

Chapter 1

American Indians

American Indians in Popular Culture

A Pawnee's Experiences and Views

James Riding In

In this chapter, Riding In examines the social, political, and economic factors that have contributed to the stereotypes of American Indians. By presenting the historical development of stereotypes that trace back to the 1400s, Riding In depicts the many challenges that persist in combating the label of "savage" people. Historically, American Indians have been presented with two choices, "perish or give away." His discussions of the impact of colonization, land allotment, and other political and judicial decisions show how stereotypes of American Indians have manifested and hindered their social and political standing in this country. Riding In also shows how stereotypes continue to persist in pop culture by providing various examples from recent motion pictures and western shows. The importance of this chapter lies in its ability to convey the deeply rooted images of American Indians and their ramifications. Riding In notes that while attitudes regarding American Indians may have somewhat changed over time, the old images persist.

Being native in contemporary U.S. society offers us Indians both comfort and conflict. Rich cultural heritages continue to shape

our worldviews, customs, and values in an often hostile and complex world that demands conformity in thought, action, and deed. Our traditions on the North American continent preceded the first arrival of European colonizers in the late 1400s by millennia. Despite repetitive efforts by the newcomers to strip us of our customary lifeways, our ancestors found means to maintain their political and social identity. Native ceremonies, kinship systems, names, social gatherings, humor, food, and oral traditions provide us a sense of identity, pride, and self-respect. We have also incorporated new ideas gained through contact with others into our traditional ways of life. We are not a vanishing race. U.S. society, following in the tradition of European colonization of the world, has a long legacy of concocting stereotypes to define Indians and using them as powerful ideological and political devices to rationalize acts of aggression and hostility. Imagery frequently provides basic assumptions about the moral character and worth of a people, and changes over time. Legal thinkers, scholars, and others have drawn on the beliefs and imagery found in popular culture. As the United States grew to its current size and Indian nations lost their ability to offer military challenges, the stereotypes have undergone revision. Non-Indians have presented Indians as either demonic or untainted children of nature. Often these images coexist, depending on the racial attitudes, issues, and conditions. Many have relegated us to the lowly status of objects of amusement, scorn, and ridicule, whereas others have elevated us to the plank of environmental purists. Still others have viewed us as unworthy recipients of unlimited federal largess. Words that deny us humanity include *squaw*, *buck*, *savage*, *redskin*, *heathen*, *loafer*, and *drunk*. Because our religions were not Christian, the invading Europeans often called us heathens, pagans, and infidels.

Many Natives have internalized colonial definitions of us found in movies, history books, and popular fantasies, and we have engaged in stereotypical and destructive behavior. Many of us are striving to decolonize our thinking, actions, and lives so that we

"American Indians in Popular Culture: A Pawnee's Experiences and Views," by James Riding In. Copyright © 2006 by Roxbury Publishing Company. All rights reserved. ♦

may pass on to future generations the values and beliefs of our ancestors.

Understanding the evolution and uses of stereotypes of Indians requires an examination of the interrelationship between historical processes and popular culture. This chapter seeks to uncover and explore some of the social, economic, and political factors that have contributed to the development, transformation, and ramifications of stereotypes of Indians held by white America. I begin by discussing a few of my experiences with negative imagery and then examine factors that contributed to the development and modification of stereotypes about Indians.

Personal Experiences

Over the years, words and phrases such as *incompetent*, *unworthy beneficiary of affirmative action*, *backwards*, *stupid*, *superstitious*, and *lazy* have been hurled in my direction. I have heard the terms *squaw* and *buck* used as synonyms for *woman* and *man*. Although I have experienced numerous racial incidents and stereotypes at different times and places in both institutional and individual contexts, I will discuss six encounters that perhaps best reflect the impact of stereotypes on my life.

First, while in the service and off the coast of Vietnam in 1969, one of my shipmates kept using the word *kook* in my presence. When I asked him to define the word, he declared, "It's anyone who isn't white." His message was clear: I was a "kook" in his eyes.

Second, while in college during the mid-1970s, one of my history professors asked me if my people were like other Indians. When I asked him what he meant, he hesitantly replied, "You know, drinking and all." I responded by telling him that some members of my tribal nation drink, but that so do a lot of non-Indians.

Third, one evening during the early 1980s I overheard the owner of a Gallup, New Mexico, pizza establishment spew racist venom. Speaking to white patrons seated near her in the bar about the failure of a Diné (Navajo) employee to report to work, she declared, "Goddamn these Indians and the government that feeds them. I hope they all starve

to death." Her promotion of genocide as a solution to a mere act of absenteeism reflects a deep-seated hatred of Indians. Moreover, her view of Indians thriving on generous federal handouts is one of many disparaging stereotypes that have hampered people's understanding of reality. The average American citizen probably benefits more from federal programs than most Indians. In fact, poverty, health afflictions, and social problems among Indians stem from the disruptive effects of U.S. territorial expansion and federal policies.

The fourth encounter occurred when my son came home from kindergarten one day and asked why Indians always lost. His query came as a surprise but not a shock. It presents an important question about how extensively negative imagery of Indians continues to influence school curricula, television programming, and popular culture. Virtually everywhere I go, I meet people who profess an understanding of Indian history and culture. Generally, however, their views have been tainted by the old stereotypes found in written history, films, and cartoons. Similarly, most students, Indians and non-Indians alike, who enter my courses have to unlearn the stereotypes, erroneous history, and misconceptions they carry. Many of them are willing and eager to explore and discover more truthful accounts, but others remain committed to maintaining the old views.

Watching Hollywood movies can be an exasperating experience, especially for a Pawnee. Generally, the popular genre of the western that dominated Hollywood throughout much of the last century offered the viewing public an image of Indians that was popularized in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. In films such as *Stagecoach*, scriptwriters and producers presented Indians as savage barriers to western expansion. Beginning in the late 1960s, Hollywood, influenced by the war in Vietnam, countercultural movements, and critical examinations of the U.S. historical experience, made several attempts to portray Indians in a more sympathetic fashion. *Soldier Blue*, *Billy Jack*, and *Tell Them Willie Boy Is Here* are examples of this change in perception. Somehow, however,

filmmakers exempted my people. Movies such as *Little Big Man*, *Dances With Wolves*, and *Cheyenne Warrior* romanticized the Sioux and Cheyenne as noble savages while willfully denigrating the Pawnees.

Finally, in 2004, while serving on my university's college senate as an American Indian Studies representative, I was asked to vote in favor of a measure designed in part to restructure the Anthropology Department in a way that would encourage anthropologists and archaeologists to work together more closely. I felt violated when the departmental representative declared that his department was conducting a search to hire a specialist in ancient Aztec or Mayan cultures. Essentially, I was being asked to support scientific grave looting in another country. Mine was the lone voice in that forum speaking out about human rights and the problems of scientific research and ethics. At times, it is not easy to be an Indian, especially when confronting institutional racism. Despite these incidents and the pervasiveness of negative racial attitudes in this country that professes color-blindness, I view my cultural differences with pride and this motivates me to challenge the ignorance, stupidity, and racism of some people.

Historical Development of Stereotypes

Stereotyping of Indians is inextricably linked to the land and to the cultural conflicts that began in the late 1400s and continue to this day. Since the time of Columbus, the English, Spaniards, French, and other Europeans have labeled Indians with a host of self-serving stereotypes that cast us as noble or ignoble. Colonial ambitions for territory to settle, resources to exploit, people to enslave, and souls to proselytize ensured that people characterized one day as kind, noble, and trustworthy would be denigrated and warred against the next day. When Europeans needed Indians as guides, military allies, and trading partners, they saw us as honest, friendly, and loyal. When they sought souls to convert to Christianity, missionaries projected us as tender, kind, and loving. But driven by a compulsion to

grab new lands to control, occupy, and exploit, settlers deemed us bloodthirsty savages who had to be removed or exterminated.

Although the images differed in many ways, each reinforced the Europeans' sense of being the intellectual, biological, and cultural superiors. In their eyes, the struggle for the continent pitted civilization against savagery. Providence had given them a right to acquire land by whatever means necessary. With the conflict presented in this manner, there could be no compromise. Indian culture and resistance had to be squashed by whatever means possible.

Europeans invented the concept of the Indian as a monolithic entity. In actuality, at the time of contact in the late 1400s, the Western Hemisphere was very diverse. California alone was more linguistically diverse than Europe. Millions of natives lived in thousands of separate nations, or tribes. Some lived in empires under powerful rulers, whereas many others resided in decentralized settings with less formal political and religious mechanisms. Although sharing numerous commonalities, our ancestors followed values, philosophies, ceremonies, and customs distinct to their respective cultures. Each nation had a name for itself, but the Europeans usually called them something else.

The development of the printing press played an important role in the dissemination of mental images of Indians throughout Europe. Slanted reports of contacts with Indians written by European explorers and colonizers gave readers biased and fantasized descriptions of Indian behavior and culture. In a widely disseminated account written in the late 1400s and first published in 1503, Amerigo Vespucci, an imaginative Italian explorer, gave a gruesome picture of Indian cannibalism:

I met a man who told me that he had eaten more than three hundred human bodies. And I spent twenty-seven days in a town where I saw cured human flesh hung up in the houses as we hang up hams in ours. (Honour 1975, 7)

The cannibal image was eventually discarded, but other stereotypes painted pictures of Indians as human monsters.

Reproductions of woodcuts, engravings, drawings, and paintings in the publications gave the public visual imagery of Indians that usually reflected distortions found in the written and spoken words as well. Symbols of Indians in artwork included bows and arrows, instruments representative of death and destruction; feathers, denoting natives living in nature; and nudity, signifying promiscuity. Other pictures depicted them as childlike, living without morality, and bestial.

Under Columbus' reign of terror as Spanish viceroy and governor of the island of Hispaniola from 1493 to 1500, more than half a million natives died from harsh treatment, execution, warfare, or diseases. Spanish colonizers, who as a class avoided work at all costs, not only severed the hands of persons who did not furnish them with a certain amount of gold, but also tracked down and killed those who sought sanctuary from their brutality in the mountains. In addition, they enslaved thousands of others, subjecting them to an existence characterized by constant hunger, backbreaking work, cruel punishment, deadly pestilence, and premature death. Indians lacked biological immunity to most of the diseases brought from Europe, including smallpox, measles, influenza, whooping cough, and the common cold. After about 50 years of colonization, Spanish brutality, aided by recurring pandemics, resulted in the virtual disappearance of the indigenous population of Hispaniola. Other islands and regions of the Western Hemisphere suffered a similar fate. Yet, many nations had the resilience to resist European encroachments.

The genocide in the Americas had far-reaching ramifications. Seeking a more durable supply of laborers, the Spanish turned to Africa as its major source for slaves. English colonists subsequently followed this practice. The ensuing quest for cheap labor ultimately resulted in the largest involuntary migration of humans in history.

Even as the brutality ensued, Spanish intellectuals, religious leaders, and rulers de-

bated the humanity of Indians. Most felt that the natives were so low on the chain of being that they could not be Christianized and had no title to the land. Others felt that Europeans had a right to enter Indian land only for the purpose of proselytism. Individuals such as Bartolomé de Las Casas, a priest who had worked in the Caribbean and witnessed the tyranny and genocide, condemned the slaughter and enslavement of Indians. Overall, however, few expressed compassion over the tragic consequences of expansion for the Indians.

Columbus' policies set the tone for English colonization enterprises. English settlers who crossed the Atlantic and occupied the northeastern coast of North America held the same basic stereotypes of Indians as the Spanish and the same assumptions about their own superiority. Nonetheless, they found themselves at the mercy of the natives. In general, Indians treated the newcomers respectfully, providing them food and aid. Indians eventually outlived their usefulness, and when the English settlers learned to survive without native assistance, the stereotypes underwent a dramatic transformation. From being handsome, generous, and friendly people, the natives became dirty brutes, barbarians, bloody infidels, and savages. Proclaiming their moral superiority, the English felt no constraints to keep treaties, truces, and promises, no matter how solemnly made. They showed little remorse when they killed innocent people in "just" wars over land and resources.

Labeling a people "savage" was tantamount to issuing them a death sentence. As the English pushed deeper into the continent, a series of bloody wars erupted in Virginia, Massachusetts, Connecticut, the Carolinas, and other places. Indians initially held their own, winning some battles, but they eventually lost more and more. Attrition, diseases, and hunger forced them to seek peace. But the English showed them no mercy. Those not killed in battle, executed while in captivity, or sold into slavery in the West Indies often spent the rest of their days as servants or slaves.

Not all colonists held such disparaging views of Indians, however. Some advocated

that the English should follow fair and honorable practices in their dealings with the natives. In addition, many captives and individuals who had run away from the colonies to join Indian communities refused to return home and accept the superior-race myth. Benjamin Franklin noted that

when white persons of either sex have been taken prisoners by the Indians and lived a while among them, tho' ransomed by their friends, and treated with all imaginable tenderness . . . yet in a short time they become disgusted with our manner of life, and take the first opportunity of escaping again into the woods, from hence there is no reclaiming them. (Koning 1993, 61)

Franklin should not be seen as a friend of the Indians; in fact, he advocated their extermination. Yet, he felt that the divided American colonies should adopt a political system that resembled that of the Iroquois Confederacy.¹

After the United States gained its independence from England, the conjoined issues of territorial expansion and the "Indian problem" presented something of a moral dilemma for the new nation. Although the political rhetoric arising from the revolutionary fervor avowed such egalitarian principles as truth and justice, Indians, along with blacks, white women, and others, were systematically excluded from fair and equal treatment, in part, at least, because of their alleged inferiority.

Like the Spanish and English colonizers, white Americans, following the Revolutionary War, often used the stereotypes as a convenient rationalization for pursuing a ruthless territorial acquisition program. In doing so, they denied Indians humanity while simultaneously placing themselves on a lofty pedestal. Writing and speaking in self-righteous terms, newspaper editors, journalists, scholars, and government officials repeatedly lauded the growth of their country in religious, economic, and political terms. They not only claimed that Indians were barriers to progress but also asserted that the natives did not use the land as God had intended.

Nineteenth-century U.S. society offered Indians two choices: perish or give way. Set-

tlers moving to the frontier tended to espouse the first solution. When Indians offered armed resistance to preserve their homeland, their families, and their cultures, the settlers, overland travelers, and military officers virtually always blamed the natives for instigating the conflict and cast themselves as innocent victims of uncontrollable Indian rage. An article appearing in the *Omaha Daily Republican* in 1873 illustrates how some Nebraskans used stereotypes, lies, and distortions for this purpose:

The plains are a cemetery from Omaha to San Francisco, of tortured, murdered victims, killed by useless savages. . . . There is but one way to deal with the Indians, and that is with brute force.

People holding this perspective praised Colonel John Chivington, a Methodist minister and Colorado militia officer, for massacring friendly Cheyenne and Arapaho Indians at Sand Creek in 1864. They called for taking drastic measures to punish the Sioux, Cheyenne, and Arapahoes who had defeated Lt. Colonel George Armstrong Custer in 1876. In California, following the gold rush, armed homesteaders routinely formed groups for the purpose of finding and killing Indians.

Reformers and humanitarians from eastern states where Indians previously had been removed, decimated, and pacified usually advocated the second solution. While condemning the slaughter and brutal treatment of Indians, they viewed assimilation as preferable to genocide. They wanted Indians transformed into mirror images of white farmers, whether Indians wanted to change or not. Thus, reservations became places where the resocialization of Indians was to occur.

Although reformers demanded the extension of U.S. laws and codes of punishment to include Indians as a vital step forward in the assimilation process, racial attitudes, often expressed in stereotypical terms, denied Indians fair treatment. Two Nebraska incidents epitomize the relationship between race and justice. In 1865, two settlers killed an elderly Pawnee merely to test the firepower of a recently purchased pistol. Al-

though local citizens knew the identities of the murderers, the authorities refused to press charges. But four years later, when settlers suspected that some Pawnees had killed a homesteader, they used coercive measures to force the Pawnee chiefs to hand over some individuals to try for the crime. The subsequent legal proceedings involving four Indian defendants were so biased that a local newspaper called the whole affair a mockery of justice. With only highly circumstantial evidence and perjured testimony to offer the court, prosecutors resorted to race baiting, negative imagery, and fear to gain convictions. In the closing arguments, one of them told the jury that "prejudice towards their [the defendants'] race is deserved because of their actions toward white people." Another prosecutor asked rhetorically, "Why should these filthy savages receive any more sympathy than white men?" (National Archives 1869). After five hours of deliberation, an all-white jury convicted all of the defendants.

Such incidents were not confined to the Great Plains. Nationally, each of the three branches of the federal government responded in coordinated ways to give a sense of legality and morality to flagrant acts of aggression, deception, and hostility. Congress enacted a number of bills aimed at appropriating vast tracts of native land and assimilating the Indians. To prevent Indians from falling under the corrupting influences of white society and to open millions of acres for non-Indian settlement, it passed the Removal Act of 1830, which had a devastating impact on the affected nations. They faced the trauma of leaving behind the graves of their loved ones, the sites where they worshipped, and the places of their birth. Thousands of relocated Indians died as a result of starvation, diseases, and other hardships experienced along the way. Because they suffered the loss of about a third of their population, the Cherokees called their forced removal from Georgia to the Indian Territory (modern-day Oklahoma) the "Trail of Tears."

Viewing customary modes of punishment as backward and as retarding assimilation, Congress attached a rider to the 1885 Indian Appropriation Act. Known as the Major Crimes Act, this action extended federal ju-

risdiction to crimes including murder, arson, rape, and assault that occurred on Indian land. On reservations, Courts of Indian Offenses imposed white American penalties on Indians accused of other transgressions.

Seeking to "save Indians from themselves" through integration into U.S. culture as lowly farmers, Congress enacted the General Allotment Act, or Dawes Act, in 1887. This piece of legislation sought to supplant traditional Indian values, beliefs, and behaviors with those of white society by making Indians individual landholders, farmers, and U.S. citizens. Implementation required breaking Indian reservations into small tracts of land ranging in size from 40 to 160 acres and opening the "surplus land" to non-Indian settlers. The allotment process ultimately left many Indians landless and trapped in a cycle of poverty, ill health, and despair. My family has suffered tremendous long-term consequences of the allotment act. Because of poverty, my relatives sold much of their allotted lands before I was born, leaving me and my siblings with relatively few acres.

Presidents not only enforced the laws of Congress, but also participated fully in the campaign to subdue and transform "savagery." As commanders in chief, presidents allowed the U.S. military to conduct brutal operations to subjugate uncooperative Indians and drive them onto reservations. In treaty negotiations, they let their representatives use whatever tactics were deemed necessary to acquire coveted land, including fraud, coercion, deception, and bribery. A saying among Indians is that the United States entered into 371 treaties with Indian nations and subsequently violated each of them. Nevertheless, many Indian nations managed to retain reduced tracts of lands called *reservations*, along with hunting and fishing rights. My research exposes the misconduct of federal officials in their 1833 negotiations with the Pawnee chiefs. They lied to the chiefs, telling them that the federal government only wanted a small tract of land. The written version of the treaty, however, stated that the Pawnees agreed to cede all of their lands lying south of the Platte

River. Consequently, we Pawnees lost millions of acres of land.

Rejecting assimilation, multitudes of families struggled to carry on their customary ways of life, including religious worship. The Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA), an agency initially placed within the Department of War and then within the Department of the Interior, used repressive measures to detribalize Indian society. BIA agents often attempted to gain absolute authority over uncooperative inhabitants by extralegal methods, including withholding provisions and rations guaranteed by treaty. In times of destitution, which occurred more frequently on many reservations as the nineteenth century progressed, coercive actions of this nature gave agents powerful leverage over Indian leaders and their people. A set of BIA regulations adopted during the 1890s, called the Code of Indian Offenses, provided criminal punishment for Indians who participated in most religious and healing ceremonies. Missionaries supported the outlawing of rituals they saw as expressions of devil worship, savagery, and heathenism. The abuse did not end there. Federal agents, following a policy that sought to "kill the Indian but save the man," literally ripped apart thousands of Indian families, placing children in distant boarding schools. In keeping with this philosophy, school policies subjected the captive children to involuntary hair shearing, hours of uncompensated labor each day, and harsh military regimens. Compulsory courses in reading and arithmetic sought to inculcate in the students the arts and habits of "civilization," and history courses aimed to replace traditional understandings of history with those held by white Americans. Those youths who dared to speak in their own language were punished by physical beatings, mouth washings with soap, and solitary confinement.

Over the years, my father and other relatives have told me stories about their experiences at the Pawnee and Chilocco Indian schools in Oklahoma. *Atius* (dad) ran away from Chilocco during the 1930s so often that he was allowed to attend public school in the town of Pawnee. *Uppit* (grandfather) Lynn Rice stated that on one occasion a teacher

struck his friend's head with a fist, causing a loss of hearing, for the "crime" of singing an Indian religious song. When I misbehaved as an adolescent, my father occasionally threatened to send me to a boarding school if I did not change my errant ways. Eventually, I came to realize that he would not have taken such a drastic measure. I feel lucky to have reached school age at a time when relatively few Pawnee youths were subjected to the tyranny of the federal boarding school system.

Finally, the U.S. Supreme Court provided a legal foundation for subjugating Indian nations under U.S. domination. During the 1820s and 1830s, Chief Justice John Marshall handed down a series of landmark cases concerning Indians that demonstrated an acceptance by the federal judiciary of insulting language, condescending attitudes, and stereotypical views. In *Johnson v. McIntosh* (1823), Marshall applied a version of the doctrine of discovery to federal Indian policy, holding that Indians merely had occupancy rights to the land until the United States wanted it. In making a case to support the dispossession of Indian nations by just wars and acts of conquest, Marshall declared that Indians were "warlike" and nomadic.

Other court decisions were equally derisive, contemptuous, and arrogant. In *U.S. v. Sandoval* (1913, 39), the high court ruled that the Pueblos of New Mexico should be legally classified as Indian because

the people of the Pueblos, although sedentary rather than nomadic in their inclinations and disposed to peace and industry, are nevertheless Indians in race, customs, and domestic government, always living in separate and isolated communities, adhering to primitive modes of life, largely influenced by superstition and fetishism, and chiefly governed according to the crude customs inherited from their ancestors. They are essentially a simple, uninformed, and inferior people.

Viewing territorial expansion as essential for the nation's future, few U.S. citizens questioned the "manifest destiny" that purportedly guided their country across the continent into lands inhabited by undeserving and depraved peoples. Intellectuals and other trained minds of the era gave an

ethnocentric expression to the national experience. Without critical analysis of the causes of conflict resulting from U.S. encroachments, historians apparently reveled with delight in depicting Indians as murderous villains, brutal savages, and barriers to progress. In a classic expression of blaming the victim for the crimes of the aggressor, the historian Francis Parkman, writing during the mid-1840s after traveling along the Oregon Trail, declared that "by a thousand acts of pillage and murder, [the Pawnees] have deserved chastisement at the hands of government" (Parkman 1950, 54).

A decade before Parkman penned those words, science had embarked on a campaign to validate the intellectual superiority of Anglo-Saxons. Proving the alleged inferiority of Indians would in effect confirm the negative stereotypes of people considered inferior and sanction taking land from people who lacked the intelligence to use it properly. Given the popularity of such views, researchers skewed their data to obtain the desired results. To amass collections of remains for study, craniologists paid frontier settlers and soldiers to loot native burial grounds. In the 1860s, the U.S. Army became involved in this type of research. Following orders issued by the surgeon general, military medical personnel stole bodies from native graves and decapitated hundreds of Indians killed in battle. While the mutilations and "body snatching" proceeded unimpeded, promoters of territorial expansion continued to present Indians as cruel, heartless butchers.

Most credible scholars eventually discredited craniometrics, but the abuse against dead Indians committed in the name of science continued unabated. Subsequent generations of anthropologists, archaeologists, museum curators, and others eagerly embarked on careers that relied heavily on looting Indian graves and storing and studying the remains. Racist attitudes that cast Indians as an inferior, childlike, and vanishing race guided the development of scientific research well into the twentieth century. Through practices sanctioned in the name of scientific curiosity, hundreds of thousands of Indian burial sites were disrupted. Viewing the remains as specimens rather

than as representing human life, curators placed them on public display, in storage cabinets, and on shelves. In most parts of the country, the public could satisfy its ghoulish curiosity by visiting local museums and Indian burial sites turned into tourist attractions. It should also be noted that pot hunters, usually ordinary citizens who peddled native burial objects and human remains, contributed significantly to the desecration of cemeteries. Unsavory, disrespectful, and sacrilegious acts of that nature continue today in spite of the enactment of federal and state laws aimed at protecting those burials. People make money exploiting the contents of Indian graves by selling their plunder on the black market.

Stereotypes in Popular Culture

Writings carried similar themes throughout much of American history. During the colonial period, captivity narratives, a popular genre, gave readers vivid illustrations of alleged Indian brutality and savagery. Women and children in particular, according to the writers, suffered unspeakable atrocities at the hands of their Indian captors.

Nineteenth-century literary figures such as James Fenimore Cooper portrayed Indians of different nations in a dichotomous light. Indians in Cooper's *Leatherstocking Tales*, written between 1821 and 1841, possessed keen senses and stamina. Cooper's "good" Indians manifested loyalty and faithfulness and were true to the white Americans with whom they associated. Conversely, his "bad" Indians delighted in repetitive acts of torture, gratuitous murder, and generally barbarous behavior (Cooper 1985).

Other forms of popular culture emerged as important promoters of myths and stereotypes. Surfacing during the latter part of the nineteenth century, Wild West shows organized by such men as William "Buffalo Bill" Cody and Gordon "Pawnee Bill" Lillie traveled extensively across the United States, Canada, and Europe, thrilling audiences with extravagant performances featuring mounted Indian warriors attacking innocent settlers and travelers. It should not come as a

surprise that by the end of each show, virtuous white frontiersmen always triumphed over the "warlike" Indians. Dime novels gave readers an equally fanciful view of adventurous Westerners outwitting, outfighting, and ultimately slaughtering scores of bloodthirsty "red fiends." A novel titled *Young Wild West Running the Gauntlet; or, The Pawnee Chief's Last Shot* (Le Blant n.d.) offers a common view of Indians as presented in the dime-novel genre. "The awful deeds of the Indians in those days," the author claimed,

could but make one's blood run cold to hear about them, and that is why we have not described in detail what took place at that massacre when Young Wild West arrived on the scene just in time to be captured by the fiends. (p. 42)

The motion picture industry surfaced early in the twentieth century as a powerful conveyer of images. Westerns quickly emerged as a staple of the movie industry. Some films attempted to present a sympathetic version of history, but most scriptwriters and producers presented the distorted themes and images of Indians found in novels, Wild West shows, and written history. Children and adults could watch heroic matinee idols save innocent settlements and wagon trains from hordes of swarming savages. Cartoons, an important element of movie theaters, often reified the stereotype of Indians as the "bad" guys. They presented Indians as brutish people, buffoons, and idiots dressed in feathers who constantly engaged in acts of violence and destruction.

Shifting of Attitudes

As movies glorified the alleged triumph of U.S. society over savagery, attitudes toward natives began to change, in some quarters at least. With the Indian wars now over and white society stretching across the North American continent, the twentieth century witnessed a gradual decline in overt racism. The growth of multiculturalism and more truthful interpretations of U.S. history and culture surfaced nearly simultaneously. Some bold writers even dared to depict Indians as victims of U.S. expansion. Seeking to see justice done, Helen Hunt Jackson's *A*

Century of Dishonor: The Early Crusade for Indian Reform and *A Century of Dishonor: A Sketch of the United States Government's Dealings With Some of the Indian Tribes*, both published in 1881, exposed much of the hatred that underlay the treatment Indians suffered at the hands of white settlers, military officers, and government officials. Angie Debo ([1940] 1989) revealed the graft, corruption, and abuse perpetrated in Oklahoma by white citizens who had been assigned as the legal guardians of Indians. Rather than acting in the best interest of their wards, guardians often embezzled or stole their money. Even worse, some committed murder to gain ownership of Indian assets. With old prejudices thriving, authorities prosecuted only a few of the criminals.

As notions of pluralism and cultural relativity grew, academic and popular thought began to challenge the civilization-over-savagery theme. Some romantic artists, writers, and scholars expressed admiration for the collectivism that characterized daily native life and the spirituality that united people and the environment in a harmonious web. They viewed federal missions of assimilation and capitalism as misguided, exploitive, and destructive. In 1922, growing sympathy encouraged outbursts of support for the Pueblo Indians of New Mexico in their successful effort to stop Congress from enacting the Bursum Bill, a measure that sought to bestow title to millions of acres of land on non-Indian squatters.

The Great Depression, which shook public faith in the country's values of individualism, capitalism, democracy, and assimilation, provided an impetus for other changes in attitude and practice. Reformers seized the opportunity to alter the course of federal Indian policy. In 1934, Congress, responding to growing concern about the deleterious impact of federal policy on native life, enacted the Indian Reorganization Act (IRA). In addition to ending allotments, the IRA encouraged Indian nations to adopt constitutional forms of government, to apply for funds from a revolving credit account, and to engage in some customary forms of worship without fear of arrest. It promised the dawning of a new era for Indian people.

Yet old attitudes that cast Indians as backward, incompetent, inferior, and incapable of making it on their own continued to permeate decision-making bodies and the wider society. The IRA sought to impose a form of government on Indians that more closely resembled white America's structures than it did customary ones. It also subjected the actions of tribal councils to the scrutiny of the Secretary of the Interior, who had the power to veto council decisions. Some Indian nations resisted, preferring to keep their existing government structure, but others accepted IRA governments. In addition, assimilation remained the overwhelming thrust of federal, state, and parochial schools that served Indian children. Congress, led by representatives from western states with many constituents who loathed Indians, refused to appropriate adequate funds for native nations to repurchase lost lands.

Resurgence of Old Attitudes

The post-World War II era saw the renewal of massive outpourings of negative imagery as the country emerged victorious in the struggle against fascism. Popular opinion once again demanded conformity from all of its citizens. Although thousands of Indians had served with distinction in the war and many had died fighting for their country, western congressmen and senators advocated the elimination of Indian nations and reservations. Others, denying that racism existed, demanded the absorption of Indians into U.S. society. They couched their arguments in terms of getting government off the backs of Indians and used stereotypes that cast natives as lazy and backward, but a desire for more Indian lands and resources underscored the assimilation drive.

Inspired by the political climate, Congress embarked on two programs, *termination* and *relocation*, designed to integrate Indians into mainstream America. During the 1950s and 1960s, Congress terminated several hundred Indian nations by severing the federal trust relationship with them. As a result, the terminated governments could no longer receive federal assistance, including education, health, and social services. Citizens of

terminated nations faced new difficulties with the loss of their land and federal services. Nonterminated tribes faced further erosion of their sovereignty and customs. In 1953, Congress enacted Public Law 280, turning criminal and civil jurisdiction of Indian lands over to state governments in six states.

The relocation program removed thousands of Indian families from reservations and rural areas to such cities as Los Angeles, Chicago, Phoenix, Cleveland, Minneapolis, Oklahoma City, and Seattle. Some program participants eventually thrived, but many others did not. The latter frequently returned home because they faced resentment from their neighbors, lacked educational and job skills, and could not adjust to city life.

Stereotypes during this era of cultural repression worked in other ways against Indians. From the 1950s to the 1970s, social workers, doctors, nurses, attorneys, and others took thousands of children from reservation families and placed them on the black market for adoption. In addition to kidnapping, they used high-pressure tactics, including threats, shame, and intimidation, to convince impoverished parents that their children would have a better chance in life if they were adopted by affluent white families. In other instances, children falling into the hands of state child protective workers were stripped from their families by legal means. Whether acting legally or illegally, the perpetrators and their accomplices saw themselves as saving the children from the harsh cycle of poverty and the hardships of reservation life. Having little understanding of or respect for Indian life, they judged Indian culture by their own standards. Of course, with the imagery presented in history and popular culture looming large, Indian society was deemed inferior. Indian government officials and families were virtually powerless to stop the transgressions because U.S. government authorities either looked away or sanctioned the snatching of Indian children.

The impact of the thefts on individuals, families, and nations was tremendous. Some children experienced physical, psychologi-

cal, and sexual abuse, but others found comfortable lives. Whatever their experiences, the Lost Birds, as they have been called, generally could not retain their language, ceremonies, and traditions. Native parents often remained hopeful of finding their lost children. Some lucky ones eventually reestablished contact, but sealed or nonexistent records prevented most others from doing so.

Medical personnel committed another form of genocide on Indian people. During the 1960s, 1970s, and 1980s, U.S. Public Health Service doctors working for Indian Health Service hospitals and contract physicians sterilized perhaps as many as several thousand unwitting women. In many instances, women discovered that surgical procedures performed on them after childbirth had left them incapable of bearing any more children. As a result, doctors not only shattered the dreams, hopes, and aspirations of many families but also acted to check the growth of the Indian population.

Although bigotry influenced the kidnapping of children and the involuntary sterilization of women, cultural and socioeconomic differences between the perpetrators and the victims also came into play. Doctors, social workers, and attorneys who participated in the genocide tended to come from affluent backgrounds. Viewing a nonmaterialistic culture as wanting, they formed self-righteous judgments based on their class and personal values, which, when it came to *Indians, were mean-spirited, ethnocentric, and damaging.*

Indian Resistance and Struggles for Respect and Dignity

As active historical participants, Indians have long understood the significance and ramifications of negative stereotypes. Over the years, they have responded to these stereotypes in a variety of ways. Some, who had succumbed to the indoctrination of the boarding, parochial, and public schools, accepted the stereotypes as reality. Feeling stigmatized and impaired, they sought relief by denying their Indian heritage, dissociating themselves from other natives, and refusing to carry on traditional values, customs, and

beliefs. Others, suffering from poor self-esteem, turned to alcohol, drugs, or quicker methods of suicide.

Fortunately, many Indians opted to challenge the legacy of the stereotypes and mistreatment. They advocated religious freedom, sought access to sacred sites on lands that had been taken from them, and demanded a lasting burial for their ancestors. Others challenged discrimination in prisons against native spirituality. Still others mobilized to halt the theft of Indian children and the involuntary sterilizations.

In many communities, traditionalists continued to speak Indian languages in family, religious, and social settings. Operating in secrecy to avoid arrest, they sponsored, attended, or participated in banned ceremonies. The Native American Church used state courts to challenge laws that interfered with their use of peyote as a holy sacrament. Many tribal leaders who refused to accept BIA paternalism continued fighting for tribal autonomy, economic self-sufficiency, and dignity. Terminated nations, usually reduced by federal policy to conditions of poverty and landlessness, sought to restore their status as federally recognized tribes. In December 1971, Taos Pueblo of New Mexico won a lengthy struggle for the return of their sacred Blue Lake and surrounding traditional lands, which had been taken from them by President Theodore Roosevelt in 1906 and placed under the jurisdiction of the *U.S. Forest Service.*

Facing opposition, stonewalling, and ignorance, native protesters often resorted to militant tactics. The climate created by the anti-Vietnam War, civil rights, and counter cultural movements probably helped spur Indian activism, but Indian goals and objectives differed dramatically from those of other social critics. In the 1960s and 1970s, Pacific Northwest and Great Lakes region natives resisted state attempts to deny them the right to hunt and fish "in usual and customary places" guaranteed by treaty. The American Indian Movement (AIM) formed in the late 1960s to fight for treaty rights, sovereignty, and cultural survival. As the 1970s progressed, however, Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) agents attempted to dis-

rupt and destroy the Indian movement. Many native leaders were killed and incarcerated, but the movement had inspired Indian people to fight for justice and political rights.

By presenting accurate historical facts and debunking stereotypes in a widespread drive to reeducate the public, Indian activists achieved some significant accomplishments. Beginning in the 1970s, courts began granting Indian inmates the right to wear their hair long, to conduct sweat ceremonies, and to participate in other forms of religious worship. Protests forced Indian Health Service officials to stop the practice of involuntary sterilization. Congress responded with significant pieces of legislation. The Indian Self-Determination Act of 1975 allowed Indian nations and groups to contract with facilities that offered educational, health, and other services to Indian people. The Indian Child Welfare Act of 1978 ended the kidnapping of native youths by medical personnel and social workers, enabling Indian courts to have a say in the disposition of native children. In the same year, the American Indian Religious Freedom Act professed to extend religious freedom to American Indians, but the measure lacked enforcement mechanisms. The Native Graves Protection and Repatriation Act of 1990 enabled Indian nations to reclaim lost ancestral remains and burial objects for proper reburial. It also established a legal avenue for Indian governments to repatriate lost sacred objects and objects of cultural patrimony.

Repatriation is an important aspect of my teaching, research, and community service. During the 1980s, the Pawnee Nation committed to retrieving the remains of at least 10,000 of our ancestors that were stolen and then placed in museums, federal agencies, and universities. Thus far, we have reburied about 2,000 of our relatives. For me and for other Pawnees, our work in this matter is a spiritual, moral, ethical, and kinship obligation that we must accept. It is our duty to protect those who cannot protect themselves. Through this endeavor, we Pawnees, along with other Indians, have successfully challenged the racist notion that deceased Indians belong to the realm of science.

Ongoing Problems With Old Stereotypes

More than ever before, Indians have been using the written word and film to espouse native themes, challenge stereotypes, and issue calls for justice. Some of their writings have sought to shape public consciousness concerning ongoing problems, and others have offered insider perspectives on native experiences.² Despite the rise of Indian writers and filmmakers, however, non-Indian authors, professors, filmmakers, and others have continued to function as the primary molders of perceptions of Indians. With the rise of social history in the 1970s, some historians became more receptive to flushing out the old ethnocentric views and stereotypes that had tainted so many works in the field. Dee Brown's *Bury My Heart at Wounded Knee* (1971), a bestseller for many months, offered readers a shocking view of the long legacy of broken treaties, government abuse, massacres, racism, and native resistance that characterized Indian-white relations. Unfortunately, many of these individuals have had minimal, if any, contact with living Indians.

Despite some accomplishments in battling negative stereotypes, Indians still face many challenges. Old images continue to permeate public consciousness, and changing times have given rise to new problems of imagery and injustice. The result is that stereotypes often promote acts of disrespect, ridicule, misunderstandings, and insensitivity. Compounding matters is widespread ignorance about Indian history and culture.

Sports logos and mascots constitute an important area of long-standing concern. During the twentieth century, it became popular for professional, collegiate, and public school sports teams to adopt Indian logos and team names. In professional football, the Kansas City Chiefs and Washington Redskins are two examples. In baseball, it is the Atlanta Braves and Cleveland Indians. At sporting events, many fans deprecate Indian culture by making hand movements called the "tomahawk chop" and donning "native clothing," complete with chicken feathers dyed to resemble eagle feathers. Although

native protesters have sought to have the offending teams change their names, the owners have refused to budge. Representatives of the Washington football team, for instance, have even gone so far as to make the ridiculous and preposterous declaration that the term *redskin* actually honors Indian people. Historically, *redskin* was used synonymously with *savage*, *red devil*, and other negative terms. Conversely, some colleges and universities have voluntarily renamed their teams out of respect for native concerns. Nevertheless, popular organizations such as the Boy Scouts and the YMCA still actively promote programs with stereotypical Indian themes. Youths playing "Indian" roles act out the part of the noble savage without understanding the cultural and historical processes, keeping alive the American stream of consciousness through cultural imperialism.

The Indian movement has won some important victories in its struggle for respect and dignity. In Arizona, Phoenix changed the name of Squaw Peak to Piestewa Peak in honor of Lori Piestewa, a young Hopi mother and soldier who died in the early days of the Iraq war.

Problems of religious freedom and tribal economic development remain constant. As I mentioned above, during the 1970s and 1980s, Indian inmates filed numerous lawsuits, winning the right to wear their hair long in accordance with custom and to hold sweat ceremonies and other forms of traditional worship in prison. But during the 1990s, state and county officials took steps to limit religious opportunities for Indian inmates.

Although gaming has enabled some Indian nations to obtain a level of economic self-sufficiency and to improve the quality of life for their members, powerful forces, perhaps fearful of native empowerment and economic competition, oppose the development of Indian casinos. Newspaper editorialists—joined by elected officials—have called for abolishing or strictly regulating native gambling operations while simultaneously encouraging new non-Indian gambling boats on our rivers and lakes. Their strategies appeal to public fears that

tribal gaming will promote the cancerous growth in society of corruption, violence, prostitution, and compulsive addictions. Essentially, these stereotypes have the dual effect of presenting white Americans as morally superior and Indians as being vulnerable to greed, ineptness, and criminal behavior. Despite the rhetoric and the brandishing of old stereotypes in new forms, many non-Indians remain supportive of Indian gaming. Funds generated by the casinos have enabled Indian nations to fund reservation health, education, and social programs.

On the opposite end of the spectrum stand the romanticists. Often called "New Agers," these individuals find so much value and inspiration in Indian beliefs that they seek to uncover their mysteries for personal guidance, health, pleasure, or profit. After reading ethnographic studies, attending a ceremony, or receiving instructions, usually from Indians of dubious authority who willingly exploit their religion for gain, New Agers seek a meaningful religious experience. Some seek an Indian identity, name, title, or connection so that they can reap potentially huge profits from individuals willing to pay to participate in a ceremony. Others, professing to have been endowed with the spiritual powers of a "shaman," charge gullible people for a "healing" ceremony. Of course, many Indians disapprove strongly of these individuals appropriating and mimicking Indian traditions, viewing the behavior of New Agers and other exploiters as sacrilege.

Conclusion

Negative stereotypes not only constitute a major barrier to interracial harmony but also promote injustice, disrespect, oppression, unequal treatment, and genocide. They keep people from understanding differences, similarities, problems, and potential solutions. Although many non-Indians truly care about the welfare of Indians and have deep, abiding admiration for native culture, many others are ambivalent, if not callous and resentful. Still others are exploitive. For these reasons, Indian struggles for acceptance as equals in the family of humankind

have not ended. Indian nations have to fight continually to preserve their inherent sovereignty and rights that are constantly threatened by non-Indian politicians, judges, and corporate leaders.

The key factor behind the development and continuation of the stereotypes is the simple fact that Indians occupied American soil that the incoming Europeans coveted. To rationalize their territorial expansion, European settlers and their progeny devised a series of stereotypes to soothe their collective conscience and sanction a host of aggressive actions—conduct that included dispossession, enslavement, removal, genocide, political subjugation, and coercive assimilation.

White America must come to grips with its treatment of its indigenous peoples. Denial of responsibility and historical amnesia merely prolong the problems rooted so deeply in this country's history. Studying the significance of stereotypes in the history of this country offers a means to understand the past and present. Significant changes in consciousness have occurred in the past few decades, but we still have a long way to go. Acquiring a more accurate view of the past should facilitate the emergence of an environment where we can celebrate the diversity and the rich ethnic mix of our nation. We as a nation must respect the sovereignty of American Indian nations as well.

Note

1. The Iroquois Confederacy is a political union of North American Indian nations who acted (and act) in war and peace, in trade alliances and treaties of goodwill, as a single nation.
2. In the 1930s, Black Elk, a Lakota holy man, told John G. Neihardt of the visions he had experienced, the holy circle, and the Wounded Knee massacre. Scholars such as Beatrice Medicine (Sioux), Anna Walters (Pawnee/Otoe), Vine Deloria, Jr. (Sioux), Duane Champagne (Chippewa), Susan Miller (Seminole), Elizabeth Cook-Lynn (Dakota), Waziyatawin Angela Cavender Wilson (Dakota), Carol Chiago Lujan (Diné/Pima), Donald Fixico (Sac, Fox, Shawnee, and Seminole), Edward Valandar (Lakota), Michael Yellow Bird (Sahnish/Hidasta), and Devon Mihesuah (Choctaw) present views of Indian histories,

cultural survival, and philosophies. In the 1980s, a small but growing number of Indian filmmakers, including Ava Hamilton (Arapaho), Victor Masayesva (Hopi), and Arlene Bowman (Diné), began producing quality works dealing with native topics. In 1995, Russell Means, a Lakota and former AIM leader turned actor, wrote *Where White Men Fear to Tread*, an autobiography detailing many aspects of twentieth-century life experiences and AIM activities. Leslie Marmon Silko, a Laguna, Simon Ortiz, an Acoma, and Dinés Laura Tohe and Lucy Tapahonso used literary techniques to reflect Indian life in contemporary settings.

References

- Brown, Dee. (1971). *Bury my heart at Wounded Knee: An Indian history of the American West*. New York: Holt, Rinehart, and Winston.
- Cooper, James Fenimore. (1985). *The pioneers* (1823), *The last of the Mohicans* (1826), *The prairie* (1827), *The pathfinder* (1840), and *The deer slayer* (1841). In *Leatherstocking Tales*, 2 vols. New York: Literary Classics of the United States.
- Debo, Angie. ([1940] 1989). *And still the waters run: The betrayal of the five civilized tribes*. Reprint, Norman and London: University of Oklahoma Press.
- Honour, Hugh. (1975). *The new golden land: European images of America from the discoveries to the present time*. New York: Pantheon Books.
- Jackson, Helen Hunt. (1900 [c1885]). *A century of dishonor: A sketch of the United States government's dealings with some of the Indian tribes*. Boston: Little, Brown and Company.
- Johnson v. McIntosh*. (1823). 21 U.S. (8 Wheat.) 53.
- Koning, Hans. (1993). *The conquest of America: How the Indian nations lost their continent*. New York: Monthly Review Press.
- Le Blant, Edward T. (ed.). (n.d.). *Young Wild West running the gauntlet; or, The Pawnee Chief's last shot*. Derby, CT: Goldstar Books.
- Means, Russell. (1995). *Where white men fear to tread: The autobiography of Russell Means*. New York: St. Martin's Press.
- National Archives. (1869, November 15). Samuel M. Janney to Ely S. Parker. Microcopy 234, Office of Indian Affairs, Letters Received, Pawnee Agency, reel 660.
- Parkman, Francis. (1950). *The Oregon Trail*. New York: American Library, Signet Classic.
- United States v. Sandoval*. (1913). 231 U.S. 28.