AMERICAN FANTASIES AND IMAGINED HISTORIES: ETHNIC PLAY AND SETTLER COLONIALISM IN TWENTIETH-CENTURY WYOMING

by

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A dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree

of

Doctor of Philosophy

in

American Studies

MONTANA STATE UNIVERSITY
Bozeman, Montana

April 2021

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DEDICATION

For Mom.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to begin by thanking my family for their continuous love and support. One of the most rewarding aspects of this entire experience was meeting my academic ally Tonya Robinson, and I am deeply grateful for her support and friendship. I would also like to extend my gratitude to Dr. Susan Kollin my advisor and the chair of my committee. Her guidance through the writing process was invaluable. I must also express my appreciate to Dr. Mary Murphy who in addition to serving on my committee, recommended both the Miss Indian America pageant as dissertation topic and the Lola Homsher Grant as possible funding. Additionally, thank you to Dr. Bob Rydell, Dr. Matt Herman, and Dr. Amanda Hendrix-Komoto for serving on my committee. I would also like to thank the American Studies program, director Dr. Bob Rydell specifically, for their support through research and teaching assistantships. These teaching opportunities allowed me to learn from the skilled teachers and scholars Jennifer Hill and Nancy Mahoney. Furthermore, I am grateful to the Montana State Graduate School, the Ivan Doig Center for the Study of the Lands & Peoples of the North American West, and the Wyoming Historical Society for research funding which directly supported this project. I also extend my gratitude to the Extreme History Project and the Museum of the Rockies, and the Campbell County Rockpile Museum for allowing me to present my work. Finally, thanks to the staffs of the American Heritage Center, the Special Collections and University Archives at Stanford University, the Sheridan-Fulmer County Library, and the Wyoming State Archives, respectively.

AMERICAN INDIAN HERITAGE

Andrea Powers is an enrolled N~~u~~mun~~uu~~ (Comanche Nation) descendant.

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NOTE ON TERMINOLOGY

This project works to recognize Native sovereignty and the specific names of tribes and nations are used whenever possible. I use the collective terms Native and Native American, interchangeably, to refer to the Ingenious peoples of North America. I employ the term Indigenous, in a broader, global context. I use the term Indian, when appropriate, to refer to specific concepts that employ the word; for example, in the concepts "playing Indian" and "Indian princess," and when referring to the misnomer "Indian." I do not use this term to refer to actual Native peoples unless quoting directly from a source. In addition, I capitalize Black when referring to human beings in both an ethnic and cultural sense which reflects the shared history, identity, and community of Blacks in the United States. I do not capitalize the term "blackface" because it does not denote actual Black or African peoples. Additionally, the collective term Black, Indigenous, and People of Color (BIPOC) offers a more inclusive and specific referent than People of Color or minorities. I use settler colonialist as a general identifier to refer to those privileged to move through the world at the top of power and racial hierarchies in the U.S. This term is broad enough to encompass intersections of race, gender, and class within the dominant society. I employ this term to refer to both the dominant Euro-American culture and to those often referred to as "white," a term that is inadequate for my purposes here. When applicable, I use the more specific terms non-Native and non-Black, when applicable. This project maintains a gender-neutral/inclusive posture, using gendered pronouns when known. I use the term "American Studies" to refer the discipline as primarily practiced in the United States. I do not change spelling or nomenclature within quotations.

ABSTRACT

American Fantasies and Imagined Histories examines three case studies unified through ethnic play, the interrelated structures of settler colonialism and white supremacy, geographical location, and time period. This project employs an interdisplinary approach that combines original archival historical research, and literary and cultural analysis while drawing on Indigenous and Black frameworks. In twentieth-century Wyoming, redface and blackface filled Native and Black cultural absences maintaining the structures of settler colonialism and white supremacy. At the same time, this dissertation examines settler colonialism, slavery, and white supremacy in relation to the experiences of Black and Native peoples. This study shows how ethnic play both maintains and disrupts the race and gender hierarchies created by the interrelated structures of settler colonialism and white supremacy.

INTRODUCTION

UNRULY, DISRUPTIVE, AND CRITICAL

> *Politics is not separate from the lived experiences or the imaginary world of what is possible; to the contrary, politics is about these things. Politics comprises the many battles to roll back constraints and exercise some power over, or create some space within, the institutions and social relationships that dominate our lives.* Robin D.G. Kelly in *Race Rebels*

> *It [critical methodologies and Indigenous inquiry] must be unruly, disruptive, critical, and dedicated to the goals of justice and equity.* Norman K. Denzin and Yvonna S. Lincoln in "Critical Methodologies and Indigenous Inquiry"

Cowboys and Indians?

1890 was a noteworthy year in the American West and for my family. In many ways, it is where this story begins. Significantly, this was the year Wyoming became the 44th state; moreover, the census that year inspired historian Frederick Jackson Turner to declare the American frontier officially closed. Despite this declaration, the genocide and dispossession of Native peoples raged on in the West. In the winter of 1890, for example, agency police murdered Hunkpapa Lakota leader Sitting Bull after Indian Agent James McLaughlin ordered his arrest. Fourteen days later, U.S. Troops fired four Hotchkiss guns on the human beings camped at Wounded Knee Creek massacring hundreds of Lakota men, women, and children. These significant events shaped the American West and Indian Country. The year 1890 also marks a starting point for the story of my family, as it was the year both my maternal great-grandfather and paternal great-grandmother were born.

My great-grandfather, Ray DeGering was born in North Platte, Nebraska. He grew up near what is now Guernsey and homesteaded, ranched, and raised his family in Lusk, Wyoming. DeGering was a second-generation American of French and Scotch-Irish descent. His obituary calls him "a true cowboy."[1] Alternatively, my paternal great-grandmother, Mattie Pewenofkit, was born in Anadarko, Indian Territory in 1890. Her father, Pe-we-nof-kit, was N~~u~~mun~~uu~~ (Comanche Nation) and her mother, Che-wath-ta, was Apache and Kiowa. After Indian residential school, Mattie Pewenofkit married and settled in Waurika, Oklahoma. Eventually, these two seemingly dissimilar families would come together in Montana.

When I was a child, I came across an event program for the *Legend of Rawhide Pageant Spectacle* in Lusk, Wyoming. The event was a historical reenactment pageant put on by the local community. The booklet itself was unassuming, but its effects were powerful. Covered with cardstock and bound with staples the program featured drawing of a man riding a horse. He wears a cowboy hat and fringe jacket while riding a horse the figure leads a wagon train that trails off into the distance. Inside its pages, I found the names of several family members. On the cast of characters page, under "Wagon Occupants," I located the names of my great-grandparents, Ray and Linnie DeGering, and my grandparents, Leonard and Margaret McCullough, along with the names of several other DeGerings I did not recognize. Under "Indian Squaws," was the name of my great-aunt, Fleeta DeGering. The pamphlet seemed like a relic at the time, and I had never seen the name of someone I knew in print before. Their names in type made them seem almost famous—or at least significant—and it would not be until years later that the implications of the overt racism against Native peoples on its pages would begin to crystalize in my mind. I held onto the program for years, taking it with me when I moved to Alaska to attend college, and bringing it back to Montana fifteen years later. I think I kept the

program all that time, not only because it was an artifact from my family's past, but also because I knew there was something I needed to articulate about it—something about what it means for my personal history and for what it means about my family's place in the history of the American West. As a descendant who has moved through the world and its intuitions with the privilege of the dominant society, how do I reconcile my own Native and settler colonialist pasts?



Figure 1. Ray DeGering, the author's great-grandfather, and participant in the *Legend of Rawhide Pageant Spectacle*, one of the case studies examined in this project. Photo from the author's collection.

The concerns I address in this dissertation are rooted in scholarship from American Studies, Indigenous and Black Studies, and History, and I ask questions about national belonging

and the oppressive and liberating spaces that shape the U.S. It is essential to address sovereignty in both physical and cultural spaces in readings of the histories of Native peoples, which in part may explain the hesitancy of Native and Indigenous scholars to engage the current transnational turn in American Studies and new postcolonial scholarship. American Studies and Indigenous scholar Robert Warrior (Ni-u-kon-ska/Osage) explains:

> The most recent notions of the transnational have progressed in some fashion from postcolonial studies. A major reason for the lack of engagement with transnationality by Native American scholars is the widespread rejection of postcolonial studies. Though it fails to take account of the formulations of the most nuanced of postcolonial scholars, this objection is grounded in the reality that Native Americans remain colonised peoples rather than people facing post-independence realities and challenges. Thus the post in postcolonialism creates a stumbling block to engagement [of Native Studies scholars].[2]

Although Warrior recognizes the lack of engagement in the transnational and postcolonial by Native scholars, he also acknowledges that Native Studies could benefit from the scholarship emerging from these academic turns. And the work of Jodi Byrd and Shari Huhndorf, for example, engage in postcolonial theory and transnational critiques. Scholarship focused both beyond and within the U.S.'s borders have much to offer each other. Although my focus remains for the most part on spaces inside the U.S., I also explore some of the contentious encounters between BIPOC and non-BIPOC spaces. Recent events in the U.S. suggest it is vital for scholars to keep a wary eye inward. In more way than one, this project has led me in that direction. Yet while my dissertation is concerned with Wyoming, it is also about so much more.

My project picks up several lines of inquiry regarding ethnic play developed by American Studies and Native Studies scholars including Philip Deloria, Eric Lott, and Michelle Raheja. While I draw on this work, my use of this scholarship for understanding *The Legend of Rawhide* reenactment, blackface in Wyoming, and the Miss Indian America pageant also covers

new ground by combining original archival research, literary and cultural criticism, and Native Studies and Black Studies in order to show how ethnic play both maintains and disrupts settler colonialism and white supremacy. In addition, I build on the approach of "otherwise" frameworks developed by scholars such as Tiffany Lethabo King whose work on comparative racial ontologies and epistemologies aims to put Black and Native Studies into conversation with each other. These approaches bridge the divide between Blacks and Native histories and experiences—a divide created by settler societies to advance settler causes, and such frameworks work to find new ways of analyzing the familiar concepts of settler colonialism and white supremacy.

Settler colonialism uses compartmentalization as a strategy to maintain its structure while the segregation of marginalized voices prevents the formation of a unified front against systematic oppression. The Anne Frank Center for Mutual Respect outlines three steps to prevent genocide: 1) Remember history 2) See the parallels of history 3) Act early to prevent new parallels.[3] This is advice I consider wholeheartedly in my dissertation. My goals include remembering the histories of genocide, slavery, and dispossession in the U.S., seeing the parallel histories of settler colonialism in the experiences of BIPOC peoples, and preventing old or new iterations of settler colonialism through the disruption of BIPOC erasure in American places and cultural spaces.

One way settler colonialism maintains racial and power hierarchies is through ethnic play. In examining ethnic play in Wyoming, I begin with a discussion of Philip Deloria's (Wičhíyena /Yankton Dakota) *Playing Indian* which explores the history of cultural appropriation of Native culture by non-Natives. Deloria's study found non-Natives often played Indian as a means to pursue national identity while at the same time obscuring and dehumanizing

actual Native peoples. Deloria brings together examples of this social process from early American history, fraternal organizations, the Boy Scouts, and New-Agers.[4] I build on Deloria's work and research to address Native cultural appropriation in instances of non-Native redface in twentieth-century Wyoming. Like Deloria's examination, my analysis also found the act of playing Indian reifies American identity on a national level, yet as I note also perpetuates and maintains settler colonialism as well as white supremacy in local and regional contexts.

Additionally, I build on Eric Lott's study of nineteenth-century blackface minstrelsy in the urban Northeast. Lott argues that white male audiences tended to experience both attraction and repulsion to blackface which they expressed through both cultural appropriation and anti-Black racism. My examination of blackface in the Wyoming builds on and extends Lott's work in several ways. For example, the time periods Lott and I address vary slightly. The historical record indicates blackface entertainment's reign in Wyoming dates from roughly the late 1880s to the late 1940s. Lott, on the other hand, dates the popularity of blackface in the Northeast from 1830s to the 1920s.[5] Additionally, Black populations in Wyoming were significantly smaller than populations in the Northeast. Furthermore, in contrast to the Northeast where audiences usually consisted largely of working-class men, blackface performers and audiences in Wyoming crossed gender lines and age groups.

Another significant analysis of ethic play is Michelle Raheja's (Onödowá'ga/Seneca descent) study of "redfacing" by Native actors in film in *Reservation Reelism*. Raheja's study provides useful insights for my examination of Native participation in playing Indian at All American Indian Days and the Miss Indian America pageant in chapters five and six. While Raheja's study focuses on film, my work examines ethnic play in live performances, specifically blackface and redface, in Wyoming. Like Raheja's film analysis, my study focuses on the ways

Native peoples' performative expressions of agency counter the very stereotypes in redface that the settler society and culture espouse. Native performers engaging in Indian play is distinct from racialized performative acts of non-Natives because of the oppressive structures of settler colonialism and white supremacy. These realities often severely limited the choices of Native peoples to perform beyond the expectations of settler colonial culture. Also useful to my discussion is the connection between Native and Black performers' disruptions of the racial and gender hierarchies in the film industry which Raheja addresses.[6] Furthermore, I develop connections between the creation of Native and Black spaces, physical and conceptual, which disrupt the hierarchies of settler colonialism and white supremacy through an analysis of comparative racialization. The analytics I employ move beyond the binary of colonizer and colonized in order to move conversations about settler colonialism and white supremacy forward.

Tiffany Lethabo King's *Black Shoals* promotes a theoretical framework that examines settler colonialism, slavery, and white supremacy in relation to the experiences of Black and Native peoples. This work offers insights into the points of intersections and contentions between Black and Native theoretical epistemologies. Likewise, I argue it is vital to see how these different histories and experiences intersect and play out in distinct ways to further reveal the structures of settler colonialism and white supremacy. As a result, King's work is useful for examinations of settler colonial theory in the context of American Studies.

An abundance of scholarship exists that examines and defines the terms imperialism and colonialism from fields such as anthropology, history, literary studies, and Indigenous studies. One useful delineation of the words come from Linda Tuhiwai Smith (Ngāti Awa and Ngāti

Porou iwi) in her text, *Decolonizing Methodologies: Research and Indigenous Peoples*, which outlines the relationship between imperialism and colonialism. She writes:

> The terms are interconnected and what is generally agreed upon is that colonialism is but one expression of imperialism. Imperialism tends to be used in a least four different ways when describing the form of European imperialism which 'started' in the fifteenth century: (1) imperialism as economic expansion; (2) imperialism as the subjugation of 'others'; (3) imperialism as an idea or spirit with many forms of realization; and (4) imperialism as a discursive field of knowledge.[7]

For this project, I use settler colonialism to refer to the American version of imperialism (or internal colonialism) but also to acknowledge the interconnectedness of American settler colonialism and European imperialism. This definition of U.S. settler colonialism, guided by Smith, encompasses economic expansion, the subjugation of Others, the idea and spirit of Manifest Destiny, and an inclusive theoretical framework. Smith also points out the complex and dynamic nature of these structures. "These usages do not necessarily contradict each other, rather, they need to be seen as analyses which focus on different layers of imperialism," clarifies Smith.[8] In this sense, my examination of ethnic play and settler colonialism explores the layers and spaces in between these concepts and structures.

In this way, slavery is a layer of settler colonialism. In the U.S., for instance, slavery required control of the land and enslaved human beings so that the settler colonial apparatus could maintain social and racial hierarchies and reap economic benefits. Similarly, after Emancipation, sharecropping and Jim Crow controlled the land and Black populations. Many scholars separate slavery from the structure of settler colonialism in definitions. For anthropologist Patrick Wolfe, the differences between settler and extractive colonialism lie in the reproduction of subjugated populations. While Wolfe suggests that reproduction of the enslaved arguably "augmented" the economic status of slavers, slavery also included the indiscriminate

and discriminate killing inherent in the "structural genocide" of bondage.[9] Stealing, selling, and enslaving human beings, including children, is genocidal. Moreover, the living conditions of many of the enslaved diminished births rates and encouraged high infant mortality. Similarly, processes of Native genocide and dispossession includes the theft of Native children and control of Native bodies. Settler colonialism relies on genocide, dispossession, and oppression. Despite these facts, Native peoples, and the descendants of the enslaved are still here. They are present.

Scholars often define settler colonialism in land-centric ways. Patrick Wolfe, for instance, discusses settler colonialism as land-centric and extractive colonialism as labor-driven. He also distinguishes the two categories through the concept of "elimination of the native" or Indigenous genocide, which settler colonialism employs to gain possession of Indigenous land. For Wolfe, this type of colonialism is in contrast to extractive colonialism and its treatment of "enslaved people, whose reproduction augmented their owner's wealth."[10] My approach, on the other hand, recognizes the histories of Black, Indigenous, and People of Color as united through the experiences of settler colonialism and slavery in the U.S. Ultimately, settler colonialism and slavery both involve genocide, land and its exploitation, labor and its exploitation, and racial hierarchies of human beings in all its nefarious forms whether there are one or one million demarcations across the globe.

Wolfe and other scholars place heavy emphasis on the role of land in settler colonialism and land is significant; however, this positions the genocide of human beings second to the importance of land. Wolfe argues, for example, that "territoriality is settler colonialism's specific, irreducible element."[11] This situates Indigenous peoples as if simply collateral damage in the taking of property. Furthermore, Wolfe's separation of the human beings from the land reproduces settler colonial attempts to remove Native peoples from Indigenous lands and cultural

spaces. Many scholars envision the differences between extractive and settler colonialism to be more about the locus of power rather than the demand for land to settle. Literary scholar Ania Loomba, suggests in *Colonialism/Postcolonialism* that the dividing line between extractive colonialism—what she calls administrative colonialism—and settler colonialism is population size and the location of centralized power. Loomba claims extractive colonialism "involved no large movement of peoples from the colonizing country to the colony, which was controlled through a military, administrative and economic apparatus."[12] Yet in the early days of non-Native immigration to America, the population of immigrants was small, and it was "controlled through a military, administrative, and economic apparatus" located in Europe. After 1776, this "metropole" was situated in the East (where it remains today), even while the empire was expanding over the far away Pacific Ocean. Furthermore, Loomba's definition discounts population growth and other changes over time. Like Wolfe, Loomba defines colonialism quite narrowly and compartmentally. Alternatively, historian Margaret Jacobs, author of *White Mother to a Dark Race*, suggests, "The distinction between extractive and settler colonies should not be seen as a signal dichotomy but as a continuum; many imperial enterprises have combined elements of resource extraction, forced labor and the appropriation of land."[13] In other words, many scholars acknowledge the overlap and simultaneity of colonialisms.

Historian Nancy Shoemaker in "A Typology of Colonialism," for instance, argues that there are at least thirteen types of distinct colonialisms while also admitting "there are probably more."[14] American colonialism qualifies for each of the twelve types Shoemaker defines at one time or another asynchronously in North America. In the same way, the settler colonization occurring in the American West and the extractive/plantation colonialism happening in the South inextricably connect. "Adding to the complexity of colonial motivations and consequences are

the ways different forms of colonialism might coexist or morph into each other," acknowledges Shoemaker.[15]

This tendency for scholars to isolate the histories and experiences of Native and Black peoples obscures the effects of the interrelated structures of settler colonialism and white supremacy. Race and gender scholar Tiffany Lethabo King asserts that often the "actual discussion of Native genocide is displaced by a focus on the white settler's relationship to land rather than their parasitic and genocidal relationship to Indigenous peoples."[16] Moreover, King suggests "settler colonialism also suffers from an acute form of unknowing in relation to Blackness and slavery."[17] This unknowing is a point of intersection between the histories and experiences of BIPOC peoples in the U.S. Moreover, considering Native and Black genocide, dispossession, and oppression in relation offers avenues to move decolonial and anti-racism projects forward.

In this study, I seek to avoid separating the human experiences from the land in examinations of settler colonialism. Additionally, I place BIPOC histories and experiences in relation to each other in order to expose the structures of setter colonialism and white supremacy. I disagree that there is an "irreducible element" of colonialism as Wolfe suggests. Instead, I note the ways that Indigenous Studies suggests that any framework for decolonizing cannot separate the people from the land or vice versa. Thus, I approach my research through "otherwise ontologies" which are "disruptions in the abjection" of BIPOC peoples from their humanity.[18] These approaches work to move beyond the historical antagonisms between Native and Black peoples. What possibilities open up if analyses reveal something otherwise beyond the dichotomies of Native as participants in slavery and Blacks as participants in settler colonialism? According to Tiffany Lethabo King, Jenell Navarro, and Andrea Smith, these approaches and

frameworks are "rooted in life" and "employ imagination to flee from the brutal confines of settler colonialism."[19] Furthermore, King, Navarro, and Smith note that it is necessary to "address our full realities where we have uniqueness, along with commonality, in order to live against the constant disasters of settler colonialism."[20] In this way, broadening the scholarly gaze to include multiple disciplines and multiple stories may offer a bridge to unite the disparities of (post/de)colonial theory and methods. Frederick Hoxie, for instance, asserts in "Retrieving the Red Continent: Settler Colonialism and the History of American Indians in the U.S.," that the lens of settler colonialism *should* "illuminate both the common and the separate experiences of 'colonizers' and 'colonized' without confirming them either within the rigid categories of culture of the expectations of national history."[21] In this sense, comparative racial approaches work to avoid the rigid categories that Hoxie addresses.

Indigenous peoples in the Americas have been identifying, naming, and railing against the processes of colonialism since its inception on this continent. They have argued against and fought the theft of their land and the killing of their people. This is not a new idea "discovered" by Wolfe or any other Western scholar, yet academics often privilege Western thought over Indigenous experiences and memories. Indigenous academic Jodi Byrd (Chikashsha Iyaakni'/Chickasaw) explains:

> There is a long line of continuity between the past and the present that has not been disrupted despite the fact the stories we tell may or may not be central to any theorizations of the conditions of postcoloniality, empire, and death-dealing regimes that arise out of indigenous lands. We are long memoried peoples, and we remember what happened the last time the world was flat.[22]

Indigenous peoples have always known that colonization results in the loss of life, land, and culture and have continuously sought ways to dismantle it. Similarly, Tiffany Lethabo King explains that "realizing the relations of conquest have far from abated encourages a reframing

and rethinking of some of the urgent questions and interdisplinary concerns that critical theories continue to grapple with" in academia.[23] In this way, acknowledging the U.S.'s settler colonial past directly relates to the fight for equity and against white supremacy today.

My dissertation reframes readings of ethnic play and cultural appropriation in the U.S. To clarify, cultural appropriation involves "the taking over of creative or artistic forms, themes, or practices by one cultural group from another. It is a way to describe Western appropriations of non-Western or non-white forms, and carries connotations of exploitation and dominance."[24] Similarly, ethnic play involves performances in which cultural appropriation portrays various stereotypes of perceived ethnic/racial groups. The complex practice maintains racial and social hierarchies through performance and prejudice. In some cases, such as those examined in chapters five and six, ethic play maintains *and* disrupts the stereotypes it relies on. It must be acknowledged, of course, that redface is "remarkably similar to but also profoundly different from, blackface minstrel stage and screen performances."[25] However, it is also worth noting that the histories of blackface and the American West were intertwined from the beginning. W. Hamon, Jr. explains:

> They [blackface performers] have dominated American popular culture since May 1830, when the white actor T. D. Rice first performed the song about Jim Crow in Louisville, giving William Leggett's story "The Rifle" a rejuvenating makeover as "The Kentucky Rifle." When Rice blacked up to sing "Jump Jim Crow" that first time, he changed the complexion of American cultural performance.[26]

Non-Black actor T.D. Rice performed his blackface character between acts of the play "The Kentucky Rifle," in 1830, which was inspired by the short story, "The Rifle."[27] The story was about a doctor who moved from back east to the frontier. He engages his friend, Silversight—a buckskin-clad Leatherstockingesque character—to transport a rifle to its owner.[28] Someone murders Silversight in the process and the doctor mistakenly arrested for his murder. Eventually

they find the real culprit, however, and the story ends happily with a double wedding. Rice's interlude performances during "The Kentucky Rifle" ushered in a century of blackface entertainment in the U.S., and by the twentieth-century both redface and blackface were commonplace in the American West including in Wyoming. In this study, I examine episodes of redface in Lusk and Sheridan, and blackface throughout the Equality State to foreground settler colonialism's ability to maintain racial and power hierarchies. My goal is to pursue an "engagement of deeper connections between Black and Native studies/peoples" in order to identify the "ongoing failures of white supremacy, anti-Blackness, and genocide and lead us to better modes of getting free," as Tiffany Lethabo King, Jenell Navarro, and Andrea Smith elaborate.[29]

Paradoxically, the American West is a site of both the nightmares of white supremacy and American utopian dreams of possibilities. The word "utopia" from the Greek has long referred to both "good place" *and* "no place." Imaginings of nowhere paradises entwined with ideas about the Americas for centuries, and before writers and artists from other parts of the world had set foot on its shores, they imagined the Americas as *terra incognito*, the Promise Land, and a New World. It was a place to build a better, more perfect society.

World-building is one point of intersection between settler colonialism and utopianism. As Lorenzo Veracini explains, "Settlement is typically imagined before it is practiced…fantasies of settler regenerated life precede the practical act of settling on the land, the sometimes painful conflict between fantasy and reality is bound to produce a number of defensive formations."[30] In this sense, the American West is a site associated with both settler colonialism and utopian fantasies that envision a better life. Veracini thus goes on to argue that "'settler society' can be seen as a fantasy where a perception of a constant struggle is juxtaposed against an ideal of

'peace' that can never be reached, settler projects embrace and reject violence at the same time."[31] Ultimately, however, the American utopian project failed to live up to its ideals for many citizens. In this sense, the U.S. is a "good place" and "no place" for those denied its promises. Langston Hughes writes about this same American contradiction in his poem, "Let America be America Again." The U.S. is "The land that never has been yet—And yet must be—the land where every man is free."[32] In this way, the conflicts, contradictions, and comprises of the U.S. have and continue to shape American places and spaces.

My project, *American Fantasies and Imagined Histories*, examines three case studies unified through ethnic play, the interrelated structures of settler colonialism and white supremacy, geographical location, and time period. This project employs an interdisplinary approach that combines archival historical research with literary and cultural analysis while drawing on Indigenous and Black frameworks. Each case study comprises two chapters, and in general, the first chapter of each pairing provides a historical or literary analysis followed by a chapter focused on ethnic play. In addition, these case studies progress from examples of extreme BIPOC absences to instances of Black and Native presence and resistance in cultural spaces. In the U.S., the interrelated structures of settler colonialism and white supremacy includes the genocide and dispossession of Native peoples as well as slavery and anti-Black racism. Ethnic play both maintains and disrupts the racial and gender hierarchies created through these apparatuses.

Chapters one and two examine Native absences in the physical and cultural spaces of twentieth-century Wyoming.[33] In this section, I explore an imaginary history where the non-Native is indigenous to the American West and Native peoples have vanished. In Lusk, Wyoming, non-Natives fill the historical and cultural absences of Native peoples in their

community by performing in redface. Specifically, chapter one traces American western legends about the use of the term "Rawhide" to refer to creeks or other landmarks and examines the dubious origins of the monikers. The rawhide stories are about a wagon train traveling west seeking gold in California. As the story goes, a member of the wagon train murders an Indigenous woman. The "Indian" characters in the story skin the murderer alive as punishment. In general, these stories portray Native peoples as savage and extremely violent. Next, I offer a reading of *The Legend of the Rawhide Pageant and Spectacle* in chapter two. This event is a reenactment of one of the rawhide legends where members of the community engage in ethnic play and entertain ideas about the American West as a settler colonialist utopia. The redface enacted in this example perpetuates Native stereotypes and reflects the influence of settler colonialism and white supremacy. My research indicates ethnic play enacted by non-Natives and non-Blacks supports settler colonialism and white supremacy by filling in Native and Black absences with dehumanizing stereotypes in the local places and cultures of Wyoming. Some of the concerns my research explores include how local history sometimes perpetuate Native stereotypes. What are the ramifications that emerge when non-Native performers engage in playing Indian and redface?

In chapters three and four,[34] I study the physical and cultural presence of Empire, an all-black[35] community in Wyoming as well as the absences of Black Americans in cultural spaces throughout the Wyoming in the early twentieth-century. Chapters three and four explore Black utopias, literary and literal, in the West and beyond. Specifically, chapter three puts the history of Empire, an intentional Black community in Wyoming, into conversation with Black speculative fiction published by Sutton Griggs and George Schuyler around the same period. Chapter four studies the history of blackface entertainment throughout the state and the ways in which

blackface stereotypes maintain the structures of settler colonialism and white supremacy in the American West. Blackface entertainment was widespread and performed an important cultural task by filling in the cultural absences of Black peoples at the same time the community of Empire disrupted physical absence by creating liberatory spaces. My examination shows redface and blackface operating in similar ways in the service of settler colonialism and white supremacy. Specifically, these structures worked to control land and "other" bodies and in some cases accomplishing this through violence. Tiffany Lethabo King, Jenell Navarro, and Andrea Smith contend that "while anti-Blackness is certainly a current state of the world, the everyday specificities of anti-Blackness as well as the modes of resistance to it, need to be attended to in order to assess the living and breathing relations between Black and Indigenous peoples all over the globe and, more specifically, in the Americas."[36] In addition to filling gaps in the study of blackface in the American West, my dissertation examines ethnic play, specifically redface and blackface, in an effort to reveal the experiences of Native peoples *and* enslaved peoples and their descendants in the context of settler colonialism. These chapters address concerns such as what examinations of literary and literal Black liberating spaces show about Black response to the structures of settler colonialism and white supremacy? What are the commonalties between redface and blackface enacted by non-Natives and non-Blacks? How does positioning Native and Black experiences in settler colonial states in relation to each other expand our understanding of settler colonialism, white supremacy, and anti-Black racism?

The case study in chapters five and six[37] shifts to an examination of Native presence in ethnic play that appeared in in Sheridan, Wyoming. The utopian space imagined in this case is different from the exclusionary spaces I focus on in earlier chapters. The vision at play here reflects ideas about a more inclusive and diverse American society. Specifically, I examine All

American Indian Days and Miss Indian America where Native and non-Native peoples worked together toward a vision of a multiracial utopia. These final two chapters address episodes of redface enacted by Native peoples and the ways in which these performances both maintained and disrupted racial hierarchies as well as the engagement of Native participants in decolonizing work and other Native issues. Specifically, chapter five focuses on an historical analysis of All American Indian Days and Show Indians in Sheridan, Wyoming. In chapter six, I focus on the ways Native performers subverted Native stereotypes perpetuated in the dominant culture through playing Indian, specifically the Indian princess stereotype. The Miss Indian America pageant participants contended with the Indian princess stereotype. My research shows Native performers disrupted cultural and physical absences in Sheridan by creating space to counter damaging stereotypes. In many cases, the act of playing Indian by Native peoples created liberatory spaces which is markedly different from redface enacted by settler colonialist society. The questions that frame my study include how does playing Indian and redfacing by Native performers differ from ethnic play enacted by non-Natives? What do more nuanced readings of Native participation in ethnic play show about the physical and cultural spaces created through resistance to settler colonialism and white supremacy?

The unwillingness to acknowledge the intersecting and overlapping histories of genocide, dispossession, and slavery directly connects to the anti-Native and anti-Black racism and the growing threat of white supremacy in the U.S. BIPOC peoples continue to fight for physical and cultural spaces in this country. Similarly, this project is at times unruly, disruptive, and critical—as it aims to be.

CHAPTER ONE

IMAGINED HISTORIES AND PLAYING INDIAN

Tall Tales and Settler Colonialism

The history of the United States is a history of settler colonialism---the founding of a state based on the ideology of white supremacy, the widespread practice of African slavery, and a policy of genocide and land theft. Roxanne Dunbar-Ortiz in *An Indigenous Peoples' History of the United States*.

Selective memory allows us to romanticize a golden age that functions as a timeless talisman of American identity. Nancy Isenberg in *White Trash*

The avengers hurried to that spot
Where, in last sunset's waning light,
He had the maiden shot.
And there, with cruel taunt and gibe,
They flayed him that he died,
And left this body to the birds,
Close by the runnel side;
But stuffed his skin, and set it up
Before all evil men,
To warn them, lest so foul a thing
Should e'er be done again.
Orsamus Charles Dake in "The Rawhide,"
Nebraska Legends and Poems

Stories are powerful. Stories shape the identities of individuals, communities, and nations. Stories tell histories and form nations. However, sometimes powerful stories are based on facts and sometimes based on fiction—and often a combination of both. One place with a long and enduring tradition of telling tall tales is the American West. The West as a metonym for America offers a site for critical inquiry into the dominant narratives that shapes ideas about

American national ideologies and identities. Like the dominant narratives of the American nation, those in the West privilege Eurocentric stories, and often the U.S. plays out its settler colonial fantasies in the region. As a result, the mythology of the American West idealizes settler colonial narratives to rationalize and distract from the country's dependence on slavery, stolen land, and genocide, both past and present.

When the field of American Studies first coalesced, scholars sought out the reoccurring myths and symbols of American culture.[38] These efforts established the first paradigms of the discipline. The Myth and Symbol school, although pivotal in the development of the field, often perpetuated the American exceptionalism of its time. The explicit goals of the Myth and Symbol school was to identity those myths and symbols in American art and letters that appeared uniquely American—that proved not only that the United States was distinct from Europe but superior. And while American Studies has since been able to turn its scholarly gaze inward, much work remains to address the power and racial hierarchies propped up by American culture and institutions. The American West with its grand entanglement with myth demands sustained and deep academic inquiry. The analysis and identification of the power of American myth inside the U.S. has failed to hold the attention of American Studies scholars during the transnational turn of the field.[39] Yet to understand American culture and identity across nations and borders requires an understanding of its innerworkings in the United States. The dismantling of settler colonialism and white supremacy on a large scale must first began with a reckoning in the way we understand and tell stories. The continued denial of the systemic racism in the United States indicates that scholars and activists still have work to do to dismantle the stories that sustain white supremacy and to draw attention to those stories silenced because of it.

The following historical and cultural analysis looks at how and why the term "rawhide" becomes the placenames for several geographical landmarks in the American West. After this history follows an examination of *The Legend of the Rawhide Pageant and Spectacle*, a reenactment of the rawhide story performed in Lusk, Wyoming. The rawhide stories are about a wagon train traveling west seeking gold in California. As the story goes, a member of the wagon train murders an Indigenous woman. The group of pioneers must trade the murderer's life for the safe passage of the wagon train. The local tribe of "Indians" skins the murderer alive as punishment. Stories such as this warned non-Native emigrants about the dangerousness of Native peoples who appear in the stories as backwards, savage, and extremely violent. Trail legends often told stories associated with specific landmarks along the journey. The Westward Expansion Trails were networks of wagon trails heavily travelled by emigrants during the nineteenth-century. The mass migrations over these wagon trails spread non-Native populations across the country furthering American colonizing efforts. Like the covered wagons, the rawhide stories followed the trails west. Some of these settler stories remain popular. The current moment beckons us to take a long and hard look at the stories we all tell about our communities and ourselves as Americans.

The Trail Legends

Half a million or more settlers traveled the Emigrant Trails (the Oregon, Mormon, and California trails) during the second half of the nineteenth-century.[40] These journeys produced many first-person accounts of traveling through the American West. In 1866, Ellen Gordon Fletcher, known as Nellie, travelled from New York to Montana. On May 16, she wrote in her diary of reaching a small stream named Rawhide Creek just west of Omaha, Nebraska. Fletcher

recorded how the small tributary of the Elkhorn River received its name. It was during the rush to California for gold that, "A man from [Illinois] I think made a threat that he would kill the first Indian which he came across. Accordingly, to fulfill his promise he shot a squaw. The Indians wanted revenge & followed the train with which he was connected. He was given up & skinned alive before their eyes."[41] Like many overland trail legends, this story was both a warning and an entertaining tale. And like many stories about the West, it employs derogatory language to refer to Native peoples describing them as uncivilized and violent. This dehumanization of Indigenous peoples works to justify western expansion and settler colonialism.

Much like Fletcher, Davis Willson recorded a similar tale in his diary account of the trip west. He, too, was at Rawhide Creek near Omaha when he recorded:

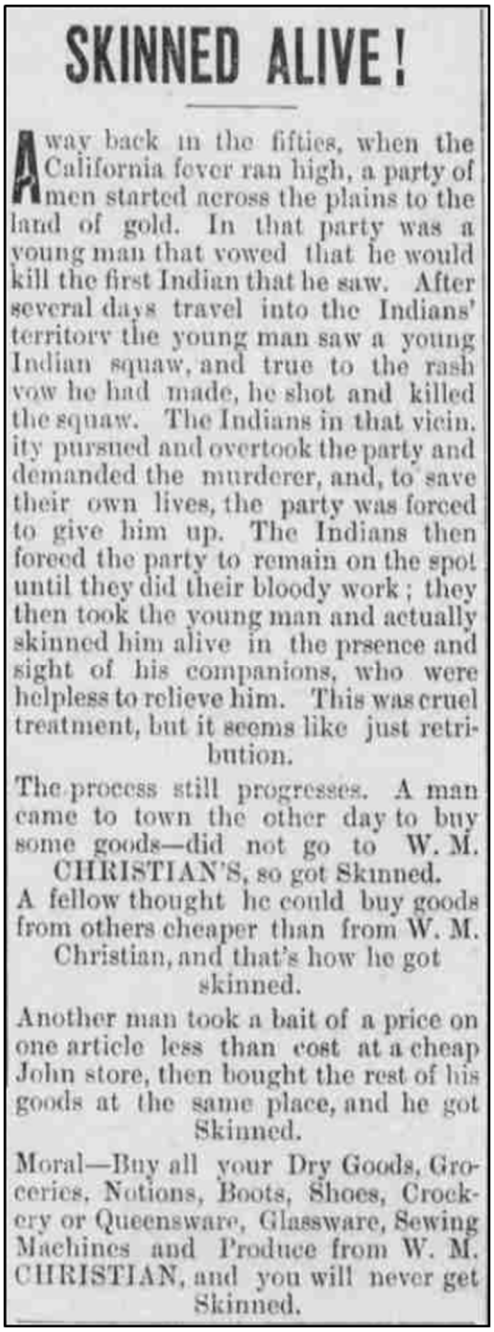
> Several years ago, a party coming through here, one of them from Pierpont NY said he would shoot the first Indian he saw. Arriving at this place, he saw a Squaw fishing in the creek nearby and fired killing her instantly. The party were followed by the Indians, overtaken about three miles, and they caught the man and skinned him alive.[42]

This story perpetuates several stereotypes about Indigenous peoples. First, it uses the slur "squaw" to refer to Native women—a term often repeated in the story's many retellings over the last century. The term's negative connotations include sexual promiscuity and a menial existence.[43] Second, it portrays "the Indians" as excessively violent. Both these stereotypes dehumanize Native peoples.

In past works of both nonfiction and fiction by non-Native writers, Indigenous peoples in the Americas appear as wild and savage while non-Native emigrants emerge as pioneering and brave in the face of Native violence. However, not all the historical record reflects the view that tribal peoples were the purveyors of one-sided hostilities against the flood of invading emigrants. Just a few years after the journeys of Ellen Fletcher and Davis Willson, the Board of Indian

Commissioners[44] declared that "a large class of professedly reputable men" used their influence to "proclaim death to the Indians at all times" and "incite the lowest class of men to the perpetration of the darkest deeds against their victims."[45] Furthermore, the board exhorted: "Every crime committed by a white man against an Indian is concealed" while "every offense committed by an Indian against a white man is borne of the wings of the post or telegraph to the remotest corner of the land, clothed with all the horrors which the reality or imagination can throw around it."[46] The Board of Indian Commissioners' report was clear that "in his most savage vices the worst Indian is but the imitator of bad white men on the border [of Indian Country]."[47] The report acknowledges that accounts of Indian violence were often exaggerated while non-Native violence was routinely obscured, ignored, rationalized, and even celebrated. The Board's report challenged the dominant narratives about Native peoples at the time, but it did not amount to much in the face of deeply engrained anti-Native ideology. Unfortunately, reports from governmental boards failed to compete with the popularity of long held ideas about Native peoples and cultures.

By the nineteenth-century, American culture included deeply negative prejudices against Native peoples. It appeared in everything from local advertisements to history books. American culture painted Indigenous peoples as uncivilized in order to continue and justify the project of settler colonialism. If the victims of genocide are subhuman, it is much easier to rationalize. In this way, casting Native peoples as losers while non-Native settlers and their descendants are winners defends land theft and broken treaties. American Western myths like the rawhide stories perpetuate the binary of savage versus civilized. Still, the rawhide story is rife with contradictions. While it presents the non-Natives in the story as the aggressors—killing a woman without provocation—it is the Native characters who are so savage as to flay a man alive.



SKINNED ALIVE!

Away back in the fifties, when the California fever ran high, a party of men started across the plains to the land of gold. In that party was a young man that vowed that he would kill the first Indian that he saw. After several days travel into the Indians' territory the young man saw a young Indian squaw, and true to the rash vow he had made, he shot and killed the squaw. The Indians in that vicinity pursued and overtook the party and demanded the murderer, and, to save their own lives, the party was forced to give him up. The Indians then forced the party to remain on the spot until they did their bloody work; they then took the young man and actually skinned him alive in the prsence and sight of his companions, who were helpless to relieve him. This was cruel treatment, but it seems like just retribution.

The process still progresses. A man came to town the other day to buy some goods—did not go to W. M. CHRISTIAN'S, so got Skinned.

A fellow thought he could buy goods from others cheaper than from W. M. Christian, and that's how he got skinned.

Another man took a bait of a price on one article less than cost at a cheap John store, then bought the rest of his goods at the same place, and he got Skinned.

Moral—Buy all your Dry Goods, Groceries, Notions, Boots, Shoes, Crockery or Queensware, Glassware, Sewing Machines and Produce from W. M. CHRISTIAN, and you will never get Skinned.

Figure 2. Newspaper advertisement invoking the legend of Rawhide Creek to sell goods, 1891.[48]

Intriguingly, by July 1891, the story was popular enough to become the stuff of marketing when in an advertisement for a general store printed in *The Comet*, a daily

newspaper in Johnson City, Tennessee. “Skinned Alive!” the ad exclaims. After relating the basic plot of the legend, it claims: “A man came to town the other day to buy some goods did not go to W. M. CHRISTIAN'S, so got Skinned. A fellow thought he could buy goods from others cheaper than from W. M. Christian, and that's how he got skinned.”[49] The ad suggests customers could avoid losing their “skins” or money by shopping at the purveyor’s store. It transforms the horrific punishment of vivisection into a selling point. The ad reveals both a horror and fascination with acts of extreme violence, an aspect of the story explored further in chapter two. The ad minimizes the violence it references and uses its graphic nature to catch the viewer’s attention. It also uses the familiar derogatory term to refer to Native women. Yet the ad is clear that the skinning “just retribution.”[50] The sacrifice of the murderer elides his violence, while describing the skinning as justified allows for false penance so future generations of settlers’ guilt is assuaged. In other words, the Indigenous woman’s murder turns out to be the last uncivilized act of settlers as they collectively become civilized, or Americans, through Turner’s successive frontiers.

Eight years later in the fall of 1899, the tale surfaced again when it circulated in several Nebraska newspapers. The *Conservative*, a newspaper in Nebraska City and the *Omaha Daily Bee* published accounts set in 1849 featuring John Rhines, “a would-be California forty-niner” who was “skinned alive by the Pawnees as a punishment for the murder of a young woman of their tribe.”[51] This is one of several accounts that feature John Rhines. In these versions, the Pawnee, a nation local to the Omaha area, meet the wagon train. Interestingly, unlike other versions, the Rhines account claims the wagon train attempted to escape retribution even though they knew one among them was guilty of the crime and when confronted by the Pawnee characters the group feigns ignorance of the murder.

Eventually, the wagon train hands over Rhines and watches his torturous punishment. The several different Rhines versions include additional embellishments about Rhines' punishment. One version reads:

> His companions were placed in plain sight of him. Around the entire party was a circle of half-clad warriors, their faces hideous with paint, and with scalps dangling at their belts. This is what followed: The Indians who had tied Rhines pulled out his finger nails, next his toenails, then took off his scalp and beginning at his feet and hands, literally skinned him alive.[52]

Fascinatingly, after the flaying, the wagon train continues its journey apparently granted safe passage. Despite the differences in the various iterations of the rawhide story, one plot point always remains the same. The murderer is the only member of the wagon train who dies by the hands of the Indian characters. The wagon train always escapes. This shows an important function of the tale—the wagon train must survive to continue the westward march of Manifest Destiny. The successful escape of the pioneer characters becomes a collective rite of passage that rationalizes the genocidal origins of the American nation. Although the murderer's flaying symbolizes the consequences of bad acts, it also reinforces the dichotomy between civilized and savage. The story portrays the Indians as savage and capable of extreme violence and torture. The 1889 Rhines accounts go on to describe the Pawnee chief picking up the strips of Rhines' skin, and then joining the rest of his group in dancing around. The story ends with members of the wagon train gathered around Rhines as he dies. The group buries his body on the banks of the creek, and with Rhines' death the tributary is christened Rawhide Creek.

Just over four years later the story was still circulating in Nebraska, with an account published in the *Stanton Picket* in early 1905. In this version details change again, as it was 22-year-old Dave Bailey who joined a wagon train and then killed a woman from the Pawnee tribe. Interestingly, the story claims it is only after a Pawnee girl who witnessed the murder identifies

Bailey as the culprit that the Pawnee dragged him away. Next, they tie Bailey to a tree and skin him alive.[53] The additional element of an eyewitness identifying the guilty party is a telling detail of this version which perhaps works to assure the audience of Bailey's guilt. It certainly suggests a more involved judicial process than other iterations. However, to be clear there are no accounts in which the fact of the murderer's guilt is in doubt. In all the versions uncovered here, a member of the wagon party is responsible for murder. As a result, the victim's death becomes repeatedly rationalized as collateral damage of Manifest Destiny.

A decade later, in the spring of 1915, M.G. Kellogg wrote a letter to his sisters in Michigan. It recounted his journey from Battle Creek to California in 1859, a few years after the California Gold Rush ended. He tells his family that when he camped near Rawhide Creek outside Omaha, he consulted his copy of *The Overland Guide* which included the rawhide story. The guide claimed:

> In first or second year of overland travel to California, a small company of twelve or fifteen camped for the night. . . Soon after camping one of the party reported that he had seen an Indian on the opposite side of the river. There was a rash youth, of eighteen or twenty years, who declared if it had been him who saw the Indian he would have shot him. He also declared he would shoot the first Indian he saw…The next morning…he spied an Indian woman on the opposite side of the river. He thereupon deliberately leveled his rifle at her and shot her dead.[54]

According to Kellogg, the unspecified tribe of the murdered woman later confronted the wagon train. As in the other stories, eventually, the group turns over the man to the "Indians" who skinned him alive.

The popularity of the story in Nebraska caught the attention of historian James Potter. Former Nebraska state archivist and senior research historian for the Nebraska State Historical Society, Potter traced the legend's occurrence in the state.[55] He locates its appearance in several works about Nebraska's history published between 1903 and 1971.[56] According to Potter, the

tale is "one of the most venerable legends associated with the overland migrations of the midcentury American West."[57] Building on the observations of Potter and other historians who have written about the rawhide story in Nebraska and Wyoming, my research traces the rawhide tale's migration to Wyoming and role of the story in Lusk, specifically. In addition, cultural analysis of the rawhide story reveals the ways in which it and stories like it function in American culture—regardless of their historical veracity. This examination works to expose the ways in which story props up white supremacy and settler colonialism in the American West. Moreover, the conflation of myth with fact remains prevalent in modern life. It is important to bring to light the insidious ways that white supremacy asserts itself through myth in American culture to work toward the project of decolonization. Recently, American monuments and namesakes have sparked similar conversations around the country. Do the statues and bronzes of Indian killers, slave holders, and white supremacists in communities across the United States represent our greatest heroes or the our most ardent failures as a nation? It is important to ask, which American stories are worth telling—and worth celebrating? But more importantly, what stories are worth undoing?

In the beginning, the rawhide story was just a trail legend. The Oregon Trail, California Trail, and the Mormon Trail pass through Nebraska and into Wyoming. The Mormon Trail (also known as the Council Bluffs road) crossed Rawhide Creek outside of Omaha, Nebraska. Usually repeated as a story heard from someone who knew of or was related to someone else who was present at the event. Firsthand accounts are absent from the record thus far. Tracing the history of this story helps to understand how a myth can function as fact. Most versions claim the flaying occurred in 1849 or 1850. Potter dates the earliest published accounts as printed in May of 1850 in the Iowa newspaper the *Frontier Guardian*. In this popular version, it is the son of a Mr.

Green who fires the fatal shot after which: "They [the Indians] then stripped him, and in the presence of his father and the whole company, they skinned him from his head to his feet. He lived for four hours after he was thus flayed."[58] The duration of the murderer's survival while being flayed becomes a common element of story although the exact details often change depending on the publication. This focus on the murderer's endurance of pain obscures the crime he committed.

The Green account inspired the 1871 poem "The Rawhide" written by Orsamus Dake, a professor of literature at the University of Nebraska. The publication of the poem inspired an investigation into the story's veracity. A newspaper editor from Columbus, Ohio concluded that the story was in fact a hoax and an "unmitigated falsehood" whose origins traced to a barroom tale fabricated in Magnolia, Illinois.[59] The editor claimed the local paper inadvertently published the story as true and the tale spread to many other publications as a result.[60] Dake, author of the poem, disagreed. In response, the naysaying editor joined forces with Elvira Gaston Platt, a teacher and missionary to the Pawnee tribe. Platt recounted that French traders named the creek after boats made of rawhide, and not an incidence of human flaying.[61] This explanation aligns much more closely the dictionary definition "rawhide," which traces back to 1763 and is defined as "stiff untanned leather" and "a whip or rope made of rawhide."[62] Dictionary definitions do not associate the word with human flaying which suggests that the term was not widely used in reference to human flesh but rather refers mostly to leather materials.

Regardless of the claims that the story was a hoax, its popularity endured. *The Overland Trail* by Agnes Laut and *Covered Wagon Days* edited by Arthur Dickson, both published in 1929, include the story albeit with their own unique flourishes. Both diaries refer to the same tributary of the Elk Horn River near Omaha. Laut's account places the story in 1852, a year later

than almost all other versions, and features "a brutal blacksmith" who kills a Pawnee woman. The perpetrator is handed over to the Pawnees who "tied him to a wagon wheel and skinned him alive."[63] The wagon wheel stands in for the usual tree in this account. Correspondingly, *Covered Wagon Days* follows the usual pattern with a man killing a "defenseless squaw" and then "before the eyes of the horror-stricken white men, the Indians skinned their victim alive."[64] These two details: that the victim is female, and the perpetrator skinned appear in all versions of the legend currently available. Additionally, the derogatory term used to refer to the victim appears widely used in newspapers at the time.

Historian Michael Tate, in his study of the overland trails, also refers to the Rawhide Creek legend. He takes his example from an 1853 letter from a westward emigrant, aptly named Calvin West, to his daughters back in Ohio. This version illustrates how the story lent itself to retelling and further fictionalization. Tate explains that Calvin West altered the particulars to suit his storytelling needs. To make the story work for West, he needed to alter the date and location. Accordingly, Calvin West changed the location to Kansas, where he was traveling at the time. Calvin West claimed the murderer originated from Ohio, where he happened to originate, and in addition to being skinned by the Indians, "they cut him up in pieces."[65] The loose approach to historical accuracy resulted in the story being associated with several different landmarks.

As exemplified in Calvin West's version, the legend appears associated with multiple geographical locations. The historian Watson Parker, for example, investigated the story's origins in Wyoming. In a letter from Parker to the Lusk Chamber of Commerce in 1961, he revealed that the legend had even been told in his own family "at least by tradition."[66] Parker found one version that included the detail that the perpetrator's wife was also tied to a tree and forced to watch her husband's demise. Parker traces the story back to a newspaper account which

ran in early February of 1850 in Lacon, Illinois. This version, like the early account identified by James Potter, also features a Mr. Green "who lived for four hours" after being flayed.[67] A retraction printed by the same Illinois newspaper concluded: "We are inclined to the opinion that the whole story was the invention of some letter writer."[68] Watson Parker determines the tale appeared in both Nebraska and Wyoming and such stories were attempts to discourage would-be travelers from making the journey west by exaggerating tales of the dangers encountered on the trail. Yet such stories also worked to entertain, excite, and incite travelers West.

My detailed account of this legend exposes the instability of the histories and identities formed in or around the American West. The examination of the interplay of race, gender, and place in the rawhide legend reveals the ease with which myth masquerades as fact and the sinister ways that the entangled structures of colonialism and systematic racism endure in in the West. Storytelling, both perpetuates and challenges racist ideology and Native stereotypes. As a result, the dominant narratives that shape the American nation appear deeply engrained in white supremacy. Furthermore, these dominant narratives conflate myth and history to perpetuation racial hierarchies in this country. Like other scholars in the fields of American Studies and Native Studies, my work contributes to the ongoing critique of settler colonialism in the U.S. This is a project focuses on decolonization as "taking apart the story" and "revealing the underlying texts" of settler colonialism in order to expose white supremacy in the American West.[69]

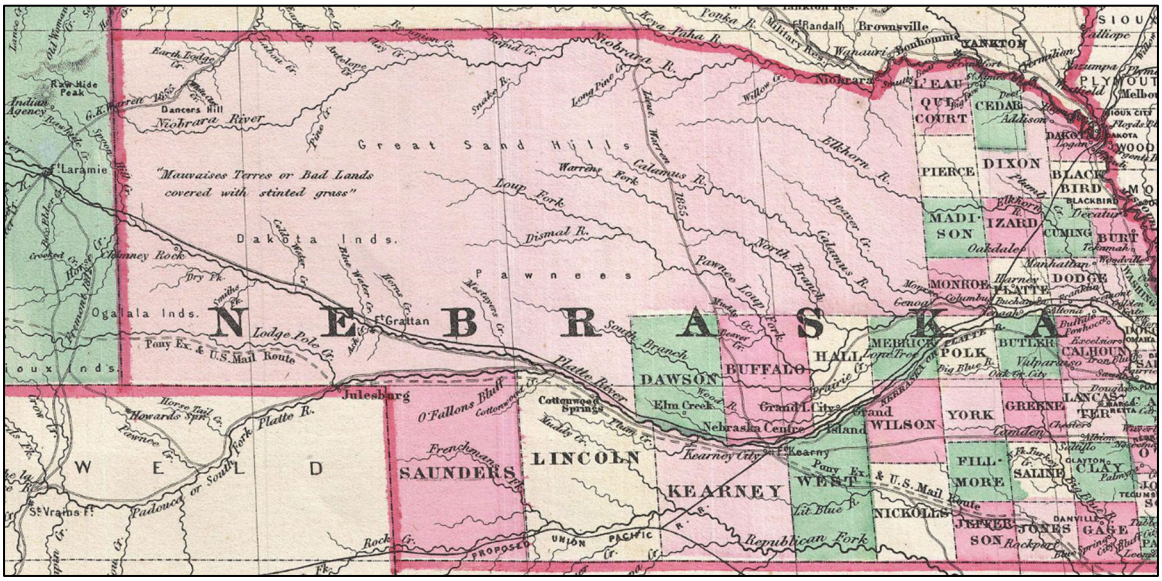


Figure 3. Close up of Johnson Map from 1866 showing Rawhide Creek and Buttes in Wyoming (left) and Rawhide Creek in Nebraska (right) [cropped, my emphasis].[70]

The Wyoming Connection

Like the westbound covered wagons, the rawhide legend travelled along the wagon roads that passed from Nebraska through Wyoming. According to the *Wyoming State Historical Preservation Office*, several hundred thousand emigrants passed through Wyoming on the Emigrant Trails between 1843 and 1869.[71] The story appears as the explanation of the placenames of two landmarks in Wyoming: Rawhide Creek near what was once Fort Laramie and the Rawhide Buttes to the north in what is now Niobrara County. In Wyoming, the tale would become a local legend associated with the Rawhide Buttes told well into the twenty-first century.

In Captain John Bourke's 1891 book, *On the Border with Crook*, the tale appears again, but the victim is a Sioux woman which marks the shift from Nebraska to Wyoming. Bourke claims "a man offered grievous wrong to one of the young squaws…The Americans gave him

up, and the Sioux skinned him alive."[72] John Bourke was a captain in the U.S. Army who served as an aid to General Crook in the Apache Wars. He kept extensive diaries of his life as well as writing books about the American West including ethnological works about Native peoples. His 1891 seminal work, *Scatalogic Rites of All Nations: A Dissertation upon the Employment of Excrementicious Remedial Agents in Religion, Therapeutics, Divination, Witch-Craft, Love-Philters, etc. in all parts of the Globe* did not receive wide circulation. In contrast, the rawhide story would continue to surface in regional histories, memoirs, and local lore.

A well-known early Wyomingite, George Lathrop, also recorded a version of the tale. In Lathrop's 1919 *Memoirs of a Pioneer*, a man from Pike County, Missouri was the murderer. Lathrop writes that he heard the story from a man named High B. Kelley and dated the tale as occurring in June of 1849. "It seems that while the poor fellow fainted a number of times, he lived till they had him nearly skinned," Lanthrop claimed.[73] Here again, details regarding the endurance of pain work to invoke sympathy for the killer. As a result, the murderer transforms into the savior and martyr of non-Native settlers. The supposed sacrifice furthers the goals of colonization. This was the sort of view advocated by historian Frederick Jackson Turner's famous Frontier Thesis which claimed the settling of the West shaped American character and democracy. For Turner, it was the successive frontiers of the West that transformed non-Native emigrants into true Americans. In this sense, the murder of the Indigenous woman in the rawhide stories marks the last uncivilized acts of a civilizing people. Significantly, Turner mostly ignored Native peoples by relegating them to a footnote. The Frontier Thesis maintained Eurocentric racial and power hierarchies by further incorporating white supremacy into the history and violence of the American West.

The rawhide story appeared in Wyoming again in 1941. That year the Writer's Program of the Work Projects Administration published in a collection of work about the state which included the rawhide story. "According to legend, an Easterner asserted he would kill the first Indian he saw, and, although the first one was a woman, he kept his word. The angry Indians stretched his skin on these blue-black buttes," the entry about Lusk purports.[74] In the same vein, *Wyoming Pageants*, a 1946 regional history, recounted the story of how the Rawhide Buttes received its name. This version claims it was a John Phillips who was a member of "the ill-fated emigrant train" and among those who watched his punishment was his mother who "died several days later along the trail," ostensibly from the shock of witnessing her son's fate.[75] This same year the town of Lusk would turn the legend into an outdoor pageant, which is addressed in more detail later in this chapter.

In Agnes Spring's 1949 book, *The Cheyenne and Black Hills Stage and Express Routes*, the story is recounted by local Luskite, Hi Kelly.[76] "A young from Pike County, Missouri, had boasted that he would shoot the first Indian saw on the plains… The man was surrendered to the Indians, who, in broad day light, tied and skinned him alive. It seems that the poor fellow fainted a number of times but lived till they had him nearly skinned," this version claimed.[77] It is nearly identical to the story that explains the naming of Rawhide Creek in Nebraska. Yet the legend's use in Nebraska did not damper its popularity in Wyoming.

Today regional travel guides, official Wyoming websites, and local lore tell the rawhide story. This explanation for the naming of the Rawhide Buttes, for example, still appears in travel guides including *Compass American Guides* and *Moon Handbooks*. The former suggests that it was an "Indian maiden" who was "suitably avenged when her relations caught him, skinned him alive, and stretched his skin to tan on top of Rawhide Butte."[78] The latter, however, admits there

is “a less interesting origin” for the buttes as “the site where raw buffalo hides were prepared for shipment east.”[79] The writers of local histories and memoirs and their publishers—indeed even many of the readers of these works—were not as interested in the truth but rather preferred to reproduce gory fantasies about Native peoples, a view that does not value historical facts in its version of history.

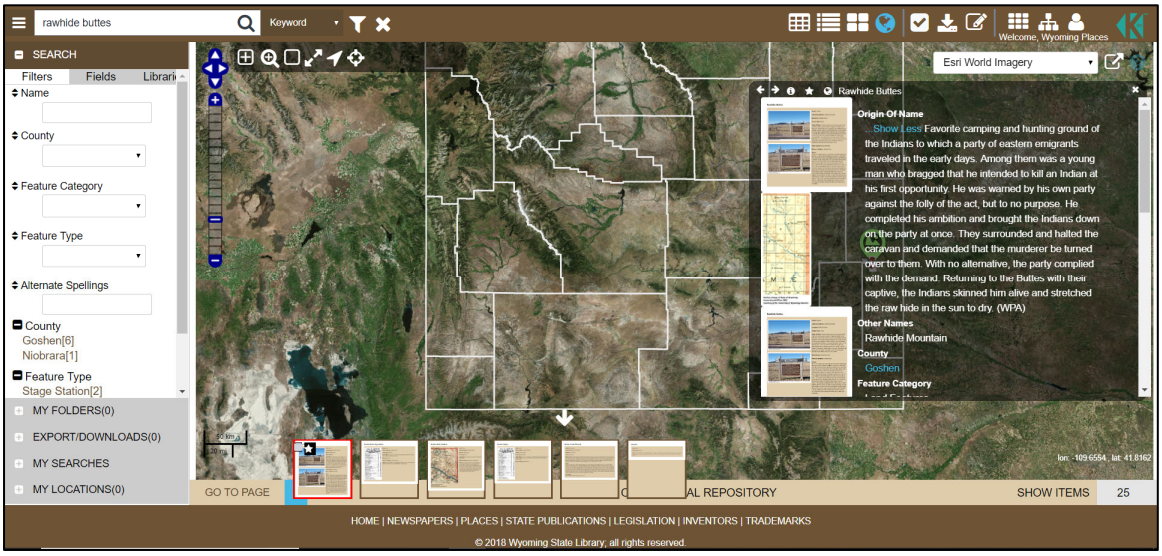


Figure 4. *Wyoming Places* website is an example of the ability of modern technology to conflate myth and historical fact [screenshot, my emphasis].[80]

Technology assures the story will stay in circulation in the twenty-first century. It is currently featured on *Wyoming Places*, a website created by the Wyoming State Library, which “provides information about locations, histories, and name origins of places in the great state of Wyoming.”[81] The site takes its version of the story from the Works Progress Administration work. The digital geographical technology is an interesting counterpoint to the tenuous relationship to truth exemplified by the legend. The use of digital technology adds a layer of authority and realism to the rawhide story as well as working to maintain settler colonialism by

renaming Indigenous land. Wyoming institutions do not adequately address the spuriousness of the story and there is little recognition that such landmarks in Wyoming have Indigenous names. This implicit endorsement of the story's veracity by the state of Wyoming further blurs the distinctions between legend and history.

Stories easily adapt to the historical moment when the truth matters little. However, underneath these changes and adaptations over the centuries remain the structures of settler colonialism and white supremacy. Currently, communities across the country are questioning the stories they tell through public monuments and namesakes. These include national holidays, public art and buildings, military bases, and other honorifics that celebrate figures from the complicated past of this country. American Studies scholar Philip Deloria (Wičhíyena /Yankton Dakota) sees the examinations of sports team names and confederate monuments as related through the common underlying ideologies of white supremacy. He explains:

> The name change [of the Washington Football Team] occurred in a summer that America has started a long-overdue reckoning with the question of who we honor, and why. The mass protests following the killing of George Floyd pivoted, soon afterward, to the over 700 statues of Confederate leaders and soldiers still standing in the United States. Supporters of the monuments said that getting rid of them would amount to "erasing" history—not quite the "honor" we hear about with Native American-themed sports teams, but derived from the same instinct to preserve a collective memory, without careful thought to the values these relics also express. In many ways, the Indian names and the Confederate monuments sound like separate issues… But it's fitting that the nation is tackling both at once: Both Confederate monuments and Indian sports teams date back to roughly the same time, about a century ago, when Jim Crow laws were fully taking root, the KKK was flourishing and the West was declared won.…Both the teams and the monuments are expressions of values that date from an earlier time, values intimately connected with two distinct manifestations of white supremacy—slavery and conquest.[82]

Many communities and institutions are facing issues about what stories to tell, how to tell them, and how to challenge them as well. Tiffany Lethabo King notes the connection between

monuments to slavery and white supremacy and the history of conquest in the U.S. in "New World Grammars: The Unthought Discourses of Black Conquest."[83]

The work of historians and scholars is central to questions of the historical record and the full view of the meaning behind such symbols. In 2017, the American Historical Association published a statement on the issue of public Confederate monuments:

> Across the country, communities face decisions about the disposition of monuments and memorials, and commemoration through naming of public spaces and buildings. These decisions require not only attention to historical facts, including the circumstances under which monuments were built and spaces named, but also an understanding of what history is and why it matters to public culture…To remove such monuments is neither to "change" history nor "erase" it. What changes with such removals is what American communities decide is worthy of civic honor.[84]

This drives to the heart of this project which aims to call attention to the role stories play in promoting white supremacy. Defending symbols of white supremacy by calling them history does not hold up under scrutiny. History evolves as we continuously build upon our understandings of the world. This includes revision and growth. History is not only good or bad or indifferent—but all these things. Questioning the meanings and ramifications of the stories we tell about our communities and the nation—about ourselves—requires a reckoning with the genocide, slavery, and white supremacy on which we base our history, nation, and culture in the U.S.

The Fantasies of the American West

> *People are so easily distracted, so I'm the distractor with a little story. People can't get enough of them because, well, they connect the stories to themselves I suppose, and we all love hearing about ourselves. So long as the people in the stories are us, but not us.* The Cohen Brothers in *Buster Scruggs*

> *[Laura Ingalls] Wilder's 'truth' was less a matter of fact than of her memories, feelings, and convictions. Her work was based on facts but not factual. It was historical fiction, not history. Its chronology, and certain incidents of characters, were invented, altered, and fictionalized…It was this ambiguous relationship to the truth that enabled Wilder to transform her family's lifelong struggles into a sterling portrait of indomitability, security, and success.* Caroline Fraser in *Prairie Fires: The American Dreams of Laura Ingalls Wilder*



Figure 5. 2018 Internet ad taken from Lusk Chamber of Commerce website [screenshot].[85]

The rawhide legend is a story that distracts from the history it purports to represent. The story's basis in fantasy appears forgotten or ignored with each retelling. Furthermore, it is an example of the willingness of Americans to suspend disbelief to create a past that is justifies the "winning" of the American West. Writer Caroline Frasier's examination of Laura Ingalls Wilder's life and work found that Wilder employed fiction as fact as a way to control her work—and her life. Like Laura Ingalls Wilder, non-Native westerners—past and present—often seem drawn to an "ambiguous relationship to the truth" that privileges fantasy over fact.[86] Wallace Stegner, often called the Dean of Western Writers, for example, once confessed that the "western culture and western character with which it is easiest to identify exist largely in the West of make-believe."[87] The dominant myths of the American West are often socially constructed

through fantasies which reflect white supremacy, and such stories are a way to maintain racial hierarchies within a region.

The Legend of Rawhide Pageant and Spectacle, 1946-2021

The Legend of Rawhide Pageant and Spectacle is set in Wyoming in 1849. A wagon train passes through the state on its way to California to join in the Gold Rush. As the group comes into view of the Rawhide Buttes, they decide to camp for the night. While in camp that night one member of the group, Clyde Pickett, boasts of his intention to kill the first Native person he sees. In the morning, the wagon train gets ready to continue their journey West. Before they can leave an arrow flies into camp, which their guide, George, tells them means they should expect a visit and sure enough, a "Sioux" Indian rides into their camp. The guide converses with the visitor translating for the rest of the wagon train. The Indian character tells the group that someone has murdered a woman of his tribe, and he would like the guilty turned over for punishment. The wagon train denies that one of them was responsible, and when asked Clyde Picket denies his guilt. George tells the group that the punishment for the murderer requires the Sioux skin him alive. As a result, the wagon train decides to fight the Indians instead of handing over Pickett. After the women of the group begin to grab weapons to fight the Indians, Clyde Pickett decides to give himself up to the Indian to save the wagon train. While the Indians become distracted skinning Pickett alive, the rest of the wagon train escapes to Fort Laramie.[88]

The "pageant of America" thus came to define the town of Lusk in southeast Wyoming. In 1946, the residents of the small town transformed the trail legend into an outdoor reenactment.[89] The outdoor pageant was the pet project of local doctor Walter Reckling, Sr., known by all as Doc Reckling. Eva Bonsell, soon to be Bonsell Paris, a local resident home from

college, wrote the script for the outdoor pageant. The country doctor and the drama student had formerly partnered in several small performances and reenactments around town. The first performance of *The Legend of Rawhide Pageant and Spectacle* was part of the Niobrara County Fair in 1946. Since World War Two was on there had not been a county fair since 1941. So, the production that year was in honor of veterans returning from the war. Doc Reckling urged Bonsell to write the melodrama and he would promote it. Years later she recalled Reckling's words of exhortation: "Do it! If not for peanuts, then for patriotism."[90]

Founded in 1886, the Lusk name came from Frank Lusk, a local rancher. The town's population for the most part has remained consistently small. It has hovered around a thousand and a half residents for the last hundred years. The 2010 census counted 1,567 residents.[91] "The Little Town with Big Possibilities" is in the least populated county in the least populated state in the country. In 2010, over 95% of residents identified as "White."[92] This number is down from the 2000 Census which reported 97.9% residents in this category. Conversely, residents identifying as Native American went up with 1.1% in 2010 compared with .62% in 2000, respectively.[93] Paradoxically, Wyoming has one of the highest populations of Native Americans in the nation while also being one of the least diverse states. The insular, relatively homogenous population of Lusk as well as its geographic isolation has allowed it to keep retelling the rawhide tale as history and to keep perpetuating negative stereotypes about Native peoples. Lusk uses fantasy to maintain a community identity based on racial hierarchies where ideological machinations overshadow historical facts. Moreover, the repetition of the yearly performance reinforces its status as a tradition in the small town. As liars and social scientists know, repeating a lie over and over creates the illusion of truth.[94] Through this story the community establishes

that they descend from civilizing heroes from whom non-Natives inherited both the history of the American West and the right to occupy Indigenous land.

The Legend of the Rawhide Pageant and Spectacle tells a tale that is more fantasy than history. Western American literature scholars William Handley and Nathaniel Lewis note the vital need to "subject even the most cherished narratives to critical reflection, recognizing without cynicism that while we use and need narratives that lend meaning and purpose to social life, narratives can tend to use us if we do not reflect upon them."[95] What does a close look at the fantasy-based stories of the American West reveal about the underlying desires of non-Native settler American communities?

If history is more a matter of choice than historical fact, why choose this story? Doc Reckling explained the pageant's beginnings in the show's program for 1955. "Origins and History of the Pageant," an article in program, claimed that the local legend about a man being skinned alive by Indians was "unclaimed for many years."[96] He asks, "Why not make a pageant out of the isolated incident of the taming of the west?"[97] Reckling explains that the show intended to honor veterans from World War Two, specifically Frank Barrett a Wyoming politician and to raise money for a community building. Senator Barrett would later be central to the procurement of the oxen used in the show, Salt and Pepper. Coincidently, the two oxen came to Wyoming by way of Nebraska—just like the rawhide legend.[98]

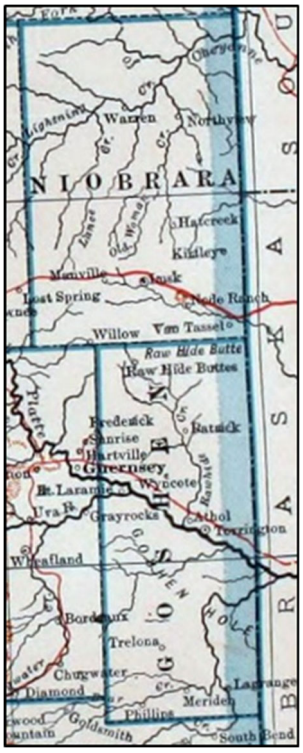


Figure 6. Close up of "Collier's, 1921 Map of Wyoming" showing Lusk (top), Rawhide Buttes (middle), and Rawhide Creek (bottom) [cropped, my emphasis].[99]

Through story, non-Native settlers laid claim to the land and its history at the same time reinforcing ideas about themselves and others. The true origins of the rawhide story are still open for debate. The use of the term "rawhide" is not unique to a single location in the U.S. In addition to landmarks named rawhide in Wyoming and Nebraska, there are Rawhide Creeks in Idaho, Texas, Oklahoma, and Oregon. In fact, Wyoming includes Rawhide Creek and two different Rawhide Buttes. One event organizer admitted the story "had its legendary origin in Goshen County," an area south of Lusk.[100] They acknowledged that "I have been accused by our neighbors to the South as being the thief who stole the story right from under their noses."[101] It is unclear if those involved in the pageant in Lusk were aware of the tale's origins in Nebraska. But, again, the primary function of the story is not historical accuracy. Instead, the origin story of

Lusk creates cohesion and community spirit. In addition, it helps maintain the structures of settler colonialism and white supremacy. Yet the pageant repeatedly falls back on claims to the legend's historical accuracy to defend its racist content and behavior. As professor of Indigenous education Linda Tuhiwai Smith (Ngāti Awa/Ngāti Porou iwi) notes "history is mostly about power. It is the story of the powerful and how they became powerful, and then how they use their power to keep them in positions in which they continue to dominate others."[102] It does not take much time looking in American history books to find stories about domination standing in for a fuller view of history.

From the beginning, event programs and newspaper articles touted the rawhide legend as historical fact in one breath and fantasy in the next. In the program for the very first production, for example, the town council of Lusk states the story "has its origins in the folklore of this community. We have no actual knowledge that the Legend is true." It continues, "It is her [Bonsell] version of the Legend." Paradoxically, the *Lusk Herald* praised the show's verisimilitude after one of the performances in 1947. "There was nothing stereotyped—it seemed to arise from the spirit of Western people carrying the spectator back with the story," the article claims.[103] This description uses its supposed historical accuracy to appeal to the audience. The performance is so real, so authentic that it seems to take viewers back in time. And yet, this verisimilitude comes from the romantically intangible "spirit of Western people" and the history it recreates is mostly an imagined one. For instance, a pamphlet for the 1957 show reads: "Fact or fancy, it's a tale that has been told and retold over a hundred years."[104] One year, the town gushed to *Time* in a letter hoping to attract press coverage: "This is a small town, but they have more professional props and a better sense of realism than almost any large pageant in the country."[105] The conflation of myth and history becomes as much of a tradition in the event's

promotion as in the performance itself. The pageant was not afraid to tell a few tall tales about itself, either. When the show appeared for the second time in September 1947, sources claimed 6,000 (or sometimes 10,000) in attendance when performed as part of the state fair in Douglas. This was also the performance that the famed "cowboy reporter" Red Fenwick of the *Denver Post* attended. In 1950, the event featured in a widely circulated special travel section published by the well-known paper.[106] And other efforts to attract notice in national publications found some success as well.

When the *Chicago American* picked up the story in 1968, it seemed to blur the lines between history and legend as much as the local press coverage. The title of the article was "Sioux Skinning in 1849 Depicted," it called the show "a gory spectacle…ripe with the history of the winning of the West."[107] Although strangely, the Indigenous female victim appears to be a small child in the article (a divergence from the actual plot of the pageant). Otherwise, the usual pattern remains. It describes the emigrants as "intrepid" while the Sioux are described as "savage."[108] This shows the racial hierarchies perpetuated by the local performance appear similar to that in national newspaper coverage of the event as well. The show even caught the attention of the Century 21 Exposition and was invited to be part of the Seattle World's Fair in 1962, an invitation that was apparently declined.[109] In 1963, the national publication *Look Magazine* ran a spread about the show under the title, "How the West was Won." That same year the minor country artist Bozo Darnell released a song based on the Lusk performance. Wyoming Travel Commission even brought in a production company from California to film the performance. The commission used the local golf course to film scenes of the reenactment and then added to footage of similar performances around Wyoming to create a fifteen-minute promotional video.

More and more the show became the defining feature of the small, rural town's identity. For example, the *Lusk Herald* recalled that Doc Reckling "believed that a town should have an identity and that the legends of the West should be kept alive to remind us of our heritage."[110] It is unclear if this claim refers to a history that is regional or national, or both. Regardless, it is unlikely the event took place in Wyoming, if at all. Furthermore, the story itself is about emigrants passing through on their way to the West Coast; these were not the folks who stayed and built what would become Lusk, or even Wyoming for that matter. In this way, the story seems to emphasize the histories and fantasies of those who briefly visited Wyoming on the way to somewhere else. In this case, historical facts fall by the wayside when it comes to the stories non-Native Westerners tell themselves—about themselves. If those who came to the West from somewhere else can trace their lineage, even if only in a story, to the fictional characters of intrepid pioneers then they can believe they have a right to Indigenous land and lives. Furthermore, it generalizes the past of settler colonialists to create a common history and culture based on anti-Native ideology. In other words, it defines Americans through the exclusion of Native peoples. This false sense of history continues to prop up settler colonialism and white supremacy to this day.

This kind of history is more about maintaining settler colonial structures than providing historical facts. Wallace Stegner noted that non-Native settlers used the journey West to prove their Americanness. He explained: "So, for the emigrants who in 1840 began to take wheels westward up the Platte Valley, the interior West was not a place but a way, a trail to the Promised Land, an adventurous, dangerous rite of passage."[111] He suggests that for most of those we often describe as pioneers the goal was to "get *through* the West as fast as possible."[112] For these travelers the utopia they sought was not in the Middle West but through it on the other side.

In the case of the rawhide legend, the stories such interlopers told about their "rite of passage" became the basis on which to claim Indigenous land, defend white supremacy, and tell bad history.

When anthropologist Patrick Wolfe writes that "settler colonialism destroys to replace," he is mainly referring to the elimination of Native bodies and communities.[113] However, settler colonialism uses the same approach to destroy and replace Indigenous cultures and histories. In the United States, settler colonial stories obscure Native stories from time immemorial. In the pageant, for instance, non-Natives in redface replace Native peoples. The Lusk reenactment's defense for the questionable veracity and morality of the story come through claims of tradition. In other words, we did it in the past, so we have a right to do it in the present. Research suggests, however, that facts and morality often have little to do with racist practices defended as tradition by settler colonialism. Often this argument uses claims to historical accuracy to legitimize constructed traditions. The 1991 program reads, "That there 'Legend' is part of Lusk's heritage since it really happened about a hundred 'n a half years ago."[114] Yet it did not "really" happen. Bonsell Paris shares that when she and Reckling conceived of the performance that, "We wanted to think of something that would be a lasting legacy."[115] In the same interview Bonsell Paris admits that while she was inspired by a book called *Kate Farely, Pioneer*, ultimately she concedes: "I made up my own story."[116] In the next moment Bonsell Paris claims the story as local heritage. "Times are tough and too, this brings out the heritage…I like them to know our heritage," said Bonsell Paris.[117] This exemplifies what historians Eric Hobsbawm and Terence Ranger refer to as the "invention of tradition," or the phenomenon of claiming that a practice or institution is old (and therefore correct or worthy) when it is relatively recent. Hobsbawm and Ranger note that reiteration is part of the process of inventing traditions, which is "essentially a

process of formalization and ritualization, characterized by reference to the past, if only by imposing repetition."[118] Of course, the dichotomy of invented versus real tradition itself is problematic. The constructed nature of cultural practices makes invented traditions very real. The invention of tradition applies to *The Legend* performance, but it also ties into the larger practice of inventing tradition in the American West—a place where tall tales often stand in for history and facts.

When challenged about the overt racism in the show, the community defends the performance as local history and tradition. In an article penned by Bonsell Paris titled, "Legend Continues Area's Heritage," she wrote in defense of the graphic violence of the human flaying scene in the pageant: "People may cringe at the thought of 'skinning a man alive' and look askance at such goings-on, but this is our heritage."[119] Such sentiments defending heritage are not uncommon and highlight the constructed nature of individual and community identities. Again, if history is more a matter of choice than historical fact—why tell this story? Although even if the rawhide story was based on historical facts, it does not excuse the dehumanization of other human beings.

Scholars have interrogated the many ways ambivalence surfaces in the clash between fantasy and fact in American culture such as in the phenomena playing Indian and going native. Shari Huhndorf (Dena'ina), whose work focuses on "going Native," suggests:

> the tension between the ideal of a free and democratic nation and the reality of racial hierarchies, the discrepancy between the myth of peaceful expansion and the history of bloody conquest—reemerge again and again in the cultural imagination. It is, perhaps, for this reason that European Americans have always been obsessed with stories of the nation's origins, repeatedly retelling and refiguring their collective past in self-justifying ways.[120]

To illustrate, an article published in the Lusk *Herald* in 1995 held similar sentiments: "Our heritage comes from finding and exploring a new frontier, plotting and searching for new worlds to conquer…This is OUR heritage. Let's keep it alive."[121] This claim is a "winner writes the history" approach. The genocide, broken treaties, and land theft transforms into a narrative that claims such atrocities are just the well-deserved spoils of colonization. This view is problematic because it obscures a fuller view of history and contributes to the dehumanization of Native peoples.

In Lusk, the story of the so-called winning of the West was something, both tangible and intangible, non-Native settlers could pass onto their children and their children's children. "The spirit of adventure that sent pioneers West is still alive and well in their descendants," exclaims one event program.[122] Yet, as discussed earlier, the non-Native pioneers and settlers are not the same non-Native emigrants who settled Lusk. This mistaken belief that non-Native settlers won the West justifies the pageant participants' racist behavior and reliance on fake history. It recalls the adage that just because one can do something does not mean one should. Lusk, however, is no longer the land of opportunity (if it ever was). Population and economic growth in the area stagnates. Wyoming's Gross State Product Growth was ranked 48th out 50 over the last several years.[123] Lusk is the least populated county seat in the least populated state in the U.S. and census projections indicate the population dropped by over two percent from 2010 to 2019.[124] If Luskites hope their conviction to tell the rawhide story would pay off for the community, it does not seem to be working. Furthermore, it just might see the town of Lusk added to the list of failed communities and ghost towns strewn across the Western landscape and the history books.

Regardless of its veracity *The Legend* shaped the community of Lusk in many tangible ways. For one, it united the small town. The program for the very first production acknowledges,

"A community is good to live in when we work and play toward a common goal."[125] In fact, articles focused on various members of the community, from local businessmen to ranchers and prominent families, fill early event programs. It contains pages and pages about the local community while the actual pageant only takes up a scant few. Furthermore, the pageant was a town-wide event with residents often encouraged to "either grow beard or wear two items of western clothing every day."[126] For many years residents of Lusk were asked to cast off current fashions in favor of more western attire. The image in mind was the mythic Old West which required fewer trendsetting fashions and more cowboy hats. Dressing in western wear was a collective act that helped maintain the fantasy needed for the community to tell and sell this story. Even if the story Lusk tells about the Rawhide Buttes is fictitious, it became real for the town through repetition and performance.

The pageant not only brought Lusk together physically during the show and the weeks spent preparing, but it also connected the entire community through ideology year-round. "I've heard comments from people here in Lusk that this has brought the community together. Every body got to know each other and worked together. It changed the town more than it change my life," suggested Eva Bonsell Paris.[127] While the story may be fictitious, the community impact is fact. In its early years pageant profits paid for improvements for the Niobrara County Fairgrounds, an auditorium, and a barn. In both early and later years, it provided an attraction aimed to increase tourism during the summer. Subsequently, it paid for new wagons, grandstands, and improvements to the rodeo grounds. [128] However, profiting from the dehumanization of other human being does not make it moral and calling racist behavior "history" does not excuse redface and racial slurs.

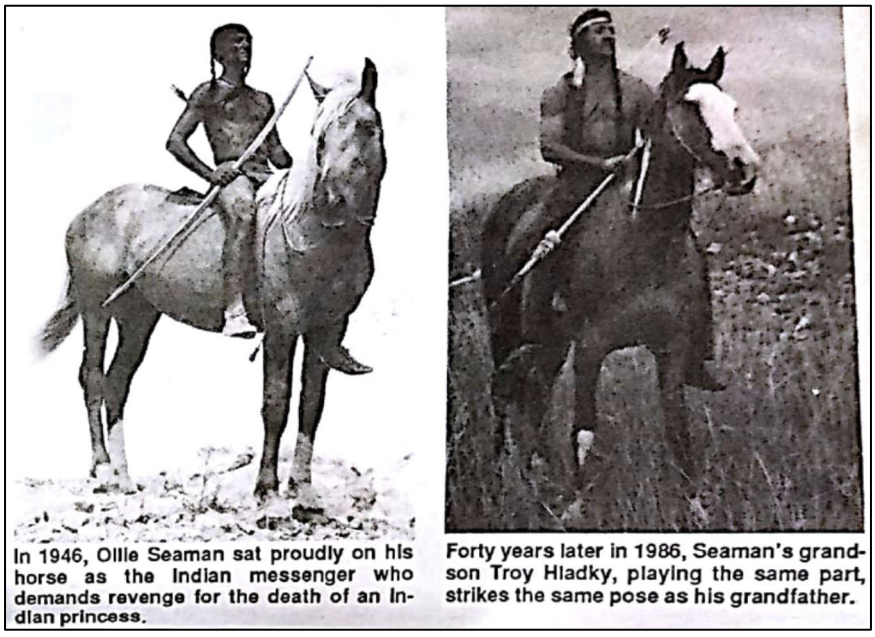


Figure 7. Image and caption from article in the *Lusk Herald* in 1987 highlighting the local tradition of participating in pageant [cropped].[129]

Perhaps the most powerful ritual enacted by the show is the family practice of participating in the pageant. Many roles ended up passed down from family member to family member.[130] For example, Ollie Seaman played an Indian Messenger in 1946, forty years later his grandson would play the same role. "I saw it in 1986 and from then on it was in my blood," stated Willy Wilcox, who worked as an usher, then as narrator of the pageant.[131] The language here indicates a strong family connection: "It was in my blood." It is hard to argue that such a sentiment could be less personal. As a result, individual and community identity became tied up with problematic and false perceptions of the West.

The show was not only a phenomenon within the small town of Lusk, but it also had a wider reach. Many Wyoming politicians attended and endorsed the performance over the years. Not only was the Mayor of Lusk the first Clyde (who gets skinned alive), later the Wyoming

congressman Jim Thompson, too, played the flayed. Wyoming senator Frank Barret sponsored a wagon and procured the oxen for the show. Additionally, Governor Milward Simpson solicited support for the show while in office, and personally invited *Life Magazine* and *Time Magazine* and other major publications to Lusk for the pageant.[132] In 1962, Governor Jack Gage rode in the pageant parade.[133] And in 2018, three candidates for the Governor of Wyoming primary gave stump speeches before the show's start (one of whom is now governor). The state tourism agency was also there that year handing out promotions with the new state slogan: "That's WY." And perhaps *that's why* Luskites have so easily defended the reenactment—because of the overt support by local and state leaders and organizations over the years.

However, the pageant is not only an expression of local or regional identities, but it also taps into national identities and cultures based on racial hierarchies. The common element between local narratives in Lusk and national narratives in America at large has been and continues to be settler colonialism and white supremacy. Literary critic Roberto Dainotto, for instance, finds literary regionalism reproduces nationalism on a small scale and retains the same xenophobic, elitism of the latter even though it is created as a response to the call to give the marginalized voice.[134] Similarly, historian Liza Nicholas purports that "in their pageants, parades, and rodeos, Wyomingites had celebrated not only a local identity but a national ideology."[135] Moreover, these practices are about the choice to tell and retell a local story that connects to something beyond the nation—to Western Civilization itself. It is evidence of the often race-based "us" versus "them" worldview that saturates American culture locally, nationally, and beyond.

The "Wests" of the American West and Western Civilization intersect in American culture and identity. The American Studies scholar Krista Comer explains:

> The two referents—the "American West" and Western colonialism—intersect in a system of narratives and images popularized in U.S. literature, visual culture, and especially cinema: Monument Valley, the Oregon Trail, cowboys, Indians, pioneers. Mainstream understanding of these narratives and images position them as wellsprings of Anglo-American nationalist character…The term 'west' becomes, in this context, a badge of identity, conflating geopolitical and topographic space with cultural belonging and matters of style. To take up the keyword 'west' is to contend at once with its national as well as its global genealogies.[136]

It behooves scholars of the American West to contend with the other Wests, both dominant and obscured, at play. Liza Nicholas suggests in her work about Wyoming and American identity that "the stories we tell about ourselves are rarely, if ever, free from the narratives that circulate around us."[137] These narrative systems privilege nationalism and white supremacy which are reproduced at regional and local levels. However, such ideas do not move only in a top-down pattern from the national level to the local. Instead, dominant narratives move more complexly with local ideological practices both informing and informed by national narratives. As a result, the stories we tell about the West blur the distinctions between myth and history while preserving racial and power hierarches. According to Nicholas, "the stories Wyomingites began telling about themselves…became increasingly nostalgic, localized, and consistent."[138] In other words, the show in Lusk reflects a larger narrative that both romanticizes the racism of the West and ignores narratives reflective of Native history and land rights.

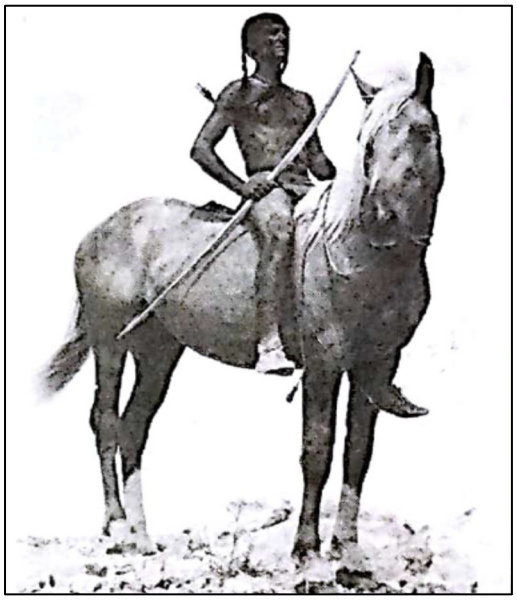


Figure 8. “The Old Time Warrior” photograph by Edward Curtis, 1910 (left) [cropped].[139]
Figure 9. Ollie Seaman performing the role of Indian Messenger in 1946 (right) [cropped].[140]

The Imagined Indian

History, art, literature, and mass media—now and in the past—construct and disseminate stereotypes about the American West and Native peoples across the globe. Edward Curtis, for instance, was a late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century photographer whose work depicting Native peoples was and continues to heavily influence American culture. Curtis’ photos appear saturated with the much older narratives of primitivism and the vanishing Indian. These same themes and stereotypes about Native peoples often appear in western heritage events like *The Legend*. In fact, photos taken of actors for the pageant show a remarkable resemblance to Curtis’ work. The romanticized pose, costume, and styling of the subjects are nearly identical. Both photos appear as if taken from a low angle looking up at the subject as they gaze off into the distance.

Curtis' work[141] depicting Indigenous peoples was both manipulated by the artist[142] and frequently misunderstood by the audience. Both Curtis and his audience confused art with ethnography in seeing Native subjects as relics of the past and the last vestiges of a vanishing people and culture. The romanticism of the noble savage easily gives way to the narratives of primitivism and extinction. The false depictions of Indigenous subjects so common in the work of Curtis and other writers and artists appear in local representations of Native peoples in communities across the West. In Lusk, for example, the fictional representations of Native peoples rely on these stereotypes and narratives to compensate for the lack of indigeneity of non-Native histories and cultures in the West. The perpetuation and espousal of these stereotypes rationalize colonial genocide and legitimize non-Native claims to the land in the past while maintaining racial hierarchies in the present.

Non-Native emigrants to the American West justified and legitimized land theft and genocide by manipulating their own histories and that of Native peoples. Consequently, non-Native society all too often believes its own falsehoods about the origins of the American nation. In this way, non-Native dominated communities make the West their own, in part, by constructing western heritage. However, the histories constructed cast tribal peoples into the role of the savage—the Other. This vision of America saw Native peoples as separate from the American nation. The view that it was emigrant-settlers against tribal peoples is evident in western heritage events like *The Legend*. For example, promotional materials from 1988 proclaimed "and still, the people of Lusk, look out on that row of blue-black buttes—a constant reminder of their western heritage—of the people who fought and died to gain a new frontier."[143] This is a story that continues to shape the non-Native perspectives of and relationships with Indigenous peoples. "One way to see how a group defines itself—to itself as well as to Others—

is to look at those it makes its heroes," suggests historian Jacquelyn Kilpatrick in her study of Native Americans and film.[144] For Luskites and many non-Native westerners, the heroes—the winners—are often the westward interlopers, upheld as pioneers and trailblazers. When the reenactment casts it heroes and villains, it is Native human beings who become relegated to the latter.

Not only are the Indian roles in the reenactment caricatures, the history portrayed in the show is fantasy as well. The show in Lusk consistently tries, in both the past and present, to pass itself off as historically accurate. During the 1990s promotional materials described *The Legend* as the "presentation of a historic event" with "covered wagons and painted Indians."[145] Similarly, an ad from 1999, exerts "The Legend of the Rawhide is a gigantic show of western history based on the legend…Calvary in the uniforms and equipment of the period and a band of Indians just as they lived on the plains over 100 years ago."[146] Strangely, the ad openly admits it is based upon a legend, yet still claims historical accuracy with "a band of Indian just as they lived on the plains" a century earlier. But by the 1890s most plains tribes lived on reservations. The Fort Bridger Treaty Council of 1868, for example, established the Wind River Reservation, the only reservation in Wyoming. The Wind River Reservation is only two hundred miles away and is the fifth largest reservation in the U.S. by population. It is home to the Eastern Shoshone and Northern Arapaho. Additionally, the Pine Ridge Reservation, home to Oglala Lakota, is only 170 miles from Lusk, and is the second largest reservation by population. While the town of Lusk itself is predominantly non-Native, it is still in close physical proximity to large Native populations. Yet the pageant reflects little knowledge about Native peoples and cultures.

The pageant offers Lusk a version of history that casts non-Native settlers as heroes and either ignores Native peoples or shows them as villains. As countless stories in American media

tell us villains deserve what they get. Stories of this mythic American West reaffirms the supremacy of the dominant group's status in the region. The story that residents of Lusk are descendants of the righteous settlers who saved the West from uncivilization is a fantasy preferred to the reality. Unfortunately, historical fallacies and white supremacy shape Lusk and the American nation. Many communities like Lusk, small and rural, seemed imbued with the sense that change, social or otherwise, is not only leaving them behind but taking something from them. Sociologist Robert Wuthnow spent several years interviewing Americans from small, rural communities. Wuthnow found "the fear is that small-town ways of life are disappearing…It stems from the fact that the social expectations, relationships, and obligations" of their shared cultural realities are being "fundamentally fractured" through the moral decline of society and the distant disinterest of Washington.[147] In this sense, Lusk seems to hold tighter to the rawhide legend as an origin story for the community. In 2019, when writer Jennifer Percy visited Lusk for a piece in *Harper's Magazine*, she asked participants what they thought about complaints against the show. "They'll shut us down one day…They'll do it because they want to make a splash in the news and be a big shot. Some people try to make it a racial thing, but people are pretending to be someone else in Hollywood all the time," replied Dan Hanson, a longtime pageant participant whose sons also perform in the show.[148] Hanson does not elaborate exactly who "They" refers to, however.

There are costs of telling stories about the West, or America, which work to dehumanize others for the sake of a fantasy. However, just because an idea—a story—is based on fantasy rather than fact does not keep it from spreading or taking root in American culture. Wallace Stegner suggested there is a "tendency to see the West in its mythic enlargement rather than it is" and a "corollary tendency to take our cues from myths in the effort to enhance our lives."[149] The

town of Lusk chooses to see the pioneer characters as heroes and Indians as villains. This is especially odd because the story centers around the crime of one of the emigrants, but it is the Indians who are savage. Despite the lapses in logic, this idea that Native peoples are the enemy or "not us" is deep-seated. To illustrate, when local Lusk resident Carl Buch, a participant who built some of the wagons for the show, explained the use of a lynch pin in the wagons he recalled: "That's what [the lynch pin] the Indians used to drive through the pioneers heads when they caught them, or at least that's what my daddy used to tell me."[150] Many of these pioneer stories reflect the idea that Indigenous peoples are violently savage. Telling stories that perpetuated Native stereotypes brought the community of Lusk together, and it became a tradition in which the residents could find common ground and community spirit.

Many of the ideas assigned to representations of Native peoples in American culture are fantasy. Film scholar Jacqueline Kilpatrick, for example, suggests stereotypes communicated through literature and media helped create the popular, albeit fabricated, image of the Indian. Kilpatrick explains:

> From adventure stories, reports of first contact, and captivity narratives, to the Indians of Cooper's woods, the fabrication of Ned Buntline and other dime novels, and finally the wild west shows and the first two decades of filmmaking, the public was presented with and consumed a distorted, shifting, polarized set of images that give them a way to categorize and redefine the first residents of the continent…The resulting invention is an imaginary Indian—not a group of widely diverse people—that could be easily digested by the consumer.[151]

And with non-Natives taking the role of Indian, real tribal peoples disappear from the present and become obscured from history. Gerald Vizenor (Anishinaabe), novelist and scholar, claims that stereotypes of Indians have existed from the first moments of contact with non-Native emigrants. "Native and indians are not read as the same stories, the indian is a cued simulation of presence."[152] For Vizenor, the "Indian" is a construction without basis in reality. These

imitations erase tribal nations by taking the place of real tribal peoples and cultures. Hundreds of tribal nations across two continents are reduce to the singular and monolithic "Indian." Vizenor explains: "The word indian, however, is a colonial enactment" whose "dominance is sustained by the simulation that has superseded the real tribal names."[153] "Indian" is a stereotype and a caricature employed to support the structures of white supremacy and settler colonialism. The fantasy often replaces the reality in literature, art, and history to maintain dominance and racial hierarchies. The rawhide reenactment's use of the Indian stereotype obscures tribal identities and cultures.

Historical works, past and present, often rely on fantasies about Native peoples. The scholars Jean O'Brien (Anishinaabe) and Rayna Green (Aniyvwiyaʔi/Cherokee) have identified several rhetorical strategies employed in literature and art to perpetuate fantasies about Native peoples. O'Brien outlines several of these tactics in her book about local histories in New England. For example, the practices of "firsting," or the process of "local texts claim[ing] Indian places as their own," and "lasting" where texts "purify the landscape of Indians by denying them a place in modernity" by depicting them as the last of their kind.[154] "Pasting," or relegating tribal peoples to the past and denying their modernity, and the vanishing Indian trope, where tribal peoples are extinct or near-extinct go hand in hand. The pageant employs both "firsting" and "pasting" to promote their version of history.

The reenactment uses storytelling to claim and reclaim ownership over the Rawhide Buttes. It renames a Native place suggesting that the history of the area begins with non-Native names and stories, and Lusk tells this narrative yearly. Rayna Green suggests: "The need to replay the roles, replay the battles, replay the historic scenes is there, especially when the distance of time has not resolved historical ambiguity about the actions of one's ancestors, or

when the reconstruction of the past seems more glorious than the present."[155] Lusk residents simulate what they perceive as the "good old days" in order to maintain a version of the history of the American West that portrays non-Natives as righteous heroes and Native peoples as savage and vanished. As the rest of the world seems to be leaving rural Wyoming behind, the community looks to the rawhide story to remind them of the past and the place of non-Natives at the top of the racial hierarchy in the U.S.

The depiction of tribal peoples in *The Legend* is rife with the usual negative stereotypes seen elsewhere in American culture. The writer of the pageant Eva Bonsell Paris suggests, in what might be described as "whitesplaining:" "Most people don't understand the Indian as he was…taught from birth to avenge wrong, count coup, and be a great warrior he did not understand the white man's sympathy for an injury or hurt."[156] The article continues, "to us the Indians were savages…I failed to see why we should deny our history."[157] Contradictorily, in one 1997 article about how the production creates smoke signals laments the 'vanishing' of tribal peoples. It reads, "Oh, some long-gone Indian should have known his secret [for creating smoke signals]!"[158] However, due to "American ingenuity" a pageant participant figured out that fire extinguishers were useful for creating the effect of smoke signals for the outdoor performances.[159]

Native peoples and their histories frequently appear as stereotypes in western heritage events purporting to be the true history of the West. The caricatures of tribal peoples performed in Lusk are at times hackneyed. Awkwardly, however, Indigenous peoples have always been in the West. The Pine Ridge Reservation in South Dakota is less than two and a half hours away and the Wind River Reservation in Wyoming is about four hours to the west. In fact, Wyoming has more Native peoples than most other states in the union.



Figure 10. Local ad from 1991 program for *The Legend* portraying Indian stereotypes [cropped, my emphasis].[160]

The stereotypes evident in the script, coverage, and promotion of *The Legend* are apparent in local advertising as well. Most advertisements published in the event programs incorporated common clichés about the American West. For example, in an ad for Lusk Office Products & Printing there are several examples of these stereotypes. The forefront of the ad features a cartoon of the pseudo-plains Indian with headdress, exaggerated facial features, fringed buckskins, and moccasins creating smoke signals. The inclusion of the saguaro cacti is most curious, as its only natural habitat exists in parts of California, Arizona, and the Mexican State of Sonora. In the end, the ad is a mish-mash of tropes associated with "Indians." It even claims that like the rawhide legend, the company had "been instrumental in the growth of Lusk."[161]

Both the ad and the pageant generalize Native peoples. The Indian caricature replaces the hundreds of distinct nations with a homogenized stereotype in national narratives and Lusk's

reenactment. The Indian appears frozen in the past both anti-modern and monolithic. Historian and author of *The White Man's Indian*, Robert Berkhofer, Jr. surmises: "Along with the persistence of the dual image of good and bad but general deficiency overall went a curious timelessness in defining the Indian proper. Despite centuries of contact and the changed conditions of Native American lives, Whites picture the 'real' Indian as the one before contact or during the early period of contact."[162] It is this Indian, neither Sioux nor Pawnee, that is performed in *The Legend*.

While Luskites choose *The Legend* as their origin story, it is not an act that comes without contradiction. The Native identities adopted through the performance are a familiar combination of stereotype and denial. Can claims to an imagined history defend the overt racism in this performance? And again, even if the rawhide story was historically accurate, it does excuse the dehumanization of human beings? These stories reflect the white supremacy of national narratives and the benefits to Lusk beyond this seem limited to modest material gains. Sociologist Robert Wuthnow suggests:

> Rural festivals heighten residents' sense of living in a uniquely special place…The stories people in rural places tell about their communities come in two varieties. There are the official stories that make up the town or county's history…The other genre of local lore includes what city people would call urban legends.[163]

In the case of Lusk, the story is part of the official history of the area and a local legend. Perhaps it is this conflation of fact and fiction, history and legend that has allowed the rawhide story to persist over so many years.

CHAPTER TWO

AMERICAN FANTASIES AND PLAYING INDIAN

Playing Indian, Going Native, and Redface

> *Underneath all the conflicting images of the Indian one fundamental truth emerges—the white man knows he is an alien and he knows that North America is Indian—and he will never let go of the Indian image because he thinks that by some clever manipulation he can achieve an authenticity that cannot ever be his.* Vine Deloria, Jr., in "American Fantasy"

> *White America has repeatedly enacted rites of conquest to confirm and extend its power over Native America, and these racial dynamics continue to shape contemporary American life.* Philip Deloria in *Playing Indian*

> *While dreams of self-improvement and personal success in the evolving settler capitalist order doubtless drove this nation of immigrants toward a society of cities and an industrial-commercial culture of modernity, alter Native dreams erupted and persisted in undercurrents of longing and collective desire: yearnings for solidarity in place of arrogance of class and of competitive and isolating individualism; dreams of archaic forms of community instead of urban anomie, cash nexus, and degradation of earth and sky.* Alan Trachtenberg in *Shades of Hiawatha*

From the earliest days of contact to the current moment, Native peoples appear represented in stereotype. Over the centuries in the U.S., Indian stereotypes solidified into easily recognizable symbols. Before Columbia or Uncle Sam personified what would become the United States, Indigenous women embodied the Americas. From the fifteenth century into the nineteenth-century, writers, artists, and cartographers often depicted the so-called New World as nubile, native, and savage. Henry Poppel's map of the British holdings in the Americas, for example, includes depictions of Native peoples. The Indigenous peoples depicted on it are

mostly naked and at ease with wild animals and violence. The scantily clad female figure in the upper portion languidly reclines against a hill next to some monkey-like animals, as one foot rests upon the back of a crocodile and the other upon what appears to be the decapitated head of a man with an arrow protruding from its skull. The male character also appears partially nude. Bare chested he holds a weapon—a bow. The man's left arm appears raised palm up as if giving a gift—America. Such typecasts would shadow the first peoples of the Americas for centuries. In addition to depicting tribal peoples in stereotypical ways, many non-Native peoples and communities would paradoxically appropriate Native identity and culture. Cultural anthropologist Renato Rosaldo terms this paradox "imperialist nostalgia." He suggests:

> Imperialist nostalgia revolves around a paradox: A person kills somebody and then mourns the victim. In more attenuated form, someone deliberately alters a form of life, and then regrets that things have not remained as they were prior to the intervention. At one more remove, people destroy their environment, and then they worship nature.[164]

These phenomena appear in the U.S. in the appropriation of Indigenous cultures despite centuries of genocide and land theft. As a result, Americans can mourn and worship Indigenous culture, while at the same time ignoring the genocidal practices of colonialism that works to eliminate Indigeneity.

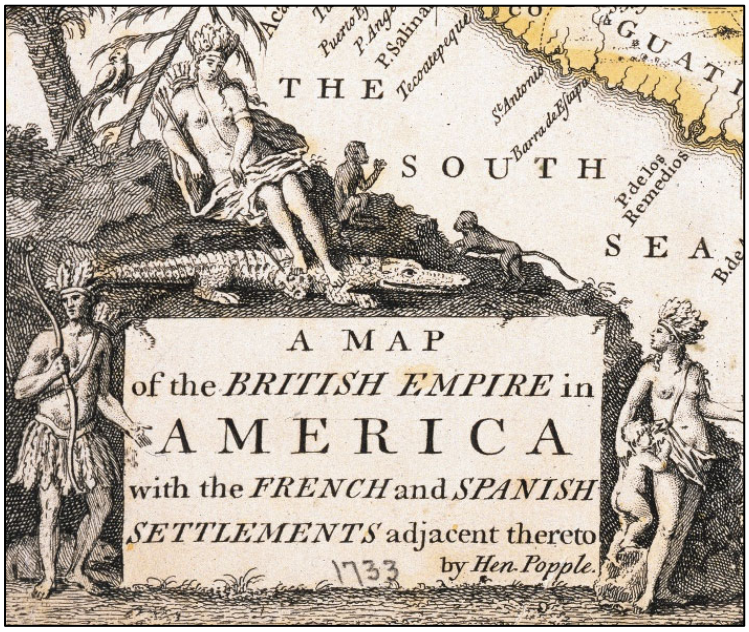


Figure 11. Close up of Henry Popple's map from 1733 showing America personified as Indigenous [cropped, my emphasis].[165]

Scholars such as Rayna Green (Aniyvwiyaʔi/Cherokee), Philip Deloria (Wičhíyena/Yankton Dakota), and Shari Huhndorf (Dena'ina) explore the appropriation of Indigenous cultures. The practices of redface, playing Indian, and going Native are examples of practices of cultural appropriation of Indigenous cultures by non-Indigenous peoples which maintain settler colonialism and white supremacy. Each of these practices are apparent in reenactments like *The Legend*. In many ways, Indian play is an American tradition similar to the likes of baseball and apple pie. American practices of ethnic play such as redface and blackface[166] function to maintain racial hierarchies by perpetuating stereotypes of marginalized groups to support and rationalize genocide, land theft, and slavery. Furthermore, in the United States, practices of ethnic play change over time and adapt to geospatial particularities, and stems from the interrelated structures of settler colonialism and white supremacy.

Redface and Playing Indian

The formation of the United States' identity as a nation was in part about becoming independent of Europe (while being for the most part still European) and native of the Americas (but still not quite Indigenous). English professor Jason Richards in his book *Imitation Nation: Red, White, and Blackface in Early Antebellum US Literature*, suggests, "What is fascinating about American anti-Europeanism is how it turned to another kind of mimesis to express itself: for it was by imitating Native and African Americans that the nation could distinguish itself from the Old World."[167] He suggests the country's nascent identity was developed through such "ambivalent mimetic acts" as black and redface.[168] Richards notes there are differences between redface and blackface as they "operate as their own distinct performance expressions with their own social and political goals, not to mention their own racial meanings."[169] However, ethnic play is present in local, regional, and national levels of identity and culture, so it is about more than separating from Europe. In addition, racial performances have continued well beyond the formative years of the American nation which is Richards' focus. During the twentieth-century, ethnic play is less about constructing the new American nation as it is about perpetuating stereotypes and normalizing white supremacy in American culture.

Deloria suggests, "for whites of all classes, the quests for personal substance and identity often involved forays into racial Otherness."[170] Yet this desire is rife with complications. Richards points out, for instance, that "the fact that white Americans copied Native Americans but didn't really want to be them…is a central contradiction of emerging [American] national identity."[171] However, Indian play continues beyond the nascent identity crisis of early America well into the twenty-first century.[172] Despite concerted social movements promoting social

equality and diversity, more subtle methods of anti-Indianism such as racist and stereotypical portrayals remain commonplace.

Non-Native peoples and communities impersonate Native peoples without having to be Native permanently through practices of playing Indian. “Indian play was a temporary fantasy, and the player inevitably returned to the everyday world. But the world to which one returned was not that of Indian people, and in that sense, play allowed one to evade the very reality that it suggested one was experiencing,” explains Deloria.[173] It is a fantasy that can be adopted and then cast aside when and where a fantasist chooses. A choice not always available, however, to actual tribal peoples living in settler colonial societies. Furthermore, while these performances were crucial to national and white identity, they intersect with local identity as well. The stereotypes perpetuated nationally through film and literature appear locally as well. Such cultural machinations are not without consequences. Richards does not mince words; according to him the connection between the impersonation of Native Americans and African Americans by European Americans and the rise of the American Empire is clear. “By mimicking the oppressive apparatuses of European colonialism and by controlling how Natives and blacks were represented in the public imaginary, imitation contributed to the rise of white colonial supremacy within the United States,” submits Richards.[174] Through ethnic play non-Natives could simultaneously pretend to be Other (and therefore separate from Europe) while dehumanizing Indigenous and African peoples to legitimize white supremacy. Redface is one way the dominant culture appropriates Indigenous cultures and perpetuates harmful stereotypes of Native peoples.

Performers in the reenactment in Lusk proudly perform in redface.[175] In the beginning, in 1946, *The Legend* cast used dry scenery paint “rubbed into the skin to give that natural Indian look.”[176] However, alternatives were sought out after the paint worked a little too well and Lusk

"had 'Indians' all summer" because the paint would not wash off.[177] Thus, began the tradition of using iron ore procured from a neighboring mine near Sunrise, Wyoming to redden the skin. According to Bonsell Paris the ore gave "those Indians a soft glowing look."[178] This method had its detractors, however, as it proved to be quite messy.[179] An article in the 1999 event program titled, "What Makes Ours Injuns Red?" called it "a delightful shade of Indian."[180] It may surprise some that just before the dawn of the new millennium a term such as "Injuns" apparently required no second thought (not by the author, editor, publisher, or community). From its earliest days wearing redface became part of the tradition of performing in the pageant. Men, women, and children rubbed the reddish earth onto their faces and over their bodies to portray Indian characters.



Figure 12. *The Legend* participants in redface, effect created by applying iron ore to the skin [cropped]. Photos taken by the author, 2018.

Redface has a long history in American media and culture in the U.S. Michelle Raheja (Onödowá'ga/Seneca descent) in *Reservation Reelism*, a study of the representations of Native characters in film, states that like blackface minstrelsy "redface performances by white actors who were spray painted with pigments to give their skin a reddish tone also elided the incredibly violent and complicated realities of North American history."[181] Just as blackface ignores the violent history of slavery and life for Blacks in the U.S., redface obscures the violent and often unlawful treatment of Native peoples. However, Raheja acknowledges that blackface and redface do differ significantly. "Unlike blackface, redface performances by white actors operated significantly under the assumption that Native Americans as a distinct group of peoples had disappeared and therefore were not available to fill 'Indian' role," writes Raheja.[182]



Many of the performers in the early presentations of the pageant have since died, among them George Earl Peet who was the first to sign up for the part of an Indian. Doubtfully even a full-blood Indian could have played the part of a chief more adeptly, and the memory of "Chief Peet" still lingers in the minds of many.

Figure 13. Image and caption published alongside an article from the *Lusk Herald* in 1971 [cropped].[183]

To illustrate, Eva Bonsell Paris, author of the melodrama in Lusk, rationalized: "If you wanted an Indian and didn't have any to pick from, what would you do? You'd dress him up to look like one, wouldn't you?"[184] Not only do Luskites take part in Indian play, but they also consider the performance to be better than the real thing. In a photo of the first "Indian Chief" to perform in the show the caption reads: "Doubtfully even a full-blooded Indian could have played the part of a chief more adeptly."[185] Rayna Green (Aniyvwiyaʔi/Cherokee), American Studies scholar and Curator Emeritus at the Smithsonian, suggests:

> Indians are in effect, loved to death through playing Indian, while despised when they want to act out their real traditional roles on the American landscape. For Indians to be Indian, or rather to be Indian in their some 200 distinct tribal roles, to be Indian in the historical future, non-Indians must give up the role.[186]

And certainly, discontinuing the Indian caricatures in *The Legend* is an option open to the town of Lusk. They *could* give up the role. However, eliminating redface would require the community to come face to face with the ugly parts of its own history in which their identities are based and their active roles in promoting white supremacy. In the face of everchanging modernity, it seems discontinuing a tradition that unites the community, whether history or make-believe, is not a desirable choice. Moreover, community spirit is no small matter in places that see less economic opportunities and dwindling populations each year.##

The Erasure of Indigeneity

The United States is a settler colonial nation and its founding, expansion, and national borders all depended upon the literal, historical, and cultural erasure of the Native peoples of the Americas. But acknowledging this historical fact undermines the national, regional, and local narratives that the colonization of the continent was moral, civilized progress ordained by a higher power. The anthropologist Patrick Wolfe describes a "logic of elimination" at work within the "structure" of settler colonialism.[187] He claims "settler colonialism destroys to replace," like a cuckoo bird that hides one of its own eggs within a clutch of its neighbors to perpetuate its own species.[188] Conceivably, it is this insidious memetic cycle of destruction and replacement that allows colonialism's structures to evolve. In other words, the narratives of non-Native histories and ethnic play prop up the structures of settler colonialism and white supremacy in the West.

To be clear although the use of the word "play" in the terms playing Indian and ethnic play seem to refer to practices that are benign and enjoyable, these practices are harmful and work to maintain white supremacy. Rayna Green explains, "the living performance of 'playing Indian' by non-Indian peoples depends upon the physical and psychological removal, even the

death, of real Indians."[189] The death and erasure of Native peoples, whether literal or figurative, legitimizes colonization and white supremacy. Jason Richards agrees and suggests that, "Through redface fantasy, whites could symbolically become 'native' Americans and inheritors of the land. At the same time, by elevating themselves above the 'savagery' of Native life, they could justify the expansion of American civilization and its attendant ethnic cleansing."[190] In other words, non-Native appropriation of culture and identity worked alongside genocide and land theft to further the goals of colonization and white supremacy. Philip Deloria maintains:

> Throughout the twentieth century, going native has served as an essential means of defining and regenerating racial whiteness and a racially inflected vision of Americanness. It also reflects on the national history by providing self-justifying fantasies that conceal the violence marking European-American hegemony.[191]

The desire for the elimination of tribal peoples is clearly part of the Lusk pageant. In *The Legend*, the character of Clyde fantasizes about killing Indians. "He don't like Indians and never had. They ain't no good. Why not kill 'em off," the character opines.[192] He even connects to the long history of violence against tribal peoples in the American West, and the glorification of those who perpetrated it. He boasts: "Look at the famous pioneers—they killed lots of Indians. Some day Clyde himself would be a big Indian killer."[193] For the character of Clyde, murdering Indians is a point of pride and a shared experience that puts him in the company of "famous pioneers."[194]

However, the narrator makes clear that this genocidal sentiment is not unanimous among the wagon party. "Nobody likes his attitude and some try to reason with him," the narrator reveals.[195] First, they try to convince Clyde of the error of his ways with the humanist approach. "They are human just as we are. They got a right to live," they plead.[196] But the group soon considers it a lost cause. "Everybody sees that there ain't no sense in tryin' to pound any love for

Injuns into Clyde."[197] But when leadership prevents Clyde from joining a scouting team because of his "hair trigger," he argues that he is not the only one who would like to kill tribal peoples.[198] "Aw Mr. Farley, I ain't seen no Indians yet and them other guys is just as liable to kill off Indians as I am," he whines.[199] But his argument does not have the desired effect and Pickett ends up assigned to sentry duty. A responsibility he quickly shirks to kill the Indian Princess character.

In *The Legend*, as the wagon train comes into view of the eponymous buttes in the distance, one character expresses the desire to rename the land:

> To the west, juttin' up on the horizon against the settin' sun, there's a range of blue-black buttes, just a sittin' like a watch dog on the prairie. There isn't a name for 'em, anyway not one that Jim can remember, but certainly an old landmark like them must be called somethin'. Maybe THEY could name 'em.[200]

But, of course, they did have names, likely several from the different tribal nations local to the area. According to the Niobrara County Library the Sioux name is Tahalo Paha (Rawhide Buttes). It is unclear, however, if this is merely a literal translation or the actual name Sioux people used to refer to the landmark. The library also includes an additional explanation for the name. Reportedly a group of Sioux had skinned a large number of bison and left the rawhides at the base of the buttes and then they came back for them they were gone, supposedly stolen by non-Native trappers.[201] This story, however, has not been a popular one. There are no reenactments about trappers stealing bison hides even though the etiology of the word "rawhide" refers to animal skin products. Most importantly it does not fit with the dominant narrative of the heroic, hardworking settler furthering the progress of civilization. "When European Americans 'play Indian,' they project an edited version of their own colonial history on the body of the Indian," claims Raheja.[202] They also project an edited history onto the land.

The United States is still experiencing existential crises and the negotiation of social struggles through ethnic play remains a part of American culture. The structures of colonialism and white supremacy require constant reaffirming through hierarchies of race, gender, and class. Playing Indian has "modeled a characteristically American kind of domination in which the exercise of power was hidden, denied, or mourned" and it "proved a fitting way to negotiate social struggles within white society that required an equally opaque vision of power," claims Philip Deloria.[203] The deliberateness and awareness of the nature of Indian Play by those who take part remains unclear.

Lusk performs a version of history— and a version of Native peoples—that reinforces the idea that non-Native residents are in their in their rightful place in the West. It creates a false history that makes them heroes—inheritors of the real West and not the beneficiaries of genocide. The terms "history" and "heritage" appear interchangeably and with ambiguity in materials related to the show in Lusk. Deloria claims that "at the turn of the twentieth-century, Indian play helped preserve a sense of frontier toughness, communal warmth, and connection to the continent often figured around the idea of the authentic."[204] The pursuit of authenticity haunts western heritage performances like *The Legend*. Liza Nicholas claims definitions of authentic Westerness "influenced how people living within the space behaved."[205] And it is "this shared understanding of Westerness" has "manifested itself across a range of events, celebrations, and institutions in twentieth-century Wyoming."[206] Furthermore, Nicholas suggests this local identity of Westerness became conflated with the national identity of Americanness. She claims, "Wyomingites institutionalized westerness in the myriad ways that they remembered and represented themselves, and their expressions of self-identity became a source of knowledge about not only the West, but also about 'authentic' America itself."[207] The fraught quest for

Western authenticity is apparent in a 1987 article by Eva Bonsell Paris for the *Lusk Herald* about the headdress used in the show. War bonnets were and continue to be a common part of the costume for those playing Indian and an enduring element of the overgeneralization of tribal peoples. The article is a mix of information about the making of the item and pseudo-history about Native peoples. One might call it yellow journalism, fake news, or just a bit of a tall tale. "Tribes represented in the headdress include Sioux, Cheyenne, Chippewa, Oglala, Crow and Arapaho," it reads.[208] It is unclear from the article how each tribe appears in the piece and it is incredibly unlikely that the artist consulted members of these tribes. The story then veers into an ethnological-like lesson claiming: "At first, Indian chiefs did not wear full headdresses. Feathers indicated some degree of bravery, courage, skill, or noted some great feat. These attributes made them chief and hence most had many feathers. In some instances, other warriors wore as many feathers as the chief, but most wore one, two, or three."[209] The information and timeline of these claims are vague and are an example of the long tradition of generalizing the many distinct nations of Indigenous people. As Gerald Vizenor points out that erasing the tribal distinctions of Indigenous peoples of the began with contact and the misnomer "Indian."

The language in the article about the headdress assumes authority over Indigenous culture. However, the article contains misinformation. It suggests that they cannot use the traditional eagle feathers because the use was illegal due to federal protections. However, since 1962, enrolled members of federally recognized tribes could own, use, and wear eagle feathers obtained through a bureaucratic permitting process. Instead, for *The Legend*'s costume, "basic turkey feathers are dyed."[210] It acknowledges that the costume differed in other ways from what some may claim as traditional—it was shorter, had a chin strap, etc. Local, Darlene Gully made the piece, she "developed an interest in Indian lore when she and her husband were leading a

troop of Boy Scouts."[211] The article attempts to gain authority over the authenticity of the costume when it adds: "Some of her interest probably arises from the fact that Gully's grandfather was a full-blooded Chippewa Indian Chief."[212] In this case, the authenticity of the headdress relies on the maker's experience in the Boy Scouts as opposed to contact with Native cultures or relationships with Native peoples. This is not to diminish Gully's artistic skill, as the costume is impressive, and spending hundreds of hours to create such a costume piece shows dedication and skill. Instead, this criticism exemplifies the ease at which appropriating tribal identity, culture, and history can result in the erasure of Indigenous peoples.

Rayna Green purports, "Not only is the impersonation of Indians essential to American identity, but those who participate in these impersonations, for the most part, often believe deeply in that doing so that they admire and respect Indians."[213] In this sense, many of those who play Indian are unaware of or do not understand the negative effects of their actions. Players may believe they are providing a service such as educating the public about the Native peoples or preserving disappearing cultures. This is one of the reasons cultural appropriation practices are so paradoxical. Good intentions aside, these practices perpetuate stereotypes and contribute to misrepresentation of tribal peoples and cultures.

Another way the performance constructed authenticity includes claiming a Native leader endorsed the pageant. For example, according to promotional materials, in 1957 "Godfr[e]y Broken Rope and his Sioux Indians helped with the Indian scenes."[214] In a letter from Doc Reckling to Wyoming Governor Simpson, the former gossiped, "I was happy that Chief Broken Rope could be present with his regalia. I am sure it did much to the Chief's ego."[215] Godfrey Broken Rope was a Sicangu artist and Episcopal minister. He worked as a minister in Billings, Montana and at the Pine Ridge Reservation in South Dakota.[216] He and several people from Pine

Ridge Reservation performed dances on the street before the pageant. Sixty years later Broken Rope's visit appeared again as an endorsement of the show. In 2017, a reporter from *Wyoming Public Media* asked member of *The Legend* board about the use of negative stereotypes. He responded that a few years earlier Oglala Lakota elders had attended and were "very impressed…with how we portray both sides." The reporter checked with the tribal historic preservation officer for the Oglala Lakota who doubted the claim's veracity.[217]

The pageant used Broken Rope's one-time visit in 1957 to prove the show's authenticity and morality. In the case of one resident of Lusk, the illusion of authenticity can be simply claimed without any real proof. In 1959, to promote Lusk and *The Legend* pageant, one local spread word around that "a cache of old rifles had been discovered on an Indian reservation." After the *Lusk Herald* and the *Associated Press* picked up the story, the man admitted it was a hoax. To convince people of the find's authenticity the Luskite used acid to age blankets. He claimed he found the blankets wrapped around the vintage rifles (to prove their authenticity) which he displayed in the front windows of his hardware store in hopes of attracting attention.[218]

Going Native and Playing Indian

Going Native and playing Indian are distinct, but interrelated phenomena. While Playing Indian tends to be more temporary, going Native implies a more permanent appropriation and integration of Indigenous culture and identity by non-Natives. In addition, the former has been associated with national identity formation and the latter as an individual response to perceived ills of modern life, yet this distinction is complicated by significant overlap. Scholar Shari Huhndorf (Dena'ina) suggests that similar to Indian play "those who go Native frequently claim benevolence toward Native peoples, they reaffirm white dominance by making some (usually

distorted) vision of Native life subservient to the needs of the colonizing culture."[219] Huhndorf contends there are several differences between "going native," and "playing Indian," however. She clarifies that playing Indian is: "temporarily donning Native costume and emulating Native practices (real or invented)" in order to aid "various quests for identity and authenticity" while the instances of going Native Huhndorf studies were specific to the late nineteenth-century and "involved the more widespread conviction that adopting some vision of Native life in a more permanent way" as an antidote to aspects of modern life. But like Indian play, going Native allowed partakers an outlet "to maintain European-American racial and national identities."[220]

In many cases, non-Native experts with little or no contact with Native peoples mediate the authenticity of Native culture. "Playing Indian cut two ways, as whites garnered the power of the 'authentic' Indian for nationalist purposes and additionally denied American Indians that same empowering authenticity," writes English professor Laura Mielke.[221] In 1987, Doug Reynolds added Indian games and dances to the list of pageant events in Lusk. Reynolds, who worked as a Niobrara county agent, was also responsible for the addition of the "authentic" Indian Sign Language performed during the pageant. Reynolds' authority to provide tribal dances, games, and sign language came from the fact that "he has spent a large portion of his life studying one phase or another of Indian costume, dancing, singing and tribal customs."[222] His expertise is further supported in pageant materials by the claim: "At one time he was hired in Owyhee, NV to teach the Shoshone Indians the old customs of Indians."[223] It is unclear if any of Reynolds' knowledge came from relationships with actual tribal peoples and culture or if it was limited to "studying."

Portraying Indian characters as lacking the language skills to learn and speak English is a long-lived trope in literature and film. Since the first silent westerns graced the big screen,

Native characters appeared without voices. If they did speak it was with stereotypically stunted, sparse, and muddled speech patterns. *The Legend* promotional materials from 1999 claim, "In 1849 there weren't a whole bunch of red men that cottoned to our jargon," so "a few brave [non-Native] souls" learned Indian Sign Language.[224] "Just remember when that Indian's speakin' he just don't put the verbs in the right place."[225] These explanations aside, the fact remains that *The Legend* renders the Indian characters mute instead of giving them speaking roles. Many Indigenous peoples were and are multilingual. And the portrayal of Indian Sign Languages ignores that fact as well as the sign language's use in inter-tribal relations. This portrays Indian Sign Language as a dumbed down form of communication required to communicate with the Indian characters. This is an example of epistemic violence, a concept developed by postcolonial theorist Gayatri Spivak. In other words, this is violence in the form of silencing the marginalized by preventing them from speaking for themselves.[226]

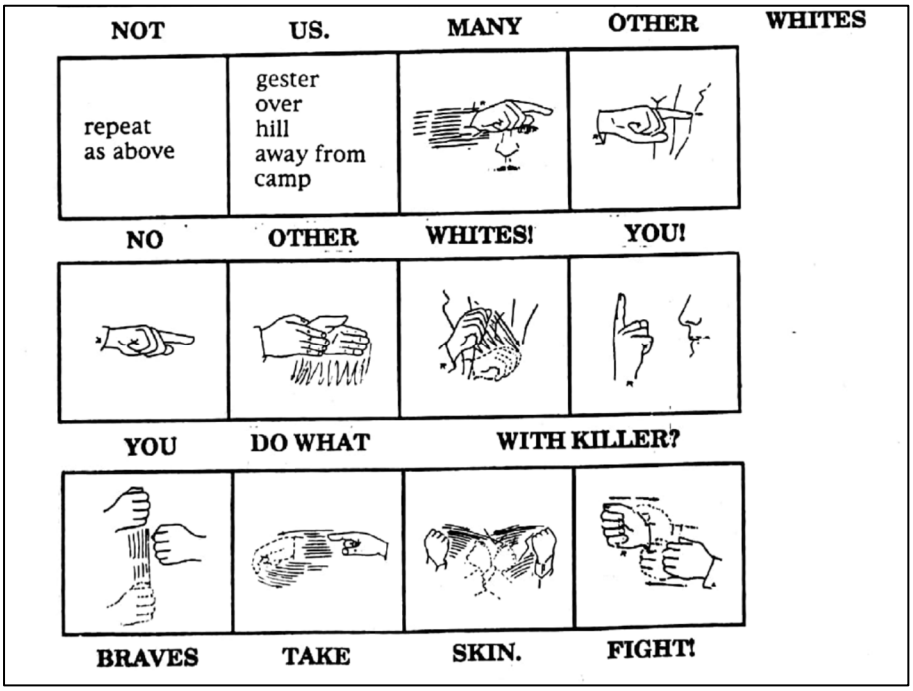


Figure 14. Indian Sign Language diagram included in program for *The Legend* [cropped].[227]

A non-Native source mediates the Indian Sign Language used in the production. The sign language images included in the event programs appear lifted from a book by William Tomkins. The dictionary style book also included the illustrations seen above. Tomkins himself first printed the book in 1926. According to the introduction, Tomkins lived near the Sioux Indian Reservation in Dakota Territory when he was a young man. He became interested in Indian Sign Language which resulted in the self-published guide. The introduction also includes evidence of vanishing Indian trope. It states:

> This language was not created by anybody living today. If it belongs to anybody it belongs to Americans, and it is for the purpose of having it carried on by the youth of the United States that this little volume is compiled.[228]

The book became popular with the Boy Scouts and even includes an endorsement from The Boy Scouts Association. This is another example of non-Native claims of authority over Native culture and the mediation of Native cultures through non-Native institutions and organizations.

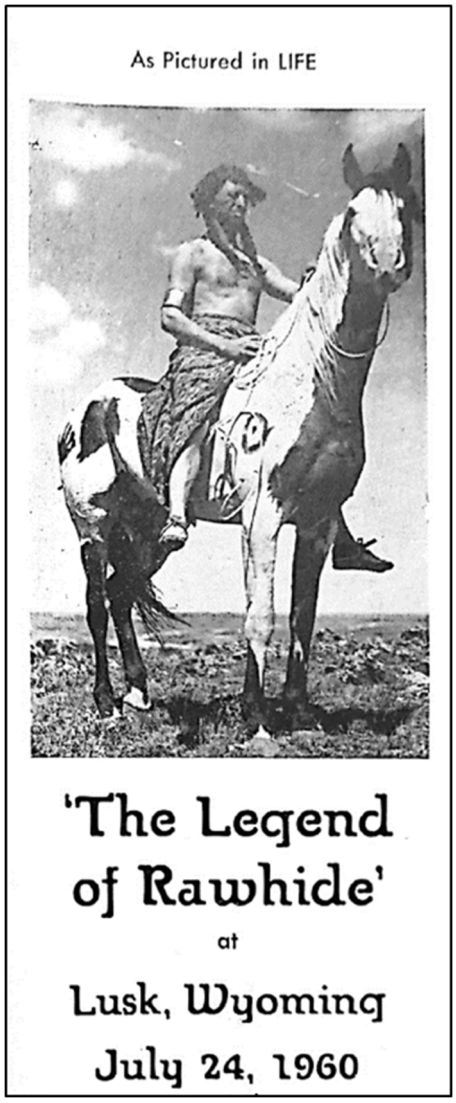


Figure 15. 1959 photo by *Life Magazine* of Jerry Scott included in 1960 event program [cropped].[229]

The "white Indian" or the non-Native guide to the Native world (who has gone Native and returned) is in the pageant, too. George, "the old Indian scout," serves as the group's guide.[230] "I been alivin' amongst 'em nigh on about 15 years," he says to establish his authority to interpret Native cultures and behaviors.[231] The character of George is the mediator and translator, and it is a role he can adopt because he has "gone native."[232] He is adamant, "If ya mind yer own business, nine times outa of ten they'll mind theirs."[233] Several times in the play the character of George corrects the rest of the group's misinterpretation of the Indian characters' behavior. When the assemblage hears something in the distance, they panic: "It's a tom-tom! An Indian tom-tom. They're gettin' ready for war!"[234] George quickly corrects, "it ain't the drum beat they used for makin' war.[235] Them beats is too slow. They're probably aprayin' for rain."[236] Raindance cliché aside, the use of the stereotypical drum is a standard in film and television. Kilpatrick explains, "the 'tom-tom' beat of drums signal to an American audience that Indians are about to appear. Actual Native forms of music are rarely heard."[237] Indeed, the tom-tom announces the arrival of Indian characters in the pageant.

Later in the show when an arrow lands in the emigrant camp, another panic ensues. Again, George is there to interpret for the group. "This ain't no war arrow. It'd have to be flamin.' This'n means we're gonna have company."[238] When the emissary from the Sioux arrives, George is the only member of the group that can converse with him through Indian Sign Language. When "an Indian rides in from the west. He grunts and sticks up his hand," George greets the visitor with the stereotypical: "How."[239] Yet, the visitor does not reply with spoken words. The narrator explains, "But the injun don't speak their language, he just stands there wavin' his arms and makin' signs."[240] Jacquelyn Kilpatrick explains that in early films "stereotypes of Native Americans were conveyed to a large degree by language or, perhaps more

importantly, the lack of language…Rarely were Indians heard…Most had little to say beyond the ubiquitous grunt."[241]

When speaking with the Sioux characters the wagon group's first instinct is to deny any wrongdoing. George informs the wagon train that the perpetrator is likely to be tortured, "They want his hide, and if I know Injuns they'll take it off while he's still livin'!"[242] The group of emigrants doesn't want to be complicit in torture, even if Clyde is guilty of murder. "One of our own men skinned alive! It isn't human…if they give him up they'll be just as guilty of torture as the Indians."[243] For the wagon leadership torture is the line in the sand. Although somehow the group feels no responsibility to admit to the murder of the woman or identify the perpetrator. They decide to fight instead of handing over Clyde to the Sioux characters for punishment. The pioneer characters form the customary circle of wagons. The fight ensues with lots of whooping and gunfire.

Clyde's uncle ends up wounded and some of the women in the group decide to help and grab guns. This horrifies Clyde: "They can't join in. They might get hurt. They're wimmin. It's alright for men—but wimmin."[244] In contrast to his feelings about emigrant women, apparently the murder of a woman by his own hands is acceptable if that woman is Indigenous. Clyde Pickett confesses to one of the wagon leaders, "Mr. Farley, I killed that squaw!"[245] However, the confession comes too late and the wagon occupants continue to fight. Pickett kisses his love interest Kate on the cheek and gives himself up. He is immediately glorified as a hero. "It took a brave man to do that, but he sure saved their necks," the narrator opines.[246] The wagon train makes a run for it to Ft. Laramie "leaving Clyde to a horrible death at the foot of the RAWHIDE BUTTES!"[247] The character of Clyde Pickett ends up tied to a tree and skinned alive. And that is how the performance ends with the perpetrator transformed into a hero and the slain Indian

woman forgotten. The reenactment's treatment of the female Indian character reflects the horrific real life pattern of murdered and missing Indigenous women. American culture continues to dehumanize Native characters at the same time Indigenous lives disappear every day in the U.S.

The Indian Princess

In *The Legend* the terms used to refer to the Sioux women are "squaw," "maiden," and "princess."[248] Just as the many other ethnic slurs used in the show such as redskin, heathen, and savage, the term squaw is used repeatedly in the pageant. "Them Sioux Indians didn't take it none too kindly when some fella shoots their Indian Princess," one program reads.[249] The Indian Princess is a well-worn myth and stereotype I discuss further in chapter six. Jaquelyn Kilpatrick describes the stereotype in film, "the Indian Princess wore a long, beaded and fringed buckskin dress and a beaded headband with one feather sticking straight up in the back."[250] Paradoxically, stereotypes of Native royalty co-existed with those of savagery and primitivism. In this sense, non-Native depictions of royalty idealized Native women at the same time othered them through portrayals as uncivilized or noble savages. In the case of the rawhide story, audiences can lament the loss of the female Indian character while simultaneously celebrating her elimination.

In addition to showing the slain female character as a princess,[251] she appears as a sexual object. For instance, Mae Urbanek, a Lusk local who was inspired to write a poem about the Legend, described the character as a "dreamy Indian girl."[252] According to Kilpatrick, "In Hollywood's westerns, the ultimate solution for a sexual relationship between an Indian and a white was that the Indian would have to die."[253] The play is ambivalent about the possibility of miscegenation. When Clyde begins another of his anti-Indian tirades, for instance, one of the party replies: "I hope you fall in love with an Indian princess or sumpin'."[254] Clyde is quick to

retort, “Yeh. I’d kill her before I had a chance to fall in love with her.”[255] Clyde’s impulse to murder Indians is complimented by the fear of loving an Indian woman.

The Legend reduces Indigenous women to squaws and princesses. And while the murdered woman is a princess, this does nothing to keep her alive.[256] She has no name. The supposed heroic acts of her murderer overshadow her life and death in the show immortalizing the murderer and allowing his memory to live on in the placename of the Rawhide Buttes. The killer is the hero who sacrifices his life for the march of progress which requires the destruction of Native lives and culture. Native women become collateral damage on the righteous road to Manifest Destiny.



Figure 11. Fleeta DeGering playing Indian for her part as "Squaw" in the 1947 pageant, from author's collection [cropped].

The Flaying Indian

> *Why do you tear me from myself?* Marsyas to Apollo in Ovid's *Metamorphosis*

> *Horror resides at the level of skin itself. Skin is at once the most fragile of boundaries and the most stable of signifiers.* Jack Halberstam in *Skin Shows*

> *He was skinned alive from head to foot and died in awful agony…They continued their grim work amid the screams of agony, while the blood flowed down over his body and crimsoned the green grass at his feet. Never was such punishment meted out to a human being. The Evening Bulletin* in *"Negro Skinned Alive,"* July 11, 1903

> *"They want his hide, and if I know them Injuns they'll take it off while he's still livin! Skinned alive!"* Eva Bonsell Paris, *Legend of the Rawhide Buttes*

Graphic violence has long drawn the attention of writers, artists, and audiences. Historically, the practice of human flaying appears in reference to ancient civilizations such as the Assyrians, Persians, and Romans as well as more modern nations such as twelfth-century England, fourteenth-century France, and the Ottoman Empire. Human flayings were often associated with armed conflicts exemplifying the horrors of wars or the savagery of the enemy. In other examples, flaying punished individuals worked as a public deterrent to certain behaviors or crimes. It often appears as a form of torture in response to an equally horrifying crime. "The function of the public torture and execution was to reveal the truth," suggests Michel Foucault in his treatise examining the history of punishment and the penal system.[257] Regardless of the

purpose, human flaying has long aroused revulsion and fascination—much like the modern horror entertainment industry.



Figure 12. “The Torment of Marsyas,” circa first or second century AD, photo by P. Vassiliadis [cropped], Wikicommons.[258]
Figure 13. The character of Clyde skinned alive, 2018, photo by the author [cropped].

Stories of human flaying have inspired artforms from classical Greek sculpture to Renaissance painting to modern television. The Italian painter, Titian, possibly inspired by the real-life flaying of the Venetian lawyer Marcantonio Bragadin in 1571 by Ottomans, painted the *Flaying of Marsyas*. It was based on the story of the Greek god, Apollo, and the satyr, Marsyas, in a tale told in Ovid’s *Metamorphosis*. Marsyas loses a musical contest to Apollo and as a result the god flays the satyr alive as punishment for his failure. While to modern audiences this torture may seem extreme, one might point out the hubris of challenging a god to a contest in the first place. Marsyas appears as a common subject of sculpture in Rome and Greece often depicted tied to a tree with his hands bound above his head. Likewise, in many of *The Legend*

performances over the years the character of Clyde appears tied to a tree with his hands above his head much like Marsyas. Moreover, Titian is not the only Old Master to depict human flaying in their work.



Figure 19. Close up of depiction of St. Bartholomew's flayed skin in Michelangelo's "The Last Judgement" [cropped], Wikicommons.[259]

The martyrdom and flaying of St. Bartholomew, the patron saint of tanners, frequently appears in religious art. One of the twelve apostles of Jesus, stories claim a king sentenced Bartholomew to death, sometimes it is a monarch from India or Turkey and other times Armenia. Bartholomew suffers subsequent beheading, crucifixion (maybe upside down), vivisection (or

possibly drowned) in various combinations and orders depending on the tradition. This flaying seems particularly attractive to artists which has inspired frescos, paintings, altar pieces, and sculptures by the likes of Michelangelo, Legros, and Lo Spagnoletto.



Figure 20. Statue in Milan Duomo of Saint Bartholomew draped in his own skin, Marco d'Agrate, 1562, photo by Miguel Hermoso Cuesta [cropped], Wikicommons.[260]

When the American writer Mark Twain visited Italy, the statue of St. Bartholomew in the Duomo Milan captured his attention which he remarked upon in his best-selling travel book, *The Innocents Abroad, or the New Pilgrims Progress.* Twain recalled:

> The figure was that of a man without a skin; with every vein, artery, muscle, every fiber and tendon and tissue of the human frame represented in minute detail. It looked natural, because somehow it looked as if it were in pain. A skinned man

> would be likely to look that way unless his attention was occupied with some other matter. It was a hideous thing, and yet there was a fascination about it somehow. I am very sorry I saw it, because I shall always see it now. I shall dream of it sometimes.[261]

The simultaneous reactions of horror and fascination to the graphic nature of the sculpture that Twain describes is apparent in modern entertainment such as film, television, and video games. Perhaps it is because such stories of torture depict the ultimate punishment and displays of pain. Gender and queer theorist Jack Halberstam, a major voice in queer theory, traces the importance of skin and its rupture in horror films in the book *Skin Shows*. "Skin houses the body and it is figured in the Gothic as the ultimate boundary, the material that divides the inside from the outside," explains Halberstam.[262] In the rawhide reenactment, the character of Clyde commits an unforgivable act—well almost unforgiveable. The character's loss of skin represents the high prices of such acts. The punishment is not just death, but the physical disarticulation of the body. The extremeness of the violence has other effects as well. It allows Clyde's compatriots to forgive him for murder and elevate the loss of his life as heroic—almost Christlike.

The character of Clyde plays a martyr in the winning of the West. In the 1991, *The Legend of Rawhide* edition of the *Lusk Herald* included a feature by Eva Bonsell Paris. In it, she extemporizes on the backstory of the character Clyde Pickett to excuse his murderous behavior because "most of the family had been massacred by Indians."[263] The deaths of his family had "left a mark on the boy" and as a result he was "bent on killing an Indian and one could hardly blame him."[264] According to Bonsell Paris his family had "their scalps lifted."[265] All this works to further erase Clyde's crime and absolve his violence against the Indian characters. In the end, Clyde becomes more like a saint than like a criminal. In other words, the act of skinning/sacrificing represents false penance which works to elide the guilt of future generations

of settlers. Moreover, after any responsibility or guilt is assuage, settler colonialist society laments the vanished Indian.

Clyde becomes a Jesus-like figure who sacrifices himself to save other members of the settler colonialist community. Scarified for his literal sins, Clyde absolves the rest of the wagon party (and by extension all non-Native emigrants) because of his bravery and willingness to sacrifice himself for Manifest Destiny. Although the group would probably not be in such danger had Clyde not killed another human being in the first place. "He had surrendered to save the wagon train," reads the 1957 pamphlet.[266] Clyde's own sins seemed absolved as his death erases his crime and in the process his victim as well. Michel Foucault suggests the publicly executed often become conflated with martyrs. Foucault explains: "A convicted criminal could become after death a sort of saint, his memory honored and his grave respected."[267] This sort of figure represents at least two conflicting meanings. "There were those for whom glory and abomination were not disassociated, but coexisted in a reversible figure," states Foucault.[268] In this sense, Clyde is part murderer of Indigenous people and part martyr for Manifest Destiny—both of which are necessary for the furthering of settler colonialism.

The skinning alive of Clyde has been and continues to be an important part of *The Legend* production. Dell Burke, a local madam, and businesswoman in Lusk, recalled hearing about Doc Reckling's plans for the theatrical recreation of the human flaying. "When Dell and the Doc happened to run into each other in the hospital waiting room, he told her, 'I've invented a knife that'll cut through the outer layer of ketchup-filled red underwear Clyde's gonna wear when the Indians skin him.' Dell was disgusted," writes author June Read.[269] The first year of the reenactment, Reckling made a full body cast of the actor playing Clyde, Forest Van Tassel, which when finished was "so realistic that, when the skin came off the face, the tongue popped

out."[270] At the end of this first performance the dummy was lit on fire.[271] One year, the head of the effigy fell off and rolled on the ground.[272] And then there was the time that a Highway Patrolman mistook the dummy for the real thing when he spied Reckling putting it in his car.[273]

The realistic skinning of Clyde enhanced the effects of horror and fascination felt by the audience. For example, Governor of Wyoming Milward Simpson, an ardent supporter, and his wife attended the show several times. In a letter to Doc Reckling from the summer of 1957, Simpson confessed, "The exemplification of the skinning of the young immigrant was almost too realistic for my dear wife…She liked all but that, and had to turn her head away. I am told you are the originator of that grisly scene, and personally I want to congratulate you on the excellence of the production."[274] Like Burke, some audiences members seemed more repulsed by the graphic violence of the performance than enthralled.

Advertisements and promotional materials agree that the climax of the show was the Indian characters flaying Clyde alive. In 1959, when Wyoming state representative, Jim Thompson, played the flayed party, plastic wrap appeared as skin and *Life Magazine* was there to photograph it.[275] In 1961, the plastic wrap was exchanged for a new method and the actor "received an application of skin-tinted corn plaster adhesive to be cut off as a bloody mess at the time of skinning."[276] When the pageant was revived in 1986 after a 21-year hiatus,[277] a dummy filled with straw was used and set on fire.[278]

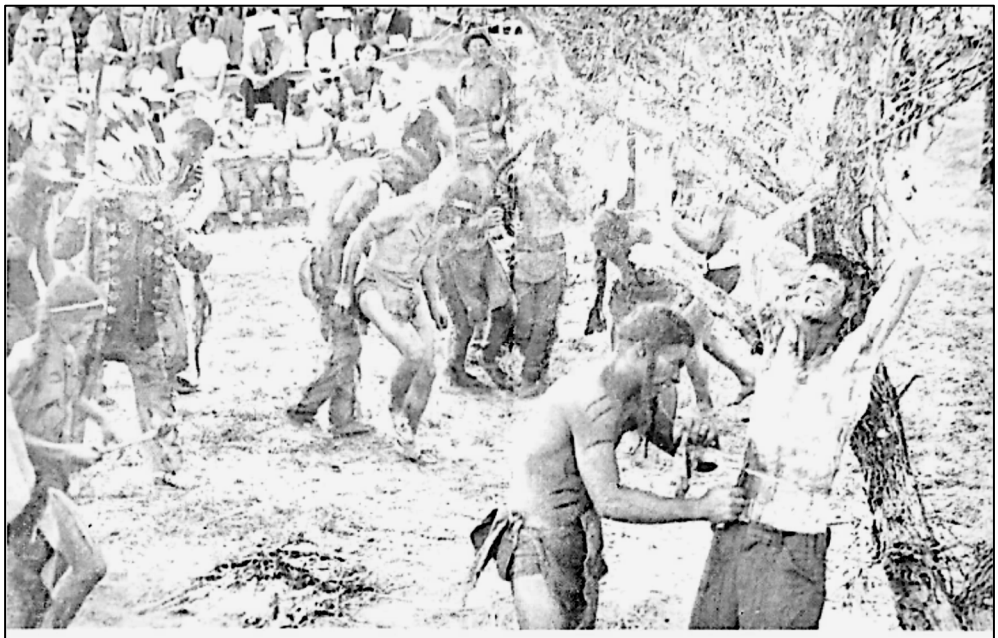


Figure 21. The flaying scene from the 1960 pamphlet [cropped, my emphasis].[279]

Vickie Lindner, a writer who attended and participated in the production in 1999, wrote in a pitch for an article to *Doubletake* magazine that: "I was invited to ride in the theatrical wagon train and shoot blanks at fake Indians, dyed red with ore from a hematite mine."[280] Lindner admits that there are many similar Western themed events around the West, "But the 'Legend of the Rawhide' pageant is the only one I know of that celebrates the murder of a racist white by Sioux."[281] She reveals, "the final flaying—grizzly even by Videogame standards—is accomplished by coating the Indian slayer with strips of moleskin and soaking them with blood-covered Ivory liquid so the whooping "Indians" can rip off his hide off convincingly."[282]

In a similar article Lindner pitched to the *Smithsonian Magazine,* she reveals, "in past pageants, strips of his bloody skin got tossed into the audience by the 'Indians.'"[283] Lindner interprets the pageant in terms of community identity, she explains:

> In a dying town the moral of the tale might have less to do with the story itself than with the ability to pull together and stay together in spite of hard times that the pageant represents. Yet there is a moral for both good and bad times in the slaying scene: Search for gold, but don't tramp other peoples' rights, don't disobey the will of your community…Indians are the Id, the pride, the untamed libido of this old, community.[284]

But the story is as important as the lessons it purportedly conveys. Professor of English Elizabeth Dillon examines theatre and performance in her book, *New World Drama: The Performative Commons in the Atlantic World, 1649-1949*. Dillon suggests performances of torture on the stage often aided in the creation of national identity: "The torture of an alien—a colonial relation—assisted in generating a new collective, namely, a national people united (from below) in affective and sensate terms."[285] This explanation for the use of performative torture bears striking similarities to the pursuits of national identity through playing Indian described in Deloria's work. However, in *The Legend* the common pattern is partly reversed with Clyde's torture. Regardless, the death of Clyde Pickett receives more attention than the unnamed Indian woman he murders. Pickett's death is important and lingered over in the play, the Native woman's murder is not. The erasure of the Native woman's murder works to maintain settler colonial hierarchy.

In contrast to Dillion's explanation, Jack Halberstam's study of *The Texas Chainsaw Massacre 2*, asserts that "the shredding, ripping, or tearing of skin is a spectacle of identity performance and its breakdown."[286] Does the skinning of Clyde represent the breakdown of the Euro-emigrant identity so that it can be reassembled as that of a true American? "I am suggesting that skin in slasher films represents the blurred boundary between representation and the real…flayed hide—these are metonymy for the uncovering of a psychic wound that cannot always be sutured," explains Halberstam.[287] Is it the inability to "suture" the historical facts of

the West with the imagined histories residents of Lusk performs each year? Or is it an inability to reconcile the widening gap between national character and local identity? It is likely that both are a factor. Ultimately, the reenactment channels the local communities' anxieties about the past and the future.

Liza Nicholas explains, "shared memories of the Old West both unified the community and supplied an opportunity for a shared rebellion against the Progressive agenda."[288] However, Nicholas points out that the desire to live out fantasies of cowboys and Indians was not without paradox in Wyoming. She suggests:

> The tears they shed over the death of the old, true, and authentic West were perhaps real, but it was an ambivalent mourning at best, for it was their memories of a lost West that gave Wyomingites traditions, culture, and a reason to celebrate in a unified grief in the first place. Their emerging culture of nostalgia enabled them to enjoy the Old West's doom as they lamented its loss.[289]

So, it is in part, the amalgam of "unified grief" and the "shared rebellion" against progressive change. These cultural constructions are complicated and hidden, but ultimately the master they serve is all too familiar—white supremacy.

The rawhide stories almost always end with the skinning of the murderer. Some accounts adlib details such as adding a burial to the end of the story or claiming the mother of the murderer dies of grief several days later on the trail. However, the wagon train always escapes. The settler-emigrants simply move on. In Lusk's version, the skinning of Clyde acts as a distraction which allows the slow-moving wagons times to escape to Fort Laramie (which is ironically back the way they came). Apparently, the Indians become so engrossed in the work of skinning a man alive that they forget all about the rest of the wagon train. This adds to level of savagery of the Indian characters. Skinning a single man is not a task for many people at once after all, and a few at most, would have the room to work upon a single body. In one version of

the trail legend, the wagon train stays long enough to watch the Indians dance around with flaps of skin. Shouldn't they stop standing around and get to escaping?

Residents of Lusk have defended any criticism of the *Legend of Rawhide* by claiming the show is history and their heritage. No doubt many fail to see how the show could possibly do any harm. Unfortunately, this is just not the case. And one might even suggest that those harmed most by the underlying current of racism throughout the show are the residents of Lusk themselves. The town, for example, misses out on fostering relationships, including in an economic sense, with near-by Native communities. In 2019, when writer Jennifer Percy asked the person playing the Medicine Man role about possible criticism of the show, he responded: "They are just actors. Do they get mad at people on TV for dressing up like a transvestite? As far as I know, they don't…It's actually depicting the white people as the bad people. They're the ones who started the conflict. So if we're being racist, I guess we're being racist against the pioneers."[290] At one point during Percy's visit to the Lusk show, a teenager yelled at performers, "Hey, this is blackface—this is racist!"[291] When Percy pressed the teen further, he indicated he was "Just kidding."[292] Percy also asked Valerie Brown Eyes, a Native woman from the Pine Ridge Reservation, if she knew of Lusk's reenactment. Brown Eyes replied, "No one told us about this. No one asked our permission. There are laws about this. You know, I used to get really mad when white people pretended to be black."[293] Stories have the power to perpetuate the worst parts of the deepest held beliefs, but we also have the power to change the stories we tell. After all the show—the town—has changed a lot over the years. Scenes change with some added and some removed. New characters like Kit Karson, Jim Bridger, Father DeSmet, and a band of prostitutes, for instance, now appear in the show. So, the story *can* change. But Lusk needs to

decide what kind of story they really want to tell about their themselves as a community and as individuals.

When I attended the *Legend of Rawhide* in Lusk during the summer of 2018, there was at least one family with young children from the Wind River Reservation in attendance. The mother of a nine-year-old girl was at a loss as how to explain the representations of Native peoples in the show to her daughter. She revealed on social media that during the show the nine-year-old was very confused asking: "mom why are they doing this? Are they doing this to make fun of us? Or because they respect us?"[294] The mother, Cherokee Brown, doubted that respect for tribal peoples was part of the show and wondered if all the talk about receiving tribal endorsement for the show was true. If local tribes did approve, "Why we're we the ONLY Natives there? And not one Native in the cast??" She asked. Brown admitted, "we we're all so confused and sick to our stomachs."[295] Herb Welsh, a Native man from Wind River Reservation who also watched the show, was less confused. He posted, "here in Lusk Wyoming, watching an unimaginable racist portrayal of Native human beings, referred to as heathen blood thirsty savages…In this 'legend' Our Native ancestors are referred to as Heathen Red skins."[296] And there it is. Lusk's historical fantasy is another's unimaginable nightmare.

CHAPTER THREE

IMAGINED HISTORIES AND BLACK EMPIRE

Black Empire in the American Literary Imagination, 1899-1938

> *Any real change implies the breakup of the world as one has always known it, the loss of all that gave one an identity, the end of safety. And at such a moment, unable to see and not daring to imagine what the future will now bring forth, one clings to what one knew, or dreamed that one possessed. Yet, it is only when a man is able, without bitterness or self-pity, to surrender a dream he has long cherished or a privilege he has long possessed that he is set free—he has set himself free—for higher dreams, for greater privileges.* James Baldwin in *Nobody Knows My Name*

> *The isolation, the separateness is always part of any utopia, and it was…the whole idea of paradise, the safe place, the place full of bounty, where no one can harm you. But in addition to that, it's based on the notion of exclusivity. All paradises, all utopias are defined by who is not there, by the people who are not allowed in.* Toni Morrison in *Paradise*

In 1963, on the steps of the Lincoln Memorial, vocalist and activist Mahalia Jackson cried out to Martin Luther King, Jr., to "tell them about the dream," and as he did centuries of fighting for Black humanity in the U.S. came into sharp focus. King went on to describe an imaginary world defined by freedom, equality, and unity. "By considering our human capacity to create and conjure a better world into existence, we have the potentiality to reorder the coordinates of our lives," explain scholars Tiffany Lethabo King, Jenell Navarro, and Andrea Smith.[297] This reordering or "breakup of the world" as Baldwin describes meets the undoing of colonial elements in the consideration of Black and Native experiences and histories in relation to each other. This approach emphasizes the experiences of BIPOC peoples living American dreams and nightmares.

Settler colonialism and white supremacy in the U.S., including in the West, comprises Indigenous genocide and dispossession *as well as* slavery and Jim Crow. Examining these stories together works to decolonize history and challenge white supremacy, both of which are goals of this dissertation. Furthermore, segregating the histories and experiences of Native peoples and the enslaved and their descendants obscures the interrelated structures of settler colonialism and white supremacy. In contrast, placing these histories and experiences in relation to each other offers new connections and insights into ways of undoing and challenging these structures.[298] The Indigenous scholar, Jodi Byrd (Chickasaw Nation) explains, for example:

> That cacophony of competing struggles for hegemony within and outside institutions of power, no matter how those struggles might challenge the state through loci of race, class, gender, and sexuality, serves to misdirect and cloud attention from the underlying structures of settler colonialism that made the United States possible as oppressor in the first place. As a result, the cacophony produced through U.S. colonialism and imperialism domestically and abroad often coerces struggles for social justice for queers, racial minorities, and immigrants into complicity with settler colonialism.[299]

As Byrd points out, settler colonialism and white supremacy continue to maintain their influence in American history and institutions in complex and contradictory ways. "The history of the United States is a history of settler colonialism—the founding of a state based on the ideology of white supremacy, the widespread practice of African slavery, and a policy of genocide and land theft," explains historian and activist Roxanne Dunbar-Ortiz in *An Indigenous Peoples' History of the United States*.[300] However, acknowledging and understanding the genocidal origins of the American nation is important not only to history, but in many ways, it is directly related to issues of sovereignty and equity in the U.S. today.

American Studies as a field investigates the promises of the American nation as well as its contradictions and failures. The discipline demands the interrogation of the relationship

between American claims to democracy and equality and the genocidal inequities of its beginnings and how those origins, or the denial of those origins, shape the U.S. and the discipline today. Historian George Lipsitz suggests the focus of the field on the U.S.'s contradictions have produced significant scholarship. Lipsitz explains:

> Many of the most generative frameworks and paradigms in American Studies have emanated from contradictions between the national culture's bright promises and its bitter betrayals, from the paradox of the state's proclamation of a Manifest Destiny characterized by conquest and colonization…Confronting these cruel contradictions and painful paradoxes has made American Studies into a never completed work of living sculpture, a place where strangers can meet, where ideas are aired, where problems are diagnosed and where solutions are imagined, envisioned and enacted.[301]

American Studies' malleability creates opportunities to further scholarship that brings together Black and Indigenous stories, histories, and epistemologies. Furthermore, American Studies, comparative racialization, and decolonization intersect in examining the "cruel contradictions" of conquest faced by BIPOC peoples in the United States. Correspondingly, my project looks at the failure of the American West, and the Equality State specifically, to live up to its promise as a "good place" for many Black Americans. Unfortunately, Black residents in Wyoming faced discrimination, blackface, and violence during the twentieth-century which affected the viability of Black space in the state. In fact, it is my contention that many of the challenges met by the community of Empire, Wyoming are directly related to the pervasiveness of settler colonialism, white supremacy, and anti-Black racism in the American West at this time. The creation of Black space in the U.S. disrupts settler colonialism and white supremacy's attempts, whether through discrimination like redlining or violence like lynching, to control Black bodies and spaces. This idea, that Black space disrupts settler colonialism and white supremacy, is not unlike the subversion of Native stereotypes by Native women I discuss in chapter six.

My dissertation examines the relationship between ethnic play, settler colonialism, and white supremacy in early twentieth-century Wyoming. In chapter two, I focus on the role of playing Indian in maintaining the structures of settler colonialism and white supremacy and the absences of Native peoples in both physical and cultural spaces in Wyoming. Correspondingly, the following two chapters address the physical and cultural presences of Empire, an all-Black[302] community in Wyoming, in addition to the absences of Black Americans in cultural spaces throughout the state in the first half of the twentieth-century. Chapters three and four put the history of Empire, an intentional Black community in Wyoming from 1908 to 1920, into conversation with Black speculative fiction written by Sutton Griggs and George Schuyler around the same time. Empire, Wyoming was a homesteading settled by two extended Black families from Nebraska the Speeses and the Taylors. In chapter three, specifically, I explore the creation of Black space, in literature and history, as a response to white supremacy and anti-Black racism. Griggs and Schuyler imagine Black nations as an escape from white supremacy, while the Black residents of Empire, Wyoming conjured, briefly at least, their Black space into reality in the American West. While chapter four focuses on the widespread use of blackface to maintain white supremacy in Wyoming, in addition to the appearance of blackface and lynching in the literary worlds of Sutton Griggs and Georgy Schuyler. This approach employs a comparative racialization framework that sees Native and Black experiences, histories, and epistemologies come together to provide a more nuanced understanding of the structures of settler colonialism and white supremacy.

One reason I place the story of Black Empire after the examination of redface by non-Natives in chapters one and two, and before the study of playing Indian by Native peoples in chapters five and six is to disrupt the usual comparative analytics employed in studies of U.S.

settler colonialism. In this way, the experiences of Black peoples disrupt the binary of settler/Native in examinations of the American West and settler colonialism. Moreover, the focus on the creation of liberating and sovereign Black spaces in chapter three engages in thinking about what African American studies scholar Jared Sexton terms the "unthought of sovereignty."[303] Sexton points out the problematics of land-based sovereignty and decolonization projects because such projects fail to address anti-Black racism and leave Blacks out of such projects because of the latter's lack of a land-base in the U.S.

The writer Sutton Griggs lived in the West and it was in this same place—Texas—that he imagined his Black empire. Likewise, for the Black Americans who settled in Empire, it was the West of eastern Wyoming that offered the promise of Black utopia. But Wyoming was not the welcoming place that some may have imagined it to be. One challenge facing Blacks in Wyoming at this time were the stereotypes spread throughout the state by blackface entertainment.

Literary Black Empires in the West and Beyond

African American literary critic Winston Napier locates American Black aesthetics as "deriving significantly from [a] reformative spirit and, accordingly, as regulated by a need to engage expressive culture as a form of protest."[304] He explains that writers such as Langston Hughes, Zora Neale Hurston, and George Schuyler created literary works which built the foundations of the African American canon that "provided the Black community lessons in identity and intellectual responsibility."[305] Although many Black writers would not find a better world in everyday American life, they created Black utopian spaces in their work. In this sense, the exclusionary nature of utopias—literary or literal—provide useful insight into Black

experiences in the American West. Literary critic Fredric Jameson, for instance, explains "utopian spaces are thus totalities, whatever their scale; they are symbolic of a world transformed, and as such they must posit limits, boundaries between the utopian and the nonutopian."[306] As writer Toni Morrison suggests in *Paradise*, a story about a fictional Black community in Oklahoma, utopia is defined by exclusion and separation. Morrison imagines the Black town of Ruby secluded from the rest of the country. Inside this Black space away from the dominant society, Morrison shifts focus to inter-racial, generational, and gender conflicts within the town where Black and multiracial peoples fight against each other as well as outsiders. Perhaps the fact that Morrison wanted to call the book *War*, suggests social and racial hierarches are a deeper part of the human experience than most of us would like to think.[307] Which raises the following questions: How can analyses of spaces within settler colonial states address the complexities of the hierarchies ordering and disordering American places and spaces? Comparative racialization approaches work to answer such questions by exposing the ways settler colonialism and white supremacy create antagonism within and between marginalized groups.

Responses to settler colonialism and white supremacy converge in the Black and Native pursuits of safe and sovereign spaces. Similarly, W.E.B Du Bois in "Criteria for Negro Art," asks:

> What do we want? What is the thing we are after? …We want to be Americans, full-fledged Americans, with all the rights of other American citizens. But is that all? Do we want simply to be Americans? Once in a while through all of us flashes some clairvoyance, some clear idea, of what America really is. We who are dark can see America in a way that white Americans can not. And seeing our country thus, are we satisfied with its present goals and ideals?[308]

The answer to Du Bois' question is a resounding "No." Instead, Du Bois situates Black art in the imaginary motivated by "a vision of what the world could be if it were really a beautiful world" and "of a new desire to create."[309] Paradoxically, imaginary Black spaces often reflect the contradictions of the desires to be both part of and apart from the American nation. On one hand is the desire to gain full access to the rights afforded by American citizenship; and on the other, the need to create Black space that provides protection from the racism and violence that is part of the Black experience in the U.S.

Black speculative fiction's role in imagining Black futures makes it quite useful to my discussion of the inclusion and exclusion of Black Americans in the American West. This interplay between absence and presence, inside and outside, unifies my dissertation. Exploring these questions of absences and presences through comparative racialization frameworks helps illuminate the similarities and differences of marginalized groups in settler colonial nations. In contrast to the imaginary histories and cultural spaces in chapters one and two where ethnic play fills the absences of Native peoples in Wyoming, in this section, I look at how Black writers inside and outside the West responded to white supremacy by imagining Black empires apart from the American nation. Moreover, my research indicates at the same time blackface fills Black cultural absences in Wyoming, the community of Empire worked toward the creation their own spaces in twentieth-century Wyoming.

The writer Sutton Griggs wrote one of the earliest known works of American Black speculative fiction.[310] Griggs was born the son of enslaved parents in 1872. He wrote several books which he often sold door to door—a practice used by Black authors to circumvent publishing houses unwilling to published and sell their work. Philosopher and social critic Cornell West suggests the novel, *Imperium in Imperio: A Study of the Negro Race Problem*,

published in 1899, is the "first literary portrayal of a Black revolutionary movement" in the U.S.[311] The novel is about a secret Black government that exists within the United States, the titular Latin phrase translates to "empire within an empire." Interestingly, a similar phrase "nation within a nation" describes the relationship between American tribal nations and the U.S. government. Placing the Black space in Griggs' novel in relation to Native sovereignty suggests that both projects work to undo settler colonialism by creating anti-colonial spaces.

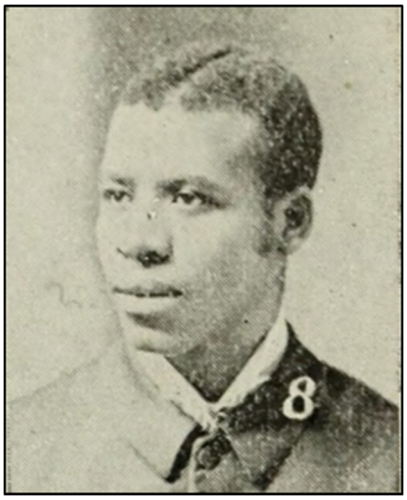


Figure 22. "The United Negro: His Problems and His Progress, Containing the Addresses and Proceedings the Negro Young People's Christian and Educational Congress, held August 6-11," 1902, Garland Penn, 1902 [cropped], Wikicommons.[312]

The plot of *Imperium in Imperio* follows the lives of two American Black men, Belton Piedmont, and his foil Bernard Belgrave. The two characters' lives parallel each other beginning when they attend the same school as children. Piedmont sees little opportunities in life, while in contrast, life affords Belgrave with many advantages throughout his formative years. Many years later, the men meet again as adults when they are both part of the Imperium which is "another government, complete in every detail, exercising the sovereign right of life and death over its

subjects."[313] The group believes in the Jeffersonian ideals of self-sufficiency, self-government, and individual responsibility, and the pursuit of these ideals is deadly serious.[314] The password for the clandestine Black government, for instance, is "Equality or Death."[315] This phrase echoes Patrick Henry's famous 1775 speech, "Give Me Liberty or Give Me Death."

The two men come together through the Imperium but are at odds when it comes to the future of the Black community. Belgrave then proposes a violent coup to take over the state of Texas. In contrast, Belton Piedmont advocates for a policy of peace and assimilation into the existing U.S. nation. A dilemma eerily like those faced by many tribal nations during the nineteenth- and early twentieth-centuries. In the end, the secret government votes in favor of Bernard Belgrave's plan. As a result, Piedmont resigns from his brief stint at the organization, however, the cost of leaving the Imperium is death. Belton Piedmont life as well as the cause for assimilation come to an end. For the Imperium, the future of the Black community relies on separating from the U.S. A few decades later, the writer George Schuyler picked up Griggs' theme of creating a Black nation.

Often remembered today for his political conservatism and the strong anticommunist sentiment he adopted later in his life, George Schuyler was a writer and journalist. Two speculative fiction serials, *The Black Internationale: Story of Black Genius Against the World* and *Black Empire: An Imaginative Story of a Great New Civilization in Modern Africa* comprise Schuyler's novel *Black Empire*. Between 1936 and 1938, the *Pittsburgh Courier*, a widely circulated weekly Black newspaper, published the serials under the penname Samuel Brooks.

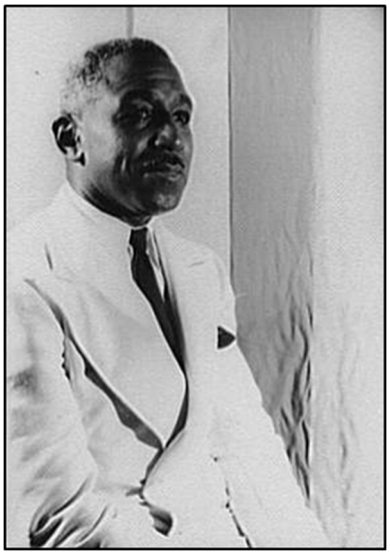


Figure 23. George Schuyler, photo by Carl Van Vechten, n.d., Wikicommons.[316]

Like *Imperium in Imperio* by Sutton Griggs, the plot of *Black Empire* centers around a secret Black organization in the U.S. This satire begins with the main character, a Black journalist named Carl Slater, witnessing a murder after which the murderer abruptly confronts Slater and introduces himself as Dr. Henry Belsidus. The doctor is the leader of a secret Black cabal, the Black Internationale. The group hopes to expel all non-Blacks from Africa, resettle Black Americans there, and then gain world dominance. Belsidus quickly recruits Slater into the movement and he becomes embroiled in a world of espionage and adventure. Belsidus beseeches Slater to join him exhorting; "You can do much to aid the cause of Negro liberation, not only in America, but throughout the world. White world supremacy must be destroyed, my lad, and it will be destroyed."[317] In contrast to Griggs' Black empire in Texas, Schuyler's Black nation moves beyond the borders of the United States back across the Atlantic Passage. Both novels agree, however, that one solution to white supremacy and anti-Black racism is the creation of a separate Black nation.

According to Dr. Belsidus, the Black Internationale was "scattered all over the world" and comprised of young Blacks who are "intellectuals, scientists, engineers."[318] Such members were "mentally the equal of the whites," he explained.[319] Under Belsidus' management the organization made scientific advancements in agriculture, engineering, and manufacturing. Additionally, the group accumulated stores of wealth and set up its own airplane factory. Furthermore, Black Internationale had several ships under its command including the *SS Nat Turner*, the *SS Sojourner Truth*, and the *SS Phyllis Wheatley*.[320] This last detail, shows the group's agency to name important pieces of material culture after Black heroes.

The journalist Carl Slater is shocked and amazed at the existence of the Black Internationale and its accomplishments. However, he questions the brutality of the group's mission which involves murder on a grand scale. But Dr. Belsidus replies:

> "Of course, it's murder…What of it? What are a few paltry lives compared to the goal we seek? Murder. Hah! Haven't they murdered millions of Black people? If we murdered one of them every day, it would take us several centuries to catch up, Slater."[321]

Arguably both Griggs and Schuyler's imaginary Black nations adopt the patterns of Western imperialism. Yet there is a distinction between settler colonial expansion and the desire for safe Black space in a country rife with anti-Black racism. Black space as an expression of agency and sovereignty does not equate to the dispossession wrought by settler colonialism. Although it exists within settler colonial space, the existence of Black space in the U.S. also disrupts settler colonialism. Gender and race scholar Tiffany Lethabo King explains, "White colonial and settler colonial discourse structure the ways that people think about and simultaneously forget the ways that Black and Native death are intimately connected."[322] In other words, equating the creation of

Black space with settler colonialist spaces obscures slavery and Black genocide. In many ways, death is where BIPOC experiences in settler societies converge.

Ultimately, the Black Internationale succeeds in expelling non-Blacks from Africa and the organization sets out to build its own nation in the decolonized country. In this case, it is the expulsion of Westerners from Africa that allows Africa to become the Black space imagined in the story which is an important distinction. Colonized Africa was not the space the group desired because the Black Internationale wanted to rebuild Black space after undoing the colonial elements of colonized Africa. The Black Internationale wanted Africa without non-Blacks. In this sense, exclusion defines this Black space. Similarly, *Imperium in Imperio* creates its Black empire by expelling non-Blacks from Texas. Perhaps Griggs' Black Texas was too close to the U.S. for George Schuyler's Black empire. As in settler colonialism, building a new nation in these novels depends on taking control of space and the exclusion of previous residents. This highlights the ways in which challenges to white supremacy take different forms for different historically marginalized groups. However, the creation of Black space also reads as decolonizing work which works to undo settler colonialism and rebuild something else in its place. To illustrate, while both Griggs and Schuyler's Black nations reproduce settler colonialism in many ways, Schuyler ends his satire with a warning for Black empire-builders. He cautions:

> And now a word of warning to the Black people of the world. You have a great empire created out of Black brains and strength…You must not make the mistake of the white men and try to enslave others, for that is the beginning of every people's fall. You must banish race hatred from your hearts, now that you have your own land.[323]

Schuyler's warning endorses land ownership and Black empire-building but draws the line at the use of human bondage to create a new nation. George Schuyler's warning seems to suggest an alternative to U.S. settler colonialism leaving space for the hope for a better world. In *Black*

Empire, the success of the new Black world relies on avoiding the genocidal mistakes of America's past. But nation-building is rife with contradictions and complications. Historian Kendra Field[324] explains, for example:

> Like the settlement of white migrants that preceded and outlasted this movement, African-American settlement was made possible by federal expansion and the dissolution of Indian Territory that began with the Civil War and ended with the Dawe's Commission's allotment of collectively held Indian lands. But this turn-of-the-century movement of African descended southerners constituted a strategic, collective response by freedpeople and their families to the stunning violence and exclusion of the post-Reconstruction South.[325]

As Field points out, acquiring dispossessed Indigenous lands allowed Black communities to escape the South and build their own spaces in the West. This moment connects to what Tiffany Lethabo King, Jenell Navarro, and Andrea Smith term "otherwise ontologies," which allow scholars a "way to look beyond the coordinates of settler, anti-Black modes of being."[326] Such frameworks bring together Black agency and Native dispossession together in complex ways.

Black Empire and Sovereignty

The question of whether to create a separate Black nation or assimilate into the U.S. is central to *Imperium in Imperio*. Sutton Griggs lays out two possible plans for Black Americans in the novel: Assimilation into the U.S. or establishment of an independent Black state. Join or secede. The character Bernard Belgrave argues that slavery had not truly ended but simply adapted to new circumstances as Jim Crow. In contrast, Belton Piedmont advocates for Black assimilation, he exclaims:

> My impression is that the negro will never leave this country. The day for the wholesale exodus of nations is past. We must, then, remain here. As long as we remain here as a separate and distinct race we shall continue to be oppressed. We must lose our identity. I, therefore, urge that we abandon the idea of becoming anything noteworthy as a separate and distinct race and send the word forth that we amalgamate.[327]

In this story, the plan to assimilate requires an abandonment of Black identity. This is a plan that would fail in a world with racial hierarchies, thus Griggs highlights the impossibility of a post-racial world. Belgrave counters with a proposal that includes making the existence of the Imperium known to the non-Black world, adopting a stance of freedom or death, and allowing four years in which to secure equity in the U.S. However, if these strategies fail, he suggests:

> In case we fail by these means to secure our rights and privileges we shall all, at once, abandon our several homes in the various other states and emigrate in a body to the State of Texas, broad in domain, rich in soil and salubrious in climate. Having an unquestioned majority of votes we shall secure possession of the State government.[328]

The Imperium choses the West as its future home. Fascinatingly, the initial plan is to gain control of Texas is through voter enfranchisement. The West's reputation as a place with lots of land and lots of possibilities made it an alluring alternative to the South where Blacks faced racial terror and economic oppression as well as the urban North where industrialism and population densities made the idea of wide open spaces preferable to many. For Griggs,' Texas becomes a site to express the desire for Black space. However, these literary desires connect to the real need for equity in the U.S. To illustrate, literary critic and historian Blake Allmendinger[329] suggests the desires for a Black nation in *Imperium* provide "the political sovereignty that they [Blacks] had long been denied" in real-world America.[330] Allmendinger further explains:

> Bernard wants to establish an empire within an empire, as the title of the novel suggests. He espouses a racial version of Manifest Destiny, claiming that the seizure of Texas and the war on whites is a justified cause. In the end, however, he becomes the reverse mirror image of his racist oppressor. He campaigns on a platform of African racial supremacy, divine right to the land, and military violence as a solution to political and racial disputes.[331]

However, Allmendinger's reading that the Black Texas in the novel is a "reverse mirror image" of the U.S. fails to account for the limited options available for Blacks in the U.S. Ultimately, the

proposition to exist as a "nation within a nation"[332] fails. There is little room to express Black sovereignty when the white supremacy and anti-Black racism of the American nation surrounds Black spaces and peoples.

Black Skin White

Just as compelling as *Black Empire*, is a second piece of speculative fiction by George Schuyler. This novel centers around a medical procedure that can turn Black skin white. *Black No More: Being an Account of the Strange and Wonderful Workings of Science in the Land of the Free, AD 1933-1940* is a satire about American race relations published in 1931. The novel features a Black scientist who creates a medical procedure to alter the appearance of skin tone. The story lampoons the very idea of racial purity in the United States. Schuyler, for instance, begins the novel with a bold dedication: "This book is dedicated to all Caucasians in the great republic who can trace their ancestry back ten generations and confidently assert that there are no Black leaves, twigs, limbs or branches on their family trees."[333] Before the story even begins, Schuyler mocks constructions of race and ideas about racial purity in the U.S. The imaginary medical procedure in the novel attempts to eliminate racial signifiers by literally erasing the appearance of Blackness. The story suggests by changing the appearance of the skin, the country would become a melting pot. It is strangely evocative of Captain Henry Pratt's infamous phrase: "Kill the Indian, Save the Man." However, the idea that changing the outward appearance of the skin equates with the erasure of Blackness is problematic. Afterall, Black history and culture are much more than skin deep.

The main character in *Black No More* is Max Disher, a Black man. In the beginning of the novel, a female love interest rejects Disher because of his skin color. When he learns of a

new cosmetic procedure developed by a Dr. Crookman, Disher decides to change his appearance. Afterwards, he intends to live his life as Matthew Fisher a member of the dominant society. "Sure, it was taking a chance, but think of getting white in three days! No more jim crow. No more insults. As a white man he could go anywhere, be anything he wanted to be, do most anything he wanted to do, be a free man at last," explains Max Disher.[334] In the story, without black skin the protagonist experiences freedom for the first time including the ability to safely exist in non-Black spaces. He exclaims: "God! What an adventure! What a treat it would be to mingle with white people in places where as a youth he had never dared to enter. At last he felt like an American citizen."[335] Schuyler's satire gets to the heart of the harsh reality of the inaccessibility of full American citizenship for Blacks, both now and in the past.

In the novel, Disher/Fisher sheds the existential shackles of living as a Black man in the U.S. Crookman's "chromatic emancipation" becomes extremely popular.[336] Opponents of the procedure try to intimidate people to scare them away, but "these people were in no mood to be trifled with. A lifetime of being Negroes in the United States had convinced them that there was great advantage in being white."[337] Therefore, any Black person able to afford the painless medical procedure can now pass as part of the dominant culture. In the end, however, a world without race, like all utopias, does not last.

In contrast to the ending in *Imperium in Imperio*, the end of Schuyler's *Black No More* suggests a much different conclusion. The Black population does not need to create a new nation or leave the U.S.—the black population disappears by physically removing signifiers of race. It's not geographic space or national borders that change but the appearances and perceptions of skin color. In this story, the Black characters do not need to escape to the West because race is confused to the point of instability. In the end, Helen and Max Fisher live happily ever after, and

the preferred skin hue trends toward an ambiguous bronze color causing many people to artificially stain their skin to receive the ideal tanned look. "Everybody that was anybody had a stained skin. A girl without one was avoided by the young men; a young man without one was at a decided disadvantage, economically and socially. A white face became startlingly rare. America was definitely, enthusiastically mulatto-minded," the novel reads.[338] Schuyler's satire about the construction of race highlights the arbitrariness of skin color preferences by comparing it to the fickle natures of fashion and taste and without outward racial appearances and signifiers of race disguised, racial hierarchies arbitrarily shift and destabilize. Unfortunately, in the real world racial hierarchies remain in place complicating desires for inclusion/exclusion. This tension between inclusion and exclusion appears in the history of the Black homesteading community of Empire, Wyoming.

Empire resident Russell Taylor advocated against segregation prior to moving to Wyoming. In 1906, the *Lawrence Democrat*, the local newspaper in Lawrenceburg, Tennessee, reported on the happenings in the local Presbyterian community. It reported there had been an effort to segregate the synods, or church councils. It was Russell Taylor who "won the fight" against the attempt to segregate the Presbyterian church leadership.[339] Historian Quintard Taylor suggests the stakes were high for Blacks in the West at this time. He writes, "late-nineteenth-century African Americans summoned all their energies to fight discrimination in their new homes. If they failed, the prospect for creating better lives for themselves and their children was lost forever."[340] When Blacks could not find the prospects for a better life in existing communities, many would create their own towns. Historian Kendra Field notes the connection between Black towns in the West and Black nationalism. Field explains:

> The making of the Black West was every bit enmeshed in the constructions of racial hierarchies and the rise of racial nationalism that expanded after emancipation. African-descended children of antebellum privilege, including the children of white planters, played critical roles in the establishment of the Black West…[Black nationalism] did not emerge in a vacuum, but was in fact rooted in the violent destruction of kinship and the coterminous creation of Black peoplehood.[341]

In this sense, black community-building in the West grew from the desire to undo the damage to Black communities and cultures by slavery and Jim Crow.

Like Schuyler's main character Max Disher/Matt Fisher in *Black No More*, Empire residents hoped to avoid discrimination in the world of the dominant culture. But unlike Disher/Fisher, those in Empire could not change the color of their skin. Empire was not an island adrift on its own. It seemed nothing could shield the community from the sea of racism and discrimination that surrounded them. Yet Empire's existence disrupts settler colonialism's attempts to control lives and land through racial hierarchies. To borrow Tiffany Lethabo King's metaphor, Empire was a shoal disrupting the flow of Manifest Destiny.



THE TORRINGTON TELEGRAM

DUNCAN LUMBER COMPANY

Retail — **NIGGERHEAD COAL** — Wholesale

PHONE 17 — C. G. POWER, Local Manager

TORRINGTON TELEGRAM
SEVENTH YEAR
Published Every Thursday by The GOSHEN COUNTY PRINTING CO. (INCORPORATED)
JAMES JOHNSTON, EDITOR
Issued every Thursday at Torrington Wyoming, and entered at the Torrington postoffice as second class matter.
Official Paper of the County of Goshen and of the City of Torrington.
Subscription $1.50 per year in advance. Advertising rates furnished on request. TELEPHONE NUMBER 74.

THURSDAY, NOVEMBER 26, 1914.

Happiness consists not so much in what one has or what he expects to get, but in themanner in which he uses that which he has.

* * *

The session of the teachers' institute that is in progress in this city will give the people of Torrington some idea of the work that is being done in the schools of the county. There are so many parents who do not visit the schools and these are the hardest ones to please in eschool matters. They make harmful remarks in the presence of the children and the children take them up as facts and carry them into practice in the school room. All this is detrimental to the welfare of the school and will be eliminated by having the parents meet the teachers and also visit the school at least once each term.

* * *

EMPIRE FEELS THE SMART

To The Torrington Telegram:

With much pleasure we have noticed the statement in your valuable paper that you publish the news of all the people. We believe that the public ought to know the inconvenience that our people are sometimes made to suffer for the simplest public accommodations in our county seat. We believe that such treatment is not approved by the best element in Torrington.

The special occasion of which we would speak at present is the refusal of a lodging place for our school teacher during her attendance upon the County Teachers' Institute, on the account of which refusal she was forced to go back and forth each day thus working upon her considerable hardship, to say the least.

Now, this is not the first time we have had to suffer such, but we have refrained from speaking of it out of deffidence. But we now think that the public should know the circumstances that knowing, it might correct the same. For we believe that the good people of Torrington and vicinity believe too much in fair play to tolerate such wrongs.

We are as proud of our county seat as any other people and we do not desire to see anything that will lessen her standing allowed to exist therein. Shall we have relief?.

Respectfully,
RUSSELL TAYLOR.

CHURCH SERVICES

The Lingle Church.

"Christ Sacrificed," Mark 15:22-37, ... 10:00 A. M.
"The Transfiguration; a Picture of the Future Kingdom," Mat. 17:1-7, ... 11:00 A. M.
"Missionary Heros and Heroines," II Cor. 4:1-18, ...6:45 P. M.
"The Crucified Life," Gal. 2:20, ... 7:30 P. M.

Everyone is cordially invited to these servi..ces, and to the worship at Wyncote in the afternoon.

GOSHEN

Sabbath school, each sabbath afternoon.

Church services, on the first sabbath of each month.

WYNCOTE CHURCH

Sabbath school in the forenoon, on the first, second, and fourth sabbaths of each month.

Sabbath school and church service, in the afternoon, on each third sabbath and also when a fifth occurs.

VAUGHN UNION CHURCH.

Sabbath school .....2:30 P. M.
Church service 3:00

Services on the second and fourth sabbaths of each month.

METHODIST EPISCOPAL CHURCH
Russell R. Kletzing, Pastor.
Sunday school .....10:00 A. M.

CRESENT BASIN.
Services for November 29
Mr. Jones, Supt.
Sabbath School .....2:00 p. m.
Church Service 11:00 a. m. and 8 p. m.
S. J. Purvis

WAKEE
Miss Whipple, Supt.
Sunday School 2:30
Church Service 3:15
December 13.
S. J. Purvis

WATSON VALLEY
Services for November 22, 1914.
Mrs. H. D. Bashford, Supt.
Church Service 3:15
Sunday School 2:30

DOME.
Services for December 6, 1914
Mrs. L. L. Spence, Supt.
Sunday School 2:30
Church service 3:15

CLASSIFIED AD COLUMN.

WANT FOR SALE LOST FOUND

Money Loaned on Real Estate in Goshen county Wyo. If you want a loan write me and give your location, Sec., Tp. and Range.
T. F. Allen,
29tf Crawford, Nebr.

NOTICE—I will be in Torrington on Thursday of each week for one day only, after this date.
C. D. Stannard, Dentist.

THE PAXTON CAFE
FRED HEWITT, Proprietor
Special Sunday Dinners
in the Paxton Hotel building
GENERAL PATRONAGE SOLICITED

Lumber Used for Over 200 Years

and still in a perfect state of preservation was a common thing at the two big Lumber Expositions recently held at Chicago and New York. And when you consider much of this lumber was never painted you can see this talk about lumber being good only for temporary structures is pure "bunk." Don't be misled into throwing your money away on building materials claimed to outlast ...

Figure 24. Ad for "N*****head Coal" alongside editorial by Russell Taylor, *Torrington Telegram*, November 26, 1914 [cropped, my emphasis].[342]

Empire did not exist in complete isolation and was instead dependent on economic and social ties to nearby non-Black communities. In 1914, three years after moving to Empire, for instance, Russell Taylor wrote an editorial to the *Torrington Telegram* with the titled "Empire Feels the Smart." The missive, included here in its entirety, focused on the poor treatment of Blacks in communities surrounding Empire, such as the refusal of lodging and other public services. Taylor wrote:

> To The Torrington Telegram:
> With much pleasure we have noticed the statement in your valuable paper that you publish the news of all the people. We believe that the public ought to know the inconvenience that our people are sometimes made to suffer for the simplest public accommodations in our county seat. We believe that such treatment is not approved by the best element in Torrington. The special occasion of which we would speak at present is the refusal of a lodging place for our school teacher during her

> attendance upon the County Teachers' Institute, on the account of which refusal she was forced to go back and forth each day thus working upon her considerable hardship, to say the least. Now, this is not the first time we have had to suffer such, but we have refrained from speaking of it out of deffidence. But we now think that the public should know the circumstances that knowing, it might correct the same. For we believe that the good people of Torrington and vicinity believe too much in fair play to tolerate such wrongs. We are as proud of our county seat as any other people and we do not desire to see anything that, will lessen her standing allowed to exist therein. Shall we have relief?
> Respectfully,
> RUSSELL TAYLOR[343]

Perhaps indicative of the challenges facing civil rights activists, a large ad above Taylor's editorial includes a racial slur. Black Wyomingites waited another forty years for equal protection under the law. The Wyoming legislature did not pass a law providing equal access to public accommodations until 1957, when after several years, Governor Milward Simpson was able to get the legislation passed.

By the summer of 1914, there appeared to be a shift in Russell Taylor's thinking about exclusion. That year, Taylor preached on the subject of "God a Ready Refuge in Trouble," at Grace Presbyterian church in Empire.[344] In the winter of 1915, Russell Taylor gave another sermon called "The Benefits Derived from the Sanctuary."[345] While the content of these sermons is unclear, the titles suggest Taylor was thinking about the idea of a safe space as well as looking to God to provide what the corporeal world could not. After three years of living in Empire, Taylor was still searching for sanctuary. Like in the fiction of Griggs and Schuyler, in Empire there was a desire to create a "good place" for Blacks that was safe and free from anti-Black racism and violence.

Questions about whether to move toward assimilation into or separation from the U.S. have concerned the Black community since Emancipation. And yet the desire for separation is complex. In a settler colonial world with pervasive anti-Black racism, spaces for expressions of

Black agency become severely limited. Russell Taylor who preached and fought against the segregation of church leadership in Nebraska, later argued that distinct Black communities could be separate but equal. Anthropologist Todd Guenther explains:

> In response to a *Monitor* piece excoriating the evils of segregation, Taylor explored the complexities of the issue in an editorial titled, "Segregation Not Always Compulsory Nor With Sinister Motives," in which he cited biblical and other sources in defense of the separation of the races. He pointed out that a desire for autonomy was not the sole property of whites…Taylor believed that if Blacks worked hard enough they could enjoy not just a "separate but equal," but rather an even better life alongside mainstream white America.[346]

This was in 1921, one year after the official closure of the Empire Post Office. Perhaps a lifetime of living in the U.S., or his time in Empire, had convinced Taylor of the benefits of exclusion. Afterall, the very existence of Empire challenges settler colonialism and white supremacy through the creation of Black space and expressions of Black agency.

Reading Black spaces as reproducing settler colonialism obscures the U.S.'s genocidal past. Furthermore, the worlds imagined by Sutton Griggs and George Schuyler disrupt settler colonialism and white supremacy if read as non-colonial spaces created through Black agency. The colonial relationship between Native and Black peoples is not a mirror reflection of the relationship between Native peoples and settler colonialists. On the contrary, the histories and experiences of Black and Native peoples reflects the "full realities" of living in the "constant disasters of settler colonialism and anti-Blackness" in the U.S.[347]

Black Empire in Wyoming

> *The most magnificent drama in the last thousand years of human history is the transportation of ten million human beings out of the dark beauty of their mother continent into the new-found Eldorado of the West. They descended into Hell: and in the third century they arose from the dead, in the finest effort to achieve*

> *democracy for the working millions which this world had ever seen…Yet we are blind led by the blind…we fell under the leadership of those who would compromise with truth in the past in order to make peace in the present and guide policy in the future.* W.E.B. DuBois in *Black Reconstruction*

> *From a very literal point of view, the harbors and the ports and the railroads of the country—the economy…could not conceivably be what they are if it had not been (and this is still so) for cheap labor. I am speaking very seriously, and this is not an overstatement: I picked the cotton, I carried it to the market, I built the railroads under someone else's whip for nothing. Nothing…This in the land of the free, the home of the brave. None can challenge that statement. It is a matter of historical record.* James Baldwin in *The American Dream and the American Negro*

The American West, as both a place and an idea, is long associated with the utopian possibilities of freedom and democracy. Black peoples, the enslaved, free, and in-between came to the American West alongside the first non-Native interlopers into Indigenous lands. And many of these travelers came to the West to pursue better lives. But for the enslaved and their descendants, the American West offered a literal escape from the racial terror of slavery and Jim Crow. The historian Quintard Taylor in his treatise on Blacks in the American West asks:

> Did the West represent the last best hope for nineteenth- and twentieth-century African Americans? Was it a racial frontier beyond which lay the potential for an egalitarian society? Or did the region fail to match the unobtainable promise imposed upon it by legions of boosters, to provide both political and economic opportunity?[348]

The story of Empire, Wyoming suggests that yes, the West often represents fantasies of freedom and self-determination. However, the community's history also makes apparent the West could be much like the rest of the country when it came to white supremacy and anti-Black racism. The literary critic Blake Allmendinger in *Imagining the African American West* suggests that ultimately "African Americans disagree about whether or not the West is a place of promise."[349] Despite this uncertainty, "over the last several centuries they [Black Americans] have migrated

to the region in order to establish segregated townships and farming cooperatives as well as experimental racial utopias."[350] Few of these towns exist today which reminds us the West can be an inhospitable place in more ways than one.

Local Wyoming cultures exhibited deeply ingrained anti-Black racism during the twentieth-century, even though Black populations in Wyoming remained extremely small. For example, in 1910, Blacks made up 1.5% of Wyoming's population.[351] Three decades later, in 1940, the Black population dropped to 0.4%.[352] According to Quintard Taylor, Blacks in the West, including those in Wyoming, found many of the same racist attitudes and behaviors they faced in other parts of the country at this time. This included segregation, voter disenfranchisement, and violence. For instance, Taylor uncovered that; "Six Black voters, men and women, who intended to cast ballots in South Pass, Wyoming Territory, in 1896, faced an angry mob of mostly Democratic gold miners who blocked their route to the town's polling place." [353] Ultimately, the group was able to vote but only when an armed U.S. Marshal escorted them to the polls. In an earlier example, when several Black troops with the Ninth Calvary arrived in Wyoming in 1885, they faced racism including in their treatment in local newspapers. Locals in Suggs were especially angry when Black troops began to visit non-Black prostitutes.[354] This is indicative of the social climate that awaited the Black citizens of Empire, Wyoming. Empire as a moniker recalls Western Imperialism and Manifest Destiny, but also it also reflects the dream to build Black space and the complexities of creating this place in dispossessed lands.

"The Sort Who Make Good Citizens"

Empire, Wyoming was a short-lived Black homesteading community in eastern Wyoming at the beginning of the twentieth-century. On historian describes Empire as "a unique

African American homesteading community."[355] In the beginning, two extended Black families from Nebraska, the Speeses and the Taylors, primarily settled the town.[356] It is certain that each family had parents or grandparents who were born into slavery.[357] Historian Robert Galbreath describes the brief boom and bust arc of the rural community near the Nebraska border. He states:

> During the 1910s, between fifty and sixty African Americans lived in the growing community of Empire. By the 1930 census, however, all of the African Americans who homesteaded in Empire, including the various branches of the Speese and Taylor families, had left the state and only four African Americans lived in Goshen County out of a population of over 11,000.[358]

Empire began to take shape in the spring of 1908, when brothers Charles, Joseph, and John Speese filed for homesteads around the Spoon Hill Creek area of eastern Wyoming.[359] Rosetta, just seventeen at the time, accompanied her husband Charles Speese in the move to the area northeast of Torrington, Wyoming.[360]

Charles and Rosetta would have seventeen children. The couple were no strangers to the Exoduster movement of African Americans migrating out of the South into Kansas, Oklahoma, and other areas to set up Black communities. Rosetta's father, Charles Meehan, a non-Black Irishman, helped establish a Black community in Overton, Nebraska in 1885, and again at Dewitty, later named Audacious, in 1910. Charles Speese's father, Moses Speese, along with brothers Jerry Shore and Henry Webb, were early homesteaders in Custer County, Nebraska. All three brothers were former slaves which is why they have different surnames.[361] Historian Kendra Field notes in her chronicle about Black migration and community-building in Oklahoma that "in their overlapping efforts to establish a black state, and ultimately black towns and settlements, in the [Oklahoma] Territory participants trumpeted a promising racial future in the West at a decibel intended to drown out the rhetoric of racial inferiority and the reality of racial

violence that dominated the South."[362] Unfortunately, at this time, as it does in the present, white supremacy existed in the American West as well as the South and North.

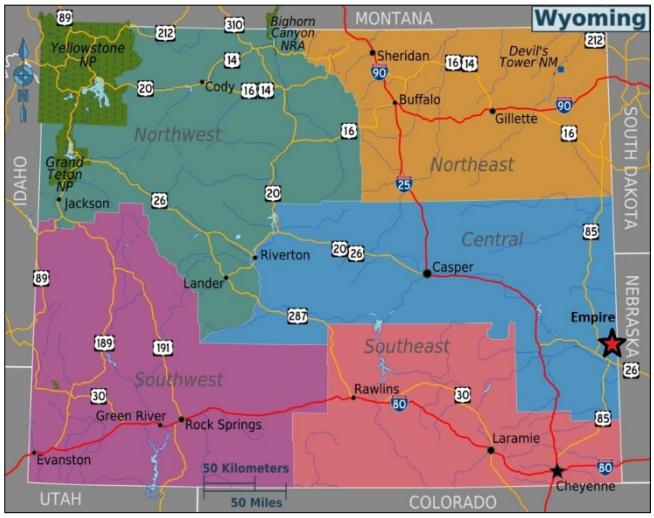


Figure 25. Wyoming Regions Map, 2009 [text "Empire" and star added], Wikicommons.[363]

The Speese brothers intended to establish "an independent and self-sufficient community for African-American homesteaders."[364] Soon after the Speese siblings acquired land in Wyoming, the brothers Otis and Baseman Taylor arrived. By the summer of 1908, several members of the Speese and Taylor families settled in what would soon become Empire. Reportedly, the town was named after the investment company that enticed the group to take up residence in the area.[365] Empire was "like a rural neighborhood, with each home dispersed on individual plots of land" and while there was a local post office it "was operated out of a private home."[366] The newspaper from the nearby town of Torrington, the *Torrington Telegram* announced the arrival of the new homesteaders and reassured the surrounding community that: "They are colored people, but are the sort who make good citizens."[367]

For several years, residents of Empire seemed near the achievement of their agrarian dreams. Between 1912-1915, for example, local newspapers acknowledged Joseph Speese's successes in farming and raising hogs. In several cases, Joseph Speese won awards for his produce at local fairs.[368] Similarly, a 1913 *Cheyenne State Leader* article declared Empire's successes. The headline reads, "Colored Colony Most Prosperous." The story features Russell Taylor "the efficient and educated pastor and school master of the colored colony."[369] The article continues to say that all those who qualified to file for homesteads had done so and others had already proved up their land. "The improvements on the homesteads rank with the best and splendid crops are raised," the story boasts.[370] Many of the residents were previously experienced with dry land farming in Nebraska and, "All are satisfied with their new homes and the colony wears an unusual air of prosperity."[371] It appears, at least briefly, the fantasy of living off the land—their land—seemed within reach for the citizens of Empire. [372] Within seven years, however, the community went into drastic decline and ultimately vanished into the prairie.

Just one year after the founding of Empire in 1908, the community created its own school. Intriguingly, Empire took advantage of a Wyoming segregation law to establish a school.[373] As a result, Empire could provide a Black teacher for the Black children of the community. Todd Guenther explains: "The Empire school under Russell Taylor was perhaps unique in that Blacks created a segregated school in which 'separate but equal' meant the Black students actually received a better education than their white neighbors."[374] Still, most non-Black families in the area refused to send their children to a school with a Black teacher.[375] Soon Empire would find out that being independent from the rest of Wyoming was much harder than anticipated.

As the community of Empire hoped, the first teacher of the school was Miss Thistle, a Black woman from Cheyenne. But in 1911, the non-Black county school board in Torrington dismissed this teacher and replaced her with a non-Black teacher of their choice. Empire residents protested the dismissal of Miss Thistle, and as a result she became the teacher once again until that time that Russell Taylor could take over the school.[376] Providing a Black teacher for the children of Empire was important to Russell Taylor. "Russell later explained that in all his years in school, no white teacher or schoolbook had ever taught anything about—indeed were ignorant of—the accomplishments of Blacks and their roles in history," relates anthropologist Todd Guenther.[377] Control of their own school was an important part of the ideal that Empire represented as a place, a separate space, for Blacks. However, while in this very specific case, local Blacks used the doctrine of "separate but equal" to their advantage, in most cases, segregation failed to offer equality let alone provide a superior benefit for Blacks in the U.S. By 1912, the school had twenty-two students and was headed by Russell Taylor, who was an ordained Presbyterian minister had a bachelor's degree as well as a divinity degree.[378] However, controversy erupted again two years later when the meddling school board ousted Taylor from his position and replaced him with a non-Black teacher from out of the state. One board member complained that the school's desire for a Black teacher was "prejudice."[379] The Black community, yet again, voiced its displeasure with this action and several residents, including Taylor, fought the decision for two years until he was reinstated in 1916.[380] The school board continued to harass Russell Taylor despite his education, experience, and status within the community of Empire.

Russell Taylor was not the only highly educated member of the community. John Speese had multiple degrees and practiced law. Radford Speese had also attended college.[381] And

Theodosia Scroggins served the community as a midwife.[382] Some Empire residents made their livings working in other local communities. For example, Baseman Taylor and Edna Speese both worked at hotels in Torrington and Florence Speese worked as a cook and/or domestic servant near Fort Laramie. Miles Speese, son of Joseph and Lizzie, started drilling wells while still in his teens and found much success with the self-made business.[383] By all accounts the people living in Empire were good citizens who worked the land or held gainful employment.

However, despite the community's many successes its residents experienced challenges as well. For example, in February of 1911, The *Buffalo Bulletin* reported Charles Speese was arrested for "cattle stealing," and he had been out on bond when he failed to appear at a hearing in Torrington.[384] At least four other Wyoming papers republished the report.[385] The record is sparse, but after forfeiting his bond, Speese's case was likely transferred to Cheyenne and dropped soon thereafter. It is certainly possible the charges stemmed from local harassment. Afterall, an accusation of cattle rustling could be a dangerous one. Just a few years later, Charles and Rosetta Speese and their children moved back to Nebraska.[386] Ultimately, Empire could not isolate itself or its citizens entirely from the rest of eastern Wyoming, and as a result, they could not avoid anti-Black racism.

Miscegenation Nightmares

In *Imperium in Imperio*, the character of Bernard Belgrave's love interest, a Black woman named Viola, chooses to kill herself instead of marrying and having offspring with Bernard, a mixed-race Black man. In Viola's suicide note to Belgrave, she explains that among the many reasons for her decision was the influence of the book *White Supremacy and Negro Subordination*. Viola writes:

> That book proved to me that the intermingling of the races in sexual relationship was sapping the vitality of the Negro race and, in fact, was slowly but surely exterminating the race. It demonstrated that the fourth generation of the children born of intermarrying mulattoes were invariably sterile or woefully lacking in vital force…Every half-breed, or for that, every person having a tinge of Negro blood, the white people cast off. We receive the cast off with open arms and he comes to us with his devitalizing power. Thus, the white man was slowly exterminating us and our total extinction was but a short period of time distant.[387]

Viola declares she made a "solemnly pledge [to] God to never marry a mulatto man."[388] She ends her note by pleading with Belgrave to "study the question of the intermingling of the races." She exhorts that if he cannot successfully separate the races and then "make the separation physical; lead our people forth from this accursed land."[389] Interestingly, Griggs explicitly connects the desire for racial purity and physical separation. The word miscegenation, moreover, originates from the nineteenth-century and comes from the Latin meaning "mix" and "stock," reflecting an association with the language of animal husbandry.[390]

Schuyler's *Black No More* also addresses miscegenation fears. The newly pale-skinned Matthew Fisher takes a job with a white supremacist group called The Knights of Nordica. A decision he rationalizes because he needs money and delights in the idea of pulling one over on the group of racists. The Reverend Harry Givens leads the white supremacist group. The Reverend just happens to be the father of the woman who at the beginning of the novel had rejected Disher's sexual advances because he was Black. Fisher, who no longer appears Black, wins the love of the previously unreceptive Helen Givens, who soon becomes pregnant. However, Fisher panics and is convinced the baby's Black skin will betray his own true complexion, and he finds himself relieved when his wife miscarries. When Helen becomes pregnant again, Matthew Fisher concocts an escape plan. A literal one. He stocks and readies a plane to whisk him away at a moment's notice if the baby's hue reveals his secret. Meanwhile

Reverend Givens and his colleague, Arthur Snobbcraft, are running on the Democratic Presidential ticket. Now that skin color is not an indicator of race and xenophobic paranoia became prevalent, the two politicians hire a statistician, Buggerie, to conduct a genealogy project to identify all Black persons in the U.S. through their family trees. This, of course, evokes the genocidal racial classification project weaponized by the Nazi regime in Germany as well as American projects in eugenics. In the story, these attempts to prove whiteness through genealogy are catastrophic failures.

The race identifying project backfires when it reveals that almost all Americans have Black ancestors including the white supremacists Givens and Snobbcraft. Because of this confusion, when Helen Givens gives birth to a mixed-race child, she blames herself as the source of Blackness. Helen cries to her husband, "I'm so sorry about all this. If I'd only known. I'd never have let you in for it. I would have spared you this disgrace and humiliation."[391] After her admission, Fisher admits his secret to his wife, and she accepts him. "You needn't worry about me, Helen. I'll stick by you as long as you have me…You're not responsible for the color of our baby, my dear. I'm the guilty one," Disher/Fisher confesses. [392] Somewhat surprisingly, the story ends happily with the Fisher family moving to a tropical paradise.

In contrast, in early twentieth-century America, fears of miscegenation resulted in legal discrimination and violence. Empire resident Russell Taylor defended multiracial families in an editorial to a local paper in 1921. The piece voiced Taylor's disapproval of a local judge's recent ruling to remove the children of a white woman because she married a Black man. He was responding to a previously published editorial submitted by C.L. Nethaway. Nethaway lauds the judge's decision because "Nebraska statutes positivity prohibit that marriage between the races."[393] Nethaway continues to expound on the evils of miscegenation, claiming:

> The stigma brought against these children by their mother's sins from their schoolmates and other associates is enough to give them their freedom from such a curse. However, society may be to blame in not assisting this mother in her troubles, and I really claim it is on account of the fact that we should have, a national statute prohibiting such marriage, and if not a national law, every state in the union should copy the Nebraska law and pass It at once, which prohibits the intermarriage between the races…The advocacy of the marriage between the races by the colored people is one of the reasons to my mind in the organization of the Ku Klux Klan at this time. It cannot now or never can be countenanced by the Caucasian race. The colored people should take more pride in their own race and fight against the amalgamation of other races, the same as the Caucasian race does.[394]

Like in Nebraska and other states, anti-miscegenation ideology was a reality in the so-called Equality State. Wyoming passed its first anti-miscegenation when it was still a territory. Overturned in 1882, anti-miscegenation laws came back again in 1913, just a few years after the establishment of Empire. Blacks in Wyoming faced other forms of legalized discrimination as well. Businesses around the state refused services and equal accommodations to Blacks and other groups during the first half of the twentieth-century. As late as the 1950s, movie theatres in Wyoming segregated Black customers allowing them to sit in the balcony only. The local Black community and their allies fought for and eventually won unrestricted seating.[395] According to Robert Galbreath, the segregation of the community of Empire from the rest of Wyoming continues to the present day, he explains:

> Other than the grave of Leota Taylor, a resident of Empire, the African Americans in the graveyard remain unknown, un-named, and disconnected from the surrounding community. This racial isolation is compounded by the erasure of Empire from contemporary maps of Wyoming and the complete lack of any physical artifacts left behind by the African American settlers.[396]

This historical absence is something Galbreath works to change by sharing his research about Empire with the community through lectures, exhibits, and public history displays. So, while Empire may be physically gone, a reminder of its history fights to remain.

The experiences of Empire residents echo the larger failure of the West to offer liberating spaces for BIPOC peoples. Wyoming's legacy as the Equality State is complicated by its denial of equality for Black citizens during the twentieth-century. Most of the homes, churches, the school, and the post office that once stood in Empire are gone. In contrast, many of the buildings in Wyoming that housed expressions of white supremacy and anti-Black racism still stand. Wyoming's theatres and other community buildings, some of which are now historical landmarks, for example, regularly hosted blackface entertainment during the first half of the twentieth-century. Ethnic play works to erase Native and Black histories while controlling their bodies and ordering cultural spaces. Not only does putting the experiences of Blacks into conversation with Native experiences reveal the ways settler colonialism and white supremacy intersect and spread, this relationship also provides insight into the ways Native and Black peoples contest these structures.

CHAPTER FOUR

AMERICAN FANTASIES AND BLACKFACE

Blackface and White Supremacy in the American West

> *A powerful visual rhetoric with a long history but newly empowered by chromolithography would arise as the century headed to a close, consists of a startling range of images in a broad range of genres, with their own repeating forms and tropes, generated from within the haunted house of the subconscious American racist imagination. These visualizations of what plantation literature had defined as the "Old Negro" were perhaps the most powerful weapon in the arsenal of white supremist ideology because of the subliminal power of endless repetition. And their collective impact—in advertisements, postcards, and trade cards, in blackface minstrelsy on the stage, and ultimately in stereotyped Black characters in moving pictures—would play a pivotal role in persuading American society that Black human beings were not only fundamentally different from white people, but irreversibly different in kind, and dangerously so, necessitating the erection of rigid boundaries and walls that demanded constant vigilance, with transgressions justifying the severest forms of vigilante punishment.* Henry Louis Gates, Jr. in *Stony the Road*

> *The American soil is full of the corpses of my ancestors, through 400 years and at least three wars. Why is my freedom, citizenship, in question now? What one begs the American people to do, for all our sakes, is simply to accept our history.* James Baldwin in *The American Dream and the American Negro*

Blackface minstrelsy, the uniquely American type of mass entertainment, spread negative stereotypes about Black peoples throughout the United States, including in the American West, during the nineteenth- and twentieth-centuries. Local Wyoming newspapers such as the *Big Horn Sentinel* and *Cheyenne Daily Leader* lauded and advertised Blackface entertainment. These shows included both local amateur acts and professional tour groups. During the first half of the twentieth-century, locals in Wyoming from Wyncote to Sheridan put on blackface shows and

attended such performances in their local theatres and schoolhouses. Appallingly, this included residents from Torrington, a community near Empire. According to one historian, local blackface minstrel shows in Nebraska contributed to the Speese family's decision to move to Wyoming. However, blackface proved popular and widespread in the state at this time. Todd Guenther explains:

> The Speeses, disgusted by racism, inadequate financial support for existing schools, and possibly legal problems with their land claims, again heard the Sirens' song when the Ansley newspaper reported newly irrigated land available in eastern Wyoming.[397]

However, moving to Wyoming would not allow the Speeses, Taylors, or other Black Americans to escape the racism that they experienced elsewhere. Everywhere it seems the nightmare of white supremacy punctured the fantasy that Empire could provide a safe space for Blacks at this time.

Historian Henry Louis Gates, Jr.'s history of Reconstruction and white supremacy, *Stony the Road: Reconstruction, White Supremacy, and the Rise of Jim Crow*, links white supremacy directly to the dehumanizing stereotypes of Black peoples communicated through art, media, and performance. Such fantasies about the superiority of one group over another are pervasive in American history and culture. For over one hundred years, live blackface performances demeaned Black peoples for the entertainment of crowds across the U.S. For example, historian Eric Lott claims, "The minstrel show has been ubiquitous, cultural common coin; it has been so central to the lives of North Americans that we are hardly aware of its extraordinary influence."[398] It may be said that this willful ignorance continues in the many instances of blackface today. For example, as of this writing there are no Black American governors in the United States; however, recently two sitting non-Black governors have made public apologies

for dressing in blackface. Likewise, those who have donned the racist costume also include the Prime Minister of Canada.



Figure 46. Richards & Pringle's Famous Georgia Minstrels, 1903 by The U.S. Lithograph Co., Russell-Morgan Print, Cincinnati & New York, Library of Congress, Wikicommons.[399] Note the exaggerated facial features, tattered clothing, and implication of drunkenness in the image.



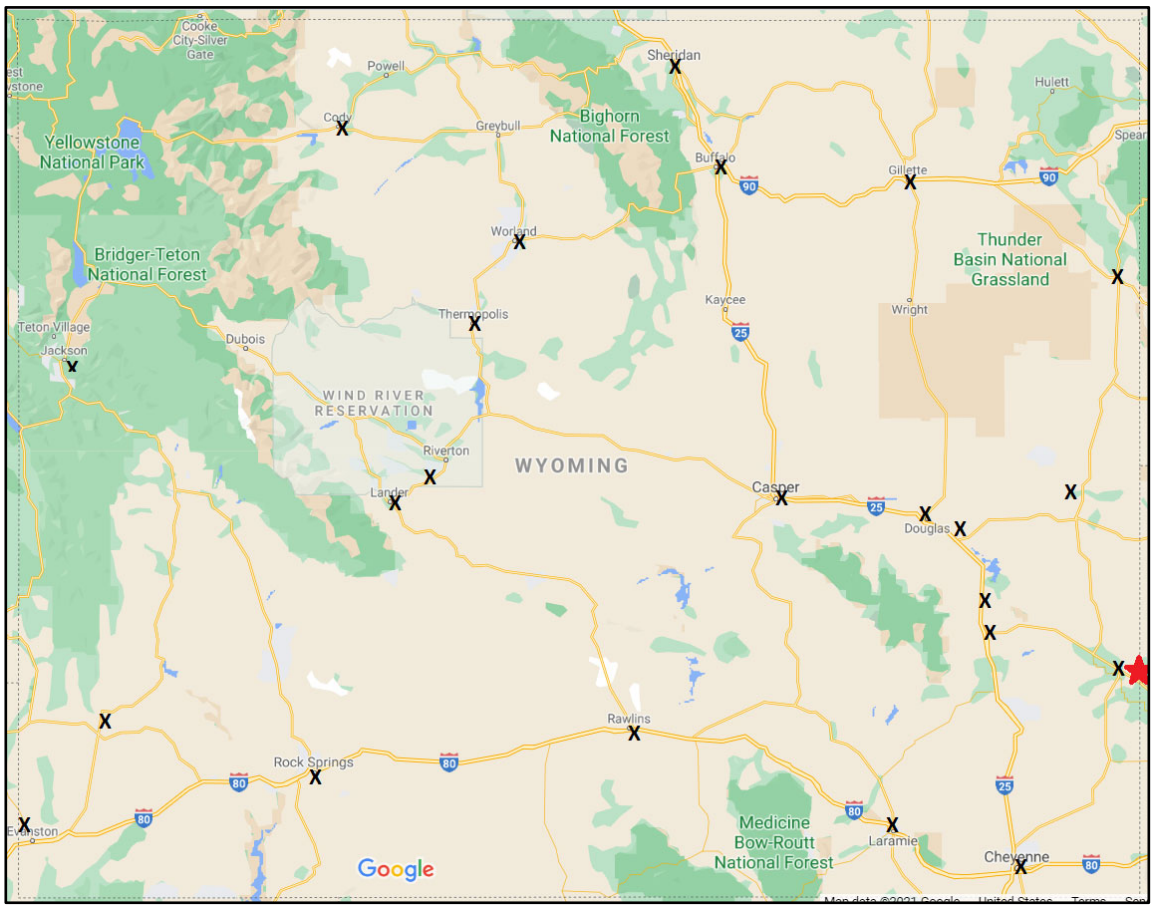
Figure 27. Billy Van, the monologue comedian. "Wm. H. West's Big Minstrel Jubilee," 1900, Strobridge Litho Co., Library of Congress, Wikicommons.[400] Notice how the performer appears both in and out of blackface to emphasis racial differences.

In broad terms, ethnic play allows settler colonial society to alleviate anxieties about the Other. Like playing Indian, blackface maintains racial hierarchies in the American West and the rest of the U.S. Cultural historian Eric Lott notes blackface minstrelsy included "a semicircle of four or five or sometimes more white male performers" who were "made up with facial Blacking of greasepaint or burnt cork and adorned in outrageously oversized and/or ragged 'Negro' costumes."[401] Blackface performances usually included a mix of comedy, music, dancing, and oration. In part, Blackface reflects the settler colonialists' fantasies and nightmares about the Black body. Lott in his history of blackface minstrelsy and the working-class, for example, explains, "Although it arose from a white obsession with Black (male) bodies which underlies white racial dread to our own day, it ruthlessly disavowed its fleshly investments through ridicule and racist lampoon."[402] Furthermore, Eric Lott explicitly connects blackface minstrelsy to violence against Black men, he contends:

> Because of the power of the Black penis in white American psychic life, the pleasure minstrelsy's largely white and male audiences derived from their investment in "Blackness" always carried a threat of castration—a threat obsessively reversed in white lynching rituals.[403]

Ultimately Lott sees blackface as propping up fantasies of white supremacy in American culture. "'Black' figures were there to be looked at, shaped to the demands of desire; they were screens on which audience fantasy could rest, and while this purpose might have had a host of different effects, its fundamental outcome was to secure the position of white spectators as superior, controlling figures," Lott explains.[404] In order to bolster fantasies about white supremacy, blackface twists and controls the Black body through performance. Tiffany Lethabo King connects the control of Black bodies to the "production and expansion of space" of Manifest Destiny.[405] In other words, slavery made western expansion possible. This "unfettered use of Black bodies" creates "an open space of possibility" that distorts both Black bodies and experiences to elide the nation's dependence on slavery, violence, and Jim Crow.[406]

Limiting the study of blackface to the South or Northeast obscures the pervasiveness of white supremacy and anti-Black racism in the West and the nation as a whole. As discussed in the first two chapters, ethnic play maintains and perpetuates the structures of settler colonialism and white supremacy. Approaching redface and blackface through an otherwise framework of comparative racialization offers new connections between ethnic play and settler colonialism in the U.S.



Blackface in Wyoming, 1885-1949

Previous studies of Blackface in the U.S. have not focused on the practice's popularity and prevalence in the American West. Newspaper accounts of blackface performances in Wyoming appear as early as 1885 and continued until at least 1949. This includes the larger towns of Cheyenne, Laramie, Sheridan, and Cody as well as smaller, more rural areas. Just before Christmas in 1912, the *Torrington Telegram* announced that local Boy Scouts had put on a blackface performance in the little town of Wyncote, a few miles west of Empire. The paper stated, "The Boy Scouts of Torrington gave a Negro dialect at Wyncote school house last Thursday night, and we can't get through smiling."[407] Other Wyomingites put on blackface

shows in their own communities as well. In 1916, high schoolers in Sheridan put on a show that included one of the teachers performing blackface. They "made a decidedly hit."[408] The event was put on for the benefit of an organization of businesses and held at a local church.[409] Similarly, in the summer of 1918, local high school seniors in Kemmerer put on a blackface sketch as part of a high school dance with the extra proceeds going to the Red Cross.[410] However, it was not just locals performing in blackface. Many professional tour groups also visited the state. As a result, not only did residents of Empire have to contend with professional blackface entertainment, they faced their neighbors participating in the racist practice as well.

Cheyenne

One of the earliest accounts of blackface entertainment in Wyoming was in Cheyenne. In 1885, Haverly's Great Minstrel Company visited the state capital. The *Cheyenne Daily Sun* reported that "The best of Black face people are in the company."[411] Two decades later, the taste for such entertainment had not abated. For example, in 1904, Fred Frink performed as Eph, "the sleepy son of Africa," as part of a vaudeville show that was called "a tremendous hit," by the *Wyoming Tribune*.[412] Interestingly, the show's review ran alongside a local news article with the headline, "Was Justified." The news story was about a Union Pacific watchman who was determined to be acting in self-defense when he shot a "negro trespasser" to death in the railroad yard.[413] The newspaper article notes the murdered man allegedly had a piece of paper indicating he served time at San Quinton prison for burglary. It was irrefutable evidence that proved the man's murder "was justified," according to the *Wyoming Tribune*.[414] In this case, the penalty for trespassing was murder.



Figure 29. "Backwall of the Atlas Stage Area, Showing Advertisements from Local Businesses," unknown photograph, no date, Wyoming State Archives Photo Collection.[415] The Atlas regularly hosted blackface entertainment during the first half of the twentieth-century.

Fantasies about the Wild West collided with blackface in June 1907, when the blackface act the Coen Brothers who "kept the audience laughing" appeared as part of Cheyenne's popular Frontier Days.[416] One year later, *The Cheyenne Daily Leader* published a glowing review of a vaudeville show at the Atlas. In addition to acrobats, the acts included the blackface comedian Happy Doc Holland, who was "of marked originality and last night kept audiences convulsed during his turns."[417] Legalized segregation is usually associated with the South, but it is present in Wyoming's history as well. Unlike the Black community of Empire, the Atlas theatre is still standing today, and even appears on the National Register of Historical Places. The Cheyenne Little Theatre, a local community theatre group, currently owns and operates the theatre. However, the Atlas was not the only Cheyenne theatre to host blackface. In Cheyenne, this type of entertainment appeared in most of the theatres in town including the Capitol Avenue theatre

and the Princess.[418] It is no coincidence that at a time Wyoming discriminated against Black peoples, blackface entertainment was both popular and widespread in the state.

For example, during the spring of 1909, the Atlas hosted: "The Oris, an unrivaled trio, consisting of two expert blackface comedians and a performing dog" in "the klever kid komical koon act with their kute kanine Kurly."[419] The alliterative "K" brings to mind the white supremist organization the Ku Klux Klan. After another blackface and animal show at the Atlas, the local paper insisted the performer "as a coon shouter he ranks with the best."[420] The slur used in the review originates from the shortened version of the animal the racoon. Likewise, in 1918, blackface duo Wilson and Wilson performed at the Princess alongside "three performing Alaska deers."[421] Animal acts were often part of vaudeville shows and while blackface communicated the superiority of settler colonialist society, animal acts projected "a fascination at the turn of the century with man's control of nature."[422] In this sense, when audiences viewed animal acts alongside blackface characters, they saw both as inferior to themselves. For example, the year before the Oris performed at the Atlas in 1908, the Mbuti human being Ota Benga was on display for viewers to see alongside the animals at the Bronx Zoo in New York. "For the human to continue to evolve as an unfettered form of self-actualizing (and expanding) form of Whiteness, Black and Indigenous people must die or be transformed into lesser forms of humanity—and, in some cases, become nonhuman altogether," explains Black Studies scholar Tiffany Lethabo King.[423]



Figure 30. “Interior of Atlas Theatre,” no date, Meyers Collection, Wyoming State Archives Photo Collection.[424] Note the balcony, this is where Blacks had to sit due until the 1950s due to segregation.

Mirth and Melody performed at the Princess in 1918. “Gus Andrews the Swede comedian is as entertaining as his title suggests, and Wurnelle who offers a novelty on roller skates is the rare type of a chap who comes close to breaking his neck for the entertainment of the Cheyenne folks,” raved the local paper.[425] Note that Gus Andrews is identified as the “Swede” which highlights the racial differences between himself and the blackface characters he plays. The next year, blackface musician Eddie Ross entertained audiences with “his African Harp.”[426] Like in the examples of playing Indian, blackface acts often claimed their performances featured “authentic” culture of the enslaved. Interestingly, in another example of playing Indian and Natives on display intersecting with blackface, Little Karlh “the world’s most wonderful Indian boy,” appeared with Eddie Ross’ blackface act.[427]



Figure 31. "Princess Theater Building," no date, Rainsford Collection, Wyoming State Archives Photo Collection.[428]



Figure 32. Newspaper feature on "Little Karlh, the World's Most Wonderful Indian Boy" part of a minstrel show, *Wyoming State Tribune* no. 184, August 2, 1919 [cropped].[429] The image recalls the ethnic play discussed in both the previous and subsequent chapters.

Laramie

Like the other large communities in Wyoming in the early 1900s, the town of Laramie hosted its share of blackface shows. In October of 1907, Laramie was getting ready for the annual Elks' minstrel show. The act featured locals as well as the professional actor Dr. A.B. Hamilton in blackface.[430] Similarly, a month later, one Miss Sinclair was training local children to put on a blackface act for the benefit of the Carnegie Library in town. The local paper remarked: "Fourteen little people in blackface and gaudy costumes will complete the 'circle' and the work of the little fun-makers promises to be remarkable."[431] The article also mentions that Miss Sinclair had just successfully completed a similar show in Cheyenne.[432] It appears the local community at this time saw no reason for children not to perform in blackface. In some cases, locals used blackface entertainment to raise money for the community. Like the ethnic play discussed in the chapter two, blackface brought the non-Black community together at the same time reinforcing dominant racial hierarchies.



Figure 33. Newspaper ad for blackface performer A.B. Hamilton in the Laramie Boomerang, October 14, 1907 [cropped].[433]



Figure 34. Newspaper ad for blackface performer Harry Holman or "The Man in Red," *Laramie Boomerang* no. 137, August 11, 1908 [cropped].[434] Such ads often emphasized racial differences show the performer both with and without blackface.

In addition to local teachers and school children performing blackface in Laramie, several purely professional acts came to town as well. For example, the Rufus Rastus Minstrels performed in Laramie at the Opera House in 1907.[435] The next summer, Harry Holman, a

blackface comedian also known as "The Man in Red," played the Electric. After the show, the *Laramie Boomerang* claimed, "he never fails to bring down the house."[436] Like in Cheyenne, blackface acts played in most if not all the theatres in Laramie at this time. For instance, in 1909, Grimm and Satchel, a blackface duo, played the O.K. Theatre, as did Benson and Dee.[437] Likewise, the "burnt cork eccentricities" of Corcoran and Dixon "made a very gratifying hit last night, receiving a recall after each performance," claimed the *Laramie Republican*.[438] By all accounts blackface was a popular attraction in Laramie. Interestingly, blackface entertainment seemed to have the endorsement of local society. In May 1920, for instance, Miss Hazel Wilson wrote in the Society and Women's Page of the *Laramie Daily Boomerang*: "Mr. Hayes is a past master of the art of blackface acting, and also that he is a very efficient dramatic director. Therefore, Laramie is expecting a 'Thriller.'"[439] Despite the apparent social acceptability of blackface in Wyoming at this time, the practice spread damaging stereotypes.



Figure 35. Newspaper ad for Hippodrome Vaudeville, *Sheridan Enterprise*, no. 50, November 29, 1918 [cropped].[440]

Figure 36. “Standard Oil Co., Minstrel Show,” 1932, Casper, Wyoming, Carrigen Collection, Wyoming State Archives Photo Collection.[441] Actors in blackface are on the far right and left.



Figure 37. “Standard Oil Co., Minstrel Show,” 1932, Casper, Wyoming, Carrigen Collection, Wyoming State Archives Photo Collections.[442]

As previously mentioned, blackface shows often billed their acts as "authentic" Black or African culture. For example, in January 1922, a recent blackface performance received lauding reviews in the *Casper Herald*. The article reads "Altho a young man, he was a favorite with the audience. His jig was good."[443] Performers often invoked the South in their acts. One vaudeville show at the Iris, for instance, featured "Blackface Singing, Talking, and Dancing" by Dixie Boy Morris, "A Sun-Kissed Boy From Dixie."[444] The references to Dixie adds a false layer of authenticity to the performances as representative of Southern Black culture. Correspondingly, in the summer of 1922, the Columbia billed the act of the Two Black Dots as "a trip to shadowland and dark town blues comedy."[445]

Figure 38. "Casper, WY Iris Theater, ca. 1920, Later became the Rex Theater; Marquee advertising 'Temptation,'" Thomas Carrigen, 1920, Carrigen Collection, Wyoming State Archives Photo Collection.[446] The establishment hosted blackface entertainment as both the Iris and the Rex.

<u>It's a Family Affair</u>

Some local amateur Wyoming shows featured child actors and professional blackface acts included children as well as women and sometimes even families. For instance, during the summer of 1910, The Deloys, a family of actors, were "a great hit" when they put on a skit where "Mr. Deloy was a blackface and Tollie [child] as a school girl."[447] Several years later, a blackface act including a child actor performed at the Empress in Laramie. The local paper wrote "a comedy team, a girl and a blackface male caused much merriment."[448] Likewise, in Sheridan in 1911, the Star theatre featured the Inslee Brothers for 10 cents a ticket. The brothers were the "World's Famous Juvenile Comedians" and "Byron, the younger of the two, does a Black Face and is certainly a Riot. He is only 12 years of age, and the youngest performer on the stage in the world today doing Black Face."[449] There appears no hint that children performing blackface might be undesirable. Moreover, after a similar blackface act played the Empress, the local newspaper coverage revealed the animal reels played after the live blackface act delighted the many children in the audience.[450] This indicates women and children not only performed on stage, but were in the audiences as well.

Similarly, in October 1922, "Casper's Family Theatre" the Columbia ran an ad in the local paper for "The Inherited Mansion, a farce comedy," a movie starring Bert Vallee in blackface.[451] Intriguingly, the Columbia promoted itself as a family establishment. This is yet another example of the practice's social acceptability as entertainment for men, women, and children in Wyoming. For over one hundred years this type of entertainment appeared on stage and in movie houses. The suitability of blackface as family entertainment in Wyoming contrasts with Eric Lott's study of blackface in the urban Northeast where audiences usually consisted largely of working-class men suggesting blackface in Wyoming was both viewed and performed across gender and age groups.



Figure 39. Ad for movie playing at Hub Theater featuring blackface illustrations in the *Casper Daily Tribune* in 1922.[452]

Live blackface performances and mass media transmitted anti-Black ideology across the country, so by the time film gained popularity, audiences were well-versed in Black stereotypes. The 1920s saw the development of reel to reel and many theatres at this time hosted both live and recorded entertainment before transitioning solely to film. But blackface would, of course, appear on film, as well, making the transmission of Black stereotypes easier and more immediate. For example, in spring of 1922, the Hub in Casper showed the movie *With Stanley in Africa* starring George Walsh. Interestingly, the actor's first part was as an extra in *Birth of a Nation*, which infamously includes blackface, in 1915. The ad for *With Stanley in Africa*

connects settler colonialism in the American West and Imperialism in Africa in the film's byline, "It's bigger and better than 'Winners of the West.'"[453] And like in the discussion of the rawhide legends, the movie invokes history to prove its authenticity. "True History's Most Dramatic Adventure," the movie ad claims, for instance.[454]

Large and Small

Blackface entertainment was so widespread it reached most Wyoming towns, large and small. For example, in 1904, the Evanston Opera house featured McIntyre and Heath, "those princes of blackface entertainers."[455] At this time, blackface acts entertained audiences in Thermopolis, Rawlins, and Guernsey.[456] This last town had a population of 274 in 1910, yet still attracted professional blackface acts.[457] This type of entertainment even appeared in local streets. In Cody, for instance, a tent show set up in a vacant lot featured blackface entertainment nightly for a week in the summer of 1911.[458] A couple of months later another blackface show was held at Cody, this time at the Opera House and the act was touted as "well worth seeing" by the local paper.[459] Locals attended blackface acts in Kemmerer, Rock Springs, and Jackson Hole.[460] And audiences in Lander saw "the cottonfields before the war, the tinkling of banjos, the tender, simple ballads, the shuffling dances and quaint humor," according to the local paper.[461] In the opening scene audiences saw "darkies at work in a field of cotton, enlivening toll with songs, dances and sallies of quaint wit."[462] "Enlivening toll with songs, dances and sallies of quaint wit" is not an accurate description the experiences of the enslaved to say the least. These renditions of enslaved experiences sublimate the horrifying reality of life in bondage and the genocidal origins of the U.S. nation.

Blackface in Wyoming reinforced community identity as part of settler colonialist society and culture as well as uniting residents by identifying and dehumanizing the Other—those not a part of the community. It also tied the local community to the nation through white supremacy and anti-Black ideology. The fact Wyoming lacked a large, diverse population did not make blackface entertainment any less popular or prevalent than in other regions. Blackface, like other ethnic play in Wyoming, is further complicated by its use to enhance local communities. In some cases, blackface performances raised money for the community and united neighbors through altruism and philanthropy. For example, in 1915, the small town of Hudson hosted local "school entertainment" with blackface acts in order to raise money for a piano.[463] Lusk featured Al Johnson's Blackface Comedians in "the greatest minstrel show on earth" as part of the First Annual Carnival in 1919.[464] The event raised money to buy Victrola for local schools.[465] Lusk, of course, is part of my discussion of ethnic play in chapter two where locals perform in redface to raise money and improve their community. In many cases, Wyoming communities consumed and engaged in both redface and blackface during the early twentieth-century.

Figure 40. Newspaper article about blackface performers, Moran and Sadler, in the *Fort Warren Sentinel* 1 no. 42, November 24, 1944.[466]

Live blackface entertainment in Wyoming continued until at least the late 1940s. For example, in 1944, at Fort Warren, Wyoming the United Service Organizations (USO) put on a show for military personnel. One headlining act was Moran and Sadler or "Two Black Crows." Moran was by this time a long-time veteran of blackface performing as part of the well-known duo Moran and Mack.[467] In 1949, again at Fort Warren, Jack Reich gave an "outstanding performance," claimed the local paper.[468] One wonders if the blackface duo had ever performed for U.S. Black troops? Afterall, the year prior in 1948, President Truman signed Executive Order 9981 ordering the integration of the U.S. Armed Forces.

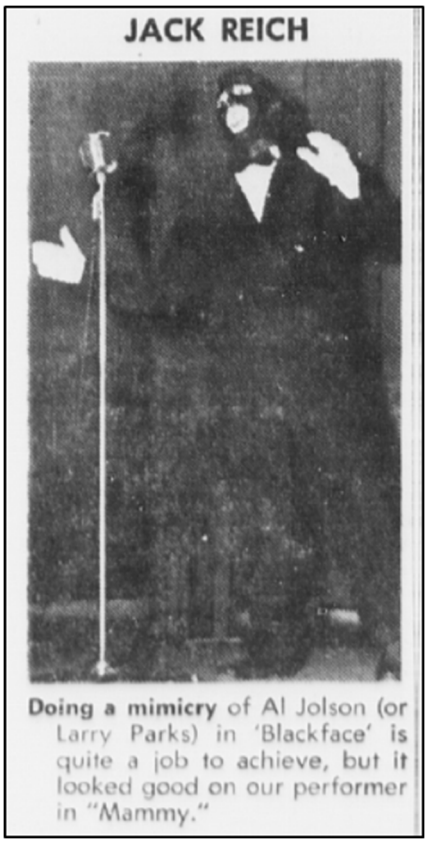


Figure 41. Photo of Jack Reich in blackface in the *Warren Mustang* no. 15, November 10, 1949.[469]

During the first half of the twentieth-century, blackface spread dehumanizing stereotypes and anti-Black ideology in the West, even in areas with little to no Black populations. Perhaps the low population of Blacks living in Wyoming was one of the reasons this form of entertainment remained popular for several decades longer than in other regions. Furthermore, the longevity of blackface suggests that Wyoming, like the American West in general, was not a haven free from discrimination. Unfortunately, for Blacks at this time, Wyoming was not the Equality State. In fact, Wyoming could be a deadly place for historically marginalized peoples. Although the West is not usually associated with practices such as blackface, legalized segregation, and lynching, my

research indicates the presence and, in some cases, the widespread engagement in these practices in Wyoming. This is a history of Wyoming, like the story of Empire itself, which is not well known.

"The N**** Got What He Deserved:" Literary and Literal Black Dystopia

Southern trees bear a strange fruit
Blood on the leaves and blood at the root
Black body swinging in the Southern breeze
Strange fruit hanging from the poplar trees
Pastoral scene of the gallant South
The bulging eyes and the twisted mouth
Scent of magnolia, sweet and fresh
And the sudden smell of burning flesh!
Here is a fruit for the crows to pluck
For the rain to gather, for the wind to suck
For the sun to rot, for a tree to drop,
Here is a strange and bitter crop.
Abel Meeropol, "Strange Fruit," 1937

> *In America, it is traditional to destroy the Black body—**it is heritage**. Enslavement was not merely the antiseptic borrowing of labor—it is not easy to get a human being to commit their body against its own elemental interest. And so enslavement must be casual wrath and random manglings, the gashing of heads and brains blown out over the river as the body seeks to escape. It must be rape so regular as to be industrial…The soul was the body that fed the tobacco, and the spirit was the blood that watered the cotton, and these created the first fruits of the American garden. And the fruits were secured through the bashing of children with stovewood, through hot iron peeling skin away like husk from corn. It had to be blood. It had to be nails drive through tongue and ears pruned away…It could only be the employment of carriage whips, tongs, iron pokers, handsaws, stones, paperweights, or whatever might be handy to break the Black body, the Black family, the Black community, the Black nation.* Ta-Nehisi Coates in *Between the World and Me*

Literary Lynchings

The violent reality of life in the U.S. over the last several centuries is a specter haunting Black peoples across the country. It readily seeped into early Black speculative fiction and both Sutton Griggs and George Schuyler wrote about lynching in their work. For example, in *Imperium in Imperio*, Sutton Griggs describes an incident where two men spot the main character Belton Piedmont at a train station. One of the men is the postmaster, and the other is the local country doctor. The two non-Black men discuss Piedmont's appearance and body, and the doctor fantasizes about dissecting Piedmont. He offers the postmaster some liquor to murder Belton Piedmont and supply his body for the doctor's dissection. The postmaster, the leader of the local white supremist group, replies:

> If we 'nigger rulers' are ever called in to attend to him we will not burn him nor shoot him to pieces. We will kill him kinder decent and let you have him to dissect. I shall not fail to call for that whiskey to treat the boys.[470]

Soon the villains are given the opportunity to enact their murderous plot when Piedmont "had the gall to enter a white church in Monroe this morning and actually took a seat down stairs with the white folks; he did not even look at the gallery where he belonged."[471] And worse than that, Piedmont "actually had the impudence to take her [white girl] book and find the place for her."[472] The congregation quickly formed a lynch mob and pursued Piedmont. The mob catches Piedmont and lynches him, and the postmaster shoots him in the head. The doctor prepares to dissect him, but Belton Piedmont wakes up. Piedmont endures partial vivisection before he can overpower and kill the doctor. Afterwards, police arrest Piedmont for murdering the doctor, but his old schoolmate Bernard Belgrave secures his acquittal. Belton Piedmont is almost skinned alive as punishment for the worst of offense in the settler colonialists' imagination—proximity to a young, fertile non-Black woman—invoking not only the fear of the Black body itself but that

of miscegenation as well. It was clear to Griggs and his readers that fears of miscegenation could be deadly for Blacks.

Like Griggs, George Schuyler wrote about lynching in his novels. In *Black Empire*, one of the many missions of Black Internationale is to end the lynching of Blacks. In the story, the Black Internationale learns about an innocent Black man lynched by locals for supposedly raping a woman. "The Black Internationale is going to stop lynching. That's final," wrote Schuyler.[473] The secret organization responds to the lynching by dropping thermite bombs on the town where it occurs. "Flames swept everywhere. The town became a raging inferno," noted Carl Slater while looking down on the carnage from the plane above.[474] Intriguingly, in George Schuyler's novel *Black No More*, he connects blackface to lynching. Schuyler inverts the traditional lynching ceremony by casting a pair of white men in blackface as the victims of mob violence. The non-Black characters of Snobbcraft and Buggerie regrettably decide that donning blackface will help them protect their identities. "We can put this Blacking on our head, face, neck and hands, and no one will take up for Snobbcraft and Buggerie. Frazier can tell anybody that inquires that we're two darkies he's taking out of the country, or something like that," Buggerie explains to Snobbcraft.[475]

But when the locals in rural Mississippi see the white men's blackened faces, they are more than willing to lynch the two men. The timing of Buggerie and Snobbcraft's arrival was advantageous because the local church congregation had just petitioned their god to provide them with a victim to lynch. Just as the two men in blackface convince the crowd they are not Black; news reaches the crowd that Buggerie and Snobbcraft's family trees include Black ancestors. The local Mississippians quickly lynch the men in blackface and mutilate their bodies. "The two men, vociferously protesting, were stripped naked, held down by husky and willing

farm hands and their ears and genitals cut off with jack knives amid the fiendish cries of men and women," writes Schuyler.[476] The scene is a strange echo of the historical realities of anti-Black violence, and it also draws attention to the fact that often when settler colonialists engage in ethnic play, it is temporary. After all, blackface performers who are non-Black did not have live as Black men in the U.S. If they did, they faced the very real threat of violence in their everyday lives.

Empire, Wyoming, and the experiences of its residents provide a fuller picture of white supremacy in the West. The community of Empire and the speculative fiction of Sutton Griggs and George Schuyler speak to the desire for Black space in the West and the nation at large. Just as moving to Wyoming failed to offer permanent respite from racism, moving on from Empire would also fail to provide an escape from white supremacy for the families who lived in Empire. Back in Nebraska and working in Scottsbluff, Russell Taylor came face to face with local racism and white paranoia in 1919. Todd Guenther explains:

> The lynching of a Black Omahan that year precipitated rioting and destruction by white mobs in that city. Shortly after the Omaha riot, whites in Scottsbluff mobbed the home of an African American family because of a rumor that Taylor was planning to open a boarding house for Blacks there.[477]

These rumors proved to be unfounded, but Russell Taylor was lucky. This was during the Red Summer of 1919, when white supremacists in three dozen cities around the U.S. hanged, shot, and burned at the stake thousands of Blacks. Despite these and other horrors, former residents of Empire continued to pursue their dreams. "Taylor and his contemporaries kept alive their slave-born parents' dreams and ideals: equality, the moral obligation to challenge injustice, and the right of people to create their own communities," explains Todd Guenther.[478] Likewise, George

Schuyler echoes these sentiments in *Black Empire*: "But we all knew it had been but a dream, an ambitious hope, an idle fantasy. Yes, we all knew it."[479] Yet this dreaming remains significant.

Lynching in Wyoming

The lynching of Blacks is usually associated with the South, but it occurred in the American West as well. Because other regions abolished slavery before the Civil War, there is the misconception that it was only in the South that Blacks faced violence and racism. But white supremacy does not respect geographic boundaries. Anthropologist Todd Guenther contends:

> Wyoming, in fact, had a lynch rate more than thirty times higher than supposedly "lynch-prone" scares in the deep South. Though "Judge Lynch" threatened the lives of individual Blacks, Wyoming mobs, unlike their southern counterparts which depended on a large, well-controlled Black labor pool, dreamed of more than just making examples of alleged Black miscreants. So few African Americans lived in Wyoming, and were such an insignificant part of the statewide economy, that the mobbers saw a possibility of banishing them entirely and creating an all-white society.[480]

In the examples of playing Indian discussed in the chapter two, ethnic play reflects settler colonialist fantasies about the West without Native presences. In that case and this one, ethnic play fills the cultural absences of Native and Black peoples with dehumanizing stereotypes rationalizing anti-Black racism and violence. The extrajudicial murder of Blacks in Wyoming goes back to at least the 1800s. In 1864, one year prior to the passage of the 13th Amendment, a slave named Asa was the victim of mob violence at Fort Halleck (near what is now Elk Mountain, Wyoming). A mob beat, and tarred and feathered Asa, and skinned him alive and dissected by the fort surgeon (who was also his owner). The mob leaves Asa's body on the prairie exposed to the elements and animal predation. Later, the surgeon grotesquely displayed the enslaved human beings' skin on the side the fort's hospital.[481] Unlike the rawhide legend I discuss earlier, this human flaying likely occurred.

Perhaps surprising or perhaps not, the West was not as different from other parts of the country when it came to the pervasiveness of white supremacy and it was commonplace for Blacks in Wyoming to face racism and violence. During the nineteenth and twentieth-centuries, Black residents in Wyoming did not have access to the same rights or protections under the law as non-Blacks and state laws made segregation and discrimination of Blacks legal and miscegenation illegal. Such Jim Crow laws were present in the West and not just the South or urban North. Robert Galbreath explains:

> Wyoming's leading newspapers dehumanized African Americans with racist and patronizing articles, advertisements, and cartoons. Entire communities of African Americans were expelled from several Wyoming towns during the decade. At least eight African American men were nearly lynched by vigilante mobs, and three men were lynched.[482]

Those who came to live their frontier dreams in Empire were not untouched by violence such as lynching and police brutality. For example, the local county sheriff, his deputies, and a non-Black prisoner murdered Baseman Taylor, one of the first people to settle in Empire, in 1913. In Wyoming today, the sheriff who lynched Baseman Taylor is more of a hero than a murderer. One historian notes the sheriff's picture hangs at the Goshen County Courthouse in a place of honor.

Empire resident Baseman Taylor was acting erratically. Local law enforcement arrested Taylor for vandalism, and a group of locals in Torrington declared him insane. The group hastily ordered Taylor be committed to the state mental hospital in Evanston, Wyoming. The town's jail was still under construction at the time, so law enforcement detained him at the Torrington Hotel. However, Baseman Taylor never made it to Evanston. According to the research of Todd Guenther and Robert Galbreath, the sheriff, and his deputies repeatedly beat and strangled Baseman Taylor over the course of several days. They did this in front of multiple witnesses at

the hotel. The sheriff also allowed another prisoner, an alleged horse thief, to guard Taylor while armed and unsupervised. This prisoner admitted to assaulting Baseman Taylor in a sworn statement. American Studies scholar and anthropologist Todd Guenther succinctly describes Taylor's murder:

> His death was a lynching, an illegal killing by a group acting under the pretext of serving justice. Baseman's infraction, according to the sheriff, was that he was "a crazy nigger." The local newspaper reported the incident as though his death resulted from preexisting medical or neurological conditions. The authorities did not prosecute the sheriff.[483]

Baseman Taylor's brother, Russell Taylor, later filed a wrongful death case against the sheriff and his insurance company, and two non-Black hotel guests testified on behalf of the Taylor family. The two witnesses reported seeing both the sheriff and one of his deputies violently strangle Taylor to the point he had trouble breathing and could no longer speak.[484]



Figure 42. Main Street Looking North from the Depot, 1918, Wyoming State Archives, Department of State Parks and Cultural Resources [my emphasis].[485] Location of Baseman Taylor's lynching five years after his murder.

After the murder, in January of 1914, the court appointed Russell Taylor as the administrator of Baseman Taylor's estate. The *Torrington Telegram* noted that Baseman Taylor "died before being taken to the state hospital."[486] The *Goshen County Journal* reported on April 23, 1914, a judge dismissed Russell Taylor's wrongful death lawsuit against Sherriff Hayes and U.S. Fidelity with Taylor ordered to pay the court costs.[487] Baseman Taylor was not the only Black victim of lynching in the Equality State during the first half of the twentieth-century. According to Todd Guenther:

> What may have seemed an aberration in 1912 when a Black prisoner was lynched inside the Wyoming State Penitentiary, was followed in 1913 by Baseman Taylor's lynching and Wyoming's antimiscegenation law. A growing national trend of racism and increasing KKK power was also extant in Wyoming. In 1917 a white mob lynched a Black man in Rock Springs. The next year a mob in Green River dragged a Black man from jail and lynched him. In 1919 or 1920 another Black man was lynched in Hudson. The local authorities' general attitude after the lynchings was that "the nigger got what he deserved."[488]

In 1919, the Wyoming legislature passed a weakly-worded joint resolution against mob violence, perhaps in an attempt to repair the state's reputation from that of a lawless state. To this day, no National legislation against lynching exists. The realities of blackface, legalized discrimination, and violence against Blacks in Wyoming counters the dominant narrative that American West is exceptional.

Homesteading, farming, and ranching in Wyoming was challenging in the twentieth-century. And Empire experienced these and other hardships. For example, the 1918 influenza epidemic would take the lives of several Empire residents.[489] Robert Galbreath explains: "The dream of building an autonomous, economically self-sufficient, agrarian community for African Americans in the Equality State did not last."[490] Punctuating the disintegration of the community, the Empire Post Office officially closed in the summer of 1920.[491]

Like the writers Sutton Griggs and George Schuyler, residents of Empire, albeit briefly, expressed agency through the creation of Black space in a world of white supremacy. Today Black lives and Black spaces continue to challenge white supremacy and anti-Black racism. Furthermore, exploring the relationships between Native and Black experiences and histories offers new insights into BIPOC futures. Moreover, approaching American settler colonialism through comparative racialization frameworks reveals possibilities for dismantling the dominant discourses that shape the West. In other words, exploring Black spaces furthers the thinking of the "unthought" of sovereignty to imagine the possibilities of BIPOC projects of decolonization and anti-racism.

While Native and Black responses to settler colonialism and white supremacy are not the same, the following chapters examine the not dissimilar disruptive forces of Native women. This last case study examines playing Indian enacted by Native actors and the complex ways these practices both maintain and disrupt settler colonialism and white supremacy.

CHAPTER FIVE

AMERICAN FANTASIES AND SHOW INDIANS

Inter-Racial Dreams, Show Indians, and Native Stereotypes

> *Whichever narrative has been in the ascendancy, American Indians themselves have had little voice. Their role has been to be the object of the White gaze and the focus of White myth. Current media representations of American Indians are understandable only if seen as the legacy of a complex mesh of cultural elements, including formal history, literature, material artifacts, folklore, photography, cartoons, art, mass media, and anthropological discourse*. S. Elizabeth Bird in "Gendered Construction of the American Indian in Popular Media"

> *Playing or dreaming Indian often came about in opposition to official notions of the nation and of the middle-class utopia of progress and material betterment. While dreams of self-improvement and personal success in the evolving settler capitalist order doubtless drove this nation of immigrants toward a society of cities and an industrial commercial culture of modernity, alternative dreams erupted and persisted in undercurrents of longing and collective desire*. Alan Trachtenberg in *Shades of Hiawatha*

Indigenous scholar Linda Tuhiwai Smith (Ngāti Awa and Ngāti Porou iwi) writes, "the past, our stories local and global, the present, our communities, cultures, languages and social practices—all may be spaces of marginalization, but they have also become spaces of resistance and hope."[492] It is these liminal and liberatory spaces that I examine in this final case study. Inside these more hopeful spaces, I explore the "strategic brilliance" of Native "presence" as described by Leanne Betasamosake Simpson (Michi Saagiig Nishnaabeg) in *As We Have Always Done*.[493]

In these last two chapters, I explore the presences and agency created by Native peoples through ethnic play. In this way, Gerald Vizenor's (Anishinaabe) concept of survivance serves as

a guiding principle. "Survivance is an active sense of presence, the continuance of native stories, not a mere reaction…Native survivance stories are renunciations of dominance, tragedy and victimry," explains Vizenor.[494] The Native presences examined here diverge from the discussion in chapters two and four, where settler colonialists fill Native and Black cultural absences with ethnic play to maintain the structures of settler colonialism and white supremacy. Chapters five and six examine how Native performers in Sheridan, Wyoming disrupt stereotypes and challenge settler colonialism through ethnic play. Specifically, chapter five covers the history of All American Indian Days in Sheridan, Wyoming while chapter six examines the Miss Indian America pageant and the ways participants express agency by adapting and subverting Indian stereotypes perpetuated in the dominant culture, specifically the Indian princess stereotype. What expectations did Native performers encounter while playing Indian and how did they meet and challenge these expectations? What do examinations of instances of redface and blackface in relation to each other reveal about settler colonialism and white supremacy?

Overall, my approach to the analysis of these practices seeks to "reject formulaic interpretations in favor of the complexity of lived experience," to use the words of Robin D.G. Kelley in *Race Rebels*, a study of the everyday rebellions of the Black working-class.[495] As long as there has been settler colonialism in the Americas there has been Black and Native resistance and resilience. As I discuss in the chapters two and four, redface and blackface filled the cultural absences of Native and Black Americans in Wyoming; in contrast, the ethnic play discussed in chapter six explores Native presence through Indian play. My dissertation ends with this case study not only because it focuses on events that occur later in the twentieth-century, but also because this story is more optimistic. The utopian spaces imagined in the following chapters contrasts the exclusionary places discussed earlier in that to some extent, All American Indian

Days encouraged Native physical and cultural presences in Sheridan, Wyoming. While in many ways still problematic, the vision at play here is one that reflects ideas about the possibilities for a more inclusive and diverse American society.

The stories we tell, how we tell them, and the voices we acknowledge in those stories matter. "I will tell you something about stories…They aren't just entertainment. Don't be fooled. They are all we have, you see, all we have to fight off illness and death. You don't have anything if you don't have stories," writes Leslie Marmon Silko (Kawaika/Laguna Pueblo) in *Ceremony*.[496] Stories, as Silko suggests, are a fundamental part of the human condition. However, this is not to suggests that the power of story is benign—it is much more ambiguous. In many ways, stories prop up settler colonialism in the U.S., while at the same time, stories have the power to dismantle this same insidious structure. As a result, the discipline of American Studies' interdisciplinarity and view of U.S. history and culture from multiple perspectives offers significant insight into analyses of settler colonialism.

The field of American Studies has produced robust scholarship about playing Indian and the Indian princess stereotype including works by historians Philip Deloria (Wičhíyena/Yankton Dakota) and Alan Trachtenberg. I build on these and other foundational works from American Studies, Native Studies as well as literary criticism, and expand on this scholarship to discuss localized cultural productions of ethnic play in Sheridan, Wyoming's All American Days (AAID) and Miss Indian America (MIA) pageant, established in 1953. Unlike my previous chapters examining redface and blackface, in this case Native peoples expressing agency step into redface to disrupt Native stereotypes. My research draws a connection between nineteenth-century Show Indians, Indian princess stereotypes, and the twentieth-century participants in All American Indian Days and the Miss Indian America pageant. The attention to Native agency

works to "counter the tendency in much scholarship on Native Americans to envision Indigenous peoples—particularly those involved in the entertainment industry—as the innocent dupes of capitalism, institutional power, patriarchy, and colonialisms," according to Indigenous film scholar Michelle Raheja (Onödowá'ga/Seneca descent).[497]

Raheja's study of redface by Native film actors in *Reservation Reelism: Redfacing, Visual Sovereignty, and Representations of Native Americans in Film* provides useful insights to my examination of Native participation in playing Indian at All American Indian Days. Like Raheja's film analysis, I focus on the ways Native peoples' performative expressions of agency counters the very stereotypes redface espouses. Raheja uses the term "redfacing" to refer to playing Indian by Native film actors, specifically, which is a "complex practice that was at times transgressive but reified negative stereotypes at others."[498] There is a distinction between redface enacted by non-Natives and that engaged in by Native performers because of the oppressive structures of settler colonialism and white supremacy. These realities often severely limited the choices of Native peoples to perform beyond the expectations of settler colonial society. Moreover, Raheja sees a connection between the resistances enacted by Native and Black performers in the film industry, "How Native American female actors intervened into a representational regime dominated by both colonials and gendered restrictions is similar to the work created by racialized subjects in other contexts" including that of Black Americans, she explains.[499]

All American Indian Days and Miss Indian America, 1953-1984[500]

In the 1950s, local personality Francis Howard Sinclair helped found All American Indian Days (AAID) and the Miss Indian America (MIA) pageant in Sheridan, Wyoming. The

Wyoming Press called Sinclair "the 'daddy' of All-American Indian Days."[501] Sinclair was well-known around Sheridan for his column in the *Sheridan Press* for which he adopted the pen name Neckyoke Jones, a cowboy persona.[502] All American Indian Days included a variety of events including art exhibits, games, dances, equestrian displays, and a beauty pageant. Decades later, Sinclair recounted he created the community event with the goal of improving relations between Native and non-Native peoples in Wyoming. This was after Sinclair "learned that the restaurants in a neighboring town would not serve breakfast to a just returned Korean veteran because he was of Indian descent. Sinclair's indignation spilled over at the treatment of this clean-cut, well educated boy in the United States Marine uniform, who had risked his life for his country," claimed one event program.[503] So in 1951, when Apsáalooke/Crow Nation woman Lucy Yellowmule won the title of Rodeo Queen at the Sheridan Rodeo, Sinclair was inspired to create the Miss Indian America pageant as part of the larger event All American Indian Days. At the rodeo that year, Yellowmule entered a long and complicated tradition of "Indian" royalty in the United States.

All American Indian Days' primary goals included educating the community about Native peoples and the improvement of race relations in Wyoming. While possibly exaggerated, when Sinclair took his campaign to Sheridan "down came the 'No Indian Trade' signs in windows of the restaurants and hotels. Indian patronage was welcomed in the local stores," claimed one event program.[504] All American Indian Days and the Miss Indian America pageant show the efforts of both Natives and non-Natives to combat racism and foster a sense of community in twentieth-century Wyoming.

At the center of All American Indian Days and Miss Indian America is the idea that a better, diverse world was not only desirable but possible. Both Native and non-Natives worked

together to organize and administer the events. Historian Gregory Nickerson suggests AAID and MIA "demonstrated how Native people and small-town citizens worked together to pursue the ideal of equality in the mountain states of Wyoming and Montana."[505] H.F. Sinclair, for example, addresses the discrimination in an article in the local paper:

> Over a long period of years out of no place, and for no apparent good reason, a wave of discriminatory practices seemed to roll over Western country. This was particularly evident in western towns and communities adjacent to Indian reservations. Signs appeared in restaurant windows reading 'No Indian trade wanted.' In one western city these signs reached the ultimate and read 'No Indians, Mexicans or dogs allowed.' Indians were refused service at some hotels and motels. In one theatre Indians were asked to sit in the balcony. The situation took on the aspect of a sort of 'Jim Crow' attitude.'[506]

As discussed in the previous two chapters, Blacks in Wyoming faced similar discrimination at this time. Sinclair acknowledges this connection between Native discrimination and anti-Black racism in Wyoming. In order to address racism, education became part of the events' approach to improving relations between Natives and non-Natives.

Significantly, All American Indian Days and Miss Indian America event materials educated audiences about Native peoples and cultures. Many of these efforts counter the dominant narratives about Native peoples in the U.S. at this time. The 1964 program, for example, disputed several long-held myths about Native peoples addressing primitivism, the name "Indian," and the homogenization of distinct tribes and nations. First, it addresses the fallacy that pre-contact Native peoples lacked sophisticated civilizations. "Indians of the Southwest developed a high degree of civilization and used gold, silver, and copper for ornaments," the program reads.[507] Additionally, the program addresses the misnomer "Indian," it explains:

> The white men who came to America made many mistakes regarding the Indians, one in regard to their name. When Columbus discovered America, he thought he

> was in India, which was the land he planned to find so he called the Natives here Indians.[508]

In addition, event programs educated audiences that there are numerous distinct tribes and nations in the U.S. "Most Americans think of the Indians as a race of men who were all alike. That was not true in early day America nor is it true today—the Seminole is very different from the Crow," reads the article.[509] These examples show several ways All American Indian Days and Miss Indian America challenged popular stereotypes about Native peoples. However, event programs and advertisements also perpetuated several common Native stereotypes. Interestingly, in addition to addressing the misnomer Indian, the same excerpt perpetuates the myth of discovery with the phrase "When Columbus discovered America."

The Persistence of "Indian" Stereotypes

As admirable as the goals of All American Indian Days and Miss Indian America, aspects of the events are still problematic. This examination of the stereotypes maintained and perpetuated by this event as well as the ways Native participants disrupted these stereotypes show the complicated and contradictory ways ethnic play operates in American culture. Event materials and local newspaper coverage often reflects Native stereotypes revealing the persistence of anti-Native racism. For example, one event program clearly privileges non-Native written histories over Native oral histories. At the same time, the program casts doubt on Native claims to the American West, suggesting:

> That the area was the home of human beings for many centuries is evidenced by artifacts which are abundantly found in every part of it. Whether or not these people were the ancestors of the American Indian is for the ethnologist, anthropologist, and archeologist to conjecture. We cannot definitely place the present day tribes much beyond white man's records—as the Indian has no written language. All that transpired prior to the white man's accounts is a matter of legend which has been told and retold and may have been distorted in the retelling. The 'winter count' of

> the Sioux is the only plains redman's record—the translation of which is also bound up with legend.[510]

The program succinctly combines two common myths about Native peoples. First, that Native peoples' indigeneity to the Americas is doubtful, and, second, the myth that Native peoples had no written language and therefore no history or sophisticated cultures and civilizations.



Figure 43. Ad including stereotypes that appeared next to AAID coverage in local Sheridan newspaper [cropped].[511] Note the use of the gendered racial slur.

Despite the goals of inter-racial harmony, the presence of Native stereotypes in local advertisements indicated deeply ingrained anti-Native stereotypes. For example, a 1955 advertisement for Sheridan Laundry features a stereotypical Plains "Indian" couple. The man sits cross-legged with a bag of wampum in his lap. He has exaggerated facial features and a feather

sticking straight up from the back of his head. Similarly, the woman wears two braids and wears a buckskin fringe dress. There is even a gendered slur in the text of the ad. “Savum Wampum on Squaw’s Clothes!” it reads.[512] At the same time that the ad caricatures Native peoples, it reinforces dominant American gender stereotypes. Most obviously the economic superiority of men. The stereotypes in such ads seem contrary to the goal of inter-racial harmony promoted by All American Indian Days and the Miss Indian America pageant. Similarly, in 1957, an advertisement for the Sheridan Iron Works appears next to an ad for that year’s All American Indian Days. The Iron Works ad exclaims, “Don’t Get Scalped!”[513] This reference to stereotypical “Indian” violence perpetuates anti-Native views. Next to these words is a drawing of a Native man dancing with a bow raised above his head and two feathers sticking out of his hair. Strangely, next to the ad for the iron works is an ad for that year’s AAID that reads, “An Inter-Racial Project in Human Relations.”[514]

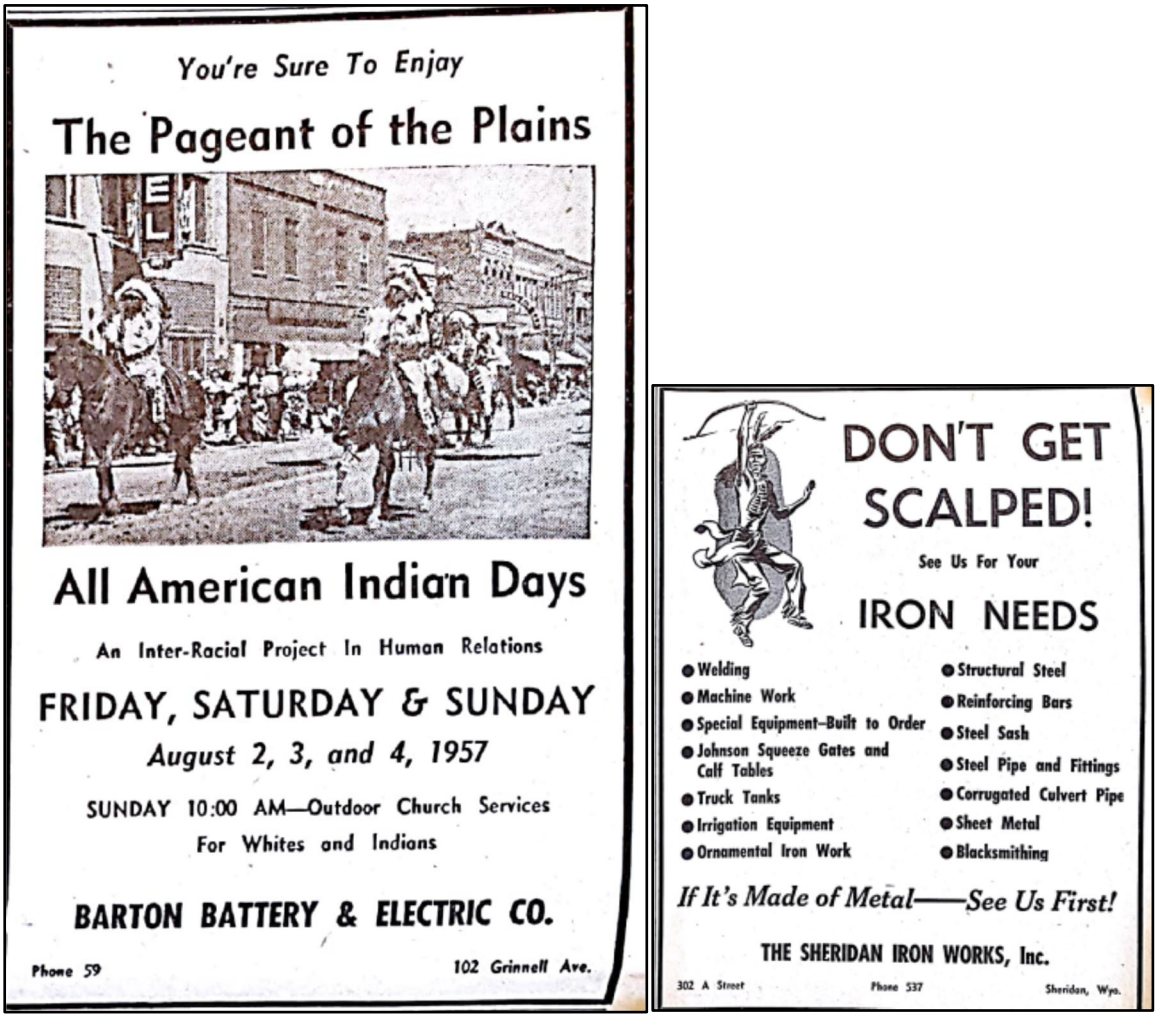


Figure 44. This ad for AAID (left) appears next to an ad for The Sheridan Iron Work, Inc. (right) [cropped, my emphasis].[515]

Native stereotypes fill cultural spaces even in events aimed at combating racism. Intriguingly, the history of AAID and MIA reflect both settler colonialism and decolonization in Wyoming. These events are so interesting precisely because they are somewhere in between settler colonial spaces and Native spaces. Furthermore, this sets All American Indian Days and Miss Indian America apart from the ethnic play I examine at *The Legend of the Rawhide Pageant and Spectacle*. In chapter four, for instance, I examine how blackface stereotypes filled Black

cultural absences at the same time the community of Empire disrupted Black absences through their presence in Wyoming. Building on these previous examinations, I focus on the ways All American Indian Days also countered physical and cultural absences in Sheridan. As scholars Tiffany Lethabo King, Jenell Navarro, and Andrea Smith assert, "the engagement of deeper connections between Black and Native studies/peoples can be indication of the ongoing failures of white supremacy, anti-Blackness, and genocide and lead us to better modes of getting free."[516] For my discussion, part of this process of "getting free" is addressing Native responses to the structures of settler colonialism and white supremacy through ethnic play.



Figure 55. "Buffalo Bill's Wild West," Buffalo Bill and Show Indians pose infront of several tents and teepees in Italy in 1890 picture by Royale Photography, Wikicommons.[517]

Show Indians in Wyoming

Show Indians, Indigenous performers most often associated with productions like Buffalo Bill's Wild West, also entertained audiences at events like rodeos, circuses, vaudeville, and variety shows. These performances included a variety of acts such as displays of equestrian skills, dances, parades, and reenactments. Show Indians performed in Sheridan for decades before All American Indian Days began in the 1950s. Since at least the 1890s, Crow and Cheyenne peoples came to Sheridan to spectate and participate in rodeo events.[518] According to historian Gregory Nickerson:

> These events gradually became more organized, and the first Sheridan WYO Rodeo was held in 1931…Local tribes paraded to display their horses and regalia, set up tipi camps, and competed in races and rough-stock events. Indian dancers held public performances sponsored by downtown merchants…At night, rodeo-goers visited the glowing Crow camp west of the fairgrounds or the Cheyenne encampment to the north.[519]

Similarly, for All American Indian Days, tribes from around the country were invited to perform and camp at the Tipi Village, which like the encampments of Show Indians with Buffalo Bill's Wild West, was an exhibit in of itself with visitors and tourists encouraged to wander through the camp for entertainment. In 1954, in addition to the Tipi Village, visitors to AAID could also see displays of horsemanship, foot races, dance contests, arrow throwing competitions, stick and hoop games, parades, and ceremonies. However, audiences often expected participants in the events to meet the Native stereotypes they knew so well. These expectations demanded a particular image of Native men wanting to participate in the horseraces, for example. Event information for 1954 reads, "all male riders in race must ride with breech cloth, war bonnet, or other headdress."[520] Although there was significant Native participation in All American Indian Days, in many cases, the events were still heavily curated by the non-Natives. Yet Native performers did not simply conform to stereotypes, they challenged them as well.

Native performers at AAID and MIA are part of a long tradition of tribal peoples in entertainment. Some scholars counter the suggestions that employers exploited Show Indians like the Oglala Sioux who performed in Buffalo Bill's Wild West. Vine Deloria, Jr. (Wičhíyena /Yankton Dakota) recognizes the valuable experiences and social capital gained by Native peoples through such employment. Scholars such as Deloria, Jr. counter stereotypes of Show Indians as one-dimensional, exploited victims. He writes, "Perhaps they realized in the deepest sense, that even a caricature of their youth was preferable to a complete surrender."[521] In this sense, these Show Indians played Indian while also continuing many traditional Native practices. Similarly, Michelle Raheja found many Native film actors "chose to exert their influence on films with Indian plots rather than choosing to be completely excluded in the film industry."[522] Furthermore, Deloria, Jr. argues Show Indians welcomed opportunities to travel, wear regalia, dance, and display horsemanship skills at a time most reservations life restricted these practices. Show Indians accessed money, travel, and opportunities not available to most Native peoples at this time. Like the benefits Show Indians gained by performing in Wild West shows, Raheja suggests Native actors used such roles to their benefit as well. Raheja explains:

> Playing Indian roles provided these actors with class and geographic mobility, financial security, independence from the restrictions of white reservation agents, opportunities for political and social activism, and access to a limited range of intuitional power…They used their privilege status in the service of their reservation or home nation, as well as broader transnational, urban communities.[523]

Similarly, the Native men and women who participated in All American Indian Day and Miss Indian America expressed individual and community agency in addition to using their experiences at these events to contribute to their communities.



Figure 46. “Donald Deernose-Crow Indian Chairman at the All American Indians Days,” no date, 17661, Wyoming State Archives Photo Collection.[524]

Two experienced Native performers involved in organizing All America Indian Days and Miss Indian America was the married couple Donald and Agnes Deernose (Apsáalooke/Crow Nation). The Deernoses previously performed overseas when they embarked on a dance tour in Europe sponsored by State Department. The couple first met Sinclair when he visited their home in Lodge Grass to have pictures taken of Lucy Yellowmule after her Rodeo Queen win in 1951. Agnes Deernose explains in her biography, “in talking with Donnie, Mr. Sinclair got the idea for American Indian Days. This was in 1952, and at first Donnie didn’t like the idea.”[525] Regardless of first impressions, however, the couple became significantly involved in the events. Donald Deernose traveled around the country to network and organize directly with tribes to assure their

involvement in All American Indian Days, and Agnes Deernose served as a chaperone for Miss Indian America contestants for many years.

The yearly event also allowed opportunities for Native and non-Native peoples to network and form lasting relationships. Agnes Deernose relates: "We made many new friends through American Indian Days, especially with other Indians from the West."[526] The couple often hosted get-togethers for Miss Indian Americas during their reigns and frequently the women would spend time with the couple in Lodge Grass, Montana. "Almost every Miss Indian America used to stay in Sheridan until the next American Indian Days. They weren't used to staying with Whites and would get lonesome," Agnes Deernose explains.[527] At AAID and MIA, the Native community was an integral part of the organizing of the events and supporting the participants which is an important distinction from the instances of ethnic play examined in chapter two where there was an extreme absence of Native peoples.

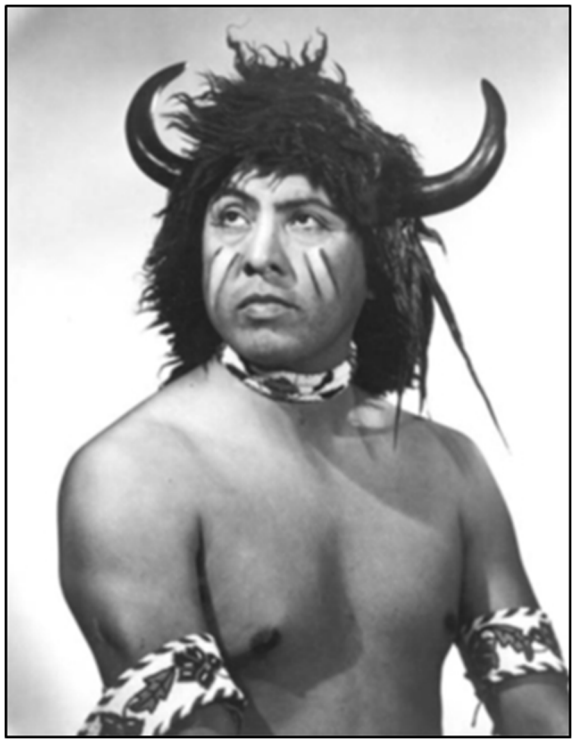


Figure 47. "Joe Medicine Crow-Crow Indian at the All American Indian Days," no date, 17662, Indians Miss Indian America All American Indian Days, Wyoming State Archives Photo Collection.[528]

Another member of the Apsáalooke/Crow Nation involved in AAID was Joe Medicine Crow. Medicine Crow was a performer, leader, writer, anthropologist, and tribal historian. The 1966 AAID program even included an excerpt from the longtime Master of Ceremonies Master's thesis in Anthropology, Medicine Crow writes:

> As a matter of fact, there is no Indian race problem. Indians are not in themselves raising economic, cultural, and biological problems for American civilization. Their problems are the same as the problems of the American citizen—human problems. The only difference is that in most instances problems have been forever made for the Indians, who have not been given their own way in meeting these problems which were in the first place unnecessary.[529]

Medicine Crow asks readers to see Native peoples as human beings as well as American citizens. Emcees and Masters of Ceremonies like Joe Medicine Crow were an important

part of All American Indian Days and Miss Indian America. The level of Native involvement is an aspect that sets All American Indian Days apart from many other Western heritage celebrations during the twentieth-century.



Figure 48. Masters of Ceremony Joe Medicine Crow and Brummet Echohawk, 1955 [cropped].[530]



Figure 49. "Monte Blue, Cherokee Star to Ramrod the Show," *Smoke Signals* [cropped].[531]

Another experienced Native performer to serve as emcee for All American Indian Days was Monte Blue (Cherokee, Osage, French, and Irish descent). Blue served alongside Joe Medicine Crow as Master of Ceremonies in 1954.[532] Gerard Montgomery Bluefeather was an actor with a long career. The 1954 AAID program states, "He specializes in Indian roles, as he is a quarter blood Cherokee."[533] Blue started out his acting career working in silent movies. His first film was 1915's *Birth of a Nation* where he worked as a stuntman and extra, a movie which is now remembered for its celebration of the Ku Klux Klan and its grotesque use of blackface.



Figure 50. Burt Lancaster (left) as Massai and Monte Blue (right) as Geronimo in the film *Apache* (1954) [cropped screenshot]. Both actors are in redface.[534]

The same weekend Blue emceed for All American Indian Days, the movie *Apache*, starring Burt Lancaster, was playing at the Orpheum in Sheridan.[535] In it, Monte Blue played Geronimo and Lancaster, a non-Native actor, played Massai, the last Apache. The movie's Cooperesque storyline about the noble but tragic Massai who is the last of his people perpetuates the vanishing Indian myth. Apache people still existed in 1954 as they do today. Regardless, the movie proved popular at the box office that year. *Apache* is an intriguing example of the use of redface because it includes Burt Lancaster, an actor of Irish and English decent, in redface as the character Massai and Monte Blue playing Indian for the role of Geronimo, the real-life military and spiritual leader of the Bedonkohe band of the Apache tribe. Surprisingly, this was not

Lancaster's first role playing Indian either. A few years earlier Burt Lancaster played Jim Thorpe in a biopic about the famous Sac and Fox athlete.

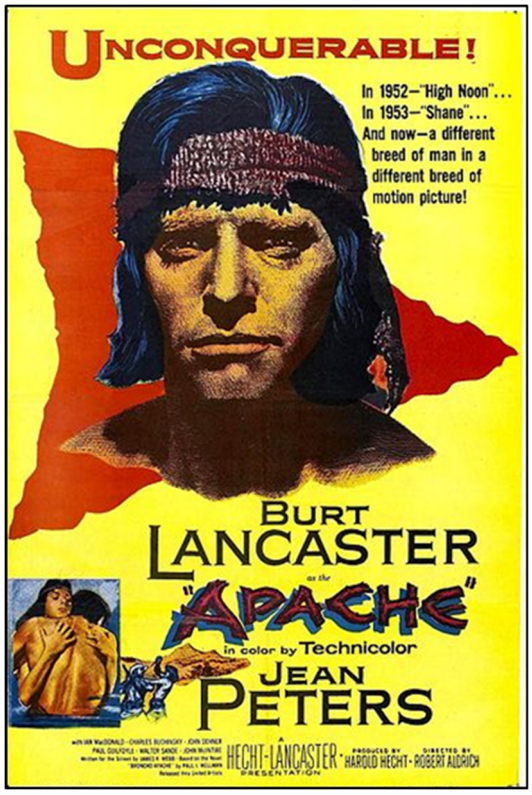


Figure 51. *Apache* movie poster, 1954. Starring Burt Lancaster as Massai the last Apache warrior, Wikicommons.[536] Note the reference to animal husbandry in the use of the term "breed."

As readings of *Apache* suggests practices of ethnic play are complex and dynamic. For example, it is important to note the distinctions between redface enacted by non-Native actors and the performances of redface by Indigenous actors because of the oppressive structures of settler colonialism and white supremacy. Michelle Raheja, Director of the California Center for Native Nations, explains:

> Yet what do we make of the many Indigenous actors who played Native American characters, some of whom also wore heavy makeup to ensure their skin took on a

> reddish cast or were fitted with prosthetic features to appear more "Indian"? These individuals enacted the prevalent discourses of the vanishing Indian by taking roles that were racist characterizations of Indian-white relations created by non-Native writers and directors, while at the same time they tested, critiqued, complied with, and attempted to overturn these stereotypical images both on-screen and off-screen.[537]

As Raheja notes, settler colonialism invests in perpetuating narratives of the vanishing Indian. Both blackface and redface by settler colonialists rely on Black and Native absence in order to maintain the hierarchies of settler colonialism and white supremacy. One reason for this is "white colonial and settler colonial discourse structure the ways that people think about and simultaneously forget the ways that Black and Native death are intimately connected," explains gender and race scholar Tiffany Lethabo King.[538] In contrast, redface by Native performers often uses such performances to disrupt settler colonialism and express individual and collective agency in response to settler colonialism. As a result, Native performers perpetuated *and* disrupted stereotypes. Michelle Raheja explains this process in the film industry:

> Through redfacing, Native actors performed the complicated role of human shields to absorb, deflect, redirect, the placate the fantasies projected on these "celluloid Indians" by the dominant culture. It would be easy to judge Native actors harshly for bequeathing to us the array of stereotypes contemporary Indigenous people are called upon to grapple with and regard with contempt. The ideological and cultural work that redfacing enacts, however, complicates any easy reading of Hollywood Indians [Native actors in redface].[539]

All ethnic play is complex, but it is important to acknowledge the power and status differences in ethnic play enacted by the dominant society versus that engaged in by historically marginalized groups, especially in the context of settler colonialism.

Examining the commonalities and departures in ethnic play and ethnic players is important to understanding how these practices both maintain and disrupt the structures of settler colonialism and white supremacy. The next chapter further examines the ways in which Native

participants in the Miss Indian America pageant both perpetuated and disrupted Indian princess stereotypes. This kind of playing Indian is different from the examples of redface discussed in chapter two. Like many Show Indians and Native actors, Miss Indian America participants expressed their agency and leveraged the social capital gained through the event to better the lives of themselves and their communities.

CHAPTER SIX

IMAGINED HISTORIES AND INDIAN PRINCESSES

Indian women were represented—or misrepresented—in the pictorial press… these ideas and images operated as part of a long standing national (and male) fantasy that constructed Indian women as symbolically useful outsiders, alternatively alluring or repulsive, but always contained by the dominant ideologies of Euro-American culture. John Coward in *Indians Illustrated*

Almost from the beginning, white-Indian contact had been imagined and understood using two contradictory and gendered story lines. In one set of narratives, Indian women, linked to the land itself, gave themselves metaphorically to colonizing white men, engendering a peaceful narrative of cross-cultural harmony in which whites became Indigenous owners of the continent through sexualized love and marriage stories such as that of Pocahontas. Another set of narratives—and sometimes the two could be woven together—relied on the masculinist imagery of violent conflict. Philip Deloria in *Indians in Unexpected Places*

The maiden or princess is the female counterpart of the noble "princes" portrayed by the early colonists and artists, although significantly the two images are rarely seen together as part of a representation of an American Indian culture. Each is presented separately for White perusal. After all, if the princess represents the virgin land that will be possessed by the White man, it would be somewhat inconvenient if she already owed her allegiance to a Native prince…The prevailing view of the princess was that she was gentle, noble, nonthreateningly erotic, virtually a White Christian, and yet different, being tied to the Native soils of America. S. Elizabeth Bird in "Gendered Construction of the American Indian in Popular Media"

Indian Princess Stereotypes

In 1951, when Lucy Yellowmule (Apsáalooke/Crow Nation) won the competition for rodeo queen at the Sheridan Rodeo, it was the first time a Native woman had won the title. Yellowmule was from Wyola, Montana and just sixteen at the time. Although she was not

officially a Miss Indian America, she inspired the event and holds a significant place in its history. In fact, to honor her and the history of the pageant former Miss Indian Americas and the Big Horn City Historical Society are currently raising funds to install a sculpture of Lucy Yellowmule in Sheridan.[540] Before moving on to looking at the ways the Miss Indian America pageant participants subverted the Indian princess stereotype, it is necessary to take a closer look at the development of the stereotype in American culture.

The Indian princess stereotype predates the establishment of the United States by several centuries, and it continues to adapt and be adapted in modern American culture. It appears in forms as varied as gold coins and fine art sculpture to Disney movies and Halloween costumes. For example, the woman commonly known as Pocahontas remains (in no small part due to Disney) one of the most recognizable Native women in American history and culture. Historian John Coward suggests, "Pocahontas was, and is, one of the most famous Native American women in history, an important and useful symbol for generations of Americans."[541] In the non-Native world, her image has been one of American royalty, international intermediary, and eager Christian convert. Anthropologist S. Elizabeth Bird, for instance, explains, "mythmaking is what the story of Pocahontas is all about. The Disney version comes two centuries or more of narrative construction, during which Pocahontas became a multifaceted symbol for the White United States."[542] In many ways, it is another tall tale about Native peoples. As discussed in the first two chapters, stories about imaginary histories often work to elide the real atrocities of the past.

Pocahontas the Indian Princess

Amonute was a real Powhatan woman while Pocahontas became something else entirely. Amonute transformed into Pocahontas, an Indian princess as well as Rebecca Rolfe, a Christian wife and mother. And like Native performers years later, she was able to leverage her role as an Indian princess to access travel and celebrity. Yet the Indian princess stereotype would far outlive Amonute. Two hundred and forty-one years later, for instance, an engraver portrayed another Indian princess figure.

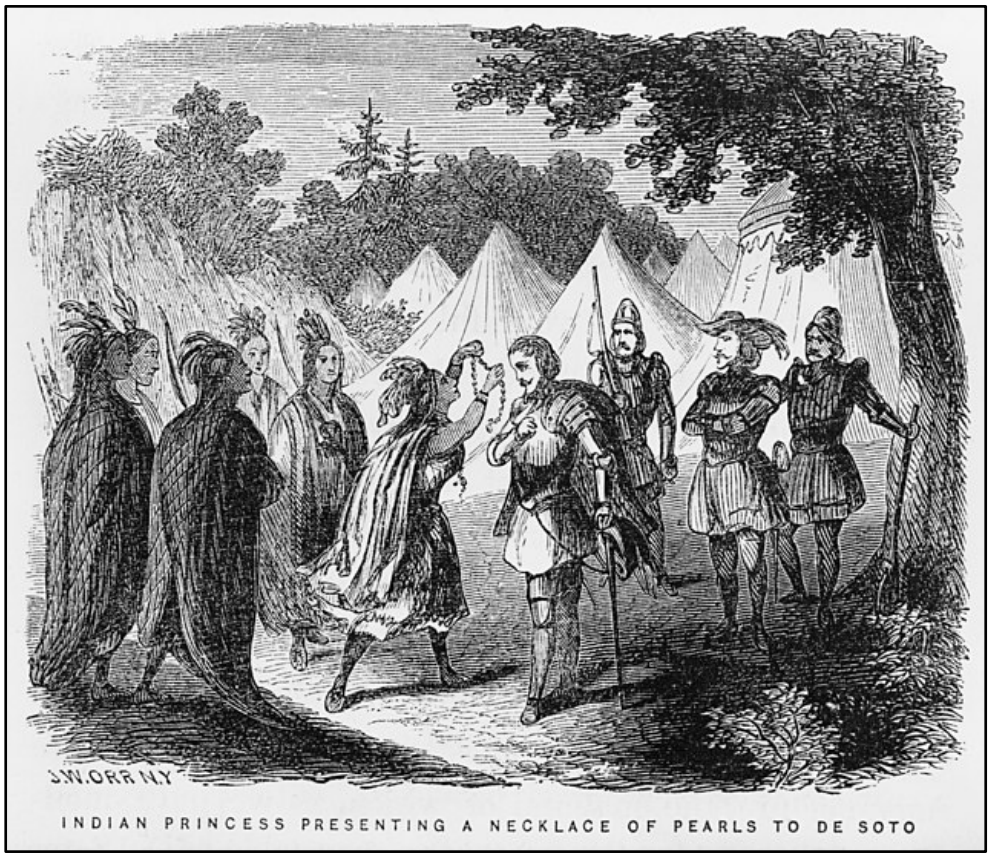


Figure 52. “Indian Princess Presenting a Necklace of Pearls to De Soto,” 1858 Engraving by J.W. Orr, Wikicommons.[543]

The Indian princess and conquest meet again in in the 1858 engraving by J.W. Orr depicting Hernando De Soto, the Spanish explorer. De Soto visited the Americas in in the first half of the sixteenth century (many years before Pocahontas would meet John Smith). The conquistador did not find the gold he dreamt about, but he reportedly found an Indian princess. Chroniclers of his expedition in present day South Carolina and Georgia reported that in the settlement of Cofitachequi the Spaniards met the settlement's female leader. Purportedly, after several weeks of hospitality, they kidnapped the woman. According to the Library of Congress, the woman depicted in J.W. Orr's engraving is Princess Xualla in the town of Cofachiqui.[544] Much like portrayals of Pocahontas, the Indian princess in the engraving reflects Native women's roles as intermediaries between Native and non-Native peoples. She appears to be the only woman in the scene, and it is the Indian princess who reaches for De Soto offering the conquistador a string of pearls—invoking notions of abundance and beauty. She wears the familiar crown of feathers indicating her royal status. But it is the Indian princess' position between two distinct worlds that is so telling. She stands between the group of Native men seemingly inviting De Soto's cadre into Native space. This Indian princess, like other Native stereotypes, obscures the history of genocide and dispossession in the U.S. For example, media scholar, M. Elise Marubbio explains:

> The Princess's desire for Western contact suggests an ability to assimilate into Anglo-American culture—to attain Whiteness. Her participation in colonization through assimilation presents an image of a nation formed out of the nonviolent mixing of different races and cultures. This symbol effectively and peacefully unites components of American history without acknowledging the traumatic and devastating consequences that the nation-building process actually imposes on those forces to assimilate.[545]

This willing convert narrative elides the historical realities of colonization and genocide. Amonute, the real woman and not the cartoon would experience firsthand the "forces to assimilate" into Western culture.

Most of the stories about Pocahontas Americans are familiar with are fantasies. Her celebrity comes from the act of prostrating herself on top of John Smith to save his life from her savage father. John Coward suggests, "Pocahontas's fame comes from her historical role as an intermediary between American Indians and Europeans."[546] Like the Indian princess in Orr's engraving, Pocahontas plays the role of royalty as well as Native and non-Native go-between. But the popular story often gets Pocahontas' biographical details wrong. Moreover, the fact settler colonists kidnapped Amonute and held her for ransom does not appear in the popular narrative that circulates in American culture.



Figure 53. "Matoaks als Rebecka daughter to the mighty Prince Powhâtan Emperour of Attanoughkomouck virginia converted and baptized in the Christian faith, and wife to the worff Mr. Joh Rolff, 1616 Engraving by Simon Van De Passe," Wikicommons.[547]

The 1616 portrait by Flemish engraver Simon De Van Passe shows the full metamorphosis of the character of Pocahontas from noble savage to genteel Euro-American mother. In the portrait, Pocahontas, now Rebecca Rolfe, appears dressed in English finery complete with vast lace collar. Pocahontas is "an ideal Indian woman, every bit as refined and womanly as an English gentlewoman," suggests John Coward.[548] The feathers so long associated with the image of the "Indian" no longer adorn free flowing hair. Instead, the feathers now

fashionably accent Rebecca Rolfe's hat and constitute the fan she holds in her hand. For many, this is proof of the great civilizing forces of Western culture. The original caption invokes Pocahontas'/Rebecca Rolfe's status as princess, Christian convert, and the wife and mother of English men. John Coward explains, "representing Indian women as loving wives and mothers was a way of reinforcing traditional family roles for American women."[549] In addition to promoting dominant Euro-American gender norms, Pocahontas' portrayal as wife and mother promotes the assimilation of Native women into settler colonial culture. This image of a Westernized Indian princess who exists somewhere between Native and non-Native worlds retains its importance to national narratives today—a painting of Van De Passe's engraving of Rebecca Rolfe currently hangs in the National Gallery in Washington, D.C. Additionally, the painting's position in the nation's capital reflects the ability of women seen as Indian princesses to gain access to powerful people and places.

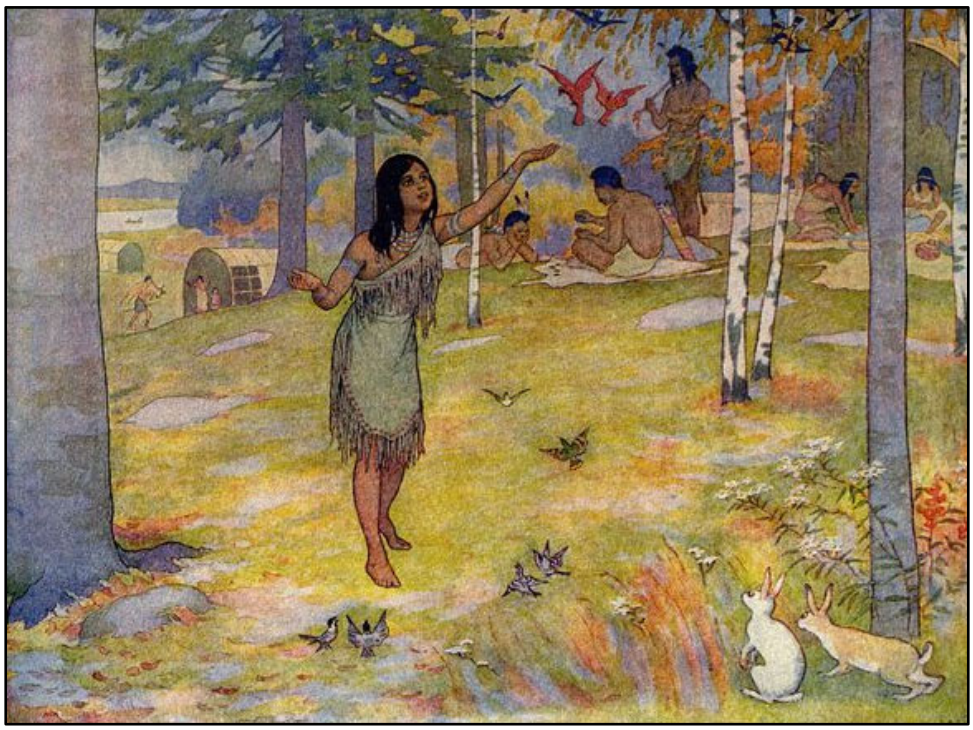


Figure 546. "Presentation of the Princess Pocahontas," Elmer Boyd Smith, 1906, Wikicommons.[550] This depiction of Pocahontas emphasizes the noble savage stereotype.

In contrast to the engraved portrait of Rebecca Rolfe, the work of American writer and illustrator Elmer Boyd Smith depicts Pocahontas as the noble savage. His 1906 illustration shows Pocahontas pre-Christian conversion which is a marked contrast to the severe portrait of Rebecca Rolfe. She appears in bare feet with hair down wearing an off-the-shoulder, form-fitting buckskin fringe dress as she joyfully communes with the animals. The illustration bears a striking resemblance to the fantastical story of Pocahontas told in cartoon form by Disney almost ninety years later (it is the same buckskin dress). According to Michelle Raheja, "through redfacing, the Indian is primarily imagined as a marker for values associated with the mythologized version of America" and the noble savage myth."[551] While anthropologist Patrick Wolfe's "logic of elimination" refers more to genocidal removal of Indigenous peoples, it applies to cultural

absences as well. In other words, stereotypes and falsehoods replace Native peoples' experiences and histories.[552] In this instance, Pocahontas and Rebecca Rolfe replace Amonute. In Smith's version of Pocahontas, the Indian princess is close to nature and frozen in her romantically uncivilized state. Like the image of Rebecca Rolfe as mother and wife, both portrayals reflect racial and gender stereotypes. As John Coward states: "Over time, Pocahontas became a convenient and flexible American symbol, setting the standard for the idealized Native American woman, a standard that—directly or indirectly—affected the way Native American women were viewed and understood."[553] In other words, real-life Native women face expectations created by the settler colonialism's version of the Indian princess even today. Native studies scholar Rayna Green coined the term Pocahontas Perplex to explain the ways this multifaceted stereotype changes over time. Green explains:

> The Indian woman began her symbolic, many-faceted life as a Mother figure—exotic, powerful, dangerous, and beautiful—and as a representative of American liberty and European classical virtue translated into New World terms. She represented, even defended America. But when real Indian women—Pocahontas and her sisters—intruded into the needs bound up in symbols and the desires inherent in daily life, the responses to the symbol became more complex, and the Pocahontas perplex emerged as a controlling metaphor in the American experience.[554]

While it is easy to see the damaging effects of the overtly negative drudge stereotype, the Indian princess stereotype is more ambiguous. However, scholars have noted the close relationship between gendered stereotypes of the Indian princess and drudge. Historian Roxanne Dunbar-Ortiz and Indigenous scholar Dina Gilio-Whitaker (Colville Confederated Tribes), for instance, explore the binary between Indian princess and "squaw,"[555] or drudge. "Centuries of British and U.S. colonization of Native nations produced the binary of the 'Indian princess' and the 'squaw,' which purports to describe both Native women's bodies and their status,"[556] explain Dunbar-

Ortiz and Gilio-Whitaker. The stereotype is yet another way that settler colonialism and white supremacy attempt to control Native bodies and cultures. Readers may recall the slur appeared in the historical pageant I discuss in the chapter two. The "squaw" stereotype, like other gendered stereotypes work to dehumanize Native women. Over time the Indian princess myth continued to change and adapt well into the twentieth-century, however, disruptions in the dominant stereotype appear as well.

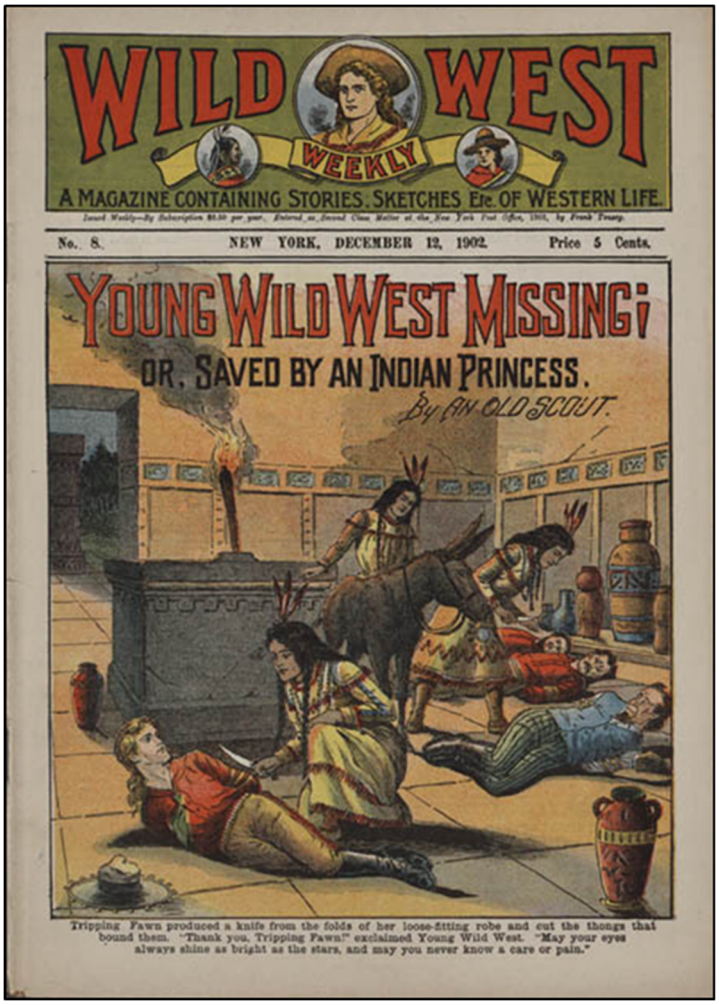


Figure 55. *Wild West Weekly* dime novel from 1902 depicting Indian Princesses saving the day, Wikicommons.[557]

Pop Culture Indian Princesses

Like the popular story of Pocahontas, Indian princesses in early twentieth-century popular culture continued rescuing non-Native men. This is apparent, for example, in the book cover of the Beadle dime novel *Young Wild West*. The cover illustration depicts an Indian princess (or three) rescuing a group of non-Native men including the titular character. Each princess wears three feathers sticking straight up out their long braids. The women are clad in the familiar fringed buckskin, and although the influence of the Pocahontas fantasy is clearly present in the dime novel cover, closer examination reveals some intriguing disruptions in this more modern version of the Indian princess. No longer alone and surrounded by men, the Indian princess on the cover appears in the company of other Native women. The artwork depicts the princesses in positions of power as they look down upon the helpless men. In this scenario, the Indian princesses are active players using their own agency to save Young Wild West and his friends. Moreover, the princesses do not play the role of human shield, and instead the Native women hold the weapons, literally and figuratively. In fact, the princesses appear so powerful that without the caption to clarify viewers could easily misread the scene to see the women as the aggressors who are responsible for subduing the men.



Figure 56. Sarah Winnemucca a self-styled Indian Princess, 1883, Wikicommons.[558]

Sarah Winnemucca

The Paiute woman Thocmentony or Sarah Winnemucca offers another example of a Native women adapting the Indian princess stereotype. Winnemucca both perpetuated and adapted the myth of the Indian princess. She was a performer, writer, educator, and activist. Winnemucca went on lecture tours and wrote the book, *Life Among the Paiutes: Their Wrongs and Claims, 1883*. The press called her the "Paiute Princess," but her royalty was a performance

and not an actual reflection of her social or cultural status. She adopted the stereotypical dress, although her buckskin and fringe consisted of cloth. Yet Winnemucca also adapted the Indian princess stereotype to her own purposes and used it to make a living, travel, and educate people about Paiute issues. She also travelled to Washington, D.C. to advocate for the Paiute who were interned at the Yakima Indian Reservation after the Bannock War.[559] Correspondingly, Miss Indian Americas would continue the tradition of Native royalty as well as the custom of adapting dominant stereotypes to employ agency and affect change. Like Winnemucca, MIA participants educated audiences about Native peoples, traveled, and met powerful people.

Miss Indian America Pageant, 1953-1984

One of All American Indian Days' most popular events was the Miss Indian America pageant. Native women from numerous tribes and nations entered the competition for the chance to serve a one-year term in Sheridan. The winners of the beauty pageant were cultural ambassadors during their reigns and often worked to educate non-Native audiences about Native peoples. They embarked on goodwill and publicity tours such as visits to children's hospitals and appearances on radio and television. However, Miss Indian America winners and contestants were more than beauty queens or Indian princesses.

The pageant was not like most other beauty pageants in the U.S. at this time. In 1950s, for instance, Miss Indian America contestants had to meet specific criteria:

> She may not sponsor or endorse any product, group or event. She may not enter any popularity or other public contest during her year as title holder, although she is the honored guest at the Miss America organization in September at Atlantic City. Her own selection is based upon the following criteria set up by the Indian executive council:
> 1) She must be at least ½ Indian—all winners to date have been at least 7/8s.
> 2) She must be physically representative of one of the ethnic tribal groups.

3) She must be thoroughly versed in the lore and traditions of her tribe—speak its tongue, be able to tell some of its children's legends, origins stories, and know in detail some of the basic facts about its history.
4) She must have distinguished herself in school by scholarship and/or individual activities.
5) She must either make or borrow an authentic tribal costume approved by her tribal group and wear it at public functions.
6) She must demonstrate proficiency and talent; singing, dancing, (Indian), dramatic, 4-H projects, etc.

This is NOT a beauty contest. Indian girls are not permitted to participate in bathing suit contests, according to tribal custom.[560]

Importantly, contestants needed to demonstrate knowledge of tribal culture and seek approval for her costume from tribal members. Although the information emphasizes that MIA is not a beauty contest, physical characteristics, especially appearing Native, was a part of the competition. Similarly, although not listed here, contestants needed to be unmarried and between the ages of sixteen and twenty-six (later it changed to eighteen to twenty-five). Unlike the Pocahontas myth, the role of wife and mother did not fit the image of Miss Indian America. In general, many pageants require contestants to be single as they represent ideals of beauty and their availability signals reproductive viability.

Despite protestations that the pageant was not a beauty contest, contestants were judged on their "beauty, personality and poise."[561] The first few years there was no talent portion of the contest because it was too time consuming (there were as many as one hundred contestants). But by 1967, when the pageant limited the number of entries, a talent show was added.[562] That year the WYO Theatre in Sheridan hosted the talent portion of the pageant.[563] The theatre opened in 1923 and was one of the oldest operating theatres in Wyoming at the time. This would not be the first time the establishment featured performances of ethnic play. The theatre regularly hosted blackface performances during the first half of the twentieth-century.

Beauty and Blood Quantum

The image of Miss Indian America winners was heavily curated to meet settler colonialist expectations. For example, the contestants had to be at least one-half "Indian." Erroneously, a local paper informed its readers that "very few full bloods" existed at the time, it reads:

> Sometimes it is asked just why not confine the contest to full bloods. The answer is that there are very few full bloods. To get full blood offspring, full blood must mate with full blood…IQ tests do not show an Indian with white blood is any more intelligent than a full blood. No race seems to have a monopoly on wisdom—in spite of Adolf Hitler's theories.[564]

This article perpetuates the vanishing Indian myth and the idea that blood quantum equates to Indigeneity both of which are extremely problematic. The U.S. government uses blood quantum to control the definition of who is and is not "Indian" as well as Native peoples' tribal membership. Interestingly, in 1924 Virginia enacted the Racial Integrity Act which made it illegal for members of settler colonialist society to marry BIPOC peoples. The act included the Pocahontas Clause or Pocahontas Exception which legally defined people with one-sixth or less Native ancestry as non-Native therefore making it legal for those peoples to inter-marry with settler colonialists. The state legislature apparently added the clause because many Virginia elites enjoyed claiming Pocahontas as their ancestor.[565] This legal definition of race was in stark contrast to the one-drop-rule regarding the decedents of the enslaved.

However, the MIA article is quick to dismiss any notions that those with "white blood" are more intelligent than those without.[566] Intriguingly, the 1956 program attempts to explain the complexities of defining Native peoples' blood quantum by the color of their skin. It informs the reader:

> NOTE: The degree of white blood in an Indian cannot be determined by the shade of complexion. Often an Indian who has almost no white blood may be very fair-skinned—while an Indian who has a heavy infusion of white blood may be very

> dark. This is one of the peculiar facts of genetics. The degree of white and Indian blood is of record at the administrative office of each Indian reservation—so that the contestant's statement as to degree of Indian blood is easily checked.[567]

As socially progressive as the pageant tried to be, the racial and gender hierarchies of settler colonialism and white supremacy are clearly present. Blood quantum does not equate to Indigeneity and the accuracy of the tracking and recording of blood quantum by the U.S. government is unreliable. Blood quantum was just one of the ways in which the event had to manage audiences' expectations of how Native women should look and behave. However, Miss Indian America participants found ways to express individual and community agency despite the prevalence of Native stereotypes. These women created cultural space through playing Indian in which to counter popular misconceptions about Native peoples.

Indian Princess Stereotypes and Iconoclasts

The connection between the Indian princess myth and the Miss Indian America pageant was part of the event since the very beginning. For example, a 1955 edition of *The Record* featured an advertisement for the pageant that year. It invokes Pocahontas and the Indian princess stereotypes to promote the event. The full-page ad reads: "If Pocahontas were alive today, she'd don her buckskins for a pretty pow-wow."[568] It continues, "Already 80 Indian maidens are heading for the reviewing stands by pony and plane, cart and Cadillac."[569] Interestingly, these words invoke the past by references horses and modernity through the mention of Cadillac. The ad makes sure to let audiences know the women in pageant exhibit modesty. It clarifies the pageant "will not be a swimsuit affair," that instead contestants wear "authentic tribal costume."[570] It takes modesty a step further making the dubious claim that "It's traditional with Indians to disapprove of scanty attire among the womenfolk."[571] In an effort to

assure audiences they could see "authentic" Native traditions and values, it claims contestants must be "at least one-half Indian blood."[572] In addition, the ad entices audiences to see "more than 4,000 Indians, many of whom were formerly deadly enemies, gather to re-enact old times, authentic ceremonies, dances and rites."[573] But of course, the most popular part of the event was "the colorfully dressed, ultra-modest, intensely loyal Americans—those pretty little Indian maids."[574] This perpetuation of the Indian princess stereotype and the idealized maiden reflects dominant American racial and gender hierarchies of settler colonialist culture.

"To be sure, the approach [of Miss Indian America] tapped into a common stereotype dating back to Pocahontas and the earliest encounters between Native people and Europeans," clarifies historian Gregory Nickerson.[575] Yet Nickerson suggests that although MIA perpetuated the Indian princess stereotype, it also worked to counter negative stereotypes especially those about Native men. He suggests Miss Indian America was a "means of reshaping popular opinion, as the non-Indian public perceived such women as innocent of the kind of behavior associated with more negative stereotypes of Indian men."[576] Similarly, some scholars assert Pocahontas and the Indian princess myth, to some extent, counter the stereotype of Native women as drudges or squaws. Historian John Coward, for instance, suggests, "idealized Indian princesses were useful cultural symbols…These women could be honored for overcoming the limitations of their race and represented…beautiful, loving, exotic, and innocently sexual, imagery that separated them from the drudge role assigned to other Indian women."[577] In this way, the cultural work of resisting Native stereotypes comes through Native women embodying these pervasive stereotypes. Similarly, Michelle Raheja argues the narratives Native actors "helped create disrupted dominant discourses even as they sometimes, in trickster fashion, seemingly helped validate conventional narratives through the roles they played."[578] Furthermore, reading Miss

Indian Americas as Indian princess stereotypes negates the ways in which these women expressed agency and countered negative stereotypes through ethnic play. Moreover, these are real women who make real choices about their lives and futures many of whom were cognizant of the popular stereotypes of Native peoples.

Miss Indian Americas

While all Miss Indian Americas deserve attention, I am only able to feature a few of these iconoclastic women here. These women were community ambassadors, roles models, and activists. The first woman to hold the title of Miss Indian America was Arlene Wesley (Yakama) in 1953. In the first national pageant for Native women, she competed against fifty-two other entrants from over twenty tribes and nations.[579] During her one-year reign, she visited Hollywood and appeared on television in New York. As Miss Indian America, Wesley gained opportunities to travel and meet the powerful and famous on both U.S. coasts.

Interestingly, although the event described itself as a celebration of Plains tribes, Wesley is Yakama a tribe from the Northwest coast. This is an early disruption of the Indian princess stereotype which most often caricaturizes Plains tribal dress. Her address to visitors in the 1954 event program was wistful, but self-aware of the event as a performance. In it, Arlene Wesley writes:

> Join with us here for two days and nights to turn back history's pages—while we try to portray for you something of our former ways—perform the ceremonies, dance the dances, sing the songs and play the games—all of which were time worn before the first white man ventured out upon these plains. Lay aside your cares and let today be yesterday. Tomorrow is a new day and we, like you, will return to our everyday tasks in a modem and changed world. In the same manner as you, we revere the historic past. The traditions of our forefathers serve us as a bright star of inspiration to light our way as we still travel along a new and strange trail.[580]

Wesley stresses fidelity between Natives and non-Natives but makes clear that Natives peoples are not stuck in the past and are just as modern as anyone else. In addition, she deftly asserts Native land claims from time immemorial. This assertion stresses Native physical presence (land) and cultural presence (traditions and ceremonies). Similarly, that year's program notes the presence of several descendants of America's most famous Native men. Families related to Chief Joseph, Spotted Tail, Red Cloud, Medicine Crow, Sitting Bull, Rain-in-the-Face, and others participated in or attended the event.[581] The increased physical and cultural presences of Native peoples in Sheridan contrasts with the examples of ethnic play I discuss in chapter two and four.

The second Miss Indian America was from Standing Rock Reservation in South Dakota. Mary Louise Defender (Wičhíyena/Yankton Dakota) was twenty-three years old at the time. According to one press release, judges selected her from a field of seventy-six "beautiful Indian girl contestants" from forty-three different tribes and seventeen states in 1954.[582] Mary Louise Defender graduated from Haskell Institute (the former Indian Boarding School turned tribal college). She worked for the Standing Rock tribe dealing with land transactions at the time. "She was selected by the judges as typifying the modern Indian girl of America, speaks her tribal language fluently, and is well versed in the history of her people. She is noted for her courteous manner and has the pride and dignity for which her race is noted," the press release explains.[583] While tribal knowledge was an asset in the contest, there is also a distinction made between a modern American girl and an "Indian girl of America." Furthermore, an earlier draft of the information notes the judges selected Defender "according to Indian rather than white standards of beauty."[584] This is a somewhat confusing notion considering the panel of judges consisted entirely of non-Natives and the contestants came from numerous different tribes making the idea of "Indian" standards of beauty problematic.[585] Despite the goals of improving relations between

Native and non-Native peoples, the event, in many ways, reproduces settler colonial racial and gender hierarchies. The judge Herbert Brayer explains the make-up of the panel of non-Native judges to the local newspaper: "It would not do…for any members of the tribes to serve as judges. They might be termed 'prejudice' in case one of their members won."[586] This explanation is problematic to say the least. The title of Miss Indian America required winners to navigate various challenges in the course of their duties. Mary Defender, for instance, was very much aware of the public expectations of an Indian princess.

Mary Defender's appearances as Miss Indian America varied; she dedicated a Standard Oil refinery and christened a new Ford Thunderbird.[587] Additionally, Defender attended the Miss America Pageant in Atlantic City in September of 1954. Miss Indian America II stayed at the Madison Hotel along with the previous year's Miss America.[588] However, Miss Indian Americas were guests at the Miss America Pageant and not possible contestants for the New Jersey beauty pageant. During Defender's visit, she stirred up a small amount of controversy in an incident with a paparazzo. "She Just Saw Red," exclaims the headline. "In tears as rain threatened to ruin her authentic Sioux costume, Miss Indian America, Mary Louise Defender shattered newsman's camera when he tried to photograph her at Miss America Pageant in Atlantic City," reads the photo's caption.[589] The headlines played on Native stereotypes to draw the reader's attention. However, Defender was aware of the public's expectations when it came to "Indians."



Figure 57. "Mako-Duta-Win-Red Earth Woman; Sioux-English Name; Mary Louise Defender. Sioux Representative on Indian Committee-All American Indian Days-Miss Indian America II," Wyoming State Archives Photo Collection.[590]

For example, Defender wrote in *Smoke Signals,* the AAID newspaper*,* that she received lots of fan mail and "even proposals of marriage" after appearing in several newspapers.[591] "When you travel to the far eastern part of the country, you come in contact with many who have Hollywood ideas of what an Indian is like and who fully expect you to break out with a war whoop and start waving a tomahawk," Defender explains.[592] However, Defender had many pleasant experiences as Miss Indian America. She recalled meeting many nice people on her travels including when she visited Chicago and enjoyed "a very speedy ride in a Jaguar car" with the local radio and television personality, Tony Weitzel.[593] Defender's experiences as Miss Indian America, like many Native performers in the past, are not as simple as completely exploitative or completely positive, but not recognizing the latter negates the voices of pageant

participants. Defender achieved many great things in her life after serving as Miss Indian America. She became a tribal judge in North Dakota, for instance, and the Executive Director of the Metis and Indian Center in Winnipeg.[594] In addition, she taught Dakota language at Sitting Bull College.[595]


Governor's Guest

Governor of Wyoming, Milward L. Simpson, entertains Miss (Indian) America II at his inaugural ceremonies.

Photo courtesy Doris Kooi Reynolds.

Figure 58. MIA II, Mary Louise Defender and Governor Milward Simpson, *Smoke Signals*, August 6, 1955 [cropped]. [596]



The Pot Begins To Boil

Indian Executive Committee meeting in Sheridan, February 21. Bottom row, left to right: Arlene Wesley, Yakima, Miss (Indian) America I; Donald Deernose, Crow, chairman;; Martin Cross, Confederated Tribes, Ft. Berthold, N. D.; Al Momaday, Kiowa, director of arts and crafts, Brumett Echohawk, Pawness; Francis Bullshoe, Blackfeet Confederation. Top row, left to right: Mary Louise Defender, Miss (Indian) America II, Sioux; W. A. Mehojah, Kaw; John Stands In Timber, Cheyenne; George Harris, Cheyenne; John Little Crow, Sioux; Ben Friday, Arapaho; William Shakespear, Arapaho; Arthur Motanic, Umatilla and George Smith, Cherokee.—Sheridan Press photo.

Figure 59. Indian Executive Committee, organizing body of AAID, *Smoke Signals*, August 6, 1955 [cropped].[597]

Sandra Gover (Skidi Pawnee) was twenty and a student at Haskell Institute when crowned Miss Indian American in 1956. Like the previous winners, she was a special guest at the Miss America Pageant in Atlantic City during her reign. In a letter hoping to secure a publicity tour, Gover was called "a national authority on Indian Sign Language" which she performed to music during the events in Sheridan.[598] According to her contestant biography, her grandfather was Crooked Hand "a famous warrior chief during the Indian Wars era."[599] For the pageant that years, Gover made her own buckskin dress which weighed thirty-five pounds.[600] And buckskin was part of the image the pageant wanted to promote.

Non-Natives involved in administrating the goodwill and publicity tours for title winners often controlled the image of Miss Indian America. Travel itineraries for September of 1956, show Sandra Gover did guest spots on television and radio shows including the *Little Rascals*, *The Ernie Simon Show*, the *Tony Weitzel Show*, and *ABC Breakfast Club*, among others.[601]

Organizers asked Gover to wear her traditional buckskin costume to such engagements as well as anytime during her travels where she might encounter the press.[602] During her publicity tour she visited big cities like Atlantic City, New York, Philadelphia, and Chicago.[603] When Gover did a TV appearance and plugged All American Indian Days, but forgot to mention Sheridan by name, others criticized her. Organizer H.F. Sinclair complained to Herbert Brayer, pageant judge and chaperone, in a letter, "I heard about it immediately!"[604] Much like Show Indians of the nineteenth-century, Sandra Gover met many influential people while traveling around the country. For example, when attending the Rotary International Convention in Chicago Gover had her picture taken with Vice President Richard Nixon.[605] And Gover was not the only Miss Indian America to meet heads of state.

Still, an important part of Miss Indian America's role included playing Indian to meet public (and private) expectations. Miss Indian America organizer H.F. Sinclair contacted Sandra Gover and "suggested to her that she always wear her hair in braids as it is essential she appear Indian at all times, otherwise she might be mistaken for a mulato."[606] Sinclair's words show the involvement of non-Natives in curating the appearance of Miss Indian America, and the fringed buckskin dress and braids have become part of the Indian princess fantasy. Sinclair explained to another event organizer:

> She has but the one buck-skin dress, but says she has a Pawnee dress, which I have not seen, but I presume is made of satin or some other cloth. I have seen pictures of them. They are not authentic but came into use after the Pawnees moved to Oklahoma where buck-skin was not easily obtainable. The Pawnee dress might be well to wear informally—but as this is a Plains Indian affair, buckskin is almost a must for all appearances. The "squaw" dress and turquoise necklace is more or less Southwestern—and not particularly appropriate. We'd like to keep away from Southwestern stuff as much as possible.[607]

Many Miss Indian America contestants and winners from outside the plains participated in the pageant despite these early attitudes of event organizers. Yet this pressure to appear in buckskin and braids shows the strong influence of the Indian princess stereotype on the pageant. However, reading this aspect of the MIA role as complicit in perpetuating stereotypes ignores the agency of Native women and the space these women created space for decolonization as well as negating the Native significance of tribal dress. As historian Robin D.G. Kelley found, historically marginalized groups often appear as accepting of power hierarchies at the same time expressing "disguised forms" of everyday challenges in "spaces controlled by the powerful."[608]



MISS CHICAGO DEPARTS

Sandra Stuart (left), recently named Miss Chicago in a preliminary of the Miss America contest, entrains for Atlantic City (N.J.) finals. On same train is Sandra Gover, of Brigham City, Utah, Miss Indian-America, who will be a guest at the event. Train left from Union Station. (Sun-Times Photo)

Figure 60. Sandra Gover pictured with Sandra Stuart on the train bound for The Miss America Pageant in Atlantic City. *Chicago Sun-Times*, September 3, 1956 [cropped].[609]

In the end, Sandra Gover looked on her experience as Miss Indian America positively. In her own words, she recalled, "During the year you meet thousands of people personally. Most of them are very nice people…You find a few, of course, who ask inane questions and who try to be funny."[610] Gover even encourages other Native women to enter, advising contestants that the "girl who holds the title has responsibilities. Her conduct reflects on every Indian in the country

and the public forms its ideas of Indian people from the way she appears and talks."[611] After her reign, Sandra Gover continued her involvement with All American Indian Days by working as secretary of one of the organizing committees.[612] This continued involvement reflects Gover's agency and the positive role the event held in her and many contestants lives. Often Miss Indian America contestants built on their experiences at AAID and MIA to make significant contributions to their communities which counters the idea that pageant participants were just Indian princesses. Historian Robin D.G. Kelley describes this focus on the "everyday forms of resistance at work and in public space" in his study of the daily rebellions enacted by the Black working-class in *Race Rebels*.[613] As Kelley argues, while these "day-to-day strategies" may seem like small-scale acts, but their existence carries significance.[614] Such a reading allows a more nuanced reading of the complex engagement of Native women with the Indian princess stereotype.



Figure 61. "Vivian Linda Arviso - Miss Indian America VII," Arviso bucked the buckskin trend in her Southwest style dress.[615]

Another true iconoclast to serve as Miss Indian America was Vivian Arviso (Diné/Navajo) who won in 1960. During her reign, Arviso attended J.F.K.'s inauguration and when she appeared at Disneyland's Indian Village, she foreshadowed the connection between Disney and the Indian princess.[616] Arviso looked back at AAID fondly. "I truly thank AAID for providing the lens that helped me grow as an individual and which has led to a highly satisfying lifelong career among Native peoples," she wrote.[617] After her reign as Miss Indian America, Arviso helped draft the Declaration for Indian Purpose a document outlining the steps for tribal self-determination.[618] In addition, Arviso went on to serve as President of Navajo Nation Women's Commission, and after serving as MIA, Vivian Arviso advocated for more Native control and involvement in All American Indian Days and Miss Indian America. For example, a

decade after her reign she voiced her view that tribal peoples needed to be more involved in the planning of the event. “Indians must be allowed to have a firm voice in an event which promotes their historical heritage and their position in society today,” Arviso wrote in the local paper.[619] She suggested that changing the host city to a location with a significant tribal population would be beneficial.[620] Similarly, Vivian Arviso also spoke out about the non-Native panel of judges for the pageant. As result, in the later years of the pageant, the panel of pageant judges to included Native and non-Native peoples.[621]

Another Miss Indian America who advocated for Native issues was Marcelle Sharron Ahtone (Kiowa), MIA VII. From Billings, Montana, she was a twenty-one-year-old college student when she became MIA in 1965.[622] Like others before her, she embarked on an extensive publicity tour visiting events such as Crow Indian Fair, Navajo Tribal Fair, and the Denver National Western Stock Show; additionally, Marcelle Ahtone and her family were also able to tour the White House while in D.C.[623] It was during these trips that she rode on an airplane and drove in a convertible for the first time.[624] Again, as a result of their positions as Miss Indian Americas many pageant winners had opportunities to travel and experience new things. However, not all Marcelle Ahtone’s experiences were enjoyable. At one of her many appearances on radio and television, Ahtone “would have to endure the indignity of being interviewed by a puppet named Froggy Do. She found it difficult to converse with a puppet in front of the studio audience, especially a puppet she did not recognize,” according to historian Josh Clough. [625] Furthermore, when Ahtone showed up for her appearance on “To Tell the Truth,” the engagement was cancelled when “producers later decided they did not want her because she looked too much like an Indian. She interpreted this to mean that her skin was too dark and that they wanted a light-complexioned ‘Pocahontas or something.’”[626]

On a more positive note, Marcelle Sharron Ahtone wore her mother's buckskin dress from the 1920s which her grandmother beaded.[627] This complicates the appropriation of buckskin by the Indian princess stereotype. "Most of the dresses and accessories the ladies wore had been handed down to them by their mothers or made by their female relatives specifically for the MIA pageant," explains Josh Clough.[628] This emphasis on the sense of pride many women felt wearing regalia and other items passed down through their families complicates the conflation of buckskin dresses and Indian princesses.

Marcelle Ahtone exerted significant influence on the Miss Indian America pageant when she petitioned the event committee to move the American Legion band dressed in "navy blue Custer 7th Calvary uniforms" to the back of the parade procession.[629] These uniforms recalled the history of the massacres of Native peoples by U.S. Troops, so Ahtone and her family "demanded that the AAID board move the band to the rear of the pro-cession where it belonged. This angered some of the white board members, but ultimately the Ahtones prevailed and the band was relocated to the back of the line," explains Clough.[630] Ahtone and other MIA continually proved themselves to be more than just Indian princess stereotypes. "Thousands of people across the nation had the opportunity to hear Sharron Ahtone Harjo speak and met her personally and many walked away from the experience impressed with her as a human being, not simply as an 'Indian princess,'" relates Josh Clough.[631] Ultimately, Ahtone, too, considered the pageant a positive experience. She called it "one of the most rewarding experiences in my life."[632] While Miss Indian America participants faced stereotypes and discrimination, they also accessed travel, fame, and activism through the pageant. Furthermore, these women created Native cultural spaces and countered Native stereotypes, and today the women who participate in Native pageants continue this vital decolonizing work.

In the End

Financial difficulties had always plagued All American Indian Days and the Miss Indian America Pageant. A June 1980 letter to event board members broke the news that the pageant "has to be done on a lesser scale due to the shortage of money."[633] By 1984, Sheridan hosted the last Miss Indian America pageant. The winner Annie Willie (White Mountain Apache/Paiute) would spend most of her reign in the new host city Bismarck, North Dakota.[634] The Miss Indian America pageant ended entirely in 1989. There was some interest in bringing the pageant back to Sheridan, yet it never materialized.[635]



Figure 62. "The Filming Crew at All American Indian Days-Looking at Tepees and Indian on their Horses."[636]

Miss Indian Americas were not just beauty queens or Indian princess stereotypes. They are activists, educators, and iconoclasts. The relationship between Indian princess stereotype and

the Miss Indian America pageant is multifaceted. However, acknowledging Native participants' voices and experiences reveals the complex ways Native people engaged in ethnic play to dismantle Native stereotypes and express individual and community agency. Miss Indian Americas, for instance, appeared in the Inaugural parades of Presidents Reagan, Nixon, Johnson, and Kennedy. They would meet powerful politicians such as Senator Robert Kennedy, Henry Kissinger, and Governor Rockefeller as well as celebrities like Johnny Cash and June Carter. They appeared on radio and television including guest spots on *The Tonight Show*, *Merv Griffith*, *The Today Show*, and the *Little Rascals*. They worked on important projects such as the United Nations Declaration of Rights of Indian People and were involved in organizations like the National Congress of American Indians, and the American Indian Council at the White House Conference on Youth. Furthermore, Miss Indian Americas found themselves in a variety of places from Parades in Pasadena to the offices of Senators in Washington D.C. Today many Miss Indian America participants are actively involved in keeping the event's memory alive in Sheridan through reunions and public works. In 2013, for example, Sheridan hosted the sixty year reunion of Miss Indian America, and as part of the celebration's events several former Miss Indian Americas led the parade as grand marshals for the rodeo and pow-wow.[637] The former All American Indian Days emcee and elder Joe Medicine Crow, the last Crow War Chief, was there. He was 99 years old.

Native women around the country still represent themselves, their families, and their tribal nations in pageants each year. They are activists, ambassadors, agents of change, and the presence they embody is decolonizing, and these women continue the tradition started by Miss Indian America and other pageants like it. They are not Indian Princess stereotypes—they are Native presence. "It is not happenstance or luck that Indigenous people and our lands still exist

after centuries of attack. This is our strategic brilliance. Our presence is our weapon," Leanne Betasamosake Simpson (Michi Saagiig Nishnaabeg).[638]

EPILOGUE

A Stubbornly Persistent Illusion

If we're to live up to our own time,
then victory won't lie in the blade.
But in all the bridges we've made,
that is the promise to glade,
the hill we climb.
If only we dare.
It's because being American is more than a pride we inherit,
it's the past we step into
and how we repair it.
Amanda Gorman in "The Hill We Climb"

Before late 2020, the term white supremacy barely appeared in these pages. However, after the summer's protests of law enforcement's dehumanization and killing of BIPOC peoples, I could no longer ignore the connections between the violence of white supremacy in the past and that of the present. The events in Washington D.C. on January 6, 2021, solidified my resolve to bring to this relationship to light. In many ways, the attack on the Capitol Building was whitelash in response to the social movements against white supremacy from the summer before. On January 6, when I watched a non-Native man in redface, who calls himself the Q Shaman or the Yellowstone Wolf, on television as he stormed the U.S. Capitol Building, and dressed in fur and horned headdress while brandishing a spear adorned with the Stars and Stripes, the connection between ethnic play and white supremacy was never clearer to me. After writing this dissertation, the dismaying and sickening déjà vu I felt watching these images and events left my mind whirling and my stomach in knots.

Yet over the last year, I have also seen more hopeful connections between my work and the present. For example, the story about the soon-to-be community of Freedom, Georgia caught my attention. In August 2020, after witnessing the protests against police brutality that summer, nineteen Black families purchased ninety-seven acres of land to create a "thriving safe haven for people of color, for Black families."[639] This community builds on the legacy of Black towns of the past, like Empire, Wyoming, to create BIPOC spaces and futures. "We needed to create a space and a place where we could be a village, again, a tribe, again," explains Ashley Scott the real-estate agent involved in the deal.[640]

In another glimmer of hope that took place in February of this year, the Cherokee Nation's Supreme Court ruled to remove the language "by blood" from its legal doctrines including the Cherokee Nation Constitution.[641] These words legalized the exclusion of the Cherokee Freedman—the descendants of Cherokee and the enslaved—from citizenship in the Cherokee Nation and obscured the Cherokee's history of slavery. The change comes after a 2007 constitutional amendment to add the "by blood" language and strip the Cherokee Freedman of any citizenship rights. This change to the Cherokee Nation's legal doctrines is the literal embodiment of sovereignty and the "co-constitution or oneness" of Native and Black histories and experiences that Tiffany Lethabo King explores in her study *Black Shoals*.[642]

Additionally, the most significant moment of hope for me was the feeling—the frisson—I felt listening to the words of Amanda Gorman at the Presidential Inauguration fourteen days after January 6. I knew then that I must continue to step into the past and help create spaces to repair it for the future. Thus, my study is an attempt to examine the forces that order and disorder BIPOC histories and experiences in the U.S. Ultimately, my goal is to explore the oppressive and

liberatory spaces that ethnic play makes possible in order to expose and disrupt the interrelated structures of settler colonialism and white supremacy.

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311 Cornel West, "Introduction," in *Imperium in Imperio: A Study of The Negro Race Problem A Novel* (Scotts Valley: Create Space Independent Publishing, 2015), xvi.

312 Penn, Garland, "Sutton Griggs," The United Negro: His Problems and His Progress, Containing the Addresses and Proceedings the Negro Young People's Christian and Educational Congress, held August 6-11, 1902, https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:The_united_negro-_his_problems_and_his_progress,_containing_the_addresses_and_proceedings_the_Negro_young_people%27s_Christian_and_educational_congress,_held_August_6-11,_1902;_(1902)_(14598034659).jpg. No Copyright Restrictions [flickr].

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317 George Schuyler, *Black Empire* (Evanston: Northeastern University Press, 1991), 4.

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319 Schuyler, *Black Empire*, 15.

320 The aircraft carriers bear the names of important Black Americans.

321 Schuyler, *Black Empire*, 11.

322 Tiffany Lethabo King, *Black Shoals: Offshore Formations of Black and Native Studies* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2019), xiii.

323 Schuyler, *Black Empire*, 257.

324 Kendra Field's masterful family chronicle about African American migrations into Indian Territory and the establishment of Black towns in Oklahoma. There are critical differences in time and geography between my work and Field's. *Growing Up with the Country* focuses on the time period beginning after the Civil War and ending at beginning of the twentieth-century, while the community I examine existed from 1908 to 1920. Most importantly while Field examines African American migration and settlement in Indian Country and later the

state of Oklahoma, while Wyoming has ceased to be Indian Country several decades earlier. Almost four decades before the establishment of Empire Native peoples lived isolated on reservations. Empire was dependent on Indigenous dispossession, but this process was more asynchronous than in the case of Black settlements in Indian Territory/Oklahoma. In Wyoming, the Wind River Reservation existed by 1868. Lastly, unlike some tribes in Oklahoma, those in Wyoming did not own slaves, an aspect central to Field's history. Yet Field's work has much to offer in terms of the history and experiences of Blacks and establishment of Black settlements in Indian Country.

325 Field, *Growing Up*, 59.

326 King, Navarro, and Smith, eds., "Beyond Incommensurability," 378.

327 Griggs, *Imperium*, 105.

328 Griggs, *Imperium*, 115.

329 Blake Allmendinger's study of African American literature focuses on work produced in or about the American West. This is not my focus here rather my emphasis is on the structures of settler colonialism and white supremacy and responses to it by two specific Black speculative fiction writers, Sutton Griggs, and George Schuyler. Yet Allmendinger's work is useful here in terms of Black writing and experiences in the American West.

330 Blake Allmendinger, *Imagining the African American West* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2005), 35.

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333 George Schuyler, *Black No More* (New York: Modern Library, 1999) 1.

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338 Schuyler, *Black No*, 179.

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341 Kendra Field, *Growing Up*, 103.

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348 Quintard Taylor, *In Search of the Racial Frontier: African Americans in the American West, 1528-1990* (New York: Norton & Co., 1998), 17.

349 Allmendinger, *Imagining*, xvii.

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354 Todd Guenther, *At Home on the Range: Black Settlement in Rural Wyoming, 1850-1950* (Master's thesis, University of Wyoming, 1988), 22.

355 Todd Guenther, "'The Kingdom of Heaven at Hand': Rev. Russell Taylor and the Struggle for Civil Rights in 1920s Omaha," *Nebraska History* 92, (2011): 185.

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361 Todd Guenther, "Empire Builders an African American Odyssey in Nebraska and Wyoming," *Nebraska History* 89, (2008): 187. Robert Galbreath, *Empire*, 17.

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