized, *peoples* rather than *nations* in his definition of rhetorical sovereignty, a distinction which, according to his own definition, privileges aspects of culture and tradition and emphasizes the group rather than the individual. The goal of accurate and meaningful self-representation need not be limited to courtrooms and lawmaking. Cultural sovereignty is a necessary step in correcting the political power imbalances that impede rhetorical sovereignty in the first place. Voices must be heard before they can be heeded.

Malea Powell, Native American Rhetoric scholar and author of “Rhetorics of Survivance: How American Indians *Use* Writing,” agrees with Lyons’ bemoaning of the scholarly treatment of Native Americans in rhetoric and composition, arguing that “in short, as a discipline, we’ve done a pretty good job of not doing a very good job of critically engaging Native texts” (397). Answering Lyon’s concern that all future work on Native American rhetorical sovereignty will not happen at the university level, Powell undertakes a rhetorical examination of two nineteenth-century Native American intellectuals, in the hopes of correcting what she views as a culturally homogenous rhetorical tradition in our field. Powell’s concerns lie not so much with the political as with the academic, as when she questions the rhetoric and composition canon and the

tendency of Other viewpoints to “visit the big house of Tradition for a night or two” without addressing the “much more structurally embedded problem...the Western Eurocentric focus of the American Academy” (397).

Lyons takes a preemptive strike at Powell’s work when he “questions the endgame of...Indian intellectuals studying Indian intellectuals,” which is precisely the work Powell undertakes in her article (1136). It may be that Lyons seems so focused on the political, on the concept of “rhetorical sovereignty” as it applies to legislation, that he devalues academic work, fearing that it may never leave the confines of the academy and enact any kind of change. Powell takes a different meaning from “rhetorical sovereignty,” meaning sovereignty from the largely White and, in her words, “imperialistic” rhetorical canon, toward exploring and developing the Native American rhetorical tradition.

With an understanding of the issue of Native American sovereignty near the intersection of the academic, cultural, and political, we can look at some of the direct and indirect influences of cultural misrepresentations unencumbered by the necessary restriction of a central and singular locality. Such an understanding enables a more thorough awareness of popular culture’s influence on not only the policies of Native American communities, but the physical and mental health of such communities, and what composition scholars can do in their classrooms to empower disadvantaged minorities.

NATIVE AMERICAN COMMUNITIES TODAY

In locating Native American issues within the political, and centralizing the concerns of a community-based people more firmly within the realm of the “nation,” Lyons lays some of the foundation for my argument. He discusses Native American

communities as the fallout of “colonial wreckage: poverty, violence, a racist dominant culture that hates and excludes them” (1140). I find the term “colonial wreckage” extremely powerful and uncannily apt. It suggests, as I have argued, that the colonization of Native peoples set a course early on for their cultural futures, and that modern Native communities exist in its wake.

While the most destructive forces of colonization have already taken their toll, the colonization continues. Lyons cites a study on Native American crime rates by the Justice Department and its startling figures: Native Americans are imprisoned at a rate of 38 percent above the national average, and at four times the national average in local jails. The same study also found that Native Americans are victims of violent crimes at more than double that of the remaining population, and that more often than not, the offender is non-Indian (Lyons 1140). My own research has backed up these abysmal figures: Native American youth have higher alcohol abuse rates, suicide rates and school dropout rates than any other group. While life expectancy for Native Americans has skyrocketed, from a horrifying 48.3 years in 1975 to 72.3 years in 2010, it is still four years behind the national average, and more than ten in some Native communities (Trahant). A report by the Center for Disease Control and Prevention found that about 1 out of every 10 deaths in the Native American community is alcohol-related (“Native Deaths”). And despite a slight rise in the number of Native Americans who’ve completed a bachelor’s degree, researchers Susan C. Fairclough and John W. Tippeconnic III highlight the disparity between the national standard graduation rates and those of Native Americans in a 2010 study, a year in which North Dakota saw 79.2% of its overall student population graduate, compared to 37.9% of its Native American

population (10). As Lyons laments, “Nobody ever wants to appropriate stuff like that” (1140).

The appropriation exists on a cultural level as well, on the level of the “people” *and* the “nation,” to put it in Lyons’ terms. Popular culture’s role in Native American colonization is both indirect and pervasive. The “Bloodthirsty Savage” entrenched early fear and hate of the Native American, and later, more sympathetic portrayals set up a straw man, more concept than concrete, a natural, vanishing Native American that the dominant mainstream could pity. The problem then becomes not only a lack of authenticity, but the metaphorical masking of Native American issues by guiding our focus toward the ideal, away from actual needs and actual realities of actual Native American people.

This is not to say that popular culture’s influence on Native Americans has been entirely and uniformly negative. After *Dances with Wolves*, Kevin Costner donated more than \$120,000 to the South Dakota Cultural Heritage Center. But that paled to the planned \$100 million investment in a resort called “The Dunbar” that was to be built on an extremely contentious piece of land in the Black Hills. News Public Radio ran a piece recently on the Quileute tribe of the Northwest and their call for *Twilight* fans to help them in their bid to move key city centers away from the hurricane zone (one of the main characters in *Twilight* is Quileute.) While the pop culture hit *Twilight* may have helped some of the Quileute’s issues come to light, it still places the power to bring the public’s attention toward specific tribes firmly in the hands of those who create and perpetuate popular culture.

The Lumbee, a tribe from the Carolina region, suffered more direct fallout from the entrenching of Native images. Fergus M. Bordewich, author of *Killing the White Man's Indian: Reinventing Native Americans at the End of the Twentieth Century*, describes how the Lumbee, of fairer skin and lighter hair than the more “traditional” Indian, lobbied unsuccessfully for decades for tribal recognition. Cynthia Hunt, a leader of this movement, claims that not only the government, but also many Western tribes couldn't accept the Lumbee because they didn't have “feathers and beads” (qtd in Bordewich, 62). Hunt's request for support from other tribes was turned down; she couldn't be Indian, she had no reservation, they said. Her reply: “Are you an Indian just because the feds gave you a reservation?” (qtd. in Bordewich, 62). Hunt's story is a concrete example of the kinds of issues that are raised when we attempt to answer questions like “What is an Indian?” with stereotypical concepts and thoroughly colonialist ideals.

As Native American representations distort cultural identity, so too do they distort Native Americans' perceptions of self-value and worth. In a 1992 research article entitled “Cowboys and Indians: Perceptions of Western Films Among American Indians and Anglos,” JoEllen Shively assembled two groups, one of male Anglos and another of male Native Americans, to view the Western film *The Searchers*. The groups were then asked to answer a series of questions regarding cultural values, as well as preferences within the Western genre and reasons for liking the specific film. Some of the results, in Shively's words, were striking. Not one Native American ranked “authentic portrayal of the old West” as an important reason for liking *The Searchers*, while half of the Whites ranked it as the most important. Follow-up questions revealed that the Native American

males did not identify with the Indian chief, Scar, suggesting that the film “link[ed] Anglos to their own history” by representing, in their minds, an authentic portrayal of history. The Native Americans felt no such link, because “they did not view the Indians on the screen as real Indians” (Shively 729). Shively posited that the Native Americans in the study were reported to have identified more strongly with the cowboy because Natives value an autonomous, independent way of life, more so than the Anglos (730). One respondent said that the Indians in the film “aren’t at all like any of the Indians I know” (qtd in Shively, 730). With the omission of well-characterized Native American heroes in a Western like *The Searchers*, Native Americans were forced to perform a kind of reverse appropriation of the identity of the Western hero.

While both groups identified with the cowboy in Westerns, they had very different views on the qualities that make a good Western hero. The Anglos in the study overwhelmingly ranked integrity/honesty and intelligence as the most important qualities, with the weighted sum of ranks at 47 and 41, respectively. The Native Americans in the study gave a nod toward integrity/honesty, but toughness came in first with a rank of 44 and bravery a close second at 40. So while the Native Americans’ choices appear to reflect a very different value system, their general liking of Western heroes and Westerns in general might indicate that Native Americans are forced to appropriate White values due to a lack of Native American heroes and value systems within the film.

It is not only the statistical “stuff” that Lyons refers to when he says “colonial wreckage,” but the cultural “stuff,” the “stuff” that directly and indirectly affects concepts of self-worth and cultural value. The Lumbee’s story provides an excellent example of where the political and the cultural spaces intersect. Do these stories and statistics reflect

on some deeper level the ultimate outcome, the colonial wreckage, of cultural misrepresentation and appropriation? Tribal Critical Race Theory scholar Bryan Brayboy believes that colonialism has so permeated the dominant culture that even Native Americans embody colonialist ideals when “[Native Americans] fail to express ourselves in ways that may challenge dominant society’s ideas about who and what we are supposed to be” (413). Where should these challenges take place? In the academy? In popular culture’s depictions and representations? In classrooms? What does it mean for a culture if they can rarely speak for themselves without being labeled inauthentic? How can Native American scholars address issues of Native American cultural colonization and sovereignty? What role does pedagogy play on reservations? Off reservations?

Refusal to accept this colonization means challenging stereotypes and depicting Native Americans as they are, in all their complexity. It means forcing the dominant mainstream and academics to consider the concept of space and locality from where each of us lives and writes. It will certainly take this sort of social responsibility to help mainstream society realize that every stereotype, every misrepresentation, steals just a little more cultural capital from the Native Americans. Scholars Octavio Pimentel and Paul Velázquez analyzed popular culture’s role in minority concepts of self-worth in an article entitled “*Shrek 2*: An Appraisal of Mainstream Animation’s Influence on Identity.” They point out the ramifications of such influences on Latino children in the White education system: “Students find themselves in a cultural, linguistic and educational vacuum that subtracts valuable aspects of their identity without replacing them with anything of value” (18), or, as Shively’s article suggests, replacing Native American social values with White ones, after creating an identity vacuum by omitting

Native American heroes that reflect Native cultural values from popular culture. Recent, romanticized portrayals fill this identity vacuum with racial and cultural stereotypes, with mainstream judgments and mainstream appraisals of the value and authenticity of their culture, and ultimately with a colonized and heavily edited version of the “authentic” Native American in which all the best parts of Native American culture are appropriated and refitted by the dominant groups, and what is left, is left to rot.

RETHINKING PEDAGOGICAL PRACTICES: COMPOSITION WRITES BACK

After Malea Powell provides a reading of the Native American intellectuals’ texts as “stories” in “Rhetorics of Survivance,” she then asks the reader, “What do we, teachers and scholars of composition, do with these stories?” (428). I ask the same question, although my answer leans toward the pedagogical: We teach them, of course. College composition has enfolded the field of cultural studies, and many educators have moved toward making cultural studies the focus of their composition classrooms. Proponents of cultural studies in composition believe in writing as a tool to “facilitate political demystification and social change,” according to Karen Fitts and Alan W. France, editors of *Left Margins: Cultural Studies and Composition Pedagogy*. Their book brings together viewpoints and pedagogical practices on teaching cultural criticism in the writing classroom. These authors seek to relocate writing outside of the individual: That is, they believe that writing is not asocial and therefore apolitical, but very much situated in the community, in the backgrounds and beliefs that students bring to the classroom, beliefs that are shaped and informed by such practices as the dominant mainstream’s colonization of Native Americans. In this sense, students cannot “freely choose meanings to encode in writing” because “writing cannot be isolated from the communal

work that it accomplishes and out of which it grows” (Fitts and France xii). In this sense, a classroom is always already politicized, regardless of the professor’s perspective.

Contributors to *Left Margins* suggest several ways in which composition pedagogy can reflect the new theoretical directions in which scholars are now moving. Feminist scholar Rae Rosenthal, in her article “Feminists in Action: How to Practice What We Teach” believes that feminists dedicated to an equal distribution of power should apply that ideology even in their classrooms. Rosenthal suggests that “we candidly identify the source of our power, clarify the way in which that power structure operates, and acknowledge the limitations of that power” (141). In her classroom, for example, she recognizes that inherent power structures in the university setting give her near absolute power over her students, and while she cannot reasonably completely overturn the professor/student hierarchy, she can empower her students by giving them as much control in the formation of their syllabus and in the topics on which they choose to write as she is able, thereby distributing as much power as possible, and creating what Rosenthal believes to be a classroom full of engaged, interested students with a say in their education.

Critical Race theorists are also interested in power relations; feminists point out masculine and feminine modes of discourse, whereas a Critical Race Theory scholar might be more interested in teasing out dominant/marginal or colonizer/colonized modes. Still, Rosenthal’s methods, including reshaping the underlying power structures in her classroom to empower her students, strongly reflect her theoretical practices and provide an excellent example of action at the intersection of theory and pedagogy.

Rosenthal also argues that feminist content and feminist practice cannot be separated. Thus do other scholars like Kathleen Dixon in “Making and Taking Apart Culture in the Classroom” focus on content in the cultural studies classroom. Dixon explains her class “Reading Popular Culture” as a composition course that “regards the classroom as a laboratory for studying culture” (100), describing how she uses popular culture as the central component in what is to be studied and dissected. Dixon includes readings from an academic book on cultural criticism, but leaves much of what is actually to be studied open-ended: Students often choose their own magazines, albums or music videos to watch, alone or collectively. She gives examples of her class collectively watching rap videos made by both male and female artists, then discussing ways in which masculine and feminine traits and viewpoints were represented in the videos. Initially, much of Dixon’s “taking apart” of culture happens in class at the group level, so that the students understand how the theoretical frameworks can be applied to the individual pieces of popular culture.

Both approaches to pedagogical practice are useful for the Tribal Critical Race theorist who may find that Rosenthal’s approach toward redistributing power works equally well for dismantling dominant thought patterns and ways of knowing in the United States formed by colonization’s endemic nature. Furthermore, if TribalCrit also contends that “Eurocentric thinkers dismissed Indigenous knowledge in the same way they dismissed any socio-political life they did not understand” (qtd. in Brayboy 430), then discussing the very foundation of knowledge, the “ways of knowing” and epistemological theories of Western thought in their classroom might also enable instructors to help students understand the concept of colonization as a mental and

cultural process as well as a geographical one. Theorists might also consider reshaping the content of their course to give their students concrete examples of colonialist thought in popular culture, such as the films or episodes discussed in this thesis. Professors may also wish to introduce their students to the subject with documentaries such as *Reel Injun: On the Trail of the Hollywood Indian*, or to compare films such as *Dances with Wolves* to *Smoke Signals*, a film produced, directed and acted almost exclusively by Native Americans that subverts many of the traditional tropes of the “Hollywood Injun.” The TribalCrit theorists might find that shaping course content toward achieving a better understanding of colonialism for students may be the best way to teach toward this theory.

This is not to say that an educator need be a feminist or a TribalCrit theorist to apply these techniques. The responsible compositionist understands that writing is not asocial: We all write, and speak, from our respective viewpoints formed by the world around us, and we are constantly drawing upon these formations, for good or ill. These techniques are merely suggestions to help students along the path of discovering and welcoming these varying viewpoints. Most any cultural criticism, through any lens, be it feminist, Marxist, or postcolonialist, will help us become less accepting and more critical of our culture, and will hopefully help our students begin to take apart some of the cultural imbalances and unequal power distributions that are formed and sustained when we do not question the culture that surrounds us.

CONCLUSION

Here, with theory informing pedagogy and a direction toward future pedagogical research, is where I would like to conclude. I believe that for compositionists, the classroom will be where we can enact meaningful change. We must always keep in mind

how we are written, and how others write us. Separating assumed identities from actual ones, for all of our marginalized, misrepresented minorities, helps all students, not just Native American ones, connect with themselves and with the world around them, recognize power struggles and embedded authorities, and most importantly, situate themselves so that they can begin writing back.

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VITA

Kristin Cheyenne Riggs, born on Tinker Air Force Base in Oklahoma, is the eldest daughter of Christin Ray Riggs and Jami Lynn Robertson. After moving all over the Deep South and Midwest as a child of the military, she finished her secondary education at Pinecrest High in Southern Pines, North Carolina, and began her university education at Appalachian State University in Boone, North Carolina. She graduated cum laude with a Bachelor of Science in English, Secondary Education as an alumnus of the teacher preparation program North Carolina Teaching Fellows. Upon graduation, she moved to Texas and entered the Graduate College at Texas State University-San Marcos a year later. She will receive her Master of Arts in English, Rhetoric and Composition in May 2012.

Permanent e-mail address: KCheyenneRiggs@gmail.com

This thesis was typed by K. Cheyenne Riggs.