RED AND WHITE ON THE SILVER SCREEN:
THE SHIFTING MEANING AND USE OF AMERICAN INDIANS IN HOLLYWOOD
FILMS FROM THE 1930s TO THE 1970s

a dissertation submitted
to Kent State University in partial
fulfillment of the requirements for the
degree of Doctor of Philosophy

by

Bryan W. Kvet

May, 2016
(c) Copyright
All rights reserved
Except for previously published materials
TABLE OF CONTENTS........................................................................................................iv
LIST OF FIGURES...........................................................................................................v
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS...................................................................................................vii

CHAPTERS

Introduction.....................................................................................................................1

Part I: 1930 - 1945
1. "You Haven't Seen Any Indians Yet:" Hollywood's Bloodthirsty Savages.........................26
2. "Don't You Realize this Is a New Empire?" Hollywood's Noble Savages..............................72
Epilogue for Part I........................................................................................................121

Part II: 1945 - 1960
3. "Small Warrior Should Have Father:" The Cold War Family in American Indian Films...............136
4. "In a Hundred Years it Might've Worked:" American Indian Films and Civil Rights....................185
Epilogue for Part II......................................................................................................244

Part III, 1960 - 1970
5. "If Things Keep Trying to Live, the White Man Will Rub Them Out:" The American Indian Film and the Counterculture.........................260
6. "Good Brave Lads Coming Out Here to Kill a Real Live Injun:" The American Indian Film and the Vietnam War.................................305
Epilogue for Part III and Conclusion.............................................................................348

Works Cited..................................................................................................................376
LIST OF FIGURES

Figure 1. Custer and Hickok in *The Plainsman* .............................................41
Figure 2. The opening shot of *Union Pacific* ....................................................42
Figure 3. A grotesque Indian in *The Plainsman* ..............................................45
Figure 4. The stagecoach in *Stagecoach* ..........................................................54
Figure 5. The Apache threat in *Stagecoach* ....................................................54
Figure 6. Ruby Big Elk in *Cimarron* ...............................................................85
Figure 7. The statue of Yancey and an Indian in *Cimarron* ..............................87
Figure 8. The contrast between Thunderhorse's appearance in *Massacre* .........95
Figure 9. The Capitol Building and the NRA blue eagle in *Massacre* ..............98
Figure 10. Rioting Indians in *Massacre* ..........................................................99
Figure 11. Magazine advertisement for *Massacre* ........................................101
Figure 12. An Indian in *They Died with Their Boots On* .............................107
Figure 13. Cochise in *Fort Apache* ...............................................................147
Figure 14. Indian savagery in *She Wore a Yellow Ribbon* ............................150
Figure 15. The O'Rourke family in *Fort Apache* ...........................................153
Figure 16. Capt. Brittiles at his family's graves in *She Wore a Yellow Ribbon* 155
Figure 17. The wreckage of Mrs. Bell's wagon in *Rio Grande* ......................162
Figure 18. Jeff's youthful appearance in *Rio Grande* .....................................165
Figure 19. "I call him Small Warrior," *Hondo* ...............................................172
Figure 20. An Apache performs for Angie in *Hondo* ....................................173
Figure 21. Cochise in *Broken Arrow* ............................................................198
Figure 22. Sonseeahray and Jeffords in *Broken Arrow* .................................200
Figure 23. Lance's transformation in *Devil's Doorway*.................................211
Figure 24. Weddle poses with Massai and Geronimo in *Apache*.........................221
Figure 25. Massai and Nalinle in *Apache*..........................................................224
Figure 26. Ethan outside the Jorgenson's cabin in *The Searchers*.........................247
Figure 27. Black Eagle and Balam in *Kings of the Sun*........................................268
Figure 28. Black Eagle's death in *Kings of the Sun*.............................................270
Figure 29. Custer's first appearance in *Little Big Man*........................................284
Figure 30. Indian spirituality in *Billy Jack*..........................................................291
Figure 31. Bernard makes Indians "white" in *Billy Jack*.......................................293
Figure 32. Cresta and Spotted Wolf in *Soldier Blue*.............................................317
Figure 33. White soldiers rape an Indian woman in *Soldier Blue*..........................318
Figure 34. The victim of Apache torture in *Ulzana's Raid*....................................329
Figure 35. Cavalry troopers mutilate an Apache corpse in *Ulzana's Raid*.............332
Figure 36. The Indian as a part of nature in *Jeremiah Johnson*.............................338
Figure 37. Buddy as a Cheyenne warrior in *Powwow Highway*..........................364
Figure 38. Ray's transformation in *Thunderheart*................................................367
Acknowledgements

As with any project that takes as long to complete as this dissertation—and it took quite a long time, indeed—I have quite the list of people to thank for their help along the way. For the sake of brevity, however, something I often struggle to achieve as evidenced by the length of this work, I shall endeavor to do so as quickly as possible. First, I owe a tremendous debt of gratitude to my dissertation director, Dr. Ken Bindas, who pulled the project through some very rough points and helped me mold it into a finished product of which I am extremely proud. Likewise, I offer my sincere thanks to Dr. Clarence Wunderlin, my Ph.D. advisor, who was a wonderful mentor through my graduate career in general, and the dissertation process in particular. I also must thank the other members of my dissertation committee—Dr. James Seelye of the Kent State History Department, Dr. Paul Haridakis of the Kent State Communications Department, Dr. Bob Batchelor of Miami University, and Dr. Mark Bracher of the Kent State English Department—who were all gracious enough to step in on short notice late in the project's development and provide their expertise. I am also extremely grateful to Drs. Ann Heiss and Becky Pulju of the KSU History Department, both of whom always had time to provide advice, support and friendly ears throughout my time at Kent State.

Beyond the university, itself, I would like to thank the incredibly helpful staffs at the archives I visited during this project, including the John Ford Papers at the University of Indiana-Bloomington, the Warner Bros. Archive and the USC Film and Cinema Archive at the University of Southern California, the UCLA Special Collections archive, and the Margaret Herrick Library at the Motion Picture Academy of Arts and Sciences in Beverly Hills,
California. It never fails to impress me how remarkably friendly and helpful archivists are toward the strangers who visit their collections.

On a personal note, I extend thanks to all of my friends at Kent State and beyond who helped me all through the dissertation process. At risk of leaving anyone out, I will not name names, with the exception of Dr. Monika Flaschka, who served as a reader for many of my chapters and, despite her own heavy workload, never failed to turn them around quickly and with loads of good advice.

Lastly, and most importantly, I must thank my family, including my sister Stacy, brother-in-law Ryan and nephew Quinn, my mother, Rosalind, without whose unwavering support I would not have made it through the most difficult stretches of what was, in itself, the most difficult challenge I've ever faced, and my late father, Bill, who played no small part in instilling a love of movies (especially Jeremiah Johnson) in me. Thank you all for your love and encouragement and for always believing I could finish this monstrosity, even when I doubted I would, myself.
Red and White on the Silver Screen:  
The Shifting Meaning and Use of American Indians in Hollywood Films from the 1930s to the 1970s

Introduction

In 1940's *Northwest Passage* (MGM), Roger's Rangers trek into the forests of 1750s' Vermont in order to destroy an Abenaki Indian village. These Abenakis are a brutal and savage lot, having committed horrifying atrocities against white settlers, including torture, mutilation and murder. When the Rangers finally arrive at the village, they show the Indians no mercy, burning their lodges and slaughtering them to the last man. The film presents this as an act of justified retribution, providing no sympathy for the Abenakis and suggesting that their annihilation is essential if the white man is to make the frontier safe for civilization. Thirty years later, *Soldier Blue* (AVCO Embassy, 1970), presents a very different picture of conflict between whites and Indians. Its Cheyenne are a beautiful, loving people whose chief proudly flies the American flag. Nevertheless, a racist white colonel and his degenerate cavalrmen attack the Cheyennes' village in a sequence of ghastly carnage. As in *Northwest Passage*, the army massacres its Indian foes without mercy, but while the earlier picture presents such an action as a feat of great courage and skill, the latter sees it as indicative of the corruption inherent in white society.¹

As these two films reveal, Hollywood's presentation of American Indians underwent significant changes over the four decades between 1930 and 1970. Whereas earlier films
regularly portrayed Indians as savages, either bloodthirsty or noble, and whites as justified in their conquest of the frontier, later movies altered this paradigm, using Indians to confront national concerns such as the Cold War, the civil rights movement, and the Vietnam War. The bloodthirsty savages who dominated the genre in the 1930s were superseded by noble savages, and by the 1960s, films even included civilized Indians whose culture had much to offer to white America. Conversely, just as onscreen Indians were becoming more civilized, whites were becoming less so, eventually occupying the savage side of the binary relationship between the two peoples. As a part of this process, Indians emerged from the background of movies over these decades. During the 1930s and ’40s, Hollywood usually did not present them as characters or even, in the worst cases, human beings. Rather, Indians were simply howling, animalistic monsters who swarmed out of the wilderness in unmotivated attacks upon white protagonists. Noble savages fared little better, usually filling minor roles, and in some cases, they were so insignificant that they barely gained any screen time whatsoever, only being dealt with through rhetoric between whites. This changed in later years, however. Indians became more prominent, appearing as legitimate characters with motivations and humanity, and some even served as the protagonists of their films. Even so, the films they occupied were never actually about them.

The American Indian films released between 1930 and 1970 were produced within a white-dominated industry by predominantly white filmmakers. They were aimed at largely white audiences and dealt with the problems of white, mainstream society. These films do not tell us about Native Americans, their history, their treatment or their concerns, and because of this, onscreen Indians have little to nothing in common with actual Native Americans. Hollywood's portrayal of Indians was rooted in stereotypes, clichés and fantasies that have existed and been modified within white culture for centuries. Moreover, Indians consistently
remained in the position of the Other, left outside of white society and placed in binary opposition against it. Thus, regardless of the importance of Indian characters, whether they were bloodthirsty or noble, savage or civilized, or even if they were the protagonists of the story, American Indian films have always been about white America.

This dissertation focuses upon a number of what I have designated "American Indian films." I define the American Indian film as a motion picture that includes social, cultural and/or military contact between whites and Indians in a borderland context, a point of contact between the two peoples. The majority of these films are Westerns, that most uniquely American of film genres, but the American Indian film is an inclusive category that comprises other types of movies, as well. Some, such as *Billy Jack* (Warner Bros., 1971), are set in the modern day, while others are so-called "Easterns," films that take place on the frontier of colonial-era America, like *Northwest Passage*. The term "Western" is somewhat loaded, conveying certain expectations of time (the late-19th century) and place (the Great Plains and points further west), and because of this, I have generally attempted to avoid its usage. However, since many of the pictures discussed in this dissertation are, indeed, Westerns, the term does appear from time to time.

Furthermore, I specifically make use of the terms "Indian" and "American Indian," as opposed to "Native American." The indigenous peoples of North America have little in common with the portrayal of their race that appears in cultural products created by mainstream America. Indians, on the other hand, are an artificial construct invented by Euro-Americans in order to describe the disparate tribes of Native Americans in one convenient mass. As historian Robert F. Berkhofer, Jr. writes, "The idea of the Indian or Indians in general is a White image or stereotype because it does not square with present-day conceptions of how those peoples called Indians lived and saw themselves." Therefore, I use the terms "Indian" and "American Indian"
when discussing this on-screen construct, while using "Native American" when referring to actual individuals of indigenous descent.²

Like other forms of popular culture, film plays an important role in the process of negotiation and understanding of society and history. In the words of scholars Tony Bennett and Janet Woollacott, products of popular culture act "as a touchstone for the entire field of ideological representations, sounding out where, ideologically speaking, 'the people' have moved to." Moreover, as literary critic Thomas Eagleton notes, studies of popular culture should focus less on what popular culture "'mirrors' than [on] what it does." As he wrote in his study of the novels of Samuel Richardson, popular culture products "are not mere images of conflicts fought out on another terrain, representations of a history which happens elsewhere: they are themselves a material part of those struggles, pitched standards around which battle is joined, instruments which help to constitute social interests rather than lenses which reflect them." Just as Richardson's novels were agents, rather than accounts, of social change in eighteenth century England, so too were the American Indian films for American society between 1930 and the early-1970s.³

The Image of the Frontier and the West

The West, and in a broader sense, the frontier and the wilderness, have been among the most significant factors in forming Americans' idea of their nation. From the earliest days of their arrival in the New World, Euro-Americans had an often adversarial relationship with the wilds beyond their settlements, a relationship they eventually contrasted with a fascination and love of the beauty and potential such lands offered. As historian Roderick Nash writes, "For most of their history, Americans regarded wilderness as a moral and physical wasteland fit only
for conquest and fructification in the name of progress, civilization, and Christianity." The Puritans of New England began this process through what Nash refers to as a "tradition of repugnance." Believing, in the words of historian Loren Baritz, that they occupied a land that was "the best and last refuge for Christ," the Puritans hoped to carve a new Jerusalem out of the American woods. In so doing, however, they faced a wilderness which, to their minds, threatened not only life and limb, through the presence of hostile natives, wild animals, and harsh weather, but also the soul, with its temptations for man to abandon his civilized tendencies in favor of barbarism. The image of the Indian came to personify the savagery and brutality of untamed lands in the Euro-American mind. As J. Hector St. John Crevecoeur wrote in the eighteenth century, "The wilderness is a harbour where it is impossible to find [the Indians]... a door through which they can enter our country whenever they please." To this end, Euro-Americans concentrated on conquering and "civilizing" the wilderness as they moved west, for in so doing, they removed the threats to life and soul that Indians represented.4

During the nineteenth century, a competing view of the frontier developed in America, principally due to the Romantic Movement in literature and art. Drawn by the beauty and majesty of the wilderness and alienated by the increasing demands of the nation's industrial society, some Americans began to appreciate the West for the very wildness that caused the Puritans to abhor it. Through his Leatherstocking novels, James Fenimore Cooper was one of the driving forces in creating this admiration for what the frontier had to offer the young nation. As Nash writes, "Although Cooper was concerned with the advance of civilization into the west, he did not portray wild country as a loathsome obstacle to be conquered and destroyed. Instead Cooper took great pains to show that wilderness had value as a moral influence, a source of beauty, and a place of exciting adventure."5
Moreover, as the nation pushed further west and Native Americans were no longer a threat to their lives, whites adopted new views of the artificial construct of the Indian, giving it positive traits such as nobility and wisdom. In the words of historian Richard Slotkin, "Indian virtues could be symbolically exaggerated and Indian values accepted as valid for American society, without being rudely checked by some savage outbreak near at hand." In addition, the stereotype of the vanishing Indian, doomed to disappear from the continent, developed in American culture during this period. Slotkin sees Henry Wadsworth Longfellow's epic poem "The Song of Hiawatha" as indicative of this process, for Longfellow suggests that Indians tamed the wilderness, much as Euro-Americans were in the process of doing. Further, as Slotkin notes, Longfellow's Indians willingly handed their lands over to the white men who served as their spiritual heirs, for as the poem ends, "the Indian hero is seen as accepting the displacement of his race in the favor of his gods by the whites." Thus, from the nineteenth century onward, Americans held two competing views of the frontier that existed simultaneously, one that abhorred it and demanded the conquest of the bloodthirsty Indians who occupied it, and another that embraced it and saw Indians as a noble, doomed people who would disappear, leaving their lands for white development. These two views would remain active into the twentieth century and prove formative for the American Indian films Hollywood produced.  

In addition to these two contradictory views of the frontier itself, historian Frederick Jackson Turner and future president Theodore Roosevelt presented important, contrasting views of the region’s role in the development of the United States, both of which came to influence the early cinematic views of the American Indians and the West. In his landmark "Frontier Thesis," presented at the 1893 Columbian Exposition in Chicago, Turner argued that the frontier was the primary force in shaping American society. It was, he wrote, "the outer edge of the wave — the
meeting point between savagery and civilization," and he believed that whites who lived on the frontier helped to consistently regenerate American institutions. According to Turner, the civilizing of the frontier was a continuous process of development. As historian William Cronon explains, "Frontier communities underwent an evolution which recapitulated the development of civilization itself, tracing the path from hunter to trader to farmer to town." This process not only added new land to the United States, but also regenerated its political and economic institutions and converted European immigrants into Americans. For Turner, westward expansion was clearly a positive development for the nation. In historian Kerwin Lee Klein's words, Turner "saw the imperial occupation of the West as the grand story of American history."

The validity of the Frontier Thesis has been vigorously challenged by historians, but its view of the tensions between civilization and wilderness heavily influenced America's view of its own westward expansion.  

Turner and Roosevelt agreed on the general concept that the frontier shaped American national character, but differed greatly on why it did so. While Turner saw westward expansion as a socio-economic process, believing that the tensions between the frontier and Eastern civilization regenerated national institutions, Roosevelt presented it in military and racial terms. As Slotkin writes, "the Turner and Roosevelt frontier theses . . . asserted that values and ideology arose from (respectively) material economic conditions and the dynamics of racial conflict."

Unlike Turner's Frontier Thesis, which viewed expansion through development and cultivation, Roosevelt saw it in terms of conquest. He believed the conflict between Native Americans and whites was a race war that could only be won when one side had utterly annihilated the other, and thought that confronting "savages" provided whites with the opportunity to revert to a more primitive state, reawakening their warlike past and regenerating the entire race.
Whereas farmers served as the primary actors in Turner's narrative, Roosevelt's heroes were frontiersmen, hunters and Indian fighters who, through their military skills, made westward expansion possible. Furthermore, while Turner's steps of development primarily focused on types of settlements, from trading post to village to city, Roosevelt's focused on the types of people who occupied the region, from Native American to hunter to rancher to farmer.

Roosevelt did not bear Native Americans any particular malice, but rather viewed this process in Darwinian terms. To him, the conquest and eventual demise of Native Americans at the hands of Euro-Americans was a natural process, one that involved a "superior" people supplanting an "inferior" one. These two competing concepts of the frontier—Turner's socio-economic development and Roosevelt's Darwinian race war—proved vital to formulating the nation's view of westward expansion.9

Hollywood Westerns were one of the most prominent products of this influence, and although all American Indian films are not necessarily Westerns, they share many traits with that genre. Because it has been extremely significant in forming and establishing American ideals during the twentieth century, a brief examination of the Western genre will prove useful. From their literary beginnings in the works of Cooper, through Owen Wister's landmark novel The Virginian (1902), to Hollywood films, the Western has been a quintessentially American cultural product. Although the genre has fallen in popularity in recent years, from the 1930s through the 1970s, it proved a powerful presence at American cinemas, and accounted for nearly 25% of all Hollywood productions up to 1950. Film historian John Cawelti explains why the genre proved so resilient and significant for so many decades: "The Western's capacity to accommodate many different kinds of meaning . . . as well as its ability to respond to changing cultural themes and concerns—have made the formula successful as popular art and entertainment for generations."
He further notes that Westerns have been "so widely appealing because they enable people to re-enact and temporarily resolve widely shared psychic conflicts," and they allow their audiences to deal with issues of violence, civilization, and what being American truly means. Thus, the Western is a malleable genre that can be made to fit into different eras and ideologies, and its popularity over the decades makes it an ideal cultural product for examination.¹⁰

The image of the Indian proved to be malleable, as well, as demonstrated by the changes it underwent between 1930 and 1970. In Berkhofer’s words, "Whether as a conception or as stereotype . . . the idea of the Indian has created a reality in its own image, as a result of the power of the Whites and the response of Native Americans." Just as Americans' views of wilderness and the West revolved around their notions of civilization, American Indian films do the same. As Cawelti writes, "The Western formula tends to portray the frontier as 'meeting point between civilization and savagery,'" and in American Indian films, this clash of civilization and savagery is often played out as a struggle between red and white. As this dissertation will demonstrate, exactly which side represents civilization and which savagery shifts based upon societal conditions during which the movie in question was made. Yet, while Indians may become civilized in these films, they did not become their focus. In Cawelti's words, "The Western formula seems to prescribe that the Indian be a part of the setting to a greater extent than he is ever a character in his own right." In the vast majority of cases, they simply serve as foils, be they bad or good, to highlight the white protagonists' traits.¹¹

The Indian as "Other"

The American Indian movies examined in this dissertation were produced in a white-dominated industry, by white filmmakers, for predominantly white audiences. As such, they fall
into the process generally known as "Othering," which involves a people defining itself by contrasting their traits with those of another group. Fredrik Barth notes that this process has occurred in human societies throughout the world, so it is not particularly unique to the American film industry, or even American culture. According to Barth, Othering occurs at boundaries between societies and persists in spite of the movement of people across them. Furthermore, and perhaps counter intuitively, it is at the border between two societies that Othering is the strongest. As he writes,

   Ethnic distinctions do not depend on absence of social interaction and acceptance, but are quite to the contrary often the very foundations on which embracing social systems are built. Interaction in such a social system does not lead to its liquidation through change and acculturation; cultural differences can persist despite inter-ethnic contact and interdependence.

Thus, although one might expect a lessening of the process at the border between a Native American reservation and a white town, due to the mixing of the two societies that occurs there, that is precisely where Othering is most distinct. When confronted with Native Americans on a daily basis, the whites of the community must work harder to define themselves as white than must residents of a city far removed from frequent contact with Native Americans. However, while Barth is concerned primarily with social and geographic boundaries between two peoples, American Indian films illustrate cultural boundaries, for these movies allow white America to contrast itself, and thus define itself, with that which it is not.12

The Othering that occurs in American Indian pictures resembles that of the European writers examined in Edward Said's landmark work Orientalism. As Said writes, "European culture gained strength and identity by setting itself off against the Orient as a sort of surrogate and even underground self," and further, "Orientalism is never far from what Denys Hays has called the idea of Europe, a collective notion identifying 'us' Europeans as against all 'those' non-
Europeans.” Said's "Orientalists" portrayed the Middle East as weak and decaying in part to justify European domination of the region. In his words, "Orientalism is fundamentally a political doctrine willed over the Orient because the Orient was weaker than the West, which elided the Orient's difference with its weakness." In much this same way, many American Indian films justified the conquest of the West by the United States, and the subsequent displacement or annihilation of Native Americans, by presenting Indians as savage and thus unworthy of ownership of such a valuable region.13

Orientalists depicted their European nations' cultures and societies as strong, vital, and masculine, while seeing those of the Middle East as weak, decaying, and feminine, and in so doing, created a system of binary opposites. Essentially, Europe was strong because the Orient was weak. According to Europeans, Said argues, "The Oriental is irrational, depraved (fallen), childlike, 'different'; thus the European is rational, virtuous, mature, 'normal.'" Moreover, as historian Kathleen Canning has noted, the linguistic turn of historical analysis has revealed this system of binary opposites throughout society. In her words, "The relentless uncovering of binary oppositions, or their hierarchies and orders of subordination, helped . . . to expose the artifices and exclusions inherent in the categories of nature, gender, class, and citizen."14

American Indian films follow this same process of Othering, with whites and Indians consistently in binary opposition to one another, and the Indians' traits being used to define that which whites are not. If the films portray Indians as savage, the whites, in binary opposition to them, must therefore be civilized, and if the Indians are civilized, then whites must be savage. Additionally, while the Othering process generally involves the dominant party building itself up by breaking down its Other, this is not always the case; some American Indian films, particularly those made during the Vietnam era, critique American society by presenting it as inferior to that
of Indians. Whether a society is building itself up or critiquing itself, however, there is one constant with the Othering process: it is ultimately concerned with the originating culture itself, and not that culture's Other. As Said writes, "Orientalism is more particularly a valuable sign of European Atlantic power over the Orient than it is as a veridic discourse about the Orient." Similarly, because they are only concerned with white society and the artificial construct of the Indian, American Indian films do not tell us about Native Americans, but rather about the dominant white culture that made them. Indians remain outsiders and whites remain insiders, and whether those Indians are brutal savages from the 1930s or beautiful children of nature from the 1970s, their films are not about them, but rather the white characters with whom they interact.15

Genre Theory

Because this dissertation tracks changes within the American Indian genre over a number of decades, a brief discussion of genre theory is in order. In film scholar Barry Keith Grant's words, "Genre movies are those commercial feature films which, through repetition and variation, tell familiar stories with familiar characters in familiar situations. They also encourage expectations and experiences similar to those of similar feature films we have already seen." Through this "repetition and variation," a genre essentially creates a film language, based upon a number of factors, some visual, some story or character related, that helps to determine the nature of the movie in question. This language provides filmmakers with what amount to shortcuts that enable them to more effectively tell their stories and allow audiences to understand those stories more easily.16
As film historian Edward Buscombe succinctly explains, "the visual conventions [of a genre] provide a framework within which the story can be told." Smoke signals, one of the most common visual conventions of the American Indian film, are an excellent example of genre filmmaking at work. If white protagonists spot a column of smoke on the horizon, the audience, through its experience watching similar films, immediately understands that Indians are on the war path and the white characters are in danger. Stereotypes form another key genre trope, particularly for American Indian films. By showing Indian characters wearing common garb, usually the feathered bonnets, buckskin breeches, and war paint of the Plains Tribes, and narrowing the broad range of Native American cultures to simplistic bloodthirsty or noble savagery, stereotypes provide audiences with a quick understanding of who the Indians are and how they are likely to react to white characters. Such cues provide the filmmaker with a shortcut that allows him or her to bypass expository dialog explaining the situation to the audience. This is not to suggest that genre filmmakers are incapable of expressing their artistic sensibilities, however. As Buscombe points out, "The artist brings to the genre his or her own concerns, techniques, and capacities—in the widest sense, a style—but receives from the genre a formal pattern that directs and disciplines the work." 17

Once this language has been established, filmmakers can modify it, but in order for such a process to work, the audience and filmmakers must have implicitly agreed upon the traits of the genre. In Buscombe's words, "Constant exposure to a previous succession of films has led the audience to recognize certain formal elements as charged with an accretion of meaning," and once that meaning has been established over the course of many films, a director may begin to alter the genre's traits, thereby challenging the audience's expectations. As Buscombe continues, a director could not work against the conventions of the genre "unless he and the audience had a
tradition in common." For instance, in *Little Big Man*, director Arthur Penn makes effective use of George Armstrong Custer's favorite march, "Garryowen," as a counterpoint to the horror of the general's troops massacring an Indian village. The juxtaposition of a jaunty martial tune being played during scenes of American soldiers committing atrocities would have been far less effective in unsettling the audience had earlier films not established "Garryowen" as a heroic anthem of the American military. In essence, the genre's formula must be established over the course of many years and many movies before a director can effectively tear the formula down through revisionist filmmaking.\(^\text{18}\)

**Audience Reception**

Motion pictures are not simply absorbed and consumed by a passive viewing public, but are rather interpreted by those viewers in a give-and-take between film and audience. Therefore, in order to understand a movie, our analysis cannot end with its projection on the big screen, but must take into account how contemporary viewers comprehended it. In film historian Richard Maltby's words, reception studies "assumes that reception involves an act of interpretation, and that the idea of the 'text-in-itself' is an empty one, because a poem or a movie cannot be understood in isolation from the act of its interpretation." In addition to examining the American Indian films themselves, then, this dissertation also looks at contemporary audience feedback, with the result being a fuller understanding of how these films reflected the image of the Indian, and the concerns of American culture when they were made.\(^\text{19}\)

The major problem with motion picture reception is that the feedback available represents only a small percentage of audience members. Box office figures are one potential avenue to determine a film's popularity, if not precisely how its viewers understood it, but for much of the
time frame of this dissertation, such numbers are unreliable. As director John Huston explained, "Under the studio system, no one ever had any idea how successful a picture was unless it was an absolute runaway. Variety gave weekly box-office figures for major houses, but those figures were only approximations, and no one could tell whether they had been padded for publicity purposes or reduced for other reasons." Susan Sackett's The Hollywood Reporter Book of Box Office Hits serves as an example of the difficulties such conditions present to historians, for she was forced to sift through and add up the city-by-city box office reports that Variety published each week in order to compile her figures. Moreover, the direct feedback that is available from viewers of specific films does not necessarily equate to a fully accurate picture of audience interpretation. Just because one viewer understood a film in one way does not mean all viewers agreed. As Maltby writes, "Not all viewers exhibit 'model' characteristics or share the same level of competence. Interpretations are, therefore, always acts of negotiation on the part of the viewer."20

In order to ameliorate these difficulties, I have attempted to create a multi-level approach to audience reception. When available, I have used fan letters submitted to movie magazines such as Photoplay and Motion Picture, as well as those sent directly to the studios and filmmakers and found in their archives. Additionally, I have incorporated movie reviews in order to examine critical interpretation of the films upon their release. I have drawn these reviews from popular national magazines, such as Time, Newsweek and Life, which form a broad, nationwide perspective, while also utilizing those from Hollywood trades such as Variety to gain the view from within the film industry and from The New York Times and The Los Angeles Times for the perspective of the nation's largest media markets.
In order to balance out this "big city" view of the films, I have also made use of a particularly valuable resource, the feature "What the Picture Did for Me," contained in *The Motion Picture Herald*. *The Herald* was a weekly industry trade aimed at independent theater owners and was published from 1931 to 1972, the entire time frame of this dissertation. One of *The Herald*'s regular features, "What the Picture Did for Me" was a collection of feedback from theater owners and managers who subscribed to the journal and were passing along their personal experiences exhibiting specific films. Although the content of their reports differed from person to person, it usually noted the amount of business a film did, as well as the owners' and audience members' feelings about it. This feedback proved extraordinarily useful because it was direct evidence of audience opinion. Moreover, because most of these theaters were located in small towns, such as Comfrey, Minnesota and Rich Hill, Missouri, the owners providing the feedback were having personal contact with their customers. As exhibitors, they were able to provide a "ground's eye view" of the way audiences in middle America received the movies, unlike the critics who could only offer their own interpretations. Unfortunately, *The Motion Picture Herald* phased out "What the Picture Did for Me" in the early-1960s, and so this excellent resource was not available for the final two chapters of the dissertation.

Nevertheless, by combining it with individual fan letters and national film reviews, I have crafted a tiered approach to audience reception that reveals the way some viewers interpreted American Indian films across a wide range of audience types. Reviews in national publications and major newspapers provide a "middlebrow," "big city" perspective from professional film critics and industry "insiders," while feedback from fan letters and "What the Picture Did for Me" give us the view of everyday audience members in small town America. Of course, even with this broad perspective, the feedback is merely representative, for it only covers a fraction of
a percent of the total viewership of each film, but it does give us insight into how some viewers understood and interpreted these movies, and whether they agreed with and accepted their use and presentation of Indians.

**Historiography**

There have been numerous books written about Hollywood Westerns, some of which focus upon the portrayal of Indians. While they contain valuable insight, many also engage in what Buscombe refers to as "exercises in tedious point-scoring" as they focus on merely upon historical inaccuracies contained in the films, which I find to be a particularly meaningless endeavor since the entire image of the Indian is a fabrication that has nothing to do with actual Native Americans. This occurs frequently in Ralph and Natasha Friar's *The Only Good Indian*. . . : *The Hollywood Gospel* (1972), one of the earliest such studies. The book is fiercely critical of Hollywood's treatment of on-screen Indians, contending that the film industry committed cultural genocide against Native Americans through its negative portrayals. A highly-biased polemic whose writing tends toward non-constructive hyperbole—it claims, for instance, that 1957's *Run of the Arrow* "set the Sioux back hundreds of years"—*The Only Good Indian* . . . remains a useful, if flawed, critical assessment of Hollywood in general, and its depictions of Indians, in particular. John A. Price's 1973 article "The Stereotyping of North American Indians in Motion Pictures," is a more balanced analysis of the topic. As the title suggests, Price is most concerned with Indian stereotypes, tracing them from their origins in the silent era through the early-1970s. However, he is unable to go into great detail regarding any of the major topics he examines and generally argues for more historical accuracy and a greater diversity of Indian tribes in film, rather than the repeated use of Plains tribes.²¹
Over the years, a number of other works have continued to examine the topic of Indians on film. *The Pretend Indians: Images of Native Americans in the Movies* (1980), edited by Gretchen M. Bataille and Charles L.P. Silet, *Hollywood's Indian: the Portrayal of the Native American in Film* (1998), edited by Peter C. Rollins and John E. O'Connor, and *Seeing Red: Hollywood’s Pixeled Skins* (2013), edited by Leanne Howe, Harvey Markowitz and Denise K. Cummings, collect a number of useful essays on either individual films or specific topics, but their very nature does not provide a broad view of the entire genre. Jacquelyn Kilpatrick's *Celluloid Indians: Native Americans and Film* (1999) does provide that broad overview, focusing Indian stereotypes and attempting to discern the sociological, ideological and political reasons for their development. Unfortunately, her work only gives a surface analysis of the films in question, often merely offering the barest of historical context in which the films were made, and moves with extraordinary rapidity through complex and important eras and films; for instance, she advances from 1939's *Stagecoach* to 1950's *Broken Arrow* to 1956's *The Searchers* in just twelve pages while ignoring any other pictures made during that decade and a half. Kilpatrick's primary goal with *Celluloid Indians* is to argue for what she refers to as an "American Indian Aesthetic," essentially greater involvement in the industry by Native American filmmakers in order to right the wrongs of Hollywood's portrayals.22

Two of the most recent works on the subject are Angela Aleiss' *Making the White Man's Indian: Native Americans and Hollywood Movies* (2005) and Buscombe's *Injuns: Native Americans in the Movies* (2006). Aleiss is one of the few scholars to incorporate archival research into her studies of Indians on film, and she approaches the subject as a trained historian. Examining Westerns influenced by the events of a number of different eras, Aleiss argues that, rather than stereotypes simply passing from negative to positive, savage and sympathetic Indians
have consistently appeared in films produced by Hollywood at the same times. Ultimately, however, Aleiss' work lacks a clear argument regarding the reasons these portrayals occurred and why they shifted, and her focus is on the trends and changes in the movie industry rather than the historical context in which the pictures were made. Therefore, Aleiss' work serves as an insightful look at specific films and a highly useful survey of the genre, but fails to attach these films to an overarching framework that would explain the vast alterations the genre underwent during the twentieth century.\textsuperscript{23}

Buscombe's work seeks to avoid overlap with that of other scholars through a handful of long chapters that concern disparate topics, including one chapter dealing strictly with sympathetic depictions, another with non-Native actors playing Indians, and a third with Indians in European films. Thus, Buscombe's work provides in-depth analysis of a limited number of themes, and does not give a broad access to the entire genre. More problematically, however, Buscombe admits that "Causation in film history is always a difficult question," and thus his work describes the portrayals of Indians in Hollywood films without explaining the reasons those specific portrayals occurred.\textsuperscript{24}

Beginning with \textit{Cimarron} and concluding with \textit{Ulzana's Raid} and \textit{Jeremiah Johnson}, this dissertation will focus on films made between 1930 and 1972. This time frame is bookended by two extraordinarily traumatic events to the nation, the Great Depression and the Vietnam War, both of which exerted a powerful influence upon American culture in general and the American Indian film in particular. Moreover, these years include the richest period of the American Indian genre in Hollywood history. While films featuring Indians had been made during the silent era, the genre was not yet fully established and therefore, as Price has pointed out, offered a disparate, splintered view of Indians. Furthermore, by the late-'70s, American Indian films
largely disappeared from theaters as the Western fell out of fashion, and while they enjoyed a brief renaissance in the early-'90s due to the popularity of Dances with Wolves, that wave of films was largely just echoing the portrayals, sentiments and attitudes of the American Indian movies of the early-1970s.25

As with most studies of this sort, the selection of which films to include, and which to exclude, posed a significant challenge. Hollywood has produced literally hundreds of American Indian movies during the four decades this dissertation examines, and practicality, time, and space limits this study to dealing with only a fraction of that total. This is not to say that the films selected are the only ones that matter, but rather, they should be viewed as a representative sampling of the genre and the significant shifts it underwent. Primarily, I have focused upon films that enjoyed major studio backing and gained wide release, but I have also included some movies that could be considered "independent" or "B" films, pictures that did not gain wide release but are particularly evocative of the era in which they were produced. Where possible, I have incorporated archival sources into my analysis, including the films' original scripts, studio memos, filmmakers’ notes, and promotional materials. However, as film studios are private corporations, they are under no obligation to release their papers, and so archival sources are often unavailable.

Chapter Outline

This dissertation is divided into three parts, each comprised of two chapters that deal with different aspects of the American Indian film during the same time frame, as well as an epilogue that analyzes trends in American society and culture that concern both chapters. Part one covers 1930 through 1945, with its chapters discussing two different interpretations of Indians. Chapter
one deals with Indians as bloodthirsty savages, presenting Indians as faceless, inhuman monsters completely lacking in motivation for their attacks on white characters. Chapter two focuses upon the competing vision of Indians as noble savages. These movies see Indians as decent, fair, but still uncivilized people who are often victimized by unscrupulous whites and, sadly, doomed to vanish as the United States moves west. The epilogue of part one ties these two branches of the genre together, arguing that they were the product of Depression-era nostalgia for the nation's past greatness.

Part two deals with the postwar era, 1945 to 1960. Unlike part one, its chapters do not deal with competing visions of Indians, but rather simply two different uses of them. Chapter three explores the role of Indians in films that stressed the importance of the nuclear family, a primary concern of Cold War America. In some of these, Indians posed outside threats that led to the formation of new families, while in others, they served as sources of wisdom who passed their knowledge of good parenting on to white protagonists. Chapter four, on the other hand, discusses films that used Indians as stand-ins for African Americans and other minorities in the era of the burgeoning civil rights movement. These pictures argued for fair treatment of minorities, seeking to reveal the ugliness of racial bigotry, but also suggested that minorities should abandon their own cultures and willingly assimilate into mainstream, white America. Part two's epilogue focuses on the conformity that largely defined postwar America and influenced Hollywood to produce films extolling the virtues of a homogeneous, white, family-centric society.

Part three discusses films made between 1960 and the early-1970s, placing particular emphasis on the Vietnam era at the end of this time frame. Chapter five deals with movies that presented Indian as ambassadors of the counterculture. Alienated by the corruption, violence,
racism and greed of mainstream America, the white protagonists of these films adopt Indian ways in order to find the happiness and spiritual fulfillment they cannot gain among their fellow whites. Chapter six explores the Vietnam War's influence upon the American Indian film, noting that some pictures used the Indian wars as allegorical means to condemn American imperialism and atrocities in Southeast Asia, while others utilized these wars in an attempt to understand the wave of violence that appeared to be defining the national character. The epilogue of part three argues that these films were part of a much larger trend in America, as the Baby Boomer generation coming of age during the 1960s challenged the Cold War consensus that had dominated the nation during the postwar years.

The big-budget Hollywood film is one of America's most profound contributions to twentieth century popular culture, and for decades, American Indian pictures enjoyed a prominent place within the industry. Between 1930 and 1970, filmmakers altered the image of Indians to fit the requirements of their movies as they grappled with the issues confronting the nation. As an artificial construct of white America, Indians came to mean whatever white Americans needed them to mean, be they bloodthirsty monsters whose defeat served as a reminder of past national glories, or peace-loving caretakers of nature whose way of life served as a counterculture to corrupt American society. Moreover, Indians also emerged from the background during this period, evolving from faceless adversaries who prowled the shadowy outskirts of movies into legitimate characters. Yet despite this, some things did not change in American Indian films. Indians consistently remained an alien Other against which white American could contrast itself, and the films they occupied remained concerned with white Americans.
American Indian films are of great importance because, more so than with any other group of people, Hollywood movies have defined the way our nation, and indeed the entire world, understands Native Americans. Because of this, when most people think of Native Americans, what they are actually thinking of is the image of the Indian created over hundreds of years in American culture and widely dispersed by the movies. This process has been one of cultural appropriation in which filmmakers, usually white, have lifted specific traits from Native Americans, be they negative ones—scalping, massacring settlers—or positive ones—communal living, a closeness with nature—that they needed for their movies, and have left the actual Native Americans behind. By exploring the way Hollywood has engaged in this appropriation and understanding the uses films have made of the image of the Indians over the decades, we can not only understand the trends that have informed American culture during the times these films were made, but can also begin to dispel the myths that surround the image of the Indian, for only by tearing these down can we begin to take Native Americans on their own terms.
5 Nash, 76.
11 Berkhofer, 3; Cawelti, 63, 65.
The European writers Said examines used "Orient" as a term for the Middle East, as opposed to its general American usage as relating to East Asia, principally China and Japan.
15 Said, 6.
18 Ibid., 21, 23.
In John Ford’s *Stagecoach* (United Artists, 1939) a cross-section of western denizens traverse the wilds of Arizona in the titular vehicle. The passengers are divided into two camps, one respectable—an army officer’s wife, a banker—and the other disreputable—an outlaw, a prostitute, a drunken doctor—and they bicker among themselves during their journey. While this internal dissention offers some of the film’s drama, the real danger the passengers face comes not from one another, but rather from rampaging Indians. Geronimo has gone on the warpath and the coach’s trek takes it right through Indian country. *Stagecoach* never establishes these Indians as human beings, however. For most of the film, they are merely an off-screen threat, spurring the stage onward and creating tension in the movie. And when they finally attack, they are utterly without motivation, sweeping out of the hills to chase the stagecoach and die at its passengers’ guns.1

Like most of the American Indian movies made between 1930 and 1945, the Indians in *Stagecoach* are nothing more than bloodthirsty savages who exist without characterization, serving only to threaten the films’ white protagonists. This chapter focuses upon *Stagecoach* and three other movies made during this period that fall into this category of bloodthirsty savages. All four films present Indians not as actual people or characters, but rather as subhuman monsters who are plot devices that endanger white characters. Furthermore, they are not even the primary villains of the pictures, roles that are filled by the greedy businessmen and
corrupt politicians many Americans blamed for the Great Depression. In large part, this presentation of Indians-as-bloodthirsty savages is derived from a centuries-old tradition of prejudice and fear directed against Native Americans that dates back to the earliest years of European settlement on the continent. Moreover, these films were made within the studio system, a profit-driven structure geared toward conservatism and consistency that rarely challenged audiences with innovative ideas or new conceptions of race. Finally, with the Depression gripping the United States during the 1930s, many Americans felt nostalgia for the grander days of their nation's past, and American Indian films reflected these feelings. By glorifying westward expansion and the heroic exploits of folk heroes, they vicariously allowed their contemporary audiences to escape the economic ruin of the 1930s and revel in the country's historic accomplishments.

Cecil B. DeMille directed two of the films discussed in this chapter, *The Plainsman* (Paramount, 1936) and *Union Pacific* (Paramount, 1939), and unsurprisingly, their Indians receive similar on-screen portrayals. Both pictures are deeply nostalgic, using historical figures and past accomplishments to inspire the country during the Great Depression, while their Indians are merely bloodthirsty savages who threaten the white protagonists and complicate the process of westward expansion. *Stagecoach* similarly features white protagonists threatened by rampaging Indians, but its Indians serve a simple, direct purpose: to bring the film's diverse cast of characters together, uniting the respectable and disreputable members of society. Lastly, *Northwest Passage* (MGM, 1940) features the most bloodthirsty of all this chapter's Indians. They are horrifying savages who have mutilated and tortured white settlers on the colonial frontier for years, and the mission of the film's heroes, Major Robert Rogers and his band of rangers, is to exterminate their village. The film does not even see these Indians as human.
beings, but instead presents them as part of the natural world, one of a series of obstacles the Rangers must overcome in their daunting trek through the wilderness.\textsuperscript{2}

Few events in the history of the United States proved as socially and culturally shattering as the Great Depression. With the collapse of the nation's economy and millions unemployed or underemployed, nearly every American was affected by the crisis, Hollywood filmmakers included. While the advent of talking pictures in 1927 provided enough novelty to carry the industry through the first years of the crisis, by 1932, the studios were suffering severe losses. In 1930, Hollywood enjoyed an industry-wide net profit of $55 million, but only two years later, it suffered a net loss of $26 million. Four of the eight largest studios—Twentieth Century-Fox, RKO, Paramount and Universal—went bankrupt. Only mighty MGM remained profitable, but its profits fell from $10 million in 1930 to $1.3 million in 1932. Throughout the decade, Hollywood slowly managed to climb out of this hole, in no small part thanks to the New Deal's National Recovery Administration. In the interest of fostering economic recovery, the NRA permitted studios to engage in previously illegal, yet widely-practiced, methods of collusion that eliminated competition and forced theater owners to take poor deals on films. The effort worked, and by 1936, Hollywood was thriving once again, producing the sort of A-list films for which it was famous.\textsuperscript{3}

Yet the Depression itself was conspicuously absent from those pictures. As film historian Tino Balio writes, "Hollywood steered clear of [the] minefield [of economic problems of the Depression] and continued to do what it did best—provide 'harmless entertainment' for the masses." As such, westerns, including American Indian films, were an ideal product. Not only were they exciting escapism, but because they were set in the past, they could ignore the economic and social ravages of the 1930s. Throughout much of the decade, A-list westerns were
relatively scarce and low-budget serials and horse operas starring singing cowboys like Gene Autry and Tex Ritter dominated the genre. Yet Hollywood did produce more expensive prestige westerns during the 1930s, many of them falling into what can be classified as American Indian films, most of which presented Indians as bloodthirsty monsters who rampaged through the West and sought to slaughter the movies' white characters.4

These bloodthirsty savage films focused on their white protagonists' efforts to civilize the West while their Indians simply served as foils, enemies for the white heroes to defeat. The Indians are not, however, actual human characters—they rarely have names, much less personalities and motivations—and they are not even the films' primary villains. That role was filled, as it often was during the Depression, by corrupt businessmen. Historian Lary May has noted that businessmen appeared as villains in 20% of the films made during the 1930s, as opposed to only 5% prior to the Depression. May continues that during the 1930s, the film industry was "rooted in hostility to what President Roosevelt called the 'new money changers' and 'feudal lords' of industry." Many Americans felt that these men, the millionaires who stood astride the American economy during the 1920s, were to blame for its collapse in the 1930s, and unsurprisingly, Hollywood used them as on-screen villains.5

The industry produced an entire cycle of movies during the Depression called "shyster films" that focused on corrupt businessmen who took advantage of weakened forces of law and order. While most of these movies were set during the present day, shysters also were present in American Indian films, appearing as crooked bankers, businessmen, and real estate swindlers. The villains of The Plainsman, for instance, are a cabal of businessmen who sell surplus guns to the Indians, while in Union Pacific, they are men who hamper the construction of the transcontinental railroad because they have invested in the competing Central Pacific. Perhaps
the most explicit example is *Stagecoach*'s Gatewood (Berton Churchill), a corpulent banker who has robbed his own customers of their savings and bloviates about the virtues of unfettered capitalism: "I don't know what the country is coming to. Instead of protecting businessmen, it pokes its nose into business. . . . The government must not interfere with business! . . . What this country needs is a businessman for president." As historian Francis M. Nevins writes, these corrupt bankers and businessmen were not some nebulous enemy to the audience: "There was nothing amusing or escapist in these films to the people who were watching them in unpretentious small-town theaters at the time the pictures were made. In the thirties, losing one's home to a bank was not an exotic menace but a credible threat and all too often a grim reality." These bankers were usually the villains of the films' plots, conspiring to get rich while placing others at risk; the Indians were simply a faceless, savage obstacle white protagonists had to overcome.\(^6\)

**The Genesis of the Cinematic Bloodthirsty Savage**

The ideas behind the bloodthirsty savage in Hollywood films did not suddenly appear during the 1930s, but rather found their origins in the centuries-old abhorrence of both Indians and the wilderness established by the Puritans of the Massachusetts Bay Colony. Viewing themselves as God's chosen people who were establishing a new Israel in the wilds of New England, the Puritans saw Indians as the instrument of Satan, sent to tempt or destroy them. In historian Robert Berkhofer's words, "Indian character and lifestyle in general showed Native Americans to be in the clutches of Satan, for their souls in the wilderness were as unregenerate as their lands were uncultivated. And nowhere was their obeisance to his satanic majesty better exemplified in Puritan eyes than in 'savage' warfare." Furthermore, as Slotkin writes, if the
Puritans' villages were God's city on a hill, "the Indian cultures were the devil's city on a hill, emblematic opposites of their own Biblical commonwealth."\(^7\)

Thus, from the earliest years of European colonization, Indians already occupied the position of cultural Others, standing in binary opposition to whites. When they first arrived in America, the Puritans viewed the continent as an empty, unpeopled wilderness, and in their eyes, Indians were little more than beasts. Historian Richard Drinnon contends that the Pequot War of the 1630s demonstrated that, to the Puritans, "Indians were truly animals that could be killed or enslaved at will," and further that they viewed Native Americans as "wild animals that had to be rooted out of their dens, swamps, and jungles." It is this attitude toward Native Americans, according to Drinnon, that formed the earliest foundation of American racism which would run throughout the national conception of Indians for centuries to come.\(^8\)

This racist view of Native Americans was firmly established in American society over the decades, becoming secularized by the mid-nineteenth century. Dropping the Puritans' fear that Indians would corrupt their souls, authors of popular fiction maintained the image of monstrous Indians in adventure novels set on the frontier. Robert Montgomery Bird was one of the most overt in his racism, as indicated by his 1837 work *Nick of the Woods*. As Drinnon notes, "Bird's vilified Indians were one and all blackened monsters, drawn not from reality but from the unconscious." The novel, which focuses upon a white pacifist who turns into a blood-soaked avenger after the Shawnee murder his family, refers to Indians as an "accursed race" and "crawling reptiles." As the nineteenth century drew on and industrialization boomed, printing became cheaper, leading to the creation of dime novels, formulaic stories for mass consumption, many of them dealing with western stories pitting whites against Indians. Prior to the Civil War, the heroes of these books tended to be either mountain men or eastern frontiersmen in the mold
of Daniel Boone or Davy Crockett, but by the 1870s, the cowboy rose to prominence. As Berkhofer writes, "the new Westerns told of ever greater feats of gunmanship, riding, and escape from ever bloodthirstier savages and outlaws," and further, that the increased viciousness of the books' villainous Indians led to increasing violence from their white heroes. Western art also began to exert an influence upon the nation's conception of the American Indian during the late-1800s, particularly due to the popularity of the work of Frederic Remington. As Berkhofer explains, Remington's "sculptures, engravings, and paintings . . . portrayed a hostile Indian race. . . . [He] regarded Native Americans as an inferior race deserving of extinction. His archetypical Indian scowled and skulked as he passed off the stage of history."9

By the 1880s, the creation of wild west shows brought live-action western exploits, including Indian fights, to audiences throughout the United States, exposing most of their viewers to actual Native Americans for the first time. These shows were, in Berkhofer's words, "dime novels come alive," and by far the most famous was Buffalo Bill Cody's Wild West, which debuted in 1884 and was one of the country's most successful entertainment products for three decades. Cody's show purported to present scenes from frontier "history," including Plains Indians' attacks on settlers and the cavalry. As Slotkin writes, "the Wild West wrote 'history' by conflating it with mythology. The re-enactments were not re-creations but reductions of complex events into 'typical scenes' based on the formulas of popular literary mythology." Cody further enhanced the verisimilitude of these acts by hiring Native Americans such as Geronimo and Sitting Bull, thus showing audiences the "infamous" warriors who had recently been killing white men, and even pitted them in mock battles against units of the U.S. cavalry. In Slotkin's words, "It is the most extraordinary tribute to the skill of the Wild West's management that its performances were not only accepted as entertainment but were received with some seriousness
as exercises in public education." With Americans flocking to such shows, these displays of savage Indians battling desperate homesteaders and heroic cavalrmen only served to further cement the notion of the bloodthirsty savage in the popular American imagination.10

Theodore Roosevelt offered a similarly violent and racially-charged view of relations between Native and Euro-Americans, one based on the concept of a race war. He saw westward expansion as a natural, Darwinian process, and because of this, Euro-Americans were justified in overcoming indigenous peoples. Moreover, he believed that conflict was certain, writing, "Unless we were willing that the whole continent west of the Alleghenies should remain an unpeopled waste, the hunting ground of savages, war was inevitable." Roosevelt's idea of an unavoidable race war that would result in the annihilation and extinction of Native Americas served to reinforce the Puritans' views of Native Americans. These interpretations of Indians as blood-soaked savages and racial inferiors who did not deserve the land they occupied found expression in the 1930s in a powerful new medium: the talking motion picture.11

Due to this historical context, when audiences attended the bloodthirsty savage pictures of the 1930s and early-'40s, they were not seeing a new vision of Indians, but rather one that had been imbedded in the American consciousness since the earliest years of European settlement on the continent. Hollywood was not simply presenting age-old racist views from an earlier era, but was perpetuating them in twentieth century America. In these movies, Indians served as little more than hyper-savage obstacles to westward expansion, and because of this savagery, the films' white protagonists had to completely eliminate them in order to allow for the development of the frontier. This is apparent in the lack of motivation for Indian attacks. In films like The Plainsman, Stagecoach, and Union Pacific, rampaging savages boil out of the hills, falling upon white travelers, but any reason for them doing so is conspicuously absent. According to these
movies, bloodthirsty savages attack whites simply because that is what they do. In *The Plainsman*, for instance, Yellow Hand (Paul Harvey) leads his tribe in rebellion after being sold surplus Civil War rifles by unscrupulous white businessmen, but while the guns provide the weaponry needed for the war, the film only offers a single mention of the killing of the buffalo by way of explanation for why the revolt occurs. Essentially, *The Plainsman* implies, Indians will go to war if given the opportunity.\(^\text{12}\)

**The Studio System**

From the 1920s, when it first developed, into the 1950s, when a combination of court cases and contract issues brought its demise, the studio system dominated Hollywood. This system was one of vertical integration, with individual corporations being involved in each level of the motion picture process: production, distribution, and exhibition. While the best known aspect of the system was the contractual control of creative talent, including producers, directors, screenwriters and actors, the exhibition of films was of even greater importance. Studios earned the majority of their profits not from the showing of films in independently-owned theaters, as is the case today, but rather from exhibiting them in a network of theaters owned by the studio itself. Essentially, during this era, the business of a film studio was not to make films, but rather to sell tickets at the theaters owned by the studio's parent corporation. Movies were nothing more than a product that the studio could exhibit in those theaters. In Balio's words, "The position of films by the major companies is not really an end in itself, on the success or failure of which the company's existence depends; it is an instrument directed toward the accomplishment of another end, i.e., domination of the theater market."\(^\text{13}\)
Although the studios were in competition with one another, they also depended upon each other for exhibition of their movies. The studios' theater networks were largely regional, Loew's (the parent company of MGM) being primarily located in New York and Ohio, for instance. Each studio showed its competitors' movies in its theaters to ensure both nationwide distribution and a steady stream of new features, as no company could produce enough films to keep its theaters stocked year-round. Thus, the entire industry was built upon an interdependent system of collusion and cooperation, for a hugely profitable film, such as MGM's *Gone with the Wind* (1939), brought profit not only to its parent studio but to the other studios, as well. During the 1930s, the studios developed illegal trade practices, including refusing independent theater owners access to first-run titles or forcing them to accept several lower-quality films in order to show a major hit. As previously noted, the Roosevelt Administration sanctioned these illegal practices in the interest of helping the industry survive the Depression. In Balio's words, the NRA "assumed that collective action was superior to cutthroat competition" and thus the studios "succeeded in receiving government sanction for the trade practices that they had spent ten years developing through informal collusion." \(^{14}\)

This collusion would eventually bring about the downfall of the studio system in the post-war years, a process that will be dealt with in later chapters, but the system was of great importance during the 1930s because, in most cases, it was the studio, not the individual talent, that made the ultimate creative decisions for the films they released. Studio heads such as Jack Warner at Warner Bros. and Louis B. Mayer at MGM exerted enormous control over their respective companies' products, deciding what specific films they would produce, and who would write, direct and star in them. However, contrary to the common-held view, these men were not the ultimate authority within the studio. Warner, Mayer and their ilk may have been in
charge of the creative end of the industry, but even they answered to the executives who ran the business end of the studios from New York, and who also exerted great power in the filmmaking process. Typically, a studio's top executives would meet at the beginning of a fiscal year to plot out a business plan, deciding how many films their company would produce and how that number would be divided among different genres. The head of the studio's exhibition branch was of particular importance in this process, because his arm of the corporation was closest to the consumer and thus received the most immediate feedback on what type of movie, and which particular stars, audiences liked. With this plan in hand, the studio chief could then return to Hollywood where he and the producers who worked under him would select stories and assign talent, including the writers, directors, and stars.15

All of this is of great significance because, as film historian Thomas Schatz writes, "The quality and artistry [of studio pictures] were the product not simply of individual human expression, but of a melding of institutional forces. . . . Ultimately any individual's style was no more than an inflection on an established studio style." There were a handful of exceptions to this, including both DeMille and Ford, whose films are examined in this chapter. Their commercial and critical success allowed them to exert a great measure of creative control over their films, but, as Schatz notes, "such authority came only with commercial success and was won by filmmakers who proved not just that they had talent but that they could work profitably within the system." Most other filmmakers lacked this freedom, and thus their portrayal of American Indians cannot be attributed entirely to the individual director's views. The same hold true for screenwriters, for, as Balio explains, "Seldom did one screenwriter create a screenplay. More likely, a different writer or even teams of writers were assigned to each successive stage. Like everything else at the studio, screenwriting had its specializations; some writers were hired
for their skill in plot construction, some for comic effects, and others for polishing dialogue.”
Because of this system, both The Plainsman and Union Pacific have three credited writers, while at least twelve writers worked on the screenplay for Northwest Passage at one time or another, even though only two actually garnered screen credit.16

With so much creative power residing with executives rather than the filmmakers themselves, it is not surprising that films of the 1930s usually did not stretch the boundaries of American Indian representation. The industry, and in particular the heads of exhibition, tended toward conservatism when it came to their finished product. Because they were most concerned with profits, not making artistic or creative statements, the heads of exhibition would generally push for "safe" films, ones that would appeal to the broadest audience while offending the least number of people possible. For American Indian pictures, this meant that the films did not challenge preexisting notions of Indians, but rather reinforced ones already existing in the nation's culture. Thus, the majority of films would present Indians as the stereotypical bloodthirsty savage, and even the few during the 1930s that did not fall into this pattern simply offered a different, but still simplistic stereotype, that of the noble savage, as will be examined in chapter two. It would not be until the decline of the studio system after World War II, when producers, directors and screenwriters gained increasing freedom that Hollywood began to offer more complicated visions of Indians.17

The Conquest of the West as National Nostalgia: The Plainsman and Union Pacific

Given that they were produced three years apart, in 1936 and 1939, respectively, it is unsurprising that DeMille's The Plainsman and Union Pacific bear great thematic and tonal resemblances to each other. They are deeply nostalgic for the American past, looking to
historical accomplishments and national folk heroes to buoy the country in an era of economic turmoil. Both films offer a mythical view of the conquest of the West, idealizing the concept of Manifest Destiny and seeing westward expansion as one of the great adventures and defining events in American history. Furthermore, they present Indians as wild, rampaging savages who are obstacles to the civilizing mission of the United States, and its agents of progress. Their Indians are without motivation or characterization, merely attacking whites in ways that confirmed age-old fears and prejudices, and they appear alternately as bloodthirsty monsters and ridiculous comic relief. Moreover, both pictures see white characters who aid Indians, even under threat of torture and death, as race traitors whose actions threaten not just the lives of other whites, but the entire civilizing mission of the United States on the frontier. Despite their inherent racism and violence, critics and audiences responded favorably to both of DeMille's efforts, raving about the entertainment value offered by their rampaging Indians and white heroes.

The twin forces of the Depression and, at the end of the decade, World War II encouraged American culture, including Hollywood, to look backwards toward the nation's past accomplishments during the 1930s. As cultural historian Warren Susman argues, the extreme dislocation brought on by the Depression caused the nation to seek out an "American way of life." The American people felt betrayed by the modern industrial order, which they blamed for the collapse of the economy. As Susman writes, "Civilization itself—in its urban-industrial form—seemed increasingly the enemy" during the 1930s. The American people feared this new age was eroding the traditional society they were comfortable with, and sought a new vision of the nation based in folklore and nostalgia. Essentially, they were seeking to remake not just their nation, which had been so devastated by the Depression, but their culture as well, and for many,
the source of this new culture would come from the country’s past. Susman notes that the cultural material being produced during the 1930s "was about American history and those who made it," and American Indian films such as *The Plainsman* and *Union Pacific* fit logically into this pattern. By glorifying a mythical view of the nation’s past, one based on westward expansion and towering folk heroes, these films enabled Americans to feel a patriotic sense of pride in what their country had once been, and could be again.18

By the end of the decade, the success of the New Deal in fostering faith in the federal government, as well as the onset of World War II, continued to drive patriotic themes in American Indian films. The late 1930s saw a wave of patriotism sweep through American culture. Once again, the American Indian genre, with its preoccupation with the conquest of the West and national military might, was ideally placed to deliver this message. This trend was not lost on observers of the day, for, when reviewing *Stagecoach*, *Newsweek* noted that the film "jibes with Hollywood’s current preoccupation with patriotism," while *Variety* reported that "Par[amount] execs admit they are looking favorably at other early western stories in order to capitalize on the surge of Americanism sweeping the country." It is unlikely that the studios did this entirely for patriotic purposes, however. As Balio notes, "Hollywood no doubt wanted to boost national morale by producing these pictures; but it might also have anticipated the closing of foreign markets by tailor-making a cycle mainly for domestic consumption." With overseas markets unavailable for exploitation, Hollywood specifically tailored pictures like *Union Pacific*, which celebrated the taming of the frontier, for American audiences.19

Whether his motivation in making *Union Pacific* was financial, nationalistic, or a mixture of both, DeMille was an intensely patriotic man who, despite already having a thriving Hollywood career in 1917, attempted to enlist in the military during World War I (he was denied
due to age). Furthermore, he professed a deep commitment to representing history, both of his country and of the world, on screen. By 1936, when he produced and directed *The Plainsman*, DeMille was one of the most well-known filmmakers in Hollywood, having worked as a director for over two decades and earning renown for the massive scale of his historical epics. He was also given tremendous freedom by Paramount to pick and develop his own projects, and this enabled him focus almost exclusively upon historical topics, with films ranging from Biblical and Roman times to the Middle Ages to 19th century America. His Depression-era films dealing with American history look back upon a mythical version of America's accomplishments, such as the conquest of the West and the construction of the transcontinental railroad, celebrating the country's past and encouraging audiences to achieve greatness in the future. DeMille once said "History should be honestly and diligently respected. It has too often been abused in films," and while this is an intensely ironic statement, given the wild liberties he took with the nation's past in *The Plainsman* and *Union Pacific*, it also indicates his commitment to presenting history on film.  

*The Plainsman* offers a patently absurd version of historical events, suggesting that Wild Bill Hickok and Buffalo Bill Cody were best friends who fought Indians alongside George Armstrong Custer, all at the behest of President Lincoln, who demanded that "the frontier must be made safe" only hours before his assassination. By connecting one of America's greatest presidents, and several of its most prominent folk heroes, into one narrative, *The Plainsman* allowed its Depression-era audiences to revel in their nation's glorious "history." Hickok, played by that upright exemplar of American decency Gary Cooper, is the film's central character, and, aided by Cody and Custer, he battles both Indians and white gun runners in an effort to tame the West and make it a suitable place for widespread settlement. Hickok dies during the film's
climax, and earlier in the picture, the audience learns that Custer has met his fate at the Little Big Horn, but the movie's closing shot is a ghostly image of these two legendary frontiersmen riding together into immortality, with a caption urging America to return to the greatness represented by their achievements: "It shall be as it was in the past, not with dreams, but with strength and courage shall a nation be molded to last."  

Figure #1: Custer (John Miljan, left) and Hickok (Gary Cooper) ride into legend in the final shot of The Plainsman.

Union Pacific similarly glorifies a great national feat, the herculean effort to build the transcontinental railroad, something DeMille himself argued was a landmark American moment. In his own words, "A President of the United States had thought that episode in our history so important that, when he signed the bill authorizing government co-operation with the building of the Union Pacific Railroad, he wrote out his name in full, Abraham Lincoln, instead of his more usual signature, A. Lincoln." The film's primary theme is the joining of the nation—at the climactic completion of the railroad at Promontory Point, Utah, one speaker announces "And so
this great nation is united with a wedding band of iron"—and such sentiments were of particular relevance in 1939, with the Depression still dragging on and war looming in Europe. Like The Plainsman, Union Pacific celebrates the conquest of the frontier, and its opening shot, perfectly straight railroad tracks heading west into the setting sun, conveys a powerful image of Manifest Destiny. The story is completely fictional, with troubleshooter Jeff Butler (Joel McCrea) ensuring the completion of the Union Pacific despite attempts by businessmen and gamblers to slow its construction because they have invested in the competing Central Pacific. And while the film offered Americans a glorified vision of their nation's past, it also connected that idealized past to a hopeful future, for the picture's closing shot is of the completion of the transcontinental railroad at Promontory Point, Utah, which then wipes into a modern diesel locomotive speeding along the tracks.²²

Figure #2: The opening shot of Union Pacific, an evocative image of Manifest Destiny.

In celebrating America's past, The Plainsman and Union Pacific depict Indians as bloodthirsty savages, using their defeat to extol the virtues of the films' white protagonists.
Indians were not unique in receiving this Orientalist treatment from DeMille, for he frequently portrayed non-white peoples as inferior, be they the primitive headhunters in *Four Frightened People* (Paramount, 1934) or wicked Muslims in *The Crusades* (Paramount, 1935), and the Indians in these films have no redeeming qualities, simply a desire to murder whites. In *The Plainsman*, savage Indians go on the warpath after buying surplus Civil War rifles from greedy businessmen, and while Chief Yellow Hand briefly mentions the slaughter of the buffalo as motivation for the revolt, the audience feels no sympathy for his people's plight because they are clearly a force of horrifying savagery. With such a threat rampaging across the frontier, Hickok attempts to convince the retired Cody to return to duty as a scout for the army. As he explains to Cody's eastern-born wife, "You've never seen the Indian tribes at war, ma'am. You've never seen men killed and mutilated, and bodies of women burned and babies dragged from their mothers' arms." Shortly thereafter, Yellow Hand demonstrates this cruelty when his Indians capture Hickok and Calamity Jane (Jean Arthur), and the chief tortures Hickok by roasting him over an open fire. Yellow Hand is one of the few Indians to even be given a name in either *The Plainsman* or *Union Pacific*, and during a great battle with the army, the cavalry slaughter his warriors by the hundreds. These Indians place no value on their own lives, riding directly into the cavalry's guns in wave after wave, willingly sacrificing themselves in order to kill the white soldiers.23

The value of Indian life is a significant point in *Union Pacific*, as well. Early in the film, an Indian boy races his horse alongside a train and a cruel gambler shoots the youth for sport. Butler thrashes the gambler in a fistfight and throws him off the train, but as he explains, he is not angry at the murder of an innocent child, but rather that the murder will result in reprisals against whites: "That shot didn't just kill an Indian. It killed a dozen white men and scalped and
tortured women and children." Thus, the Indian boy's life has no inherent value, itself, but is only worth something due to the white lives that will be taken by vengeful Indians. Later in the film, Indians attack a train, murdering nearly everyone on board and ransacking the cars like wild animals. Much like those in *The Plainsman*, these Indians do not have names and are not characters with motivations. They simply attack the train because they are Indians and it is filled with white people.24

While both films portray Indians as monstrous savages, they also use the Indians' primitivism as a source of comic relief, depicting them as ridiculous figures incapable of understanding the more "civilized" culture of white America. In *The Plainsman*, Yellow Hand's warriors trap Calamity Jane in the cabin shared by Cody and his wife, Louisa, and in an attempt to earn her freedom, Calamity gives them Louisa's hats as gifts. As if the image of painted Indian warriors wearing ladies' lace hats was not ridiculous enough, DeMille then has their leader look into the cabin's warped mirror, the distorted image making the Indian appear even more absurd and monstrous. Calamity, whom the movie presents as a masculine figure who does not know her proper role as a lady, had looked into the mirror herself in an earlier scene, and just as it presented her as a grotesque mockery of a woman for her gender-bending ways, it presents the Indian as a grotesque mockery of a human due to his savagery. During the raid on the train in *Union Pacific*, Indians again prove themselves incapable of understanding the most rudimentary aspects of white culture. They festoon their horses with ladies undergarments, are bewildered by a wooden cigar store Indian, and terrified of the notes given off by a piano. Critics applauded of these comedy elements, *Motion Picture Daily* noting that "How they use and regard their findings, such as bolts of cloth and corsets, is amusing," while *The Motion Picture Herald's* Joseph F. Coughlin suggested that the scene "should bring a tempestuous
comedy reaction from any kind of audience under any kind of local condition." Thus, both films offer a dualistic view of Indians, but neither view is a positive one: they are, in turns, bloodthirsty monsters and ridiculous comic relief.25

![Image of an Indian in a ladies' hat]

Figure #3: An Indian in a ladies' hat becomes a grotesque mockery of a human being when he looks into a mirror in The Plainsman.

While the films portray Indians as savages, either monstrous or absurd, they present any white characters who aid them, even involuntarily, as race traitors. DeMille described one of The Plainsman's chief villains, John Lattimer (Charles Bickford), as "the unscrupulous mastermind of a ring selling high-powered rifles illegally to the Indians," and he and his fellow capitalists were untroubled by the white lives that Indians would kill with their guns. With The Plainsman being released only a year after the publication of Gen. Smedley Butler's sensationalistic book War Is a Racket, which accused American industry of war profiteering, it is entirely possible that Lattimer and his ilk were a nod toward the businessmen who made millions selling munitions during World War I. When one member of the cabal objects to the sale of
guns to Indians, another merely proposes they deal with "peaceable" tribes and make the Indians promise not to turn the guns on white men. Of course, such an oath would be impossible to enforce, and the casual nature of its suggestion—the man who makes it is playing with a toy on his desk during the conversation—indicates the businessmen are well aware of how the Indians will actually use the guns. While these greedy capitalists voluntarily betray the nation and their own race for profit, Calamity is branded a race traitor even though she is coerced into aiding the Indians. When Yellow Hand tortures Hickok over the fire, she breaks down and reveals the location of a cavalry column, knowing full well that she is dooming many soldiers to death. Afterwards, she wallows in self-loathing and is ostracized by members of her community. Further, Custer tells her that, if she was in the army, he would have her shot, and Hickok is disgusted with her, as well, even though she saved his life. Calamity may have prevented the man she loved from suffering a horrible death, but according to The Plainsman, such personal feelings do not outweigh the harm caused by her helping Indians.26

Dozens, if not hundreds, of Indians are slain in both The Plainsman and Union Pacific, but critics still raved about the films' entertainment value and those deaths did not subtract from the viewing pleasure they gave audiences. The review of The Plainsman in Motion Picture Daily refers to the picture as "a blood and thunder saga of the west" that tells "in roaring terms how a vast domain was wrested from the red men and white renegades," and finally concludes that it is "stirring, human interest entertainment." Likewise, Coughlin's review of Union Pacific in the Motion Picture Herald called that film's Indian attack on the train "delicious and enjoyable entertainment," while Photoplay's review of the same film claimed that audiences would "howl as hundreds of redskins bite the dust."

26

27
Critics were not alone in their praise of the entertainment provided by both of DeMille's films. As demonstrated by feedback from theater owners in *The Motion Picture Herald*, *The Plainsman* and *Union Pacific* were hits with audiences. W.H. Brenner of the Cory Theatre in Winchester, Indiana noted that "'The Plainsman' knocked all records for a cocked hat," while W.H. McPhee of the Strand Theatre, Old Town, Maine, described the film simply as a "Box office smash," and three years later, wrote that *Union Pacific* was "a grand tonic for your summer box office." Theater owners received glowing feedback from their audiences, as well, with Warren L. Weber of the Deluxe Theatre in St. John's, Kansas noting that *The Plainsman* "Pleased everyone. Made to order to Kansas or the middle west exhibitors." *Union Pacific* garnered similarly glowing feedback, with Frank J. Biberstein of the Attica Theatre, in Attica, Kansas calling it "the type of picture people want to see" and Mrs. W.A. Wright of the Rex Theatre, Konowa, Oklahoma commented that her "customers praised it to the ceiling." Finally, P.G. Held of the New Strand Theatre, Giswold, Iowa referred to *Union Pacific* as "A masterpiece. A picture for the whole family. Clean and entertaining."  

Certainly, the ability to derive enjoyment from on-screen violence (even for families, if Held is to be believed) is not unique to these films, or the American Indian genre in general, but this feedback reveals no compunction in finding grand entertainment in films that glorify the slaughter of entire tribes of Indians. Likewise, Edwin Schallert's review of *Union Pacific* for *The Los Angeles Times* noted that the Indian attack on the train "raged and raged until it looks as if none of the people would survive that you are really interested in," but because the Indians are never established as characters, it is understandable that audiences should only care about the white protagonists caught inside the train and not the nameless Indians outside. However, at least one critic evinced some understanding for the Indians' actions in *Union Pacific*, for, as
Llewellyn Miller wrote in *Hollywood Screen Life*, the film's "Indians showed a not unreasonable tendency to resent the march of progress" by attacking the train.\textsuperscript{29}

Critics also casually used racist terms when describing the pictures, with many reviews including the terms "redskins," "red men," or "Injuns." *Los Angeles Times* reporter Read Kendall noted, for instance, that "DeMille has used real redskins wherever possible" in *The Plainsman* while *Variety* described *Union Pacific* as "cowboys and Injuns backgrounded by the epochal building of the Union Pacific." Of course, such terms were far more acceptable in the 1930s than they would be today—George Preston Marshall renamed his football team the Boston (later Washington) Redskins in 1933, after all—but other instances of racism directed toward Native Americans crop up, as well. *Newsweek*’s review of *The Plainsman* notes that the film employed "2,500 Cheyennes from the—believe it or not—Rosebud Reservation," as if it was difficult to accept a reservation could be named after something as prosaic as a flower. Furthermore, the review of *Union Pacific* in *Motion Picture Daily* used language associated with vermin to describe that film's Indians, referring to the West as "an Indian-infested wilderness" and referring the train as "beset by a swarm of Sioux Indians." Such feelings indicate that the critics had difficulties separating the on-screen savages from actual Native Americans, demonstrating the insidious nature of these bloodthirsty savage American Indian films.\textsuperscript{30}

*The Plainsman* and *Union Pacific* presented similar views of American history in general and Indians in particular. They were deeply nostalgic movies, glorifying past accomplishments as a way to remind their audiences of the nation's former greatness while it was mired in the Depression and to stir patriotic fervor as World War II broke out in Europe. In order to accomplish this, they fictionalized the lives of American folk heroes and manufactured events that bore some semblance to history, thereby creating mythical versions of the past. As a
function of this process, both pictures presented Indians as bloodthirsty savages, animalistic monsters without character or motivation who sought only to torture and murder any whites they encountered. While this savagery usually manifested itself violently, with the Indians throwing their lives away in great numbers in order to kill whites, it also served as a source of comic relief. By playing upon the Indians' simple-minded primitivism, the films found humor in their lack of understanding of white culture. And audiences and critics found great enjoyment in these films. Their feedback indicates that they were unbothered by the on-screen violence inflicted upon savage Indians by white frontier heroes, instead seeing the pictures as good, clean entertainment.

The Indian Threat as a Force of Social Unity: *Stagecoach*

*Stagecoach* is often seen as the film that relaunched the A-list western after nearly a decade in decline. This is not entirely true—a March 1, 1939 article in *Variety* attributed the new wave of westerns to *Union Pacific* and *Jesse James*, and noted a significant number of such movies already in production when United Artists released *Stagecoach* that spring—but *Stagecoach*'s artistic and financial success did much to herald the return of the genre as a box office force. Furthermore, it has proven to be one of the most important and influential films of the genre ever made, and more then two decades after its release, Ford himself said he thought "*Stagecoach* set a trend, sort of blazed a trail for the adult western." On first viewing, *Stagecoach* seems familiar, even routine, in no small part because other movies have borrowed nearly every aspect of it over the decades. It tells a simple story: a number of passengers take the stagecoach between the southwestern towns of Tonto and Lordsburg, facing internal strife due to their own differences, and external danger from Geronimo and his Apaches. Much of the drama of the picture comes from bickering between the passengers, with the social elites of the cast
looking down upon the outcasts. Off-screen for the majority of the picture, the Indians form a threat that keeps these disparate personalities together and forces them to work together to survive, bringing all the characters into a single, functioning unit.\textsuperscript{31}

As \textit{Stagecoach} demonstrates, the 1930s were an era of community and conformity. Much as the decade saw Americans looking to the past to remind themselves of their nation's greatness, it also saw them attempting to establish a definition for what being an American meant. In Susman's words, "It was characteristic of life in the 1930s for the idea of commitment to merge with some kind of culture and produce, at least for a time, participation in some group, community or movement. The 1930s was the decade of participation and belonging." Across all aspects of society, from political movements to labor unions to literature, Americans felt, in Susman's words, "the need to feel one's self a part of some larger body, some larger sense of purpose." The heroes of the era's American Indian movies were not simply loners in the wilderness, but rather men bringing civilization to that wilderness, much as the expanded power of the federal government under the New Deal, brought order to the chaos of the Depression. Just as Cody leaves his comfortable civilian life in order to scout for the army and Butler risks his life to help construct the railroad in \textit{The Plainsman} and \textit{Union Pacific}, so too do the characters of \textit{Stagecoach} work for something more important than their individual selves as they come together to form a single community.\textsuperscript{32}

The review of \textit{Stagecoach} in \textit{Time Magazine} noted that it was "built along the plot lines of \textit{Grand Hotel}," and, indeed, with its cast of characters brought together by various circumstances, the film's structure is that of the sort of ensemble drama popular during the 1930s. When the stage leaves Tonto on its journey to Lordsburg, the passengers are strangers and, in many cases, disdainful of one another. In a 1939 interview for the \textit{New York Post}, Ford and
screenwriter Dudley Nichols joked about the fallen nature of the passengers: "'There's not a single respectable character in the cast' said Mr. Ford. 'The leading man has killed three guys.' 'The leading woman is a prostitute,' said Mr. Nichols." Their assessment is not entirely true, however, for the passengers represent something of a cross-section of American society. Among them are social elites: banker Gatewood (Berton Churchill) and army officer's wife Lucy Mallory (Louise Platt); outcasts: outlaw Ringo (John Wayne), prostitute Dallas (Claire Trevor), and alcoholic Doc Boone (Thomas Mitchell); and some who fit in between: lawman Curley (George Bancroft) and liquor peddler Peacock (Donald Meek). The outcasts have quite literally been thrown out of society, for Dallas and Doc Boone are run out of Tonto by the moralistic Law and Order League, Boone explaining, "We're the victims of a foul disease called social prejudice," while Ringo is wanted by the law for seeking revenge on the men who gunned down his father and brother. Throughout the film, the elites frequently pass judgment on this trio, most notably when the pregnant Mrs. Mallory refuses the kindness offered by Dallas. Yet, these very different people manage to become a working community while they travel through Indian country. As May has noted, the characters of *Stagecoach* eventually "learn to forge a public life where opposites cooperate."33

This community is made possible because of the threat posed by Geronimo and his Apaches. The opening moments of the movie reveal that the Apaches are on the warpath, and, as film critic Arthur Knight notes, "The Indian threat provides a canopy that hangs ominously over all the subsequent action" of the film. While the conflict between the cast serves to create the film's drama, the Indians keep the passengers in the stagecoach and keep the coach itself heading toward Lordsburg. This is perhaps most obvious when the stage stops for the night at a roadhouse, presenting Ringo an opportunity to escape from Curley's custody. As he bids
farewell to Dallas and prepares to ride off, Ringo sees smoke signals on the horizon and realizes that he cannot abandon the others to their fate. He turns himself back in to Curley and stays with the other passengers, protecting the burgeoning community with his skill at arms. By the film's end, the outcasts have proven their worth in various ways—Doc Boone sobering up long enough to attend to the birth of Mrs. Mallory's child, Ringo saving the coach during the climactic Indian attack, and Dallas comforting the newborn during the battle—Gatewood, the corrupt banker, has been arrested, and the passengers have become a functioning social unit. Without the Apache threat, the disparate passengers would never have been able to coexist, much less work together. In this way, the Indians merely serve as a means to an end, and the fact that they are Indians is inconsequential. They could have been bandits or wild animals or, for that matter, Zulu warriors if the film was set in Africa. The Indians are of such little importance in and of themselves that Ford simply created new traits for them when it served his purpose. After an unseasonable blizzard struck Monument Valley, for example, he explained the snow on the ground by having the stage's driver, Buck (Andy Devine), declare that he took a high road into the mountains because "those breech-clout Apaches don't like snow." The notion of Indians living in the mountains and disliking snow is absurd, but it explained the continuity issue of snowfall and was possible because the Indians in *Stagecoach* are simply ciphers.34

Because the Apaches are of such little consequence, they receive no motivation for their attacks in the film; there are no broken treaties or mistreatment at the hands of corrupt officials. They simply go to war because that is their nature and they kill whites because that is what Indians do. Moreover, much like the Indians in *The Plainsman* and *Union Pacific*, those in *Stagecoach* place no value upon their own lives. During the climactic battle, they race after the coach heedless of the danger they are in, falling in great numbers before the guns of Ringo and
his fellow passengers, so desperate to kill these white interlopers in their territory that they willingly throw their own lives away. The shooting script for *Stagecoach* leaves little doubt as to the feeling Ford and Nichols sought to convey about their bloodthirsty Indians, regularly using loaded terms such as "menace" and "savage" in reference to the Apaches, and "despair" and "dismay" when referring to the white protagonists' feelings while passing through Indian country. Throughout the script, the mere mention of the name Geronimo strikes fear into whites; stage directions describe him as "the most dreaded figure in the Southwest" and his warriors as "a band of savage-looking Apaches, their foreheads smeared with white war paint." So menacing are the Apaches that the mere sight of their smoke signals terrifies whites, as indicated by stage directions during Ringo's abortive escape, when he and Dallas see smoke signals: "A look of despair comes into Dallas' eyes. Ringo's jaw tightens . . . [Dallas] stands there, beyond speech, beyond all hope."\(^{35}\)

Ford also used visual techniques to emphasize the danger faced by the passengers. Early in the film, when the stage is accompanied by a cavalry column, he consistently utilized medium shots, placing both the soldiers and the coach large in the frame. As the soldiers depart, however, the camera cut between them heading down one branch of a trail and the stage taking the other, the latter growing smaller and smaller on screen. As the protagonists travel through perilous Indian country with no escort for the rest of their journey, Ford nearly always showed their stagecoach very small in the frame of panorama shots, a technique that built a sense of dread and danger, with stage directions in the script noting this tension: "No soldier escort now. They are alone and on their own." For the climactic Indian attack on the stage, Ford shot the coach from long distance as it runs across a valley and is tiny in the frame, and then panned right
to reveal a line of Apaches standing on a hill and looming in the foreground of the frame, illustrating the protagonists' extreme vulnerability.\(^{36}\)

Figures #4 and #5: The danger faced by the passengers in *Stagecoach*. In Figure 4, above, Ford shoots the stage very small in the frame, indicating its vulnerability, while in Figure 5, below, the Apaches fill the frame, a display of their menace and power.

Reviews of *Stagecoach* complimented it for its quality and excitement, but its Indians were of such little importance that some critics barely discussed their presence in the film. *The
Los Angeles Times and Variety only mention the Indians in passing—the former noting their attack on the coach and the latter the tension their presence provides—while Photoplay did not make a single mention of the Apaches in its entire three-paragraph review. Furthermore, a different, capsule review in Photoplay and a review in The Motion Picture Herald both referred to Arizona as "Indian infested territory," using the same vermin-themed rhetoric toward the Apaches in Stagecoach that Motion Picture Daily used in its review of Union Pacific. Other reviews indicated that rampaging Indians were an expected feature of the western genre during the 1930s. As The National Board of Review Magazine's James Hamilton Shelley wrote, the film "brings things that are eternally delightful back out of the youth of the movies . . . Stagecoaches, Indians, rescuing cavalry, are the Homeric stuff of the motion picture" and referred to the plot as "a stagecoach journey with all the trimmings, including cavalry and Indians." Likewise, Frank Nugent of The New York Times, who would go on to work as Ford's screenwriter a decade later, called the film's subject matter "one of the oldest formulae" of the movies.37

Like many of these critics, theater owners made little mention of Indians in their feedback about Stagecoach, seeing the picture as a standard, if high quality, western. Of course, that very fact indicates that not only did Indians make little impact upon audiences who saw the film in 1939, but that they accepted its simplistic portrayal of the Apaches as bloodthirsty savages without complaint. C.L. Niles of the Niles Theatre in Anomosa, Iowa wrote that it was "an excellently made western with good cast and story. A little over the head of the average western fan," while A.H. Records of the Majestic Theatre in Hebron, Nebraska simply called it "a big western and nothing more." The Los Angeles Times even covered the burning of a set during films, noting that it brought "vivid reality to the depredations of Arizona's dreaded
Apache leader, Geronimo." Bloodthirsty Indians who would kill whites and burn their outposts, it seems, were not simply the "Homeric stuff" of the western and part of "the oldest formulae," but simply an expected aspect of the genre.38

*Stagecoach* may have been a landmark film in Hollywood history, introducing many tropes common to the western genre, but it certainly did not break any new ground through its portrayals of Indians. Geronimo and his Apaches are an omnipresent threat to the passengers, but for most of the movie, that threat is entirely off-screen. The primary purpose the Indians serve in the picture is to keep the diverse cast of white characters together in the coach and, ultimately, to unite those characters, insiders and outsiders both, into a single unit. Ford and Nichols gave the Indians no motivation for their attack, but the screenplay left little doubt as to the menace they posed to the films' protagonists, and Ford's visual methods emphasized the constant danger the stagecoach was in during its journey. Because the film does not establish them as characters or anything other than an existential threat, reviews of *Stagecoach* hardly took notice of the Indians. At best, they saw bloodthirsty Indians as a necessary part of any western, and at worst, they did not even acknowledge their presence in the film, indicating that they were nothing more than a plot device and, thus, did not matter.

**Indians as Part of the Wilderness: *Northwest Passage***

Produced in 1940, *Northwest Passage* was an ode to American military resourcefulness, courage, and masculine toughness. Released by MGM and directed by King Vidor, the film portrays the exploits of French and Indian War hero Major Robert Rogers (Spencer Tracy) and his Rogers' Rangers as they trek into the Vermont wilds, exterminate a village of hostile Abenaki Indians, and struggle to reach civilization once more. The ordeal is seen through the eyes of
protagonist Langdon Towne (Robert Young), a would-be painter who joins the expedition as a map maker when Rogers appeals to his sense of duty to help make the frontier safe. Much of the film plays out as a rugged test of masculine endurance, with the Rangers facing all manner of natural obstacles in their quest, and ultimately, the Indians are simply an additional obstacle the wilderness places in their path. The film is exceedingly brutal in both word and deed, with explicit descriptions of torture and mutilation carried out by the Indians that justifies the complete annihilation of the Abenakis. Ironically, some observers of the era believed that brutality backfired on the film, making audiences feel unintended sympathy for the Indians, but, much like *The Plainsman* and *Union Pacific*, most audiences found great entertainment in the gruesome story.  

*Northwest Passage* was part of the wave of patriotic films released beginning in 1939 that included *Union Pacific* and *Stagecoach*, and like *The Plainsman*, it used a frontier hero as its protagonist in order to remind audiences of their nation's past accomplishments. Through its near-deification of Rogers—at the film's end, Towne declares that "Every time we look across a river, we'll hear his voice, calling us through the wind. He'll be within us."—the picture not only endorsed his actions against the Indians, but held him up as a paragon of American virtue. Furthermore, it celebrated the Rangers as national heroes who helped to tame the frontier, in no small part by exterminating hostile Indians, and promoted their courage, toughness and resourcefulness as traits needed in modern America due to the onset of war. Vidor biographers Raymond Durgnat and Scott Simmon posit that audiences who viewed *Northwest Passage* and other patriotic films of the era were "perhaps regearing themselves to a pre-World War II hawkishness," and thus the film may have been "urging Americans to brace themselves against an extremely ferocious enemy, Nazi Germany."
The movie's on-location shoot in Idaho was extremely difficult—Vidor was repeatedly forced to convince Tracy not to abandon the project during filming—and coverage of its production in the media focused heavily upon the actual hardships suffered by Tracy, Montgomery, and the other actors. As journalist Gladys Hall wrote in *Motion Picture*, "When [Tracy] came back from location for *Northwest Passage* and he wasn't any beaut', either, bearded and bronzed and bunged up, like he was, he didn't have to tell anyone that there hadn't been any cheating done about the hardships of *Major Robert Rogers*." Hollywood's Serena Bradford also stressed the ruggedness of the shoot, noting that both Tracy and Montgomery were swept away by a river in different incidents during filming and that, during a sequence shot in a swamp, "a man would sometimes disappear in a chuck hole and have to be dug out by his fellow actors—realism with a vengeance!" Likewise, *New York Times* film critic Bosley Crowther conflated Tracy, the actor, with Rogers, the historical figure, writing, "Spencer Tracy's Major Rogers seems . . . not to be Spencer Tracy's Major Rogers at all, but just plain Major Rogers, that almost legendary white devil of the Indian wars." By stressing the difficulties the actors faced while filming, this coverage melded them with their roles, suggesting that they had suffered and persevered just as the original Rangers had. Thus, both the film and the media reporting on it suggested that the Rangers' masculine skill and toughness, so evident during the French and Indian War, were still present in American men in 1940 when those traits might be needed for another war.41

While *Northwest Passage* celebrated American masculine toughness, it also depicted Indians as part of the natural world. In so doing, it drew upon a tradition that dated to the seventeenth century and saw Native Americans as one of a series of obstacles, including mountains, rivers, wolves and bears, that European settlers had to overcome in order to tame the
frontier. When arriving in America, the Puritans viewed it as an empty, unpeopled waste, and saw Indians as little more than animals. As William Bradford, the future governor of Plymouth, wrote, "What could [Europeans] see but a hideous, desolate wilderness, full of wild beasts and wild men," for New England was populated by "only savage and brutish men, which range up and down, little otherwise than the wild beasts of the same." Because of this conception of Indians as animals, the Puritans fought a series of vicious wars against the Native Americans of New England, often completely eradicating the tribes in their territory.42

During the nineteenth century, government policy toward Native Americans exacerbated this tradition of dehumanization. American expansion assumed that Native Americans had more land than they could use and were always willing to part with it when whites wanted to buy it. Moreover, this was a self-perpetuating process, for as the nation grew through the acquisition of tribal lands, it resulted in the formation of new states, which resulted in increasing voices demanding the acquisition of more tribal lands. The nation's traditional distrust of a large, peacetime standing army meant that the army that Congress was willing to fund only existed to fight Native Americans, but was never large enough to protect their lands from white incursion. As Berkhofer notes, white juries on the frontier rarely found whites guilty of committing crimes against Native Americans, but white militias regularly killed both innocent and guilty Native Americans for transgressions against whites. In his words, whites on the frontier "saw little reason not to violate Indian country or to kill Native Americans at will, justifying their actions by summoning up the image of the Indian as horrible savage."43

The Cherokee Removal, proposed by James Monroe and carried out by Andrew Jackson, continued this process of dehumanization. While many Americans opposed the Removal, citing treaties that guaranteed the Cherokees their lands, Jackson and his allies simply explained that
the nation did not need to abide by treaties made with Native Americans. In the words of Georgia governor George Gilmer, "Treaties were expedients by which ignorant, intractable, and savage people were induced without bloodshed to yield up what civilized people had the right to possess." Americans justified the taking of tribal lands, through the Removal or, in later decades, throughout the west, through a combination of American exceptionalism and racism. Simply put, white Americans believed Native Americans were unworthy of the lands they occupied. The Indian wars of the late-nineteenth century, and the massacres that accompanied them, including Sand Creek in 1864, Washita River in 1868, Wounded Knee in 1890, were a logical extension of government policies that dehumanized Native Americans, as whites saw Native American lands as being more valuable than Native American lives.44

While the Indian Wars ceased in the 1890s, the process of dehumanizing Native Americans, turning them into just another part of nature, continued into the next century. As historian Kerwin Lee Klein notes, during the twentieth century, "Many Americans took up 'wilderness' and dropped 'savagery' [when discussing Native Americans]. In the process they helped to change wilderness from an area occupied by wild people or savages to a place where, as the Wilderness Act (1964) put it, 'Man himself is a visitor who does not remain.' Thus, some historians continued to see indigenous people not as human beings, but rather as one of many natural obstacles the West placed in the path of settlement. One of these scholars, Ray Allen Billington, went so far as to refer to the frontier as "the Indian barrier," which, in the words of Klein, "formalized the conflation of Natives and nature."45

Throughout Northwest Passage, the Rangers face continual hardships as they forge their way through the wilderness, and the trek essentially serves as a test of their masculinity and ability to triumph in the face of extreme suffering. They cross a trackless swamp, sleep in trees,
deal with swarms of mosquitoes, and face starvation so intense that it drives one of their number
to cannibalism and, eventually, suicide. The picture places particular focus upon two
achievements the Rangers make in contending with natural obstacles: dragging whaleboats over
a mountain, and fording a rushing river by forming a human chain. Both of these set pieces
emphasize the physical rigors and misery the wilderness inflicts upon those who enter it, as well
as the Rangers' resourcefulness and toughness in overcoming such barriers. Every part of their
trek is rugged and difficult, and all of it leads to the ultimate obstacle, the Abenakis at St.
Francis. By defeating each of these obstacles, the Indians included, the Rangers are able to begin
the conquest of the frontier and bring Euro-American civilization to the region.46

The conflation of Indians and the wilderness reaches its apex in the movie's final scene,
when the surviving Rangers, having destroyed St. Francis and reached civilization once more,
receive a new mission to search for the legendary northwest passage to the Pacific Ocean. While
delivering these orders to his men, Rogers includes Indians in the list of natural wonders the
Rangers will experience as they explore the continent:

Why, you Rangers haven't seen any Indians yet! You're going to see the Plains Indians.
You're going to see the red men of the Shining Mountains. And those men along the
mighty river Oregon. Red men white men have never seen before, because we're going
to end up by the great western ocean itself. . . . You'll see hardwood groves like
cathedrals. Corn stalks as high as elms. Rivers packed with salmon trout. And grass so
high the cows stand knee-deep in it and give nothing but cream. . . . All you have to do is
walk along, through Ottawas, Chippewas, Wyandots, Miamis, Sauktes [sic], Shawnees,
Sioux. Well, I'll sort 'em all out to you when we get to them.

Thus, the Rangers will "walk through" Indian tribes, just as they will forests, corn fields and
rivers, confirming the Abenakis as one of many obstacles the wilderness put in their path to
complete their mission, akin to the mountains and swamps they had to cross. Like the Puritans
and historians such as Billington, *Northwest Passage* sees Indians as part of America's
landscape, scenic attractions for white explorers as they "tour" the continent.47
The suggestion that the Indians are animals rather than human beings is reinforced by their treatment on film. None of the Indians who appear in *Northwest Passage* have names, none are characters, and the only ones who even speak a line or two are friendly Mohawks who serve as the Rangers' scouts, and who ultimately prove to be unreliable drunks. The Abenakis, on the other hand, are faceless savages who provide the Rangers with targets for their vengeance and, after St. Francis is destroyed, give the third act a sense of tension as they pursue the white men back toward civilization.48

Although the audience does not actually see any Indian atrocities in *Northwest Passage*—those that occur do so off-screen and the battle at the Abenaki village of St. Francis is entirely one-sided in the Rangers' favor—the rhetoric of Indian savagery is among the most explicit in any American Indian film made before or since. As Rogers tells his men,

> Most of you have lost folk and friends to Indian raids since '57. You'll find their scalps at St. Francis . . . Your folks on the border farms, they weren't fighting anybody. They were clearing woods and plowing and raising children, trying to make a home of it. And then one night, Abenaki tomahawks at the door. If it was over quick, they were lucky.

Another Ranger explains what happened when his comrades were captured by the Indians:

> "Phillips had a strip of skin torn upwards from his stomach. They hung him from a tree by it while he was still alive. . . . They tore my brother's arms out of him. They chopped the ends of his ribs away from his backbone and pried them out through the skin, one by one." Later in the film, when the Rangers flee to civilization with Indians in pursuit, they learn that some of their party were ambushed and chopped apart by Indians who then played catch with the soldiers' heads. By providing such explicitly graphic descriptions of mutilation and torture, *Northwest Passage* not only established the Abekanis as deserving the brutal vengeance wreaked upon them by the Rangers, but also presented them as an obstacle to America's civilizing mission, the mission being carried out by the "folks on the border farms" before they were preyed upon by
savages. Additionally, since Rogers actually did exterminate the village of St. Francis during the French and Indian War, the rhetoric not only justified the on-screen actions carried out by actors playing the Rangers, but also did the same for the historical events the film depicts and, in a broader sense, the entire conquest of the West.\textsuperscript{49}

The Rangers' central accomplishment is the destruction of St. Francis, and it is a scene of merciless brutality. Having surrounded the village while the Abenakis are sleeping, the Rangers' then set fire to its lodges. Fleeing their burning homes, the Indians race from one end of the village to the other, finding all their escape routes blocked by the Rangers. Finally, the Abenakis gather in the center of St. Francis, where the Rangers slaughter them all. Ironically, this massacre is so ghastly that some critics felt it backfired on the picture. Jimmie Fidler, entertainment columnist for the \textit{Los Angeles Times}, wrote that "So terrific is the emotion sock [of the sequence] that you forget all about the carefully planted speeches about Indian cruelties." He spoke to several other critics after screening the picture, "and each one admitted to being 'terribly sorry for the poor Indians.'" Fidler's colleague at the \textit{Times}, critic Philip K. Scheuer, was similarly troubled by the brutality of the scene, but preferred to view it with some historical perspective: "That the be-all and end-all of Rogers' expedition—the wiping out of a human tribe, the Abenakis, to the last man—is a purpose whose justification may be questioned by the more pacifistic minded among audiences, one can scarcely deny. . . . One must perforce take the 'long view' here—of history, or adventure fiction, or what-you-will." Thus, the slaughter is so horrifying that Scheuer suggests his readers take comfort in the "long view" that such actions were necessary to tame the frontier.\textsuperscript{50}

Like Scheuer, many other critics focused upon the exploits of Rogers and his men, promoting \textit{Northwest Passage}'s vision of the conquest of the frontier as a patriotic and heroic
achievement. As Life Magazine's review of the film stated, when Rogers "led his Rangers through trackless northern forests and exterminated the fiercest Indian marauders, he returned to New England the hero of all youths, the toast of all soldiers, the adored of all women."

Llewellyn Miller of Hollywood Screen Life, who a year earlier demonstrated a semblance of sympathy for the plight of the Indians in Union Pacific, was even more effusive in his praise of Rogers' exploits:

It is a salutary thing, once in a while, to remember at what high costs of courage and endurance our ancestors tamed the wilderness that was the new world two hundred years ago. . . . [Rogers] took his Rangers through what was considered impassable swamp, to burn out the village of Saint Francis and so teach the marauding Indians that white settlers must not be tortured, that British officers and men must not be treated with the shocking savagery that was making a nightmare of the western frontier.

These critics embraced the film's view of horrifying Indians and heroic white avengers, characterizations that had existed for hundreds of years in American culture. And with patriotism running high in Hollywood during 1940 and World War II on the horizon, they appeared to see Rogers and his Rangers as ideal heroes for a difficult time. Some critics even reveled in the carnage inflicted upon the Abenakis, Time Magazine's review noting that "Northwest Passage is a grim reminder to pale faces with an atavistic itch to bag an Indian that potting 'those red hellions up there' is all work and no play." The rather astonishing notion that audience members might possess an "itch to bag an Indian" in 1940, even an atavistic one, shows a casual disregard for Indian life that is confirmed by the review referring to the slaughter at St. Francis as a "grand blood bath."

Theater owners were as enthusiastic, if somewhat less bloodthirsty, than Time's critic, raving about the enjoyment their audiences derived from the picture. J.F. Bobbitt of the Stearns Theatre in Stearns, Kentucky called the film "real entertainment and the kind that does not come along often," while Mrs. W. A. Wright of the Rex Theatre in Konawa, Oklahoma, wrote "It is
entertainment plus and will do business anywhere, any time." While E.M Freiburger of the Paramount Theatre in Dewey, Oklahoma believed *Northwest Passage* was a "good picture . . . but a little too bloodthirsty for the women," M.R. Harrington of the Avalon Theatre, Clatskanie, Oregon disagreed: "Our patrons were most enthusiastic in their praises, even the ladies, and they in spite of the fact that certain sequences are gruesome." Finally, Floyd J. Jacobs of the New Theatre in Sardinia, Ohio referred to the film as "Just the type of picture people like," a contention that proved correct as a coast-to-coast survey conducted by the American Institute of Public Opinion found *Northwest Passage* to be the fourth best-liked movie of 1940. Thus, as they did with *The Plainsman* and *Union Pacific*, audiences found great entertainment in the film and were untroubled by the massacre its heroes inflict upon the Abenakis.\(^\text{52}\)

*Northwest Passage* promoted a patriotic view of westward expansion through the glorification of an American hero at a time when the Depression and the outbreak of war in Europe were leading to a rise in nationalism across the country. It established Rogers and the Rangers who served under him as national heroes who helped make the United States what it would become and whose skill and courage could serve as an inspiration to Americans facing the possibility of war in 1940. To this end, the picture used its Indians as savage monsters deserving of the Rangers' wrath while presenting them as one of the many natural obstacles that the United States had to overcome in order to tame the frontier. Just as the Rangers had to haul their boats over a mountain, ford a river and slog through a mosquito-infested swamp, so too did they have to eradicate the Indians who preyed upon peaceful white settlers. Furthermore, it includes some of the most explicit and violent anti-Indian rhetoric seen on film, which was necessary to justify both the historical actions of the Rangers and the brutality of the attack on St. Francis in the movie. Critics and audiences embraced the heroic accomplishments of Rogers and his men, and
while the massacre of the Abenakis instilled some viewers with unintended sympathy toward the Indians, the majority appeared to find great entertainment in the rugged tale and the accompanying violence inflicted upon its bloodthirsty savages.

Conclusion

The four films discussed in this chapter are representative of the bulk of American Indian movies produced in Hollywood between 1930 and 1945. By presenting Indians as bloodthirsty savages who exist only to kill whites, these pictures were part of a tradition of racism that dated back to the earliest days of European settlement in New England. From the Puritans' abhorrence of Native Americans as threats to their lives and souls, to the writings of nineteenth century authors like Robert S. Bird, to Theodore Roosevelt's view of white-Native American contact as a race war, this tradition saw Indians as racially inferior monsters who would emerge from the wilderness, murder whites, and disappear once more. Thus, the shadowy, murderous Indians in films like Stagecoach and Northwest Passage are not far removed from those of the captivity narratives so popular in seventeenth century New England. However, while their portrayals of Indians may have been drawn from the past, the ways these films employed those Indians were very much a function of Depression-era America. With corrupt businessmen filling the role of " heavies" in these films, Indians were never established as characters or able to serve as fully developed villains, and thus simply served as plot devices to threaten white protagonists.

The four films discussed in this chapter were far from the only films of the era to present Indians as bloodthirsty savages. Allegheny Uprising (RKO, 1939) and Ford's Drums Along the Mohawk (Twentieth Century Fox, 1940) were colonial-era historical epics with white protagonists battling wild Indians, as did the titular lawmen in Vidor's The Texas Rangers
Like The Plainsman, Kit Carson (United Artists, 1940) and Geronimo (Paramount, 1939) were bloodthirsty savage films based upon historical figures, while The Big Trail (Twentieth Century Fox, 1930) was one of the first big budget westerns of the sound era and featured wild Indians attacking a wagon train. Furthermore, despite its portrayal of Uncas and Chingachgook as noble savages, the overwhelming number of Indians in the 1936 adaptation of Cooper's Last of the Mohicans (United Artists) are as bloodthirsty and vile as those in any film of the era. Many low budget B-movies and horse operas, such as Mystery Ranch (Fox Film, 1932) and the Roy Rogers vehicle Colorado (Republic, 1940), also featured bloodthirsty savages. Even young Shirley Temple starred in a film featuring an Indian massacre, Susannah of the Mounties (Twentieth Century Fox, 1939), although Temple being Temple, she managed to make peace between whites and Indians in the end.

Like all of these films, the four examined in this chapter presented Indians as bloodthirsty savages but used them for different purposes. The Plainsman and Union Pacific both demonstrate the trend toward nostalgia that the Depression created throughout American culture during the 1930s. They created fictionalized and mythical versions of the nation's history—using folk heroes like Hickok, Cody and Calamity Jane in the former and the construction of the transcontinental railroad in the latter—in order to remind their viewers of what America once was and could be again. Their Indians are simply monsters, killers without names whose lives have no value and whose attacks have no motivation beyond the murder of whites. The Indians in Stagecoach were similarly without motivation, but serve a different purpose. With the Depression creating a strong sense of community and belonging, these Indian are the threat that keeps the film's disparate cast of white characters together in the titular vehicle and unite them into a working society. Finally, the Indians in Northwest Passage are the most monstrous of all,
as the film includes extraordinarily graphic descriptions of the atrocities they have committed against white settlers. Such explicit rhetoric was necessary in order to justify the Rangers' merciless slaughter of the Abenaki village, and the subjugation of Indians, in general. Moreover, drawing from the Puritan tradition that saw Native Americans as part of the wilderness, *Northwest Passage* presents the Abenakis as one of a myriad of natural obstacles the Rangers must overcome in order to tame the frontier. And despite all of the carnage inflicted upon the Indians in these films, critics and audiences alike found great entertainment to be had in all four films, embracing their views of bloodthirsty savages and avenging white heroes.
The Pequot War was essentially a war of extermination fought by the Puritans against the Pequots of New England between 1634 and 1638, resulting in the complete eradication of the tribe. For more information regarding the Puritans' views on the Pequot War, see Drinnon, 35-61.

During the 1930s, Hollywood was divided into the so-called Big Five and Little Three. The Big Five—MGM, Paramount, RKO, Twentieth Century-Fox, and Warner Bros.—owned their own networks of theaters and thus controlled all three levels of the industry, while the Little Three—Columbia, United Artists, and Universal—did not own theaters, and only handled production and distribution. The Big Five would use their theaters to exhibit the films of the Little Three, as well as those of the smaller "Poverty Row" studios.

The Pequot War was essentially a war of extermination fought by the Puritans against the Pequots of New England between 1634 and 1638, resulting in the complete eradication of the tribe. For more information regarding the Puritans' views on the Pequot War, see Drinnon, 35-61.

During the 1930s, Hollywood was divided into the so-called Big Five and Little Three. The Big Five—MGM, Paramount, RKO, Twentieth Century-Fox, and Warner Bros.—owned their own networks of theaters and thus controlled all three levels of the industry, while the Little Three—Columbia, United Artists, and Universal—did not own theaters, and only handled production and distribution. The Big Five would use their theaters to exhibit the films of the Little Three, as well as those of the smaller "Poverty Row" studios.

The Pequot War was essentially a war of extermination fought by the Puritans against the Pequots of New England between 1634 and 1638, resulting in the complete eradication of the tribe. For more information regarding the Puritans' views on the Pequot War, see Drinnon, 35-61.

During the 1930s, Hollywood was divided into the so-called Big Five and Little Three. The Big Five—MGM, Paramount, RKO, Twentieth Century-Fox, and Warner Bros.—owned their own networks of theaters and thus controlled all three levels of the industry, while the Little Three—Columbia, United Artists, and Universal—did not own theaters, and only handled production and distribution. The Big Five would use their theaters to exhibit the films of the Little Three, as well as those of the smaller "Poverty Row" studios.

The Pequot War was essentially a war of extermination fought by the Puritans against the Pequots of New England between 1634 and 1638, resulting in the complete eradication of the tribe. For more information regarding the Puritans' views on the Pequot War, see Drinnon, 35-61.

During the 1930s, Hollywood was divided into the so-called Big Five and Little Three. The Big Five—MGM, Paramount, RKO, Twentieth Century-Fox, and Warner Bros.—owned their own networks of theaters and thus controlled all three levels of the industry, while the Little Three—Columbia, United Artists, and Universal—did not own theaters, and only handled production and distribution. The Big Five would use their theaters to exhibit the films of the Little Three, as well as those of the smaller "Poverty Row" studios.

The Pequot War was essentially a war of extermination fought by the Puritans against the Pequots of New England between 1634 and 1638, resulting in the complete eradication of the tribe. For more information regarding the Puritans' views on the Pequot War, see Drinnon, 35-61.

During the 1930s, Hollywood was divided into the so-called Big Five and Little Three. The Big Five—MGM, Paramount, RKO, Twentieth Century-Fox, and Warner Bros.—owned their own networks of theaters and thus controlled all three levels of the industry, while the Little Three—Columbia, United Artists, and Universal—did not own theaters, and only handled production and distribution. The Big Five would use their theaters to exhibit the films of the Little Three, as well as those of the smaller "Poverty Row" studios.

The Pequot War was essentially a war of extermination fought by the Puritans against the Pequots of New England between 1634 and 1638, resulting in the complete eradication of the tribe. For more information regarding the Puritans' views on the Pequot War, see Drinnon, 35-61.

During the 1930s, Hollywood was divided into the so-called Big Five and Little Three. The Big Five—MGM, Paramount, RKO, Twentieth Century-Fox, and Warner Bros.—owned their own networks of theaters and thus controlled all three levels of the industry, while the Little Three—Columbia, United Artists, and Universal—did not own theaters, and only handled production and distribution. The Big Five would use their theaters to exhibit the films of the Little Three, as well as those of the smaller "Poverty Row" studios.

The Pequot War was essentially a war of extermination fought by the Puritans against the Pequots of New England between 1634 and 1638, resulting in the complete eradication of the tribe. For more information regarding the Puritans' views on the Pequot War, see Drinnon, 35-61.

During the 1930s, Hollywood was divided into the so-called Big Five and Little Three. The Big Five—MGM, Paramount, RKO, Twentieth Century-Fox, and Warner Bros.—owned their own networks of theaters and thus controlled all three levels of the industry, while the Little Three—Columbia, United Artists, and Universal—did not own theaters, and only handled production and distribution. The Big Five would use their theaters to exhibit the films of the Little Three, as well as those of the smaller "Poverty Row" studios.
was the only film he made that was not historical in nature. 
Explaining that "I insist upon accuracy," DeMille had Jean Arthur learn to use a bullwhip for her role as Calamity Jane. That insistence upon accuracy obviously did not extend to the plot of The Plainsman. DeMille, 350.

21 The Plainsman.

22 DeMille, 362; Union Pacific.

23 The Crusades, DVD, directed by Cecil B. DeMille (1935; Universal City, CA: Universal Studios Home Entertainment, 2006); Four Frightened People, DVD, directed by Cecil B. DeMille (1934; Universal City, CA: Universal Studios Home Entertainment, 2006); The Plainsman.

24 Union Pacific.


26 Smedley D. Butler, War Is a Racket (New York: Round Table Press, 1935); DeMille, 351; The Plainsman.


The Variety article names twenty-one westerns currently in some stage of production when Stagecoach was released.

32 Susman, 172. Author's emphasis in original.


Smith was the assistant director on Stagecoach and indicated that Ford was excited about the snowfall, proclaiming "Great, that's just what we need" when informed about the blizzard. According to Smith, "We took the whole crew out in the snow and shot stagecoach scenes. [Ford's producing partner] Merian C. Cooper, who was back at headquarters, kept calling on the shortwave radio to ask Jack how he was going to use those scenes. Jack wouldn't say. For days he wouldn't tell his plan. Then one day, he had a scene of the stagecoach coming into the station. He had Andy Devine deliver the line; 'I took the high road, because the Apaches don't like snow.'"

35 Dudley Nichols, Stagecoach Final Continuity Script, undated, 87. 96, John Ford Papers, Box #4, Folder #9.

36 Nichols, 49; Stagecoach.


Northwest Passage.

39 Raymond Durgnat and Scott Simmon, King Vidor, American (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1988), 183, 190, 196. Durgnat and Simmon also note that the British serve as unreliable allies for the Rangers while the French are their enemies, points which suggest the film's politics may have been isolationist, instead.


41 Ibid., 158-62.

42 Klein, 187.

43 Northwest Passage.

44 Northwest Passage. "Saukkees" is an apparent reference to the Sauk tribe of the upper Midwest.

45 Ibid.

46 J.F. Bobbitt, "What the Picture Did for Me," Motion Picture Herald 138, no. 12 (March 30, 1940): 80; E.M. Freiburger, "What the Picture Did for Me," Motion Picture Herald 139, no. 2 (April 13, 1940): 58; George Gallup, "Poll Picks 'Boom Town,'" Los Angeles Times, February 27, 1941, 1A; M.R. Harrington, "What the Picture Did for Me," Motion Picture Herald 139, no. 8 (May 25, 1940): 57; Floyd J. Jacobs, "What the Picture Did for Me," Motion Picture Herald 139, no. 8 (May 25, 1940): 57; Wright, "What the Picture Did for Me," Motion Picture Herald 139, no. 3 (April 20, 1940): 49.
Yancey Cravat, the protagonist of *Cimarron* (RKO, 1931) is an outspoken advocate of Manifest Destiny. Following the Oklahoma land rush of 1889, he moves his young family to territory that had previously belonged to Indian tribes, becoming a pivotal figure in the growth of the fictional town of Osage. He is an outsized frontier hero, defending his community with his guns while also serving as its newspaper editor, lawyer, and preacher. Yet despite his financial success and responsibilities to his wife and children, Yancey is at the mercy of his wanderlust, always seeking new lands to settle. With his support of empire, both through talk and action, he appears to be an ideal protagonist for one of the bloodthirsty savage films discussed in the previous chapter but for one major difference: he is also a champion of Indian rights. In a newspaper editorial, Yancey demands citizenship for Indians while exposing a scheme hatched by a corrupt white businessman to defraud them, a stance that costs him a chance to be governor of Oklahoma. Thus, he is paradox: an advocate of both expansion into Indian lands and a defender of the rights of Indians displaced by that expansion.\(^1\)

The majority of American Indian films made between 1930 and 1945 fall into the bloodthirsty savage category discussed in chapter one, portraying Indians as wild monsters who threaten the lives of the films’ white protagonists. However, the era also saw a competing vision of Indians, that of the noble savage, and this chapter examines three such movies. Continuing a cultural tradition that developed during the nineteenth century, these pictures saw Indians as
dignified victims of westward expansion. Furthermore, even if they rarely established Indians as fully developed characters, these three films still present them not just as human beings, but people worthy of assimilating into American society as full citizens.

*Cimarron* (RKO, 1931) appeared in theaters prior to Franklin Roosevelt's election but still reflected many of the era's liberal ideals through its protagonist, Yancey. Indians only make a handful of appearances in *Cimarron*, and only one of them is of any importance, however, and thus the film is more concerned with rhetoric in favor of Indians than it is in presenting them as actual characters. *Massacre* (Warner Bros., 1934) also demands equal rights for Indians, but in this case, the activists are Indians, themselves. Because it pre-dated the Breen Code, which policed the content of Hollywood productions, *Massacre* was able to engage with controversial subject matter, such as miscegenation, white-on-Indian rape, and the rejection of enforced Christianity. It was one of many "social problem" pictures that Warner Bros. made during the mid-1930s, films that revealed the suffering caused by the Depression, and, with its Indian hero turning to the Indian Bureau for help, it demonstrates the clear influence of John Collier, the New Deal's progressive commissioner of Indian affairs. Lastly, *They Died with Their Boots On* (Warner Bros., 1941) glorifies the career of Gen. George Armstrong Custer, revealing the same pre-war patriotism exhibited by *Union Pacific* and *Northwest Passage*. Unlike those films, however, this movie's Indians are noble and honorable people, and it portrays Crazy Horse as a courageous warrior who earns Custer's respect and admiration. Moreover, it alters history in order to present Custer himself, perhaps the nation's most infamous Indian fighter, as a staunch defender of Sioux lands and a champion of Indian rights when greedy businessmen invade their territory.
Like the movies discussed in chapter one, these three pictures were made during the Depression and contain many of the same themes that recurred in those bloodthirsty savage films. Community, such a dominant factor throughout the 1930s, remains of great significance in noble savage pictures, with each protagonist joining something larger than themselves. *Cimarron*’s plot revolves around the role Yancey plays in the growth of a frontier town, *Massacre* concerns an Indian reconnecting with his people and heritage, and *They Died with Their Boots On* presents Custer as a man who is only able to find a purpose in life within the hierarchy of the army. Nostalgia is another common theme, as *Cimarron* celebrates the wild frontier days of Oklahoma and the concurrent rise of the nation as an industrial power, while *They Died with Their Boots On* uses an American folk hero to glorify a mythical version of the nation’s history, just as *The Plainsman* and *Northwest Passage* did. Greedy capitalists, the ubiquitous villains of Depression-era Hollywood, appear in all three films, as well, as they did in their bloodthirsty savage contemporaries. Unlike in those movies, though, the corrupt businessmen in noble savage pictures specifically prey upon weak, helpless Indians who need the protection of magnanimous white heroes. Indians in these films generally remained plot tools, just as they were in bloodthirsty savage pictures, but instead of using them to create tension and encourage slaughter, *Cimarron* and *They Died with Their Boots On* utilized them to establish the liberal credentials of their white heroes.

During this era, Hollywood produced fewer noble savage pictures than it did bloodthirsty savage ones, but those that it did make established an important precedent. Movies released in later years would build upon the characteristics of these noble savage pictures in greater and greater numbers, until their descendants would come to completely define the genre. Although these later films would be overtly critical of America’s imperialism in the West, the noble savage
films made prior to World War II demonstrated a conflicted view of the nation's past. Like their bloodthirsty savage counterparts, they saw westward expansion as a positive development because it enabled the United States to grow into a great nation, and as such, they celebrated the nation's history. However, they also evinced guilt over the mistreatment and displacement of Native Americans, and thus presented a paradoxical, and even hypocritical, stance on the conquest of the West.

The Genesis of the Cinematic Noble Savage

While the origins of the bloodthirsty savage branch of American Indian films begin in the Puritan tradition of the seventeenth century, the foundations of the noble savage pictures are based in cultural sentiments that developed in the years following the Revolutionary War. As Euro-Americans secured the eastern regions of the continent and pushed the frontier west at the end of the eighteenth century, a new attitude toward Indians developed to challenge the traditional Puritan abhorrence of the wilderness and its inhabitants, one based on the image of the noble savage that developed in France during the Enlightenment. In the decades following the Revolution, authors sought subject matter that would create a uniquely American culture, and, as Berkhofer writes, "In their search for American material the authors and artists of the day hit upon the American forest and the Indian as subjects for a new indigenous literature and art." The noble savage, doomed to die out as civilization advanced upon him, became a popular subject for nineteenth century Romantic art and literature, focused as they were upon emotion and nostalgia. In Berkhofer's words, "The nostalgia and pity aroused by the dying race produced the best romantic sentiments and gave that sense of fleeting time beloved of romantic sensibilities."³
James Fennimore Cooper was foremost among these romantics, prominently featuring noble savages in his extraordinarily popular *Leatherstocking* tales such as *The Last of the Mohicans* (1826) and *The Deer Slayer* (1841). Most of the Indians who appeared in Cooper's books were bloodthirsty savages, but the most important ones, such as Delaware Indian Chingachgook and his son, Uncas, were noble savages who fought alongside white allies and against those bloodthirsty monsters. Moreover, as indicated by the relationship between Chingachgook and his adopted white son Natty Bumpo, Cooper's Indians imparted their knowledge of the wilderness to white protagonists and then disappeared, leaving white America as the rightful heir to the continent. By connecting the nation's growth to a respect for the Indian, this approach allowed the United States to inherit the wilderness. It justified the conquest of the frontier and the displacement of its original occupants, suggesting that Indians accepted their own demise and willingly passed on their traditions, skills, and lands to white inheritors, a hypocritical impulse that survived in noble savage films.4

Pro-Native American sentiment developed both politically and publicly during the 1820s and '30s, roughly concurrent with the publication of Cooper's works. In 1822, for instance, Reverend Jedidiah Morse called for a Native American-only state in what became Wisconsin and the Upper Peninsula of Michigan. Furthermore, the Cherokee Removal of the late-1830s engendered immense sympathy and support for Native American rights when the government forced thousands of members of that tribe to relocate from North Carolina and Georgia to the Indian Territory (later Oklahoma) on the infamous Trail of Tears. Many Americans, including famed frontiersman-turned-Congressman Davy Crockett, were horrified by the Removal, seeing it, in the words of Andrew Jackson biographer Sean Wilentz, as "the great moral stain on the Jacksonian legacy." Likewise, the play *Metamora*, a dramatization of King Philip's War of 1675
– 1678, enjoyed immense popularity during the 1830s and '40s and presented Philip as a magnificent noble savage who fought to defend his people and died a martyr, cursing the white man for his crimes. However, as historian Jill LePore writes, it also depicted Philip's demise as "A tragic death, yes, but a necessary one. *Metamora* mourned the passing of Philip and the disappearance of New England's Indians but it mourned these losses as inevitable and right."

Reaching the public during the debate over the Cherokee Removal, the play allowed Americans to feel guilt over the fate of Native Americans while also seeing their extinction as natural, serving as a forerunner to the noble savage films a century later.⁵

Support for Native American rights continued throughout the nineteenth century. Although much decried for its later abuses, for example, the reservation system was originally conceived as a way to protect tribes from white incursion in order to ensure their survival in the face of extinction. As historian Francis Paul Prucha notes, the men of the Indian office "saw no philosophical conflict in their acceptance and promotion of an expanding white society that was moving into the vast regions acquired in the previous decade and their benevolent concern for the Indians who were being threatened with being crushed by the American advance."

Furthermore, following the Civil War, the Andrew Johnson Administration established the Peace Commission in order to end conflict between the United States and the tribes of the West. The Commission asserted that much of the strife occurring between the two peoples was due to broken treaties and widespread corruption by white America, reporting in 1868, "Here civilization made its contract and guaranteed the rights of the weaker party. It did not stand by the guarantee. The treaty was broken, but not by the savage. If the savage resists, civilization, with the ten commandments in one hand and the sword in the other, demands his immediate extermination." Private activism also grew, as many abolitionists turned from slavery to Native
American rights. Reform groups such as the Friends of the Indians, which claimed to represent "the conscience of the American people on the Indian question," advocated assimilation as the ultimate goal of Indian policy, which they believed could be accomplished through education, Christian conversion, and citizenship.⁶

By the late-nineteenth century, American historians were building upon this view of Native Americans as victims of white aggression and deceit, Helen Hunt Jackson's *A Century of Dishonor* (1881) serving as a leading example. As its title suggests, Jackson's work was severely critical of the nation's treatment of Native Americans, seeing the history of white/Native American contact as one of broken treaties, lies, theft, and murder, all committed by, or allowed by, the United States government. It was, in the words of historian Brian Dippie, "a classic muckraking polemic." According to Dippie, Jackson "saw it as her role to confront the nation with a record of duplicity in its dealings with the Indian so repugnant that no citizen could ignore it" and in so doing, prod the American people into action on behalf of Native Americans. Thus, Jackson wrote, "There is not among these three hundred bands of Indians one which has not suffered cruelly at the hands either of the Government or of white settlers. The poorer, the more insignificant, the more helpless the band, the more certain the cruelty and outrage to which they have been subjected." Other historians, such as Frederick Jackson Turner, tempered this rhetoric but still presented Native Americans not as the traditional bloodthirsty savages so prevalent in the American cultural consciousness during the preceding centuries, but as human beings who suffered greatly during the process of westward expansion, indicating a further evolution in the nation's understanding of its treatment of its indigenous population. Turner's "Frontier Thesis," for instance, argued that that westward expansion was the single most instrumental factor in the
development of the United States, but also recognized that this process had great cost for Native Americans.

During the first quarter of the twentieth century, anthropologist Franz Boas revolutionized the understanding of Native American culture and, by extension, Native Americans themselves. Boas introduced the concept of cultural relativism, shattering the widespread belief among Americans that Anglo-American culture was inherently more advanced than all others. By undertaking intensive study of all aspects of specific tribes, Boas and his followers determined that different aspects of cultures developed at different rates, which thereby disproved the notion that all culture advanced linearly, with Western European and American culture being the farthest along in that process. Thus, rather than Native American culture being inferior and less "civilized" than that of white, mainstream America, Boas argued that all cultures were of equal value and simply developed in different ways.

Boas' work reached beyond anthropology classrooms, finding its way into cultural products of the era. In 1929, for example, Oliver LaFarge, who was educated as an anthropologist, published *Laughing Boy*, a highly successful novel that concerned the romance between a young Navajo couple. As Berkhofer writes, "Possessed of the same dignity and fallibility as other human beings, the two young lovers try several lifestyles in their efforts to cope with the commercialism and instability of the White world and the poverty, pride, and stability of the Navajo world." Similarly, Robert Gessner wrote *Massacre: A Study of Today's American Indian* in 1931, a non-fiction polemic that Warner Bros. loosely adapted into its pro-Indian film, *Massacre*. In the work, Gessner detailed the dismal living conditions faced by Native Americans and concluded: "It is my duty as an American citizen—it is every citizen's duty—to launch myself into the positive struggle of placing the living Indian on the respectable,
human plane of a self-sufficing, culture-effusing American." During the early decades of the twentieth century, Native American culture found its way into mainstream music, as well. In an attempt to create a distinctly American style, white composers such as Charles Wakefield Cadman and Arthur Farwell based their arrangements on elements of Native American music. Much of this music included imagery of the noble, not bloodthirsty, Indian. As historian Beth E. Levy writes, "The unrequited Indian lover and the dying Indian warrior, these were the twin icons of Cadman's Indianism," while Farwell, also believing in the image of the vanishing Indian, saw his work as preserving and carrying forward Native American culture. Thus, by 1930, the American people were beginning to place value on Native American culture and to understand the struggles Native Americans were facing on the reservation and in attempting to assimilate into the nation's society.  

**John Collier and the New Deal's Native American Policies**

As commissioner of Indian affairs, John Collier was one man empowered to improve the lot of Native Americans during the 1930s. During the fifty-five years prior to Franklin Roosevelt’s election in 1932, assimilation had been the primary federal policy toward Native Americans. Dating back to the adoption of the Dawes Act in 1887, the government attempted to force Native Americans to adopt the ways of white society, including Christianity, the English language, and the rejection of communal ownership in favor of private property. Collier tried to change that when Roosevelt appointed him as Commissioner of Indian Affairs in 1933. A leading advocate for Native American rights for more than a decade, Collier argued that instead of assimilation, the government should empower Native Americans to preserve their culture, traditions, and tribal systems. Moving to Taos, New Mexico during the 1920s, he had come into
contact with members of the Pueblo tribe and believed their way of life could be a tonic to the problems the nation faced. In the words of Berkhofer, Collier "saw the Indians as repudiating the materialism, the secularism, and the fragmentation of modern White life under industrialism for a simpler, more beautiful way of life that emphasized the relationship of humans with one another, with the supernatural, and with land and nature." As head of the Indian Bureau, Collier pursued a series of progressive reforms, including the regeneration of Native American societies and tribal governments, an end to the mandatory land allotment that had resulted in the disintegration of communal ownership of reservations, and the conversion of boarding schools, which forced assimilation upon Native American children, into local day schools, which kept the children at home and as members of their family and community. Essentially, Collier sought to replace the institutionalized assimilation of the Dawes Act with policies that gave Native Americans the agency to govern themselves and their land as they saw fit.  

As commissioner of the Indian Bureau, Collier also hired anthropologists to help guide his reform efforts, using them as a research arm of the bureau and relying upon their findings. In Prucha's words, "If the cutting edge of Indian reform had earlier been the Christian missionaries of the Dawes Act, now it was to be the social scientists." With their aid, Collier aimed to provide both economic and cultural regeneration for Native American societies. He was also committed, in his own words, to the "proclamation and enforcement of cultural liberty, religious liberty, and unimpeded relationships of the generations" for Native Americans. To this end, he issued controversial orders demanding the respect for indigenous religion and the curtailment of Christian missionary work, particularly in day schools. Furthermore, in a move that connected cultural and economic reform, he passed the Indian Arts and Crafts Act in 1935, encouraging
tribes to embrace their culture through the manufacture of traditional craft goods, the sale of which would serve as an economic boon for the community.\(^{10}\)

However, just as Hollywood's noble savage films would demonstrate a hypocritical current in their thinking, so, too, did Collier. As Prucha notes, "despite the high-sounding rhetoric of Indian self-determination, [Collier's plan] was a paternalistic program for the Indians, who were expected to accept it willy-nilly," whether or not they actually supported the reforms the government was forcing upon them. Although he hired anthropologists and tasked them with providing research on individual Native American communities, Collier often ignored their findings if it conflicted with his own views. For instance, he insisted that all Native Americans communities adopt the tribal system used by the Pueblos he was most familiar with, even though his researchers found that many Native American communities were actually based on the level of the village or band. Collier and the Roosevelt Administration took steps to improve Native Americans' position under government control, but did so in a manner that did not provide individual tribes with their own voice, or choice, in the matter. This hypocrisy is at the heart of the noble savage films, as well, for like Collier's at once sympathetic but paternalistic plan, these films evinced guilt over the mistreatment of Indians, recognized the Indians' right to their own lands, and yet glorified American empire while proclaiming the importance of westward expansion.\(^{11}\)

**Manifest Destiny vs. Indian Rights: *Cimarron***

*Cimarron* was a sensation when released by RKO in 1931, proving to be a major hit at the box office as well as winning the Academy Award for Best Picture. The movie details the opening of Oklahoma—the former Indian Territory—to white settlement, tracing the evolution
of the fictional town of Osage through the exploits Yancey Cravat (Richard Dix) and his wife, Sabra (Irene Dunne). A consummate frontiersman, Yancey is a champion of American expansionism, extolling the need for the nation to open new lands to development. Yet paradoxically, he is also an advocate for Indian rights, standing up against corrupt interests who would defraud the very people who lived on the lands Yancey himself is helping settle. This advocacy exists purely as rhetoric, however, for Indians almost never appear on screen in *Cimarron*. Of the few who do, only Ruby Big Elk (Dolores Brown), the Cravats' eventual daughter-in-law, is an established, if very minor, character. The absence of on-screen Indians allows the film to take a more outspoken stance in support of them, for it is easier to simply talk about the oppression of a minority than to actually depict that oppression in action. *Cimarron* thus presents a hypocritical view of Indians, one that defends their rights and laments the unfair treatment they received, while simultaneously glorifying westward expansion, the very process that deprived them of their lands. And as critical and audience reception indicates, the version of American history presented by *Cimarron* had great resonance with those who saw it in 1931, with some even declaring it an ideal tool for education.12

The film opens with Yancey participating in the Great Oklahoma Land Rush of 1889, during which the government made large tracts of what had been Indian tribal land available to settlers. Unable to secure his preferred plot for a ranch, Yancey instead moves Sabra and their infant son, Cim, into Osage, where he founds his newspaper, *The Wigwam*. Throughout *Cimarron*, the town undergoes the very sort of development described by Turner in his Frontier Thesis, evolving from a lawless settlement into a thriving rural town and, finally, a bustling industrial city, and its growth reflects the decade's preoccupation with community. Yancey is a
foundational figure in Osage's rise, not only publishing *The Wigwam*, but also defending the town during a bandit raid and even serving as its first preacher.\(^\text{13}\)

Despite his success, though, Yancey is consistently overcome by wanderlust to explore new lands. He and Sabra enjoyed a safe, prosperous life in Wichita prior to moving to the frontier, but he was obsessed with playing his part in the expansion of America. As he tells Sabra's wealthy, skeptical family, "Don't you realize that this is a new empire? Why, folks, there’s never been anything like it since Creation. Creation? That took six days, this was done in one. History made in an hour. Why, it's like a miracle out of the Old Testament!" To him, the conquest of the West is like the creation of the world, only better, and by mentioning the Bible, he implicitly invokes the Christian roots of Manifest Destiny. Even when they are firmly established in Osage, Yancey still presses Sabra to move west yet again, telling her "If we took root and squatted, there'd never be any new country." Throughout *Cimarron*, Yancey departs for new adventures and then returns to Osage, but the film never condemns him for shirking his responsibilities to his family. Instead, it suggests that those responsibilities are secondary to the role he can play in helping the country grow. With the Depression ravaging the nation, audiences could find inspiration in this fictionalized version of the past, as the growth of Osage represented not only the sort of prosperity that had been lost during the 1930s, but also Yancey's commitment to the development of the nation.\(^\text{14}\)

Although a champion for empire, Yancey is also a tolerant liberal and a defender of Indian rights, traits that differentiate him from the bigoted Sabra. The film's treatment of Indians is almost entirely rhetorical, however, and Indians themselves only make a handful of appearances on screen. Those Indians who do show up are broad stereotypes, speaking pidgin English and dressed in shabby clothes. Ruby, who appears in a single scene, is the film's sole
established Indian character, and while she is well-spoken, she is a stereotype, too, wearing a traditional Osage dress during a formal dinner in honor of Sabra's election to Congress and imparting clichéd, nature-themed wisdom. Yet Ruby's romance with Cim is noteworthy because it is one of the few successful interracial love stories in the entire history of American Indian films, as the pair are married at the film's end and even have children, albeit ones who look entirely white. This stands in stark contrast to other entries in the genre, even those made in the 1970s, for the usual result of a white/Indian romance is the death of the Indian. Still, this romance largely exists, not through scenes of Cim and Ruby together, but through dialog spoken between the white Cravat family members. Sabra and Cim's sister, Donna (Judith Barrett) are disgusted at the prospect of the marriage—Donna gripes, "Well, that's a nice social problem: an Indian in the family"—but the tolerant Yancey is supportive of the relationship, giving the union his blessing.¹⁵

Figure #6: Ruby Big Elk (Dolores Brown) in her only appearance in Cimarron, wearing traditional Indian garb to a formal dinner. At right is her husband, Cim, and at left are their children, rare examples of miscegenation in American Indian films.
Yancey's support of Indians goes beyond his daughter-in-law, however. When a businessman approaches him with a scheme that will defraud Oklahoma's tribes of their oil wealth, Yancey writes a scathing editorial revealing the plot, even though he knows this pro-Indian stance will cost him the chance to be elected governor. The editorial, which Yancey reads aloud, is the film's most overt expression of its liberal ideals on Indian rights, reflecting the views of Helen Hunt Jackson and other reformers who saw Native Americans as being exploited by greedy, unprincipled whites:

The demagogues plan to rob them, again. Stealing the vast ocean of oil gushing up through the miserable, barren land known as the Osage Indian reservation, again victimizing those duped and wretched Americans, the Osage Indians. Their treaties broken, their land stolen, and now there’s about to burst forth the gaudiest, star-spangled piece of crookedness ever played under the wing of a double-dealing government.

Sabra is horrified, not only at the content of the editorial, but at the political suicide her husband is committing, and yet he stands firm in the face of her opposition, continuing, "The time has come to give the red man full citizenship, so he can live as free as the white man lives!" This call to turn Indians into Americans was a far cry from the attitude of bloodthirsty savage films of the era, which suggested that the nation could only prosper after Indians were completely eradicated. Sabra ultimately softens her stance on the issue of Indians, coming around to Yancey's viewpoint about both the editorial and their daughter-in-law. By the film's end, she not only proudly introduces Ruby at her congressional dinner, but also reprints the editorial in a special anniversary issue of the newspaper, proclaiming it Yancey's finest hour as an editor and noting that Congress gave the Indians everything he demanded.16

Such rhetoric rings hollow in the face of Yancey's imperialistic bent, however. Earlier in the film, for instance, he complains about the government stealing Cherokee land, but mere moments later, suggests to Sabra that they move there. Regardless of how America acquired it,
it is still undeveloped land that must be settled for the good of the nation. Ultimately, then, Yancey's pro-Indian talk is a simply a means of establishing his progressive bona fides as champion to the less fortunate. He fights for Indian rights just as he protects meek Jewish peddler Sol Levy (George E. Stone) from the roughneck bullies who occupy Osage and serves as defense attorney for Dixie Lee (Estelle Taylor) when she is accused of prostitution, even thought it was she who stole his preferred plot during the land rush. Thus, Yancey is not simply a brawling, two-gun frontiersman, but he is also a liberal Great White Man. As Levy says, "It's men like him that build the world. The rest of them, like me, well, we just come along and live in it." This sentiment is echoed by the film's final shot, a statue of Yancey built to honor Oklahoma's pioneers, for it shows him striding past a kneeling Indian as if, as the Great White Man, he is taking possession of the frontier from its original, doomed inhabitants.\textsuperscript{17}

\textbf{Figure #7:} \textit{Cimarron}'s final shot, a statue of Yancey that honors the pioneers who settled Oklahoma. Note the Indian crouching behind him, representing the past, as he strides into the future.
*Cimarron* was a massive hit, both commercially and critically, and feedback from critics and audience members alike indicate that its interpretation of westward expansion and themes of national growth resonated with them. Feeding into the film's glorified view of American history, RKO arranged a special Washington, D.C. screening that drew, among others, Vice President Charles Curtis, six members of the cabinet, nine ambassadors, forty senators, and 250 members of the House, and provided a private screening for then-Governor of New York Franklin Roosevelt, as well. Audience members provided glowing feedback in letters to movie magazines, with E.H. Booth, Jr. of Los Angeles declaring "the four of us who went to see *Cimarron* think it is the finest thing we've seen," while Anne Miller of New York City proclaimed, "What a picture! I saw it twice." Moreover, it was such a box office smash that the Paramount Theater in Denver ran a 24-hour marathon showing, with every screening selling out with the sole exception of one at 4 A.M.¹⁸

Beyond general raves, the film drew praise specifically aimed at its portrayal of westward expansion. One viewer, identified as "Miss L.W.," wrote to *Motion Picture*:

> For two hours, I left the commonplaceness of every-day existence and witnessed the springing up of a New Empire, its struggle for existence, its social and economic development, and the vision and foresight of one Yancey Cravat. It glorified that band of people who dared to conquer the wilderness; who stood by their convictions, and blazed a trail of glory down through the years. . . . In Yancey is exemplified that colorful spirit of adventure that called forth the courage necessary for the colonization of the great Southwest.

In a letter to *Photoplay*, M. Sheridan of East Elmhurst, New York, complained that, because of Yancey's onscreen exploits as a frontiersman, Dix should have on the Best Actor Oscar instead of Lionel Barrymore for *A Free Soul*, couching his or her criticism in Yancey's on-screen accomplishments as a frontiersman: "Does the Academy consider the portrayal of a drunkard more edifying for future generations than that of a pioneer?"¹⁹
Film critics also embraced *Cimarron*'s theme of the nation's development as seen through the Turnerian growth of Osage. The review in *Motion Picture* declared that "The real interest of the picture does not center in the [supporting cast], nor the restless, swaggering Yancey—it is the mushroom development of the town of Osage, from a raw prairie hamlet to an imposing city," while *The Los Angeles Times'* Schallert echoed those sentiments: "Over and above all perhaps, the film symbolizes the growth of a town, showing spiritedly its advancement from the uncouth, hard-boiled village into a modern metropolitan entity." While critics and audience members enjoyed *Cimarron*'s depiction of the growth of American empire, none made mention of the cost such expansion had for the Indians being dispossessed in Oklahoma, Yancey's pro-Indian activism, or even simply the absence of Indians in the film. With Indians physically absent from the film and only the subject of rhetoric, their plight apparently had little impact upon viewers of the movie. In large part, the only mention of Indians in articles concerning *Cimarron* were those dealing with Dix being named an honorary Osage chief or the casting of members of the tribe, who were all millionaires thanks to their oil wealth, as extras in the film.²⁰

Beyond merely accepting *Cimarron*'s view of westward expansion, some viewers extolled it as a tool for education, thus legitimizing it as an acceptable interpretation of American history. According to *Film Daily*, Roosevelt sent a letter to RKO president Hiram S. Brown, "waxing enthusiastic over 'Cimarron' as a great historical document," while Lou MacKenzie of Milwaukee, Wisconsin wrote in a letter to *Photoplay* that the "soul-stirring 'Cimarron' will teach a child more history in two hours than weeks of studying books would." Such acceptance of *Cimarron*'s educational value was not simply limited to glowing letters, however, as Laurabell Schutt, a schoolteacher from Chicago, informed *Photoplay*: "How much movies do help in school! The day after the children's matinee showing of a picture such as 'Cimarron' at least
fifteen minutes of the history class is devoted to an eager discussion of the historical features and
the story of the picture. . . . Films of this sort make teaching easier." Moreover, as part of a
broader education program, the Cleveland Public Library partnered with the Cleveland Cinema
Club to promote historical films, including Cimarron, in the local newspapers, thus using the so-
called "pioneer library in motion picture film tie-ups" as a means to not only advertise, but
further legitimize, Cimarron's interpretation of history.21

With its conflicting views on American empire and the treatment of Indians, Cimarron
encapsulates the hypocrisy inherent in noble savage films. Yancey is not only a vociferous
advocate for expansionism, but serves as a prime mover in the process, settling in Osage, taming
its wilder elements, and then succumbing to his urges to find new lands to open. Yet, he is also a
tolerant champion of Indian rights, foiling the scheme to defraud the Osage tribe, demanding
they receive fair treatment and citizenship, and accepting his son's Indian bride. This
contradiction is completely without irony: while Yancey may lament Indians being dispossessed
of their land by the government, he is more than willing to move into that land and make it part
of the United States. Because Indians are rarely seen in the film, and are, instead, simply the
subject of rhetoric, the audience tends not to notice this hypocrisy, allowing Yancey's
paradoxical views on Indians to serve to establish him as a Great White Man. Audiences
responded in kind, enamored with both Cimarron itself and Yancey as a character, while viewing
the film's hypocritical interpretation of American expansionism as not only acceptable, but as a
legitimate teaching tool for history classes.
The American Indian and New Deal Activism: *Massacre*

In the context of other American Indian movies of its era, *Massacre* is an extraordinary film. With its Indian protagonist, white villains, and story of abuse on the reservation, it resembles a movie made during the 1970s far more than it does any other American Indian film of the 1930s. Its plot concerns Joe Thunderhorse (Richard Barthelmess), a Haskell Institute-educated Sioux who has not been back to his reservation in years and is content earning a hefty salary and romancing white women as the star of a Wild West Show at the Chicago Century of Progress exposition. When news comes that his father, Black Pony, is dying, Thunderhorse returns home to find a group of white officials, led by reservation agent Elihu P. Quissenberry (Dudley Digges), defrauding his people, stealing their wealth and desecrating their culture. After one of these men rapes Thunderhorse's teenaged sister, the hero takes the law into his own hands, dragging the offender behind his car and leaving him mortally injured. Fleeing the reservation's corrupt justice system for Washington, D.C., Thunderhorse allies himself with J.R. Dickinson (Henry O'Neill), the virtuous head of the Bureau of Indian Affairs, testifies at a Senate hearing about the abuses suffered by Indians, and ultimately sees the white villains arrested. At the film's end, he abandons his previous career as a showman, replacing Quissenberry as the reservation agent in order to help his people prosper.22

While *Massacre* was decades ahead of its time in its portrayal of Indians—even in recent years it is rare for a Hollywood production to focus on an Indian protagonist—the film's existence can be explained as one of the "social consciousness" movies Warner Bros. made throughout the 1930s. During the Depression, the studio released a number of these "headlines pictures," low cost, high profit films that tackled timely subject matter. Their topics ranged from brutal prison conditions (*I Am a Fugitive from a Chain Gang*, 1932) to homeless youth (*Wild...*)
Boys of the Road, 1933) to racist anti-immigrant movements (Black Legion, 1937). Barthelmess was no stranger to the social problem film, having starred as a Chinese man in Son of the Gods (1930), which dealt with anti-Asian bigotry. These movies reflected the politics of the titular Warner brothers, Jack and Harry, for they had been staunch Republicans prior to the 1930s but shifted their political allegiance to Roosevelt during the Depression. As film historian Nick Roddick writes,

Of all the studios, Warner Brothers was the one whose production programme [sic] most enthusiastically reflected the New Deal, both before it officially came into existence—in facing up to the social crisis in a more direct way than any other studio—and after, adopting the Roosevelt administration's terminology . . . placing its symbol, the NRA Eagle, on the main title cards of its films, and preaching the paternalistic concern which was a feature of the FDR years.

Massacre's story of abuse of Indians was a logical fit as one of these "headline pictures," particularly given the increasing awareness of Native American culture brought about by Boas and books like Laughing Boy, as well as the changes wrought to Native American affairs by John Collier and the Roosevelt administration.23

This commitment to the New Deal nearly caused a total revision of Massacre's script, however, since the picture's white villains were government agents. Producer Hal B. Wallis discussed shifting the plot from Indians to Jews and the setting from a reservation to an urban ghetto. While the finished film remained focused upon Indians, Wallis ordered the screenplay altered to stress that Quissenberry and his cronies, though employees of the government, were simply corrupt individuals, while federal representatives, like Dickinson and the senators who hear Thunderhorse's testimony, were truly committed to protecting Indians. This simplistic solution to the Indians' problems was standard for the social consciousness formula. As Balio writes, "Warners did not meet the social problems head on; instead, the studio typically sidestepped issues by narrowing the focus of the exposé to a specific case or by resolving
problems at the personal level of the protagonist rather than at the societal level.” Thus, the crisis in Massacre is resolved not through significant change to federal Indian policy, but simply through the arrest of Quissenberry and subsequent appointment of Thunderhorse as the reservation's new agent.24

As a social consciousness movie, Massacre included sensationalistic and controversial subject matter such as rape, miscegenation, and the rejection of Christianity, and was able to directly engage with these topics because its early-1934 release predated the July 1934 adoption of the strict new Production Code. A system of self-censorship had existed in Hollywood since the early 1920s, when Will Hays established the Motion Picture Producers and Distributors of America (MPPDA) in an attempt to inject "small town morality" into the movies. Hays issued a list of controversial topics, commonly referred to as the "Don'ts and Be Carefuls," and expected studios to submit their scripts to his office for approval, but lacked the power to force them to cooperate. Yet because sensationalistic subjects, such as those dealt with in Warners' social consciousness films, made for good box office at a time when the industry was struggling, economic concerns outweighed moral ones and the studio often did not submit scripts like Massacre for censorship.25

During the early-1930s, however, Joseph Breen, the MPPDA’s head of publicity, led a new decency movement in Hollywood. This was part of a broader wave of Christian morality sweeping the nation at the start of the decade led by the Catholic Church, which positioned itself as the nation's preeminent moral force during the Depression. A staunch Catholic himself, Breen conspired with other like-minded crusaders to give the Production Code the coercive powers the MPPDA previously lacked. He succeeded after two years of pressure, and in July, 1934, the studios signed a new Production Code that would force them to submit all scripts to Breen's
Production Code Authority (PCA). While the PCA could not outright censor scripts, it did enjoy great coercive powers as the studios agreed to only release films that bore the PCA's seal of approval. Warner Bros. released *Massacre* only months before the adoption of this new Production Code, a fortunate bit of timing since the Breen Office would certainly not have signed off on the picture's controversial content.26

Without interference from the Breen Office, *Massacre* was able to tackle material that movies made in later years were unable to touch. The film opens with Thunderhorse not only working as the star attraction of a Wild West show, but also drawing the attention of white women. In his first appearance on screen, he is dressed in stereotypical Plains Indian garb: shirtless, with long braids and a headband, his face stony and expressionless. As he displays his trick riding and sharpshooting skills, white women in the crowd swoon over him, one horrifying her mother by saying "I'll be that big chief's squaw anytime." While signing autographs after his performance, Thunderhorse speaks in the pidgin English "Injun" talk that movies had popularized—"Heap much, pretty girl" he tells one groupie.27

Once off-stage and in his dressing room, he undergoes a complete transformation, however. He uses perfect Americanized English and removes his braided wig, revealing short, stylishly oiled hair. Due to his education at Haskell, Thunderhorse is fully assimilated into mainstream American society and the film presents him as a thoroughly modern man, no different than if he was white. Eschewing the expected trappings of an Indian, Thunderhorse wears a white suit and a cowboy hat, drives a large, sporty convertible with his name emblazoned on the door, and employs an African American servant, Sam (Clarence Muse). He then attends a party thrown by a wealthy society girl who has romantic designs on him, and when she shows him her collection of Indian artifacts, it becomes apparent that he has no knowledge in
his people's culture or history and is far more interested in bedding his paramour than viewing her museum of relics. Given the way Hollywood traditionally dealt with miscegenation over the years—white male/Indian female relationships were acceptable but doomed, Indian male/white female relationships existed only as rape—Thunderhorse romancing white women, and white women actually initiating the affection, is a rather extraordinary development.

Shortly thereafter, Thunderhorse receives news that his father is ill, prompting his return to the reservation. Although initially placated by Quissenberry, Thunderhorse quickly discovers the abuses his people are suffering. White officials have whipped his brother Adam (James Eagles) for trying to leave the reservation, while the local white doctor never actually visited Thunderhorse's dying father. Furthermore, Quissenberry and his cronies are defrauding the families of deceased Indians by selling off their land and keeping the profits, literally stealing the inheritance of the Indians, as the United States had done in the preceding centuries. They have also sold out the Indians' heritage, forcing them to dress in ceremonial garb and dance as part of a promotional film being made by an African American doctor who, himself, is dressed as a Sioux chief.
Enraged by these injustices, Thunderhorse is determined to put an end to the corruption. He is aided in this process by Lydia (Ann Dvorak), a Haskell-educated Indian woman who serves as Quissenberry's secretary. With her help, Thunderhorse becomes a social activist, challenging white domination of the reservation. In perhaps the most shocking incident of not just this film, but of any discussed in this dissertation, Thunderhorse rejects the enforced Christianity inflicted upon the Indians by a white preacher. After a Christian funeral service for their father, he insists that Adam find Indians who can conduct a traditional Sioux service, explaining "We're going to bury Black Pony in our own way." Both the preacher and Quissenberry are outraged by this act of religious rebellion, the former complaining that it has undone thirty years of missionary work. When Quissenberry claims that if Christianity is good enough for whites, it should be good enough for Indians, Thunderhorse defiantly declares that "Nobody interferes with your religion," so why should Indians not enjoy the same freedom? This notion of religious freedom for Indians and an outright rejection of Christianity is extraordinarily radical for a film made in the 1930s—similar sentiments would not appear again in American Indian films until the 1970s—but it reflects Collier's efforts to respect and preserve Native American religion and was only possible because Massacre predated the Christian-influenced Breen Code.30

In another incident that would not have slipped past Breen's censors, Shanks (Sidney Toler), the local undertaker, rapes Thunderhorse's teenage sister Jennie (Agnes Narchy) during their father's funeral. By having a white man assault an Indian woman, Massacre again reverses the polarity of the common depiction of white/Indian sexual relations. Rather than the stereotype of an Indian man preying upon a helpless white woman, it is a white man who is the degenerate savage, and the Indian woman who is the victim. In retaliation for the rape, Thunderhorse lassos
Shanks and drags him behind a car, leaving him mortally injured. This act of vengeance allows Quissenberry to arrest Thunderhorse, and the resulting sham trial reveals even further white corruption. The judge and other officials who preside over the proceedings may be Indians, but they are all Quissenberry's cronies who follow his orders during the trial, including handing down the sentence he demands.  

Unable to defeat Quissenberry on his own, Thunderhorse turns to the federal government for help, much as Americans turned to the New Deal when unable to contend with the Depression. Escaping from jail, he flees the reservation for Washington, arriving in front of two symbols of the federal government: a fence with the blue eagle of the NRA painted on it and the Capitol Building looming in the background. There, he finds a staunch ally in Dickinson, his longtime friend and now head of the Bureau of Indian Affairs. A clear stand in for John Collier, Dickinson wants to root out the corrupt forces that have been "bleeding the Indian for years," and he is willing to place himself at risk in order to help: "The most powerful interests in country will try to smash you. But if they do, they'll have to smash me, too." Thus, while the local white officials on the reservation are corrupt to the core, the officials of the federal government are quite the opposite: men of intense idealism and courage.  

Dickinson arranges for Thunderhorse to testify at a Senate hearing, and there the Indian gives a stirring speech that echoes the demands made in Yancey's editorial:

The Indian a citizen, eh? That's funny. He doesn't have any constitutional rights. He can't even hire a lawyer without the agent's consent. Oh, he's given the right to live. On a wasteland. He's given the right to a trial, before Indian judges who are under the agent's thumb and do just what he tells them to. He's given the right to worship, but if he happens to remember that the Indian once had a religion of his own, he gets a beating for it. He's given the right to love, but a white man can violate an Indian girl and get away with it. . . . You used to shoot the Indian down. Now you cheat him and starve him and kill him off by drink and disease. It's a massacre any way you take it!
As in *Cimarron*, the film advocates full citizenship for Indians, again seeing them as people who are worthy of inclusion in American society. With the federal government's help, Thunderhorse is able to return to the reservation and crush Quissenberry and his corrupt ilk. And as the film closes, he decides against returning to his comfortable life of wealth and celebrity, preferring to help his people as the new reservation agent, an extension of the government that restored the Indians' rights and freedom. As he tells Lydia, "Gee, just think of all the time I wasted shooting glass balls and signing autographs. This is a *real* job."³³

Figure #9: The Capitol Building and the NRA's blue eagle greet Thunderhorse on his arrival in Washington.

Yet, while *Massacre* was years ahead of its time in its portrayal of Indians, it also presents a number of contradictory impulses regarding them. While Thunderhorse and Lydia are well-spoken and courageous, they stand in stark contrast to their fellow Indians who never left the reservation. These reservation Indians speak pidgin English and are either weak and cowed by Quissenberry, or have betrayed their own people by working for him. Adam, for example,
hates the corrupt white authorities, but is wide-eyed and terrified when Thunderhorse defies them. Essentially, the film sees reservation Indians as primitives, which becomes particularly apparent at the film's end, when Thunderhorse faces a second trial for the death of Shanks. While he and Dickinson want the trial to go forward in order to reveal Jennie's rape and other instances of corruption, a mob attempts to free Thunderhorse by burning down the jail. This scene, with wild, whooping Indians rampaging through a burning town could easily have come from any bloodthirsty savage movie, feeding into their stereotypes of wild, animalistic monsters.

By presenting the reservation Indians as helpless primitives who need an educated Indian to lead them, Massacre implicitly advocates assimilation, the policy that Collier was fighting against. Moreover, in showing Thunderhorse and Lydia, its heroes, to be well-spoken products of Haskell, it endorses the boarding school system that both Collier and Gessner, the author of the book Massacre was based on, stridently opposed. These contradictions reveal Warners'
struggles with understanding and contending with the incredible complexity of the issues facing Native Americans, for the studio intended to make a film celebrating Collier's work, but inadvertently undermined some of it, instead.\textsuperscript{34}

Even with these contradictory elements, \textit{Massacre} was still a groundbreaking film, and the marketing for it reveals that exhibitors were not sure how to approach its new presentation of Indians. Rather than stress its progressive views or storyline of modern corruption on the reservation, magazine advertisements resorted to sensationalism. They showed Barthelmess in stereotypical Indian garb, promoting equally stereotypical notions of savage Indians and even the taboo of interracial romance. One advertisement read "Savage Blood Runs Wild Again!" another "Look out, America! Imagine the Fury of a Million \textit{Savages} Turned Loose on the Country Today!" and a third, which shows Barthelmess embracing a white woman, "When \textit{White Arms Quicken Savage Blood.}" Likewise, Warner Bros. promotional material directed at theater owners made the film appear as an Indian-centric western, rather than a social problem picture, declaring "Make your screen an arena of whirlwind thrills with Dick [Barthelmess] as a fighting red man hurling defiance at his white foes." Not only do these have nothing to do with the actual plot of the film, but they also are in direct conflict with its theme of an educated Indian bettering his people's lives with the help of the New Deal.\textsuperscript{35}

Conversely, while Warner Bros. itself downplayed the social themes of the film in its marketing, film critic Charles S. Aaronson of \textit{The Motion Picture Herald}, a magazine directed at independent theater owners, suggested they play up that aspect of the picture. "Sell it as a straight drama, not overlooking the action content and utilizing the selling angle of an exposé of the treatment of the tattered remnant of the once mighty tribes which ranged the North American
continent," he advised. While further suggesting that owners should not present the film as a true story—which it was not—they should "concentrate on the dramatic action, the romance of the young Indian who remembered his heritage and returned to aid his people in their fight for decent treatment."36

Figure #11: A misleading advertisement for Massacre, published in Film Daily, suggests that the film concerns Indians on the rampage in the wild West, not a social activist attempting to better his people's lives during the 1930s.

With subject matter so divisive that the studio itself was unsure how to market it, it is unsurprising that Massacre resulted in strong opinions, both negative and positive, among its audience. Those who viewed the film negatively appeared to do so not because of its quality, but rather because of its pro-Indian focus. The critic for Photoplay, for instance, referred to the picture as "Indian propaganda laid on thick," while Variety declared that the "persecution of the redskin" was a " tepid" and "not-so-timely subject" for a movie. Similarly, Newsweek
demonstrated a general ignorance of the historical mistreatment of Native Americans, commenting that "if half the white man's abuses of Indians shown in [Massacre] are true, it is a wonder any Redskins have survived." Finally, Mordaunt Hall of the New York Times complained that while he enjoyed the lighter material early in the film when Thunderhorse was living his opulent lifestyle as a Wild West show rider, "when [Massacre] thunders about the crooked doings of the white man, it becomes a trifle tedious, for apparently all the officials on the reservation are tarred with the same brush." Thus, Hall rejected the entire focus of the film—the abuse of Indians by corrupt reservation officials—while also bristling because there were not enough virtuous whites to counterbalance the white villains.37

Other contemporary critics demonstrated a more positive view of Massacre, however. Grace Kingsley of the Los Angeles Times, for instance, reveled in the rare victory won by on-screen Indians, writing, "Whenever I see an Indian play coming on the screen I reach for my hanky, certain that I'm going to weep buckets. But in 'Massacre' Poor Lo really gets a break," and she goes on to refer to the vengeance Thunderhorse wreaks upon his white foes as "just grand!" Theater owners generally appeared to concur with Kingsley's view of Massacre, rather than those of the critics hostile to it, accepting its message of Indian rights along with its value as entertainment. S.H. Rich of the Rich Theatre in Montpelier, Idaho described it as "a feature that will please most everyone. . . . This picture should make money anywhere," while J.J. Medford of the Orpheum Theatre, Oxford, North Carolina, was even more effusive: "This is a wonderful picture, dealing with the problems of the American Indians. . . . This is suitable for the whole family and will provide excellent entertainment, especially for the kids." Surprisingly, given the film's adult subject matter, children did, indeed, prove to be great supporters of Massacre, for in
a National Board of Review survey, boys aged 8 to 15 named the film their second favorite, while girls ranked it 15th.\textsuperscript{38}

*Massacre* is a unique film within the American Indian genre. With its Indian hero dominating the proceedings and fighting to protect his people from white corruption, it offers a far more progressive view than even its noble savage contemporaries. Even if some of its Indians are cinematic stereotypes, Thunderhorse himself is a fully realized character who defies those very stereotypes, and the movie's advocacy for Indian cultural agency, particularly in the area of religious freedom, is startingly ahead of its time. Taken in the context of other American Indian pictures from the era, *Massacre* appears to be an anomaly, but its existence makes sense in the context of the Warners' social consciousness pictures, as the studio made a number of films tackling similarly controversial topics during the 1930s. With John Collier pushing a reform-minded agenda as the commissioner of the Indian Bureau, the plight of the Indian was certainly timely in 1934, and the Warners were fully committed to the New Deal, as the federal government coming to Thunderhorse's aid demonstrates. Given its contentious subject matter, not to mention the strict dichotomy it draws between its Indian hero and white villains, it is not surprising that *Massacre* met stiff resistance from some viewers. However, it is also noteworthy that the film found its admirers who found the picture entertaining and even appreciated seeing Indians finally win out in the end.

**Rewriting the History of the Indian Wars: They Died with Their Boots On**

Released in December, 1941, only days after the Japanese bombing of Pearl Harbor, *They Died with Their Boots On* is a patriotic and highly positive biography of perhaps the single most controversial figure in the history of the American frontier, Gen. George Armstrong Custer. The
film rivals *The Plainsman* in its abject altering of history, casting the infamous Indian fighter as a staunch defender of the Sioux while excising his most odious actions, such as the Washita River Massacre. And like *The Plainsman*, it uses this historical figure as a way to reference past national greatness during a time of crisis. It bears many other similarities to the bloodthirsty savage movies of the era, as well, including greedy businessman villains, a glorification of westward expansion, and an intensely patriotic tone. Yet unlike the protagonists of *The Plainsman* and its ilk, the Custer of *They Died with Their Boots On* has tremendous respect for Indians. He fights them when he must, but he also protects their land from white incursions and argues passionately on their behalf. Furthermore, these Indians are noble, not bloodthirsty savages, tragic figures who are betrayed by white treachery. Some viewers complained about the way the film glorified Custer's career, but in spite of this, many critics and audiences found great entertainment in its ahistorical action. Like *Cimarron*, it demonstrates the hypocrisy of the noble savage movie, for it celebrates a legendary Indian fighter while simultaneously demonstrating guilt over the nation's treatment of the Indians he fought.39

*They Died with Their Boots On* was part of the wave of patriotic films produced by Hollywood just prior to World War II, which also included the likes of *Union Pacific* and *Northwest Passage*. Warner Bros. had already made a pair of overtly anti-fascist movies during the late-1930s, *Black Legion* (1937) and *Confessions of a Nazi Spy* (1939), and as historian Leo Braudy has noted, Harry Warner believed that fascism "sought to divide and conquer by turning groups against one another." Thus, the theme of the film, like other Warners' products of the era, is that "We are all in this together, and racial and religious and sectional prejudice . . . is a perilous sapping of national strength." Moreover, the story of *They Died with Their Boots On* had particular relevance for Americans since the picture's release coincided with the entry of the
United States into World War II. In historian Paul Hutton's words, "As the nation reeled from the shock of Pearl Harbor, Wake, and Bataan, it could easily identify with Custer's last stand."

Much like *The Plainsman*, another film of the era that presented Custer as a hero, *They Died with Their Boots On* used a fabricated story about a well-known historical figure in order to celebrate America's past, and in so doing, preach the need for national unity.40

The film presents Custer's military career as a grand adventure, and with the swashbuckling Errol Flynn playing the lead role, it portrays the general as a consummate dashing hero, fearless and skillful in battle, yet honorable and decent to his foes. This again demonstrates the era's preoccupation with the importance of belonging, for Custer achieves greatness as a member of the army during the Civil War and in the West, but he is miserable as a civilian in between those two stints in the service, drinking in a saloon and reminiscing about past glories with other veterans. Ultimately, the picture is so generous to Custer that after screening it for the first time, Jack Warner told director Raoul Walsh, "If Custer really died like that, history should applaud him." Such a positive portrayal of the general ignored then-current scholarship, for historians had begun casting a revisionist eye upon his career since 1934, when Frederic Van De Water published *Glory Hunter*, the first critical biography of Custer. The onset of war prevented Warners from following suit, as screenwriter Lenore Coffee's memo to producer Hal B. Wallis indicates:

> It seems to me, in our present crisis with so much attention focused on the army and so much valiant effort being made to give it both dignity and glory—that we shall be severely reprimanded, if not worse, by the Government for debauching the memory of one of our national heroes and for distorting the history and traducing the regimental honor of the famous 7th Cavalry.

With war on the horizon during the film's production in mid-1941, Warner Bros. rejected the critical assessment of Custer being put forward by Van De Water and other contemporary
historians, instead offering a fictionalized version of the general's career in order to not only glorify him, but to serve as propaganda, as well.41

The studio could certainly have achieved this sort of patriotic propaganda by casting its Indians as bloodthirsty monsters, but elected to go a different route, instead, presenting them as noble savages. As director Walsh explained, "Most Westerns had depicted the Indian as a painted, vicious savage. In They Died with Their Boots On, I tried to show him as an individual who only turned vindictive when his rights as defined by treaty were violated by the white man."

Not only did bloodthirsty savages have no place in a film preaching racial harmony and national unity, but if Custer was to argue on behalf of Indian rights, he needed Indians worthy of his cause. Thus, the film's Sioux, and in particular its lead Indian character, Crazy Horse (Anthony Quinn), are not wild savages who boil out of the hills in unmotivated attacks on whites, but rather are noble ones, honorable and dignified people who want peace and only go to war when unscrupulous whites break treaties. And as an onscreen caption shows, the film recognizes the cost that America's expansion west had for them: "And so was born the immortal 7th Cavalry, which cleared the plains for a ruthlessly advancing civilization that spelled doom for the red race." Even so, the image of the noble savage it presented is still a stereotype, albeit a more positive one than the bloodthirsty savage, and They Died with Their Boots On even presents Indians as part of the wilderness, much as Northwest Passage did, for its Indians frequently appear on screen peering out from foliage or behind rocks, quite literally emerging from nature.42

Just as they sought to present Indians as noble savages, the filmmakers also tried to create a fictionalized relationship between Custer and Crazy Horse. As Warner Bros. executive Melvin Levy explained in a studio memo to producer Robert Fellows, "It is my proposal to dramatize the situation by creating a relationship of respect and even friendship—perhaps reluctant and
difficult, but real—between Custer and Crazy Horse." When he first arrives in the West, Custer manages to capture the chief, but upon bringing Crazy Horse to his fort, he finds his regiment is comprised of drunken and lazy soldiers. Given these conditions, Crazy Horse easily escapes, racing away in a display of stunt riding, and Custer is duly impressed with the Indian's skill and courage, declaring, "In a way, I don't mind that Indian getting off. He's the only cavalryman I've seen in this fort so far." Levy's hope of establishing friendship between the two never comes to pass, as they only share a handful of scenes together in the finished film, but they do have great respect for one another, both in war and peace. And once this peace is achieved and the treaty guarantees the Sioux their most sacred lands, Custer vows to "defend the Black Hills against all white men who seek to profane them."  

Figure #12: The Indian as a part of the natural world in They Died with Their Boots On.

However, a cabal of greedy businessmen—the same sort who served as villains in other Depression-era movies—lusts after this fertile territory. Unable to open those lands to development due to a treaty and the presence of Custer's cavalry, these capitalists fabricate a
story about a gold rush in the Black Hills, flooding them with white prospectors and settlers. Knowing that this violation will mean war, Custer travels to Washington, risking his career in order to argue on the Indians' behalf. It is here that the film provides its hero with his most passionate, and most historically inaccurate, pro-Indian rhetoric. Speaking before a Congressional committee, he argues, "The sanctuary of the entire red race is being violated. . . . If I were an Indian, I'd fight beside Crazy Horse to the last drop of my blood!"\(^44\)

When these words fail to change policy and prevent war, Custer returns to the West and, ultimately to the Little Big Horn. There he heroically sacrifices the lives of himself and his men in order to save thousands of settlers and soldiers who would otherwise fall prey to the Indians, and he dies a gallant hero, shot down by his respected foe Crazy Horse. Yet, the night before the battle, he still fights for the rights of the Indians who he knows will kill him in the morning, writing a letter to his wife that demands the government "must make good on its promise to Chief Crazy Horse. The Indians must be protected in their right to an existence in their own country." Essentially, *They Died with Their Boots On* employs this progressive rhetoric in the same way that *Cimarron* did for Yancey, as it proves what a magnanimous Great White Man Custer is. In so doing, the film, released as the nation was entering war, holds the general up not only as a paragon of martial skill and courage, but as a champion of equality and national unity, as well.\(^45\)

Despite this high-minded rhetoric, *They Died with Their Boots On* displays the hypocrisy inherent in noble savage films. Custer may sympathize with the Indians and be repelled by the corrupt businessmen who caused the war, but once war breaks out, he still fights against Crazy Horse. The film suggests that while the Sioux may be justified in their anger, once that anger manifests as open warfare, the Indians form an obstacle to progress that the army must remove
for the greater good of the nation. As story notes for the picture explain, "Our country must
either become a vast nation spreading from ocean to ocean, large enough and safe enough so that
liberty and eternal freedom can develop within it, or it must reconcile itself to borders which
must perpetually be defended, and a North American continent as broken and divided as the
European." According to further notes, Custer believes that, given enough time, whites and
Indians could learn to live together in peace, but he goes to war "rather than see his country
diminished before it has reached its growth." Levy summed up this attitude in a memo to
Fellows:

The conflict between [the Indians] and the whites is terrible and inevitable; for the Black
Hills are indeed 'the key to the west.' Without them the Indians will not survive. Without
them also the United States cannot reach the great western ocean, the peaceful possession
of which is a categorical necessity for the building of a nation large and strong enough to
dedicate itself to liberty.

Therefore, They Died with Their Boots On sees white-Indian contact as a zero sum game, and
while it is unfortunate, the Indians must be displaced in order for the United States to reach its
potential as a worldwide force of good.46

Even so, the filmmakers had the temerity to suggest that Custer's death at Little Big Horn
would result in a long term benefit for Indians, claiming that the whitewashed general was a
martyr who died, not fighting to conquer Indians, but fighting for their rights. In a wildly
ahistorical recasting of events, the picture's story notes conclude, "The nation now willing to
listen to his case against the Indian trades, suppressed while he was alive, is a step nearer the day
when every human being within it may live in freedom and safety." Thus, according to They
Died with Their Boots On, Custer's death at the Little Big Horn led to a happier, more unified
nation—one based in the ideals of Roosevelt's Four Freedoms, no less—rather than what actually
occurred: fifteen years of brutal warfare followed by the complete subjugation of the Plains
tribes. Clearly, Warner Bros. was no more committed to an accurate, historical portrayal of Indians than it was of Custer, but rather manipulated their image in order to suit the needs of the film. For example, despite prodding from Warner Bros. security chief and amateur historian Lee Ryan, who urged his friend Fellows to feature Sitting Bull as a prominent character, the Sioux leader only gains a single, brief mention in the film while Crazy Horse fills the role as Custer's opposite number. Furthermore, out of 194 requests processed by the studio's research department for the film, a mere thirteen concerned Indians, while others dealt with such minor issues as when the filing cabinet was invented or whether canned food was used in 1870.47

They Died with Their Boots On may have been an intensely patriotic film that glorified the American military just as a war was commencing, but its fictionalizing of Custer's life and legacy was so extreme that it alienated some critics and viewers. Douglas Churchill of the New York Times, for instance, condemned the film for excluding the infamous Washita River Massacre, which he called "the greatest blot on Custer's career," and complained that "the massacre of the Little Big Horn has been rearranged so that Errol Flynn as the general will be justified and the slaughter will not appear to result from Custer's greed for glory." Likewise, Life echoed the increasingly accepted view of Custer as a fame-hungry self promoter: "George Armstrong Custer, who was not one of America's best generals, was cut out to be a swashbuckling movie hero. . . . While Custer was reckless and brave with his own life, he was equally reckless with other men's lives. He was a confirmed glory hunter . . . whooping for joy at the prospect of any battle." Some audience members were incensed by the film's portrayal of Custer, too, as indicated by the letter Mervin Redbush of Good Hope, Illinois sent to Warner Bros. after seeing the film: "The unprovoked attack upon the encamped Indians, which led to the massacre, was entirely of Custer’s initiative. . . . Your movie version does not present a true
picture for the public. It might seem to some people that this is a way of falsely glorifying an ambitious General."\textsuperscript{48}

Perhaps due to the war, however, other critics took a softer stance, explaining away the historical inaccuracies by claiming it was only a movie. The \textit{National Board of Review Magazine}, for example, declared that the "occasional deviations from history are excusable."

Likewise, the attitude of \textit{The New York Times}' Bosley Crowther was summed up by the subtitle of his review: "In 'They Died with Their Boots On,' History Is Scalped by Writers in Warbonnets, but it Makes a Good Show Anyway." He noted the changes to history and admitted that "There once was a time when we blustered and yelled outrageously at any desecration of history committed for the sake of a plot" but concluded, "somehow, it's hard to wax indignant over a 'Western' as obvious as this. It's hard to sniff contemptuously when Custer's cavalry comes sweeping down." \textit{Time} also pointed out the controversy, even if it refused to take a stance regarding it, noting that "pro- and anti-Custerites are among the most vociferously vocal of U.S. cultists," and posited that "[Warners'] version, which whitewashes Custer and bypasses history, is not likely to please either side." The review concluded with a sardonic note regarding the studio's boast that the film's final battle was a faithful reproduction of Cassily Adams' famous painting, \textit{Custer's Last Fight}, "for the one thing that everyone agrees on is that the painting is all wrong." At least Warner Bros. maintained enough historical accuracy to have Custer die at the Little Big Horn, rather than succumbing to the demands of female college students from Denver who, according to \textit{Los Angeles Times}' gossip columnist Hedda Hopper, "wrote protesting against the killing of Errol Flynn in 'They Died with Their Boots On.'"\textsuperscript{49}

Beyond the controversy over the film's ahistoricity, critics also offered differing views on the importance of its Indians. Some, such as Sara Corpening of \textit{Hollywood}, Philip Scheuer of
the Los Angeles Times, and the critic for Variety, made no mention of Indians at all, focusing their reviews on the melodrama involving Custer and other white characters, instead. Corpening and Scheuer both mentioned the rousing final battle, but did not discuss who it was fought against, while the review in Variety noted the fine performances by actors playing the white roles while making no mention of Quinn’s work as Crazy Horse. To these critics, the Indians were simply faceless adversaries for Custer to fight, much as they were in bloodthirsty savage films. Others, however, complained that Indians were not present in enough of the film. William Weaver of the Motion Picture Herald, for instance, observed that they do not appear until an hour and seventeen minutes into the picture, while Newsweek groused, "The chief trouble with [the movie] is that it takes much too long to get to the Indians." This is particularly telling since the first half of the movie contains plenty of action, concerning as it does the Civil War. Thus, since the real Custer earned his fame as an Indian fighter, and since They Died with Their Boots On bore the hallmarks of an American Indian film, both critics apparently felt that the Indian wars should be the entire focus of the picture. In that way, they echo the sentiment of James Shelley Hamilton’s review of Stagecoach that Indians were "the Homeric stuff of the motion picture." In short, these reviews suggest, Indians were an essential part of the western.50

Regardless of whether Indians did not appear soon enough, audiences found great enjoyment in the picture. In a letter to Photoplay, for instance, James C. Negley, Jr., a member of the Coast Guard stationed on the west coast, wrote, "Life is pretty grim for service men these days and we surely appreciate a picture that makes us laugh a little. . . . Some laughing and romance in 'They Died with Their Boots On,' and we learn history in [a] pleasant way at the same time." Rather tellingly, Negley did not reference the patriotic themes of the film, but merely its entertainment qualities, listing it alongside other pictures such as screwball comedy
Ball of Fire and Disney's animated Dumbo as an example of "just what we service men like."

Other viewers agreed with Negley's assessment. S.L. George of the Mountain Home Theatre, in Mountain Home, Idaho, commented that They Died with Their Boots On was "An excellent picture that was harmed by a bad title. . . . Everyone that came was pleased. A really outstanding feature," while A.C. Edwards of the Winema Theatre, Scotia, California, wrote, "A fine, wholesome, real American production that will be sure to please everyone except the ultra-critical." Thus, while some audience members were upset at the extent to which Warner Bros. rewrote history, others did not mind the picture turning Custer from an enemy of Indians into their ally. They simply found that the film delivered the sort of swashbuckling action on the frontier that they wanted during the dark, early days of World War II.51

Released just as the United States was entering war, They Died with Their Boots On served as an intensely nationalistic piece of propaganda. Ignoring then current scholarship that saw Custer as a glory hound, Warner Bros. rewrote history, turning America's most infamous Indian fighter into a principled liberal who argued for Indian rights, thereby presenting him as a champion of national unity. In order to accomplish this revisionism, the film not only had to present Custer himself as an advocate for freedom and equality, but also had to offer Indians who were worthy of such respect. Thus, Crazy Horse and the other Sioux are noble savages, honorable people who earn Custer's admiration and only go to war due to the machinations of greedy white businessmen. In spite of their inherent decency, however, the film still suggests that Indians form an obstacle to the civilizing of the West, and once war comes, Custer has no choice but to aid in their conquest. As screenwriter Levy indicated, the United States needed the Black Hills in order to reach its potential, and the greater good required that the United States take them, despite the cost this had for the Sioux. Therefore, like other films of the noble savage
strain, there is an inherent hypocrisy at the heart of They Died with Their Boots On, for it glorifies westward expansion while lamenting the suffering of the Indians. The film's rewriting of history rivals that carried out by The Plainsman five years earlier, and some viewers were alienated by its celebration of the controversial Custer, but many looked past these changes, finding it to be entertaining escapism, as well as stirring propaganda.

Conclusion

While Hollywood only produced a handful of noble savage movies in the years between 1930 and 1945, those it did make represent an important development in the presentation of the American Indian on film. The vast majority of American Indian movies released during this period were of the bloodthirsty savage bent, depicting Indians as bloodthirsty savages. But by presenting Indians as noble savages and recognizing white misdeeds in the West, Cimarron, Massacre and They Died with Their Boots On laid the foundation for what was to come, as over the following decades, their version of the Indian could eventually become the dominant one in Hollywood. Of course, these three films were made during the same era as the movies discussed in chapter one, and thus many of the same themes appear in both groups: businessmen are often villains, there is a sense of nostalgia for the heroes and glories of the nation's past, and a strong sense of community and involvement. Both branches of the genre also endorsed westward expansion but with a very significant difference: unlike their bloodthirsty contemporaries, noble savage films expressed a strong sense of guilt. They saw the conquest of the West as necessary for the growth of the United States while also grappling with the cost this process had for Native Americans. In this way, they built upon the nineteenth century tradition of seeing the Indian as a
noble savage, presenting them as honorable but doomed, a sadly vanishing race that left the continent to the white man.

While few in number, there were a handful of other noble savage films produced between 1930 and 1945. *Laughing Boy* (MGM, 1934) was an adaptation of Oliver La Farge's groundbreaking novel about the difficulties faced by a Navajo couple. *Buffalo Bill* (Twentieth Century Fox, 1944) bore a thematic resemblance to *They Died with Their Boots On*, with the famed frontiersman admiring and even befriending Indians, but, in the end, fighting against them for the good of his nation. Furthermore, the most famous Indian character of the era, Tonto, was a noble savage who faithfully fought for justice alongside the Lone Ranger on the radio and in film serials. All of these films were part of a broader cultural movement within the nation. From the work of Franz Boas to literature like La Farge's *Laughing Boy* music such as Cadman's "From the Land of Sky-blue Water," Americans were beginning to understand the struggles and abuses suffered by Native Americans, as well as the value of their culture. This had a particular relevance during the 1930s, with the reform-minded John Collier, bringing policies intended to preserve traditional Native American ways and culture to the Bureau of Indian Affairs.

Each of the noble savage films discussed in this chapter engaged with this tradition in different ways. While Indian characters were largely absent from *Cimarron*, Yancey still fought for their rights through pro-Indian rhetoric, while endorsing his son's marriage to an Osage princess. In *Massacre*, Warner Bros. used the plight of the modern Indian as the basis for one of its social problem films, tackling controversial subject matter such as the right of Indians to reject Christianity, as well as the rape of Indian women by white men, neither of which would have been possible if the movie had been made after the adoption of the Breen Code. Reflecting Warners' support for the New Deal, as well as Collier's influence upon Native American affairs,
the film saw Thunderhorse turn to the federal government for aid to defeat the corrupt white officials. *They Died with Their Boots On* freely rewrote history, just as *The Plainsman* had done, turning Custer into a steadfast defender of Indian rights. In so doing it presented him as a magnanimous Great White Man who championed equality and fair treatment for all Americans, serving as a stirring figure for national unity as the United States entered World War II.

Despite their advocacy for Indians, these films were not quite as radical as they might first appear, the result of being made in the inherently conservative structure of the studio system. Designed to make profits, not push boundaries, the system ensured that onscreen Indians would be acceptable to their audiences. Thus, Yancey may fight for Indian rights, but he is also a champion of American empire, exposing the hypocrisy inherent in the noble savage tradition that these pictures drew upon. Likewise, Custer may defend the Black Hills from white incursion, but the film suggests that the Hills are vital to the growth of the United States and thus the nation must take them away from the Sioux, treaty or no treaty. Furthermore, although the Sioux are justified in their anger, once they rise up, they form an obstacle to civilization that Custer must overcome. *Massacre* is certainly the most groundbreaking of the three films, and in some ways was decades ahead of its time, but controversy was part of the selling point for the string of social problem films Warner Bros. produced during the 1930s. Moreover, its hero was an assimilated Indian who was largely indistinguishable from whites, while its reservation Indians were weak, uneducated, terrified, and, during their uprising, even savage. Thus, these three pictures offered a progressive alternative to the bloodthirsty savage American Indian films, but while they grappled with guilt over the historic mistreatment of Native Americans, they still largely embraced a view of Indians as victims, not people with agency, and their defeat as unfortunate but necessary for the growth of the United States.
As a means of criticizing European society, Enlightenment writers extolled the virtues of the noble savage who they saw as being more in touch with Natural Law than "civilized" man due to their savagery and primitiveness. In the words of Berkhofer, these Enlightenment thinkers believed "Primitive peoples apprehended the laws of nature more clearly than civilized man since they were less corrupted by the practices and prejudices of civilization and more creatures of instinct considered natural. Man was born good and equal but everywhere in modern Europe was found chained by social convention and artificial civilization. . . . In the end, this use of the Noble Savage and the primitivistic tradition was dedicated to the establishment of a new social order consonant with the liberal ideas of the age. As a result, the Noble Savage really pointed to the possibility of progress by civilized man if left free and untrammeled by outworn institutions." Berkhofer, 76, 86, 89.

Berkhofer, 93-4; Drinnon, 160-61.


Crockett's stance on the Cherokee Removal effectively ended his relationship with President Andrew Jackson, who had served as Crockett's political mentor. For a full discussion of the Cherokee Removal, see Theda Purdue and Michael D. Green, The Cherokee Nation and the Trail of Tears (New York: Penguin Group, 2007).


In 1856, Indian Commissioner George Manypenny argued that reservations were essential: "Humanity, Christianity, national honor, unite in demanding the enactment of such laws as will not only protect the Indians, but as shall effectively put it out of the power of any public officer to allow these poor creatures to be despoiled of their lands and annuities by a swarm of hungry and audacious speculators, attorneys, and others."

The Peace Commission was comprised of the following individuals: Nathaniel G. Taylor, commissioner of Indian affairs under President Johnson; Samuel F. Tappan, who chaired the military commission investigating the Sand Creek Massacre; Sen. John B. Henderson of Missouri, chairman of the Senate Committee on Indian Affairs; John B. Sanborn, a lawyer and retired General who served on the committee that investigated the Fetterman Massacre; Gen. William Tecumseh Sherman; Maj. Gen. Alfred H. Terry; Gen. (Ret.) William S. Harney; and Maj. Gen. Christopher C. Augur.

Citizenship for Native Americans was perhaps the most radical aspect of the Friends' platform, but the reformers pointed to the freed slaves as an example. In the words of Board of Indian Commissioners member Merrill E. Gates, "By the stupendous precedent of eight millions of freedmen made citizens in a day, we have committed ourselves to the theory that the way to fit men for citizenship is to make them citizens."


William Christie MacLeod was one of these historians who followed and presents a similar view as that of Jackson's A Century of Dishonor. As Klein writes, "In MacLeod's text, Europeans and later white Americans cheat, steal, and slaughter their way across the continent in one long, bloody, imperial misadventure. Klein, 188-89.


Prucha, vol. II, 942, 944-48, 951-53, 973-76. One step Collier took in order to alleviate the ravages of the Depression was the organization of a separate Civilian Conservation Corps specifically for Native Americans. Although it failed to provide long term economic reform on reservations, the Indian CCC did supply short term relief from the Depression, employing more than 85,000 Native Americans throughout the decade.

Ibid., 944, 1010. For a full discussion of Collier and the New Deal's approach to Indian affairs, see Prucha, vol. II, 940-1012.
Ibid.
Ibid.
Ibid.
Ibid.
Ibid.
Ibid.
Ibid.


*A Free Soul* concerns an alcoholic lawyer whose daughter becomes romantically involved with a criminal he has defended in court. *A Free Soul*, DVD, directed by Clarence Brown (1931; Burbank, CA: Warner Home Video, 2008).


The other films promoted by the Cleveland Public Library and Cinema Club were Revolutionary War-era drama *The Great Meadow* and D.W. Griffith's *Abraham Lincoln*. *Abraham Lincoln*, DVD, directed by D.W. Griffith (1930; Dallas, TX: Reel Media International, 2004); *The Great Meadow*, directed by Charles Brabin (1931; Santa Monica, CA: MGM).

*Massacre*. While Warner Bros. adapted Gessner's book into *Massacre*, the end result was essentially based on the book in name only. Gessner wrote the original screenplay, incorporating anecdotes from his work into a fictional story, but studio-mandated rewrites watered down his intent leaving him without onscreen credit. As film historians Peter Roffman and Jim Purdy wrote, "Gessner was left with the vague hope that the limited social realism 'slipped' into Hollywood's 'bourgeois form' may have some impact upon public opinion since the movies reach such a large audience." Peter Roffman and Jim Purdy, *The Hollywood Social Problem Film: Madness, Despair, and Politics from the Depression to the Fifties* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1981), 160.


Aleiss, 51; Balio, 281. For a full discussion of other social consciousness films made by Warner Bros. that focused on issues of race, see Roddick, 144-174.


For a full discussion of the development of the MPPDA and the adoption of the different versions of the Production Code, see Ibid., 37-72.

*Massacre*.

Ibid.
Ibid.
Ibid.

Ibid. Bold added for emphasis in quote.

Ibid.
Ibid.

Ibid. Bold added for emphasis in quote.


Gessner devoted nearly a quarter of his book to the boarding school system, writing, "The pretentious, inhumane boarding schools should be dissolved into small reservation day schools. Such a dissolution would enable the children to live at home with their parents and experience a wholesome, normal childhood."

Magazine advertisements, *The Film Daily* 55, no. 7 (January 9, 1934): 3. 5. Italics in original.
I, it identifies the Nazi Party as a

As historian Sherry Smith has noted, while the army often served to defend Native American lands from white incursions, many officers had ambivalent views of the Native Americans themselves. Officers generally rejected t

Wallis himself, this was because "Wally talked to Lenore, and frankly told her that he and MacKenzie would appreciate her not holding out f

In spite of her work, Coffee does not receive on

Screenwriter Lenore Coffee expressed concern to producer Hal Wallis over Custer's drinking in the script, as in her

They Died with Their Boots On.

The title of the film comes from Thomas Ripley's book of the same title, a collection of stories about lawmen in the West, none of which concern Custer. Warner Bros. purchased the rights to Ripley's work for $750, but instead of basing the screenplay for the film upon it, simply attached its title to the script about Custer written by Wally Kline and Aeneas MacKenzie. This led to legal wrangling between Ripley's attorneys and Warner Bros., and because Kline and MacKenzie swore in notarized affidavits that they did not take any content from the book, Ripley did not receive an onscreen credit. Legal notes, They Died with Their Boots On, Folder 2881, Warner Bros. Archive, School of Cinematic Arts, University of Southern California.

They Died with Their Boots On.

Warner Bros. (1935)

They Died with Their Boots On.


Black Legion, one of Warners' later social consciousness films, stars Humphrey Bogart as a disaffected man who joins an ultra-rightwing, anti-immigrant organization modeled on the Ku Klux Klan, while Confessions of a Nazi Spy was based on the true-life breaking of a Nazi spy ring inside the pre-war United States. Concerning the latter picture, Roddick writes, "Though released well before the outbreak of World War II, it identifies the Nazi Party as a threat to humanity in general and to America in particular." Roddick, 162. For a full discussion of both films, see Roddick, 155-64. Black Legion, DVD, directed by Archie L. Mayo (1937; Burbank, CA: Warner Home Video, 2008); Confessions of a Nazi Spy, DVD, directed by Anatole Litvak (1939; Burbank, CA: Warner Home Video, 2009).


Screenwriter Lenore Coffee expressed concern to producer Hal Wallis over Custer's drinking in the script, as in her memoir, Libby Custer claimed she and her husband never drank. Coffee worried that showing Custer drinking to excess could make Warner Bros. vulnerable to a lawsuit by Custer's estate. In a July 16, 1941 memo to Coffee, producer Robert Fellows replied that other books about Custer noted his drinking and that "if he did drink at any time, it doesn't make any difference if he drank in 1864 or 1868."

Wallis brought Coffee onto the project to rewrite portions of the script in order to develop the relationship between Custer and Libby. In spite of her work, Coffee does not receive on-screen credit, which goes to the original writers, Wally Kline and Aeneas MacKenzie. According to a memo from Walter MacEwan, Wallis' executive assistant, to Wallis himself, this was because "Wally talked to Lenore, and frankly told her that he and MacKenzie would appreciate her not holding out for credit because it meant so much to them." Walter MacEwan, Memo to Hal B. Wallis, dated September 17, 1941, in Inside Warner Bros., ed. Behlmer, 178.

Hollywood would not produce a film critical of Custer until 1948's Fort Apache, a recasting of the Little Big Horn to Arizona, which will be discussed in chapter three.

42 Walsh, 325; They Died with Their Boots On.

43 Melvin Levy, Memo to Robert Fellows, dated 30 April, 1941, They Died with Their Boots On, Story Notes folder, folder 2303, Warner Bros. Archive; They Died with Their Boots On.

As historian Sherry Smith has noted, while the army often served to defend Native American lands from white incursions, many officers had ambivalent views of the Native Americans themselves. Officers generally rejected the
James Fenimore Cooper notion of Native Americans as noble savage, instead seeing them as savages who were racially inferior to whites. Many officers did, however, believe Native Americans were superior to white Americans in certain aspects of their character, such as honesty and fair dealing. Smith notes that Generals George Crook, Oliver O. Howard, and Nelson Miles all praised various aspects of Native American culture, using it to critique mainstream white society in much the same way that Hollywood used American Indian films during the twentieth century. For his part, Custer was largely ambivalent toward Native Americans. Sherry Smith, *The View from Officers’ Row: Army Perceptions of Western Indians* (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 1990), 15-25.

44. *They Died with Their Boots On.*

45. Ibid.


In his memo to Fellows, Ryan suggested that Sitting Bull, not Crazy Horse, should be the principle Indian opposite Custer, writing, "The name of Crazy Horse means nothing to the average American, who is not a student of Indian history, but the name of Sitting Bull (truly a tremendous character) is known to everyone. For that reason I can’t see how you can kiss him off with a mere mention of his name."


Between 1930 and 1945, Hollywood produced two competing versions of the American Indian film. Both saw westward expansion as a positive development for the United States and, by extension, the rest of the world, but they differed in their presentation of Indians. The bloodthirsty savage films discussed in chapter one saw Indians as shadowy monsters who slaughtered whites without motivation, while the noble savage pictures from chapter two viewed them as honorable people who were, unfortunately, doomed by the conquest of the West. In both cases Indians were not the focus of the films, but rather served as plot devices that helped to move the story forward or prove the greatness of white protagonists. In *The Plainsman* and *Union Pacific*, for instance, they were as an obstacle that white heroes had to overcome in order to help the nation grow, in *Stagecoach*, the threat they posed kept the passengers together and forced them to unite into a workable community, and in *Cimarron* and *They Died with Their Boots On*, they proved the liberal bona fides and personal magnanimity of the two agents of empire, Yancey and Custer.

Both of these strains of films presented Indians in binary opposition to their white characters. Indians may have been bloodthirsty monsters trying to murder the passengers in *Stagecoach*, or noble warriors being driven to war by white corruption in *They Died with Their Boots On*, but they consistently were savages, Others whom the films contrasted with "civilized" whites. However, there is a significant difference between the two types of film in this is regard. While one strictly saw Indians as bloodthirsty savages whom white America needed to eradicate,
the other suggested that, with help from white America, noble savages could assimilate into mainstream society. In *Cimarron*, for instance, Yancey not only argues for Indian citizenship, but his son begins the assimilation process by marrying Ruby Big Elk, a union that produces children who look entirely Caucasian. *Massacre* and *They Died with Their Boots On* similarly argue in favor of assimilation, the former through the example of the well-educated, financially successful Thunderhorse, who is contrasted with miserable, downtrodden Indians who have remained on the reservation, and the latter through Custer's impassioned demands for fair treatment for the Sioux in the name of national unity. As the story notes for *They Died with Their Boots On* explain, Custer's heroic death will lead to "the day when every human being within [the United States] may live in freedom and safety," Indians included.¹

These films were heavy with nostalgia, using the past as a defense against the psychological and economic ruin of the Depression. In so doing, they reinforced American greatness at a time when that greatness was in question. Furthermore, as Slotkin has noted, the success of the New Deal and its many programs intended to rekindle patriotic feelings, "suggested that American history could once again be read as a kind of 'success story."

particularly during the late-1930s, when Hollywood produced many of these films. However, in order to look back upon westward expansion in a positive manner, these movies were faced with the question of how to handle the Indians. Were they bloodthirsty savages that white America should slaughter, or noble savages that it should pity, but still push aside? According to films like *The Plainsman* and *Northwest Passage*, it was the former: Indians were monsters and the United States was right to exterminate them in order to extend civilization to the frontier. Thus, those movies did not treat Indians as characters or give them motivation. Instead, they simply presented them as bloodthirsty savages and explained their attacks with the simple notion that
Indians killed whites because that is what they did. Conversely, films like *Cimarron* and *They Died with Their Boots On* saw Indians as noble savages, honorable victims of white greed and broken treaties. In this way, they perpetuated the stereotype of the vanishing Indian who gave his lands to white America before disappearing.²

Both the noble savage and bloodthirsty savage strains used stereotypes of Indians that had been in existence for more than a century, and thus none of these films presented a radical interpretation of them. Rather, they simply ranged from overly conservative views of the nation's past and its dealings with Indians, to more moderate ones. For instance, none of these pictures suggested that westward expansion was wrong, nor did they present an alternative to the defeat and subjugation of the Indians. Noble savage films embraced Manifest Destiny as much as their bloodthirsty savage contemporaries did. They accepted the righteousness of the conquest of the West, a process that was necessary for America's rise to greatness, but simply expressed guilt over the treatment Indians endured. Even *Massacre*, while deploring corruption on the reservation, and the Indians' impoverished living conditions, did not suggest that the United States should have left the frontier to its original inhabitants, but just that it should treat them with fairness, respecting their customs and giving them a semblance of self determination. On close examination, then, noble savage films were similar to the New Deal. Roosevelt's program may have appeared radical in comparison to the economic and political policies of the past, but was actually a moderate alternative to far more extreme possibilities such as fascism and socialism.

The studio system's inherently conservative business model was an important factor in the films' traditional presentation of Indians. Far more concerned with profits than creativity, the system reined in the artists working within it while presenting its customers with products they
were comfortable with, rather than ones that would challenge their attitudes. It stuck closely to proven formulas, mass producing movies that resembled ones that had already been proven successful. This was true for actors and directors, who, once they had success in a particular role or type of film, found themselves reworking variations of the same movie, and it was true of genres, as well. Changing the formula meant risk, and with the industry scuffling during the Depression, Hollywood was risk averse. In the case of American Indian pictures, this meant that the studios delivered Indians their audiences found familiar—bloodthirsty or noble savages—coupled with an interpretation of the past that did not question the nation's actions, but rather glorified westward expansion.3

American Indian films were not alone in offering a conservative reading of history during this era. Slotkin has noted the increased emphasis on history throughout American culture during the 1930s, while Susman writes that, during the Depression, the country was seeking "to find, characterize and adapt to an American Way of Life as distinguished from the material achievements (and the failures) of an American industrial civilization." This search included a reassessment and embracing of national history, myth and folklore, which he adds, had "results far more conservative than radical, no matter what the intentions of those who originally championed some of the ideas and efforts." This conservative, glorified version of the past appears throughout American Indian films, but it was also present in other areas of society, such as the education system. As sociologists Robert and Helen Lynd detailed in their examinations of America, 1929's *Middletown* and its 1937 sequel *Middletown in Transition*, the study of history grew in importance throughout the 1920s, and became even more significant during the Depression. In 1890, for instance, history was not a core class in American schools, but by 1924
it had become a required subject that was occupying the third-most hours for high school students, behind only English and vocational and domestic training.\textsuperscript{4}

This new emphasis aimed to impart a view of history heavy in American exceptionalism. The Lynds quoted a board of education president who claimed that "We need to teach American children about American heroes and American ideals," while a 1923 State Manual for Secondary Schools asserted, "We are justified in believing that our political philosophy is right, and that those who are today assailing it are wrong. To properly grasp that philosophy of this government of ours, requires a correct knowledge of history." This approach to history focused upon patriotism, indoctrinating students to the greatness and unassailability of the United States. The result was a nationalistic, and quite racist, student body. In a poll of over 500 students, 77\% of boys and 88\% of girls answered "true" to the question, "The United States is unquestionably the best country in the world," while 66\% of boys and 75\% of girls answered "true" to "The white race is the best race on earth."\textsuperscript{5}

During the 1930s, this move toward a conservative interpretation of history became even more pronounced as the Depression detached the American people from the ways of life with which they were comfortable. As the Lynds wrote, many Americans believed that "the function of the educational system is the perpetuation of traditional ways of thought and behavior, the passing on of the cultural tradition, and, if need be, the securing of conformity by coercion." They sought conformity as a means of overcoming the upset of the Depression, and used history classes to impart their traditions to their children. Local conservative groups, including business interests and patriotic organizations such as the Daughters of the American Revolution exerted great influence on the educational process, demanding that students be taught the "right" sort of social studies and placing ever greater emphasis on a patriotic interpretation of history and
civics. Ultimately, the Lynds wrote, this conservative trend was "determined that there shall be no dissent in Middletown and that our town, our industries and public utilities, and our way of doing things shall be accepted as uncritically right." Thus, schools were not simply placing increased focus on history during the 1930s, but were teaching a version of history that emphasized nationalism and patriotism and the unquestioning acceptance of American exceptionalism.6

Therefore, the conservative depiction of history on display in American Indian films made between 1930 and 1945 did not occur in a vacuum, but rather was part of a nationwide trend. Audiences who attended these movies were seeing an interpretation of the American past that they were comfortable with, as their feedback shows. In reviews, letters, and testimonials from theater owners, viewers consistently remarked upon the entertainment they derived from both strains of the genre. This almost universally positive feedback indicates that they were not offended by the depiction of Indians in either type of film. Rather, they were comfortable with the portrayals of both bloodthirsty and noble savages because those images were an ingrained aspect of American culture since the nineteenth century or before. Because the studio system did not challenge audiences with either a radical interpretation of history or new, more complex portrayals of Indians, audiences were content to accept the on-screen depictions of Indians, whether they were horrifying monsters intent on slaughtering white settlers or honorable victims of white greed. Furthermore, Indians were completely absent from many viewers' feedback, an indication that they simply made little impression upon audiences because Indians in these movies were so underdeveloped and disposable.

Only three films, Northwest Passage, They Died with Their Boots On, and Massacre received feedback that indicated audience discomfort with their depictions of Indians and/or
American history. In *Northwest Passage*, this was due to the Rangers’ slaughter of the Abenaki village. Some critics noted that the carnage was so merciless that it made them feel sorry for the Indians, despite the picture going to great lengths to dehumanize them. *They Died with Their Boots On* created significant controversy when released in late-1941 because its whitewashing of Custer defied the current view of the general as a shameless self-promoter and glory hound who killed Indians to further his own career. It is noteworthy, for instance, that Douglas Churchill of *The New York Times* criticized the film for ignoring the existence of the Washita River Massacre, during which Custer’s troops infamously slaughtered a village of peaceful Cheyennes. Finally, some critics complained about *Massacre*'s corrupt white villains, seeing the film as pro-Indian propaganda. Yet Quissenberry and his cronies are little worse than the similarly greedy white businessmen who served as heavies in other films of the genre. Thus, these critics were offended, not necessarily by white villains, but because the hero who opposed them was an Indian, rather than a virtuous white man like Yancey, Hickok or Custer. In different ways, then, each of these films challenged their viewers, making them uncomfortable in a manner that the other movies did not, and thereby elicited negative responses from audience members.7

*Massacre*, the subject of some of this negative feedback, bears special mention. It was certainly the most groundbreaking film of all those examined in these two chapters, and with its Indian protagonist romancing white women and fighting white villains, it was years ahead of its time. However, its existence is not quite as anomalous as it might first appear, for while it was quite progressive when compared to other American Indian films of the era, it was standard fare as one of Warners’ "headline pictures." The studio made these socially conscious movies in order to tackle timely subject matter, and intended them to be controversial, for that controversy was part of their box office appeal. Certainly, an Indian dragging the white man who raped his
sister behind a car would not appear in other American Indian films, but such a scene was not uncommon in these headline pictures. In *Wild Boys of the Road* (Warner Bros., 1933), for instance, a group of teenage runaways take justice into their own hands by beating a railroad worker who raped a young girl. Such sensationalism drew attention and enticed potential viewers to buy tickets. Moreover, *Massacre* had the advantage of predating the Breen Code, and thus it could engage in edgy subject matter, including rape, miscegenation, and the rejection of Christianity, topics that later films were unable to touch. While *Massacre* is ardently pro-Indian and reflects both the progressive work being done by John Collier as well as the Warners' admiration for the New Deal, it is also a rather shallow treatment of the issues at hand. For instance, by showing Thunderhorse to be a well-educated, well-spoken success story, it implicitly endorses boarding schools and assimilation, policies that Collier opposed. Thus, while *Massacre* appears to be a radical film on the surface, it actually demonstrates a purely superficial understanding of the problems faced by Native Americans in the 1930s, and rather than advocating an entirely new approach to Indian affairs, it argues that the government should maintain the status quo in its dealings with them.  

The Difficulties of Establishing Authorship

One of the major problems inherent in analyzing films made during these years is determining which individuals were responsible for the content of a given movie. The studio system's screenwriting process usually resulted in multiple writers working on a single script, with three writers garnering credit for *The Plainsman* and *Union Pacific*, for example, and twelve working on *Northwest Passage* at various stages of its development. Essentially, screenwriters were hired hands during the studio era, doing the work that their producers
ordered, and, as Balio wrote, "The Hollywood screenwriter never had final say over what appeared on the screen. That was always the province of the studio producer." Even if a film was based upon a book, the original author may not have enjoyed any influence over the finished film, either. For instance, while Warner Bros. adapted Massacre from Gessner's nonfiction account Massacre: A Study of Today's Indians, and went farther than other Hollywood pictures in lamenting the treatment of Indians, the film is still significantly less critical than Gessner's angry polemic, leaving the author disillusioned with it. Kenneth Roberts, the author of Northwest Passage, had a similarly unhappy time while dealing with the Hollywood adaptation of his work, one which he despised so much that he devoted only a single paragraph of his memoir to the film, writing, "The less said about that miserable experience, the better."9

The studio system even made it difficult to assess the personal contributions of directors, for, like screenwriters, they were often simply assigned their projects by studio producers. For example, King Vidor was a highly regarded filmmaker in 1940, having worked for MGM since the silent era, turning out such classics as The Big Parade (MGM, 1925) and The Crowd (MGM, 1928). As such, he enjoyed more creative input into the pictures he worked on than most studio directors. Vidor was also a staunch leftist, described by Durgnat and Simmon as a "premature anti-fascist" who provided financial support for the Republicans in the Spanish Civil War. His politics were most apparent in his 1934 passion project Our Daily Bread (United Artists), a film he wrote, produced and directed, and which film historian Carlton Jackson described as "probably the most intense 'leftist' Depression movie from Hollywood." The film concerns the establishment of what amounts to a socialist cooperative on a farm, with skilled-but-homeless residents adding their own talents to the burgeoning community. Yet, with its genocidal
treatment of Indians, call for masculine militarism and conquest of the frontier in the name of a growing America, *Northwest Passage* bears none of the director's leftist leanings.\(^\text{10}\)

This is due, at least in part at least, to the influence of MGM studio head Louis B. Mayer, whose politics were diametrically opposed to Vidor's. Mayer was an outspoken conservative who campaigned for Herbert Hoover in 1928 and 1932, and was disgusted with Vidor's political views in general, and *Our Daily Bread* in particular. While Mayer was an administrator and not involved in the day-to-day creative process of MGM's films, by the late-'30s, his personal views were finding their way into nearly every film made at his studio. As historian Thomas Schatz writes, "Mayer did not impose [his politics] directly, since he had virtually no involvement in day-to-day filmmaking. Rather, they filtered through the layers of management control that Mayer developed during his reign." With such influence being exerted at the highest levels of the studio, it is no surprise that *Northwest Passage*, made within MGM's corporate structure, bears some of Mayer's personal politics, while *Massacre* and *They Died with Their Boots On* reflected some of the New Deal liberalism supported by Jack and Harry Warner. Thus, with the studio assigning directors and multiple screenwriters to projects, and executives at various levels of the studio influencing the content of pictures, as well, most of the movies made during this era are the result of studio bureaucracy rather than any one individual.\(^\text{11}\)

There are exceptions to this rule, however, as John Ford and *Stagecoach* demonstrate. As one of Hollywood's most well-respected and successful filmmakers of the 1930s, Ford was one of the few directors who were able to exert complete creative control over his productions during the studio era. He claimed that he had been able to choose his own projects since approximately 1920, and this was certainly the case with *Stagecoach*, which he based on the Ernest Haycox short story "Stage to Lordsburg," originally published in *Colliers*. He took the project to RKO
studio head David O. Selznik, who was skeptical, given the poor box office results westerns generated during the 1930s. Still, Ford's reputation was such that Selznik agreed to make it if Ford would cast major stars Marlene Dietrich and Gary Cooper as Dallas and Ringo, respectively. Wanting Claire Trevor and then little-known John Wayne for the roles and refusing to compromise his vision, Ford turned down Selznik's offer, electing to make the picture independently with the backing of producer Walter Wanger. Wanger exerted little influence on the picture, for, as Ford later recalled, the producer "was away most of the time we were doing Stagecoach." The director worked closely with his long-time screenwriter Dudley Nichols on the script, and while the finished product certainly included some of the Nichol's input and ideas, the film is very much Ford's vision. As Nichols wrote to Ford after screening the film for the first time, "If there was ever a picture that was the director's picture, it was [Stagecoach]."

Moreover, Ford's method of shooting only what he envisioned—in essence, cutting the film in the camera—ensured that an editor could only put the film together as Ford wished. In his own words, "[Producers] get to the cutting room and they say, 'Well, let's stick a close-up in here . . . but there isn't one. I didn't shoot it.'" Thus, even if most studio era films were the product of the corporate machinery of MGM, Warner Bros., or their ilk, Stagecoach, and its Indians, are largely Ford's personal vision.¹²

Conclusion

With the exception of Massacre, which was part of a larger series of "headline pictures" that focused on problems throughout society, the American Indian films discussed in chapters one and two were not about Indians. Instead, they were movies about the American past, viewed through the lens of a white-dominated culture. Because of this, the movies rarely established
Indian characters, leaving even noble savages like Crazy Horse in *They Died with Their Boots On* as shallow stereotypes. Ultimately, Indians were simply tools that the pictures used to further their plots, and they only mattered insofar as the way they interacted with the white protagonists of the pictures. Both groups of films placed Indians in binary opposition to whites, presenting them as either bloodthirsty or noble savages who stood in contrast to the "civilized" white characters.

There were differences between how the two strains presented their Indians, of course. Noble savage films not only saw Indians as human beings, but as people who could be worthy of citizenship within the United States. Yancey demands just that with his scathing editorial, while Thunderhorse and Custer insist that the federal government must live up to its responsibilities to care for its Indian wards in *Massacre* and *They Died with Their Boots On*, respectively. Conversely, bloodthirsty savage films saw Indians as murderous monsters whose presence on the frontier was a constant threat to white civilization. Rather than seeing Indians as people who could be brought into the United States as future citizens, these pictures viewed them as subhuman, and charged their white heroes with eradicating them in order to complete the conquest of the frontier. As *Northwest Passage* suggests, their Indians were little more than wild animals whose lives had no value, either to themselves or their white enemies. Both groups of films used interaction with Indians as a means to establish their white protagonists’ excellence, but did so in different ways. The whites in bloodthirsty savage films quite simply proved their heroism by fighting against Indians, thus making the frontier safe for civilization, while the protagonists in noble savage pictures proved their worth by fighting for Indians, crusading for their rights even if, like Custer, they also fought against them on the battlefield.
Both groups of films were deeply nostalgic for the country's past, presenting an idealized version of the conquest of the frontier. They fictionalized a great national achievement like the construction of the transcontinental railroad, or the exploits of folk heroes like Hickok and Custer, in order to remind their viewers of America's past greatness and to inspire them in the difficult times of the Depression and World War II. As such, they were part of a larger movement of patriotic history that developed during the 1930s and extended into the ’40s. Just as Hollywood was making films that emphasized American exceptionalism, be it demonstrated through the extermination of an Abenaki village or the growth of an Oklahoma town in what had been Indian territory, schools were imparting a similarly conservative view of history to their students. Because of this, these films did not challenge their viewers with radical reworkings of the past, but simply gave them what they were comfortable with: stereotypical Indians, be they bloodthirsty nor noble, and virtuous white heroes. And as their feedback reveals, audiences found enjoyment in both strains of the genre, only complaining when a movie like Massacre or Northwest Passage ventured beyond the confines of what viewers found acceptable.

The studio system dominated Hollywood between 1930 and 1945, and with its economically conservative business model and aversion to risk, it is little surprise that these American Indian films did not challenge their audiences' preconceptions. That would change in later years, however. As the system began to deteriorate after World War II, more individual talents, be they directors, screenwriters, or producers, were able to exert creative influence upon their films. With that freedom came new interpretations of the American Indian. The films examined in these two chapters serve as a baseline in that regard. During the following decades, the film industry still made movies featuring bloodthirsty savages, even if it used for different reasons than The Plainsman and Stagecoach had, but that depiction would grow less significant.
over time. Instead, as attitudes toward Native Americans and other minorities evolved, Hollywood increasingly built upon the image of the Indian established in the noble savage film, using it to comment on, or even critique, mainstream American society in films concerned with the family, civil rights, and the Vietnam War. It was this view of the Indian as a noble savage that would come to dominate the image of the American Indian on screen, while the bloodthirsty savage became a marginalized and, eventually, socially unacceptable.
The Lynds polled 241 boys and 315 girls over two years of high school civics classes and did not include any African American students in the polling. For the question "The United States is unquestionably the best country in the world," the breakdown was as follows: True, 77% boys, 88% girls; False, 10% boys, 6% girls, Uncertain, 11% boys, 5% girls, No Answer: 2% boys, 1% girls. For the question "The white race is the best race on earth," the breakdown was: True, 66% boys, 75% girls; False, 19% boys, 17% girls; Uncertain: 14% boys, 6% girls; No Answer: 1% boys, 2% girls.

According to the Lynds, the D.A.R. claimed that "both the high school and the college have 'some pretty pink teachers,'" and in Massachusetts, the state government forced all teachers to take a loyalty oath between 1935 and 1937.

Mayer was personal friend of Hoover and was the first person involved in the movie industry to spend the night at the White House. He began exerting more personal influence upon MGM's films following the death of Irving Thalberg, the studio's leading producer, in 1936. Prior to that point, Thalberg had served as a buffer between Mayer and the filmmaking process.

Although Vidor usually worked for MGM, he made Our Daily Bread independently and released it through United Artists.
In *Hondo* (Warner Bros., 1953), the title character comes into the lives of Angie Lowe and her son, Johnny, who live on the Arizona frontier. Angie's husband has abandoned his family during an Apache uprising, leaving them defenseless on their ranch, and Hondo, an army scout, eventually takes the man’s place. He not only gives her a husband who can do the manual labor around the ranch, but, more importantly, serves as a father to her child, providing the boy with the sort of manly parenting his real father neglected. Yet he is not the only man who has taken an interest in the boy. Vittorio, the local Apache chief, has a vested interest in the boy's upbringing, having made Johnny a member of his tribe and named him "Small Warrior." Because of this, Vittorio watches over this newly formed family, not only protecting them from more vengeful Indians, but also providing Hondo with guidance on how to be a good father. Vittorio is a consummate noble savage, much like Crazy Horse in *They Died with Their Boots On*, but *Hondo* uses him in a new way: as a figure of wisdom who aids in the formation of this family and then leaves the West to them as he disappears from the story.¹

World War II saw a decline in Hollywood's production of American Indian films, with war movies generally filling the action-oriented slots available in the studios' production schedules. However, during the late-1940s, as audiences tired of pictures directly focused on the war, the American Indian film made a return to the big screen. Led by John Ford's informal cavalry trilogy—*Fort Apache* (RKO, 1948), *She Wore a Yellow Ribbon* (RKO, 1949), and *Rio
Grande (Republic, 1950)—these pictures reflected the seismic shift in American society caused by the onset of the Cold War. This chapter examines how American Indian films dealt with domestic life in this period, specifically through their advocacy for the nuclear family. In her seminal work Homeward Bound, historian Elaine Tyler May argued that throughout the post-war years, the family served as a bulwark against the psychological ravages of the Cold War, and these films promoted the importance of the family unit in maintaining a strong nation. While some of them presented Indians as the bloodthirsty savages of the 1930s, and others as the noble savages from that era, they continued to use their American Indian characters as plot devices in order to generate conflict which resulted in their white protagonists founding strong family units.

In the first two films of Ford's cavalry trilogy, Fort Apache and She Wore a Yellow Ribbon, young lieutenants meet and fall in love with young women during Indian uprisings. The Indian wars provide action and suspense in the films, but they also enable the creation of new family units. Family is a particularly significant theme throughout Fort Apache, with the fort's commanding officer opposing the romance between his daughter and her low-born suitor, while She Wore a Yellow Ribbon deals with a love triangle between a woman and two officers that plays out during an Indian war. Rio Grande, the third entry in the trilogy, places an even greater focus on the family unit and its importance to keeping America strong. The movie concerns the reconciliation of a family shattered by the Civil War, a reunion made possible by an Indian revolt. With his long-estranged son now serving under him, and his equally-estranged wife arriving at the fort in order to secure the boy's release from the army, a cavalry officer not only must put down an Apache uprising, but, in keeping with the era's preoccupation with family, rescue children abducted by the Indians and carried into Mexico. While the cavalry trilogy uses Indians as plot devices that help create families, the Indian chief in Hondo plays a far more
active role in the process. The film used yet another Apache uprising as the backdrop for its romance between army scout Hondo and single mother Angie. The noble Vittorio watches over and shepherds this burgeoning union, knowing that Hondo has the traits necessary to be a good father for Johnny. Thus, in each film, whether indirectly, through their wars, or directly, through Vittorio's wisdom, Indians help create new families to keep the nation strong through times of crisis.²

The Family in Postwar America

The years after World War II saw a drastic increase in the importance of the nuclear family within American society. A breadwinner father, homemaker mother and two or more children, all living within a family-owned house in the suburbs, became the national ideal. As historian Robert L. Griswold writes, "During the baby boom, most Americans assumed that marriage was the ideal adult state, that parenthood was preferable to nonparenthood, and that having at least two children was superior to having only one." Certainly, the rise of the middle class played an important role in this process, for more Americans could afford to have families during the prosperous postwar years than could during the Depression. Over sixty percent of American families had a middle class income level during the 1950s, double that of even the pre-Depression '20s, and as historian Stephanie Coontz writes, "For most Americans, the salient symbol and immediate beneficiary of their newfound prosperity was the nuclear family."

However, other, more psychological factors, led to the explosion of the family during the 1950s, as well, including the onset of the Cold War, with its accompanying fears of atomic warfare, and changes in the workplace, with women and, to a far greater extent, men, taking corporate jobs that left them feeling weak and personally unfulfilled. The family counteracted these trends,
providing a modicum of security and hope for the future in the face of the hydrogen bomb, as well as a sense of control for men who felt powerless at work. This represented a drastic shift from the Depression, which saw exceedingly low marriage and birth rates as Americans felt that they could not afford a family. During the 1930s, popular culture, including Hollywood films, promoted a vision of independent, working women who did not need a husband or children in order to feel fulfilled. World War II expanded upon this independence, as millions of women entered the workforce, further challenging traditional gender roles. The return of peace in 1945, however, brought with it a desire for a return to "normalcy," represented in part by the reemergence of the traditional family.3

The Cold War, and the fears of nuclear exchange between the United States and the Soviet Union that came with it, were among the driving forces in Americans embracing family life during the late-1940s and throughout the 1950s. As May writes, "Americans were well poised to embrace domesticity in the midst of the terrors of the atomic age. A home filled with children would create a feeling of warmth and security against the cold forces of disruption and alienation. Children would also be a connection to the future and a means of replenishing a world depleted by war deaths." Faced with the horrifying possibilities of nuclear annihilation, Americans turned to family life in extraordinarily high numbers. They may not have been able to exert any control over the outbreak of war, but they could govern their homes in the suburbs. Furthermore, children gave them a hope for the future and a sense of optimism that such a war would not occur. In May's words, "The family seemed to be the one place where people could control their destinies and perhaps even shape the future. . . . Marrying young and having lots of babies were ways for Americans to thumb their noses at doomsday predictions."4
Beyond the Cold War, other trends in postwar America led to a growing emphasis on marriage and family life. Employment became increasingly white collar after World War II, with hundreds of thousands of men finding jobs in the corporate workforce. As historian Arlene Skolnick notes, "white-collar workers outnumbered blue-collar workers for the first time" during the 1950s. While this gave men the financial security required to buy a home and start a family, it also led to widespread dissatisfaction. No longer did these men work for themselves or even know their employer. Instead, they felt that they were merely numbers, faceless drones operating within a giant bureaucratic machine, and this left them feeling emasculated and unfulfilled. Just as it had with their Cold War fears, the family served to resolve these feelings of dissatisfaction. As May writes, "Where . . . could a man still feel powerful and prove his manhood without risking the loss of security? In a home where he held the authority, with a wife who would remain subordinate." Furthermore, the family was also seen as a bulwark against the sexual perversions that preyed upon men in postwar America, for a loving wife and children could help a man resist the temptations such as pornography, communism, and homosexuality. For men, as May notes, "compensation for the loss of independence and creativity would be provided in the family, where fatherhood gave life meaning. The arrival of the child tamed the husband's extravagance and recklessness, making him a responsible provider."5

Marriage would tame female sexuality, as well, turning formerly independent women into dutiful housewives, a trend that Skolnick called, "a throwback to the Victorian cult of domesticity with its polarized sex roles and almost religious reverence for the home and hearth." While women entered the workforce during the Depression and World War II, the return of millions of male veterans into the workforce meant they were no longer needed. As historian Maureen Honey has noted, magazines and other forms of mass culture encouraged women to get
jobs to help the war effort, but with the end of hostilities, those same sources served as propaganda to push the women out their jobs and into the home. During the postwar years, even college educated women opted for lives as housewives and mothers rather than careers, and university curriculums changed to train women for working in the home. Women faced tremendous social pressure to conform to this domestic role, and, as Coontz writes, "vehement attacks were launched against women who did not accept" the self-definition of housewife and mother. Throughout the 1950s, women embraced this focus on the family, hoping to gain sexual fulfillment through their marriage and personal fulfillment through their child rearing, rather than professional fulfillment through a career.6

The result of these trends was an explosion in family life throughout middle class society. During the post-war years, Americans got married in greater numbers, and had more babies, at younger ages for both, than at any other point in history. Of this generation, an astonishing 96 percent of women and 94 percent of men married, and their unions generally produced between two and four children. Those children were extraordinarily important, not only because they provided hope for the future, but also because they demonstrated that their parents' marriage was a successful one. In May's words, "Children provided tangible results of a successful marriage and family life; they gave evidence of responsibility, patriotism, and achievement. They would, presumably, tame the wayward tendencies of men and fulfill the sexual energies of women."

Popular culture played a major role in this process. In the years after World War II, magazines and film encouraged women to embrace their traditional roles as mothers and homemakers. As May writes, "Hollywood's professed advocacy of gender equality evaporated during the forties. Two positive images of women had shared the limelight during wartime: the independent heroine and the devoted sweetheart and wife. After the war, as subservient homemakers moved
to center stage, emancipated heroines gave way to predatory female villains." Likewise, television shows like *Leave it to Beaver, Father Knows Best*, and *The Adventures of Ozzie and Harriet* centered upon the daily lives of loving, suburban, nuclear families. Moreover, those programs did not focus upon the profession of the families' fathers, but rather on their fathering, and thus parenting, not work, defined their lives. These products were not showing the realities of American life, of course—Coontz wryly notes that "contrary to popular opinion, 'Leave it to Beaver' was not a documentary"—but they served to establish a perception that the nuclear family was the central institution of American society, and American Indian films played their part in this process, too.7

**The Indian Threat as a Catalyst for Family Construction: *Fort Apache* and *She Wore a Yellow Ribbon***

The cavalry trilogy is only a trilogy in the informal sense. While Ford made the three films in three consecutive years and focused on similar settings in themes, characters and plot lines do not carry over from one film to the next. The first two entries, *Fort Apache* and *She Wore a Yellow Ribbon*, deal with the construction of new families, and while their Indians indirectly support that development, their onscreen portrayals vary, with the former presenting its Apaches as noble savages and the latter seeing Indians primarily as bloodthirsty, but providing a dignified, peace-loving chief as a counterbalance. *Fort Apache* recasts the Little Big Horn to the Southwest, substituting the arrogant Col. Owen Thursday (Henry Fonda) for Custer and the Apaches for the Cheyenne and Sioux. A glory-hungry martinet who is insulted by his posting to the frontier, Thursday sees a chance for a great victory to resuscitate his career when Cochise (Miguel Inclan) and his Apaches leave their reservation after suffering white abuses. Over the objections of his subordinate, Capt. Kirby York (John Wayne), who is far more experienced in
dealing with Indians, Thursday finally forces a battle with Cochise and the Apaches massacre him and most of his command. *She Wore a Yellow Ribbon* (1949) concerns a massive Indian uprising, which occurs only days before the retirement of aging Capt. Nathan Brittles (Wayne). Avoiding open warfare, Brittles leads his troops on a long patrol across the prairie, eventually finding a bloodless solution to the crisis by stampeding the renegades' horses, robbing them of their mobility and forcing them to return to their reservations. Family is a prominent theme in both films, and their Indians serve as an outside threat that brings those families together, just as the communist threat was a catalyst for the construction of American families during the Cold War.  

Ironically, while these movies deal with the importance of the family, Ford's own family life was far from ideal. In many ways, he marginalized Mary, his wife, and Pat and Barbara, his children, while seeing the people he made his movies with as his real family. Ford was an alcoholic who never drank while directing films but binged on liquor between them, and even when sober, he was an indifferent husband and father. As biographer Joseph McBride writes, "Alcoholism blighted not only Ford's life but also those of his wife and children." He was particularly abusive, both emotionally and physically, toward Pat, who was a sickly child and failed to live up to his father's masculine expectations. Ford fared no better as a husband than he did as a father—Maureen O'Hara, the female lead of *Rio Grande*, recalled that Ford made comments to his wife that "were so downright mean and nasty that I thought, I'm going to get up and leave"—and he had affairs with women and, according to O'Hara, men. He embarked on a romance with Katharine Hepburn during the filming of their 1936 picture *Mary of Scotland*, which became so serious that Cecil de Prida, Ford's niece, alleged that Hepburn offered Mary $150,000 to divorce him. As Ford biographer Ronald Davis wrote, "Ford's relationship with
Hepburn ended any pretense of monogamy [in his marriage]. After that Mary gave Jack unspoken permission to go his own way, so long as his affairs didn't become public."

Furthermore, O'Hara, herself an object of Ford's desire, claimed that while visiting his office, she once walked in on Ford kissing one of Hollywood's leading men and hypothesized that his ill-treatment of his wife may have been the result of the "great pain and turmoil" of being a closeted homosexual.⁹

Once his children grew to adulthood, Ford employed them on his films, Pat in a variety of production roles, Barbara as an editor, but his relationship with Pat remained icy. Ford rarely gave his son significant responsibilities or showed him much respect, and O'Hara recalled that Ford often referred to Pat as a "capon son of a bitch," a term for a castrated rooster. Pat performed uncredited duties developing story ideas into scripts, but Ford was generally dismissive of his work. For instance, along with Frank Nugent, Pat co-wrote the screenplay for Ford's 1950 picture *The Wagon Master*, and Nugent later wrote that Ford sarcastically told them, "I liked your script, boys. In fact, I actually shot a few pages of it." Unsurprisingly, the relationship between father and son was strained throughout their lives, completely falling apart in 1964 during the filming of *Cheyenne Autumn*, which prompted Pat to quit the film business entirely. He occasionally had contact with his father, but their relationship was so badly damaged that Ford's will read, "I specifically request that no share of my estate be distributed to my son, PATRICK MICHAEL FORD." Paradoxically, then, Ford idealized the American family on screen throughout his career, and in particular in the films of the cavalry trilogy, while treating his own family with neglect and abuse.¹⁰

*Fort Apache*, the first film in the trilogy, sets its story of family against the backdrop of the Indian wars, drawing directly on the noble savage tradition of films like *Massacre* and *They
Died with Their Boots On. Its Apaches are an honest, peace-loving people victimized by two white officials, Col. Thursday and Indian agent Silas Meacham (Grant Withers). These two men wrong the Indians in different ways, the former lying to them and forcing them into a conflict they do not want, the latter profiting off their misery by selling them whiskey and worthless goods. Ford and his screenwriter, Nugent, were well aware of the historical wrongs committed by Americans against the Apaches, for production notes include research on the 1871 Camp Grant Massacre, a terrible, if little known, incident in which Arizona whites, Mexicans, and Papago Indians murdered 150 peaceful Apaches who were ostensibly under the protection of the army. Further, in a 1966 interview, when journalist Michele Mott noted, "In Fort Apache, you take the Indians' side and demystify the American general that Henry Fonda incarnates," Ford replied, "I am not trying to make a legend live. I simply recall historical facts." This suggests that Ford used *Fort Apache* as a means to reveal the abuse Native Americans suffered at the hands of the United States throughout the nation's history.¹¹

Led by the dignified Cochise (Miguel Inclan), the movie's Apaches have earned the respect of Capt. York, the picture's most upstanding soldier. As York's character biography reveals, he "is a great admirer of the plains Indians, as a soldier and as a man. He believes they have been badly treated by dishonest Indian agents, Carpetbaggers and Politicians. He has a great and particular respect for the Apaches." Because of this, York takes the Apaches side when they leave their reservation after suffering Meacham's abuses. As he explains, "Whiskey, but no beef. Trinkets instead of blankets. The women degraded, the children sickly, and the men turning into drunken animals. So Cochise did the only thing a decent man could do. He left, took most of his people, and crossed the Rio Bravo into Mexico." Thus, not only is Cochise
blameless for the Apaches fleeing their reservation, but he is actually to be admired for doing so.\textsuperscript{12} 

\textit{Fort Apache} is unequivocal in its condemnation of Meacham, who Thursday calls "a blackguard, a liar, a hypocrite, and a stench in the nostrils of honest men." Meacham is a corrupt and sleazy man who plies the Apaches with rotgut whiskey while hiding his contraband in crates marked "Bibles." The biography for the character (originally named John Ricker) explains that he was a war profiteer during the Civil War, a carpetbagger after it, and "now is taking his third crack at the dishonest dollar in the Indian service." It further notes that Meacham is "a sanctimonious hypocrite who misquotes the Bible . . . [and] is more apt to talk of the red brethren, the civilizing mission, these wayward wards of Washington," while taking advantage of the Indians who entrusted to him. Even his trading post is a dismal place, as the screenplay reveals: "Meacham's place, in a word, should reflect the man: vile, degraded, false. . . . Meacham is a slimy rogue, a psalm-singing hypocrite, a squaw-man." It is noteworthy, however, that while Nugent condemns Meacham for abusing the Indians, he also finds the man reprehensible for marrying an Indian woman, as the disparaging term "squaw-man" indicates.\textsuperscript{13} 

Abused by Meacham's corruption, Cochise has fled to Mexico, and York follows, hoping to convince him to bring his Apaches back to the reservation. Once again, the character biography reveals the film's intended portrayal of Cochise, referring to him as the Apache "counterpart to Chief Joseph. A highly-intelligent Indian, great strategist, philosopher." More significantly, it seeks to dispel audience expectations regarding Indians in general and Apaches in particular: "His name will strike terror and dread into the hearts of men, but when they meet him, he will prove to be an impressive and dignified man, no more vengeful fighter, but a man who has suffered much at the hands of the whites and has, in fact, right on his side." The
screenplay describes Cochise as "an impressive figure, a man marked for leadership and who
would be a great leader no matter what his color or his birth." Further, Nugent recalled Ford's
description of the chief's first appearance on-screen: "I see him standing straight against the sky
line, one hand clutching his pipe and pressed against his chest," and when Nugent pointed out
that Apaches smoked cornhusk cigarettes, not pipes, Ford replied, "In that hand he may have a
flute, he may have an ax, I don't give a damn what he has . . . But he isn't smoking any
cigarette!" Thus, Ford intended Cochise to be a man of great dignity, a consummate noble
savage, wronged by Meacham and justified in his decision to save his people.14

Figure #13: The noble and dignified Cochise (Miguel Inclan) parleys with Capt. York (John Wayne) in *Fort
Apache*.

York convinces Cochise to return to Arizona for a negotiation with Thursday, but whites
betray the Apaches yet again. Ignoring York's promise that only a handful of officers would
attend the peace talks, Thursday arrives with his entire regiment, intending to force the Apaches
back to their reservation at gunpoint. The colonel sees the Indians as savages and believes that by beating the Apaches into submission through negotiations or battle the army will reward him with a more glamorous assignment in the east. As a storyline treatment indicates, Cochise is in the right and Thursday is in the wrong during their conference: "Cochise will tell his story of white-man wrongs—a story which is all true although Thursday will not believe it. Cochise will explain about the ritual observance and will pledge his Apaches to peace in exchange for non-interference by the Army. Thursday refuses." Thursday insults the Apaches, referring to them as recalcitrant swine and demanding they surrender and return to the reservation, and therefore, when battle breaks out and Thursday's command is almost entirely wiped out, it is because of the actions of dishonest white men—Meacham and Thursday—not those of the noble Cochise.¹⁵

Despite the sympathy they gain in *Fort Apache*, the Indians are not major figures in its story. Rather, they are the backdrop against which the dramas involving the white characters play out. As the storyline treatment explains, "The Indian . . . will be ever-present in our story, not always seen, but never to be forgotten. He will be at first a distant drum, the hint of a smoke signal in the morning sky—and he is to come steadily closer as our story unfolds until finally he dominates the scene and with his scalping knife, cuts the tangled thread of our plot." Thus, as with the films from the earlier decade, Cochise and his Apaches serve as devices that propel *Fort Apache*'s plot along. Unlike those films, however, which feature only noble or bloodthirsty savages within them, *Fort Apache* includes both aspects of dichotomy, even if the former far outweighs the latter in screen time. While riding in the desert, for instance, Philadelphia and Michael find the bodies of soldiers tortured to death by Apaches, and the character biography of Cochise includes mention of "one of his lieutenants [sic], a younger, fiercer, altogether
unreliable savage who is to become infamous as Geronimo," yet this noble Cochise/ bloodthirsty Geronimo dichotomy only serves as a slight counterbalance to Cochise's nobility.16

_She Wore a Yellow Ribbon_ reverses this dichotomy, with most of its Indians being of the bloodthirsty variety, counterbalanced by the noble Pony That Walks (Chief John Big Tree). Unlike Cochise and the Indians in _Fort Apache_, who are justified in their uprising, those in _She Wore a Yellow Ribbon_ are simply motivated by a general hatred of whites, and emboldened by Custer's defeat. The film's screenplay, co-written by Nugent and Laurence Stallings, is rife with loaded language representing these Indians and their leader, Red Shirt (Noble Johnson). It variously describes them and their actions as "savage," "sinister," and "wild," while Indians "howl" and "growl" like animals, dance about "waving scalps," and give off "screams of rage and frustration" when white men escape them. This description reaches its hyperbolic peak during a scene in which the Indians turn on gun trader Rynders (Harry Woods) and his men, murdering them in a fit of savagery. The script refers to the Indians' actions as "a devil's ritual," while Red Shirt chants "like some satanic dance-caller at a square dance in hell" and his warriors "are at the pitch of fury in their antic delirium." These Indians are bloodthirsty savages come straight from hell, and stage directions for their initial appearance on screen reveal the tone the filmmakers sought to convey: "THIS IS OUR FIRST REAL CLOSE SHOT OF THE INDIANS. IT MUST BE DRAMATIC AS AN EXCLAMATION POINT. STRONG COLOR, STRONG FACES TO LIFT EVERY KID IN THE AUDIENCE A FULL TEN INCHES OUT OF HIS SEAT." Far from the "impressive and dignified" Cochise of _Fort Apache_, the Indians of _She Wore a Yellow Ribbon_ are intended to terrify, not engender sympathy.17

The Indians' greatest atrocity is the slaughter of Rynders's gang of gun runners, and while the film presents the white men as race traitors, even they do not deserve the horrifying deaths
inflicted upon them by Red Shirt and his braves. With Brittles and Lt. Pennell (Harry Carey, Jr.) watching from a concealed perch, the Indians "roar with laughter" as they throw one of the men into a bonfire, burning him alive. The scene is one of such savagery that Pennell is "stricken dumb." He had been planning on resigning his commission in order to get married and enjoy his family's wealth, but the actions of these Indians change his mind. The implication is clear: now that Pennell knows how bloodthirsty the Indians are, he cannot leave the service, but instead must do his part to ensure that they are defeated and the West is made safe. Yet as brutal as this scene is, the finished film is considerably toned down from James Warner Bellah's original treatment, which featured a sixteen year old girl driven insane after being raped by Indians, her fourteen year old brother "staked out spread-eagled with his abdomen burned out by the fire set upon it," and soldiers tortured so badly that one of their comrades shoots them to put them out of their misery.  

Figure #14: The bloodthirsty Red Shirt and his savage warriors throw a white gun trader into a fire in She Wore a Yellow Ribbon.
*She Wore a Yellow Ribbon* contrasts this bloodthirsty mayhem with the noble Pony-That-Walks (John Big Tree), an elderly chief who wants peace but is incapable of preventing Red Shirt and other young "hotheads" from going to war. Brittles meets with Pony-That-Walks in the Indians' camp, braving the angry warriors who want to kill him in order to try to negotiate an end to the uprising. The screenplay describes the elderly chief as "a magnificent old patriarch whose dignity is in no way lessened by his reservation-Indian speech." That may have been the intention, but as directed by Ford and played by Big Tree, Pony-That-Walks is a broadly comic parody, and a far cry from the noble Cochise. He shouts all his dialogue in broken English, declaring "I am a Christian! Hallelujah!" and the effect is one of a doddering, senile old man, not a dignified one. Moreover, while Brittles and Pony-That-Walks are both aging and have known one another for many years, Brittles remains in command, directing his young soldiers, even on the day of his retirement, while Pony-That-Walks is ineffectual. He does not want Red Shirt to go to war, but is too weak to stop him, and instead suggests that he and Brittles leave the crisis behind and go off to hunt buffalo together. Thus, the sole noble savage offered by *She Wore a Yellow Ribbon* appears not as the impressive Cochise, but as a bumbling, comic fool.¹⁹

Just as in films from the 1930s, the Indians in both of these pictures serve as plot devices rather than actual characters, helping to push forward story elements regarding white protagonists, including the importance of family. In *Fort Apache*, the theme of family is dealt with through the contrast between the O'Rourkes and Thursdays, as well as the romance that develops between their children, Michael (John Agar), a newly-minted lieutenant, and Philadelphia (Shirley Temple). The O'Rourkes represent an idealized nuclear family of the postwar era, as well as the upward mobility possible in American society. In one generation, they have risen from working class immigrants to achieving middle class status for Michael. The
Irish-born Sgt. Major O'Rourke (Ward Bond) came to the United States, enlisted in the army, received the Congressional Medal of Honor in the Civil War, and secured an appointment for his son at West Point. The O'Rourkes' home at Fort Apache is, according to the script, "a tribute to the good housewifeliness and taste of Mrs. O'Rourke," much like the suburban homes occupied by postwar families, while her character biography describes her as "a woman of intense culture, refinement, gentility, yet with her roots deep in the earth and still, after all these years, romantically in love with her husband . . . In an age when gimcracks and gew-gaws were the vogue, she had great simplicity of taste and her home reflected it."20

*Fort Apache* contrasts this middle class dignity with Thursday's aristocratic arrogance. Far from being the involved, compassionate father admired during the postwar years, he is consumed with his work and neglectful of his family duties. As his character biography explains, he has spent most of his career away from home, first serving abroad in Europe and then fighting in the Civil War, and left the raising of Philadelphia to his wife and, after her death, his sister-in-law. Even worse, as the storyline explains, he sees Philadelphia as an asset for his own career ambitions: "Thursday has plans for his daughter . . . A brilliant marriage would feed his appetite for success." Thus, Thursday does not know his daughter as a father should, having shirked his responsibilities as a parent, but also wants what is best for himself, not his child. He opposes her romance with Michael both because he is a class snob and because a marriage to the son of an enlisted man will not help his own career. As the storyline explains, "Thursday cannot believe his daughter could be guilty of loving a ranker's [enlisted man's] son, however good an officer he might be." Therefore, *Fort Apache* presents two views of the American family, one an idealized middle class household with parents who earned a better life for their son than they
have had, the other with a single, neglectful parent more consumed with his own selfish desires than his child's happiness.  

The Indian wars serve as a backdrop to this family melodrama and ultimately make the marriage between Philadelphia & Michael possible. They bring Philadelphia to the West alongside her father, reveal the shortcomings of Thursday's character, including his arrogance, deceitfulness, and lust for glory, and, by killing him off, eliminate the marriage's main obstacle. At the end of the film, months after the Apaches massacre Thursday and most of his regiment, Michael and York excepted, the couple are happily wed and introduce their son, Michael Thursday York O'Rourke. In this way, they reflect the standard postwar family: they married young—Michael is twenty-two, Philadelphia is nineteen—just as the postwar generation did, and produced a child who will strengthen America in its time of need, watched over by his doting

Figure #15: The creation of a new family thanks to the Indian Wars: Capt. York holds Michael Thursday York O'Rourke while his parents, Michael (John Agar) and Philadelphia (Shirley Temple), and Michael's mother (Irene Rich) look on in *Fort Apache*.  

153
parent, as well as the mature hand of York and the loving eye of Mrs. O'Rourke. Yet because "Massacre," the Bellah story that *Fort Apache* is based on, only deals with the Custer's Last Stand-aspects of the plot, Ford and Nugent manufactured all of these family-centric elements for their film.22

Family is a theme of *She Wore a Yellow Ribbon*, as well, even if it is not as central to the story as in *Fort Apache*. While much of the film focuses upon Brittes' impending retirement and his last patrol across the Plains, Bellah's treatment also notes that the film is "a story also of army women, with a love for their men, that made them follow those men at the cost always of personal comfort. . . . At the sacrifice, quite frankly, of the lives of their young children and of their own lives to smallpox and the ravages of the rugged existence they lived far out on the rim of empire." Brittes' wife and children suffered that fate, dying of smallpox many years before—Bellah calls it "an old tragedy, not a new one"—and the captain frequently visits their graves at the fort, watering flowers planted upon them and telling his late wife about his day. With his real family gone, he has become a father to his regiment and, in particular, his two young lieutenants, Pennell and Cohill (Agar), guiding and teaching them as a postwar father should.23

Brittes also oversees a rivalry between the two lieutenants for the affections of Olivia Dandridge (Joanne Dru), a young woman visiting the fort, but he is not the only one with an interest in the outcome of this love triangle. Abby Allshard (Mildred Natwick), the wife of Brittes' commanding officer, is intent on playing matchmaker. As Ford suggested in a note that did not make it into the final film, one he called "Natwick's creed," "Look you here, Nathan. I'm going to marry that girl to a cavalry man if it's the last thing I do." With the postwar era's obsession with marriage, Olivia will end up with one of the two lieutenants, of course, the only
question is which one. Initially, she is drawn to the wealthy Pennell, who plans to resign his commission to marry her, while being infuriated by Cohill's hard-bitten demeanor. Eventually, however, she comes to understand that the committed, duty-conscious Cohill is a more mature and admirable man than the immature, shallow Pennell. As the screenplay notes, "Olivia is no longer looking at Pennell, but for the first time begins to understand the professional competence of an officer like Cohill." In his command and support of the soldiers who serve under him, she sees a man who would make a good father, and at the film's end, Cohill has won her over while Pennell exits gracefully from the fray, having been taught by Brittles that he still has growing up to do, and will thus remain in the army. As in *Fort Apache*, this family building is made possible by the Indians, for their revolt leads to the patrol that allows Olivia to spend time with both men and witness Cohill's masculine excellence, while it also convinces Pennell that his place is in the
army, not back east married to Olivia. And like *Fort Apache*, Ford and his screenwriters invented these family elements for the film, as they are absent from its source material, Bellah's story "War Party," which focuses entirely upon the topic of Brittes' retirement.²⁴

Critical and audience response to both films indicate that viewers continued to take Indians for granted in the postwar years, just as they had prior to World War II. For instance, despite the importance of Cochise in *Fort Apache*, and the film's intensely sympathetic portrayal of him, reviews in *Variety* and *Time* made little mention of the Apache chief. The former merely noted that, along with other supporting players, Inclan made his role count, while the latter did not acknowledge Cochise at all, but did complain about the film's family elements, commenting that the pleasures of the movie's action and scenery were counteracted by "many protracted and unrewarding views of domestic life on the post." Furthermore, the critic for *Newsweek* continued to see the killing of Indians as a source of thrills and enjoyment, writing "Of course, the local Indians are on the warpath . . . Wayne, and the rest of Thursday's command . . . succeed in bringing back the time-honored business of making redskins biting the dust as first-rate entertainment." Likewise, Bosley Crowther of the *New York Times* praised *Fort Apache* for delivering "more hollering and whooping and cavalry charging and Indian fighting than we've caught in some time," but also noted the picture's "new and maturing viewpoint upon one aspect of the American Indian wars. For here it is not the 'heathen Indian' who is the 'heavy' of the piece but a hardbitten army colonel, blinded through ignorance and a passion for revenge." Even so, Crowther never mentioned Cochise in his review, and instead just discussed the white characters. That these critics focused on the actions of the white protagonists, principally Thursday—*Newsweek* labels him as "the kind of an officer whom second-world-war [sic] GI's would have branded as 'chicken'" while *Time* called him "an idiotically reckless martinet"—
indicates they still did not see the Indians as anything other than background players. Yet, while critics ignored *Fort Apache*'s sympathetic portrayal of Indians, Hollywood itself did not, using the picture as a defense against claims of onscreen racism. As the *Los Angeles Times* reported, in responding to a "three Oklahoma legislators who charged that Indians are too often portrayed in motion pictures as 'low, mean and treacherous,'" an industry spokesman noted that "Motion pictures dealing with Indians naturally are guided by history books. Only recently, John Ford's 'Fort Apache' told the Indians' side in a highly sympathetic manner."²⁵

*She Wore a Yellow Ribbon* also received reviews that paid little attention to its Indians, an unsurprising development given that these Indian characters were less developed than those of *Fort Apache*. As with the reviews of *Fort Apache*, *Newsweek* and Crowther focused upon the white melodrama, only making a brief mention of the uprising that serves as a backdrop for the film while ignoring the film's portrayal of Indians, both noble and bloodthirsty. Further, in noting that "Joann Dru is decorative if irrelevant" while praising the "masculine matters of barracks, barroom, and saddle," *Newsweek* indicated that the entire love triangle storyline was essentially unimportant to the movie. Moreover, Brittles' nonviolent tactics actually incensed the critic for *Time*, who complained that the movie lacked the sort of big battle expected in such a film: "Despite hordes of hopping-mad Cheyennes in full war paint, there is not a first class Injun fight in the film. For some unaccountable reason the hairraising possibilities of authentic history have been submerged." The film does not lack for action—there are skirmishes between the cavalry and Indians and the climactic stampeding of the Indians' horses is an exciting sequence—and thus it is extraordinarily telling of the way that Hollywood informed the popular conception of the West that this critic believed that "authentic history" could only be represented on screen through a climactic, violent battle that would leave hundreds of Indians dead.²⁶
Feedback from theater owners on both films appears to confirm the assessment that audiences still did not view Indians as important factors. For instance, James C. Balkcom, Jr. of the Gray Theater in Gray, Georgia called *Fort Apache* "the old West at its peak," while M.R. Harrington of the Avalon Theatre, Catskanie, Oregon, wrote that it was "One of the season's outstanding productions from every angle. We gave it an extra day and it did fine business and we had nothing but laudatory comments from our patrons," but neither made mention of anything involving Cochise, the Apaches or the film's theme of family. Owners similarly ignored the Indians in *She Wore a Yellow Ribbon* in their feedback. John S. Oatley of the Star Theatre in Rockford, Michigan wrote, "Not much of a story but John Wayne and Technicolor made this one of our biggest grossing pictures of the year," while the Rowell brothers of the Idle Hour Theatre in Hardwick, Vermont commented that it "Pleased some patrons and disappointed others," and Pat Fleming of the Gail Theatre, Round Pond, Arkansas complained "About the best thing this picture offers is 103 minutes of Technicolor. It's a long-drawn-out affair about the U.S. Cavalry in the 1880's. Some of this picture is pleasant and entertaining and other parts of it are boring and tiresome." Although it is only possible to speculate, one reason why the film may have disappointed some viewers is the lack of a violent battle that alienated the critic for *Time*. Ultimately, because the Indians in both movies remain minor characters who simply serve as the backdrop against which the drama involving the white protagonists plays out, audiences still ignored their presence in feedback, both critical and popular.27

The Indian Threat as a Force for Family Reconciliation: *Rio Grande*

While *Fort Apache* and *She Wore a Yellow Ribbon* deal with the creation of new families, *Rio Grande*, the last picture of the cavalry trilogy, focuses upon the regeneration of a broken one.
Capt. Kirby Yorke (Wayne), not to be confused with the Capt. York of *Fort Apache*, finds his long-estranged son, Jeff (Claude Jarman) assigned to his regiment as an enlisted man, and soon thereafter, his equally-estranged wife, Kathleen (Maureen O'Hara) arrives to secure Jeff’s release from the service. When Apaches abduct many of the regiment's children, Yorke leads a rescue mission across the Rio Grande into Mexico, violating that country's sovereignty in order to finally defeat the Indians, an action that results in a happily reunited family. *Rio Grande*’s Indians are even more vicious than those in *She Wore a Yellow Ribbon*, bloodthirsty savages who prey upon women and children, and they once again serve as plot devices that enable white melodrama, the reuniting of an estranged family into a loving one.²⁸

Unlike the previous two films in Ford's trilogy, there is virtually no noble-bloodthirsty dichotomy in *Rio Grande*; its Indians are almost entirely bloodthirsty and entirely without motivation for their revolt, recalling the unmotivated attacks on whites from films like *Stagecoach* and *Union Pacific*. In no small part, this is due to a change in screenwriter, from the liberal Nugent to the conservative James Kevin McGuinness, who served as the executive director of the anti-communist Motion Picture Alliance for the Preservation of American Ideals, as well as Ford's own politics, which were shifting to the right as Cold War tensions increased. *Rio Grande*’s Apaches are so heinous that Gen. Phil Sheridan (J. Carroll Naish) is willing to violate international law, ordering Yorke to cross into Mexico to defeat them. The film includes numerous references to the Apaches torturing soldiers—Yorke notes that three of his men died "staked face down on anthills"—as well as the rape of white women.²⁹

In spite of these vicious acts, the finished film was actually toned down from the screenplay's first draft, which was so overt in its Indian savagery that the Breen Office warned Republic Pictures executive Allen Wilson,
There is an important organization designated as the Association of American-Indian Affairs, Inc. . . . This organization is comprised of prominent serious-minded citizens who are much concerned that this minority group be fairly portrayed. It is our considered opinion that it behooves the industry to see to it that Indians in Motion Pictures are fairly presented. With this in mind, we recommend to your careful consideration the dialogue on page 48, "Those Apaches are the scourge of your country and mine—thieves and murderers"; and on page 61, the line, "These Apaches are the only Indians who kill and torture for the sheer lust of it." This latter line, we believe, it might be well for you to omit.

The final film did excise the mention of Apaches being "thieves and murderers" from the first line, leaving Yorke to tell a Mexican officer, "Natchez and his band are a scourge to both your country and mine," and completely eliminated the second line concerning the Apaches' lust for torture. But the alteration of two lines of dialogue did not change the overall tenor of the movie, nor does the brief mention of Navajo scouts who served with the cavalry. Ultimately, Rio Grande still presents Indians as the sort of shadowy, bloodthirsty monsters who prowled films like Northwest Passage and The Plainsman. 30

For centuries, white America has been consumed with fears of non-white men raping white women—the abduction and rape of white women was a common theme of stories about Indians dating back to the captivity narratives of the Puritan era, while the myth of the "black beast rapist" developed after the end of the Civil War—and the Indians in Rio Grande reinforce these anxieties. At the beginning of Rio Grande, for instance, the cavalry has captured and imprisoned Natchez, the Apache's chief, and when Kathleen sees him sitting by his fire, the screenplay indicates his barbarous thoughts: "He looks out and sees Mrs. Yorke. He looks her over with unabashed appraisal. Even under that grim, fixed face the nature of his thoughts is obvious." The indication is clear: the non-white savage, Natchez is contemplating the violation of the pure Kathleen. 31
This fear of Indian rape becomes realized later in the film, after Natchez escapes and his Apaches seize a wagon that was carrying the regiments' women and children to safety. While in pursuit, Yorke's column comes across the body Mrs. Bell, of one of those women, defiled and mutilated by the Indians. Although the screenplay only contains a brief description of the scene—"The sergeant points to the huddled figure of a woman--dead--sprawled on a slight rise"—Ford crafted it into a sequence of gothic eeriness. Mrs. Bell lies in a nightmarish, moonlit swamp, with twisted trees and overgrown weeds enveloped by a menacing fog, and while her corpse is kept off screen, the camera lingers on her bonnet, left hanging on the ruins of a wagon. Mrs. Bell's husband is a soldier in the column, and when he asks to see her body, Yorke refuses:

Corporal: But it's my wife, sir. If it was yours---Wouldn't you want to go?
Yorke is struck hard by this. It could have been his wife.
Yorke: Yes, I would. But if I had a friend, he'd keep me from going.

Obviously, the Indians despoiled the woman's body to such an extent that the mere sight of it would give her husband a lifetime of nightmares. Like Yorke, the rest of the soldiers are horrified and infuriated by the incident, as stage directions show: "Troopers look off to the right--at the burial party. They recognize what has happened. The faces of the men show horror, pity, anger---but, above all, a grim determination for revenge."  

While the Indians' rape and murder of Mrs. Bell is a violation of the family, so too is their abduction of the fort's children. During the attack on the wagon, the children are understandably terrified, and the screenplay includes a sequence in which an Indian intends to kill one of them while its mother looks on in horror: "SHOT of baby trying to crawl. An Indian brave rides towards baby, lance pointed down to spit the child," and a trooper saves the baby at the cost of his own life. Ford excised such an explicit scene from the finished film—the trooper dies while
firing at the onrushing Apaches in an attempt to let the wagons escape—but the Indians still kidnap the children, carrying them across the Rio Grande into Mexico. It is this act that finally leads Yorke to violate Mexican sovereignty in order to eliminate the Apaches as a threat. Occupying a Mexican village, the Apaches confine the children to a church while they engage in a stereotypical bout of drunken revelry. Prior to storming the town, Yorke sends a rescue mission to infiltrate the church. In a sequence heavy with symbolism, the soldiers use this house of God as a fortress, ringing its bell and firing through the cross-shaped embrasures in its window shutters, to protect the children and the future for America that they represent. Unlike the Indians in *Fort Apache*, who are motivated by white treachery, or even those in *She Wore a Yellow Ribbon*, who the army defeats nonviolently, the Apaches in *Rio Grande* are irredeemable, and thus Yorke and his men wipe them out completely.  

**Figure #17**: The result of Indian savagery: the moonlit swamp and ruined wagon where Yorke's column finds the despoiled body of Mrs. Bell in *Rio Grande*.  

33
It is unsurprising that the Indians prey upon women and children because the film's central theme is the importance of the family. In this way, it differs significantly from its source material, Bellah's short story "Mission with No Name." That story deals with the reconciliation between an estranged father and his son, not the whole family—Kathleen is only mentioned in passing—and thus the emphasis is upon the two men learning to understand each other. The film, on the other hand, focuses upon the reigniting of romance between Yorke and Kathleen, as well as the reunification of the entire family. During the Civil War, Sheridan ordered Yorke to burn his wife's Virginia plantation, Bridesdale, an act that destroyed their marriage. Ford drew from his own family history on this, as his wife's ancestors saw their South Carolina plantation burned by Sherman, a man the Maine-born Ford greatly admired. By following Sheridan's orders, Yorke did his duty at the cost of his family, which left him unfulfilled in his personal life. As Kathleen tells Jeff, his father is "a lonely man. A very lonely man." He has not seen his son for fifteen years while Jeff has no memory of his father, and after the boy flunks out of West Point and joins the army as an enlisted, he finds himself assigned to Yorke's regiment. Their first meeting is icy, with Yorke telling Jeff, "On the official record, you're my son. But on this post, you're just another trooper," to which Jeff replies, "I'm not on this post to call you 'father.' I was ordered here as Trooper Jefferson Yorke of the United States Cavalry, and that is all I wish to be."34

Jeff's assignment to Yorke's regiment provides the family a chance to be reconciled, for Kathleen arrives at the fort, seeking to buy him out of the army. Tension still exists between her and her estranged husband—she laments that Yorke's "sense of duty had to destroy two beautiful things, Bridesdale and us"—but eventually, a mutual concern over Jeff's wellbeing results in a rekindling of their romance. As Kathleen's relationship with Yorke blossoms once again, she
begins to take on an increasingly domestic appearance and role. Formerly an independently wealthy woman when separated from her husband, she begins to transform into a housewife, earning her keep at the fort by washing soldiers' laundry and wearing simple work clothes, her hair caught up in a scarf, rather than the lovely dresses befitting a woman of her position in society. Yet, she remains an officer's wife through it all, at one point entertaining two of Yorke's lieutenants who sip coffee and chat with her while she irons clothes.³⁵

As the family slowly reforms, the film draws a stark dichotomy between gender roles within it. Kathleen is stereotypically motherly toward Jeff, fussing over his bruises suffered in a fist fight and trying to get him out of his military service so that he can achieve a more respectable place in life. Yorke, on the other hand, provides fatherly discipline, demanding more of his son than he does of other soldiers. Although it is within his power to grant Jeff's release from the army, Yorke tells Kathleen that he will not do so in order that their son learn the importance of honoring his commitments. This is not to say that Yorke is unconcerned with his son—he is obviously worried when Jeff crashes from his horse after attempting a jump and when he gets into a fistfight with another soldier—but that, unlike Kathleen, he is willing to let Jeff take his lumps in order to grow into a man. As a woman, she is too soft on her son, as a man, he is too hard, but together, they moderate each other's tendencies and form an ideal parental partnership.³⁶

Such a partnership is essential because Jeff is still a boy as the picture opens, in no small part because he grew up without a father, and he needs his parents' guidance to become a man. Jarman was only sixteen at the time of filming, and he looks every bit his age in comparison to the burly, grown men he acts alongside, particularly when he engages in a shirtless fistfight against a much stockier, older soldier. Jarman also adopted a habit of wiping his nose with the
Figure #18: The youthful appearance of Jeff (Claude Jarman) in *Rio Grande* is emphasized by his contrast with Trooper Heinze (Fred Kennedy) after their fistfight.

back of his hand when under stress, a tic that serves to increase Jeff's callow, childlike appearance. Throughout the film, Jeff remains more a boy than man, and Yorke gets to see a bit of his son's youth that he missed when a doctor feeds Jeff castor oil and the boy reacts in disgust, much as would a child. Furthermore, Jeff does not actually fight the Indians during battles in *Rio Grande*, a duty handled by more mature men. During one Apache attack, for instance, he rides off for help while his friend Tyree (Ben Johnson) borrows Jeff's pistol and protects him from pursuing Indians. Likewise, during the film's climax, Jeff, alongside Tyree and Sandy (Carey, Jr.) are the three men who sneak into the church to protect the children, but while Tyree and Sandy fight, Jeff only reloads their guns and even accidentally discharges one of them, nearly shooting Sandy in the process. Only at the end of the battle, after Yorke is hit in the shoulder by an arrow, does Jeff finally reach manhood. As his fellow soldiers watch on and voice
encouragement, Jeff yanks the arrow from his father. This action finally reunited the family, as Yorke calls Jeff "son," rather than his standard "Trooper Yorke," and at the film's close, Jeff's reconciled parents watch with pride as their son receives a medal for valor.\textsuperscript{37}

The audience response to \textit{Rio Grande} indicates that, while some viewers still found plenty of enjoyment in a story of gallant cavalry fighting bloodthirsty Indians, others were growing tired of the subject matter in general, and Ford's repeated return to it, in particular. In his review of the picture for \textit{The Motion Picture Herald}, critic Fred Hift praised \textit{Rio Grande} as irresistible, noting its stirring portrayal of "the men of the U.S. cavalry who fought to protect the territory from the Indians." This is quite a telling analysis of any American Indian film, one developed from decades of revisionist history regarding the frontier, for Native Americans were the original residents of the territory, of course, and were actually the ones attempting to protect their lands from the cavalry's incursions, not vice versa. Some theater owners agreed with Hift, noting the entertainment value their audiences found in the film. Fred I. Lindau of the Valley Theatre, El Paso, Texas, simply wrote, "Excellent picture and excellent at B.O.," for example, while Tom S. Graff, of the Garland Theatre in Pollock Pines, California declared, "Without question this is the most important as well as finest production to be released by Republic," and explained that even if ticket sales were not as high as he expected, "Audience reaction, however, was excellent."\textsuperscript{38}

Yet others commented on how pervasive the cavalry picture had become in the postwar years, with some viewers clearly growing tired of it. As gossip columnist Hedda Hopper wrote, "The way the cavalry has been fighting Indians on the screen, you'd think studios would run out of themes or Indians. But, no, John Ford started the cycle with 'Fort Apache' and '[She Wore a] Yellow Ribbon,' and follows up with 'Rio Grande,' starring John Wayne." Similarly, while
praising *Rio Grande* in his *New York Times* review, Crowther called the film part of "John Ford's continuing war with the Red Man and his romance with the cavalry," and noted "Mr. Ford's vendetta against the Apaches." While the comments of Hopper and Crowther seem to show that they saw some life in the cavalry genre yet, feedback from other viewers demonstrate a growing disenchantment with it. *Time Magazine*'s review, for instance, complained that "*Rio Grande* continues the descent for Director John Ford into his latter-day role as scourge of the redskin and glorifier of the U.S. Cavalry," and noted that it featured "screeching Indian raids," among other clichéd content so familiar in Ford films. Likewise, Robert Cook of the Bungalow Theatre in St. Maries, Idaho wrote, "I think they have just about squeezed the last possible story out of the post-Civil War cavalry."³⁹

Throughout all three movies of his cavalry trilogy, Ford utilized both the bloodthirsty and noble savage images of Indians, at times in the same film. *Fort Apache* focused upon the honorable Cochise and the wrongs done to his people by white America, only slightly counterbalancing his nobility with the untrustworthy Geronimo, while *Rio Grande* dealt with entirely bloodthirsty Apaches, unrepentant monsters who preyed upon women and children, again only slightly counterbalancing them with brief mentions of brave Navajo scouts. *She Wore a Yellow Ribbon* attempted the most even-handed approach, featuring the vicious Red Shirt, whose warriors committed terrifying atrocities, as well as the noble, if comical, Pony-That-Walks. While these three movies perpetuated the dichotomous views of the American Indian, they did not do so to tell stories about those Indians, or to feature them as characters, but rather to further stories about white protagonists. Just as Ford had done with *Stagecoach*, the Indians in these movies serve a specific purpose, principally to make possible the construction of American families. Each of the three pictures focused upon the family, and the Indian Wars made those
families possible. *Fort Apache* deals with the contrast between a "good" family, the O'Rourkes, and a "poor" one, as well as the founding of a new one comprised of each family's offspring, *She Wore a Yellow Ribbon* sees Brittles as a father figure to his troops and the creation of a new family through the romance between Olivia and Cohill, and *Rio Grande* shows the reconciliation of a broken family. In all three instances, the Indians, be they noble or bloodthirsty, provide the backdrop against which the drama of these white families play out.

**The Indian as a Guide for Family Building: *Hondo***

Like the Indians in Ford's cavalry trilogy, the Apaches in *Hondo* play a role in the creation of an Anglo-American family, but they are not simply an outside force that pushes the family together. Rather, the Apaches' chief, Vittorio, plays an active role in the construction of the new unit, guiding and protecting the white protagonists so that their young son can reach his potential as a man. The film focuses upon the creation of a new family, as army scout Hondo (Wayne) becomes a husband to Angie (Geraldine Page) and father to her son, Johnny (Lee Acker), after Angie's cowardly husband abandons them. Even as Hondo comes to love Angie and Johnny, Vittorio (Michael Pate) takes an interest in the boy, too, for he is impressed by Johnny's courage. The seemingly omnipresent Vittorio advises Hondo on how to be a good father and then dies in battle with the cavalry, while the new family departs for Hondo's ranch in California. In this way, the film not only demonstrates the significance of the American family during the postwar era, but also the importance of a loving father who would nurture his children, a view that became increasingly prevalent during the Cold War.40

This conception of a caring father who was deeply involved in the lives and development of his children grew during the 1950s, supplanting previous ideas of fathers as distant authority
figures and disciplinarians. Being a husband and father became an essential marker for any
American man, and psychologists insisted that fatherhood was not simply a job for "sissies." As
Griswold writes, "The willingness to shoulder the responsibilities of fatherhood and
breadwinning was the hallmark of mature manhood in the 1950s." Furthermore, the era
advocated compassionate fathers who, by maintaining a close relationship with their offspring,
could provide the guidance needed to teach their children proper values. In Griswold's words,
"Fathers need not adopt a gruff, authoritative posture . . . Instead, sons and daughters profited
from nurturing fathers who exemplified for both what modern masculinity should be."

According to this new mindset, fathers should spend time with their children, rather than leaving
all the chores of parenting to their wives. In so doing, they would teach their sons what it meant
to be men and their daughters what they should expect from other men in their lives. As
historian K.A. Cuordileone writes, "The compassionate dad would be a 'pal' to his son,
cultivating a close, affectionate relationship that would eventually instill in the boy a sense of the
values and behaviors appropriate to a well-adjusted American male." Popular culture of the era
demonstrated the expected conduct of postwar men, with the fathers on Leave it to Beaver and
Father Knows Best, among other television shows, serving as loving, involved role models who
taught their boys right from wrong, rather than disciplining them like tyrants. 41

This fatherly influence was essential during the postwar era because the nation was also
wracked with fears that its urban and suburban society was having an emasculating effect upon
boys. In Cuordileone's words, Americans were worried "that urban middle-class boys were
living a pampered, 'namby-pamby' existence, surrounded by excessive female influences at home
and at school and undisciplined by the rugged, outdoor lifestyle that had once turned boys into
men." Masculine fathers were essential because American society had changed from a rural one,
which by its very nature turned boys into men, into an urban and suburban one that surrounded boys with all sorts of feminizing influences. This was of particular importance because, during the 1940s and '50s, housewife mothers spent far more time with their children than did breadwinning fathers, busy as they were with work. Thus, boys needed involved, active fathers to counterbalance the impact their omnipresent mothers had upon their lives, and without it, they were doomed. As May notes, if boys only experienced the feminine influence of the mother, without the masculine parenting of the father, "The unhappy result would be 'sissies,' who were allegedly likely to become homosexuals, 'perverts,' and the dupes of communists. Fathers had to make sure this would not happen to their sons." Thus, fathers were essential not only to teach their sons proper values, but also to counteract the feminizing effects of housewife mothers and female teachers. Only with such masculine influence, could America produce the sort of men who could defeat communism and win the Cold War, and it is this sort of guidance that Vittorio insists Johnny receive, and that Hondo ultimately provides.42

At the beginning of Hondo, Johnny is in desperate need of such a caring father, for Ed Lowe (Leo Gordon) is a selfish coward who has abandoned his family to their fate at the hands of the Apaches. Yet initially, Hondo is not capable of filling that role because he lives by a creed of pure independence. His near-feral dog, Sam, serves as a symbol of this independence, and Hondo does not even acknowledge that Sam is his pet, only explaining that "he stays with me." He will not allow Angie to feed the dog because he forces Sam to hunt for his own food: "Sam's independent. He doesn't need anybody. I want him to stay that way. It's a good way," and when Angie suggests that "everyone needs someone," Hondo replies, "Yes, most everyone. Too bad, isn't it?" He is so committed to his creed of personal independence that he refuses to tell anyone what to do, even if it mean they might be hurt. For instance, when Johnny tries to pet the vicious
Sam, Hondo warns the boy that the dog will bite him, but then simply adds, "But you do what you want to do." In spite of his independence, however, Hondo quickly demonstrates that he is capable of filling the role of Johnny's father and Angie's husband, as the film establishes a strict separation of the genders. Angie busies herself with domestic chores, cooking and caring for Johnny, while Hondo deals with work around the ranch that has gone undone since Ed's departure, including re-shoeing horses and breaking a wild stallion. Angie claims that she is capable of handling any ranch work aside from sharpening an axe—a job that Hondo does, as well—but the poor condition of her spread shows otherwise. She may be a strong and resourceful woman, but she is still a woman and needs a man.43

Hondo is not the only man to take an interest in Angie and her son, for the noble Vittorio soon does, as well. Even before he makes his first appearance, the audience learns that the chief and his people are justified in going to war, for as Hondo explains, "We broke the treaty, us whites. There's no word in Apache for 'lie,' and they've been lied to." The Indians make a fearsome on-screen entrance, thundering onto Angie's ranch and surrounding her cabin after Hondo has left to report in to the army. The screenplay indicates a similar impressive introductory shot as that given to Cochise in Fort Apache: "The face of Vittorio, strong and forbidding, the war paint making his countenance even more impressive." When one of the Apaches threatens Angie, Johnny defends his mother with a huge pistol, an act that so impresses Vittorio that he makes the boy his blood brother, naming him Small Warrior and adopting him into his tribe. Vittorio explains to Angie that his own sons are dead—"White man kill them"—and he comes to see Johnny as a replacement, taking the boy for rides and even slipping into the cabin at night to check on him. As he tells Angie, "Wikiup empty without sons. Mine empty wikiup." Because Johnny is part of his extended family, Vittorio is concerned with his
upbringing and troubled that Angie is raising him on her own. Just as Americans in the 1950s believed that a boy who only had his mother's influence would not grow up into a well-adjusted man, so, too does Vittorio, declaring that "Small Warrior should have father."\(^{44}\)

![Figure #19: "I call him Small Warrior." The noble Vittorio (Michael Pate) presents his new blood brother, Johnny (Lee Acker) to Angie (Geraldine Page) in Hondo.](image)

All of this is a departure from the Louis L'Amour story "The Gift of Cochise," upon which the movie was based. In it, the Apaches actually attack Angie's ranch and it is her courage, not Johnny's, that impresses Cochise (whose name was changed to the fictional Vittorio for the film). As a reward for her bravery and skill, Cochise rewards her with a husband in the form of Ches Lane (whose name was changed to Hondo), a man who has been searching the West for Angie to repay her for her husband dying while helping him in a gun battle. The emphasis on family and fatherhood is utterly absent from L'Amour's story, as is the chief's concern for, and adoption of, Johnny, and those central themes of the movie were invented by the filmmakers.\(^{45}\)
Despite Vittorio's nobility, however, he is still a savage, and so are his people. The screenplay, for instance, refers to Indians speaking in Apache through disrespectful substitutes such as "jabbering" and "glub, glub, glub." Moreover, Vittorio reveals his primitive ways when he demands that Angie take one of his warriors as her new husband. As each demonstrates his skill on horseback through a series of stunts, Vittorio extols the man's qualities: "This is the one I was calling Emiliano. Very brave, has taken many scalps. Has six horses and two squaws, but one old and will soon die." Angie is horrified at the prospect of marrying an Apache stranger, and while Vittorio may understand that "it's not good for Small Warrior to be without father to teach him how to be a man," he is a savage and does not understand the importance of love in making a successful family. 

Figure #20: One of Vittorio's Apaches demonstrates his skill in an attempt to win Angie's hand in marriage in *Hondo*.

While Vittorio is a consummate noble savage, his lieutenant, Silva (Rodolfo Acosta), is a bloodthirsty one who serves as Hondo's primary nemesis throughout the film. Silva, who the
screenplay describes as "a mean-looking bastard" is the man who threatens Angie when the Apaches first arrive at her ranch, and as stage directions indicate, he is a vicious murderer:

 Silva pauses an instant to grin at Vittorio and touches the top of his head and also the mane of Vittorio's palomino—he is obviously comparing Angie's blond scalp to the palomino mane. . . . Silva turns away from Angie and toward [Johnny] at the same time holding up two fingers for Vittorio and pointing to the palomino's mane. This fellow is looking forward to a pair of matched trophies for his deerskin mantelpiece.

Later, when the Apaches capture Hondo, Silva gleefully tortures him, smiling evilly as he places a burning coal in Hondo's hand. Even after Vittorio orders Hondo freed, mistakenly believing him to be Angie's missing husband, Silva demands satisfaction. The adversaries face off in a knife fight and the screenplay again demonstrates the Apaches' savagery as they watch the brutal combat, "The Indians are happy. This is the Santa Anita handicap to them." Hondo wins the fight, sparing Silva's life, and in retribution, the sadistic Indian kills Sam, running the dog through with his lance.  

Just as Sam symbolized Hondo's independence, the dog's death symbolizes the end of that independence. Having been forced to kill the duplicitous Ed earlier in the film, Hondo willingly takes the man's place as husband to Angie and father to Johnny. Ed had shirked his fatherly responsibilities, but Hondo fills the role admirably, showing the boy how to fish with the sun in his face so he does not cast a shadow, and teaching him to swim by throwing him in a river. Angie panics when he does this, fearing Johnny will drown, and her reaction reveals the boy's need for a father. Without Hondo to counteract her over-protectiveness, she would smother her son, but with Hondo present, Johnny can learn the lessons he needs to become a man. Furthermore, Hondo benefits from having a family as much as Johnny benefits from having a father. As he tells Angie, "Other night, after you went to sleep, he crawled up into my bunk and put his arms around my neck. Made me feel kinda funny, like he was depending on
me." Thus, Hondo reflects the postwar era's belief that family and fatherhood was not simply a necessary undertaking for men, but it was a rewarding one, as well. Vittorio looms over the construction of this new family, watching Hondo's treatment of Johnny and advising him on how to be a good father: "Watch like the hawk, be patient as the beaver, brave as the puma, that he may learn well." Vittorio even tests Hondo's worth by demanding that he give false information to the cavalry on the Apaches' movements. When Hondo refuses, the noble Vittorio is impressed, rather than angered, for this honesty shows that Hondo is a trustworthy figure who will make a good father for Johnny.\(^4\)

Vittorio may have played a significant role in the construction of this new nuclear family, but Hondo retains the same hypocrisy that marred the noble savage films of the 1930s. The picture repeatedly stresses that whites wronged Vittorio and his Indians by breaking a treaty and killing the chief's sons, and Hondo even mentions in passing that he is part-Indian himself, a character trait that never amounts to anything of significance in the story. Moreover, he was married to an Apache woman and lived among her people for five years, and, at the end of the picture, laments that the army will soon arrive in force to defeat the Apaches: "End of a way of life. Too bad, good way." Yet, for all of Hondo's admiration of the Indians, he still fights against them. He kills several Apaches before they capture and torture him, and, at the end of the film, after Vittorio is slain by the army, he leads a collection of soldiers and settlers in a running battle against the Indians, who are now commanded by Silva. These Apaches are in the right, they have no quarrel with Hondo himself, yet they still fight him because they are Indians and he is a white man. In essence, Vittorio may be a noble savage, but, like Cochise in Fort Apache and Crazy Horse in They Died with Their Boos On, he is an Indian, and thus an enemy of white America. Furthermore, as Vittorio dies near the end of the film, Hondo even endorses the
stereotype of the vanishing Indian, with the noble chief departing the scene, leaving the frontier to white America and, specifically, Hondo's new family.⁴⁹

Promotional material further minimized the importance of Vittorio and presented Hondo as a standard western involving cowboys fighting Indians. A photo essay in Life Magazine, for instance, includes the caption "Redskin Bites the Dust . . . Paleface Bites the Dust" and features stills of the knife fight between Hondo and Silva, as well as an Apache being shot off his horse. The article notes that Hondo is a western with a moral, "Something about truth vs. falsity and the sad passing of Indian culture. But the moral gets second billing to some of the most nonmoral, nonpsychological physical violence of good guys vs. bad guys to be filmed in a long time."

Likewise, a synopsis in The Los Angeles Times refers to Hondo as the "Story of a man who, nursed back to health by a rancher window and her son after being tortured by marauding Apaches and who, in later saving their lives during an Indian raid, discovers that he has found a family for himself." While this does lay out the bare bones of the story, it misleads the reader by suggesting that the film is entirely about a white man battling Indians. Even the script for the film's trailer makes no mention of Vittorio or the Apaches, only dealing with Hondo's toughness and his romance with Angie.⁵⁰

Audience feedback indicates that, despite Vittorio's major role in the movie, viewers saw him as an afterthought, much as the promotional material had. Reviews largely portrayed Hondo as a cowboys vs. Indians movie, acknowledging the relationship between Hondo and Angie but presenting Vittorio and the Apaches as stereotypical bloodthirsty savages. Newsweek's review noted, "As one might expect, James Edward Grant's screenplay . . . plunges into Indian fighting and other abrasions and contusions. . . . [Hondo] encounter[s] some posers from the Indians, including a knife duel with a singularly malignant brave." Furthermore, Arthur Knight, the critic
for *The Saturday Review* complained that the picture’s love story got in the way of the sort of cowboys and Indians fighting expected in a western, writing, "Small wonder everyone seems relieved when the Indians finally hit the warpath and all the love palaver can give way to solid action." One critic did appear to note *Hondo*’s nuanced approach to the Indians, however, as the review in *Variety* reveals: "[The film] depicts a conflict of interests rather than an individual battle of good vs. evil. . . . The views of the Apaches are forcefully revealed in 'Hondo.' Vittorio, the Apache chief, is shown as a just leader, concerned with the problems of his people and bewildered by the white man's violations of treaties." Regardless of whether audiences understood the complex and sympathetic presentation of Indians contained in *Hondo*, Wayne's presence ensured that the film would be a hit—Annamae Adams of Canton, Ohio, informed Warner Bros. that "There was only two days of publicity in our paper concerning this picture, but on the opening day there was a line one large block long. When John Wayne is mentioned, that is all people need"—but as Elaine S. George of the Star Theatre in Heppner, Oregon noted, it received "A few complaints that it too closely resembled 'Shane,'" the similarly family-themed western released a few months earlier.\(^5\)

Like the films of the cavalry trilogy, *Hondo* is a movie that is deeply concerned with the nuclear family, but it further demonstrates the importance placed upon fatherhood after World War II. Americans began seeing fatherhood as a noble and fulfilling endeavor during these years, believing that fathers should be caring nurturers rather than cold disciplinarians. *Hondo* comes to embrace family life during the movie, understanding the rewards it offers him while providing Angie and Johnny with the husband and father that each of them need. As with the cavalry trilogy, the Indians in *Hondo* play a role in this process, but while Ford's Indians merely served as the backdrop against which family building occurred, Vittorio is directly involved in
the process. By demanding that Angie take a husband so that Johnny will have the father he needs, the Apache chief expresses the era's concern that boys could not develop properly without a male role model to guide them. In this way, Vittorio is a far more proactive character than most of the Hollywood Indians who came before him, for he exerts a positive influence upon the story and its white protagonists. Despite this, however, he is still subservient to those white characters, and although he is a noble savage, he and his Apaches remain in the role of adversaries to them, while the bloodthirsty Silva balances Vittorio's decency. The Indians may be justified in their anger over white treachery, but like those in *Fort Apache* and, more than a decade earlier, *They Died with Their Boots On*, they form an obstacle to American civilization. These elements, reflective of the hypocrisy present throughout the American Indian film, led many viewers to overlook Vittorio's decency, as well as the pivotal role he played in the construction of the new American family, instead seeing *Hondo* as standard cowboys vs. Indians fare.

**Conclusion**

During the years after World War II, American society and culture were preoccupied with the nuclear family. From a financial standpoint, the booming economy meant that Americans could afford to get married and buy homes in the suburbs. While this security provided the opportunity to start families, the Cold War and changes in the workplace provided the impetus. The omnipresent threat of nuclear war left Americans feeling helpless, while the increasingly corporate and bureaucratic economy left men feeling emasculated. A family living in a house in the suburbs offered a solution to these psychological crises. Children gave their parents hope for the future in the face of the hydrogen bomb, while a home provided men with a
sense of control in their lives that their jobs lacked. The result was that Americans married younger and had more children at younger ages than at any other point in the nation's history. Moreover, notions of fatherhood changed during this era, as well. Rather than the more traditional concept of a father as a cold, distant disciplinarian, fatherhood in the postwar era became focused on men being warm and nurturing parents. Fatherhood was seen as a noble and fulfilling role, the most important job a man could undertake. Americans believed that, with involved, caring fathers, the nation's boys would grow up to be the sort of strong, well-adjusted men the United States needed in order to defeat communism, but without such guidance, they would fall under the smothering influence of their mothers, slipping into perversions and homosexuality.

In presenting their family-focused stories, the American Indian movies of the postwar years retained the noble and bloodthirsty dichotomy established during the preceding decades. However, while earlier films presented Indians as one or the other, the pictures of the cavalry trilogy included both. Cochise and his Indians in *Fort Apache* were noble savages, driven to war by the white man's abuses, but the inclusion of the bloodthirsty Geronimo as a minor character counterbalanced their decency. Conversely, the renegades in *She Wore a Yellow Ribbon* were primarily bloodthirsty savages, monstrous killers who reveled in torture and murder, but the film attempted to offset them with the noble Pony-That-Walks, even if he ended up more of a comical, rather than dignified, character on screen. Lastly, *Rio Grande* presented its Apaches as the most vicious and bloodthirsty of any in the three films, raping women, kidnapping children, and mutilating soldiers. Yet even that film included a brief mention of heroic Navajo scouts who fought on the side of the cavalry. Despite their importance in moving these films along, however, the Indians simply remained story elements, and the wars they fought against the
United States, whether justified or not, were just the backdrop against which the melodrama of the pictures' white protagonists played out. That melodrama was largely concerned with the construction of families. *Fort Apache* contrasts the loving O'Rourkes with the glory-hungry Thursday and concludes with Michael, Philadelphia and their son as the consummate young American family, while *She Wore a Yellow Ribbon* focuses upon Brittes' fatherly guidance of his troops, as well as the love triangle between the two young lieutenants, Cohill and Pennell, and Olivia, the woman they both pursue. *Rio Grande* is the most explicit of the three in its family building, with the Apache raid leading to the reconciliation of the Yorkes, as Kirby and Kathleen reunite while Kirby reconnects with his long-estranged son.

Family, and more specifically, fatherhood, is the central theme of *Hondo*, as well. Burdened with a cowardly, worthless father, Johnny needs a good man who will help him grow up right, and Hondo fills that role admirably. He takes on the jobs around the ranch that Angie is incapable of doing, both manual chores, such as splitting wood, and parental tasks, like teaching Johnny to swim. This family-centric focus resembles that of the cavalry trilogy, but unlike that film, *Hondo* features an Indian who plays a central role in the creation of this new, white family. Vittorio is a noble savage, dignified in bearing and wronged by white treachery, as was Cochise in *Fort Apache*, but once he adopts Johnny into his tribe, he is as concerned with the boy's upbringing as he is with his own people's survival. He orders Angie to take a husband who will help Johnny mature into a good man, and once Hondo joins the family, he tests him and advises him, ensuring that Johnny will have a caring, and nurturing father. Thus, Vittorio is a different sort of Indian than those of Ford's films, or most American Indian films that came before, as he is a character who actually affects the story, rather than simply serving as its backdrop. Yet the film retained the noble-bloodthirsty dichotomy, for Vittorio, however noble, is still a savage, and
his death leaves the West to Hondo and his white family. While one critic noted recognized the complexities of Vittorio's character, most viewers missed those nuances, reducing *Hondo*, and the films of the cavalry trilogy, for that matter, to their most basic level. They saw them as simple cowboys or cavalry vs. Indian stories, and even complained if romance, family-building or nonviolence got in the way of the bloody battles between whites and Indians that they still saw an entertainment.

Other American Indian films made during the postwar era were similarly preoccupied with issues of family. *The Last Outpost* (Paramount, 1951), for instance, dealt with two brothers fighting on opposite sides of the Civil War who unite their forces to defeat an Indian uprising, while *The Tin Star* (Paramount, 1957) features a cynical, widowed bounty hunter who is regenerated by the love of a woman and her half-Indian son. Furthermore, *The Last Frontier* (Columbia, 1955) deals with a barbaric mountain man who becomes an army scout to fight Indians, and is tamed by the combined efforts of the military and the love of a good woman into becoming a productive member of society. Each of these pictures dealt with the construction or reunion of American families, as did the four films discussed in this chapter, and each also featured Indians in varying, but minor, roles. Even Vittorio, as much as he expresses the film's views regarding the importance of fatherhood, serves to support the movie's white protagonists. With their focus on the white, nuclear family, these movies kept Indians in the background, where they had been throughout the 1930s, but they would finally begin to emerge as significant characters in a different set of films made during the postwar era, ones that dealt with the burgeoning civil rights movement.\(^{52}\)
4 May, 23, 24.
6 Coontz, 31-2; Maureen Honey, Creating Rosie the Riveter: Class, Gender and Propaganda During World War II (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1984); May, 79-83; Skolnick, 52.
As Coontz writes, "Women who could not walk the fine line between nurturing motherhood and castrating 'momism,' or who had trouble adjusting to 'creative homemaking,' were labeled neurotic, perverted, or schizophrenic," and further noted that "institutionalization and sometimes electric shock treatments were used to force women to accept their domestic roles and their husbands' dictates. Shock treatments were also recommended for women who sought abortion, on the assumption that failure to want a baby signified dangerous emotional distress." Coontz, 32.
7 Coontz, 24, 29; Griswold, 191; May, 62, 67, 146, 160.
8 Fort Apache; She Wore a Yellow Ribbon. While the films of the cavalry trilogy were released in three consecutive years, Ford did not make them in succession, as he directed other projects in between making each entry. According to Ford, She Wore a Yellow Ribbon was Gen. Douglas MacArthur's favorite movie, and he watched it "at least once a month and never got tired of seeing it." He also suggested that MacArthur's most famous quote, "Old soldiers never die, they just fade away," was inspired by Capt. Brittles' retirement speech near the end of the film. Libby, 48; Claude-Jean Philippe, "Telerama's Exclusive Interview with John Ford in the Flesh," in John Ford Interviews, ed. Peary, 97.
Ford sent a number of love letters to O'Hara between 1950 and 1951, and O'Hara later explained that she believed that he became infatuated with her while writing the screenplay for The Quiet Man, as he was projecting his feelings for that film's female lead, who O'Hara was to play, onto O'Hara herself.
11 Fort Apache; Fort Apache Production Notes, 2, Box 5, Folder 8, John Ford Papers, Lilly Library, University of Indiana-Bloomington; Michele Mott, "Old John Ford Talks about Westerns," in John Ford Interviews, ed. Peary, 108. For information on the Fort Grant Massacre, see Karl Jacoby, Shadows at Dawn: A Borderlands Massacre and the Violence of History (New York: Penguin Press, 2008). Nugent admitted that he knew nothing about the West, or the conflicts between the United States and Native Americans, when Ford hired him to write Fort Apache. Therefore, Ford sent him on a seven week tour of the Southwest, "to Tombstone and Apache Pass and Cochise's Stronghold and to the pathetic little markers showing where men had been spreadeagled and submitted to the small Apache torture fires." After returning, Ford asked Nugent if he understood western history, and when Nugent said he did, Ford replied, "Now forget everything you've read and we'll start writing a movie about the cavalry." Nugent, X5.
12 Capt. Kirby Calvin York character biography, Box 5, Folder 8, John Ford Papers; Fort Apache.
13 Fort Apache; John Ricker, Indian agent character biography, Box 5, Folder 8, John Ford Papers; Frank S. Nugent, Fort Apache screenplay, undated, 95, Box 5, Folder 8, John Ford Papers.

Fort Apache; War Party storyline, undated, 4, Box 5, Folder 8, John Ford Papers. War Party was the original working title of Fort Apache, although the James Warner Bellah short story "War Party" was the basis for She Wore a Yellow Ribbon. Fort Apache itself was based on another Bellah story, "Massacre."

War Party storyline, 1; Cochise character biography.


Nugent and Stallings, 106-7; James Warner Bellah, She Wore a Yellow Ribbon treatment, undated, 53-4, 83, Box 5, Folder 16, John Ford Papers.

She Wore a Yellow Ribbon; Nugent and Stallings, 142.

Fort Apache; Nugent, Fort Apache screenplay, 22; Sgt. Major Miles Breffini O'Rourke character biography, Box 5, Folder 8, John Ford Papers.

Brevet Major General Owen Thursday, U.S.A. character biography, Box 5, Folder 8, John Ford Papers; War Party storyline, 1, 2.

Bellah, "Massacre," Saturday Evening Post 219, no. 34 (February 22, 1947): 18-19, 140-46, Miscellaneous Folder, John Ford Papers; Fort Apache; Michael Breffini O'Rourke character biography, Box 5, Folder 8, John Ford Papers; Miss Philadelphia Thursday character biography, Box 5, Folder 8, John Ford Papers.

Bellah, She Wore a Yellow Ribbon treatment, 1-2, 72; She Wore a Yellow Ribbon.


Rigo Grande.

McBride, 372; Rigo Grande.

Rigo Grande; Joseph I. Breen, letter to Allen Wilson, dated May 12, 1950, Correspondence File, John Ford Papers.

James Kevin McGuinness, Rigo Grande shooting script, dated May 5, 1950, Box 5, Folder 27, John Ford Papers.

Rigo Grande; McGuinness, 94, 94A, 94B. Pages 94A and 94B are revisions, dated May 24, 1950; Rigo Grande.

McGuinness, 83, Rigo Grande.

Bellah, "Mission with No Name," undated, Box 5, Folder 27, John Ford Papers; McBride, 505; Rigo Grande. Despite being born in Maine and having great admiration for Sherman, Ford was "a Confederate sympathizer" according to Nugent. In part, this stemmed from the experiences of his uncle, Michael Connolly, who was tricked into joining the Union army almost immediately after arriving in the United States from Ireland. Incensed at the deception, Connolly deserted at the first opportunity and fought for the Confederacy, instead. Nugent, "Hollywood's Favorite Rebel," 264.

Rigo Grande.

Ibid.

Ibid.


40 *Hondo*.


42 Cuordileone, 10, 130; May, 97, 146, 147-48; Griswold, 209.

43 *Hondo*.

44 James Edward Grant, *Hondo* script, undated, 27, folder 1941, Box B00196, Warner Bros. Archive, School of Cinematic Arts, University of Southern California; *Hondo*.


46 Grant, 28, 47; *Hondo*.

47 Grant, 28-29, 51; *Hondo*.

48 *Hondo*.

49 Ibid.


Chapter Four
"In a Hundred Years it Might’ve Worked:"
American Indian Films and Civil Rights, 1945 – 1960

In Devil's Doorway (MGM, 1950), Indian protagonist Lance Poole, aka Broken Lance, fights for racial equality with tragic consequences. Despite being a decorated veteran of the Union army in the Civil War, he still is disrespected by many of the whites who live near him. Poole dreams of turning Sweet Meadows, the pastoral valley his people have called home for centuries, into a thriving ranch, but a bigoted lawyer rallies white ranchers, the law, and eventually even the army, against Poole, simply because he cannot bear to see an Indian succeed. Initially facing this opposition with great poise, Poole eventually turns to violence, using force to defend his land from the white men who would take it from him. A climactic battle pitting Poole and his Indian allies against the army and the local whites destroys his ranch, and the mortally wounded Poole stumbles from the rubble of his ranch house before collapsing dead in the flaming ruins of Sweet Meadow. In this way, Devil's Doorway represents a departure from American Indian films of the past and a new focus for the genre, for it was part of a wave of pictures made during the 1950s that dealt with the issue of civil rights, confronted the evils of racism, and demanded fair treatment for the nation's minorities. ¹

While some American Indian movies made during the early-1950s focused upon the theme of the Cold War family analyzed in chapter three, others dealt with what would become the primary domestic issue of the decade: race relations. Hollywood began to engage with issues of civil rights after World War II and American Indian films served as an ideal platform for the
subject. With their stories set in the past, films confronted issues of race in allegorical, rather than direct, ways, submerging their messages in the plot of the American Indian movie while still depicting the ugliness of bigotry. Yet these movies also demonstrate the hypocrisy of postwar liberalism, for they offered equality on white America's terms, not those of the minorities in question. Nonetheless, they serve as important landmarks in the genre, for unlike earlier pictures, their Indians were not simply employed as plot devices, but instead began to emerge as actual characters and, in some cases, the films' protagonists.

Chapter four discusses four films made between 1950 and 1960 that deal with issues of racism and civil rights. Released in 1950, *Broken Arrow* (Twentieth Century-Fox) was one of Hollywood's first forays into the civil rights-oriented American Indian film. With its story of a retired army scout negotiating peace with the Apaches, and in the process becoming good friends with their chief and falling in love with an Indian maiden, it presented an optimistic vision of race relations in America. It idealistically argued that even if some bigots resist, good intentions and good will on both sides can bridge the racial divide. The movie's Indians remain supporting characters for the white protagonist, and in many ways, they are idealized noble stereotypes, but they are far more significant than Indians in most films of the genre up until that point. While *Broken Arrow* is told from the perspective of a white man, *Devil's Doorway*, released later in 1950, focuses upon an Indian protagonist. It is a far darker and more tragic film, detailing the terrible toll bigotry takes upon Poole, as white racism forces him to become an intransigent, radicalized outlaw. Finally, two films starring Burt Lancaster and produced by his production company reveal the negative influence commercialization could exert upon "message movies." *Apache* (United Artists, 1954) focuses on the one-man war fought by the last renegade Apache against white America, presenting its protagonist as a wronged man who simply wants to be able
to live the life he wishes, while depicting this conflict not as the actions of an illegal outlaw, but rather as a legitimate and justified war between two nations. *The Unforgiven* (United Artists, 1960) deals with a Texas community that turns upon one of its own members, the adopted daughter of a prominent family, when rumors emerge that she is an Indian. Both of these films reflected the progressive personal views of Lancaster and his directors, Robert Aldrich and John Huston, but decisions to make the films more marketable ended up muddying their messages.²

These American Indian films were part of a larger movement within Hollywood to confront bigotry after World War II. The war itself played a major role in redefining Hollywood's portrayal of minorities, for it prompted the film industry to present an image of a unified nation, one that saw all Americans as equals and drew a stark contrast with the ideology of the Nazis. To that end, the film industry replaced longstanding negative stereotypes, such as the faithful African American and the miserly Jew, with more positive, if still stereotypical, portrayals of minorities as noble contributors to the war effort. Moreover, a series of social problem pictures emerged after the war, and these movies often dealt with prejudice. Films such as *Pinky* (Twentieth Century Fox, 1949) and *Home of the Brave* (United Artists, 1949) focused on racism against African Americans, the former dealing with a light-skinned black woman who must pass herself off as white in order to avoid discrimination, the latter with a black soldier who serves alongside racists in the Pacific. Likewise, the industry tackled anti-Semitism with *Crossfire* (RKO, 1947), in which a psychotic soldier murders a Jewish man, and *Gentleman's Agreement* (Twentieth Century Fox, 1947), which concerns a reporter who adopts a Jewish name in order to experience anti-Semitism first hand. As film historians David E. Wilt and Michael Shull note, "These films were undoubtedly produced for a variety of reasons, not all of them altruistic, and they are more well intentioned than realistic or groundbreaking, but the very fact
that they were made suggests a growing awareness of the societal problems that needed to be addressed."³

This era also saw Hollywood exploring the psychological strains and dislocation that faced the United States after World War II. The country underwent extraordinary upheaval during the war, including increased social and geographic mobility, the development of a booming consumer economy, and the redefinition of race and gender roles. Furthermore, the Cold War brought anxieties of its own, including the terror of atomic war and the paranoia of communist infiltration. New types of films, such as the psychodrama and the film noir referenced the fears of the time, revealing that dark flaws existed below the seemingly happy and prosperous facade of America. For instance, Jim (James Dean), the main character of Rebel without a Cause (Warner Bros., 1955) may lead a comfortably middle class life, but he is disgusted by his weak father and desperately needs a strong male role model. Likewise, Dixon Steele (Humphrey Bogart), the screenwriter protagonist of In a Lonely Place (Columbia, 1950) is so alienated by society that he drives away the only woman to ever love him, while Jeff (Robert Mitchum), the hardboiled hero of Out of the Past (RKO, 1947), sees his comfortable life doomed when his actions of years ago catch up to him. As film historian Steve Mintz writes, films such as these "metaphorically addressed many anxieties and apprehensions generated by [World War II]," including issues of race, family, and alienation.⁴

This emphasis on the psychic ravages of World War II and the postwar years found its way into the western genre, as well. Arguably beginning with The Ox-Bow Incident (Twentieth Century Fox, 1943), which concerns a posse lynching three men for a murder they did not commit, the psychological western represented a significant departure from the kid-friendly, action-packed movies that audiences generally associated with the genre. These dark, serious
films featured complex characters, such as John Wayne's obsessively driven cattleman in *Red River* (United Artists, 1948), and grappled with adult themes, such as the cowardice of the townspeople in *High Noon* (United Artists, 1952). Furthermore, during these years, James Stewart, the star of *Broken Arrow*, subverted his squeaky-clean, good guy image by uniting with his friend, Anthony Mann, the director of *Devil's Doorway*, for a series of psychological westerns, including *Winchester '73* (Universal, 1950), *Bend of the River* (Universal, 1952), and *The Naked Spur* (MGM, 1953). Philip Scheuer of *The Los Angeles Times* argued in a 1950 article that *Broken Arrow* and *Devil's Doorway* were part of this industry-wide trend focused on "a new, almost masochistic preoccupation with death, both sudden and lingering." Those pictures, along with the likes of *Apache* and *The Unforgiven*, were not unique to this era, but rather represented a union of two movements within Hollywood: the civil rights-focused social problem film and the complex, adult-oriented psychological western.\(^5\)

**Postwar Native American Policy**

While these new trends were appearing within the film industry, the postwar era also saw a drastic shift in federal policy toward Native Americans. After more than a decade of John Collier's approach, which sought to regenerate and protect tribal identity and culture, the Bureau of Indian Affairs reversed course, adopting "termination" as its central policy. Termination sought to end both the federal government's stewardship of Native American tribes and the special status Native Americans held under the law, bringing about their final assimilation into mainstream society as taxpaying citizens. In 1948, acting commissioner of Indian Affairs William Zimmerman, Jr. set out a plan for termination based upon the economic and cultural readiness of individual tribes. This process was endorsed by the Hoover Commission, an
advisory committee created by President Truman, which advocated assimilation for all Native Americans. In the words of Prucha, the commission suggested "complete integration of the Indians into the mass of the population as taxpaying citizens, and until that could occur it wanted the social programs for Indians to be transferred to the state governments." Dillon S. Myer, who assumed the post of Commissioner of Indian Affairs in 1950, was also an avid supporter of termination, and in 1952, he began a survey of all tribes to determine which would ready for the process to begin. Native American rights activists, including Collier himself, argued fervently against termination, believing that it would undo decades of progress in regenerating cultural and tribal identity, but because Myer had the support of like-minded politicians in Congress, those protests were to no avail.6

When campaigning for president in 1952, Dwight D. Eisenhower supported termination but promised that it would only go into effect for tribes that wanted it. After his election, however, his administration adopted it wholesale as its policy toward Native Americans, regardless of individual tribes' feelings on the matter. In Congress, few members cared about the issue, and those who did were largely conservatives from western states. These congressmen were ardent proponents of individualism and private property who conflated the communal nature of Native American tribes, and their shared ownership of land, with the evils of communism. Under the guidance of these conservatives, the termination policy would lead to the end of federal welfare programs and the protection of Native American lands, and placed criminal and civil court cases under state, not tribal, jurisdiction. However, when it actually went into effect in 1954, termination was a disaster, taking years longer than expected and resulting in cultural and economic ruin for Native Americans. Unfortunately, by viewing the issue through the prism of their conservative world view, rather than the reality of the situation,
the pro-termination officials in Congress and the Eisenhower administration underestimated the massive difficulties faced by even the most seemingly assimilated tribes when the federal government removed its support. By the mid-1950s, the troubles with termination and increasing Native American activism led to the involvement of more liberal members of Congress, and the government finally abandoned the policy by the end of the decade. Ultimately, termination galvanized the Native American rights movement of the 1960s and '70s for, as Prucha writes, "Opposition to the policy became a rallying point for Indian groups, and it unified Indian voices in a new and remarkable way. 'Termination' became a hated word." During the 1950s, however, the government's endorsement of assimilation into white society found its way into many American Indian films.  

The Postwar Civil Rights Movement

Just as the government's assimilation policy found expression in American Indian films, so, too did the burgeoning civil rights movement. Although the 1960s remain the best known decade for civil rights activism, it was during and in the years immediately after World War II that black activists laid the movement's foundation. The irony of black men still facing discrimination at home while fighting against racist Nazi Germany abroad was not lost on African Americans. As historian Manning Marable writes, "The blatant contradiction between the country's opposition to fascism and the herrenvolk state [in Germany] and the continued existence of Jim Crow in the States after 1945 was perfectly clear to all." During the war itself, A. Philip Randolph and other African American leaders developed the "Double V Campaign," dedicated to victory over both the Axis abroad and racism at home, and pressured President Franklin Roosevelt into establishing the landmark Fair Employment Practices Commission
(FEPC) in 1941, which policed discrimination in the workplace. The FEPC was largely ineffective, as it had little coercive power, but it was still an important step in the federal government's engagement with racism. Moreover, as African Americans left the south, moving north and west for defense industry jobs, they discovered that they enjoyed leverage as an important labor force for the war effort. In historian Stephen Tuck's words, "Black activists gained new power to fight for equality [during World War II] . . . They used their new power to gain better jobs and housing, to end discrimination in the army, to seek global freedom, and to challenge racial stereotypes."8

The late-1940s brought great optimism for African Americans, as returning black veterans joined the NAACP by the thousands and the courts issued decisions that overturned all-white party primary elections, "housing covenants" that restricted minority home ownership, and the segregation of interstate buses. Military service empowered African American men, who were determined to fight for their rights when they returned home. As historian Jennifer Brooks writes, "Black veterans were an early vanguard of the grassroots leaders who waged the black freedom struggle throughout the South in the 1950s and 1960s." Furthermore, President Harry Truman became a supporter of civil rights during the lead-up to the 1948 election. According to Marable, "Truman privately viewed the blacks' goals of social and political equality with great contempt," but the president understood that he would need African American support in order to win reelection. To that end, he issued executive orders desegregating the military and forbidding discrimination for government contractors, while his fellow Democrats adopted a pro-civil rights platform for the election. This platform caused a rebellion within the party, with southern Democrats walking out of the convention and nominating Strom Thurmond, governor of South Carolina, as the candidate for the segregationist Dixiecrat Party, but it ultimately proved decisive.
in Truman's reelection as the African American vote helped Truman carry several key states.\textsuperscript{9}

The optimism felt by African Americans during the late-'40s was eroded by a lack of movement during the early-'50s, however. Truman remained a supporter for civil rights during this second term because he saw segregation as a stain for the United States' standing during the Cold War, but his successor was far more ambivalent on the subject. As Marable writes, "No friend of the armed forces desegregation decision of 1948, [Eisenhower] wanted to slow down the pace and retard the movement for civil rights." Inadvertently, however, Eisenhower supplied African Americans with one of their staunchest allies when he appointed Earl Warren as the chief justice of the Supreme Court, as the Warren court would prove to be extremely sympathetic to the cause of civil rights and consistently ruled against segregation. Yet, as demonstrated by the landmark case of \textit{Brown v. Board of Education} (1954), the change in laws did little to actually change daily life for African Americans. With the \textit{Brown} decision, the Supreme Court unanimously overturned school segregation, ruling that such a system left African American students irreparably harmed and scarred with feelings of inferiority, but it took years, and, as in the case of Little Rock, Arkansas's Central High School in 1957, the use of federal troops, before integration became a reality. Thus, despite continued activism by the NAACP and courageous individuals who faced abuse and violence in their fight for equality, African Americans won legal rights during the 1950s, but saw the new laws go unenforced. Furthermore, African Americans often faced intense discrimination beyond the South; violent race riots wracked Detroit in 1943, while Chicago averaged one violent racial incident every ten days between the end of World War II and 1960. As Tuck writes, "Taken together, street by street, factory by factory, the appalling degree of urban violence [in the North] rivaled anything in the South."\textsuperscript{10}
In spite of this intransigence, white attitudes toward minorities, particularly African Americans, were changing during the postwar era, in no small part due to popular culture. Films like *Pinky* and *Home of the Brave* revealed the evils of racism on movie screens across America, and while the new medium of television was almost entirely white, black performers began to enjoy success in other fields, such as sports and music. In 1946, Marion Motley and Bill Willis of the Cleveland Browns, and Kenny Washington and Woody Strode of the Los Angeles Rams, broke the color barrier of professional football, but Jackie Robinson integrating baseball with the Brooklyn Dodgers a year later was of even greater cultural importance, due to the sport's popularity as the "national pastime." Furthermore, the advent of rock and roll during the early-'50s meant that millions of young whites were listening to black music, both that performed by African American artists, such as Little Richard, Chuck Berry, and Fats Domino, and white performers playing black music, such as Elvis Presley and Jerry Lee Lewis. Whites listening to black musicians or cheering for black athletes did not mean they automatically abandoned prejudicial views, but as Tuck notes, "Popular opinion on race undertook one of the most dramatic shifts of opinion on any issue in modern times. Less than half those polled in 1944 thought 'Negroes are as intelligent as white people.' By 1956, 80 percent did, including a majority of southerners." Thus, popular culture, through movies, sports, and music, was playing an important role in America's shifting attitudes on race, and the American Indian film was part of this process, beginning with the release of *Broken Arrow* in 1950.11

**Racial Harmony on the Frontier: Broken Arrow**

Directed by Delmer Daves and adapted from Elliott Arnold's historical novel *Blood Brother* (itself based on actual events), *Broken Arrow* was the first civil rights-oriented American
Indian film produced by Hollywood. The movie concerns the efforts of former army scout Tom Jeffords (James Stewart) to make peace between the United States and the Apaches in post-Civil War Arizona. Despite opposition from radicals on both sides, Jeffords succeeds in negotiating a truce between the warring parties, in the process becoming friends with the Indians' chief, Cochise (Jeffrey Chandler), and falling in love with an Apache maiden, Sonseeahray (Debra Paget). White bigots, principally Ben Slade (Will Geer) are unwilling to give up their hatred, however, and they kill Sonseeahray during an attempt on Cochise's life. This senseless murder cements a lasting peace and thus the film suggests that racial harmony is possible, even if sacrifices are necessary. Even thought *Broken Arrow* is the story of a white man, told from Jeffords' perspective and focusing upon his efforts, love, and sacrifice, it does allow Indians to begin to emerge as fully-developed, if still largely stereotypical, characters.\(^\text{12}\)

Under the guidance of Darryl F. Zanuck, Twentieth Century-Fox positioned itself as the studio that tackled issues of race and prejudice in the years after World War II, dealing with anti-Semitism in *Gentleman's Agreement*, and bigotry against African Americans in *Pinky* and *No Way Out* (1950). Thus, *Broken Arrow* is one part of a larger, studio-wide pattern. As Joseph L. Mankiewicz, the director of *No Way Out*, said while discussing his film's examination of racial violence, "Darryl had all the guts in the world as far as subject matter is concerned." Because of the nation's rapidly evolving views on minorities, Julian Blaustein, the producer of *Broken Arrow*, expressed opinions on racial tolerance and the treatment of on-screen Indians that would have been nearly unthinkable a decade earlier, saying:

> We wanted to deal with Indians who would not look like cardboard cutouts of redmen, and particularly with Cochise, their chief, who, besides being a fearless warrior, was also a man of vision of feeling. Jeffords, the white man, was lifted by his association with him. . . . We have treated [the Indians] as people, not savages; have tried to show that the only real 'heavies' are ignorance, misunderstanding, and intolerance. In short, none of our Indians say 'Ugh!'"
To this end, the studio hired 375 Apaches from the White River Reservation in Arizona to serve as extras and advisors, teaching the filmmakers how to mix war paint, perform Apache dances, and build wikiups.

Michael Blankfort was the credited screenwriter for *Broken Arrow*, but he was only a front for the film's actual writer, the blacklisted Albert Maltz. One of the infamous "Hollywood Ten," Maltz spent nearly a year in prison for contempt of Congress after refusing to answer questions about communism in Hollywood before the House Un-American Activities Committee (HUAC). A devout leftist, he revealed his views on civil rights through the short film *The House I Live In*, which received a special Academy Award for promoting racial tolerance in 1946, as well as the statement he delivered at the HUAC hearings, telling the committee's pro-segregation congressmen, "I will not be dictated to or intimidated by men to whom the Ku Klux Klan, as a matter of Committee record, is an acceptable American institution." As *Los Angeles Times* journalist Jerry Belcher writes, prior to being blacklisted, "Maltz became known as a versatile and painstakingly realistic writer who concentrated on the ordinary working man and timely social issues," which are the focus of *Broken Arrow*.

In his script for *Broken Arrow*, Maltz goes to great lengths to humanize Indians, a necessary step given that American audiences of 1950 had been inundated with movies that demonized them. As a memo from Twentieth Century-Fox executive Michael Abel to studio chief Darryl Zanuck explains, Arnold's novel portrayed Cochise and Sonseeahray as "real, understandable and likeable human beings," and the film sought to do the same. *Broken Arrow* is told from Jeffords' perspective, and as he learns that the Apaches are real people, so too do the viewers. The picture opens with Jeffords coming across a wounded Apache boy in the desert, and in nursing him back to health, he realizes that Indians are not the savage monsters he once
believed. He explains this epiphany in voice-over narration when the boy tells him that he wants to return home: "'My mother is crying,' he said. Funny, it never struck me that an Apache woman would cry over her son like any other woman. 'The Apaches are wild animals,' we all said." A later encounter with Apache warriors is a further lesson to Jeffords regarding the humanity of Indians, for they do not kill him when they learn that he saved the boy's life. These incidents shake Jeffords' prejudiced views of the Apaches: "I learned things that day. Apache mothers cried about their sons. Apache men had a sense of fair play."15

While Jeffords overcomes his prejudice, many of his fellow residents of Tucson, people who Abel referred to as "hate-crazed whites," do not. Chief among these bigots is Slade, a rancher consumed with hatred of the Apaches for the killing of his wife and son. He is mystified that Jeffords saved an Indian's life, asking, "I don't understand, you mean you found a wounded Apache and you didn't kill him?" and tells Jeffords, "'If you don't fight against 'em, you're with 'em," echoing the intolerant, us-or-them mentality that was omnipresent during the Red Scare and led to Maltz' blacklisting and imprisonment. Other whites share Slade's views, even after Jeffords negotiates a truce with the Indians. One cowboy declares "We'll have peace when every Apache is hung from a tree," and a mob of furious bigots attempts to lynch Jeffords, seeing his peace efforts as a betrayal of his race. Furthermore, Broken Arrow also emphasizes that whites have frequently wronged the Apaches. For instance, when Slade blames the Apaches for the conflict, Jeffords corrects him: "Cochise didn't start this war. A snooty little lieutenant fresh out of the east started it. He flew a flag of true, which Cochise honored, and then he hanged Cochise's brother and five others under the flag." In this way, Broken Arrow reflects the work of historians such as Helen Hunt Jackson who took the United States to task for its tradition of broken treaties and duplicitous treatment of Native Americans.16
Despite opposition from Slade and other bigots, Jeffords embarks on a dangerous, self-appointed mission to meet with Cochise in order to negotiate peace, and *Broken Arrow* builds the Apache chief into a figure of near mythic standing. A "tame" Indian warns Jeffords not to lie to Cochise for "his eyes will see into your heart," while Jeffords tells an overconfident colonel that the army could not defeat Cochise in six months or six years. When Jeffords finally meets Cochise, the chief strikes a singularly impressive figure. Played by blue-eyed Caucasian actor Chandler, Cochise is a tall, strapping, handsome man and Daves often shot him from below, thereby increasing his stature and grandeur. In spite of being wronged by white men, he is willing to accept Jeffords' peace overture because he cares deeply for his people and understands that the whites' overwhelming numbers make the war unwinnable for the Apaches.  

![Figure #21: Apache chief Cochise (Jeffrey Chandler) in Broken Arrow, shot from below to increase his nobility and grandeur.](image)

Yet while Cochise is the film's second most important character, he remains a stereotype, albeit a positive one. He is a man entirely without flaws, impossibly honorable and upright, who
one character describes as "greater than other men." Thus, he is less an actual human being than a paragon of nobility. Ironically, while Cochise is almost inhumanly honorable, Zanuck complained about Jeffords being too noble as originally written. As he explained in a script conference, "[Jeffords] is so completely noble and untarnished, so uncompromisingly lofty in his ideals, that I found myself asking, 'What makes this man tick?' . . . As presently written, nobility simply oozes out of Jeffords. He is never wrong about anything. He is perfection itself, and this worries me greatly." Zanuck's concerns led to revisions that presented Jeffords as more realistic, and therefore, the white man needed to be a more complex character, but the Indian could remain impossibly noble. Furthermore, while Cochise is the Broken Arrow's second most prominent character, the film reduces his role from Arnold's novel. In Blood Brother, he is at least as important as Jeffords, and much of the story is told from his perspective, but in the film, he remains secondary to the white man, appearing as a near-mythic figure of decency and wisdom who helps guide Jeffords on his story arc through the film.18

Sonseeahray is Broken Arrow's other prominent Indian, and like Cochise, she is both a fully realized character and a stereotype: the lovely, pure Indian princess. As played by Paget, who was only sixteen years old at the time of filming, Sonseeahray is all youthful wide-eyed beauty and innocence. The movie introduces her to both Jeffords and the audience at "the holiest time of her life," her ceremony to pass into womanhood. During this ceremony she is White Painted Lady, the mother of life, and possesses the power to take away the pain of old wounds. Thus, her entire introduction is based upon her purity. In short order, Sonseeahray and Jeffords fall in love and plan to wed, despite the chief's warnings regarding the difficulties interracial couples face in society. As he explains to Jeffords, "It will not be easy for you. You are an American. Where will you live? Here? There will always be Apaches who have suffered from
white men who will hate you for it. Tucson, maybe? Will there not always be whites who hate your wife because of the color of her skin?" The couple marries nonetheless, yet while *Broken Arrow* reveals society's prejudices against interracial relationships, Sonseeahray still suffers the fate of most Indian women in the movies who engage in romance with white men: she dies, slain in a last spasm of racial violence by Slade and his fellow bigots. In this way, the film does not permit their love to last, nor does it allow for the racial mixing that would have been the result of their marriage producing children.\(^{19}\)

![Image](image.png)

**Figure #22:** The wide-eyed, innocent, agreeably exotic Sonseeahray (Debra Paget) converses with Jeffords (James Stewart), her husband-to-be, in *Broken Arrow*.

Furthermore, the casting of Paget as Sonseeahray reveals the film's problematic engagement with race. In personally selecting Paget for the role, Zanuck believed that she could offer something new from the typical onscreen Indian woman: "I hadn't wanted a formula personality for *Broken Arrow*. Indian girls are too often cast that way. I wanted this picture to
have special conviction." Yet, like *Pinky*, which starred Caucasian actress Jean Crain as the African American title character, *Broken Arrow* features a white woman playing a non-white part. *The Los Angeles Times* noted that Paget was "hailed at 20th Century Fox as the ideal type to play native girls on the screen," and thus while Zanuck was committed to exploring race relations in his studio's films, he was unwilling to cast non-white actresses in lead, romantic roles.20

As Jeffords' plan for peace between the whites and Apaches moves forward, he finds a staunch ally in Gen. Oliver O. Howard (Basil Ruysdael), and this so-called "Christian general" serves as the most overt spokesman for the film's liberal views on race relations. He tells Jeffords that "The Bible preaches brotherhood for all of God's children," and when Jeffords asks if that includes non-white people, Howard assures him, "My Bible says nothing about the pigmentation of the skin." Howard offers peace and equality to Cochise, but *Broken Arrow* again demonstrates a problematic view of racial harmony, for it sees equality as occurring only on white America's terms. The Apaches, it suggests, must assimilate into mainstream society, giving up their old way of life in favor of that of the white man. As Cochise tells his people, "Why should not the Apache be able to learn new ways? It is not easy to change, but sometimes it is required. . . . If a big wind comes, a tree must bend or be lifted out by its roots."

Furthermore, given that, earlier in the film, a white character unironically declares, "I don't claim the white man's always done right, but we're bringing civilization here, ain't we? Clothes, carpets, hats, boots, medicine," *Broken Arrow* implies that the materialism of postwar America is the basis for white society, and if Indians, or any other minority, wish to be a part of it, they must adopt such ways. Therefore, the film embraces the liberal attitude that racial harmony is possible
if both sides cooperate in a spirit of tolerance and peace, but that process will only occur on the terms set out by white America.  

_Broken Arrow_ was a critical and commercial hit when released in 1950, not only because it is a well-made film, but because its story of peace between Indians and whites was revolutionary after Hollywood had spent decades only showing the two peoples at war. It received a Golden Globe award for "promoting international understanding," and was particularly revelatory for Native Americans, who expected to see themselves demonized on the screen. The Association of American Indian Affairs helped to promote _Broken Arrow_, presenting New York civic leaders with a preview showing on July 13, 1950, at which the organization's vice president, Eduard C. Lindeman praised it while criticizing Hollywood for previously only stereotyping the Indian as "a ruthless killer, a schemer without honor, an uncivilized savage, or, what is even worse, an ignorant foil of his white conquerors." Likewise, _The Los Angeles Times_ Scheuer related the reaction of a Native American boy who saw the film at a special showing. According to Scheuer, the boy "remained silent for several minutes afterward. Pressed for an opinion by an elder . . . the boy finally turned and said, 'For the first time in my life I'm proud to be an Indian,'" which producer Blaustein called "the single more significant of the compliments the picture has received."  

Most critics tended to agree with this positive assessment of the picture, seeing it as offering a new perspective on a familiar genre. _Variety_, for instance, saw it as "a western with a little different twist—the story of the attempt of whites and Apaches to learn to live together," and complimented Chandler for "investing [Cochise] with a great deal of dignity." Yet the review also commented that _Broken Arrow_ "has a quality of naive charm that wouldn't fit many westerns and would ordinarily scare off the blood and thunder fans," suggesting that the critic
saw the movie as being overly optimistic regarding the ease with which racism could be overcome. *Newsweek* echoed *Variety's* general praise, calling the picture "a refreshingly new twist" on the American Indian genre, while noting that "Jeffords [is] apparently the only man in the territory who believes Indians are human beings." Scheuer was particularly effusive in his praise of the film's attempts to tackle the issue of race, as well as the longstanding prejudices against Indians on-screen:

> Because of differences in languages alone—not to mention those of race, customs, and temperament—no 'type' has been harder to capture on the American screen than the American Indian. Insofar as it could be accomplished, however, 20th Century-Fox has leveled these barriers in 'Broken Arrow,' a film of such beauty and enduring spirit that you may well desire to live through it a second time, as I did. Its theme, as new as it is old, is that all men are blood brothers.

Scheuer further noted that the interracial love story "makes the picture unique. But there are also the deeper-than-words friendship between Jeffords and the Apache chief, Cochise, and beyond this, the eventually conciliatory attitude of other men on both sides, extending the hand of greeting to traditional enemies."23

Robert Gessner, the critic for *The Saturday Review of Literature* generally praised *Broken Arrow*, but his review included touches of cynicism, indicating that he did not fully accept its portrayal of flawless, whitewashed Indians. He noted, for instance, that "the Association on American Indian Affairs, the sentimental guardians of Indian rights . . . have most curiously lent themselves as academic drum-beaters in the promotion of this thriller." Seeing Hollywood struggling to find new ways to enliven the same action, including "Indians biting the dust, the ambush of the stagecoach . . . the attack and encirclement of the U.S. cavalry wagon train, and especially how to bring Geronimo, that old stand-by of John Ford, back alive," Gessner felt that *Broken Arrow* regenerated the genre with its tale of friendship and love between whites and Indians. Yet his cynicism is further apparent in his discussions of Sonseeahray and Cochise,
declaring that Paget makes for "an ideal Indian maiden looking very much like a schoolboy's dream of Pocahontas," while noting that Cochise "keeps reminding one of Hiawatha." In conclusion, he recommended that "If you like action and are sentimental about Noble Savages who do not scalp, you'll enjoy 'Broken Arrow.'"\footnote{24}

*The New York Times* Crowther was far more explicit in his condemnation of *Broken Arrow*’s canonization of Cochise and whitewashing of the Apaches. In a pair of articles, he praised the film as "an honorable endeavor to clear the public's mind of the traditional notion that the American Indian was an unprincipled and uncivilized brute," but recognized that, instead of presenting the Apaches as humans, it simply replaced a negative stereotype with a positive one. Crowther acknowledged the mistreatment experienced by Native Americans, writing, "the American Indian had his fine and noble points and . . . was the first American to suffer racial prejudice," and further, that "the American Indian has been most cruelly maligned and his plight as a 'minorities' person has not yet been fully clarified." However, he saw *Broken Arrow* as taking its liberal intentions too far in the opposite direction: "In trying to disabuse the public of a traditional stereotype, the producers have portrayed the Indian in an equally false, romantic white ideal." As he noted, Cochise, who Chandler plays "with the magnificence of a decathlon champion at the Olympic Games and speaks with the round and studied phrasing of the salutatorian of a graduating class," is "twice as clean and stalwart-looking as James Stewart." He further expands upon the film's dichotomy between the good Indians and racist whites, writing that "it is a group of snarling citizens of Tucson who show blind bigotry and ruthless hate," and suggesting, "One might wonder from this exhibit . . . whether it isn't the white man, not the Indian, who should be regarded as 'good' only when dead." While Crowther appreciated the
Crowther may have been troubled by *Broken Arrow*, but audiences apparently did not share his reservations, as feedback from theater owners demonstrates. A number raved about the tremendous business the film did, with Ken Gorham of the Town Hall Theatre in Middlebury, Vermont, writing, "An excellent picture that appealed to the natives, children and rural patrons to such an extent that we had a full house, which is not the case these days very often," E.A. Patchen of the Minor Theatre, Arcata, California proclaimed, "The theatre wasn't big enough to hold the crowds even on the last night, and not a single patron failed to like it," and Ted Keelen of the Royal Theatre, Sheffield, Illinois, praised it as "Really a fine picture and one that you can 'get well' on, too." Moreover, theater owners and their customers appeared to take no issue with the film's theme of racial harmony. As Charles Rossi of the Paramount Theatre in Schroon Lake, New York, wrote, *Broken Arrow* represented "a different treatment of the cowboy and Indian theme. An outstanding departure from the type of pictures currently in the process of release," while Brad Messer of the Burley Theatre, Burley, Idaho, declared, "Fox really set a mark for the others to shoot at with this type of western." Pat Fleming of the Gail Theatre in Round Pond, Arkansas, was perhaps the most effusive: "I consider this one of the best Indian pictures ever made. Acting was very good, especially that of the Indian chief who made the picture more realistic. It's a picture that pleased everyone here, even the ladies. . . . Debra Paget makes a good looking Indian girl, too." Of all the feedback available, only one contained a complaint regarding the pro-Indian subject matter, that coming from Shirley Booth of the Booth Theatre, Rich Hill, Missouri, who noted that "One woman walked out, saying 'Too many Indians,'" but concluded, "Other comments were all good."26
Because of its groundbreaking nature, it is unsurprising that some audience feedback related directly to the interracial romance between Jeffords and Sonseeahray. Scheuer, for instance, noted with satisfaction that "the typical downtown audience" at his viewing responded to the relationship "with respectful attention and none of the giggles and imitative noises I had half-resigned myself to hearing." He believed that this "respectful attention" was due to the exotic nature of Sonseeahray, in particular, and of the romance in general. He saw *Broken Arrow* as "Pointing the way to a return to love stories on the screen. Audiences will accept them without snickering, I notice, if the man is masculine and 'practical' and the girl is foreign, accented or 'strange.'" It is important to recognize, however, that *Broken Arrow's* "foreign, accented or 'strange'" girl is played by the Caucasian Paget, and audience reaction may have been very different if the film had featured a romance between a white actor and a non-white actress.

While Scheuer focused on the romance between Jeffords and Sonseeahray, Hopper, his colleague at the *Times*, noted the sex appeal demonstrated by Chandler. As she wrote, "The most remarkable aspect of the characterization was that, though he played the part [of Cochise] in make-up, it caused heart flutters among women all over the nation. Jeff was revealed a very sexy man." With his strapping physique and chiseled, matinee-idol looks, Chandler is certainly a desirable man, and thus Hopper's surprise at women being drawn to him simply because he was playing an Indian is quite telling regarding the era's views of Native Americans.27

Not only was *Broken Arrow* Hollywood's initial civil rights-oriented American Indian film, it was also one of the first to present Indians as human beings and important figures, thereby heralding their emergence as characters in their own films. As such, it reflected the liberal politics of screenwriter Maltz and producer Blaustein, and continued Twentieth Century Fox's tradition of making films that dealt with issues of race. The movie itself argued
passionately for racial tolerance, presenting Indians as decent people who wanted peace yet were forced into wars by duplicitous white bigots. Yet because those Indians, particularly Cochise and Sonseeahray, were descended from the noble savages of earlier movies, and were entirely without flaws, *Broken Arrow* was ultimately replacing negative stereotypes with more positive ones. Nonetheless, the friendship between Jeffords and Cochise, and the romance between Jeffords and Sonseeahray, broke new ground for the genre, even if the picture did not allow Sonseeahray to survive. Audience response to the film was almost universally positive, with critics praising its message and quality, and theater owners indicating that it was a major box office hit with their customers, with only a single instance, among all the sources examined, of a viewer taking issue with *Broken Arrow*’s tale of racial harmony.

**Racial Prejudice and the American Indian Protagonist: Devil's Doorway**

While *Broken Arrow* deals with the ugliness of prejudice from the perspective of a liberal white man, *Devil's Doorway*, released only months later, does so from that of an Indian protagonist. Not since *Massacre*, nearly two decades earlier, had Hollywood produced a film with an Indian main character, and thus *Devil's Doorway* represents an important milestone for the emergence of Indians as lead characters in their own movies. Unlike *Massacre*, however, which detailed the misery of life on the reservation, *Devil's Doorway* uses its Indian hero as a means to critique racism in white society. It focuses upon the travails of Lance Poole (Robert Taylor), a Shoshone Indian who returns to the west after serving in the Civil War, in which he won the Congressional Medal of Honor. White racism blocks his ambitions of building a thriving ranch, and when his idealistic white lawyer, Orrie Masters (Paula Raymond), cannot help, Poole becomes radicalized, dying in a battle while defending his land from the army. In
detailing this doomed cause and concluding on such a tragic note, Devil's Doorway reveals the mistreatment of Native Americans, and, in more general terms, the evils of prejudice against all minorities.28

Devil's Doorway is a dark film that presents a far more pessimistic view of race relations than the one presented by Broken Arrow, attacking bigotry but reminding the viewers of racism's depth within American society. When the film opens, Poole feels a sense of optimism toward the future. As an MGM script synopsis explains, he is "convinced that Indians and white men can live together in friendship with one another. He is soon bitterly disillusioned." Returning to the mountains of Wyoming after fighting for the Union, Poole, who the screenplay describes as a man with "inner dignity," dreams of turning the bucolic mountain valley Sweet Meadows into a prosperous ranch where "no man, red or white, will ever be turned away." In this way, he is a surrogate for America's black World War II veterans who felt they had earned equal treatment due to their service, and Poole espouses the virtues of the integrated military, believing that the American people are moving beyond bigotry based on skin color. As he tells his father, "The country's growing up. They gave me these [sergeant] stripes without testing my blood. I led a squad of white men. Slept in the same blankets with them, ate out of the same pan, held their heads while they died. Why should it be any different?"29

Poole may exhibit an idealistic belief that racism is a thing of the past, but he soon faces intense bigotry from whites determined to prevent an Indian from enjoying success. The screenplay includes a scene, cut from the final film, that reveals this, as Poole's father attempts to dispel his son's misconceptions: "I once thought as you. I left my tribe to trap and live with the white man. But they drove your mother and myself from their villages because our skin was red and fear always rode with us." Verne Coolan (Louis Calhern), a lawyer described in the script
synopsis as "a force of vicious evil in the community," is the principal source of racism in the film, and he freely expresses his bigoted views, believing all white men share in them. As he says to two of Poole's white friends after first meeting the Indian, "Did you notice how sour the air got? You can always smell them." Coolan is not alone in his bigotry, for the screenplay describes some of the local whites as looking at Poole with expressions of "mingled apprehension and hostility," and, as in Massacre, the local white doctor cannot be bothered to minister to Poole's father when he falls ill, thereby condemning the old man to death.30

The racism of Coolan and other whites bears a great resemblance to that faced by African Americans in the postwar United States. For instance, when Poole visits the saloon, one of Coolan's allies, a gunslinger with "a happy disregard for human life or dignity," evokes Jim Crow segregation, declaring, "I don't think it's right for an Indian to stand at the same bar as a white man. Let you in the saloon, and the first thing you know, you'll want to mix with us socially." Moreover, Coolan rallies support for his cause by manipulating the prejudices of local whites who are jealous of Poole's financial success, playing upon the same fears used by white conservatives to defend the oppression of African Americans. As he says in an extended speech from the screenplay that was edited down for the final film:

A band of red savages threatens the very safety of our women and children. We would be less than men if we did not meet this threat boldly and courageously. . . . This is our west, and we must run it our way—not as a pack of howling devils would have it. Who could blame us if we were to dangle Poole and his Indians from the yard arms of telegraph poles as a warning to the other redskins—as a guarantee of Wyoming for the white man—once and for all?

With this rhetoric, Devil's Doorway suggests a tie between Coolan's bigotry and that of segregationists in the South, such as the members of the White Citizens' Councils, who claimed integration would lead to miscegenation and the abuse of white womanhood. As historian Steve Estes writes, "Positioning themselves as loyal husbands and fathers, council leaders won at least
tacit support from [Eisenhower] and other white men by arguing that they were simply protecting the flower of southern womanhood from black men who supposedly could not control their 'animalistic' passions."

Coolan hopes to drive Poole off his family's ancestral land, and while he expresses a general desire to have a homestead at Sweet Meadows, his primary motivation is simply the persecution of a successful Indian. Racism, not greed, motivates Coolan's actions, and like the white supremacists of the 1950s, he seeks to keep a minority in its "proper place," ensuring that America is a nation in which non-whites are a permanent underclass. Not all the film's whites hate Indians—sheep rancher Rod MacDougall (Marshall Thompson) needs Sweet Meadows' grass for his herd but is a decent man who wants Poole to be treated fairly, while sheriff Zeke (Edgar Buchanan) has known Poole all his life and admits, "Law says an Indian ain't got no more rights than a dog. That's the law I was sworn to enforce"—but they still aid Coolan in his fight against the Indians, MacDougall for economic reasons, and Zeke for legal ones.

Devil's Doorway also stresses the injustice of laws targeting specific minority groups. Poole had frequently socialized with white men at the saloon and is friends with its owner, but Coolan and his fellow racists demand that Zeke enforce Indian prohibition. Thus, when Poole arrives at the bar, he is humiliated to find a sign reading "No Liquor Allowed for Indians."

Moreover, as Coolan attempts to take Sweet Meadows away from him, Poole hires Orrie to help him fight for his land legally. However, when Poole suggests they file a homesteading claim, Orrie is forced to inform him that he is not eligible because of his race. As she explains, "Under the law, you aren't classified as an American citizen. . . . You're a ward of the government." This news devastates Poole, as the script's stage directions indicate: "Now it's out and the quiet that follows is a grating tension almost palpable. Lance betrays the effect of the blow only by the
rigidity of his body." He fought for the United States and won the Congressional Medal of Honor, but legally has no rights, and thus Coolan and other bigots can claim land that has been in Poole's family for generations because they are white and he is not.33

With his legal options exhausted and whites like Coolan and MacDougall pressing to take possession of Sweet Meadows, Poole becomes radicalized, willing to use violence to oppose this mistreatment and defend his property. As the MGM script synopsis explains, "Rapidly Lance changes from the civilized American, Lance Poole, to the Indian warrior, Broken Lance." The film indicates this process through a physical transformation. Early in the picture, Poole dresses in typical cowboy clothes, including a kerchief and cowboy hat, and aside from his darker skin, he essentially looks Caucasian. As injustices mount, however, he swaps the hat for an Indian headband, and, as shot by Mann and lit by cinematographer John Alton, Poole's visage takes on the appearance of an Indian: gaunt-faced and high cheek-boned. As the screenplay describes him, "Lance Poole, the soldier, the cattle grower, has become Broken Lance, the Indian. His dress is totally Shoshone, and his hair is long, and braided."34

Figure #23: The transformation of Lance Poole (Robert Taylor) into the radicalized Broken Lance in Devil's Doorway. On the left, early in the film, Poole dresses as a cowboy, while on the right, after being victimized by racism, he has adopted the attire and physical appearance of an Indian.

Ultimately, this radicalization dooms Poole and the other Indians who live on his land, and his plight serves as a microcosm of the Native Americans' wars against the United States, for
he cannot hope to hold out against the power of white America. He and his fellow Indians manage to fight off an attempt by Coolan and the sheep herders to force their way onto Sweet Meadows, but that battle only results in the arrival of the army, which surrounds Poole's ranch house. Despite Orrie's attempt to convince Poole to surrender and take his people to a reservation, he refuses, telling her,

> Children were happy here. They didn't want much if they could be happy, enough to eat, medicine if they got sick, listen to the old men tell them stories about the past. They could speak their own language and worship their own god and know they were loved. You tell them to go back to the reservation, Orrie, but be sure to tell them they won't get any of those things here.

The army then attacks, bombarding the ranch with artillery and killing all the Indians. At the films' end, the mortally wounded Poole stumbles from the wreckage of his home, his Medal of Honor pinned to his chest, telling Orrie, "Don't cry. In a hundred years it might've worked," before falling dead at her feet. Thus, *Devil's Doorway* ends on a tragic note, but also provides a glimmer of hope. As Poole's last words suggest, perhaps, a century after the events of the movie, the United States might be ready to move beyond bigotry and embrace all people.  

That having been said, the film still struggles with the issue of race. Like *Broken Arrow*, it advocates assimilation into white society for minorities, with the twist that, in *Devil's Doorway*, it is the Indian who actually wants to assimilate. Poole's dream is not to preserve his peoples' way of life, but to turn the wilderness of Sweet Meadows into an American-style ranch, and his financial success is what infuriates many of the film's white bigots. Moreover, Poole's radical transformation serves as a warning to minorities that intransigent resistance to white American will only result in tragedy. Orrie and other decent whites offer Poole the opportunity to negotiate a peaceful solution, giving some of his land to the shepherders but keeping the rest for his ranch, but he refuses. By engaging in violent resistance, Poole dooms himself and his
people, and thus the film suggests that while bigotry is wrong and minorities deserve fair treatment, they should also be flexible and accept the terms offered them, not by racists like Coolan, but by magnanimous liberals like Orrie.\textsuperscript{36}

Just as the film's lesson for minorities is problematic, so too is its handling of the issue of miscegenation. Unlike \textit{Broken Arrow}, \textit{Devil's Doorway} avoids any direct romance, in no small part because an Indian male/white female relationship was far less acceptable in 1950 than was the white male/Indian female one between Jeffords and Sonseeahray. While Poole and Orrie are obviously attracted to each other, they are never allowed to act upon that attraction, and thus their relationship exists primarily in the form of a shy flirtation. Moreover, the characters themselves realize the taboo nature of this potential love, for Poole is uncomfortable in any situation that might be misconstrued as a romantic gesture toward Orrie. As he tells her when she invites him to her house, "It wouldn't be a good idea for you to be seen with me after dark," and the screenplay's stage directions note the awkwardness when he assists exiting a buggy: "Lance politely takes her arm, helps her. The gesture seems to momentarily surprise Orrie; she looks at Lance uncertainly. Lance, misunderstanding her surprise for embarrassment, or even resentment, hurriedly drops her arm." However, while the film skirted around the topic of miscegenation, the marketing for \textit{Devil's Doorway} did not. As the script for its promotional trailer reads, "MAN and WOMAN. MEANT FOR EACH OTHER! THEY MET AND LOVED," and "A LOVE STORY AGAINST A BACKDROP OF TREACHERY . . . AND WILD PASSIONS!" Given that Poole and Orrie never even kiss in the film, such lurid language is a clear attempt at exploitation, drawing audiences in with the promise of a taboo interracial romance that does not exist in the film.\textsuperscript{37}
Devil's Doorway was a smaller picture than Broken Arrow, and garnered less attention from critics. Variety's review revealed inherent biases rooted in both American exceptionalism and a prejudiced view of Native Americans. It described the picture as an "Action drama about injustices to the Indians back in the days when the United States was a young nation and spreading its wings westward," as if the nation's youth justified its mistreatment of Native peoples. Further, it criticized Taylor as "too polished and educated for the role [of Poole], although the script weakly tries to explain that the education was picked up during his three years of war association with the whites," as if an Indian could not possibly be well-spoken and should only speak in stereotypical pidgin English. The Los Angeles Times' Schallert was far more generous, arguing that Devil's Doorway was elevated "well above the estate of the normal western" by its engagement with the issue of race and the mistreatment of Indians: "The MGM production espouses the cause of the Indian in a historic era, when he was being crowded out of his lands by the white man. Ruthless, bitter and powerful are many of its scenes of action, that are lifted above the level of conventional melodrama because of the theme."38

Furthermore, as he did with Broken Arrow several months earlier, Crowther again offered a salient and perceptive reading of the picture. However, he was more positive in his review of Devil's Doorway because, unlike Broken Arrow, it treats its Indian protagonist as a human being rather than an impossibly noble stereotype. Recognizing the new trend in Hollywood toward a more critical assessment of the nation's treatment of Native Americans, he begins, "Perhaps it is too late now to change the course of fiction which has established the American Indian as a ruthless savage, but our movie makers appear to be endeavoring to right some of the wrongs they themselves have done the red man over the years." He further notes that, in the film, "The prejudices and covetousness of certain of the pioneers who settled the West is dramatized in
terms that leaves a bitter taste," and that the plot, "calls the turn on the white man's disregard of
the Indian's right to life and the pursuit of happiness" and "speak[s] out against the red man's sad
plight as a mistreated ward of the Government." Ultimately, Crowther concludes that Devil's
Doorway "is a Western with a point of view that rattles some skeletons in our family closet."
This final assessment by Crowther would prove prescient, for films like Broken Arrow and
Devil's Doorway would be the models upon which American Indian movies of the 1960s and
'70s would critique the nation's past and current society.39

Just as it did with critics, Devil's Doorway received mixed feedback from theater owners.
Thomas Goff of the Grand Theatre, Pollock Pines, California reported that "Comments on this
unusual picture ranged from excellent to poor and back again." Some clearly did not expect
much from the film, in quality or business, but were pleasantly surprised. The manager of the
Park and Ritz Theatres in North Vernon, Indiana, for example, declared that it was "a lot better
than it sounds and one of the superior westerns of the screen. The whole cast is excellent and the
picture played to above average business." Pat Fleming and Brad Messer, two owners who were
enthusiastic about Broken Arrow evinced differing opinions on Devil's Doorway, with Fleming
writing, "Better than I expected, but . . . Metro seldom makes a bad picture, especially a western.
It did the business for me and I don't think you'll lose on it, either." Messer, on the other hand,
complained, "What might have been made into a good story was spoiled by such a quick, corny
ending," and sarcastically commented, "Taylor as an Indian was about as convincing as an Indian
would be playing Taylor." Moreover, unlike Fleming's experience, Messer suffered through
poor business with Devil's Doorway, concluding his negative assessment by writing, "What's
worse, the public sensed it beforehand and stayed away."40
Like *Broken Arrow* earlier in 1950, *Devil's Doorway* broke new ground for the American Indian genre. Yet unlike *Broken Arrow*, which dealt with racism from the perspective of a white protagonist, *Devil's Doorway* viewed it through the prism of an Indian, and was the first picture since *Massacre*, fifteen years earlier, to feature an Indian as its principle character. *Devil's Doorway* certainly stacks the deck in Poole's favor, making him a war hero and all-around decent man, but he is a far more complex and fully realized character than the impossibly noble Cochise from *Broken Arrow*, for he becomes so filled with despair at the ill treatment he receives from unfair laws and racists like Coolan that he becomes a radical, defending his land with violence. Yet the film still advocates assimilation as a solution for minorities, and warns them against the path of radicalization that doomed Poole. Critical and audience response to the film was mixed, with some embracing its portrayal of the abuses suffered by Native American at the hands of white America and others complaining that they could not accept the Taylor as an Indian, and yet it is certainly possible that the subject matter of the film itself—an Indian protagonist who is abused by the racist whites around him—turned off many white viewers and led to such mixed reviews.

**The Decline of the Studio System**

The collapse of the studio system, which occurred in the years following World War II, was an important factor that enabled filmmakers, like those who made American Indian movies, to examine controversial subjects such as racism and discrimination in America. The federal government had actually filed anti-trust suits against the major studios during the 1930s, but the Depression led the Roosevelt Administration to suspend those suits. Through the National Recovery Administration (NRA), the government provided the studios with temporary anti-trust
exemption in order to allow the film industry to recover economically, but after World War II, it revived its lawsuits. At the center of the issue were unfair business practices used by the studios, including block booking of films and their ownership of theater chains. Block booking involved the studios forcing independent theaters to purchase an entire slate of films sight unseen, often before the films were even made, essentially making an owner buy a number of the studio's bad pictures in order to be allowed to show its good ones. Further, during this era, theaters were classified as first-run, meaning they exhibited the film on its first release, then onto second-run, and down through sixth-run or more. The major studios colluded to ensure that only the theaters they owned would be classified as first- or second-run, preserving the majority of the profits for themselves while forcing independent theaters to accept far less lucrative later-run classifications. In 1939, for instance, an independent company built a 1,050-seat movie palace in Inglewood, California, intending it to be the centerpiece of an entire shopping complex. However, the studios would only grant it fifth-run status, which would actually result in the theater losing money, and thus neither it nor the surrounding shops ever opened.41

The federal government considered such tactics to be restraint of trade and moved to break up the studio system, including its ownership of theaters. The Big Five studios—MGM, Warner Bros., RKO, Paramount, and Twentieth Century Fox—claimed that since each of them only owned a small proportion of theaters nationwide, they could not possibly be a monopoly, but the government countered that they represented a de facto monopoly due to their collusion. In 1948, the Supreme Court ruled against the studios, ending their unfair practices such as block booking and preferential theater relationships, and, most devastating of all, forcing them to divest their ownership of theaters. The breakup of the entire system did not occur immediately—MGM maintained its model of contract stars and in-studio production until the late-1950s—but from
this point on, the studios would no longer handle exhibition. In the words of Schatz, "The
filmmaking companies were mandated to handle production and marketing on a picture-by-
picture basis, and this would bring an emphatic end to the studio-based production system, with
its contract personnel, steady cash flow, and regulated output."42

On-screen, the end of the system meant that creative talent gained increasing artistic
control of their films. As Schatz writes, "For top industry talent, particularly the leading
producers, directors, and stars, declining studio control meant unprecedented freedom and
opportunity." Furthermore, another Supreme Court case in 1952 provided films with First
Amendment protection, sapping the Production Code of much of its power and, in the words of
Balio, leading to "new freedom of expression accorded to motion pictures." Prominent talent
utilized their new-found independence to take control of their careers in ways they had been
unable to enjoy under the studio system. In the early-'50s, for instance James Stewart signed a
multi-picture contract with Universal which enabled him and his good friend, Anthony Mann, to
make their series of psychological westerns. Moreover, some actors and directors exercised their
freedom by moving into the realm of production, which in turn allowed them to insert their
personal views on film as never before. Along with Harold Hecht, for example, Burt Lancaster
founded his own production company, Hecht-Lancaster (later renamed Hill-Hecht-Lancaster
when Jimmy Hill joined), which produced both his own starring vehicles, such as Apache and
The Unforgiven, as well as films in which he did not appear. As Lancaster said in 1960, "I think
the major studios won't be majors anymore—more like larger independents. I think fewer
pictures will be made but more serious ones."43

Despite the end of the studio system, the film industry remained inherently conservative,
economically if not politically, for films were still expensive to make and the institutions
providing the funding were as risk-averse as were the studios in earlier years. As Balio notes, when loaning money to independent producers, banks asked "Is [the film] of an extremely controversial nature from the religious, racial, or ideological points of view?" Films funded directly by the studios avoided risky topics, as well, because they were less sure of their profits. In Balio's words, "Whereas in the past, there had been occasional scope for experimental films in which the production people could do their best work, divorcement [of theater ownership] had now removed the margin of certainty which theatrical outlets had once provided. Instead of better films, the public got routine grist from the celluloid mill." Thus, while filmmakers enjoyed greater creative freedom, they also were without the economic safety net provided by the studio system, and were therefore under greater pressure to turn in films that would be sure things at the box office.44

**Burt Lancaster and Commercialized Civil Rights Films: Apache and The Unforgiven**

*Apache* and *The Unforgiven*, two films that reflect Lancaster's progressive views on race relations, felt this pressure, demonstrating the major role commercialization played within the movie industry. While Lancaster, his directors, screenwriters, and fellow producers, set out to impart messages about the evils of prejudice, commercial concerns ultimately undermined those messages in both movies. In essence, economic concerns outweighed artistic and social ones, as the intended messages of racial injustice became muddled, leaving the filmmakers disappointed.

*Apache*, released in 1954, is a highly fictionalized account of the life of Massai (Lancaster), the last Apache renegade. Captured and sent to Florida with the rest of Geronimo's warriors, Massai escapes and makes an epic trek across the continent to his home in Arizona. Once there, he conducts a one-man war against the army as revenge for white America's abuses,
but eventually, the love of his woman, Nalinle (Jean Peters) ameliorates his fury, and their child gives him something to live for. Like Devil's Doorway, Apache focuses upon an Indian protagonist and explores the anger and violence that results from racism, and while it deals with Indians, Lancaster and director Robert Aldrich intended it to be an allegory about prejudice in general. An ardent liberal, Lancaster turned down the lead role in the Biblical epic Ben-Hur for purely multicultural principles, explaining, "I grew up in the slums of New York, among Jews, Negroes, Italians, East Indians, Catholics, Protestants, Buddhists, all faiths, all colours. So how could I convincingly portray the idea that Christianity is the one true faith?" Furthermore, as film historians Edward T. Arnold and Eugene L. Miller write, Lancaster said "that while [Apache] told of the 'genocide of the Indian,' it was meant by all involved to make a broader statement on the injustice of racism." The picture also reveals the views of director Robert Aldrich, a political radical. In the words of Lancaster biographer Gary Fishgall, Aldrich, made many films that "reflected an antiauthoritarian, even revolutionary, posture," and this is certainly the case with Apache, given its story of a lone man fighting against the power of an invading government.45

Apache opens with Geronimo surrendering to the American army, a peace that Massai attempts to break in his desire to die a warrior's death. Taken prisoner, he and his fellow renegades suffer dehumanizing abuse at the hands of the whites, being treated like criminals and confined to a train for incarceration in Florida, an act that the Indians see as a death sentence. As Massai explains, "If an Apache cannot live in his own mountains like his fathers before him, he is already dead." On the journey, which Aldrich saw as a "very low level" parallel to the treatment of the Jews in the Holocaust, Indian agent Weddle (John Dehner) treats the Apaches with contempt, yanking a cigar out of Geronimo's mouth and forcing the Indians to keep the
window blinds pulled so they cannot see the country through which they are passing. At one stop, a photographer boards the car and Weddle covers up Geronimo's chains with a blanket before posing for pictures with the chief as if he is a tourist attraction or an animal at a zoo. Massai uses this opportunity to escape, making his way to St. Louis, where he wanders the bustling streets, gazing in wonder at its sights, such as a player piano and a Chinese laundry. Yet whites also gather to gawk at him, and then chase him through the city. He has committed no crime in St. Louis and thus this pursuit is simply a matter of racial persecution. After a months-long trek back to Arizona, Massai again witnesses Weddle, also returned from Florida, heaping further abuse on the Indians. Forcing young Apaches to build a new road, he snarls, "I'm gonna
ride soft and easy, right over your aching backs.” It is this type of white mistreatment that drives Massai to war, convincing him that violence is his only outlet to avenge his people.46

Throughout its story, Apache establishes Massai as a man of great pride and extraordinary skill. He understands that he cannot defeat white America, but carries out his war nonetheless, fighting for his ideals and seeking a warrior's death. He is a man of intense principles, at one point refusing the assistance of other escaped Apaches because, unlike him, they are criminals, murderers and thieves. Massai is a more complex character than Broken Arrow's impossibly noble Cochise, yet like that film, Apache still retains stereotypical trappings of the Indian, in this case, the almost otherworldly skill of the Indian warrior. Simply surviving a hike across the United States without being discovered is a clear demonstration of Massai's unmatched abilities, as is his one man war against both whites and Indians. He kills Weddle from a hiding place inside an army fort, for instance, and still manages to escape the soldiers by lighting a fire and stampeding their horses. Massai’s acts are essentially impossible for any human to carry out, yet the film justifies them through the simple explanation that he is an Apache.47

The film may treat Massai as something of a stereotype, but it does attempt to humanize him and his fellow Indians. In part, it accomplishes this by deviating from Paul Wellman's source novel, making Massai and Santos (Paul Guilfoyle), Nalinle's father and the chief of the Apaches who have remained on the reservation, more sympathetic characters. For instance, the audience rarely sees Massai kill any soldiers in the film, and while he is consumed with rage at the defeat of the Apaches by the white man and his people's capitulation, the violence that results from this anger is understandable. He is a man lashing out at oppression. In the novel, however, Massai is a far more nihilistic and vicious figure, murdering whites and Indians alike, among
them an unarmed farmer and his wife, as well as Nalinle's defenseless mother. In perhaps his most heartless act, he abducts an Apache woman only to abuse her psychologically, maim her physically, and drive her to suicide. Likewise, in the novel, Santos is a contemptible character, a greedy man who sees Nalinle as the source of a massive dowry, and he seeks vengeance upon Massai less for the murder of his wife and abduction of his daughter than for the loss of wealth Nalinle's kidnapping represents. But in the film, Santos is a tragic figure, a once proud man reduced to alcoholism due to his tribe's subjugation. When Massai first returns to Arizona after his trek across the country, Santos betrays him, getting him drunk and turning him over to the authorities, but this is simply an example of how he has been reduced to a pathetic shell of his former self, for he lives in fear of white reprisal and in shame of his own powerlessness.

Just as in the films discussed in chapter three, family is of great importance in Apache, for Massai's love for Nalinle helps to further humanize him for the audience. In one scene, for instance, the pair playfully wrestle until Massai pillows his head on her stomach. This is an image that would never have appeared in earlier American Indian films, and becomes even more tender when Nalinle tells her husband that she is pregnant with "little Massai." It is this nascent family that leads to an end of Massai's war. When army chief of scouts Al Sieber (John McIntyre) and his men finally locate their mountain hideaway, Massai goes out to die gloriously in battle while the very pregnant Nalinle goes into labor. Yet as he struggles with Sieber, Massai hears the cries of his newborn child and drops his knife, turning his back on the soldiers and walking back to his hut while Sieber lets him go. The army's reaction to this development is perhaps Apache's most important contribution to the American Indian film, for as he watches Massai join his family, Sieber simply tells his colonel, "Looks like he called the war off." Thus, the army does not treat Massai as a criminal, but rather as an enemy combatant, and with their
war over, the two sides can simply live in peace. As the critic for *Variety* noted, "Twist that leaves [Massai] free at finale is fact it's a declared war between him and the United States Army, just as though between nations, so he's off the hook for killings and property destruction soon as he's willing to make peace." This may be an unrealistic conclusion to the film, for Massai faces no punishment for the murders he has committed, but it does reveal a continued evolution of the Indian onscreen.49

![Figure #25: Massai lovingly rests his head upon Nalinle (Jean Peters) in *Apache*.](image)

However, *Apache*'s solution to the struggles faced by Indians is problematic, for like *Broken Arrow* and *Devil's Doorway*, it endorses the program of assimilation through farming that, for decades, was the nation's policy toward Native Americans. During his trek across the country, Massai meets Dawson (Morris Ankrum), a Cherokee living in the Indian Territory who attempts to convince the Apache of the virtues of assimilating into white society. Through Dawson, the film suggests that the white man's ways are superior to those of the Indian: "Once,
we Cherokee were like the Apaches. We feasted when the hunting was good, we starved when it was bad. But the white man ate the whole year round, because he raised his own food. We found we could live with the white man only if we lived like the white man." The notion that Native Americans starved when hunting was bad and did not understand how to raise crops is absurdly ahistorical, but it conveys the film's views that racial harmony will accompany assimilation. As Dawson tells Massai, "Here, Cherokee and white men live side-by-side. There is no difference," an expression of pure liberal idealism that has little basis in the reality of race relations, whether they be between whites and Native Americans in the nineteenth century or whites and African Americans in the 1950s.\(^{50}\)

Given a sack of seed corn by Dawson, Massai brings the Cherokee's message of prosperity-through-farming back to the Arizona, telling Santos and Nalinle that farming will provide the Apaches with "A warrior's peace, a peace between equals. You heard of the Cherokees. They walk in peace and hold their heads high, and work for themselves and not for the white man." Massai's dreams are disrupted when Santos turns him in to the white authorities, an act that drives him to war, yet Nalinle saves the seeds and they plant it after settling in the mountains. It is this field of crops that convinces the army that Massai really wants peace, for as a colonel says to Sieber, "He planted that corn and made it grow, something no other Apache ever did before." Thus the army allows Massai to live in peace because the corn proves his willingness to assimilation.\(^{51}\)

This conclusion was not the one from the original script, which as Aldrich explained, "ended with the hero, Massai . . . going back up to a shack to be shot needlessly in the back by Federal troops." The studio put pressure on the production to change it to a happy ending for purely commercial purposes. According to Lancaster, "United Artists said, 'You can't kill Burt,'"
and while both he and Aldrich and Lancaster initially resisted, Lancaster eventually relented and forced the director to shoot the ending with Massai surviving. Years later, both felt it was a mistake, with Aldrich claiming, that "If Burt had stood firm, I think the picture would have been—'significant' is a pompous word—but I think it would have been more important. It was seriously compromised," while Lancaster admitted, "I regret to this day that I didn't do what I wanted. . . . It was my opinion that we would have had something of a classic."

Yet their reasons for preferring the original ending actually convey a continued embracing stereotypes, particularly that of the Vanishing Indian. Aldrich, who said "A great deal of what I wanted to say about the Red Indian . . . was lost" with the happy ending, saw the film as being "about one thing, the inevitability of Massai's death. His courage is measured against the inevitable. The whole preceding two hours become redundant if at the end he can just walk away." Both men saw Massai as a doomed anachronism in modern society, with Aldrich explaining, "I felt he could not possibly be re-accepted or survive, for progress had passed him by. I respected his audacity, courage and dedication, but the world no longer had a place for him." Lancaster echoed this Vanishing Indian sentiment, seeing it as a function of white prejudice: "Here was an Indian who tried to get along but couldn't. We wanted to show that there was no hope for him. The white man didn't want him. 'Let him drink and stay by himself,' they said. There was no hope for him." Yet ironically, while Aldrich and Lancaster believed Massai's survival was harmful to the film, perhaps seeing it as a standard Hollywood ending, it actually serves as a rejection of a century-old Indian stereotype and allows Apache to stand in contrast to Broken Arrow and Devil's Doorway, two pictures that killed their Indian protagonists for the sake of their anti-bigotry message."
As critical and audience feedback for *Apache* indicates, by the mid-'50s, viewers were becoming used to films that focused heavily upon Indian characters. *Time*’s critic, for instance, complained about the lack of logic behind the happy ending and admired "Massai’s bewilderment as he wanders through the streets of bustling 1886 St. Louis," but demonstrated no problem with the film’s protagonist being an Indian. Likewise, the review in *Variety* noted that the film’s "main plot switch is viewing Indian from sympathetic angle, even though his knife, arrows, bullets often find their marks among white soldiers," and further praised the movie for its unusually sensitive treatment of its Indians, noting "Lancaster and Miss Peters play their Indian roles understandingly without usual screen stereotyping. As played, these two top characters are humans, surprisingly loquacious in contrast to usual clipped redskin portrayals." Perhaps most revealingly, despite the film dealing with a renegade Indian who kills white soldiers, Mandel Herbstman of *The Motion Picture Herald* saw *Apache*’s plot as "spelled out in dramatic, mass-entertainment terms," and called the film "an exploitable item, sizzling with action and box office astuteness." Thus, just as viewers found enjoyment in the killing of Indians in earlier films, Herbstman saw *Apache* offering entertainment in the form of an Indian killing whites. Yet as these reviews demonstrate the growing acceptance of pro-Indian films, the feedback from Walt and Ida Breitling of the Comfrey Theatre in Comfrey, Minnesota, indicates that some audiences may have been growing tired of that particular approach to the genre. As they wrote, "This is a very different Indian story but drew very poorly as everyone is getting fed up on this subject."54

Lancaster’s other foray into American Indian films during the era, *The Unforgiven*, was based on the novel by Alan Le May and focuses upon a Texas frontier community so overcome with bigotry that it turns upon one of its most beloved members, Rachel Zachary (Audrey
Hepburn), when it discovers that she is an Indian. Rachel was adopted as a baby after whites massacred her village, and she and her brothers, including family patriarch Ben (Lancaster) and racist Cash (Audie Murphy), grew up believing she was white. Thus, all are shocked to learn she is actually a member of the Kiowa tribe whom the community has fought for years and who killed the Zachary's father. Racism was not the original focus of the film, for screenwriter J.P. Miller intended it to be an examination of the brutal conditions of life on the frontier. While Lancaster, Hecht, and Hill, as well as director Delbert Mann, all initially agreed with this approach, the trio of producers eventually wanted a more commercial product. Hill-Hecht-Lancaster was in dire financial straits, desperately needing a hit, and they asked Miller to rewrite the script, expanding the role of Cash into something suitable for Lancaster's friend and frequent co-star Kirk Douglas. After attempting, and failing, to do so, Miller and Mann left the project, and the replaced, respectively, by Ben Maddow and John Huston. Yet in his autobiography, Huston referred to directing *The Unforgiven* as "a mistake," because the producers' commercial concerns undermined his intended message regarding racism. 

It was Maddow and Huston who were responsible for film's focus on prejudice, for as Fishgall writes, "Several elements were added to the Western [by Maddow and Huston] to heighten the story's racial tension," among them making "Cash Zachary a rabid Indian hater," and turning cowboy Johnny Portugal "into a possible half-breed and, as such, the object of derision by Cash and the other local bigots." Huston was a prime motivator in this civil rights-oriented approach to the film, writing, "I thought I saw in Maddow's script the potential for a more serious—and better—film than either he or Hecht-Hill-Lancaster had originally contemplated; I wanted to turn it into the story of racial intolerance in a frontier town, a comment on the real nature of community 'morality.'" Lancaster agreed, telling *The Los Angeles Times,*
"In 'the Unforgiven,' we were searching for a new way to tell the problem of prejudice. . . . We try to get down to the reasons people act this way." This was not simply idle talk from Lancaster, for in addition to Apache, his company also produced Take a Giant Step (United Artists, 1959), which dealt with an African American teenager facing prejudice in high school. Yet once again, commercialism interfered. As Huston complained, instead of an examination of racism, the film became "a swashbuckler about a larger-than-life frontiersman." The fate of Portugal (John Saxon) demonstrates this, for he simply disappears from the story by the mid-point of the picture after being established as an important supporting character early on.

Assistant director Tom Shaw explained that this occurred because Rachel was attracted to Portugal in the script, and "Burt didn't want to believe that [Rachel] could fuck somebody else. It was strictly a big ego thing." Thus, a character who could have mirrored Rachel's experiences and provided an additional layer of nuance to the film's exploration of racism was sacrificed to the producer-star's pride.\(^{56}\)

Despite this, The Unforgiven still strives to reveal the ugliness of racism. As played by Hepburn under red makeup, Rachel is a beautiful, kind, spirited young woman who does nothing to deserve the bigotry she faces. Yet longtime friends and even members of her family attack her when they learn she is an Indian. Cash is so bigoted that he demands that Ben, "Get her out of here! I don't care how you do it, get her out of here, I'm telling you," and his newfound hatred of his sister eventually leads him to abandon the family. Furthermore, he claims that when "the wind's in the right direction, I can smell an Injun a mile off," and when Ben strikes Portugal, one of their ranch hands, for flirting with Rachel, Cash howls, "Finish him, Ben! One less redhide!"

Likewise, Zeb Rawlins (Charles Bickford), Ben's even-keeled business partner, tells him, "I've loved you as well as I've loved my own sons, but we're finished. Unless you pack this girl back
to the Kiowas, we're partners no more." While this type of bigotry is not unusual for American Indian films of the civil rights era, *The Unforgiven* goes even further in its portrayal of racism. When Kiowas kill Charlie Rawlins, Rachel's fiancé, his mother, Hagar (June Walker), takes out her grief and rage on the innocent Rachel. "Wound yourself around my son Charlie to get yourself a littler of half-breeds to run around my Charlie's cabin!" she screeches like a mad woman, "Kiowa squaw! Red-hide nigger as ever was!" Cash refers to his sister as a "red-hide nigger" as well, and in using such language, *The Unforgiven* explicitly links the racism Rachel faces to that of present-day African Americans.\(^{57}\)

While *The Unforgiven* attempts to impart lessons in racial tolerance, it hypocritically embraces the inferiority of Indians and the superiority of white culture. As such, the film serves as something of a microcosm of the United States during the Civil Rights era, with many whites being against the idea of legal oppression of African Americans, but still uncomfortable with the notion of having them as social equals. For instance, in 1956, 80% of Americans were opposed to segregation, yet a majority also did not believe that the government should force integration on the South. Similarly, *The Unforgiven* condemns the overt racism of Cash, Hagar, and other whites, but it also implicitly endorses their views through the abject horror evinced by Ben and Rachel when they learn that she is an Indian. When Ben still thinks Rachel is white, he declares that their family has "nothing to be ashamed of," as if such shame would be justified if Rachel was an Indian. Further, when Rachel calls the Indians her "own kind," Ben replies, "By blood, yes, but not by anything else." Thus, the film is not about an acceptance of all Indians, but rather the acceptance of one Indian—Rachel—who was raised white and is a member of an upstanding white family.\(^{58}\)

230
Likewise, *The Unforgiven*'s portrayal of Indians is also highly problematic. Rachel, for instance, may be a Kiowa by birth, but unlike the Indian protagonists in *Devil's Doorway* and *Apache*, who embrace their heritage, she rejects it and desperately wants to be white. Furthermore, the film's other Indians are little different from the bloodthirsty savages of earlier decades: nameless, shadowy Others who lurk outside the Zachary's cabin, posing a physical threat that the racists never present. Tellingly, while most of the dramatic conflict in *The Unforgiven* revolves around bigotry, the film's climactic battle is not between the Zacharys and the white racists who have been tormenting them, but between the Zacharys and the Kiowas, led by Rachel's brother, who intends to reclaim her. Thus, the film may focus on prejudice, but its Indians remain in the same adversarial role that he did in the 1930s. Reflecting the era's continued emphasis on family, Cash overcomes his bigotry and returns in order to help save the day, but significantly, it is Rachel who decides the issue by killing her Kiowa brother. Through this act, she symbolically excises her Indianness and is thus allowed to embrace her adopted heritage as a white woman. At the film's end, the Zacharys depart the territory, leaving their racist neighbors behind, but they can only do so once Rachel has abandoned any ethnic identity as an Indian. In effect, the makeup of the family may be multiracial, but it remains a decidedly white family culturally and socially, and Rachel must assimilate into white society in order to remain a part of it.59

Lancaster saw the film as dealing with racism on the level of the individual, saying, "The point we try to make in *The Unforgiven* is that nothing will stand in the way of love. If you love somebody enough, really love that person, then the color of her skin, where she comes from, her background—these things become unimportant," yet that offers no solution to the systemic racism rife in American society. The loveable Rachel, played by Hepburn, one of the most
charming actresses in Hollywood history, overcomes the bigotry aimed at her, but the other Indians remain faceless savages who are wiped out in order to save Rachel and allow her to be assimilated into white society. Moreover, at the film's end, Ben and Rachel plan to marry, a bizarre development given that they grew up together as brother and sister and Ben never expressed romantic interest in Rachel when he thought she was white. Only once she is established as an Indian does romance bloom, and thus incest is subsumed by racial difference.60

Critical response to The Unforgiven demonstrates that, while its surface engagement with issues of racism was apparent to its audience, evidence of the grip the issue of civil rights was exerting upon the United States in 1960, not all viewers noticed its hypocrisy. Sidney H. Rechentnik of The Motion Picture Herald, for instance, complimented Huston for fashioning "an absorbing and compelling drama of epic proportions in this tale of hatred between Indian and white in the Texas panhandle," and praised Hepburn for giving "a sympathetic performance in the complex role as the foster girl shocked into the knowledge that she is an Indian." Likewise, the critic for Time noted that the film "Seizes a timely and heroic theme, the struggle between human feeling and race prejudice," and further, "Even though [Ben] hates Indians as only a man can whose father has been killed by them, he defends the little 'red Niggah' against those who would harm her. Thus both reviews recognized the film's engagement with racism, but did not question why the object of that racism, the Indians, also serve as its primary villains. Other critics, however, provided a more nuanced reading of the picture. Life's review, for instance, noted that, "In the end, The Unforgiven becomes a rootin' tootin' old-fashioned supercolossal horse opera with a pioneer family holed up in a sod house besieged by hordes of Indians," acknowledging that, while the movie tried to do something different with its story about
prejudice, it still returned to the standard ending made popular in years past: savage Indians attacking white people.\(^6^1\)

The most perceptive analysis, however, came from Arthur Knight of *The Saturday Review*, who reviewed it alongside John Ford's *Sergeant Rutledge*, a film about a black soldier who faces bigotry in the frontier army. According to Knight, "The inflammatory racist issue dominates two new 'adult Westerns,' but neither seems calculated to outrage the white supremacists. One wonders why. Why make a picture that handles hot, controversial subject material in a manner that either blunts the edge or reduces everything to a noncontroversial cliché?" While commercial concerns—white supremacists represented a market the filmmakers may not have wanted to alienate—are one possibility, Knight hypothesizes that "the producers, directors, and writers failed to think through the implications of their themes. They had ideas, but lacked a point of view." As he continues,

> Obviously, the screen writer, Ben Maddow, is trying to convey something important through all of this. The blind, unreasoning hatred of a human being because of the color of his skin is wrong, he seems to be saying. . . . And love, not blood, is thicker than water, he adds. Now, both of these are admirable and elevating sentiments, but in the context of this story they seem curiously lacking in force or validity. The film finds nothing wrong in the fact that a white family stole the Indian baby; because they gave it love and a good home, presumably, everything is fine. And the Indian girl is asked to express her gratitude by killing her brother. It is tempting to speculate what kind of dénouement would have been provided if she had been a white baby stole by Indians.

Thus, while other critics identified the film's theme of racial bigotry, Knight saw through them and questioned its hypocrisy in providing a different set of values for whites and Indians. In effect, as Knight recognizes, behavior that *The Unforgiven* finds acceptable for whites it would find unacceptable for Indians.\(^6^2\)

*Apache* and *The Unforgiven* demonstrate that, despite the filmmakers' best intentions, commercial concerns can undermine a movie's social message. Driven by Lancaster's liberal
idealism, both pictures attempted to reveal the evils of racism. In *Apache*, Massai is so filled with rage at the mistreatment he and his people receive at the hands of the white man that he embarks on a one-man war, and is only rescued from this path by his love for Nalinle and their child. Significantly, the film treats Massai’s conflict as a legitimate war, rather than criminal activity, and thus the military allows him to live in peace instead of punishing him for his offenses. Likewise, *The Unforgiven* views racism through the prism of an Indian protagonist, Rachel, with the bigots in her community so despising the local Kiowa tribe that they turn on her and her family when they learn she is an Indian, too. Yet both films advocate for assimilation into white society as the solution to the nation's problems with race relations. Having learned about the benefits of living like the white man, Massai gives up his warrior's ways in order to raise corn, while Rachel rejects her Indian ancestry, desperately wanting to be white. And in both films' cases, commercialism undermined the progressive message Lancaster and his fellow filmmakers intended to deliver. The studio pressured Aldrich and Lancaster into changing the ending of *Apache* from a tragic one, as originally planned, into a more audience-friendly happy one, while Huston's hopes of using *The Unforgiven* as an examination of community racism were hampered by Hill-Hecht-Lancaster's financial struggles and their desperate need for a hit.

**Conclusion**

In the years after World War II, some of Hollywood's American Indian films dealt with the importance of the nuclear family, but others dealt with, and revealed the growing importance of, the civil rights movement. As such, they were part of a larger movement within Hollywood that engaged with minority rights, be they African American, Jewish, or Native American. Reflecting the liberal ideals of their filmmakers, *Broken Arrow, Devil's Doorway, Apache* and
The Unforgiven all sought to open viewers’ eyes to the injustice and evils of racial bigotry. Through the friendship of Jeffords and Cochise and the romance of Jeffords and Sonseeahray, Broken Arrow emphasized racial brotherhood and harmony, suggesting that, good intentions and sacrifice could overcome hate. Devil's Doorway focused upon the injustice of racism, both legal and personal, and, along with Apache, revealed the anger and violence that could result from the oppression of minorities. Finally, The Unforgiven, dealt with the vicious bigotry of a community that turned on one of its most beloved members simply because of her racial background. All four movies reflected the liberal belief that whites and minorities could, and should, peacefully coexist, for, to paraphrase Lancaster, love should know no racial boundaries.

These four films also reveal the increasing emergence of Indians as characters, and even protagonists, in American Indian films. As demonstrated in previous chapters, prior to the 1950s, Indians served largely as plot devices that helped to move the story forward or help the movies' white protagonists in some manner. Because they focused specifically upon race, however, the civil rights-oriented pictures of the postwar era brought Indians to the fore. Broken Arrow may be told from a white man's perspective, but next to Jeffords, Cochise and Sonseeahray are the film's two most important characters, a vast departure from earlier American Indian pictures. Moreover, Poole and Massai are the protagonists of Devil's Doorway and Apache, a development that the genre had not seen since the curious one-off of Massacre in 1935, while Rachel is one of The Unforgiven's two lead characters. Furthermore, each of the latter three protagonists was played by a major Hollywood star—Taylor, Lancaster, and Hepburn—another indication of the importance of those parts, and the continued evolution of the Indian on screen. As audience feedback reveals, viewers accepted this development; while
critics and theater owners may have expressed different views on the quality of these films, they showed little distaste for the civil rights themes of the pictures or for their Indian-heavy focus.

Despite these good intentions, however, each of the four films' engagement with race was problematic. All of them saw assimilation as the solution for minorities in America, suggesting that, just as a rejection of racism was necessary on the part of whites, a willingness to join white, mainstream society was necessary on the part of minorities. *Broken Arrow* and *Apache*, for instance, both presented the adoption of farming as a means by which the Apaches could thrive economically while becoming accepted socially within the structure of the United States. Likewise, Poole in *Devil's Doorway* wants nothing more than to open an American-style ranch on his family's land, and, in effect, the bigots like Coolan are simply unwilling to allow him to assimilate. Each of these three films involves the abandonment of Indian heritage and culture as part of the bargain for the end of racism, and this is taken to an extreme in *The Unforgiven*, when Rachel must kill her own Kiowa brother in order to excise her Indianness and prove that she is, if not racially, then culturally and socially, white. Thus, while all four of the films present racism as a great evil, they also suggest that minorities must become part of white society, and must do so on white America's terms.

While the 1950s saw an increasing engagement with Indian rights on screen, this does not mean that racist depictions of Indians were gone from the genre, however. Films such as *Ride Lonesome* (Columbia, 1959) and *Comanche Station* (Columbia, 1960), both directed by Budd Boetticher and starring western stalwart Randolph Scott, featured bloodthirsty savage Indians who are little different from those in *Stagecoach* or *The Plainsman* decades earlier. Far worse was *Arrowhead* (Paramount, 1953), which was written and directed by Charles Marquis Warren and stands as one of the most overtly racist American Indian films ever produced. The film
concerns Ed Bannon (Charlton Heston) an army scout who hates all Apaches, particularly the vicious Toriano (Jack Palance). Bannon only joined the army because it was the one institution that could stop the Apaches, and sneers in derision at the liberal white officers who believe they can make peace with Indians. He would have been an ideal villain in a picture like Broken Arrow or Devil's Doorway, but in Arrowhead, he is the hero. Moreover, the film justifies his racism, as the once-liberal army commander eventually admits that Bannon's views are correct, and every Apache in Arrowhead is, indeed, a duplicitous, devious monster. Toriano murders his childhood best friend because he is white, Nita (Katy Jurado) works as a washerwoman for the army so that she can spy on it for Toriano, and Jim Eagle (Pat Hogan) is a scout who continually professes his loyalty to the cavalry yet leads it into an ambush and kills his white partner. At the film's end, Bannon informs the defeated Apaches that their revolt intended to overthrow the white man "was a false dream," and thus Arrowhead is a work of white supremacy, insisting that minorities are inferior and should accept the dominance of white America.63

Yet while these movies continued to portray Indians in a negative light, there were additional American Indian films made during the 1950s that argued against racism. Co-written by Delmer Daves, the director of Broken Arrow, The White Feather (Twentieth Century Fox, 1955) was essentially a remake of that earlier film, with the setting changed to Wyoming and the Indians to Cheyennes. One further alternation was that, unlike Sonseeahray, the Indian love interest in The White Feather, again played by Paget, survived and lived happily with the picture's white protagonist. Other films such as Taza, Son of Cochise (Universal, 1954), which featured a cameo by Chandler reprising his role as Cochise, Sitting Bull (United Artists, 1954) and Chief Crazy Horse (Universal, 1955), all focused on historical Native American leaders who, according to the films, found their efforts to make peace impeded by white racism. Thus,
Hollywood was continuing to confront prejudice through these movies, and this approach of using the American Indian film as a platform to critique the flaws in American society would come to predominate the genre during the turbulent 1960s.\textsuperscript{64}
The case of Smith v. Allwright (1944) ruled that white-only party primaries in Texas were unconstitutional, paving the way for fully integrated political parties nationwide. In the 1948 Supreme Court case of Shelley v. Kraemer, the Justice Department, in the words of historian William C. Berman, "argued that housing covenants merely served to perpetuate 'an artificial quarantine of minority groups' and should, therefore, be declared null and void." The Supreme Court ruled that "Private agreements to exclude persons of designated race or color from the use or occupancy of real estate for residential purposes do not violate the Fourteenth Amendment; but it is violative of the equal protection clause of the Fourteenth Amendment for state courts to enforce them," essentially eliminating them from society. The case of Briggs v. Elliott unsuccessfully challenged school segregation in

1 Devil's Doorway, DVD, directed by Antony Mann (1950; Burbank, CA: Warner Bros. Digital Distribution, 2010). The title of the film refers to a mountain pass that leads from the local town to Sweet Meadows.
In addition to films about racism, the postwar wave of social problem pictures included ones that dealt with alcoholism, such as The Lost Weekend (Paramount, 1945), mental illness, such as The Snake Pit (Twentieth Century Fox, 1948) and juvenile delinquency, such as Knock On Any Door (Columbia, 1949).
For a full discussion of Hollywood's portrayal of minorities during the postwar era, see Roffman and Purdy, 235-256.
5 Bend of the River, DVD, directed by Anthony Mann (1943; Universal City, CA: Universal Studios Home Video, 2003); High Noon, DVD, directed by Fred Zinneman (1952; Chicago, IL: Olive Films, 2012); The Naked Spur, DVD, directed by Anthony Mann (1953; Burbank, CA: Warner Home Video, 2006); The Oxbow Incident, DVD, directed by William A. Wellman (1943; Century City, CA: Twentieth Century Fox Home Entertainment, 2003); Red River, DVD, directed by Howard Hawks (1948; Century City, CA: Twentieth Century Fox Home Entertainment, 2007); Scheuer, "Movie Makers Get Tough in Tearing Own Institution and Some of Society," Los Angeles Times, December 24, 1950, C8; Winchester ’73, DVD, directed by Anthony Mann (1950; Universal City, CA: Universal Studios Home Entertainment, 2003).
7 Ibid., 1041-59.
Although Thurmond did not win the presidency in 1948, he did carry four southern states: his native South Carolina, as well as Mississippi, Alabama, and Louisiana. For a full discussion of the Dixiecrats, see Numan V. Bartley, The Rise of Massive Resistance: Race and Politics in the South During the 1950's (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1969), 28-46.
The Supreme Court case of Smith v. Allwright (1944) ruled that white-only party primaries in Texas were unconstitutional, paving the way for fully integrated political parties nationwide. In the 1948 Supreme Court case of Shelley v. Kraemer, the Justice Department, in the words of historian William C. Berman, ‘argued that housing covenants merely served to perpetuate 'an artificial quarantine of minority groups' and should, therefore, be declared null and void.' The Supreme Court ruled that 'Private agreements to exclude persons of designated race or color from the use or occupancy of real estate for residential purposes do not violate the Fourteenth Amendment; but it is violative of the equal protection clause of the Fourteenth Amendment for state courts to enforce them,' essentially eliminating them from society. The case of Briggs v. Elliott unsuccessfully challenged school segregation in

10 Marable, 37; Tuck, 242, 251-52.

The plight of African Americans Donald and Betty Howard exemplified northern racial strife, for after moving into a previously all-white Chicago housing project in 1953, they faced a year-long campaign of racially-motivated mob violence and vandalism, including stink bombs and broken windows, before moving out in 1954. For a discussion of their experience, see Tuck, 248-50.


11 Tuck, 245, 285.

12 *Broken Arrow*.


In the author's forward to the script for *Broken Arrow* (under its original title, *Blood Brother*), screenwriter Albert Maltz wrote, "The Apaches are today, as they were yesterday, a vigorous and handsome people. It is both practical and advisable that they be used in the cast." Albert Maltz, screenplay for *Blood Brother*, Author's Forward, *Broken Arrow* folder 1, Twentieth Century Fox Archive, USC Film and Cinema Archive, School of Cinematic Arts, University of Southern California, Los Angeles, California; *Broken Arrow*.


*The House I Live In* featured Frank Sinatra, appearing as himself, confronting a group of children for bullying a Jewish boy and teaching them about the evils of prejudice. The Writers' Guild of America finally corrected the credits for *Broken Arrow* in 1991, recognizing Maltz as the film's screenwriter.

15 Michael Abel, memo to Darryl F. Zanuck, dated April 1, 1949, 1, *Broken Arrow* folder 1, Twentieth Century Fox Archive, USC Film and Cinema Archive; *Broken Arrow*.

16 *Broken Arrow*.

17 *Broken Arrow*.

Chandler was such a success in *Broken Arrow* that he went on to play Cochise in two other films, *The Battle at Apache Pass* (Universal, 1952), and as a cameo in *Taza, Son of Cochise* (Universal, 1954). Hopper, "Chandler Will Repeat Indian Cochise Part," *Los Angeles Time*, June 5, 1951, 16.


19 *Broken Arrow*.

20 Schallert, "Debra Paget a Natural as Screen 'Native Girl,'" *Los Angeles Times*, July 30, 1950, D1, D4.

It was not until 1957 that Zanuck and Twentieth Century Fox would finally break through with an actual interracial couple on screen, that of Harry Belafonte and Joan Fontaine in *Island in the Sun*. Unlike *Broken Arrow*, that film featured a non-white male/white female relationship, and as they shared the first interracial kiss in Hollywood.
history, it was both a sensation at the box office and the subject of the sort of controversy that Broken Arrow avoided. As Gussow writes, Island in the Sun "was threatened with boycotts, mostly by southern theater owners. The South Carolina legislature considered passing a bill which would fine any theater showing the movie $5000, and Zanuck announced that he would personally pay all such fines. The bill was not passed." Gussow, 190-91; Island in the Sun, DVD, directed by Robert Rossen (1957; Century City, CA: Twentieth Century Fox Home Entertainment, 2006).

21 Broken Arrow.


28 Devil's Doorway.

29 Devil's Doorway; Frances B. Kopp, Devil's Doorway Script Synopsis, dated August 11, 1949, Devil's Doorway folder 1, MGM Collection, USC Film and Cinema Archive; Guy Trosper, Devil's Doorway screenplay, 2, Devil's Doorway folder 3, MGM Collection, USC Film and Cinema Archive.

30 Devil's Doorway; Kopp; Trosper, 5, 9, 13-14.

31 Devil's Doorway; Estes, 45; Trosper, 28, 83.

32 Devil's Doorway; Trosper, 28, 83.

33 Devil's Doorway; Trosper, 45.

34 Devil's Doorway; Kopp; Trosper, 45.

35 Devil's Doorway.

36 Ibid.

37 Devil's Doorway; Devil's Doorway trailer script, Devil's Doorway folder 3, MGM Collection, USC Film and Cinema Archive; Trosper, 43. Capitalization and emphasis in original.


42 Balio, 255, 402; Borneman, 452; Schatz, 435, 440.
When discussing *The Unforgiven*, the shooting of which involved Audrey Hepburn fracturing her spine after falling from a horse and Audie Murphy nearly drowning, Huston wrote, "In the end, the worst of it was the picture we made. Some of my pictures I don't care for, but *The Unforgiven* is the only one I actually dislike. Despite some good performances, the overall tone is bombastic and over-inflated. Everybody in it is bigger than life. I watched it on television one night recently, and after about half a reel I had to turn the damned thing off. I couldn't bear it." Huston biographers Madsen and Lawrence Grobel offer competing explanations for why Huston took the job directing *The Unforgiven*. Madsen suggests that he needed the $300,000 salary to renovate his Irish castle, which had no electricity or plumbing, and finance his lavish "jet-set lifestyle." Grobel, on the other hand, wrote that "the reason John was taking on the project had nothing to do with making a film but rather with acquiring more pre-Columbian vanities. It had become an obsession with him," and thus Huston used the location shoot in Mexico as an opportunity to hunt up and ship home artifacts. Lawrence Grobel, *The Hustons: The Life and Times of a Hollywood Dynasty*, updated edition (New York: Cooper Square Press, 2000), 458-59; Huston, 284; Axel Madsen, *John Huston* (Garden City, NJ: Doubleday and Company, Inc., 1978), 179; Thomas M. Pryor, "Audrey Hepburn Home to Recover," *Los Angeles Times*, February 3, 1959, 36.

Alpert, E1; Fishgall, 182-83; Huston, 283; *Take a Giant Step*, DVD, directed by Philip Leacock (1959; Santa Monica, CA: Warner Home Video, 2006).

*The Unforgiven*, DVD.

Tuck, 285; *The Unforgiven*, DVD.

*The Unforgiven*, DVD.

Alpert, E1; *The Unforgiven*, DVD.


*Arrowhead*, DVD, directed by Charles Marquis Warren (1953; Hollywood, CA: Paramount Home Video, 2004); *Comanche Station*, DVD, directed by Budd Boetticher (1960; Culver City, CA: Sony Pictures Home Entertainment,
Arrowhead was originally intended to a far more liberal film, with white abuses driving the Apaches to war. However, Luigi Luraschi, Paramount’s head of censorship who also reported directly to the CIA, believed that such stories were harming the nation’s image abroad. In historian Lary May’s words, “Despite its positive portrayal of Indians, the script presented ‘a story which the Commies could use to their advantage in Asia,’ for it served as an ‘indictment’ of America’s treatment of the Apache Indians.” Luraschi pressured Warren into rewriting the screenplay in order to present the United States in a better light. As May continues, “At first . . . Heston resisted, but after being told of the Cold War imperatives at work, he relented.” Unfortunately, Heston makes no mention of the changes to Arrowhead in his autobiography, limiting his discussion of the film to a brief compliment regarding Palance’s performance, followed by a lengthy diatribe regarding his dislike of the term “Native American,” declaring, “The term ‘Native American’ really raises my hackles. I’m a native American, goddamnit. I was born here, so were my parents. My son, Fraser, can trace his American roots back twelve generations through his mother to 1633—by written record. That’s a native American.” Charlton Heston, In the Arena: an Autobiography (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1995), 119-20, emphasis in original; May, 203-4, 208-9.

Epilogue for Part II

The nuclear family and civil rights were two themes that dominated American Indian films in the years after World War II, but the topics were not necessarily independent of one another. *Apache* and *The Unforgiven* focus upon racial prejudice, for example, but family is an important part of their stories, as well. Of all the films of the era, *The Searchers* (Warner Bros., 1956), John Ford's masterpiece, is perhaps the best example of the melding of the two issues. It deals heavily with the importance of family, just as the cavalry trilogy did several years earlier, but also wrestles with the ugliness of racism. Perhaps the most written-about and analyzed western ever made, the movie concerns Ethan Edwards (John Wayne) and Martin Pawley (Jeffrey Hunter), two men who spend five years combing post-Civil War Texas searching for Debbie (Natalie Wood), Ethan's niece and Martin's adopted sister, after a Comanche raid results in the death of Ethan's brother and his wife, and the abduction of Debbie and her sister. Ethan eventually finds the sister's despoiled corpse, but the Indians raise Debbie as their own, and Ethan and Martin will stop at nothing to find her. Yet, the two men have very different plans for the girl when they finally locate her.¹

Ethan is a racist who despises Indians, abusing and mocking Martin simply because the younger man is one-eighth Cherokee. His bigotry is so intense that it even disturbs his fellow Indian fighters, as evidenced by their disgust when he shoots the eyes out of a dead Comanche to prevent the Indian from entering the afterlife. As associate producer Patrick Ford wrote in a production memo, "[Ethan] is a cruel man. . . . He would see every Comanche dead if he had his
"way," and further notes that "A modern man would find much about him that is psychopathic."
This becomes fully apparent when Ethan and Martin finally find Debbie living with the Indians who murdered her family, for it is only then that Ethan reveals his terrible plan. As Patrick Ford's memo explains, "He intends to kill the girl Debbie when he finds her because she has been sullied by the Indians he hates." *The Searchers* contrasts this horrifying racism with the more liberal attitude of Martin, who protects Debbie from her murderous uncle, declaring, "Better she's alive and living with Comanches than with her brains bashed out."

Yet *The Searchers* is a film with an often problematic presentation of Indians. In his memo, Patrick Ford declared that "We hope to show the Comanche with as much barbarism and savagery as possible," and in this, the film succeeds, for its principle Indian, Chief Scar (Henry Brandon), is a consummate bloodthirsty savage. Perhaps even more problematic is the film's treatment of Look (Beulah Archuletta), a homely Indian woman who Martin accidentally marries and Ford uses as comic relief. Despite Martin's more enlightened views, he still treats Look terribly, kicking her down a hill and abusing her until she gets the message and departs. Yet hypocritically, when he comes across her corpse in the ruins of a Comanche camp massacred by the cavalry, Martin mourns her death, saying, "What did the soldiers have to go and kill her for? She never done nobody any harm?" Furthermore, despite Martin's suggestion that Debbie is better off living with Indians than murdered by Ethan, the film never questions the validity of their rescue mission. Racists like Ethan may think she is better off dead, and liberals like Martin may think she must be fetched "home," but no one seriously contemplates leaving her with the Comanches, even though they have been her family for years. Thus, when *The Saturday Review*’s Knight posed the query in his critique of *The Unforgiven*, "It is tempting to speculate what kind of dénouement would have been provided if she had been a white baby stole by
Indians," *The Searchers* had already given him the answer four years earlier: a white baby must be brought back to white society.³

As this quest to bring Debbie home reveals, *The Searchers* fully embraces the era's other prominent theme, the importance of family. Ethan is obsessed with avenging the murder of his kin while Martin will stop at nothing to save Debbie, the last surviving member of his adopted family. Patrick Ford's memo indicates that the family is the only institution in the harsh Texas wilderness: "There is no communal life on this frontier. Each family holds tenaciously to its holdings, and their only social life is an occasional wedding or burial at a neighbor's home twenty miles distant." Martin cannot bring himself to start a new family with his sweetheart, Laurie Jorgenson (Vera Miles) until he finds his sister, but at the film's end, with Debbie returned home, he and Laurie plan to wed. And despite Ethan's bigotry, family wins out over racism, for when he finally catches Debbie during the film's climactic cavalry vs. Indians battle, Ethan lifts his niece above his head as if to dash her to the ground, and then cradles her in his arms, telling her, "Let's go home." Even so, Ethan's odious personal views and murderous ways will always keep him in the position of an outsider, unable to enjoy the warmth that a family provides. As Patrick Ford noted in his memo, when Martin "has found Debbie and saved her from the Indians and her uncle, he has grown into a man of [Ethan's] stature without the bitter under-currents that will keep the veteran from ever knowing happiness." *The Searchers* ends, therefore, with Ethan forlornly watching Martin, Debbie and the Jorgensons enter their cabin before turning and walking away. In this way, Ford explored the two main themes of the era's American Indian films in *The Searchers*, acknowledging the ugliness of racism and the importance of family.⁴
Conformity and the American Indian Film

While the nuclear family, motivated by the Cold War, and rising consciousness regarding race relations, driven by the civil rights movement, were reflected in the American Indian films of the postwar years, another important factor that influenced Hollywood’s creation of these movies was the wave of conformity that swept the nation after World War II. The booming postwar economy, the bureaucratization of the white collar workforce, and the rise of suburbia led to a flattening of society, as all of America appeared to be white, middle class, Christian, heterosexual and married. It is important to recognize that this was only perceived conformity, as many Americans did not fit into one or even all of those categories, but for Hollywood, perception was reality. Seeing all Americans as being part of a nuclear family, the industry made films targeted at, and in promotion of, the family, and seeing all of American society as white, if made films that advocated the assimilation of minorities as the solution to bigotry and racial strife.  

Figure #26: In the final shot of The Searchers, Ethan (John Wayne) is left alone outside the Jorgenson’s cabin, a man in permanent exile from the rest of society due to his odious ways.
First published in 1950, David Riesman's *The Lonely Crowd* was a landmark examination of postwar America that analyzed the drastic social changes as they were occurring. According to Riesman, the decades prior to World War II were dominated by a mindset he called "inner directed," which was individualistic and drew motivation from the self. However, postwar trends such as corporate bureaucratization, suburbanization, and the rise of a consumer economy, led to a new, "other directed" mindset. As the name suggests, other directed individuals had their goals defined not by themselves, but other people, such as their superiors and peers at work and their friends at home. Other direction led Americans to seek approval and respect from their contemporaries, and focused upon the importance of being liked. Riesman saw this as typical of the middle class, and claimed that it resulted in a close-knit, conformist society based in the rapidly expanding environs of suburbia. There, Americans constantly stayed in touch with one another because they provided each other with motivation and direction. Yet Riesman did not see the other directed mindset as weak or soft, nor did he suggest that it was inferior to inner direction. For instance, while inner direction may have worked in an agrarian economy, where people generally worked for and by themselves, other direction was far more necessary in an interconnected society and bureaucratic, corporate workforce. In such an environment, people needed to be liked in order to be successful at jobs that involved constant contact with customers, clients, and coworkers, and other direction led to friendly, tolerant, and empathetic individuals.6

Riesman may have viewed these developments objectively, and did not place value judgments upon them, but William H. Whyte's 1957 work *The Organization Man* did see this conformity as a negative development for the United States. Whyte claimed that what he called the Protestant Ethic, which valued individualism above all else, was being subsumed by the Social Ethic, in which the group or community was paramount. According to Whyte, this was a
product of bureaucratization, not just of the workforce, as Riesman suggested, but all of society.
Whyte labeled employees within this system Organization Men, for they belonged to, and indeed had surrendered their individual identities to, the Organization for which they worked, be it a corporation, a government agency, a university laboratory, or even the Church.\(^7\)

According to Whyte, Organization Men were not boat rockers, but instead willingly accepted conformity and allowed themselves to be pushed around by the Organization because such surrender allowed them to get ahead, achieve, and enjoy success in their line of work. They were workaholics who brought their jobs home with them at night, but unlike members of the Protestant Ethic, who worked for themselves, organization men did so for the Organization. Yet, Organization Men also sought assurance that this surrender of their individuality was worth the cost, and thus created the Social Ethic, which morally legitimized society's dominance over individuals while insisting that their lives within the Organization had meaning. Whyte saw these Organization Men as inherently transient, moving from place to place in pursuit of success—they were loyal to the Organization overall, not any one particular company within it—and thus they clung to conformist suburbs where everything and everyone was the same, regardless of where it was geographically located in America. Ultimately, Whyte believed the concurrent developments of the Social Ethic and the Organization Man were turning the nation into a soft, conformist, communal society, and thus saw his book as a way to teach Americans to both cooperate with and to resist the Organization.\(^8\)

The unprecedented explosion of the American economy during and after World War II—in 1949, the United States had 7% of the world's population and 42% of its wealth—was a major factor that led to the conformity that both Riesman and Whyte saw growing throughout the nation's society. As David Potter argued in his 1954 work *People of Plenty*, the United States
was defined by abundance, both potential (natural resources) and actual (the ability of the American people to exploit those resources), and this was having a leveling effect on society. A southern conservative, Potter argued that America did not offer full equality to everyone, but rather equality of opportunity, and further believed that class striations were valuable and that members of the underclass would be content if they simply accepted their place in society. After all, there was so much wealth available in postwar America that even working class people could enjoy a relatively pleasant life. However, this extraordinary abundance had the effect of blurring class divisions, leading lower class citizens to reject their status and believe in upward mobility that Potter found unnecessary and even harmful. Essentially, he claimed, abundance made everyone in America appear to be equal, rather than simply have equality of opportunity, because it erased the divisions between classes, thus resulting in perceived, if not actual, social leveling.9

This great abundance went hand-in-hand with the material consumption that dominated postwar America. After World War II, Americans developed a mentality that historian Lizabeth Cohen has labeled the "purchaser as citizen," which professed that mass consumption was a patriotic duty, keeping the economy strong and thriving in the face of the Soviet Union. As Cohen writes, consumption "provided a ready weapon in the political struggles of the Cold War era," for material and economic abundance proved that America's way of life was superior to that of the USSR. But as Cohen reveals, this mass consumption also led to conformity. Government programs and social trends intended to promote consumption and economic stability, such as the GI Bill, career training, property ownership, and the increasingly important control of credit, placed greater emphasis on the male-dominated nuclear family because they favored men, especially married men, over women. Moreover, just as Potter feared, the consumption and abundance of the postwar years led to the leveling of society, with increasing salaries and the
availability of material goods leading to economic egalitarianism. More and more Americans entered the middle class, often moving to the suburbs in the process, which led to ever more conformity and gentrification. Therefore, during the 1950s, America appeared to be a nation of white, middle class, Christian families. As Cohen notes, advertisers aimed for "the middle of the middle" and the "average consumer," seeing all Americans as essentially the same. This was not actually the case, of course, and by the decade's end, marketers would begin to target specific demographics through segmented advertising, but during the 1950s, conformity was widely accepted and thus, like the advertisers, Hollywood aimed for "the middle of the middle" with its films.10

Movies are, of course, consumer products, and in an era that not only stressed the importance of the family, but also saw everyone in America as being a part of a family, Hollywood produced family-focused films. The pictures discussed in chapter three promoted the family to their viewers as something the nation needed to remain strong, but they were also aimed at Americans who belonged to nuclear families. By making movies about the family in an era of such conformity, Hollywood sought to bring in ticket buyers (undoubtedly mostly male due to the action-oriented nature of the western genre) who could identify with the people they saw on the screen, be they adults who saw themselves in family men like Hondo or She Wore a Yellow Ribbon's Britles, or young boys who did the same with the sons in Hondo and Rio Grande. In this way, these American Indian films were part of a larger trend in the entertainment industry during the postwar era that focused heavily upon the family, including movies like Father of the Bride (MGM, 1950), It's a Wonderful Life (RKO, 1946) and Cheaper by the Dozen (Twentieth Century Fox, 1950), and television programs like Leave it to Beaver
and *Father Knows Best*, products that targeted families while simultaneously glorifying the merits of family life.

Conformity also played a significant role in Hollywood's engagement with race in the civil rights-oriented American Indian films discussed in chapter four. To be certain, pictures like *Broken Arrow* and *The Unforgiven* sought to teach their viewers that racial prejudice was an evil and ugly element of American society. However, their formula for racial harmony was not one that involved respecting and maintaining the cultural differences of minorities, but rather encouraged their assimilation into mainstream society. Therefore, they preached that minorities, be they Native Americans or African Americans, should conform to white America's ways. With consumerism, abundance, and the bureaucratization of the economy flattening society into a homogeneous mass of white, middle class, Christian families, assimilation was the one way in which non-white Americans could conform. Thus, the Indians in *Broken Arrow* and *Apache* abandon their warlike ways and become farmers, Poole in *Devil's Doorway* simply wants to be allowed to assimilated by turning his ancestral land into a ranch, and Rachel in *The Unforgiven* must prove that she is assimilated, going so far as to kill her Kiowa brother, in order to remain a part of white society. In this way, the era's perceived conformity resulted in films aimed at the family because that was their audience, and advocated assimilation, because that was how minorities could conform and join mainstream society.

**The Challenge from Television**

While conformity was informing the content of American Indian films, developments within the entertainment industry were leading to changes, as well. As noted in chapter four, the collapse of the studio system led to directors, producers, and actors gaining greater creative
control in Hollywood, and the explosion of television throughout the postwar era was equally as earthshaking for the motion picture industry. Although television was a rarity before and during World War II, by 1953, two-thirds of American households had a television set and the average viewer watched five hours of programming a day. This new brand of entertainment, free aside from the cost of the television itself, posed a massive challenge to Hollywood. This was particularly the case with the western genre, including American Indian pictures, for as historian Gary A. Yoggy writes, "No television program genre, not even the situation comedy, ever became so dominant at any given moment in time as the Western during the late 1950s and early 1960s." As Yoggy notes, in 1958, seven of the ten most watched shows on television were westerns, as were twelve of the top twenty-five, and beginning with the debut of *Hopalong Cassidy* in 1948, more than 150 western series eventually reached air. With so much western programming available for free, Hollywood was forced to innovate, both in terms of technology and content, in order to keep paying crowds coming out to the theaters to see westerns, including American Indian pictures, on the big screen.\(^\text{11}\)

One way Hollywood dealt with this challenge was by stressing the cinematic experience that movies could offer and television could not. This most commonly meant color, be it Technicolor, which dominated the industry, or one of its later competitors, such as Kodak’s Eastmancolor. Five of the eight films examined in chapters three and four were in color—*She Wore a Yellow Ribbon, Hondo, Broken Arrow, Apache,* and *The Unforgiven*—and the vibrant look of these films differentiated them in an age when television was almost entirely black-and-white. Ironically, however, while color set movies apart from television, as film historian Richard Maltby notes, "At the end of the 1950s only half of Hollywood's output was in color. It was only when television converted to color in the 1960s that Hollywood abandoned black-and-
white." The film industry used other devices to compete, as well, including widescreen CinemaScope and even wider-screen Cinerama, which required three projectors for exhibition, while 

*Hondo* was shot in 3-D. Such gimmicks did not last long within the industry, but in 1953, when free television was poaching the movies' paying audience, the sight of John Wayne stabbing a knife directly out of the screen was an attractive enticement for viewers.¹²

Beyond these technological innovations, Hollywood altered the content of its films in order to attract audiences away from the television and into the theater. Prior to 1955, the vast majority of westerns on television were aimed at younger viewers. Series like *The Lone Ranger and Tonto* and *The Cisco Kid* were formulaic morality plays for children, shows in which good always triumphed over evil and the hero defeated the villain with fisticuffs or by shooting the gun out of his hand, rather than killing him. In many ways, these programs were the equivalent of the child-oriented horse operas and western serials of the 1930s, and, indeed, horse opera stars like Gene Autry, Hopalong Cassidy and Roy Rogers all migrated from the silver screen to the small screen.¹³

Losing its child-heavy audience to television, Hollywood responded by making more adult-oriented westerns. These films, including psychological westerns like *High Noon* and *The Naked Spur*, as well as many of the American Indian films discussed in chapter four, were far more challenging for their audiences, and confronted far more complex subject matter, including cowardice, the morality of violence, and, of course, race relations. In this way, Hollywood could differentiate its product from what viewers could see for free on television, for issues like the interracial romance of *Broken Arrow* and the brutal persecution of Poole in *Devil's Doorway* were far too controversial for the TV westerns of 1950. Television eventually did follow suit, however, launching adult western programs, beginning with the anthology series *Death Valley*
Days in 1952, and following it with the likes of Gunsmoke, The Life and Legend of Wyatt Earp, and Cheyenne in 1955. In aiming these shows at adults, the television industry engaged with the same subject matter that Hollywood had begun to grapple a handful of years earlier. As Yoggy writes, "Excessive violence and stories dealing with sex, religion, and racial discrimination—especially toward Native Americans—appeared in most successful adult [television] Westerns." Thus, by the end of the 1950s, television had moved into the same realm of adult subject matter than Hollywood migrated to years earlier, but the challenge of television pushed the film industry to confront more complex subject matter throughout the decade.14

Conclusion

Between 1945 and 1960, Hollywood turned the focus of American Indian films to two of the era's most significant domestic issues, the nuclear family and civil rights. The booming postwar economy made it possible for Americans to start families in greater numbers than ever before, and to do so at a younger age, and further enabled them to buy their own homes in the suburbs. Yet while this made family life possible, other factors, including the security the family offered in the face of the Cold War, and the control men enjoyed at home after feeling emasculated in the newly bureaucratized workforce, made it desirable. American Indian movies reflected this preoccupation with the nuclear family, and promoted it, as well. Hondo and Ford's cavalry trilogy all demonstrated the importance of family life, and further, the need for men to be caring, involved fathers. Both Johnny in Hondo and Jeff in Rio Grande need their fathers' guidance in order to grow into the sort of men who will keep the nation strong, while Hondo and Yorke need their families in order to be fulfilled and happy men. However, while Hollywood was promoting the family through such films, it was also attempting to make films that families
would find appealing. Because of the widespread perception that all Americans belonged to families, films that focused on family life gave audience members something with which to identify, and thus Hollywood was playing to its family-focused audience at the same time that it was preaching to it about the importance of the family.

With the burgeoning civil rights movement raising consciousness about race relations in postwar America, Hollywood also produced American Indian films that dealt with prejudice. As filmmakers like Burt Lancaster and John Huston explained, these pictures were concerned with both the mistreatment of Native Americans and, more generally, racism directed against all minorities, thereby fitting into a broader industry-wide movement that dealt with the issue of bigotry. While earlier films had presented Indians in a sympathetic light, these civil rights-oriented movies broke new ground by demanding not simply fair treatment, for them but equality and an end to racism. *Broken Arrow* was foremost among these films when released in 1950, and it received widespread praise from critics and audience members for its twist of whites and Indians seeking peace, rather than war. The movies that followed stressed the injustice of racial persecution, such as that suffered by Rachel in *The Unforgiven*, and warned that such treatment could force minorities to respond with violence, as did Poole and Massai in *Devil's Doorway* and *Apache*, respectively. Yet all of these films offered assimilation as the pathway to racial harmony. In this way, they reflected the government's termination policy, intended to bring Native Americans into mainstream society, but they also were a product of postwar conformity. Assimilation was a logical step in a society in which everyone appeared to be white, middle class and Christian, and thus American Indian pictures suggested that, if minorities wanted equality and justice, they would have to abandon their unique cultural traits and adopt the ways of mainstream, white America.
While the conformity of the postwar years was felt throughout the American Indian films of the era, be they ones dealing with the family or civil rights, other trends within the motion picture industry exerted an influence upon the genre, as well. The decline of the studio system, brought about by the federal government's lawsuit against the five majors, provided individual filmmakers with creative freedom most had never before enjoyed. Rather than simply being contract workers for a corporate entity, as they had been under the studio system, they now could insert their personal views into their pictures. Therefore, a producer-star like Lancaster, or directors like Aldrich and Huston, were able to make films the way they wanted, ones that dealt with social issues like racism. However, the loss the security provided by studio backing also made filmmaking a riskier endeavor, and commercial concerns often outweighed artistic ones, leaving intended social messages muddled. Hollywood also faced a challenge from television during this period, for westerns dominated TV programming during the 1950s. The movies used color and 3-D, among other technical methods, in an attempt to keep their paying customers, but they also changed the content of their films. Since most television westerns were aimed at children, Hollywood began to make more adult-oriented films, including many of the American Indian pictures discussed in chapters three and four. These psychological westerns dealt with subject matter that television would not touch during the first half of the 1950s, such as racism and interracial romance, and thus the competition from television prompted the film industry to make more complex and challenging American Indian films.

One of the most significant developments that occurred in American Indian films during this era was the emergence of Indians as fully realized characters. Because their focus on the white nuclear family, the Indians of Ford's cavalry trilogy largely remained in the same role of plot devices that Indians had occupied in the 1930s. Whether they were noble, such as Cochise
in *Fort Apache*, or bloodthirsty, such as the vicious Apaches in *Rio Grande*, they simply existed to create the conditions necessary for family building. Even in *Hondo*, which featured a more developed Indian character, Vittorio serves to help the construction of Hondo's new family and then disappears from the story when his job is done. However, as civil rights-oriented films dealt directly with white-Indian race relations, their Indians were of far greater importance. Cochise and Sonseeahray were two of the three most significant characters in *Broken Arrow*, for instance, and through them, the audience could empathize with the plight of oppressed minorities. The civil rights films that followed elevated Indians to the role of protagonists, with *Devil's Doorway* and *Apache* focusing entirely upon the travails of Poole and Massai, while Rachel is the co-lead of *The Unforgiven*. Not since *Massacre*, more than a decade before, had Indians been the main characters in the films about them. Unfortunately, this development would not last. As filmmakers used American Indian films as a means to comment upon, and criticize, the flaws in society during the 1960s, Indians themselves would fall back into supporting roles, helping white protagonists as they dealt with white America's problems.
The Searchers, DVD, directed by John Ford (1956; Burbank, CA: Warner Bros. Home Video, 2006). The Searchers was based upon the novel by Alan Le May (who also wrote The Unforgiven), which was, itself, based upon the true story of Cynthia Ann Parker, who was abducted by Comanches in 1836. Unlike in the film, however, Parker lived with the Comanches for more than twenty years, and was devastated when American cavalry forces "rescued" her and forced her to return to white society. Her son, Quanah Parker, was one of the most important Comanches of the second half of the 1800s, both in their war against the United States and, later in securing peace, and he even appeared in an early western film, 1907's The Bank Robbery. For an account of Cynthia Ann Parker and Quanah Parker's lives, the writing of Le May's novel, and the production of the film, see Frankel.

Patrick Ford, Memo to Frank Beetson, Merian C. Cooper, John Ford, and Frank Nugent, dated February 1, 1955, 2-3, Correspondence Box, John Ford Papers, Lilly Library, University of Indiana, Bloomington, Indiana; The Searchers.

Ford, 5; Knight, "A Matter of Attitude," 32; The Searchers.

Ford, 1, 4, The Searchers.


William H. Whyte, Jr., The Organization Man (Simon and Schuster: New York, 1956).

Ibid. In order to help his readers resist the organization, Whyte went so far as to include an appendix on how to foil personality tests, which Whyte saw as a particularly invasive example of the new organizational culture.


Cohen, 112-65, 292-98.


Yoggy, 160-65.

Ibid., 165-68.
In *Little Big Man* (National General, 1970), 121-year old Jack Crabb relates his life story up to the Little Big Horn, of which he is the lone white survivor. Adopted and raised by a tribe of Cheyenne, Crabb spends the movie moving back and forth between Indian and white society. While his experiences with the Cheyenne are uniformly positive, those with whites are almost entirely negative. Among the Indians, he finds Old Lodge Skins, his serene and wise grandfather, Sunshine, his beautiful wife, and a culture based upon love, peace, and the appreciation of nature. White society, on the other hand, proves to be entirely corrupt, populated by liars, cheats, and murderers, including a sex-obsessed minister's wife, a snake-oil salesman, and, worst of all, General Custer. A far cry from the heroic figure of *They Died with Their Boots On*, this Custer is a racist lunatic who massacres Indians because he thinks victories in battle will lead to his election as president. *Little Big Man*'s Cheyenne are noble and civilized while its whites are degenerate and barbaric, and thus the film flipped the standard Indian-white dichotomy that had existed in Hollywood, and American culture in general, for decades. In this way, it offered Indian society as an effective alternative to the evils that many Americans felt infected mainstream society at the end of the 1960s.¹

During the 1960s, the generation of children born during the Baby Boom began to reach adulthood. Alienated by the conformity and materialism of the 1950s, some of these young people saw mainstream American society as corrupt and searched for alternatives. While this
process was underway during the early '60s, it exploded during the second half of the decade due to the political upheaval and widespread disgust with the Vietnam War and slow progress being made by the civil rights movement. This disillusionment encouraged the counterculture, a movement that saw American society as irreparably broken and looked to Native American culture as a legitimate alternative. As historian Sherry Smith writes, the counterculture expressed "a belief that marginal groups seemed more culturally authentic, [which] led some to seek out Native Americans, updating the old leftist tradition that assigned people of color sought-after authenticity."²

The films of the early-'70s reflected this attitude, presenting Indian life as peaceful and natural, standing in stark contrast to the violence, greed and racism of white America. As members of the counterculture sought to adopt the lifestyle and spirituality of Native Americans and individuals who were either of the younger generation or simply sympathetic to it entered the film industry, Hollywood produced movies in which their white protagonists did the same, often under the guidance of Indians. While earlier films presented Indians as savage and whites as civilized, those made during the Vietnam era reversed the formula, showing Indians as civilized and white society, the army in particular, as savage. Yet despite their full embracing of Indian life, the Vietnam era pictures continued to portray Indians as subordinate to white protagonists who appropriated Indian culture for their own purposes.

This chapter examines three films that saw Indian life as offering positive traits that could regenerate the corruption of white America. *Kings of the Sun* (United Artists, 1963) presented Indian culture as a curative for a more developed, but degenerate civilization. The only film discussed in this dissertation that features no white characters, *Kings of the Sun* is set in pre-Columbian America, with technologically advanced yet morally corrupt Mayans serving as
stand-ins for white America. The seriocomic *Little Big Man* deals with the naive Crabb's encounters with Indians and whites, presenting Indian life as a pastoral ideal and mainstream America as a haven of corruption and vice. *Billy Jack* (Warner Bros., 1971) features a half-Indian veteran of Vietnam who defends his reservation from the predations of greedy, lawless whites who live in the nearby town while also protecting the reservation's counterculture school and its hippie students from racist bullies. Each of these films presents Indian life as a morally pure and spiritually fulfilling alternative to the corruption of white America, and thus their focus is not on Indians themselves, but rather on how Indians can help regenerate mainstream, white society.³

American Indian films were by no means the only type of movie to engage with the Counterculture during the late-1960s. Although for most of the decade Hollywood had largely ignored the massive cultural shifts occurring in the United States, according to film historian Christopher C. Lowell, it was in 1967, "[as] headlines increasingly proved that the optimistic world of the Frankie Avalon-Annette Funicello beach movies and even of The Beatles had disappeared, that filmmakers produced movies that reflected the stresses in America's cultural and social fabric." That year proved to be a watershed for Hollywood's examination of the counterculture, as it produced films like *Bonnie and Clyde* (Warner Bros., 1967), *Cool Hand Luke* (Warner Bros., 1967) and *The Graduate* (Embassy Pictures, 1967), that examined the disillusionment and dissatisfaction felt by young people toward their society. In *Bonnie and Clyde*, Arthur Penn, the director of *Little Big Man*, portrayed Depression-era criminals Bonnie Parker (Faye Dunaway) and Clyde Barrow (Warren Beatty) as anti-establishment heroes, robbing banks as a means to fight against a corrupt system, while Stuart Rosenberg's *Cool Hand Luke* starred Paul Newman as a convict who is incapable of submitting to authority, particularly
that of the warden of the brutal prison in which he is serving time. *The Graduate*, directed by Mike Nichols, starred Dustin Hoffman as an alienated young man who has no idea what to do after college, only knowing that he wants no part of his parents' world. Two years later, Dennis Hopper's *Easy Rider* (Columbia, 1969) proved to be another landmark, as it followed two hippie bikers, played by Hopper and Peter Fonda, as they sold drugs, toured America, and explored the counterculture. Thus, the American Indian films discussed in this chapter were not an aberration, but rather were part of a broader wave of counterculture-focused pictures being produced by Hollywood at the end of the '60s and beginning of the '70s.4

**The New Left and the Rejection of Conformity**

While the 1950s were an era of perceived conformity, unrest and alienation simmered below society's surface. As Coontz has noted, despite the decade's reputation for happy family life, such was always not the case. Many Americans were caught in unhappy marriages, with growing numbers of women resorting to alcohol and tranquilizers to cope. Social pressures kept divorce rates low during the 1950s, but soared in later years, tripling between 1960 and 1982. Coontz writes that "many . . . couples simply toughed it out" during the decade, but ultimately, "between one-quarter and one-third of all marriages contracted in the 1950s eventually ended in divorce." Norman Mailer's essay "The White Negro," first published in 1957, identified this brewing discontent, arguing that the horrors of World War II and the Holocaust led to disgust, not only with Germany, but all of humanity, while the Cold War created a fear that nuclear warfare could begin at any moment. For Mailer, death in nuclear war was causeless, and thus life was causeless, as well. Further, anti-communism had revealed the dangers of being nonconformist, because expressing one's voice put the individual in danger, if not now, then in
the future when his or her views might become unacceptable. The result was a generation of "hipsters," American existentialists who felt untethered and alienated from society.\(^5\)

Mailer identified the "hip" as the polar opposite of "square" conformity. Hipsters preferred a life of excitement to the bland security offered by American society, refusing to be imprisoned by social expectations such as a career, marriage and family. In effect, the hip lived without a safety net because, despite its dangers, such a life was, at least, \(\textit{living}\). The hipsters of the 1950s lived in the present, drawing inspiration from African Americans—or, at least, Mailer's personal view of African Americans—hence the name "white Negroes." Mailer saw the hip as a union of three groups—Bohemians, juvenile delinquents, and blacks—and claimed that blacks brought the "cultural dowry" to the coalition, for they naturally existed on the margins of society, facing its danger and oppression while partaking in its illicit thrills. Ultimately, Mailer claimed that hipsters were psychopathic in their mentality, since they lived from moment to moment and their only morality was doing whatever they felt like doing, as often as possible.

Certainly, Mailer's assessment of the hip, and African Americans, for that matter, was far more fanciful theorizing than it was rooted in legitimate sociological analysis, but it successfully identified a growing disillusionment with the decade's conformity and foresaw its widespread rejection. Further, he recognized that a generation was growing up believing that American society was flawed and in need of correction, ideas that were initially expressed by a small group of activists during the early-1960s, but would come to be accepted with the escalation of the Vietnam War.\(^6\)

Mailer proved remarkably prescient in predicting that the conformity of the 1950s would give way to an era of rebellion, because, by the end of the decade, a student protest movement was slowly developing on university campuses throughout the nation. This was the birth of the
New Left, a radical political wave that differentiated itself from the traditionally liberal Old Left by claiming that, while traditional liberalism embraced the American dream, the New Left wanted to fundamentally change what the American dream meant. Moreover, Mailer's assessment of the hip being a union of outcasts proved correct, as well, for, in the words of historian James Miller, "Young radicals [at the University of Michigan] in Ann Arbor and elsewhere found themselves allied with other nonconformists on the fringes of mainstream culture." These students were not quite products of the postwar Baby Boom, for most were born in the late-'30s or early-'40s, but they came of age in the prosperous conformity of the 1950s and found much to dislike about American society. As sociologist Todd Gitlin, himself a leader of the era's protest movement, writes, "All over America, little knots of students were looking for ways to forsake the predictable paths of career, propriety, family."  

Students for a Democratic Society (SDS), an organization Gitlin led as president during 1963-64, expressed the views of this radical movement in its landmark 1962 treatise *The Port Huron Statement*. Arguably the most important political document of the 1960s, it laid out a series of proposals to address the shortcomings these young leftists saw in America, including an end to both the Cold War and racial discrimination. Refusing to accept the blind patriotism of the era, *The Port Huron Statement* claimed that the United States was responsible for much of the tension between itself and the Soviet Union, and further that fears of communism "seriously weaken democratic institutions and spawn movements contrary to the interests of basic freedoms and peace." Moreover, fearing that Americans were too far removed from the political process, SDS argued for the adoption of participatory democracy, which could provide the individual with greater say in his or her life and foster a society that encouraged independence and participation, leading to a more well-informed voting public.
Throughout the early-'60s, SDS remained a small organization—it had a mere 575 members in 1961—but by the middle of the decade, people were drawn to it in vastly greater numbers. As Miller writes, "Fueled by the hostility of many American students to the war in Vietnam, the New Left after 1965 quickly mushroomed into a mass movement that aggressively challenged the legitimacy of America's political institutions." Therefore, the New Left revealed a growing discontent within the nation's younger generation regarding the society their parents had built after World War II. America, they believed, was flawed and needed to be regenerated.9

The Indian as a Source of Moral Regeneration: *Kings of the Sun*

While not a product of the New Left, *Kings of the Sun* demonstrates that the belief that mainstream society was flawed was not confined to the student protest movement. The film was co-written by Elliott Arnold, author of *Blood Brothers*, the basis for *Broken Arrow*, and like that earlier picture, it concerns two different groups of people learning to live with one another. *Kings of the Sun* is a particularly noteworthy movie because it is one of the very few Hollywood films to be set in pre-Columbian America, and thus features no white characters. Instead, it focuses upon a tribe of Mayans who, driven from their home by an invading army, sail across the Gulf of Mexico to what is now Texas, where they encounter American Indians. The Mayan king, Balam (George Chakiris), and his guards capture Black Eagle (Yul Brynner), the Indians' chief, intending to sacrifice him to their gods. However, Black Eagle successfully persuades Balam to give up the practice of human sacrifice, and when the Mayans old enemies arrive from over the sea, their two peoples unite to defeat them. Black Eagle is slain in the battle and Balam decides to remain in this new land, his society having been improved by its contact with the Indians. *King of the Sun* draws a stark contrast between the Mayans and Indians, presenting the
former as technologically impressive but spiritually degenerate, and the latter as primitive but pure. In this way, the film embraces the trope of the noble savage, not simply from earlier films, but from its very origin in the Enlightenment. It sees the Indians, in their primitiveness, as being morally superior to more "civilized" societies, while the Mayans, who benefit from the Indians' wisdom and purity, serve as stand-ins for white America.¹⁰

From the very start of the film, *Kings of the Sun* establishes the Mayans as an advanced yet degenerate society. As voice-over narration informs the audience, "Without metals, without horses, without wheels, these incredible people built roads, pyramids, temples worthy of ancient Egypt. They charted the heavens, devised a higher system of mathematics than the Romans, and created a calendar as accurate as the one we use today." However, their society was marred by the practice of human sacrifice. As director J. Lee Thompson explained, "To me the cutting out of the heart is like the atom or the hydrogen bomb—that was the awful evil in a world far better than our own." Therefore, according to the narration, "Despite the maturity of their art and their science, in the most important part of their lives, the worship of their gods, they remained primitive. . . . In their profound desire to win favor from the deities, the Mayans made human sacrifice the keystone of their religion." The Mayans were thus a people with a magnificently advanced yet morally corrupt civilization, a corruption that the spiritually pure Indians could remedy.¹¹

Black Eagle's Indians stand in stark contrast to the degenerate Mayans. While the Mayans quickly build a village, including a wooden palisade and stone pyramid, and plant fields of crops, the Indians are nomadic hunters who live in teepees. Furthermore, promotional material for the film describes Black Eagle as "a savage chieftain" and "a splendid and savage warrior" who "relishes combat above all things." He is wounded during his initial battle with
Balam and violently refuses medical treatment, with the Mayan woman assigned to nurse him declaring, "It's like trying to help a wild animal!" The casting of the film's two leads played a role in establishing the contrast between the two peoples, as well, for the savage Black Eagle is played by the ultra-masculine Brynner, while the cultured and civilized Balam is played by the somewhat effeminate Chakiris. Black Eagle's people are just as primitive as he, for once they make peace with the Mayans, they proceed to tear down the village's palisade, with Black Eagle explaining, "We needed firewood and we took it. We always take what we need." While the civilized Mayans plan for the future by building defenses and planting crops, the Indians are children of nature, noble savages who live in the moment and show little concern for what will come.12

Figure #27: the contrast between the savage, masculine Black Eagle (Yul Brynner, left) and the civilized, more effeminate Balam (George Chakiris) in *Kings of the Sun.*

The most significant difference between the two peoples, however, is a moral one, for the Indians are horrified at the practice of human sacrifice. The Mayans intend to execute Black Eagle so that the gods will ensure prosperity in this new land, and while he is understandably opposed to this plan for personal reasons—as the film's synopsis notes, "When he learns that he is destined for the sacrificial altar, Black Eagle denounces the Mayans as barbarians"—the
Indian chief offers an ideological argument against it, as well. He tells Balam that "The grass has always grown for us, the trees spread their branches, the rivers have flowed, and my people have always enjoyed these blessings. My people are the fiercest on earth. Our land is red with the blood of our enemies. But never, never have we shed one drop of blood in sacrifice." Black Eagle persuades Balam, who in turn convinces the Mayans, to abandon human sacrifice as the central tenet of their religion. As Balam tells his people once their farm fields begin to blossom, "The crops grow faster in this new land than they ever did at home. And without human blood to nourish them. . . . We made this field ready, we planted the seeds, and we have brought the water. This crop grew without sacrifice." Therefore, the Indians impart their moral purity to their new friends, helping to regenerate the corrupt Mayan culture by excising its one great stain.13

In this manner, the Indians and Mayans learn to live together. When a Mayan warrior complains about the Indians tearing down the palisade for firewood, for instance, Balam explains, "If we are to live together in peace, there must be no wall between us." Further, when the Mayans old enemies arrive, seeking to eradicate Balam and his people, Black Eagle's Indians come to the rescue, and in the film's climactic scene, Mayans and Indian unite to throw the invaders back into the sea. Black Eagle suffers a mortal wound in the battle, and as he dies, he expresses the film's views on cultural exchange and racial harmony, telling Balam, "You never taught me to read, and I never taught you to hunt, and yet there are many things we have learned from each other." Thus, Kings of the Sun does not simply suggest that different groups of people can coexist, but that they can learn from one another, as well. Further, unlike the civil rights films of the 1950s, which involved Indians adopting white ways, it sees the exchange of ideas going in both directions. Yet even so, it does not treat the two peoples equally. It is a film about
the Mayans, not the Indians, just as most American Indian films are actually about whites, and Black Eagle is its only prominent Indian character. Moreover, once he has regenerated the Mayans' ways through his primitive nobility, Black Eagle's role in the story is finished and he dies. Thus, in a stroke of intense irony, the film may oppose Black Eagle's sacrifice by the Mayans, but it sacrifices him to them anyway—he even dies on the pyramid upon which he would have been ritually killed—for his death makes him a martyr, emphasizing the need for peace and the righteousness of his opposition to the Mayan's barbaric ways.\textsuperscript{14}

![Figure #28: Black Eagle lies mortally wounded on the Mayans' pyramid in Kings of the Sun, an ironic sacrifice to them in a film that sees human sacrifice as the great moral stain upon the legacy of the Mayan people.](image)

Critical response to \textit{Kings of the Sun} was decidedly mixed, but tellingly, none of the reviews found the story of Mayan and Indian contact to be particularly unique. This is likely due to the fact that Hollywood commonly produced big historical and Biblical epics during the late-1950s and early-'60s, and thus, even though none of them were set in pre-Columbian America, critics were used to seeing similarly exotic settings. For instance, both Scheuer of \textit{The Los Angeles Times} and Ronald Gold of \textit{The Motion Picture Herald} noted that only a year earlier, director Thompson and star Brynner had teamed on \textit{Taras Bulba} (United Artists, 1962), an adventure epic set among the Cossacks of the Ukraine. However, \textit{Variety} did believe that the
subject matter of *Kings of the Sun* meant the picture was "quite limited in commercial range and appeal." Representative of the split in critical acceptance of the historically inaccurate story, Gold praised the film for its "interesting conflict of cultures—literate, agricultural, 'intellectual' Mayans vs. warlike, individualistic nomads," while *The Saturday Review*'s Knight lambasted it as "the kind of vast, aggressively stupid spectacle that Hollywood's spokesman keep assuring us they don't make any more."¹⁵

Gold may have found the conflict of cultures to be interesting, but both he and *Variety*’s critic complained about the lack of historical accuracy, feeling that the unrealistic plot undermined what might have been an insightful exploration of Mayan culture, a topic heretofore unexamined by Hollywood. As *Variety* noted, "The more discerning, demanding filmgoer will be disappointed by [*Kings of the Sun*’s] synthetic, transparent approach to a potentially fascinating subject—the ancient Mayan civilization at a point of great crisis," while Gold lamented, "One could have hoped for a little more insight into the world of the Maya." It is important to note, however, that neither asked for more insight into the world of the Indians, since they were a common, if usually historically inaccurate, fixture on movie screens. Furthermore, despite pictures like *Broken Arrow* and *Devil's Doorway* that sought to humanize Indians, critical feedback for *Kings of the Sun* indicates a continued acceptance of the savage Indian stereotype. Scheuer, for instance, wrote that "The pigtailed Brynner makes a whooping, whopping wild man indeed, a leaping spider of a fellow," while *Variety* noted that "Brynner easily steals the show with his sinewy authority, masculinity and cat-like grace." Thus, viewers still accepted Indians as wild warriors, and still described them in animalistic terms.¹⁶

*Kings of the Sun* is a unique film, given its complete lack of white characters (but not white actors, of course, since all major roles were filled by Caucasians), and its focus on cultural
contact between Indians and Mayans in pre-Columbian America. It presented the Mayans as a technologically advanced people who were morally corrupt due to their use of human sacrifice, and conversely, saw the Indians as consummate noble savages, primitive people who, in the tradition of the Enlightenment, were morally pure due to their close contact with nature. In this way, the Mayans occupied the position generally filled by whites in American Indian films: "civilized" protagonists who come into contact with savage Indians. Through the dignity and righteousness of Black Eagle, the Indians succeed in saving the Mayans spiritually, convincing them to abandon their murderous religious practices. Therefore, the film's real concern is not the Indians, themselves, but how their culture could be used to regenerate Mayan, and by extension, white culture. Critics complained about the film's copious historical inaccuracies, but still some found interest in the subject while continuing to embrace the image of the Indian as a wild savage. *Kings of the Sun* may have predated the creation of the counterculture, but it indicates that even in 1963, Hollywood was beginning to understand the growing disillusionment Americans had with their nation, and the picture's story of Indians helping to save a morally bankrupt society would continue to be used by other films throughout the decade.

**The Emergence of the Red Power Movement**

During the 1960s, a wave of social and political activism swept through Native American communities as individuals embraced their ethnic and tribal identity and demanded justice and respect from white America. This Red Power movement elevated Native American rights to a position in the national consciousness that it had not occupied in decades, if ever. Ironically, as sociologist Joane Nagel has demonstrated, attempts by mainstream America and the federal government to force assimilation upon Native Americans backfired, creating the conditions for
this activism. For instance, the blanket term "Indian," was used by whites to conflate all tribes into one homogeneous whole, but it actually enabled Native Americans to bridge their tribal differences and forge a single, supratribal ethnic identity. Moreover, federally mandated English education provided a common language, while boarding schools, justifiably reviled for attempting to eradicate Native American culture, enabled students to meet members of different tribes for the first time. During the 1950s, the hated Termination policy united Native American activists in a common cause, while the government's relocation program, which encouraged individuals to move from reservations to urban centers through incentives such as vocational training, job placement, and transportation, once again brought together members of disparate tribes. Furthermore, because the move to the city was often jarring, activists such as Adam Nordwall in San Francisco set up social clubs intended to allow urban Native Americans to fraternize with one another, as well as learn and practice traditional language and culture. The result of this was an increasingly supratribal Native American identity, as well as the creation of an infrastructure that was already in place when activism began in earnest during the 1960s.

This activism initially emerged on the local, grassroots level. As historians Paul Smith and Robert Warrior write,

Since the late 1950s, [Native American] student groups had been working on campuses and in communities, producing cohorts of college-educated tribal officials and administrators. At the same time, traditional people and local poor and working-class peoples had been getting to know each other around the country and staging courageous, if often ignored, protests.

While there was little contact between black and Native American activists, largely because the two peoples did not share the same problems, the civil rights movement served as an inspiration and guide for Native Americans. In the words of historian Troy Johnson, "As civil rights issues and rhetoric dominated the headlines, some Indian groups adopted the vocabulary and techniques
of African Americans in order to get Indian issues covered by the media and thus before the American public." In the late-'50s, for instance, members of the Six Nations of upstate New York used nonviolent resistance to protest the construction of hydroelectric dams that would flood tribal land and displace residents. Likewise, in the early-'60s, Native Americans in the Pacific Northwest, who were inspired by the success of African American sit-ins, held "fish-ins" in bodies of water that were off limits to fishing but guaranteed to their tribes by treaty. Throughout the decade, Native American activism continued to increase, including the occupation of national monuments and abandoned military installations, the creation of a protest camp at Mount Rushmore, and marches outside Bureau of Indian Affairs offices throughout the country. Furthermore, organizations such as the American Indian Movement (AIM) and Indians of All Tribes emerged to coordinate activism. Again drawing inspiration from the civil rights movement, the Minneapolis-founded AIM began as a Native American answer to the Black Panthers, with members driving the streets, monitoring law enforcement activity and protecting Native American suspects from police brutality.  

In 1966, activist Vine DeLoria, Jr. labeled the movement "Red Power," again imitating the civil rights movement and its Black Power wing, and by the end of the decade, Native American activism was in full bloom. Returning Vietnam veterans swelled the ranks of Red Power organizations, for 61,000 Native Americans served in the war and many identified with the plight of the Vietnamese, a non-white people being confronted by the overwhelming power of the American military. The movement reached an important juncture on November 20, 1969, when Native American students occupied the abandoned prison island of Alcatraz in San Francisco Bay. Claiming that a clause in the Fort Laramie Treaty of 1868 guaranteed Native Americans any decommissioned federal lands, the occupiers wanted ownership of the island, on
which they planned to build an education center. Lasting for nineteen months, the occupation garnered tremendous attention for Red Power throughout mainstream America. In Johnson's words, Alcatraz "became a rallying point for Indian people who had been searching for the means to express their outrage at social injustices forced upon them by what they perceived as an uncaring society and an unyielding government."19

However, the supposed clause did not actually exist in the Fort Laramie Treaty, and thus the government had no legal grounds or obligation to surrender Alcatraz to the protestors. The occupiers held out for nineteen months, their population averaging 100, and at one point reaching 1,000, but in June, 1971, federal officers raided the island and removed the fifteen remaining activists. As DeLoria argues, the Alcatraz occupation failed because it lacked a legal foundation and the activists had no clear goal for which they were fighting: "[the occupation] dealt primarily with the symbols of oppression and did not project possible courses of action that might be taken to solve problems." The Red Power movement continued well into the 1970s, becoming increasingly violent, particularly during the 1973 siege at Wounded Knee, in which activists engaged in gun battles with federal and tribal police. During the late-60s and early-'70s, however, it was extremely important because it brought the plight of Native Americans into the public consciousness, drawing attention from actors and filmmakers in Hollywood and exerting a great influence upon the American Indian films of the period.20

The Counterculture's Appropriation of Indianness

While Native Americans fought for their rights through the Red Power movement, non-Natives also adopted idealized aspects of Native American culture during the late-1960s, making it a central tenet of the counterculture, alongside rock music, free love, and the use of
psychedelic drugs. As Sherry Smith writes, "Many [hippies] looked to Indians as symbols of, and even models for, alternative ways of life. Native Americans seemed like perfect foils, in fact, to all that these predominantly Anglo Americans disdained about their own culture." Like the New Left, the hippies of the counterculture were disgusted and disillusioned by the state of America, but rather than undertaking political action, as did the student protesters, they sought to create an alternate society. In essence, they protested not through marches, but through their very lifestyle, which many based upon that of Native Americans. In the words of Native American scholar Philip DeLoria, members of the counterculture "worked hard to counteract their parents' America, perceived in terms of consumptive excess, alienated individualism, immoral authority, and capitalism red in tooth and claw." Likewise, the emergence of environmentalism prompted some Americans to turn away from the nation's traditional view of industrialization as progress, embracing the Native American respect for nature. Thus, to many hippies, the apparent simplicity and harmoniousness of Native American life seemed an ideal alternative to the corruption of mainstream society.  

Throughout the era, the counterculture engaged with Native American life in a myriad of ways. Indians became a symbol of the movement as counterculture artists incorporated them into their psychedelic images, while some members, including actor Marlon Brando and comedian Dick Gregory, participated in fish-ins. Brando even sent Native American activist Sacheen Littlefeather to decline his Best Actor Oscar for The Godfather at the 1973 Academy Awards as a protest against the portrayal of Indians in Hollywood. Furthermore, literature of the period also brought Native American issues to a broader audience. Ken Kesey wrote his 1962 bestselling novel One Flew over the Cuckoo's Nest from the perspective of an Indian, Chief Broom, while Stewart Brand sold millions of copies of his Whole Earth Catalog, which
incorporated Native American spirituality into its methods of ecological farming. Moreover, nonfiction works like Vine Deloria, Jr.'s *Custer Died for Your Sins* and Dee Brown's *Bury My Heart at Wounded Knee* exposed non-Native readers to the nation's abuse of Native Americans in both the past and the present.  

Yet it was the development of communalism in the late-'60s that was the most evocative way in which the counterculture engaged with idealized versions of Native American life. Thousands of hippies abandoned mainstream society, moving onto rural communes intended to combine Native American spirituality, social harmony, and love of the natural world with purely counterculture traits such as drug use and free love. These communalists believed that by living together in the best imitation of Indian life that they knew, they could escape the corruption of their parents' society. As Philip Deloria notes, communalists "were attempting to redefine themselves and their local community. In doing so, they hoped, in some small way, to offer an example to the nation as a whole." However, these communes often struggled to remain viable because the counterculture's ethos of anarchy and personal freedom did not mesh with a community that required social restraint and respect, and, more significantly, because their members often simply attempted to imitate Native American life without the benefit of generations of knowledge on how to actually make it work.  

Through these communes, as well as simple traits such as their long, braided hair and headbands, many hippies were copying Native American culture for their own ends and as a way to symbolically protest the problems they saw in mainstream white society. Often, communalists did not particularly understand the specifics of Native American life, and thus their mimicking of it was largely superficial. Rather than adopting the ways of the tribes who lived in their region, for instance, they simply recreated what they had learned in school or seen on television and in
American Indian films. Thus, Philip Deloria recounts members of a Pacific Northwest commune living in Plains-style tepees which leaked and were wholly inappropriate for the area's rainy climate, while the founders of the New Buffalo commune named it after the animal that sustained the Plains tribes but had little relevancy to the Pueblo Indians of New Mexico, where the commune was located. Furthermore, some hippies appointed themselves as their spiritual heirs to Native Americans and believed that local Native Americans should be complimented by their attempts at appropriating their culture. As Philip Deloria writes, "Although there were certainly exceptions, communalists tended to value Indian Otherness and its assorted meanings more than they did real native people."24

However, Sherry Smith argues, many communalists did reach out to their local Native American communities, attempting to secure mentors who could teach them native skills and culture. Through their interest in and emulation of Native American life, the hippies were providing it with legitimacy it had rarely received from white America. In Smith's words, "Never before in American history had so many non-Indians sought out interaction with Indian people for the purposes of learning from them, attempting to approximate elements of native life, and supporting the political demands of the community." This represented a remarkable shift in white opinion, for it came on the heels of the federal government's termination plan and followed decades of attempts at forced assimilation. As Smith notes, "Out of the dominant society, which for so long had tried to extinguish Indian cultures, emerged children of privilege who completely reversed that impulse. Indianness was cool, something to be valued, preserved, and perpetuated." The American Indian films of the late-'60s and early-'70s reflected this complex and even hypocritical stance. They paid respect to Indians, demanded fair treatment for them, and exposed the brutal treatment they had received at the hands of the United States, but were
still primarily focused upon critiquing white society rather than exploring Indian culture, and were concerned with how Indian life could help their white protagonists.\textsuperscript{25}

**New Left Revisionism on the Frontier: *Little Big Man***

*Little Big Man* is one of the most prominent examples of this wave of revisionism that swept American Indian films, and the western genre as a whole, during the late-1960s and early-'70s. Disgusted by the Vietnam War, disillusioned by the flaws of mainstream society, and inspired by the New Left, Red Power, and the counterculture, filmmakers began to question the veracity of American exceptionalism. As Stephen Faber, movie critic for *The New York Times*, wrote, "The disenchantments that have shaken America during the last decade have not produced many thoughtful movies about current problems. [However] that radical disillusionment surfaces in some fine recent films about the American past." *Little Big Man* was one of the movies Faber referenced, and it presented Indian life as an alternative to white society. Whereas earlier American Indian movies portrayed Indians, noble or bloodthirsty, as savages who served as an obstacle to westward expansion, *Little Big Man* reversed the paradigm. It still saw Indians and whites in binary opposition to one another, but now, the Indians were civilized and the whites were savage. In following protagonist Jack Crabb (Dustin Hoffman) as he moves from Indian life to white, and back again, a path that eventually leads him to Custer's destruction at the Little Big Horn, the film consistently presented Indian society as morally pure, and white society as utterly corrupt. Moreover, there is no suggestion that, by taming the frontier, the United States made the West a better place or improved the lives of Indians. How could it if it was entirely corrupt? Instead, *Little Big Man* argued that the conquest of the West was an act of genocide. Thus, the film criticized American society as violent and savage, and offered Indians
as a countercultural alternative: peaceful, civilized people who lived in harmony with nature and offered redemption to whites who were fortunate enough, or enlightened enough, to accept it. Yet, this demonstrates the hypocrisy of *Little Big Man*, for in spite of the picture's liberal intentions, it remains a film that relegates Indians to the status of Others, using them as a means to point out the flaws in white America.\textsuperscript{26}

Given the revisionism on display in *Little Big Man*, it is unsurprising that many of the individuals involved in its making were sympathetic to Native American rights and the New Left, in general. Coming off two major hits with *Bonnie and Clyde* and *Alice's Restaurant*, director Arthur Penn had, in the words of journalist Bernard Weinraub, "won virtually total artistic independence," which allowed him to move "toward films of intensely personal statement." Penn was involved in protesting Vietnam and supported activist groups such as SNCC (Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee) and SANE, an anti-nuclear weapons organization, had already made an anti-McCarthyism movie, *Mickey One* (Columbia, 1966), and, although forty-seven years old at the time of filming *Little Big Man*, was, in his own words, "very sympathetic to the young now. I am very fixed at that point, emotionally." Both *Bonnie and Clyde* and *Alice's Restaurant* were films that embraced the counterculture and the anti-authority bent of the late-'60s, and, as Penn said regarding the former, "There was the sense of [Bonnie and Clyde] not belonging to the life and times and society in which they found themselves. These are problems related to what young people feel in society now." Jack Crabb, preferring Indian life to that of white America, represents the same alienation. Moreover, the film's screenwriter, Calder Willingham, had also shown sympathy for similar causes, as demonstrated by his scripts for *Paths of Glory* (United Artists, 1957), Stanley Kubrick's intensely anti-war picture, and *The Graduate*.\textsuperscript{27}
While Penn was exploring the issues that confronted American youth with *Little Big Man*, some of the other individuals involved in the picture advocated for Native Americans, seeing the movie as a new approach to portraying Indians on screen. Hoffman, for instance, explained, "I was interested in this picture because it presents the Indian in a different light. I've seen a lot of movies but never one that's presented the Indian fairly. Most of them go along with the 'Indians are savages' theme." Likewise, producer Stuart Millar evinced the influence of Red Power, as well as the changing American view toward Native Americans during the 1960s, telling *The New York Times*, "It's time movies caught up with contemporary attitudes about the history of the West, including attention to the significance of genocide." Furthermore, Dan George, who plays Crabb's adopted grandfather Old Lodge Skins, was a chief of Canada's Salish tribe and a political activist whose family performed programs demonstrating Native American culture. When asked if Hollywood's presentation of Indians over the decade had been fair, he told his interviewer,

You know the answer to that. The kind of movies and TV that white children see makes them feel like they hate the Indians. The Indians, who are usually played by white men, always slaughter a wagon train or something like that. And at the end, the white children are happy when the Indians get slaughtered. But I think things are going to change after the public sees 'Little Big Man.' I hope so, anyway.

Thus, *Little Big Man* was representative of a shift in Hollywood away from presenting Indians as savages who needed to be wiped out or assimilated, and toward seeing them as a civilized people whose culture could positively influence white America.²⁸

In order to offer this new vision of Indians, *Little Big Man* portrays an idealized view of their lifestyle, indirectly conflating it with the counterculture. The film's Cheyenne are a people free from greed, violence and misery. They do not lie and are peaceful unless threatened. Furthermore, unlike intolerant white America, they are accepting of everyone, including
contrarian Younger Bear (Cal Bellini), who does everything backward, and homosexual Little Horse (Robert Little Star), and do not force men to become warriors if they lack the inclination. The film's screenplay reveals the picture's reverence for the Indians, repeatedly referring to their "dignity," and describes Old Lodge Skins as a man of "monumental poise." Stage directions for a shot of Cheyenne warriors convey this sense of grandeur: "The shot is from below and gives an impression of the heroic, of the larger-than-life-sized. . . . The shot should convey the wildness, the bravery and the immense dignity of the American Plains Indian."29

While living among the Cheyenne, Jack finds personal and emotional fulfillment that he never receives from white society. He gains a loving father figure, the serene Old Lodge Skins, and a beautiful wife, Sunshine (Aimee Eckles). Sunshine even insists that he marries and sleeps with her three widowed sisters, and while he is initially reluctant, Jack eventually comes to appreciate the arrangement. In the words of historians Margo Kasdan and Susan Tavernetti, "the scene of communal lovemaking in the tepee mirrors the image of a hippie commune and reflects the free-love, open-marriage ethos associated with the Sixties." Thus, Little Big Man sees Indian life as an idealized society that offers everything that white, mainstream society does not, including spiritual and sexual gratification. As Jack says when first being taught by Old Lodge Skins, "For a boy, it was paradise. I wasn't just playing Indian, I was living Indian."30

Little Big Man contrasts the wonder and purity of Indian life with the abject corruption of mainstream America, and is so successful in doing so that the Soviet newspaper Pravda claimed that it "reminded people of 'what was done by the Hitler barbarians and in our day is carried out by the American military in Indochina.'" In the film, the Cheyenne refer to themselves as "the Human beings," with Old Lodge Skins telling Jack, "There is an endless supply of white men, but there has always been a limited number of Human Beings." Therefore, according to Little
Big Man, most white people are literally not human. Virtually every one Jack meets bears some sort of moral flaw. Mrs. Pendrake (Faye Dunaway), the wife of a fire-and-brimstone minister, may present a prim front, but is a sex-obsessed adulterous described by the screenplay as "lewed" and "lascivious," while Mr. Merriweather (Martin Balsam) is a snake-oil salesman who is so dishonest that he has lost an eye, ear, and hand to angry customers. Furthermore, unlike the peace-loving Indians, whites in Little Big Man are largely defined by violence. Jack's sister, Caroline (Carole Androsky), abandoned him as a child, leaving him with the Cheyenne, and when they meet again as adults, she is "utterly appalled" to learn that he does not know how to use a gun. Caroline teaches him to shoot and when, after a brief spell as a gunfighter, Jack throws away his pistols, she abandons him once again. Unlike the tolerant Cheyenne, white America has no use for a man who is not prone to violence. As Old Lodge Skins tells Jack, "The white men, they believe everything is dead. Stone, earth, animals, and people. Even their own people. If things keep trying to live, the white man will rub them out."31

Of all the white characters in the film, none are more monstrous and corrupt than Custer, who Penn described as an individual whose "life was based on butchery. He was a brutal man." As played by comic actor Richard Mulligan, this Custer is a far cry from Errol Flynn's swashbuckling hero of They Died with Their Boots On. He strikes a magnificent figure when first introduced, looming over Jack on horseback, shot from below to emphasize his grandeur, with his golden hair shining as the sun forms a halo around his head. However, unlike Flynn's Custer, Mulligan's does not live up to this image of the gallant American military hero. Instead, he is a vain, preening, racist fool who gives ridiculous advice and makes promises he cannot keep. As the script reveals, he is also a psychopath who shows "not the faintest trace of human sympathy" when declaring that he is touched by the sight of Jack losing his store to debtors, and
that there is something "decidedly, if faintly, paranoid about his insistence on finding opposition where there is none," when an officer hesitates to follow one of his orders."32

Figure #29: Custer (Richard Mulligan) strikes an impressive figure during his first appearance in Little Big Man, although his racism and brutality quickly dispel any notion of heroism.

Custer leads a pair of massacres of the Cheyenne, which Jack sees from both sides, and they serve as the film’s purest expression of white corruption. During the first, Jack is serving as a mule skinner with the army, and watches as brutal white troopers, including a "Rat-Faced Soldier," and a "pig-eyed and sadistic" sergeant, mercilessly slaughter Indians, including one of Jack's best friends. In the second, the infamous Washita River Massacre, Jack is living with Sunshine and her sisters when Custer attacks the peaceful Cheyenne on land guaranteed them by the federal government. Just as it did in They Died with Their Boots On, the cavalry attacks to the tune of "Garryowen," but rather than the heroic call to arms of the earlier film, the jaunty march has become an anthem of murder. Jack is outside the village when the army arrives, and the script describes the terrifying scene from his perspective:

    Slowing, eerily, a strange noise becomes audible. It is the grotesque SOUND of a brass band—trumpets, flutes and drums. The tune is "Garry Owen" [sic], and the effect is hallucinatory, gruesome, eerie. An expression of unbelieving horror is on Jack's face as he stands there, paralyzed. And then, the merrily grotesque martial lilt of the brass band is suddenly drowned by a spine-chilling ROAR. . . . Custer, in a resplendent uniform, is on
a huge white horse at the lead of the line, saber raised. He lowers the saber in a signal to fire and all hell breaks loose."

Although Jack and Old Lodge Skins manage to escape, the army slaughters nearly everyone else in the village, including Sunshine, her sisters, and Jack's child. To ensure the complete annihilation of the Cheyenne, Custer orders his men to shoot the tribe's herd of ponies, and when they hesitate, he reveals his true feelings about Indians: "You think it's shocking to kill a few ponies? Well, let me tell you, the women are far more important than the ponies. The point is, they breed like rats." Thus, to Custer, the pure and beautiful Cheyenne are nothing more than vermin who need to be exterminated from the West. In effect, he is echoing the views of earlier American Indian movies, like *The Plainsman* and *Northwest Passage*, but while those pictures advocated such action, *Little Big Man* sees it as genocide.  

As Custer's actions at the Washita River demonstrate, he is a madman, and Penn attributed his death to this insanity. As he said, "When Custer was attacked [at the Little Big Horn], he was right out of his gourd. No one in his right mind would have gone at that many Indians, unless he was so infatuated with his capacity to win, so racially assured that he belonged to a superior race." Unlike *They Died with Their Boots On*, in which Custer sacrifices himself and his men to save thousands of settlers, *Little Big Man* presents him as riding to the Little Big Horn for purely selfish reasons, as he thinks he needs one final victory over the Indians to secure the presidency. Although initially shaken by the massed forces of the Sioux and Cheyenne, Custer attacks anyway. As the screenplay explains, "He rises tall in the saddle as 'the look of the eagles' returns—mad and insane, but there in all its vain megalomania, turned on full blast."

Thus, his own insanity and ambition lead to his downfall, and he does not receive a hero's death but dies a raving lunatic, mistaking Jack for President Grant and giving an insane speech to Congress while his men fall around him.\(^{34}\)
Critical reception of *Little Big Man* demonstrates that its engagement with the counterculture and Red Power were not lost on viewers. *Variety*, for instance, saw the film as attempting to capture the mindset of the age, noting that Willingham's screenplay "tries very hard to be socially significant and meaningful, but at the same time as cool and detached as the current generation is said to be." Further, it also questioned *Little Big Man*'s intent in its portrayal of Indians: "Is it the story of a perpetual but likable loser who happens to be where history is being made? If so, the sociological grit is shamelessly used as a prop. Or, might it be a serious attempt to right some unretirable [sic] wrong via gallows humor which avoids polemics?" Similarly, Knight complained that the film starts lighthearted, but then becomes "not only bitter but tendentious. Its emerging theme is a protest against the genocide perpetrated by General Custer upon the Indians." However, Knight did praise George for lending "to the picture just the right blend of authenticity, dignity and humor that the director wanted—but rarely attained—for his entire film," and thus his condemnation of the film's bitterness appears to be a product of the film's tone, not its content or message. Therefore, both *Variety* and Knight found *Little Big Man* to be a problematic film, the former for using the genocide of Indians as a backdrop for entertainment, if that was the film's intent, the latter for its inability to moderate its bitterness.\(^{35}\)

Other critics were less troubled by the film's dealings with Indians, however. Charles Champlin of *The Los Angeles Times*, believed that *Little Big Man* humanized its Indian characters to a far greater degree than other American Indian films, and, in the process, made its portrayal of their mistreatment fare more effective. As he wrote,

> [Penn and Willingham] have not been guilty of . . . the anthropological solemnity of other recent films about the Indians. And in the end, by seeing the Indians as men and women and children . . . rather than as a Cultural or a Historical Force, Penn's 'Little Big
Man' states the tragedy of the confrontation more eloquently and powerfully than any of the other recent films, and more effectively indeed than any film I can remember seeing. Likewise, both *The Motion Picture Herald* and *Time* demonstrated an awareness of Red Power and Native American activism, which had become so prevalent during the late-'60s and early-'70s. Richard Gertner of *The Motion Picture Herald* described the film's climax as "a staging of . . . Custer's Last Stand unlike any ever seen in a movie before," and continued, "The audience is rooting for the Sioux to win; Custer and his followers are only getting what they deserve. It's quite a switch—enough to make Errol Flynn turn over in his grave." Further, according to Gertner, *Little Big Man*'s revisionism "shatters a great many myths about the Old West and its people long-treasured by moviegoers through the years." Stefan Kanfer of *Time* noted that the film's "General Custer is pure Pig on the Prairie, babbling insanely as the consummate racist militant," but did not see the film's revisionism as particularly controversial, declaring, "In the era of occupied Alcatraz, surely it's no news that the white man spoke with forked tongue or the first Americans were maltreated." Thus, even if the Red Power movement was still being forced to fight for change, it had brought sufficient attention to the plight of Native Americans for critics to see it reflected in *Little Big Man*, and for some to see such revisionism as expected or, at the least, unsurprising.36

Driven by its makers' personal politics, embracing of the counterculture, and respect for the Native American rights movement, *Little Big Man* offered a revisionist view of the conquest of the West. Just as the New Left was pointing out faults in mainstream society and the counterculture was searching for an alternative way of life, Penn's film criticized white America. Holding up Indian society as a model of virtue, it presented the Cheyenne as honest, peaceful, and dignified people who stood in stark contrast to violent, racist, dishonest whites. Further, the film sees Custer as the worst white America has to offer, an insane megalomaniac who murders
Indians for his own personal ambitions. As such, *Little Big Man* reverses the binary system that had dominated even the most sympathetic American Indian films in years past, for it now presented Indians as civilized and whites as savage. However, despite the picture's glowing portrayal of the Cheyenne, it remains inherently concerned with white America. It uses Indians as a positive Other against which it judges white corruption, while seeing Indian society as a bastion for its white protagonist and a remedy for the flaws in mainstream America. Moreover, while it presents the Cheyenne as a wonderful people, it portrays their enemies, the Pawnee, as bloodthirsty savages. Thus, *Little Big Man* may exhibit good intentions and see the purity and beauty of Indian life as superior to the corruption and violence of mainstream society, but it remains a film about, and for, white America, leaving its Indians subservient to Jack, teaching him to be a better person and offering him an escape from his own people.

**The Indian as Counterculture: *Billy Jack***

While *Little Big Man* connected Indians and the counterculture allegorically, *Billy Jack* did so directly, conflating them in its modern story of Indians and hippies battling against intolerant white townspeople. As such, it represents an apex of the era's Indians-as-counterculture films. The movie focuses on the title character, played by co-writer and director Tom Laughlin, a half-Indian, half-white ex-Green Beret described in voice-over narration as "a war hero who hated the war." Returning home to the Southwest after Vietnam, he protects his reservation, and the "freedom school" on it, from white bigots, most notably Stuart Posner (Bert Freed), the local town's leading citizen, and Bernard (David Roya), his vicious son. Billy Jack's use of force stands in stark contrast to the philosophy of the school's founder, Jean (Delores Taylor, Laughlin's wife and the film's co-writer and producer), who espouses non-violence even
after Bernard rapes her. Killing Bernard in retaliation, Billy Jack engages in a tense stand-off with law enforcement during the film's climax, but ultimately decides to surrender so that his trial will bring attention to the plight of Indians across the nation. A low budget independent production, *Billy Jack* was a stunning box office success, as its defense of the counterculture generation, embracing of Indian spirituality, attacks on mainstream white society, and Laughlin's martial arts skills, united to strike a chord with young audiences.37

Laughlin was a political radical who ran for president three times (1992, 2004, 2008) as a protest candidate. Disillusioned by the nation's broken political system, he said he hated both the Democratic and Republican parties, and made *Billy Jack Goes to Washington* in 1977, an expose on political corruption that never received a theatrical run. He was inspired to write *Billy Jack* after visiting Taylor in her hometown of Winner, South Dakota, near the Rosebud Reservation and seeing firsthand the discrimination and poverty suffered by the local Sioux. Likewise, according to journalist Lydia Lane, Taylor's "attitude toward life has been greatly influenced by her being born in [South] Dakota close to a reservation of Sioux Indians," and Laughlin included incidents both she and her brother related to him in the screenplay. Laughlin certainly saw himself as a champion of Native American rights, and publicly connected himself to Native Americans while promoting the film, claiming, "In scouting locations for *Billy Jack*, I was always accompanied by a Hopi messenger. He'd consult Indian medicine men, and if they said no about a site, we wouldn't shoot there." Moreover, as journalist Marc Aldridge wrote, Laughlin "talked vaguely [at a press conference] about four Indians who had a dream and helped in some inexplicable way to make the movie." According to Laughlin, these Native Americans "Tell us we're being used by an Indian messenger to spread their word. *I believe this.*"38
Due to these unusual policies and his support of Native American rights, Laughlin conflates Indian life with the counterculture in *Billy Jack*, both through the alternative school and through Billy Jack, himself. Jean's school is not only located on an Indian reservation, but its student body is comprised of both Indians and hippie kids of all races. They are all outcasts from mainstream society—one girl runs away to the school after her father, the corrupt local sheriff, becomes abusive when he discovers she is pregnant—and on the reservation, they find identity, meaning, and belonging. Rejecting traditional book learning, the school emphasizes creativity and an appreciation for each student's individual heritage. As Jean says:

> I opened [the school] up to any kid with a problem, black, white, Indian, Chicano, who could come any time that they wanted, stay as long as they wanted, and leave when they wanted, no questions asked. . . . I announced that there'd be only three rules: no drugs, everyone had to carry his own load, and everyone had to get turned on by creating something, anything . . . preferably something that made one proud of one's own heritage and past.

This unorthodox curriculum baffles the townspeople, even those who try to reach an understanding with the students, for the divides between the generations, the races, and the hippies and "straights" are too great. For instance, when students attend a town council meeting, one girl reads a speech that bears an uncanny resemblance to the rhetoric of the right during the Vietnam era, citing the threats to society posed by Russia, communism, and rioting students, and then reveals that it was originally delivered by Adolph Hitler in 1932, "and everybody from Nixon down to your council is repeating it today."39

Along with the school, Billy Jack is the film's other important site of conflation between the counterculture and Indian life. He is undergoing his own education by an Indian shaman and experiences a vision during which the Piute holy man Wovoka speaks through him. During this vision, Billy Jack tells the students, "The whole spiritual wisdom of the great holy men of the Indian tradition is now what the young people of the world are looking for . . . The young whites,
they know there is a supernatural world and a great spirit, and they try to reach the great spirit."
He further suggests that the counterculture's drug use is an attempt to deal with the void left by
the emptiness of western culture, a void that Indian spirituality can actually fill. This ceremony
is not particularly accurate—Native American activist and scholar Ward Churchill notes that the
film presents "a weird confluence of Navajos and various Pueblos, occasionally practicing what
appear to be bastardizations of Cheyenne and Kiowa ceremonies"—but along with his half-
Indian ancestry and protection of the hippie school, Billy Jack's embodiment of such a prominent
Native American religious leader serves as another direct connection between Indian life and the
counterculture. Furthermore, Laughlin himself saw Billy Jack's success at the box office as a
demonstration that the film was providing the sort of spiritual experience for young people that
Billy Jack advocated. As he said, "Kids are trying to find their transcendental selves. They can't
find that in church—it's too much like Rotary. They're desperate for a religious or spiritual
experience. That's what Billy Jack gives them."40

Figure #30: The conflation of Indian spirituality with the counterculture, as Billy Jack (Tom Laughlin)
speaks to Indians and hippy students during his vision as Wovoka.
The film contrasts Billy Jack, and the Indian and hippy students, with white townspeople who present three common traits of corrupt mainstream America: greed, violence, and racism. As the picture opens, Posner and his thugs have trespassed on the reservation, intending to slaughter a herd of beautiful wild mustangs in order to sell their meat for dog food, and only Billy Jack's timely intervention saves the horses. With his riches and control of the local sheriff and government, Posner has no respect for the reservation or the rights of Indians, thereby embodying the nation's historic mistreatment of Native Americans. He is not the only one who dislikes and disrespects the representatives of the counterculture, however, for most of the townspeople share his bigotry. As a barber complains to the corrupt sheriff, "When are you gonna do something about those long-haired weirdoes? Before or after they start burning their draft cards?"41

Bernard, Posner's son, is the worst of the lot, a brutal, entitled thug whose actions escalate from bullying to rape and attempted murder. In perhaps the film's most famous scene, he confronts Indian students in an ice cream parlor that refuses them service due to their race, and pours flour on the Indians' heads to "make them white." Laughlin based the incident on the actions of Taylor's brother, who admitted to doing the same thing to Native Americans when he was young. Although Taylor's brother got away with such bullying, Billy Jack is present in the film to mete out justice, telling Bernard, "When I see this . . . this little girl, who is so special to us that we call her 'God's Little Gift of Sunshine,' and I think of the number of years she's gonna have to carry in her memory the savagery of this idiotic moment of yours, I just go berserk!" before thrashing him and his crony. Bernard's actions demonstrate the depths of corruption in white society, as well as the ugliness it generates, and Laughlin said, "I'm very proud of that scene. I think we show, as clearly as you can, what racial prejudice really is and what it does."42
Figure #31: The corruption of white society on display in *Billy Jack*. Bernard (David Roya, left) pours flour on Indian students to make them "white" when they visit a segregated ice cream parlor.

Billy Jack's frequent martial arts fights with Bernard and other bigoted goons reveal a major contradiction, as the film argues for pacifism while its hero settles problems through combat. Aldridge saw this as a product of the film's pro-Indian ideology, for, as he wrote, Billy Jack is "torn by the conflict between his Indian self (peaceful, good) and his white self (violent, bad)," and thus, like *Little Big Man*, *Billy Jack* sees Indians as civilized and whites as savage. Jean is an ardent practitioner of nonviolence, and consistently attempts to convince Billy Jack to stop fighting back, even after Bernard rapes her. Film critic Stuart Byron, who saw the film attempting "to understand and reconcile these contrasting forces [of pacifism and nonviolence] in American life," believed that Jean's nonviolent philosophy was yet another connection between the counterculture and Indian life, for "rather than representing settlement and rule of law, she symbolizes a return to pre-civilized tribal living." Billy Jack's response to Jean's pleas reveals the film's despair over the lost idealism of the 1960s, for, as he tells Jean, leaders like Martin Luther King and John and Robert Kennedy died because Americans "Wouldn't put the same
controls on their guns as they do their dogs, their bicycles, their cats, and their automobiles," and continues, "in what remote corner of this country, no, of this entire goddamn planet, is there such a place where men really care about each other and love each other?"  

Eventually, Billy Jack comes around to Jean's way of thinking, but not before he beats Bernard to death and holes up in the school, besieged by the police. Jean and a handful of decent townsfolk convince him to give up so that, in the words of one of the liberal whites, his trial can bring attention to, "the unbelievably horrible way the Indian is cheated and forced to live in this country." Laughlin saw Billy Jack's conversion to nonviolence as one of the film's central points, claiming that, "in every male there is a female and vice-versa," and, in the words of journalist Jerry Beigel, that, "'Billy Jack' offers a solution to violence in our society by depicting a violent man who finally gives himself over to the gentler female nature within him." Nonetheless, the film's engagement with violence remains hypocritical, because it embraces the ethos of nonviolence only after allowing its audience the pleasure of watching Billy Jack beat up Posner's thugs and kill Bernard.  

*Billy Jack* was a box office sensation during the early-1970s, making $40 million during an era when tickets cost a dollar or less, a stunning total that made it the highest grossing independent film released up to that point. This success is all the more remarkable because Warner Bros., the studio that distributed the picture, thought it had such little merit that it dumped it into pornographic theaters and drive-ins. In response, Laughlin sued to regain control of his movie and then sold it to theaters, city by city, by himself. Despite this chaotic release, *Billy Jack* still found an audience with young people who sought it out because its combination of counterculture message and action movie violence spoke to them. Critic Rex Reed suggested that it should receive "an award for 'the sleeper of the year,'" writing, "The critics ignored it.
Warner Bros. . . . tried to kill it. But in the movies, when all the back-stabbing is over and the tabulations are in, the ticket buyers have the last word. 'Billy Jack' is one of those rare Hollywood miracles—a movie nobody cared about except the public that would not let it die.”

Critics did not entirely ignore *Billy Jack*, as Reed suggested, and while they did not all agree on the film's merits, they did perceive its connections to the counterculture. *Variety*, for instance, noted that the film "appears to be a labor of love in which the plight of the American Indian, the prejudices against and refusal of many to accept him are pinpointed," and that it "does score a point in today's awareness of minorities." Yet *Variety* also griped that "the message is rammed down the spectators' throats," and criticized the way, "the young people in the school, many of them white, spout their philosophy and question the behavior of whites," as if white students were out of line criticizing their own society. Likewise, *The Motion Picture Herald* complained that "Billy and Jean are more symbols of their respective philosophies than real people," and that "the white man . . . is as rapacious as ever," in the film. Despite their criticism, however, both reviews saw the film's box office potential and the way it could speak to young audiences, with *Variety* noting, "Reception may benefit by feature also reflecting some of the trouble of present-day youth," and *The Motion Picture Herald*, "It comes loaded with so many lurid incidents that it could very well make a name for itself on the action market." Howard Thompson, the critic of *The New York Times*, was slightly less negative, writing that "For a picture that preaches pacifism, 'Billy Jack' seems fascinated by violence, of which it is full," and that "The violence commences to pile on predictably and endlessly, with an assortment of town bullies and psychopaths right out of Western stereotypes." However, while *Variety* and *The Motion Picture Herald* appeared to care little for *Billy Jack's* counterculture message, Thompson
admitted, "Some of the sensible utterances of the harassed youngsters have the quiet, authoritative ring of truth."46

*Newsweek* and both Champlin and Kevin Thomas of *The Los Angeles Times* were far more effusive in their assessments of *Billy Jack*. *Newsweek* saw it as an important entry in the portrayal of the counterculture on screen, noting that "The 'counterculture' by and large has not fared well in the movies," and that this "mysterious but palpable cultural shift in America" has been "co-opted, commercialized and corrupted." However, according to the review, "Into this state of affairs *Billy Jack* rides with a real sense of refreshment. . . . The film has a kind of naïveté and innocence, the first film to capture those qualities which must, and do, lie somewhere in the morass which the counterculture has gotten itself into." Accepting the film's presentation of the counterculture, if not drawing the connection between the movement and Indian life, the review concludes that *Billy Jack*, "succeeds by winning the audience's emotional allegiance to the young people . . . who are troubled but beautiful, open, filled with intelligent yearning, unquestionably touched with grace." Similarly praising *Billy Jack*, Champlin referred to it as "a stunning piece of work. It has the flavor of a children's crusade against everything that is wrong in the world using as its weaponry everything that is right in the world, love and forgiveness prominent among them," and further that it "takes as its heroes losers and outcasts. . . . Chicanos, Indians and disaffected middle-class Anglos, all fighting (pacifically) to rediscover themselves. The enemies are establishment figures, a political boss, a crooked cop, the weak and bigoted."

Thomas also celebrated *Billy Jack* as "In its unique, awkward way one of the year's important pictures," and seeing, as its best moment, the meeting between the students and the town council: "For a moment, good vs. evil—i.e. hippie vs. square—gives way to confused, voluble humanity,
and one agrees with a councilwoman who observes that each side is confirming its worst fears about the other."47

Given that *Billy Jack* was such a massive underground success, it is unsurprising that audience members also praised its message. In a letter to *The New York Times*, Rosalyn Drexler wrote that Billy Jack "is the Lone Ranger, Tonto, Nader, Ellsberg, Brando, and Mick Jagger all rolled up into one," seeing him as a force of ultra-cool goodness who helps the pure-but-abused members of the counterculture. As she continues, "He protects the wild, the beautiful, the innocent: things of nature, things of spirit. He is big brother to a local freedom school full of vitally intelligent children of all races and ages," and conclude, "It is an affecting film and a true film about kids. So I want to go on record as a friend of Billy Jack." Likewise, Stewart Stern's letter to *The Los Angeles Times*, explained that he "found 'Billy Jack' to be absolutely wonderful . . . the experience reached down from the screen and took me in—the film is that contagious." Moreover, he saw it as continuing the spirit of the counterculture: "I remember seeing 'Hair' . . . and thought how tragic it would be if all that love and joy and fun and fury were to disappear before everyone on earth could share it. Fortunately it was revived with a different energy and a tougher point of view. 'Billy Jack' has that energy now, and it has more to say."48

As one of the most successful independent films ever made, *Billy Jack* certainly spoke to a large segment of America's youth during the Vietnam era. With its half-Indian protagonist protecting his reservation, as well as its alternative school and hippie students, the film represents a full and direct conflation of the counterculture and Indian life. And while the film criticizes the United States for its mistreatment of Indians—at one point, Billy Jack declares that "As far as I can tell, Washington entered into three thousand five hundred treaties with the Indians to date, and they've broken about three thousand, four hundred and ninety-nine of them"—it also
criticizes mainstream American society through the corruption of thugs like Posner and Bernard. Much like the communalists who moved to New Mexico in search of a more pure way of life, *Billy Jack* presents Indian spirituality as a remedy for the moral emptiness of white America. In order to accomplish this, its hero uses violence to fight violence, but in the end, he adopts the nonviolent ethos espoused by Jean and heroes of the left like Martin Luther King. However, the film's hypocritical embracing of pacifism while celebrating Billy Jack's martial arts exploits proved to be a boon, as the film's combination of action and counterculture message made it a massive box office success. Critics may have differed in their assessments of its quality and the validity of its ideas, but they did recognize it as an important work of the counterculture, even if they failed to see the connection it was drawing between the movement and Indians.49

**Conclusion**

The 1960s saw a drastic shift in Hollywood's portrayal of Indians from American Indian films made a decade earlier. While the civil rights-oriented movies of the 1950s suggested that Indians needed to assimilate into mainstream society, those of the 1960s and early-'70s reversed this paradigm. Rather than demanding that Indians become white, or simply advocating their extermination, these pictures saw value in Indian culture. To them, it offered cures for the problems that the nation faced, and they argued that Americans could benefit from the wisdom of Indians, drawing lessons from their moral purity. Yet this reveals the inherent flaw in these pictures. Instead of being concerned with, and confronting, the issues Native Americans actually faced in modern America, they were only focused upon the problems of white society, and the ways Indians could address them. Essentially, they represented white America's cultural appropriation of Native American life, seeing it as a cure for its own shortcomings.
These shortcomings were rooted in the seeming stability and happiness of the 1950s. By the middle of the decade, many observers recognized that a current of discontent flowed beneath the seemingly placid surface of the country. By the early-'60s, this alienation was emerging in the form of the New Left, a political movement of young people disgusted by the shallow consumerism, greed, violence and racism of their parents' society. Through organizations such as SDS, they demanded change, including an end to the Cold War and racial discrimination. Thus, when *Kings of the Sun* was released in 1963, its story of a technologically advanced yet morally corrupt society of Mayans being regenerated by a less advanced but morally pure tribe of Indians mirrored these feelings. The Mayans may have been an ingenious people, but their practice of human sacrifice was a terrible blot upon their culture, one that only the wisdom of Black Eagle, the consummate noble savage, could repair. This is not to say that *Kings of the Sun* is a New Left film, but rather that both it and the New Left revealed a growing discontent within American society, as well as the belief that the country was morally flawed and needed to be repaired.

As the decade wore on, the Red Power and counterculture movements led to further changes within the American Indian film. With its activism aimed at righting wrongs committed by the United States against Native Americans, Red Power ultimately revealed those wrongs to the American public at large. From fish-ins to the occupation of Alcatraz to the publication of *Custer Died for Your Sins* and *Bury My Heart at Wounded Knee*, Red Power brought greater attention to the plight of Native Americans than perhaps had ever previously occurred. Furthermore, Native American life appeared to be the answer to the counterculture's search for an alternative to mainstream society. Whether simply drawing inspiration from *The Whole Earth Catalog* or actually moving to a commune like New Buffalo, hippies reveled in the spirituality
and back-to-nature aspects of Native American society. In many cases, of course, they were not actually adopting the ways of local tribes, but were rather copying what they had seen in movies and on television, and the thus counterculture both reflected the importance of the American Indian genre in popular culture, and influenced movies yet to be made.

1970's *Little Big Man* demonstrates this influence, for it portrayed the peaceful, beautiful society of the Cheyenne as an allegory for the modern day counterculture. Jack's experiences demonstrate that, while Indians are dignified, honest and decent, white America, personified by the monstrously savage and racist Custer, is utterly corrupt. Once again, however, the focus of the film is on the flaws and shortcomings of white America, and how Indians such as Old Lodge Skins can offer a willing white man like Jack an alternative way of life. While *Little Big Man* presented Indians as an allegorical equivalent to the counterculture, 1971's *Billy Jack* conflated them directly. By making its hero a half-Indian who is disgusted with mainstream society, and placing its freedom school on his reservation, the film draws a straight connection between Indians and hippies. Just as many in the counterculture felt that they were the spiritual heirs of Native Americans, the hippie kids in *Billy Jack* who resist oppressive white authority figures are the equivalent of modern day Indians. Billy Jack, whose vision presents Indian spirituality as providing the meaning that many young people were searching for in their lives, is torn between Indian and white, peace and violence, and it is only through the guidance of Jean, the school's founder and leading hippie, that he finally embraces the nonviolence that defines both the counterculture and his Indian self.

These were not the only films of the era that engaged with the counterculture and Indian rights, though. *Hombre* (Twentieth Century Fox, 1967) is essentially a remake of *Stagecoach*, but with Paul Newman's half-Indian title character taking the place of John Wayne's Ringo as the
social outcast, hated by racists in the coach but still serving as their protector from outlaws. *A Man Called Horse* (National General, 1970) and *The White Dawn* (Paramount, 1974) both deal with white men (and in the case of *The White Dawn*, an African American man), who find spiritual purity in Indian life. In the former film, an English aristocrat (Richard Harris) is captured by Sioux, and after initially being treated as a pack animal, he undergoes the agonizing Sun Dance ceremony, becomes a full member of the tribe, and uses his military training to save it from its enemies. In the latter picture, three whalers stranded in the frozen north are rescued by a village of Inuits. But while one of their number (Timothy Bottoms) is entranced by the inherent goodness and innocence of these people, the others (Warren Oates and Louis Gossett, Jr.) cannot leave behind their corrupt ways, and come to abuse their hosts’ hospitality. Finally, *Soldier Blue* (AVCO Embassy, 1970) is a film that, like *Little Big Man*, presents Indian life as a beautiful alternative to the savage violence and racism of white America. Its focus, however, is principally upon the army’s atrocities and the way they reflect the Vietnam War, and thus it shall be dealt with in chapter six. For, while some American Indian films during the 1960s and early-'70s sought to point out flaws in American society, and used Indian life as a counterculture that could address those shortcomings, others drew connections between the Indian wars and Vietnam, seeing great similarities in American massacres and, more generally, the nature of war and the violence of humanity. 50
Although the exact location of the film's setting is never revealed, since Texas obviously did not exist as a geographical entity in pre-Columbian America, notes provided by the Mirisch Company, which produced the film, confirmed Texas as the film's setting. "Facts About 'Kings of the Sun,'" Hollywood Reporter (December 12, 1963), Kings of the Sun clipping file, USC Film and Cinema Archive, School of Cinematic Arts, University of Southern California, Los Angeles, California.

12 "Facts About 'Kings of the Sun';" Kings of the Sun synopsis, Kings of the Sun clipping file, USC Film and Cinema Archive.

Kings of the Sun synopses.

13 Kings of the Sun; Kings of the Sun synopsis.

14 Kings of the Sun.


16 Gold; Review of Kings of the Sun, Variety; Scheuer, "'Kings of the Sun' Whooping Whopper," C11.


19 Johnson 4-5, 32.


23 Philip Deloria, 156-58, 180; Sherry Smith, Hippies, Indians, and the Fight for Red Power, 121-22, 125.

Two of the communes that survived the era were New Buffalo, which existed into the 1980s, and Lama, which is still in existence today. Both were in the Taos, New Mexico area, which was the most popular location for the movement. Sherry Smith, Hippies, Indians, and the Fight for Red Power, 143.

24 Philip J. Deloria, 155, 159.
New Buffalo gained particular fame because it was featured in the iconic 1969 counterculture film *Easy Rider.*


Among the other "fine recent films about the American past" that Faber cited are *Bad Company,* which concerns draft dodgers during the Civil War, *McCabe and Mrs. Miller,* about a gambler and a prostitute opening a thriving bordello and casino in a mining settlement, and *The Great Northfield Minnesota Raid,* which depicted the James and Younger Gang's disastrous attempt to rob a bank in the titular town.


Regarding *Mickey One,* Penn said, "I wanted to make a film about McCarthyism and the vulnerability of a society to McCarthy. All the revolutionaries of the thirties were successful and living well and then naming names and confessing to things that I don't even think they were guilty of. They were welcoming the guilt because they were too well off. The affluent society had taken a bizarre twist and these people were a bunch of willing confessors."


In Thomas Berger's novel, *Crabb* complains about white actors playing Indians in movies. Despite, or perhaps because of this, Penn originally offered the role of Old Lodge Skins to British actors Laurence Olivier and Paul Scofield, but both turned it down. He then cast Richard Boone, a Caucasian-American veteran of many Westerns including the television program "Have Gun, Will Travel," but Boone dropped out of the film shortly before production began. Only then did Penn turn to George. It proved to be an inspired choice, as George received an Academy Award nomination as Best Supporting Actor for his work and many critics consider his performance to be not only the film's best, but perhaps the most significant factor in the movie's success. Stefan Kanfer, "The Red and the White," *Review of Little Big Man,* *Time* 96 no. 26 (December 21, 1970): 56.

29 *Little Big Man*; Calder Willingham, *Little Big Man* screenplay, Pre-Shooting Draft, dated August 29, 1968, 1, 4, 6, 82, Script Collection, Margaret Herrick Library, Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences, Beverly Hills, California.


31 *Little Big Man*; "Pravda Finds 'Little Big Man' Exposes 'Crimes of Capitalism,'" *Los Angeles Times,* July 24, 1971, 14; Willingham, 26, 35, 44.

32 *Little Big Man;* Weinraub, 11; Willingham, 57, 109.


Custer led his troops onto land guaranteed to Native Americans by the American government at Washita River. The use of "Garry Owen" during the attack is not a fabrication on the part of Penn, as the Seventh Cavalry's regimental band did, indeed, play the tune during the initial charge on the Cheyenne village. For more information the Washita River Massacre, see Jerome A. Greene, *Washita: the U.S. Army and the Southern Cheyennes, 1867-1869* (Norman, University of Oklahoma Press, 2004).

34 Friar and Friar, 277; *Little Big Man;* Willingham, Production Draft, 151.


37 *Billy Jack.*
Laughlin used the name T.C. Frank for his directing credit, and he and Taylor used the names Frank Christina and Teresa Christina, for their screenwriting credits. The names are those of their three children, Frank, Teresa and Christina Laughlin.


39 Billy Jack.


A member of the Paiute tribe of California and Nevada, Wovoka spread the practice of the Ghost Dance to other western tribes during the late nineteenth century, claiming it would result in whites vanishing from North America and the return of its lands to Native Americans. Concerned about the subversive implications of this spiritual movement, the American government cracked down on the performance of the Ghost Dance, and this suppression eventually led to the massacre of many of its practitioners at Wounded Knee in 1890. For more information on Wovoka, see Michael Hittman, Wovoka and the Ghost Dance, ed. Don Lynch, (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1990).

41 Billy Jack.

42 Aldridge, W19; Billy Jack; Laughlin, "Good Day Sacramento."


44 Jerry Biegel, "Women Discussions Explosive at Filmex," Los Angeles Times, November 18, 1972, A8; Billy Jack.

45 Albo; Rex Reed, "Hollywood Picks on the Wrong Guy," Los Angeles Times, January 9, 1972, V14. Ironically, just as Billy Jack fought Bernard, the son of the local political boss, in the film, the lawyer who opposed Laughlin in Chicago during his lawsuit was one of the sons of Richard Daley, the city's mayor. "Out of the Sun," Review of Billy Jack, Newsworld 78, no. 9 (August 30, 1971): 76.

For accounts of Laughlin's legal struggles with Warner Bros. over Billy Jack, see Aldridge and Reed.


49 Billy Jack.

Chapter Six
"Good Brave Lads Coming Out Here to Kill a Real Live Injun:"
The American Indian Film and the Vietnam War, 1960 - 1970

In *Soldier Blue* (AVCO Embassy, 1970), Cresta and Honus are the only survivors of an Indian attack upon their cavalry column. A consummate flower child, Cresta has lived with the Cheyenne for two years and loves them and their ways, while the naive Honus is a fresh recruit who only believes what the army has taught him about Indians: that they are bloodthirsty monsters. As the pair trek through the wilderness, Cresta argues with Honus, attempting to change his mind about the Cheyenne, but ever the square member of the establishment, he stubbornly clings to the cavalry's view. Only when the pair makes contact with the army does Honus learn the truth. Under the command of the psychopathic Col. Iverson, the cavalry attacks a peaceful Cheyenne village, raping, torturing and murdering nearly all the Indians who live there, men, women and children alike. This orgy of violence horrifies Honus, as he finally comes to realize that the military is an institution of racism and savagery, and the film ends with this formerly conservative soldier in chains, a radical who despises the very army in which he served. In this way, *Soldier Blue* transposed the Vietnam War onto the Indian wars, conflating the nation's imperialistic actions toward two non-white peoples and seeing in the brutal massacres the army carried out against Indians a historical precedent for its conduct in Vietnam.¹

The Vietnam War created extraordinary upheaval within American society and culture. The United States had involved itself in another nation's civil war, with hundreds of thousands of combat troops stuck in a conflict with no clear objectives, route to victory or way out, and
Americans became increasingly horrified by the conflict's bloodshed, pointlessness, and seeming amorality. The New Left, so small and isolated during the first half of the 1960s, grew into a powerful protest movement during the war, while race riots and the brutality of the war overseas led many to believe that the nation was becoming defined by violence. Just as American Indian movies had engaged with the counterculture during this era, presenting Indian life as a pure alternative to corrupt mainstream society, so did they confront the Vietnam War. Some films saw the army's actions in Southeast Asia as a reflection and continuation of its actions against Native Americans a century earlier, presenting their Indian characters as stand-ins for the Vietnamese and portraying the army as an institution of murder. Other pictures used the Indian wars as a means to explore the "American madness" of violence, arguing that the world was an inherently savage place where "civilized" men would succumb to that brutality if faced with it, and that, in terms of the violence they were capable of committing, there was little difference between whites and Indians.

Chapter six discusses three films made during the Vietnam era that reflect the war's influence upon the American Indian film and its portrayal of Indians. Much like Little Big Man and Billy Jack, Soldier Blue presented Indian life as an innocent and pure alternative to corrupt white America. Cresta's love for the Cheyenne and hatred of the military marked her as a radical representative of modern American youth, while the army's slaughter of the Indian village served as a timely reminder of similar massacres in Vietnam. Ulzana's Raid (Universal, 1972) follows a cavalry patrol as it attempts to track down a small band of renegade Apaches in the harsh Arizona desert. These Indians are a savage lot, torturing and murdering any whites they come across, yet Ulzana's Raid tries to understand their actions rather than pass judgment upon them, attributing such brutality to their environment. Indeed, as the film reveals, white soldiers resort
to similar actions during the mission, and with the Apaches engaged in Viet Cong-style guerilla tactics, *Ulzana's Raid* suggests that violence and warfare are a part of human nature. *Jeremiah Johnson* (Warner Bros., 1972) offers a similar message about the omnipresence of violence in human life. Disillusioned by the Mexican War, its protagonist abandons civilization and heads into the Rockies to live the solitary life of a mountain man. Once there, however, he finds himself embroiled in a new conflict, this time against a band of Crow Indians. Each of these films used wars between Indians and whites to make statements about Vietnam and the violence that appeared to be inherent in American life. Much like the movies discussed in chapter five, they were concerned with the flaws and problems of white America, and thus reduced Indians to secondary status, using them as allegorical stand-ins for the Vietnamese in stories focused upon white protagonists.2

The American Indian film was not the only genre to engage with the Vietnam War during the 1960s and early-’70s. As historian Andrew J. Huebner writes, "Audiences [during these years] often confronted the Vietnam War in film whether they realized it or not." John Wayne's ardently pro-war *The Green Berets* (Warner Bros., 1968) presented an idealized view of the conflict, offering up courageous, square-jawed American commandos fighting alongside noble South Vietnamese allies in a what amounted to a morally simplified recasting of World War II to the jungles of Southeast Asia. The film is so inaccurate that its final shot is of the sun setting over the ocean off the east coast of Vietnam, but it was the only major Hollywood film to deal directly with the war during the era. Other war movies confronted Vietnam more obliquely, engaging with it in an allegorical manner, just as American Indian pictures did. Perhaps the best known of these is *M*A*S*H* (Twentieth Century Fox, 1970), Robert Altman's irreverent comedy of nonconformist army doctors coping with the insanity of war. While the action was set two
decades earlier during the Korean War, the film's anti-establishment, anti-authority heroes Hawkeye, Trapper John and Duke made it clear that the film was a satire of the nation's then-current Asian conflict. Likewise, the hippie tankers and profit-interested G.I.s of *Kelly's Heroes* (MGM, 1970) brought a counterculture sensibility to World War II's European front, as did the surreal antiwar elements of *Castle Keep* (Columbia, 1969). Ironically, then, just as *The Green Berets* transposed World War II values onto the Vietnam War, these films transposed Vietnam attributes onto World War II.³

Yet while Vietnam made oblique appearances in war movies, it was even more prevalent in the era's American Indian pictures because, in many ways, the United States viewed the conflict through the lens of its wars with Native Americans. Historian Richard Drinnon has argued that the nations' actions in the Philippines and Southeast Asia during the twentieth century were simply a continuation of its imperialistic expansion west throughout the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, and indeed, American government officials, soldiers, and civilians equated the Vietnam War, and the Vietnamese themselves, with Native Americans. For instance, some policymakers declared that the United States was certain to win in Vietnam because Asians lacked the will of Anglo-Saxons, and, as Drinnon notes, such an assumption was based on "three and a half centuries of conquest [that] had made more self-evident than questionable the Anglo-American conviction that in any contest with nonwhites, dusky natives would surely lose." Because of this, the American government and military vastly underestimated the Vietnamese, viewing them simply as an extension of the Indians the nation had defeated a century earlier. In Drinnon's words, they saw the communist National Liberation Front (NLF) as "'wild varmints' that had somehow followed the empire across land and sea to this tropical frontier." These policymakers projected age-old Indian traits onto the Vietnamese,
claiming they had, as Slotkin writes, "a racial propensity for torture," and presenting America's role in the war as one of the cavalry protecting the settlers (the South Vietnamese) from the Indians (the NLF). Furthermore, the American war machine devalued Vietnamese life, even that of the "good" South Vietnamese it was supposed to be protecting, much as American culture had devalued Indian life for centuries. Drinnon notes, for instance, that G.I.s referred to "the Indian idea" or the "mere gook problem" ("MGR"), both of which were drawn from General Phil Sheridan's infamous quote, "The only good Indian is a dead Indian." Because of the nature of the war and how indistinguishable the "good" Vietnamese were from the "bad," American soldiers began to feel that, like Sheridan's Indians, all Vietnamese were the enemy, a perception that logically led to the murder of civilians.4

Moreover, the guerilla warfare carried out by the NLF against the United States brought to mind Indian wars from centuries past, as did the tactics and even the language the American military employed when carrying out the conflict. Much like Native Americans in history and Indians in the movies, the NLF would attack and then vanish into the wilderness, leaving the better-armed American troops maddened by their inability to engage the enemy in decisive battles. Furthermore, one of the most enduring images of the war—G.I.s burning Vietnamese villages—recalled the earliest days of European settlement in New England, when the Puritans had similarly put Indian communities to the torch. Only now, as Drinnon points out, it was the Zippo lighter, and not an actual torch, that lit the fires. Likewise, the army's strategy of using firebases and other outposts in the wilderness brought to mind the cavalry's system of forts in the American West, while journalists presented the Green Berets and other elite commandos as modern versions of the frontier rangers who fought Native Americans during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. Language reminiscent of Indian wars was common in Vietnam, as well,
with G.I.s describing enemy territory as "Indian country," the military naming operations after western terms such as "Prairie," "Crazy Horse," "Rolling Thunder," and "Daniel Boone," and policymakers suggesting that the United States was bringing order to the frontier of Vietnam. As Drinnon writes, "It was as if cowboys and Indians were the only game the American invaders knew." Thus, the image of the Indian wars permeated the nation's view of Vietnam, and American Indian films served as a logical platform to confront the cultural upheaval caused by the conflict.5

Vietnam, My Lai and the Antiwar Protest Movement

The Vietnam War was the dominant American issue of the late 1960s, and as such, it was a primary topic that the American Indian genre engaged with during this era. Although American military advisors were active in Southeast Asia dating back to the late 1950s, it was not until the mid-’60s that the United States became heavily involved in the war between North and South Vietnam. Beginning in 1965, President Johnson committed combat troops the conflict and within three years, nearly 500,000 American troops were stationed in Vietnam. As hundreds of thousands of young men were drafted into the military and the death toll from this conflict mounted, eventually surpassing 58,000, the war became increasingly unpopular at home. The Tet Offensive in January, 1968 was a watershed moment in this process, for while the fighting resulted in a tactical American victory, it proved to be a public relations disaster. The highly-coordinated series of Viet Cong attacks throughout South Vietnam not only caught the United States by surprise but made the war appear unending to the American people at a time when Johnson had been claiming that victory was within reach.6
While the Tet Offensive made the American government appear dishonest about its conduct of the war, the My Lai Massacre seemed to confirm that it was a conflict based on imperialism and racism. On March 16, 1968, a company of the 23rd Infantry Division assaulted a South Vietnamese village supposed to be friendly to the NLF, but actually occupied by noncombatants. Although they did not face a single incoming round all day, the American troops proceeded to engage in a rampage of rape, torture and murder, killing at least 347 civilians, many of them women and children. The military managed to cover up the massacre for a year and a half, but in November, 1969, *Life Magazine* ran an exposé of photographs taken by Ronald Haeberle during the slaughter, and shortly thereafter *The New York Times* published investigative reports on the atrocity. Although dozens of G.I.s participated in the My Lai Massacre, many of whom stood trial, only Lt. William Calley was found guilty. A Congressional investigation that followed declared that the incident was out of the national character of the United States, but as Drinnon argues, "Massacres were at least as American as the timeworn assertions that they were foreign abnormalities." News of the atrocity deeply shook many Americans. In Slotkin's words, letters to the editor published by *Life* "express the sense of horror [readers] felt at the inversion of their normative expectations about the behavior of American troops. Americans are supposed to protect women and children, not murder them." After My Lai, not only did it appear that Vietnam was a war without end, but even worse, that rather than fighting "the good fight," the American army was actually an institution of savagery, racism and murder.\(^7\)

Faced with the draft, increasing combat deaths, leadership that claimed the war was nearly over just when it appeared endless, and atrocities like My Lai, Americans turned against the war in mounting numbers. In part, Vietnam was so shattering because, as activist Joan Libby said, "We remembered the kind of optimism that we'd had during the Kennedy years. That
optimism may or may not have been justified, but it had certainly been in the air." As early as the fall of 1964, even before Johnson had deployed American combat troops to South Vietnam, Students for a Democratic Society (SDS) had begun to plan protests against American involvement in Southeast Asia, and its first antiwar march, in April, 1965, drew between 15,000 and 25,000 participants. From there the movement experienced tremendous growth. SDS' membership rose from a mere 575 in 1961 to 10,000 by the end of 1965, while an antiwar march in the fall of 1965 totaled 30,000 activists and one in 1967 topped 100,000. In the words of historian James Miller, "Inspired by teach-ins and marches and defiant acts of draft resistance, a growing number of previously apathetic young people passionately debated the right of civil disobedience, the wrongs of government policy, the duties of citizenship, the limits of authority, the possibility of revolution." For many of these activists, the antiwar movement was aimed not at bringing America's troops home, but rather saving the Vietnamese from American aggression. According to Miller, New Left leader Bob Moses "maintained that the killing of peasants in Vietnam by American soldiers was morally and politically on par with the killing of civil rights workers in the South by segregationists," while activist David Hawk explained, "There was no question in my mind that the means we were using in Vietnam were out of all proportion to any possible good end."8

By late 1967, however, many protesters became disillusioned because, despite all their marches and teach-ins, the Johnson administration was continuing to escalate, not draw down, the war. As William Sloane Coffin, a Yale University chaplain and antiwar activist, said, "Things began to get more agitated and tense when all these resorts had been exhausted and we still didn't seem to have any effect." Angered by this lack of progress, the movement shifted from protest to resistance during the fall of 1967. Male protesters began burning their draft cards
as a public form of defiance, while Coffin and some of his colleagues at Yale, including famed pediatrician Dr. Benjamin Spock, collected the cards of student activists and delivered them en masse to the Justice Department. Moreover, during the fall of 1967, students at more than forty colleges staged demonstrations aimed at disrupting campus recruitment by the military and Dow Chemicals, the manufacturer of napalm, while the Bay Area was wracked by major disruptive protests that shut down city streets and resulted in brutal police reprisals. The activists defined this action as "militant self-defense," and believed that they could, in the words of Gitlin, "[stop] the war by stopping America in its tracks."

Moreover, the attitude of some protestors shifted during this period from wanting to save the Vietnamese to actually wanting the North Vietnamese to win. While many Americans ultimately viewed G.I.s as victims forced to fight by their government, others saw them as co-conspirators who were complicit in the murder of the Vietnamese. As Slotkin writes, "The increased militancy of the antiwar movement, the growing disaffection with the war in the mass media, and the emphasis given to atrocities all suggested that the war was not merely a thankless task for the soldiers but one for which they would actually be held culpable." Some prominent antiwar activists visited North Vietnam, and, in one of the most infamous acts of the movement, movie star Jane Fonda posed atop an antiaircraft gun in Hanoi that had shot down American planes. As the war dragged on, it became increasingly unpopular—in 1965, only 33% of Americans opposed it, but by 1971, 61% did while a mere 28% supported it—but the increasing intransigence of the activists was making the antiwar movement more unpopular, too. For instance, many Americans blamed the protesters, not the authorities, when the 1968 Democratic Convention in Chicago descended into a police riot that was broadcast on the nightly news. In Miller's words, "Television had shown [the American people] a mob of long-haired kids—
spoiled brats, they seemed to some—hurling curses and chanting slogans and waving communist flags." Thus, when *Soldier Blue* was released in the summer of 1970, the antiwar movement had grown into a powerful and divisive force within American society. Millions of Americans were ardently opposed to the conflict in Vietnam, and through pictures like *Soldier Blue*, Hollywood was reflecting, participating in, and feeding their ire.10

"Same Army, Different Victims:" *Soldier Blue*

Other American Indian films, *Little Big Man* included, used the nation's wars against Native Americans as an allegory for Vietnam, but none did so as explicitly as *Soldier Blue*. Directed by Ralph Nelson, the film presents its audience with two views of the United States, that of the establishment, as represented by inexperienced soldier Honus (Peter Strauss), and that of the New Left, expressed by worldly, Indian-loving Cresta (Candice Bergen). As the film opens, Honus is part of a cavalry column escorting Cresta home after she has lived with the Cheyenne for two years. When Indians attack, the pair are the only survivors, and as they hike out of the wilderness Cresta attempts to reveal to Honus the army's brutal treatment of Indians. Words alone cannot change the intransigent Honus' mind, however, and he only comes to understand that Cresta is right at the film's end, when the two young whites witness the cavalry's unprovoked and horrifying massacre of the peaceful band of Cheyenne with whom Cresta used to live. As the film ends, the now-radicalized Honus is imprisoned for trying to stop the rape and murder of women and children and for confronting his insanely racist commander, Col. Iverson (John Anderson). Yet despite this New Left message, *Soldier Blue* is another American Indian film that is more concerned with white society than the Indians. While the army slaughters hundreds of Cheyennes, the film never establishes any of them as well-developed characters and
thus Indians serve as idealized figures against which the film contrasts the corruption and flaws of mainstream America, in this case, the nation's history of imperialism and the army's conduct in Vietnam.\footnote{11}

As a stridently antiwar movie, and one that criticizes American's treatment of Indians, \textit{Soldier Blue} reflects the politics of both its director, Nelson, and star, Bergen. Bergen had been a Native American rights activist for several years prior to making the picture, and that sentiment drew her to its story. As she explained, "the only reason I wanted to do this film was because this is the first script I have read where the Indian was not saying 'How' and walking around committing atrocities." While Bergen was attracted to the picture's pro-Indian sentiments, Nelson was more concerned with its stance against Vietnam, and war in general. He called it, "My commentary on war," and, as Dotson Rader of \textit{The New York Times} noted, Nelson "said he made 'Soldier Blue' in the light of Vietnam and [My Lai]. The same army, different victims." Nelson was so intent on showing war in all its gruesome, graphic horror that he hired amputees to play the Indians who would be mutilated during the massacre, and further explained that a psychologist was "in charge of the children [portraying Indians] to make sure we were not going to give them any psychological traumas that they would have to live with the rest of their lives." He even felt that the brutality of the final slaughter was so critical to the film's message that he demanded the studio pull \textit{Soldier Blue} from theaters in Australia when that nation's censors cut out much of its gore.\footnote{12}

Because Indians are mostly absent from \textit{Soldier Blue}, only appearing briefly outside their battles with the cavalry, the film principally deals with them through a series of arguments between the radical Cresta and the square Honus. As with films like \textit{Little Big Man} and \textit{Billy Jack}, \textit{Soldier Blue} sees Indian life as a counterculture alternative to white society, and Cresta, its
spokesperson, is very much a modern woman of the 1960s transposed to the 1870s, sexually confident, foul-mouthed, and outspoken in her opposition to mainstream America. Having lived among the Cheyenne, she vastly prefers their ways and explains to Honus that she is only returning to white society "Because they talk different, they dress different, and they eat different. Because I am not a Cheyenne, Soldier Blue, and I never will be, but I can tell you right now, I'd rather be one than any runt butt soldier of any bloodthirsty army you can name."

Furthermore, she is disgusted with the cavalry, sarcastically arguing that its soldiers are "good brave lads, coming out here to kill themselves a real live Injun. Putting their forts in a country they've got no claim on." When they encounter a trader who sells guns to the Cheyenne, she even stops Honus from destroying the man's stock of rifles, knowing full well that Indians will use them to kill American soldiers. Just as the antiwar radicals were hoping that the North Vietnamese would win the current conflict, so too does Cresta hope that these guns will help the Cheyenne fight off the cavalry. This attitude consistently horrifies the naive Honus, who echoes the establishment's uncritical patriotism and believes everything the army has told him, including that Indians are all bloodthirsty savages. He sees Cresta as a traitor, but when he witnesses the army's treatment of Indians, he comes to realize that her views are morally and factually correct.13

Like other films of the Vietnam era, Soldier Blue drew a stark contrast between Indians and white America, as represented by the army. While its Indians are seldom seen, Cresta's love for them conveys their innate goodness to the audience, and the picture's one significant Cheyenne character, Chief Spotted Wolf (Jorge Rivero), is a strikingly handsome man who proudly displays an American flag and the medal he received from the government. Cresta manages to return to his village in order to warn the Indians of the cavalry's impending attack,
and the reunion is joyous, as the Cheyennes gather around her, their smiling faces filling the screen. The white soldiers, on the other hand, are all degenerate racists and murders, the well-meaning but naive Honus aside. During the film's opening scene, for instance, one cavalryman leers at Cresta and asks Honus how many of "them red bucks" he thinks "got to her. Don't it get you all worked up?" Far worse than this pervert, however, is Col. Iverson, a Nixonian authority figure obsessed with slaughtering Indians. After Cresta angrily confronts him, he echoes the establishment's attitude toward the 1960s' youth movement, complaining, "When I see young people behaving like that, I can't help wondering what this goddamn country's coming to."

*Soldier Blue* provides no motivation for Iverson's hatred of Indians, merely suggesting that it is based in racism and white corruption. It is a hatred that borders on religious mania, and, during the cavalry's attack, he orders his men to "Raze the village, burn his pestilence!"\(^{14}\)

![Image](image_url)

*Figure #32: The joyous reunion of Cresta (Candice Bergen) with Spotted Wolf (Jorge Rivero) and the rest of his Cheyenne village in *Soldier Blue*.*

The ensuing slaughter is an extraordinarily gruesome scene, as Nelson attempted to show the carnage of war in all its detail while connecting it to similar atrocities being carried out by American troops in Vietnam. He based the sequence upon the infamous Sand Creek Massacre, in which Colorado militiamen annihilated a peaceful Cheyenne village in 1864, and like Sand
Creek, the attack in the film is entirely unprovoked. Spotted Wolf rides out with his American flag in an attempt to prove that his people are not hostile, but his efforts are for naught. The cavalry engages in an orgy of butchery, trampling Spotted Wolf's flag, raping an Indian woman and then cutting off her breasts, shooting children and crucifying their bodies on spikes, and gunning down dozens of helpless Indians trapped in a gully. Horrified by this carnage, Honus finally comes to understand that Cresta was right about the army, and when he confronts Iverson, the act results in his arrest. Honus ends the film in chains, a prisoner of his own army, as he and a handful of Indian survivors are led away from the smoldering ruins of the village. Iverson, on the other hand, considers the massacre a great victory for the nation, telling his troops, "You men here today have succeeded in making another part of America a decent place for people to live in. . . . For the rest of your lives, you will hold your heads proud when this day is mentioned. And you will say, 'Yes, I was with Iverson!'" Such a sentiment certainly echoes the advocacy of Empire and the eradication of Indians contained in earlier American Indian films such as *The Plainsman* and *Northwest Passage*, but in this case, the tone is purely ironic.\(^{15}\)

![Image](image_url)

**Figure #33:** The savagery of the American army is on full display as cavalry troopers rape a Cheyenne woman before murdering her in *Soldier Blue*. 
Through its slaughter, and Iverson's psychotic hatred of Indians, *Soldier Blue* reflected American attitudes in the wake of My Lai, as well as Red Power's influence upon the nation's view of its imperialistic past. AVCO General, the studio behind the film, distributed production material that discussed the massacres at Sand Creek and Wounded Knee, while Nelson claimed that Sand Creek "caused a shock comparable to that which has recently followed reports of a massacre by American soldiers at My Lai." Moreover, the cavalry's conduct in *Soldier Blue* mirrored that of some American G.I.s in Vietnam. In Stokin's words, My Lai represented, "The inversion of the normal war-movie/Western scenario . . . Instead of rescuing the woman/child from rape and slaughter, the Americans commit rape—in fact, child rape—and murder amid the burning buildings of the 'settlement.' . . . Now, we are the savages." Moreover, in terms of western imagery, soldiers were supposed to protect settlers from Indians, but in Vietnam, the "settlers" and "Indians" were indistinguishable. This led to a conflation of the two—the settlers, or "good" South Vietnamese, became one with the Indians, or NLF—and a massacre was the logical result. As Slotkin notes, if any Indians could be hostile, "when in doubt, it is safer to assume that all Indians are actually or incipiently hostile," and thus, in *Soldier Blue*, the army simply kills every one they see.16

Much of the critical response to *Soldier Blue* focused not on its portrayal of Indians or its castigation of the American military, but rather upon the explicit violence of the climactic massacre. Hollis Alpert of *The Saturday Review*, for instance, noted that, the studio's distribution of information on actual atrocities committed by the United States against Native Americans indicated that Nelson felt "there was sufficient justification for telling it—or, rather, showing it—like it was." However, while Alpert admits that what he called the "alleged" massacre of My Lai served as "a plain insinuation that the American character, so called, has
always been tainted by blood lust," he also argued that the studio was hypocritically marketing the film based on the sensationalism of its gore. As he pointed out, one ad referred to Soldier Blue as "THE MOST SAVAGE FILM IN HISTORY." The Los Angeles Times' Champlin agreed, complaining that the filmmakers "obscure history with an unbelievably fatuous love story," thereby using the horror of Sand Creek as a backdrop for romance between Cresta and Honus. Champlin did note that "Nelson finds a sharp parallel between [Sand Creek] and the more recent savageries in Vietnam," but wondered, "just how much gory violence is legitimized by the fact that there are historical precedents. Is there some sort of chastening, ennobling gain to be realized by watching this sickening carnage?"17

The Motion Picture Herald's Gertner perceived the film's modern tone, writing, "the heroine is a hoyden who swears and shouts at the soldier; in fact, Candace Bergen makes her such a contemporary 'kook' that she comes across as an anachronism." Gertner was somewhat less critical than Alpert and Champlin regarding the violence content of the film, however, seeing Soldier Blue as a "mostly ordinary and routine" story, but suggested that, just as Alpert feared, "'Soldier Blue' will need whatever controversy can be stirred up by the excessive blood and savagery." Perhaps most telling was Variety's review, which inadvertently pointed out the madness of racial violence. It complained that the cavalry lacked motivation for its attack on the Indians, noting, "The sole reason for the massacre appears to be the totally unexplained anti-Indian phobia of the commanding officer . . . His order is to fire on the Indians despite an attempt to surrender. You're never told why they're being punished." Yet Sand Creek itself, which Variety refers to as an "allegedly historical incident," was unprovoked, motivated largely by racial hatred and a desire to eradicate the Cheyenne.18
Other critics were less negative regarding *Soldier Blue*, accepting its message of American imperialism and the accompanying violence. Roger Greenspun of *The New York Times* noted that the film "Does not hesitate to identify the United States Army as the brutal, bestial, stupid destroyer of essentially decent, honorable American Indians," and further posits that viewers will accept "the sentiments, which I suspect are just." Likewise, *Newsweek*'s S.K. Oberbeck immediately identified the modern-day parallels of the picture, writing, "Back in the good old days before My Lai and Kent State, you bit your nails hoping the U.S. Cavalry would get through in time. In *Soldier Blue*, you wish to hell they hadn't," and further, that the massacre "shatteringly corroborates the white man's cruelty" expressed by Cresta throughout the story. Oberbeck also noted the connection between Cresta and contemporary activists, noting that "Her lines, full of 'off-the-pigs' wisecracks and cuss words . . . ring like notes from an SDS meeting."

Moreover, a letter to the *Los Angeles Times* by Bruce Anselmo of Oxnard, California, attacked viewers who were put off by the film's violence. He complained that *Soldier Blue* was drawing criticism for its explicitness while Sam Peckinpah's *The Wild Bunch*, a similarly gruesome western, was garnering praise: "The true story of a massacre by the United States is a bit more touchy than some rampaging semi-bad guys. Maybe, certain portions of our history should be kept from the public? . . . I believe the truth, no matter how brutal, is no vice. . . . I applaud 'Solider Blue' for telling a story which should concern us all."19

*The New York Times* Rader agreed with Anselmo, and of all the feedback examined, none were as rapturous as his. Fully embracing the film's New Left leanings, Rader opened his review with a two paragraph discussion of the Sand Creek and Wounded Knee massacres (it is likely not a coincidence that those were the massacres featured in studio promotional material), and then declared, "What a staggeringly powerful, magnificent film Nelson has created. 'Soldier
Blue' must be numbered among the most significant, the most brutal and liberating, the most honest American films ever made." Further, Rader praised it for its revisionism, which "attempts to confront and break with the indecent complicity of the American film industry in a racist falsification of history; to destroy at last the phony myth of Cowboys and Indians, Good Guys and Bad Guys, which Hollywood has been embellishing and profiting from for half a century."²⁰

Rader believed the film had the potential to be a revelatory experience for Americans while demonstrating the influence Red Power had upon the nation's view of its treatment of Native Americans. As he wrote,

> With 'Soldier Blue,' the American Indian is able to commence the return to white America of the anguish and despair, the lamentable grief white America has laid upon him for four centuries. For an American to see 'Soldier Blue' is to experience, I imagine, what a German, a 'good German' of decent sensibility, experienced when he witness the extermination camps after World War II.

However, Rader also criticized the film for its underdeveloped Indian characters, seeing "a conscious holding back, a hesitancy to fully enliven the Indians, to give them individual character," which resulted in the massacre, while horrifying, being less powerful than it could have been if the audience was fully invested in Spotted Wolf and the other Cheyennes. Ultimately, Rader argued that viewers who were disgusted with the film's violence, like Champlin and Alpert, were attempting to bury their nation's past: "I think we need to face our violence more openly within its historical context, we need to face it as it was and is if we are ever to overcome it. It is not Indians who find 'Soldier Blue' too violent. It is whites. . . . It is painful to witness. But it is necessary."²¹

Rader's suggestion that Soldier Blue will allow Native Americans the chance to show white people its mistreatment of them points out the central flaw of the film. Like the vast majority of American Indian pictures, Soldier Blue is a movie about white America, not Indians.
It is concerned with the nation's abuses of Indians, but only because those abuses demonstrate the violence, racism and corruption the filmmakers believed to be inherent in mainstream society. Once again, Indians merely serve as a means to this end. Because the film does not establish well-developed Indian characters, it only deals with them rhetorically, through Cresta's arguments with Honus, and as victims of the army's bloodlust. The massacre, then, is more about the savagery of the military than it is about the mistreatment of Indians, and therefore, instead of engaging with the nation's historical abuse of Native Americans, *Soldier Blue* uses Indians as stand-ins for the Vietnamese, and the army's mistreatment of them as an allegory for the atrocities of the Vietnam War. Thus, while Rader argues that, through the film, Native Americans can convey their suffering to whites, the film is actually white America conveying white corruption to white audiences. *Soldier Blue* may be a well-meaning, if exceedingly gruesome, American Indian film, but ultimately, it is a film about Vietnam and the flaws of mainstream America, rather than one about Indians.

**Violence, the "American Madness"**

During the late-1960s, Americans became concerned with the wave of violence that had swept the country and dominated the headlines. From the Vietnam War to the high-profile assassinations of Malcolm X, Martin Luther King and Robert Kennedy to the outbreak of race riots in American cities—200 between 1966 and 1967—violence seemed to define the nation's character. As Slotkin notes, Americans initially hoped that they would influence South Vietnam into becoming a western-style liberal democracy, but instead, the reverse seemed to be occurring; the murder of political leaders and chaos in the streets made the United States look more and more like South Vietnam. The media's presentation of America's fighting men in
Southeast Asia reflected and contributed to this shift toward violence, as well. Whereas early coverage of the war saw G.I.s as ultra-competent professionals, by 1967, television and print were presenting them as bitter, resentful and frustrated. In historian Andrew J. Huebner's words, in 1967 "reporters at the [Demilitarized Zone] painted a bleak picture. Americans there were demoralized, dirty, tired, scared, hungry, thirsty, and, often, wounded or killed." Moreover, as early as 1965, *Look Magazine* covered atrocities committed by G.I.s, and in early-1968, CBS News ran footage of Viet Cong corpses whose ears had been cut off by American soldiers. As the first televised war, and one that featured significantly less government censorship than earlier conflicts, Americans began to see the horrors of combat, including the sometimes gruesome offenses carried out by their own troops.²²

This disillusionment regarding American soldiers, and by extension the nation's exceptionalist view of itself, was exacerbated by the Tet Offensive and My Lai. In Slotkin's words, "The revelation [of My Lai] transformed the terms of ideological and political debate on the war, lending authority to the idea that American society was in the grip of a 'madness' whose sources might be endemic to our 'national character.'" Coverage of the Tet Offensive revealed the vast amount of civilian casualties caused by American firepower, and when added to the common image of G.I.s burning South Vietnamese villages, this led many to have a less-idealized vision of its army. Moreover, Americans began to be disturbed by the disproportional ratio between the violence inflicted on the Vietnamese by the American army and the seeming insignificant progress actually being made in the war. The horrors of My Lai only added to this, and many Americans feared that Vietnam was turning the United States into a nation of murderers. As Slotkin writes, while Americans initially believed that they were rescuing the Vietnamese from communism, "After My Lai, the logic of the captivity/rescue myth required us
to identify ourselves as the Indians, and by that logic, our mission now became one of rescuing Vietnam from us, or (better) of rescuing us from ourselves, by finding a cure for the 'American madness.'” In order to address the rise of brutality sweeping the nation’s society and culture, President Johnson created the National Commission on the Causes and Prevention of Violence in 1967. This commission saw the unrest throughout the country as a byproduct of racial, social and economic injustice, but also attributed it to America's history of Indian wars. Violence, it suggested, was endemic to the national character, as the wars against Native Americans on the frontier formed a sort of collective memory that influenced society today. In short, violence committed against Native Americans in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries resulted in violence in domestic America in the 1960s, as well as the savage warfare in Vietnam.

Fearing this, Americans began to view their nation, and specifically the G.I.s fighting in Southeast Asia, as victims. In Huebner's words, many, including those ardently opposed to the war, believed that "violence against the Vietnamese brutalized the Americans perpetrating it." The public reaction to My Lai served as one of the most overt examples of this process, for while many Americans were abjectly horrified by the massacre, they did not necessarily blame the men who committed it. Instead, they saw those soldiers as victims of an unjust war. Blame, they claimed, belonged with the policymakers at the highest levels of government, not with the troops who carried out their orders. Remarkably, Lt. William Calley, the only soldier found guilty for My Lai, became something of a folk hero, as both pro- and antiwar Americans believed the army was using him as a scapegoat. The prominent antiwar organization Vietnam Veterans Against the War (VVAW) was particularly fervent in conveying this mentality of victimhood. During its Winter Soldier Investigation in January, 1971, veterans described all manner of atrocities they had committed in Vietnam, including rape, torture, murder and mutilation, but the VVAW
emphasized that the ultimate responsibility for these acts lay with the government, not individual soldiers. As Huebner writes, "Even a character as odious as William Calley might become a folk hero and victim in this climate." Thus, as Vietnam dragged on, Americans began to believe that it was infecting and influencing their national character, turning them into a nation of murders, but also seeing those murderers as victims of a corrupt government and an unjust war.²⁴

"American Madness" on the Frontier: Ulzana's Raid and Jeremiah Johnson

During the late-1960s and early-'70s, Hollywood began to explore the nation's concern with violence. Films like Bonnie and Clyde, The Wild Bunch, and, of course, Soldier Blue, pushed the boundaries of what motion pictures could show, presenting far more explicit bloodshed than had pictures made in earlier years. Two American Indian films released in 1972, Ulzana's Raid and Jeremiah Johnson, went beyond merely depicting violence, however. Influenced by Vietnam and the growing belief that violence defined the American national character, they suggested that the world was an inherently savage and brutal place. Ulzana's Raid, directed by Robert Aldrich, concerns a small cavalry unit, led by inexperienced, devoutly Christian Lt. DeBuin (Bruce Davison) and grizzled veteran scout McIntosh (Burt Lancaster), that pursues a half-dozen renegade Apaches, led by the titular Ulzana (Joaquin Martinez). The film portrays these Indians as vicious murderers who regularly torture their victims to death, yet it never passes judgment upon them. Through Indian scout Ke-Ni-Tay (Jorge Luke), it suggests that the Apaches are a product of a brutal environment and, further, that left in such an environment, white men, too, will become savages. Directed by Sydney Pollack, Jeremiah Johnson stars Robert Redford as the title character, a man who abandons white society for the simplicity of life as a mountain man in the Rockies. Although the film never reveals Johnson's
past, it hints that he is a deserter from the Mexican War, yet while he seeks peace in the wilderness, what he actually finds is more violence, in the form of rugged weather, vicious wolves and bears, and a band of Crow Indians led by Paints His Shirt Red (Martinez, one again). Violence is omnipresent in these films—both whites and Indians commit atrocities and devolve into savagery—and they essentially present a Hobbesian vision of life as nasty, brutish and short.25

From its Arizona setting to its focus upon the Apaches, *Ulzana's Raid* bears a great resemblance to *Apache*, Lancaster and Aldrich's 1954 collaboration. Aldrich called it, "a remake of *Apache*, told from the scout's point of view," yet while the earlier movie reflected the optimism of the early civil rights movement, the later one is influenced by the bitterness of Vietnam. Lancaster, Aldrich and screenwriter Alan Sharp all considered the film an allegory for the Vietnam War, but unlike the rather simplistic comparison made in *Soldier Blue*, that in *Ulzana's Raid* is more complex, revolving around the arrogance of the United States and its refusal to see value in other cultures. Lancaster, who had no official role in the production beyond acting but was heavily involved creatively due to his star power and a contract that deferred upfront payments for a piece of the profits—Sharp called him "a silent producer, with a big financial stake in the piece and a lot of clout"—was a believer in cultural relativism and an opponent of the Vietnam War, having starred in the surreal antiwar film *Castle Keep* in 1969. As he said, the Indian was "highly moral, had his own code of ethics, his own religion. We were trying to draw a parallel to a condition like Vietnam, say, where the Americans don't know the people, don't understand them, and don't even care to." Likewise, the Scottish-born Sharp said, "To me, the Vietnam War was just another imperial war. The Americans were getting stuck defending their vital interests as they defined them. Like the British had done, and the Germans
had done." *Ulzana's Raid* used the Apaches as a way to explore that imperialism, from the perspective of both the conqueror and the conquered. Sharp also explained that he saw the world as a potentially terrifying place, one in which environment and society could conspire to inflict great violence on human beings. Alongside Nazi Germany and Turkey during World War I, he admitted that the Southwest between 1860 and 1886 was one of "three historical landscapes that I shudder to consider," and that *Ulzana's Raid* "is an attempt to express allegorically the malevolence of the world and the terror mortals feel in the face of it."\(^{26}\)

In this way, the Apaches of *Ulzana's Raid* are forces of nature, and extraordinarily savage ones at that. Even before any killings occur, the film suggests the violence Indians have inflicted upon whites, for the screenplay directs the camera to linger on headstones in a graveyard that read, "(name) Killed by Indian," and "(name) Killed by Apaches." Furthermore, when news comes that Ulzana and his renegades have escaped the reservation, the film leaves no question as to the result of their breakout. As McIntosh declares, "Their probable intention is to burn, maim, torture, rape, and murder." Ulzana's Apaches do, indeed, commit these atrocities, and the film spares little detail in presenting their savagery, and the terror they evoke in whites. For instance, when the Indians overtake a soldier escorting a farmer's wife to the safety of a fort, the trooper immediately shoots the woman and them himself, thus sparing them the agony of death-by-torture. Others are not as lucky, however. The Apaches murder homesteaders by burning them alive, and rape a woman who, when discovered by the cavalry, begs for death. The screenplay details the fate of one of Ulzana's victims as follows: "Jorgenson is tied, naked, upside down over his corral fence. His legs are bent over the top rail and ropes from his ankles tied to the second rail. His arms are bent over the top rail and ropes from his ankles tied to the second rail. His head is about a foot
from the ground and under it there is a small fire. His body on the back is blacked almost to the waist.”

Figure #34: Lt. DeBuin (Bruce Davison) looks on as McIntosh (Burt Lancaster, at right) cuts down the corpse of a homesteader tortured to death by the Apaches in Ulzana's Raid. Note the remnants of a fire below the man’s head.

Young Lt. DeBuin, the son of an eastern minister, is horrified by the Apache's actions. Initially, however, he professes a belief that "it's a lack of Christian feeling toward the Indians that's at the root of our problems with them," and, further, that "They are men, made in God's image, like ourselves." More experienced soldiers do not share this optimistic view of their foes, however. As a veteran sergeant (Richard Jaeckel) tells him, "Christ never fetched no infant child out of a cactus tree and waited around for two hours 'til it died so he could bury it . . . There ain't nobody gonna tell me to turn the other cheek to no Apache." Soon enough, DeBuin comes to share this bitter antipathy toward the Indians.28

While Ulzana's Apaches are an extraordinarily savage lot, the film does not judge them. Instead, it demonstrates a respect for their culture while suggesting it has as much value as that of white America's. The naive DeBuin eventually declares that he hates the Apaches for their bloodthirsty ways, but McIntosh merely accepts that as their character. As Sharp wrote,
Intosh "has seen the worst and expects to see more and yet he will not judge, not presume to be right." In an effort to understand the violence of the Indians, DeBuin asks Ke-Ni-Tay why his people are so cruel, and while at first, the scout simply responds, "It's how they are," he goes on to explain that torturing other men to death is merely their means of survival in a harsh land: "Each man that die, the man who kill him take his power. Man give up his power when he die. . . . Here in this land, man must have power." Thus, *Ulzana's Raid* argues that the Apaches are merely a product of an environment that the screenplay describes as "A landscape at once bleak and noble, lifting the mind into an awareness of awesome desolation." Sharp saw "the Apache as the spirit of the land, the manifestation of its hostility and harshness," and had McIntosh express this view when he tells DeBuin that hating the Apaches is pointless, because it would "be like hating the desert 'cause there ain't no water in it."[29]

Ultimately, *Ulzana's Raid* rejects the optimistic notion of assimilation expressed in *Apache*, suggesting instead that Indians and whites are simply too different to ever come to an effective understanding. This is something that McIntosh has learned over years of fighting Ulzana and his ilk, but DeBuin does not yet realize. The film consistently stresses the Indians' alienness when viewed by whites, never arguing that Indian culture is inferior, but simply that it is different. For instance, DeBuin's commanding officer tells the young Christian, "I doubt that the Apache Injun would consider Jesus Christ an inspiring leader," while, after the column finds a homesteader tortured to death with a dog's severed tail stuffed in his mouth, McIntosh tells DeBuin, "Apaches got a sense of humor. Nothing you'd recognize. They just find some things funny." Further, McIntosh explains that, even though Ke-Ni-Tay is Ulzana's brother-in-law, the scout will still be loyal to the army: "He'll track down his own kind and kill them. When he goes back to his tribe nobody will hold it against him. We would call him a traitor, we'd make him an
outcast. Apaches ain't like that. They got different ways of lookin' at things." McIntosh's claim holds true, for it is Ke-Ni-Tay who kills Ulzana at the film's end, taking the chief's power as his own. DeBuin admits to Ke-Ni-Tay that he cannot understand the Apaches, and Aldrich believed that this disconnect between two peoples was potentially destructive. As he said, "Through ignorance of other peoples cultures, beliefs, deities, customs, you do more damage to them by intention." For that reason, he hoped that McIntosh would serve to explain the Apaches to the audience: "In Apache, there was no white man to speak for the strength and integrity of the Indian. You only had a self-serving statement by Indians about Indians. In Ulzana, I hoped that by having [McIntosh] speak for the Indians you got an educated and experienced point of view on their culture and what they meant."  

In part, this message included the suggestion that whites were capable of just as much savagery as the Apaches. Throughout much of the film, the soldiers merely pursue the Apaches, without managing to engage them in battle—a nod toward the war in Vietnam, with the American army often hunting for, but unable to achieve contact with an elusive enemy—and because of this, Ulzana's Raid lured the audience into a false sense of comfort regarding the "civilized" nature of its white characters. When battle does come, however, the movie turns the tables on audience expectations. Instead of the paragons of virtue from John Ford's cavalry films, the soldiers in Ulzana's Raid engage in atrocities similar to those carried out by the Indians. When they succeed in killing one of the Apaches, for instance, the troopers mutilate the corpse, hacking it apart in their fury. DeBuin is disgusted by their actions, but McIntosh points out that the soldiers' actions have simply dispelled DeBuin's preconceptions of white civilization: "What bothers you, Lieutenant, is you don't like to think of white men behaving like Indians. Kinda confuses the issue, don't it?" As Lancaster explained, "The white man had many of the
same bloody instincts as the Indian, only they were kept in check by the thin veneer of civilization." Thus, *Ulzana's Raid* argues, the Apaches were not savage because they were racially inferior, but because they had to be savage in order to survive in the brutal conditions of the Arizona desert, and, taken out of the East and placed in the same conditions, white men acted with the same sort of barbaric viciousness.\textsuperscript{31}

![Figure #35: Cavalry troopers descend into savagery, mutilating an Apache corpse in *Ulzana's Raid*.](image)

*Ulzana's Raid* did not receive particularly glowing reviews when released in 1972, as critics tended to view it as simply a standard, if violent, American Indian picture, and it only gained stature after being reassessed in later years. *Variety*, for instance, saw the picture not as exploring violence, but merely using it as a means to draw attention and sell tickets. As its review declared, "Whatever the film's aspirations, the effect is simply another exploitation western which crassly exploits the potentials in physical abuse, and in which plot suspense is not what is going to happen, but how bestial it can be." Moreover, *Variety* argued that *Ulzana's Raid* was attempting, at the same time, to be a revisionist western, criticizing the genre as "a simplistic glorification of narrow hypocrisy," and an old-fashioned one that served as "a healthy reminder
of pioneer spirit gone soft in modern living," concluding that "Ulzana's Raid' would have it both ways, an astonishing ambition." Kevin Thomas of The Los Angeles Times found it to be a routine genre picture, but complained that by not explaining "its adversaries respective strategies," likely an attempt to convey the uncertainty of guerilla warfare, it left him confused: "At times, the viewer has no more idea of what one side is up to than does the enemy." Yet, Thomas did acknowledge that Ulzana's Raid "does somewhat attempt to go beyond exploiting Indian savagery by explaining how it is partly rooted in mysticism."32

In a letter to The New York Times, however, Joseph L. Sholkin castigated the film for its portrayal of the Apaches. Reflecting the influence of the Red Power movement and recent revisionism of the nation's treatment of Native Americans, Sholkin wrote, "If the Indian had an 'Anti-Defamation League' there would be a hue and cry across the land in protest against the denigration of the Apache image so thoughtlessly portrayed in 'Ulzana's Raid.'" Clearly misreading the filmmakers' intent to show that all of humanity, whites and Indians included, were capable of savagery, Sholkin declared that the film had a "jaundiced and prejudicial view of the American Indian," and further, that it "perpetuates the myth that any American brutality, whether in the Far West, Vietnam or elsewhere in the world, stems from noble impulses or righteous reaction to savage people who don't understand loftier ideals." In closing, Sholkin attacked New York Times film critic Vincent Canby for a positive review of the film, suggesting that Canby "might do well to read 'Bury My Heart at Wounded Knee' and the other accounts of what actually happened in our glorious movement westward."33

Canby's review, which so incensed Sholkin, evinced a greater acceptance of the message Aldrich, Sharp and Lancaster attempted to convey in Ulzana's Raid. He saw the movie as being "as bleak as its Arizona landscapes," and taking place in "a wasteland where people find
themselves living out lives that have long since been beyond their control, where cruelty is a
matter of form and method for power." Canby noted that "the film makes no attempt to justify
[the Apaches'] brutality in the civilized terms of wrongs done them, nor does it make more than a
half-hearted attempt to explain them in their own terms," terms that he thought sound "like the
sort of mumbo-jumbo talked by tacky professors in vampire movies." Yet Canby also
recognized that, by not apologizing for Ulzana's actions or attempting to explain his raid as a
noble response to white wrongs, the picture makes him a powerful figure. As he wrote, "Ulzana
himself remains a mystery, which has the effect of giving the Indian the sort of stature denied
him in films that insist on treating Indians as simple but dignified red brothers, poor folks born
on the wrong side of tracks yet unlaid." In essence, Ulzana is a character who exists on his own
terms, and not on those of white America. Rather surprising, however, none of these critics,
Canby included, noted the parallels to Vietnam that Aldrich and his fellow filmmakers intended,
evidently missing Ulzana's Raid's suggestion that a frustrating guerilla war fought against a
crafty, skilled foe could result in a descent into violence and savagery.34

Unlike Ulzana's Raid, made by a creative team that was in political agreement, Jeremiah
Johnson was the product of political tensions, with director Sydney Pollack and star Robert
Redford approaching the movie from a liberal perspective, and original screenwriter John Milius
from that of an arch-conservative. The result was a film that serves as a meditation on the
meaning of violence, seeing human bloodshed as an extension of the brutality inherent in nature.
In 1969, three years earlier, Pollack helmed Castle Keep, the surreal World War II picture
starring Lancaster, which the director called "certainly as much of an antiwar film as I could
make." He and Redford both lived in Utah's Wasatch Mountains, and saw Jeremiah Johnson as
something of an ecological movie that explored man's interaction with the ruggedness of nature.
Redford, like Lancaster with *Ulzana's Raid*, was officially only an actor on *Jeremiah Johnson*, but, as journalist Winfred Blevins wrote, he was "involved as a prime mover of the project as well as an actor: he wanted it made because its sense of the West is personal to him." An outspoken advocate for ecological causes, Redford brought a romantic notion of the mountain man to *Jeremiah Johnson*, for, as Blevins explained, he "wanted to make 'Jeremiah' partly because he knows and loves the mountain-man lore and the mountains themselves."\(^{35}\)

While Redford romanticized the mountain man, Milius romanticized the violence that was obsessing the nation during the Vietnam Era. One of Hollywood's most prominent conservatives during the 1970s, Milius claimed he lived by "the Kendo code of bushido. Honor and skill," loved guns and hunting, and exhibited, in the words of journalist Stephen Farber, a "jingoistic attachment to war." In the 1980s, he wrote and directed the grim and brutal *Conan the Barbarian* (Universal, 1982) and the rightwing fantasy *Red Dawn* (United Artists, 1984), and his original screenplay for *Jeremiah Johnson* similarly exulted in violent masculinity. Milius based the film on the life of John "Liver-Eating" Johnson, a mountain man who supposedly cannibalized the Native Americans he killed, and Milius' original script, titled *Crow Killer*, reveals a far more savage version of the film than the one Pollack made. The script is less a meditation on man's place in the violent natural world that it is an exploration human depravity. For instance, while the finished movie starts with Johnson briefly visiting a trading post and them immediately heading into the mountains, Milius' screenplay features an opening scene lasting several pages that involved the murder of an Indian prostitute, and a man "fondling a fourteen-year old Indian girl. His sons lay around bored and spent, obviously having taken their turn before." As Milius complained, "'Jeremiah Johnson,' originally titled 'Liver-Eating Johnson'
is a man who dedicated his life to revenge. That's something really good. It takes a great man to
dedicate his life to revenge. But [Pollack and Redford] toned it down."

*Jeremiah Johnson* presents its protagonist as a social dropout, a man so disgusted with
mainstream society that he completely abandons it for a solitary life in the wilderness. The film
reveals virtually nothing about Johnson's back story, only that, according to the song over the
opening credits, he "made his way into the mountains, betting on forgetting all the troubles that
he knew." Through his blue cavalry trousers, the audience is able to surmise that he was a
soldier and, perhaps, a deserter from the Mexican War. What is clear is that he did not care for
that conflict. When fellow mountain man Bear Claw (Will Geer) notices the pants and muses
that he "must've missed another war," Johnson curtly replies, "Didn't miss nothing." Further,
Johnson admits that he felt out of place in "civilized" America: "Ought to have been different," he
explains to Bear Claw, who sagely notes, "Many's a child journeys this high to be different,
planning to get from the mountain what their natures couldn't get them below." In this way,
Johnson reflects the existential disillusionment many Americans felt during the Vietnam era. He
apparently dislikes the pointless war he fought in, feels alienated by mainstream society, and is
searching for an alternative that will provide him with some sort of spiritual fulfillment.37

Unlike the alienated protagonists of counterculture films like *Little Big Man* and *Billy
Jack*, however, Johnson does not simply abandon white ways for those of the Indians. Instead,
he carves his own personal society out of the Rockies, creating a cultural middle ground that
combines white and Indian life. He adopts a son, Caleb (Josh Albee), the mute survivor of an
Indian massacre, and marries Swan (Delle Bolton), the daughter of a Flathead Indian chief, and
together, they build a cabin in the mountains. As Redford explained, "We were working with
characters who don't say anything. A trapper who has lost the habit of speaking at all. His
woman, a Flathead who doesn't speak English. A boy who is mute. We wanted to show, without words, how these people grow together and become a family." The film presents this process through the construction of the cabin, the trio playing an Indian version of field hockey, and Johnson teaching Caleb how to set beaver traps. The wedding between Swan and Johnson is a particularly noteworthy example of such a melting pot of cultures, for it unites a white man and an Indian woman through a ceremony presided over by Two Tongues Lebeaux (Richard Angarola), a French-speaking Catholic Indian.38

This idyllic family life does not last long, however, because the world these characters occupy is an unrelentingly violent place. Rather than finding peace in the mountains, Johnson instead discovers extraordinary hardships. Throughout the film, he faces bitter cold, starvation, and attacks by wolves and grizzly bears. The picture emphasizes the harshness of life in the wilderness early on, when Johnson comes across the corpse of a mountain man who froze to death after a bear broke his legs. As Bear Claw tells him, "You can't cheat the mountain, pilgrim." The wilderness, Jeremiah Johnson suggests, is a place of sublime, terrifying beauty where death comes in many forms. Yet the picture also celebrates it as the purest test of a man. Del Gue (Stefan Gierasch), one of Johnson's few friends, explains this attitude when he relates his parents' horror at the prospect of their son becoming a mountain man: "Acted like they was gut-shot. Says, 'son, make your life go here. Here's where the peoples is. Them mountains is for animals and savages.' I said, 'Mother Gue, the Rocky Mountains is the marrow of the world,' and by God I was right."39

Jeremiah Johnson presents Indians as part of this violent, natural world, perpetuating a view of Native Americans that dates back the Puritans and returning Indians to the position they occupied in bloodthirsty savage movies like Northwest Passage. Indians materialize out of
nowhere in the film, and Pollack often shot them as if one with nature, through screens of trees and branches or, in one case, leaping directly out of a snow bank. Johnson goes to war with a band of Crows, led by the stoic Paints His Shirt Red, and this conflict emphasizes both the cruelty of the wilderness and Johnson's inability to find peace. He inadvertently precipitates the conflict by leading a troop of soldiers through a sacred Crow burial ground, and in retaliation, the Indians kill Swan and Caleb. A prolonged series of brutal battles follows, with Johnson clubbing one foe to death with the butt of his musket, and shooting and stabbing others.40

Figure #36: A Crow warrior appears through a screen of trees, making him one with nature in Jeremiah Johnson.

Yet, like Ulzana's Raid, the film does not present the Crow warriors as crazed savages who are inherently inferior to Johnson. Rather, they are one more natural obstacle he must overcome if he is to survive in the Rocky Mountains. As Redford explained, this reflected his and Pollack's shared "personal message": "When he heads for the mountains, the music says he wants to escape the codes of society and live by his own code—control his own destiny. But he can't do it. . . . He's driven higher and higher into the mountains to escape this vendetta [of the Crows]. . . . Even up there a man can't control his own destiny." Johnson may have fled the war and corruption of mainstream America, but in the mountains, he simply finds more violence and
another, more personal war. The film does conclude on a potentially positive note, as he and Paints His Shirt Red meet and the Crow chief raises his hand as if asking for peace, a gesture Johnson returns. Even this hopeful image is ambiguous, however, for Redford saw it as "What Patton and Rommel would do if they saw each other across the whole field of battle. Just salute like that. Jeremiah's definitely going to keep on doing what he's been doing."41

Critical reception of *Jeremiah Johnson* indicates that viewers understood its message of omnipresent violence in the world, even if they did not necessarily grasp the causes of that violence. *Newsweek*'s Paul Zimmerman, for instance, saw Johnson as the latest in Redford's line of similar characters, "an existential hero with a vapor at the center, coming and going to and from nowhere," and claimed that Redford had attached himself to "a superficial ethos of existentialism." Thus, while Zimmerman indentified the alienation represented by Johnson, he saw it as essentially empty alienation, a rebel without a cause, in a sense, and did not recognize that the crises the nation faced in the early-70s may have been the source of that angst. The review in *Time* similarly failed to identify the source of the film's violence, but it did realize that the brutality of nature was the film's point: "Mountain men like Johnson became the greater part beast after a while. Their survival depended almost solely on their readiness to adopt such survival skills and senses as are usually called animalistic." *The New York Times*' Greenspun was most generous to the picture, seeing it as a study of a man testing himself against the power of the natural world. As he wrote, Johnson's trek "is to become a lifelong journey, a total redefinition of the man. It takes him into a beautiful, awesome, often terrifying wilderness—a wilderness that is curiously full of people, many of them dead. . . . He makes a kind of spiritual contract with the mountains that surround him (there is no making peace with them)." Yet tellingly, these critics did not discuss the film's portrayal of Indians. Much like reviews of the
bloodthirsty savage movies of the 1930s, which also presented Indians as part of the wilderness, these for *Jeremiah Johnson* did not see Indians as important enough to mention because the movie itself presents Indians, not as fully developed characters, but as obstacles against which its white protagonist can test himself.⁴²

In this way, *Jeremiah Johnson* and *Ulzana's Raid* represent a regression to earlier portrayals of Indians. Unlike the counterculture movies or those concerning civil rights, these pictures were not concerned with Indians or their society. Rather, they used Indians as a means to present the inherent violence they argued was omnipresent in the world. Ke-Ni-Tay and Swan may have been characters of some significance, but ultimately, Indians were simply tools allowing the films to explore the era's fixation with the "American madness" of violence. *Ulzana's Raid* portrayed the Apaches as a product of their brutal environment, seeing their horrifying penchant for torture as a means for survival in the Arizona desert. Refusing to pass judgment upon them, the film suggested that white men, if faced with the same conditions, would act in the same savage manner, as DeBuin's cavalrmen so. *Jeremiah Johnson* presented the Crows as one of many threats posed by the sublimely terrifying mountains, while using them to show that, although Johnson may have abandoned society to avoid war, nature still confronts him with conflicts of its own. He briefly manages to create his own "middle ground" society, adapted from the cultures of mountain men and Indians, but the violence of the world cannot be held at bay by family life, and thus Johnson is thrust once more into the fray during his war with the Crows. *Jeremiah Johnson* may not have been the overt an allegory for Vietnam that *Soldier Blue* and *Ulzana's Raid* are, but it still reflects the existential angst of an era when the nation was beset by crises and seemingly overcome by violence.
Conclusion

While Indians emerged as important characters in civil rights and counterculture-focused movies, they returned to the background in these Vietnam-oriented ones. Continuing Hollywood's practice of shifting the meaning and role of Indians for its own end, *Soldier Blue*, *Ulzana's Raid* and *Jeremiah Johnson* used them as minor players in support of stories that centered on white protagonists. The three films were concerned with the Vietnam War, and the fears of social corruption and violence that accompanied it, and thus they utilized Indians not as a means to explore Indian culture, but rather to explore the shortcomings of white America. The American Indian film was not the only genre to reflect the massive influence of Vietnam, but it was uniquely placed because many Americans viewed the conflict in Southeast Asia from the perspective of the nation's Indian wars. Whether they were equating the soldiers of the National Liberation Front with shadowy Indians who attacked and then melted into the wilderness, or seeing their country's involvement in the war as an extension of the imperialism of westward expansion, many Americans looked upon Vietnam in terms of the conquest of the Indians. Hollywood had played an extraordinarily important role in establishing the image of that conquest through decades of American Indian films, and therefore, the genre was a logical place to grapple with the issues surrounding the conflict in Southeast Asia.

The war spawned a massive protest movement, as hundreds of thousands of Americans mobilized against their nation's involvement in Vietnam. As the fighting dragged on and the war grew increasingly unpopular, the movement became far more militant, with some protesters openly calling for an NLF victory over American forces. Further, the horrors of My Lai appeared to confirm the protesters' worst beliefs regarding the war and the military's conduct of it. *Soldier Blue* reflected this fury, presenting an ardently revisionist and antiwar version of
America's conflict with the Cheyenne. Cresta, the film's heroine, serves as a stand-in for the New Left protesters of the late-'60s, attempting to convince the square, naive Honus that the army he fights for is a racist institution of murder, while the film itself reverses the civilized/savage dichotomy prevalent in the American Indian genre, presenting Indians as a morally pure people, and whites as bloodthirsty savages. Through the graphic violence of the climactic slaughter of the Cheyenne village, Soldier Blue allegorically connects the massacres of the Indian wars with My Lai and other American atrocities in Vietnam, a comparison that was not lost upon many of its viewers.

Due to My Lai and other atrocities in Vietnam, as well as the rash of assassinations and race riots in the States during the late-1960s, Americans began to fear that violence was becoming a defining aspect of their national character. The war in Southeast Asia, it appeared, was rubbing off on the United States, turning it into a country of chaos and bloodshed. This feeling was exacerbated by a victim complex many Americans, including antiwar protesters and Vietnam veterans, felt toward the war. Absolving G.I.s for their actions at My Lai and elsewhere, this view argued that responsibility for such atrocities lay with the nation's government. The soldiers, and the rest of the nation in general, were victims of policymakers who conducted an evil and incompetent war, one that continued to inflict increasing levels of brutality upon the country.

Ulzana's Raid and Jeremiah Johnson reflected this obsession with the "American madness" of violence. Ulzana's Raid suggests that, while its Apaches are a viciously bloodthirsty people, they are merely the product of their environment, one that turns "civilized" white men into savages, too. Because of this, the film makes no judgment upon its Indians, nor does it apologize for their actions, but merely asks the viewer to accept them as they are. In
Jeremiah Johnson, the titular protagonist apparently left mainstream society in an attempt to escape war, but in the Rocky Mountains, all he finds is more strife, be it caused by weather, animals or Indians, and in this way, the film recalls a far earlier presentation of Indians as a part of nature. Johnson temporarily succeeds in forging a cultural middle ground for himself and his family in this terrifying wilderness, but this happiness is overwhelmed by the violence inherent in the mountains and he ends up engaging in a personal war against the Indians. Thus, both Jeremiah Johnson and Ulzana's Raid present a world defined by violence and suggest that the best a man can do is learn to accept it and continue to fight for survival.

Other American Indian films made during this era reflected the influence of the Vietnam War, as well. The massacres in Little Big Man, for instance, bear a marked resemblance in tone, if not gore, to the one in Soldier Blue, reminding the viewer of My Lai and similar acts of murder carried out by American troops in Southeast Asia. As in Soldier Blue, the military of Little Big Man is a savage institution of racism, imperialism and slaughter. Like Ulzana's Raid and Jeremiah Johnson, A Man Called Horse presents the world as an inherently violent place, confronting its English protagonist with Indians who practice self-mutilation and constantly fight for survival in a harsh land occupied by vicious foes. Finally, Tell Them Willie Boy Is Here (Universal, 1969) focuses upon the titular character, a young Indian, who kills in self-defense and is pursued by a sheriff and his posse. Directed by Abraham Polonsky, a victim of the blacklist during the 1950s and ’60s, it sees Willie Boy as an object of racial oppression, an anti-establishment champion, and a practitioner of guerilla warfare, while presenting the sheriff as a man who also questions authority and resists the political pressures being placed upon him by his superiors to bring Willie in dead. Willie Boy was a more important character than many of the Indians in the other films of the genre made during the Vietnam War, but nonetheless, Tell Them
Willie Boy Is Here, like the other pictures, is largely concerned with white America. Thus, as was Hollywood's habit, Indians during the Vietnam era remained subservient to white protagonists, serving to reveal the flaws filmmakers found in mainstream society.43
Inventing Vietnam: The War in Film and Television

1. 


For a discussion of the late-70s wave of Vietnam War films, see Suid, 332-368. For a survey of American films that dealt with Vietnam into the 1990s, see Michael Lee Lanning, Vietnam at the Movies (New York, Fawcett Columbine, 1994).

4. Drinnon, 445, 448, 453-55, 457; Slotkin, Gunfighter Nation, 494-95, 621
5. Drinnon, 3, 450, 458; Slotkin, Gunfighter Nation, 495-96, 546.

Beginning on January 30, 1968, during the traditional cease fire that occurred during Tet, the Vietnamese New Year, the Tet Offensive involved a stunning series of attacks on well over one hundred cities and villages across South Vietnam by more than 70,000 Viet Cong and North Vietnamese troops. Most famously, it included a direct assault on the American embassy in Saigon, as well as heavy fighting in the city of Hue. The offensive led to the virtual destruction of the Viet Cong due to massive losses suffered during the attacks, and left the fighting of the war in the hands of the North Vietnamese Army.


Although Calley was found guilty of 22 counts of murder and sentenced to life in prison, President Nixon immediately had him moved to house arrest rather than actual imprisonment, and then pardoned him in 1974.


9. Gitlin, 100-106.

David Miller was the first activist to publicly burn his draft card, doing so at a protest in New York in August, 1965. Miller spent two years in prison for the act, while Coffin, Spock and their colleagues at Yale were initially found guilty of conspiracy for collecting the students' cards, but the government dropped their charges after an appeal resulted in a split verdict. For a full account of Miller's activism, see Morrison and Morrison, 107-111, for Coffins', see Morrison and Morrison, 98-106.


11. Soldier Blue.


13. Soldier Blue.

14. Ibid.
While inspired by it, the massacre in the film is not a direct reenactment of Sand Creek. Sand Creek occurred in 1864, while the film sets its action in 1877, a year after Little Big Horn, and Iverson serves as a fictionalized stand-in for John Chivington, the commander at Sand Creek. Black Kettle was the chief of the Cheyennes at Sand Creek, and four years later, his people were again the subject of an unprovoked attack by the cavalry, that being Custer's infamous Washita River Massacre which was reproduced in *Little Big Man*. For information on Chivington and Sand Creek, see David Svaldi, *Sand Creek and the Rhetoric of Extermination: a Case Study in Indian-White Relations* (Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 1989).

In another display of irony, Iverson's victory speech mimics the "Crispin's Day" speech from William Shakespeare's *Henry V*, intended to rouse patriotic fervor in Henry's troops prior to the climactic Battle of Agincourt: "He that outlives this day, and comes safe home, will stand a tip-toe when this day is named and rouse him at the name of Crispian. He that shall live this day, and see old age, will yearly on the vigil feast his neighbors, and say 'To-morrow is Saint Crispian.' Then will he strip his sleeves and show his scars and say 'These wounds I had on Crispian's Day.'"  


Gertner; Review of *Soldier Blue*, *Variety*. Capitalization from *Soldier Blue* ad quoted by Alpert in original.


Rader.

Huebner notes that, at the beginning of the fighting during the Tet Offensive, responsibility for civilian casualties was split approximately 50-50 between the Viet Cong and American forces. However, once the United States went on the attack to reclaim territory captured by the Viet Cong, American forces began to inflict nearly all civilian casualties due to their superior firepower and the nature of offensive warfare in cities.

*Los Angeles Times*, May 13, 1972, K20; Windeler, 40, 154.

As Aldrich explained in an interview, the Vietnam elements of *Ulzana's Raid* created some difficulties with the film's producer, Carter DeHaven: "We had constant fights with the producer over it. Sharp, Lancaster and I totally believed in the parallel with Vietnam. The producer through the public would see it immediately and if they did that would lessen the film's chances of economic survival. We tried to do it all the same."

*Ulzana's Raid* screenplay, dated December 6, 1971, 21, 80, Box F89, UCLA Special Collections, Box F89, University of California, Los Angeles; *Ulzana's Raid*.  

*Ulzana's Raid*.  

*Ulzana's Raid* screenplay, 3; Sharp, "White Man Unforks Tongue for 'Ulzana,'" *Los Angeles Times*, May 13, 1972, K20; Windeler, 40, 154.

Arnold and Miller, 169; Petit and Combs, 39-40; Sharp, *Ulzana's Raid* screenplay, 83; *Ulzana's Raid*.  

*Ulzana's Raid*; Windeler, 154.


Redford was so intent on living in the wilderness of the Rockies that he made his home in Utah because he felt that the more popular Colorado was too developed. He spent four days living as a mountain man in preparation for *Jeremiah Johnson*, wearing animal skins and sleeping in a cabin built for the film on his property. However, he admitted that he had a difficult time placing himself in the position of a real mountain man simply because safety, warmth and food were within easy distance, while they faced danger, cold and starvation every day. Blevins, 54.


Milius often demanded expensive guns as partial payment for his work and had, in the words of journalist Linda Strawn, the "contractual right to personally shoot all the game used" in *Jeremiah Johnson*. He did not, however, actually exercise this right. Strawn, 18.

The finished film borrows only a handful of traits from the real John Johnson’s life, most notably his feud with a tribe of Crow Indians due to their killing of his Flathead wife, and ignores his many brutal traits, most notably his cannibalism. For more information on the life of Johnson, see the book upon which Milius based his screenplay, Raymond W. Thorp and Robert Bunker, *Crow Killer: The Saga of Liver-Eating Johnson* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1958).

37 *Jeremiah Johnson.*

38 Blevins, Calendar 54; *Jeremiah Johnson.*

I have derived the concept of Johnson’s middle ground from the work of historian Richard White, who argued that, in the Great Lakes region during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, colonials, British, and Native Americans forged an amalgamation of their cultures that served as a middle ground between the three groups and existed in equilibrium with one another. Richard White, *The Middle Ground: Indians, Empires and Republics in the Great Lakes Region, 1650-1815* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991).

39 *Jeremiah Johnson.*

40 Ibid.

41 Blevins, Calendar 54; *Jeremiah Johnson.*


Epilogue for Part III and Conclusion

The American Indian films produced by Hollywood during the Vietnam era were part of a much larger social movement throughout the nation. During these years, many Americans, particularly the Baby Boomers who came of age during the mid-1960s, challenged the Cold War consensus that had dominated the nation's society during the previous decade. By participating in civil rights demonstrations, protesting the war, experimenting with drugs, listening to rock 'n' roll and watching antiestablishment movies such as *Little Big Man* and *Soldier Blue*, it seemed as though young people were rejecting the values of the postwar era, including unquestioning patriotism, respect for authority and acceptance of conformity. As historian Mark Hamilton Lytle notes, during the 1960s, "Many parents and politicians began to see young Americans, certainly those under thirty, as a discreet [sic] political and cultural force. Whether marching for civil rights, protesting the Vietnam War, or engaging in outrageous behaviors, the young seemed increasingly determined to challenge authority and convention across a broad front." This revolt against the national consensus occurred in a wide variety of ways, crossing boundaries of race and politics, and American Indian films were part of this process.¹

The Cold War consensus was established in the affluence of the postwar boom and set by the society's dominant demographic—conservative, middle and upper class white Anglo-Saxon protestant men—promoting "traditional" values, such as patriotism, Christianity, the family, anticommunism, and model citizenship. This consensus resulted in a conformity that informed the American Indian films of the 1950s and challenged the individual's identity, as all Americans
were expected to comply with the national norm. Conformity seemed to be omnipresent, from the sameness of the suburbs, to boys and girls dressing like their parents, to strict codes of conduct for college students, and even the American Indian films like *Hondo* and *Broken Arrow* that extolled the importance of family and demanded that minorities assimilate into mainstream society. As the Baby Boomers grew up, they chaffed at this consensus, challenging and eventually overturning it.²

Their revolt carried tremendous weight due to the sheer size of their generation. Birthrates soared after World War II, rising from 2.8 million per year in 1945 to over 4 million per year from the mid-'50s through the mid-'60s, and the result was an increasingly younger nation. According to the 1960 census, 37% of the population was 18 or younger, up from 32% in 1940, and by the middle of the 1960s, the nation's average age was 17. Teens became their own discrete demographic during the '50s as companies targeted them with consumer goods ranging from rock 'n' roll records, comic books, and teen-oriented movies, to anti-acne medication and transistor radios. As Lytle writes, "The teen-oriented media defined a fault line along which the consensus broke down," because these products were made strictly for young people and not their parents. Furthermore, there were simply so many young people during this era that, in the words of historian Terry Anderson, "explaining, exploiting or catering to youth became a national obsession." The concern with juvenile delinquency during the 1950s was one example of this, for while teen misbehavior occurred on the same proportional level as it had in earlier generations, the size of the Baby Boom generation made delinquency appear to be a national crisis.³

Although it reached a peak in the late-'60s, the breakdown of the consensus actually began a decade earlier as young people began to look askance at the ideals of 1950s America.
They were alienated by the hysteria of anticommunism, particularly after the Army-McCarthy hearings discredited the extreme right in 1954, as well as adults' attacks on teen culture such as rock 'n' roll and comic books. In some cases, such as that of the Beatniks glorified by Norman Mailer in "The White Negro" and represented by the writings of Jack Kerouac and Allen Ginsberg, the attack on the consensus was a conscious effort, but for the vast majority of Baby Boomers, it was purely apolitical. Listening to rock 'n' roll was not an act of overt political rebellion, for example, but rather was a cultural break with older generations. This movement gained momentum during the late-'50s and early-'60s, when a wide range of cultural products began to confront the postwar consensus. Joseph Heller's 1961 novel Catch-22 suggested that unquestioned patriotism and a willingness to fight for one's country bordered on insanity. Stanley Kubrick's satirical film Dr. Strangelove (Columbia, 1964) and Sidney Lumet's deathly serious Fail Safe (Columbia, 1964) challenged the logic behind Cold War nuclear deterrence. Nevil Shute's 1957 novel On the Beach, and the 1959 film version of it, explored the horrifying aftermath of nuclear warfare, while historian Gar Alperovitz' 1965 work Atomic Diplomacy argued that the United States dropped atomic bombs on Japan not simply to end World War II, but also to threaten the Soviet Union. Each of these indicated flaws within the Cold War consensus and its inability to silence dissent, as it had in earlier years.4

During the 1960s, the civil rights movement, the New Left and the counterculture represented three major lines of attack, each challenging different aspects of the consensus in different ways. One of the mantras of the age, "Don't trust anyone over 30," demonstrated that not only were the young disillusioned with their parents' generation, but that the consensus had lost its power to control them. This was apparent through campus protests that occurred even prior to the escalation of the war in Vietnam. Due to the affluence of the postwar years, as well
as the expansion of the higher education system during the same period, a far greater proportion of Baby Boomers attended college than had earlier generations, and it was there that many were exposed to the new ideas that encouraged them to question their parents' values. By 1964, when the first of the Baby Boomers were arriving at college, student activism, such as the Free Speech Movement at the University of California-Berkeley, began to challenge the near dictatorial power college administrations held and demanded an end to *in loco parentis*, through which those administrations exerted paternalistic control over students through strict rules on dating, sexuality and conduct. Many of these revolts proved successful, earning students a greater say in their education and more freedom in their campus lives, thereby emboldening young people to take more action.\(^5\)

Vietnam was, of course, the central event of the decade, as well as of the Baby Boomers' attack on the consensus. As historian Robert V. Daniels writes, "Around [Vietnam] moved a variety of revolutionary challenges to the old social and cultural order—student protests, the counterculture, so-called, and everything falling under the rubric of the 'New Left.'" It is important to note, however, that a majority of Americans, including the young, were in favor of the war during its early years. During the autumn of 1965, for instance, 75% of people in their twenties backed it, an even higher proportion than older generations. Yet as the war dragged on, pro-war support fell: from 72% in July 1967, to 58% in October 1967, to 42% after the Tet Offensive in January 1968. After 1967, Vietnam proved to be the trigger that set off far greater open rebellion in America, rebellion that had been primed by the civil rights movement and student protests. Young Americans began opposing the war on both moral grounds and personal ones, since a June 1967 executive order by President Johnson placed 19-year olds at the top of draft boards and ensured that the Baby Boom generation would shoulder the war effort. This
made Vietnam a war of the young—the average age of American soldiers in it was 19, as opposed to 26 in World War II, and by protesting it, young people also challenged the rest of the Cold War consensus. In Daniels' words, "Antiwar feeling prompted a self-righteous rejection of the whole American tradition of a triumphant and uncontroverted national history." Certainly, all Americans did not feel this way—a majority supported the invasion of Cambodia in 1970 and blamed the student protesters for the shootings at Kent State—but the antiwar protests, and the accompanying civil rights and counterculture movements, carried tremendous cultural weight.6

Yet while Vietnam was the most visible and divisive source of opposition to the consensus, it was far from the only one. Nor did all the attacks upon it come from the left. The conservative Young Americans for Freedom (YAF) had more members throughout the 1960s than its radical counterpart SDS, and it, too, took on the Cold War consensus. Alienated by the moderate politics of Dwight D. Eisenhower and Richard Nixon, the members of YAF found inspiration in the ardent conservatism of Barry Goldwater and William F. Buckley and sought to take control of the Republican Party. Thus, the challenge to the consensus was not simply limited to leftists who opposed segregation or the war in Vietnam, but was generational. Moreover, by the late-'60s, the intense activism of the antiwar and civil rights movements led to the development of a vast array of additional protest campaigns. Some, such as environmentalism and Ralph Nader's consumer rights movement, aimed to correct specific flaws in the nation's socio-economic system, while others were based on identity politics. Embracing the concept that "the personal is political," these movements included women's liberation, Chicano rights, Red Power and gay rights, all of which took their cue from African American civil rights activism in their demands for equality.7
Therefore, the Baby Boomers’ breaking of the Cold War consensus took on many forms. Some, such as the civil rights movement, the New Left and YAF, were political; some, such as rock 'n' roll and antiestablishment movies, were cultural; and some, such as the counterculture, were a mixture of both. What they all had in common was a rejection of the values of older generations. Many young people did not necessarily know what they wanted, but they were certain of what they did not want: their parents’ America. While older generations placed great emphasis on money and security because of their experiences in the Depression and World War II, the Baby Boomers who grew up in the affluence of the 1950s were not particularly concerned with such issues. Instead, they focused upon personal fulfillment, which was lacking in consumerist and conformist postwar America. In the late-’60s, a poll indicated that only 20% of college students found Christianity, patriotism and "clean living" to be important, while a 1970 poll reported that only 45% placed value on making money but 80% said their primary objective was "developing a meaningful philosophy of life." This rejection of their parents' values largely defined the Baby Boomers. As historians Maurice Isserman and Michael Kazin write, "Although young Americans in the 1960s were not the first generation in history to feel that they were more sensitive to hypocrisy and injustice than their elders, they were certainly unique in the degree to which they expressed their newly awakened political aspirations in terms of generational identity." Their challenge and ultimate overturning of the Cold War consensus had far-reaching consequences for the nation, as it resulted in a society that evinced greater tolerance, individual freedom and openness, along with less respect for authority.8

As the Baby Boomers were breaking the Cold War consensus throughout the 1960s, American culture was also shifting its attitude toward Native Americans, rejecting the previous decade's preference for assimilation and termination and placing value on Native Americans and
their culture. As Sherry Smith writes, during the '60s, "Many [non-Native] people in the country finally seemed convinced that not only did America need Indians, but also that it should back that rhetoric with action. It was a transformational moment in American history." However, while some non-Natives did become involved in the Red Power movement for altruistic purposes, many only engaged with Native American culture for their own ends, picking aspects of it that they felt could help improve their own lives, and American Indian movies were part of this process. As filmmakers sought to criticize aspects of society they found odious, they used the image of the Indian as a counterpoint. In order to reveal the emptiness of American materialism, they saw Indians as spiritually rich; in order to condemn white racism, they presented Indians as tolerant; in order to attack the brutality of Vietnam, they portrayed Indians as peace-loving. Thus, rather than attempting to present Native Americans in an accurate manner, Hollywood simply took what it needed from the image of the Indian.9

This selective use of the image of the Indians by white culture is apparent in two major trends of the late-'60s and early-'70s, the adoption of Native American spirituality and environmentalism. Many young Americans were searching for a sense of spiritual fulfillment they did not receive from mainstream society during this period and explored a wide variety of non-western religions and philosophies, including Buddhism, Hinduism, Taoism and Transcendental Meditation. Therefore, when members of the counterculture embraced Native American religion, as they did on some communes and in *Billy Jack*, they did so as part of a larger trend of white Americans searching for alternative spirituality. Likewise, environmentalism grew into a powerful force after the publication of Rachel Carson's *Silent Spring* in 1962, with a 1970 poll indicating that Americans found the environment to be the nation's most pressing domestic issue. As part of this movement, Keep American Beautiful, Inc. 

354
produced television and print ads that offered one of the era's iconic images: Indian actor Iron Eyes Cody shedding a tear over a polluted landscape. Yet these ads were not aimed at cleaning up Native American reservations, but rather used the stereotype of the Indian as a child of nature to encourage non-Natives to stop polluting the environment as a whole. In both of these instances, white America appropriated the image of the Indian for its own purposes, and this was precisely what Hollywood was doing in its American Indian films of this era, as well. Films like *Soldier Blue* and *Little Big Man*, which used Indian life as a means to critique mainstream society, were not just part of a larger trend to challenge the Cold War consensus, but they were also part of one that co-opted Indian culture for white America's needs, while leaving Native Americans behind.¹⁰

**New Hollywood and the Post-Studio System Era**

Just as American society was undergoing seismic shifts during the 1960s due to the Baby Boomers' activism and breaking of the consensus, so too was the film industry. The changes that led to this so-called New Hollywood enabled the production of riskier, more politically pointed, and more explicit American Indian movies. The majors had grudgingly divested themselves of their theater holdings throughout the '50s due to the Supreme Court's 1948 *Paramount* decision, and by 1960, the studio system was finally gone. The arrangement of contract talent, including directors, stars and screenwriters, was in the process of dying as well, ultimately coming to an end with the expiration of Rock Hudson's deal with Universal in 1965. As a result, the studios no longer oversaw the creative process of filmmaking, only providing financing, distribution and space for filming, while independent producers dominated the industry. During the 1930s and '40s, only seven studios accounted for two-thirds of all American movies, but by 1960, there
were more than 150 independent production companies in the United States. This meant that creative control now rested with individual filmmakers, not studio moguls. As evidence of the studios' departure from the creative process, when Kinney National Services purchased Warner Bros. in 1969, it laid off six of the seven members of Warners' story department, for they had become redundant in New Hollywood.\textsuperscript{11}

The end of the studio system proved to be an extraordinary opportunity for creative talent, providing them with the sort of control over their careers and films they did not enjoy as contract players. Prominent directors such as John Huston and William Wyler, and major stars like Lancaster, Wayne, Frank Sinatra and Gregory Peck, became producers in this new system. Moreover, independent producers now took the lead on putting film projects together, often by selling financiers, be they a studio or a bank, on a "package deal" that included a director, screenplay, and one or more stars already attached. This gave prominent actors and directors an enormous amount of power in the filmmaking process. For instance, buoyed by the success of \textit{Bonnie and Clyde} and \textit{Alice's Restaurant}, Arthur Penn had virtually complete creative control on \textit{Little Big Man}. Likewise, in the words of film historian Paul Monaco, "the end of long-term studio contracts was catalyst to shifting the fortunes of the most successful Hollywood actors and actresses toward becoming prominent players with substantial financial clout and increased artistic control over what the industry produced." This allowed Lancaster to exert a significant amount of influence on \textit{Ulzana's Raid} and Redford to do the same with \textit{Jeremiah Johnson}. It also meant that actors and directors could now choose projects that were personal to them, rather than simply accepting roles that the studio offered, as demonstrated by Native American rights activist Bergen starring in \textit{Soldier Blue}.\textsuperscript{12}
While the end of the studio system meant greater freedom for artists during the 1960s, the decade also saw a youth movement at multiple levels within Hollywood. A new generation of filmmakers, including Penn, Sydney Pollack, Peter Bogdanovich and Robert Altman, received opportunities to tell stories that resonated with their own age group. Younger executives replaced aging moguls at the top of studios and the entire film industry began to target the youth market. In part, this was due to massive financial struggles that Hollywood faced throughout much of the decade. Ticket sales, which had fallen by 50% during the 1950s, continued to decline throughout the '60s as the movie audience fragmented and television replaced film as the nation's principle form of family entertainment. Because of this, the industry was making fewer films, which in turn made those films ever riskier propositions, as they simply had to be profitable in order to keep Hollywood afloat financially. Throughout the early-'60s, however, the industry was floundering—three-quarters of movies made in 1961 lost money—due to aging studio heads leaning on outdated formulas, such as expensive musicals and historical epics. The success of a handful of these pricey films, most notably *The Sound of Music* in 1965, led to a trend toward costly blockbusters, many of which failed, thus compounding Hollywood's financial woes.\(^\text{13}\)

Relief appeared in 1967 in the form of *The Graduate* and the Penn-directed *Bonnie and Clyde*, two inexpensive pictures that struck a chord with young audiences and proved to be box office hits. Their success prompted a new trend in Hollywood as producers aimed for the youth market, a fertile ground for exploitation due to the size of the Baby Boom generation. As film historian Geoff King writes, "Lower budget productions with a contemporary edge were shown to be far less risky in this context than unwieldy spectacles that seemed to belong to another age." The result, in King's words, was that "money flowed freely, if not in huge amounts, to a
younger generation of filmmakers who, if they did not exactly 'take over' . . . made considerable inroads into the culture and business of Hollywood."\textsuperscript{14}

The success of these films demonstrated the growing generation gap during the Vietnam era, as well as the important cultural ground Hollywood provided for the Baby Boomers' rebellion. \textit{Bonnie and Clyde}, \textit{The Graduate} and \textit{Cool Hand Luke} served as the first of a wave of movies that appealed specifically to the younger generation. Film historian Paul Monaco notes that "For this audience, the identification with the anti-hero was assumed to be rooted in a widely shared sense of alienation from middle class American society, the values of America's older generations, and the nation's economic, social and political 'establishment.'" Through Bonnie and Clyde's exuberant crime spree, Luke Jackson's refusal to submit to prison authority and Benjamin Braddock's rejection of his parents' "plastic" lifestyle, these movies embraced and celebrated the rebellion of the Vietnam generation. Although the late-'60s were, in King's words, "a time when Hollywood made a gesture toward the more liberal or radical forces in American society," this move toward the youth market initially was not a conscious step, for the industry did not immediately recognize the hunger Baby Boomers had for films that would speak to them. Critics savaged \textit{Bonnie and Clyde} when it was first released, for example, and Warner Bros. believed it only had limited appeal, dumping it into a small number of theaters. Nonetheless, it eventually became a box office sensation as young people flocked to it in huge numbers, making it at the time one of the twenty top grossing films in history. \textit{The Graduate} was an even bigger hit, breaking attendance marks in 90\% of its theaters, and those record-setting audiences were extraordinarily young: 96\% were 30 or under and 72\% were 23 or under.\textsuperscript{15}

Although the first wave of youth-oriented films may have caught it by surprise, Hollywood quickly responded by shifting its product in an attempt to recapture the success of
Bonnie and Clyde and The Graduate. As Gulf + Western CEO Charles Bluhdorn said in 1970 when he appointed 29-year old Stanley Jaffe to the post of president of Paramount Pictures, "To me, Mr. Jaffe epitomizes what the motion picture business is all about today. He is a knowledgeable young man in an industry that is appealing, first of all, to the youth market.” It was in this context that many of the American Indian films discussed in chapters five and six were made. Soldier Blue, Little Big Man and Billy Jack all reflect the antiestablishment bent of pictures like Bonnie and Clyde and Cool Hand Luke, damning the war in Vietnam, embracing the counterculture, and criticizing the older generations as out-of-touch. Likewise, while Jeremiah Johnson may not, on the surface, appear to be a film aimed at young people, its protagonist is very much a product of the age: an alienated individualist intent on living life on his own terms, not those of the rest of society. While this wave of youth-oriented innovation would not last—film historian James Monaco writes that The Graduate and Bonnie and Clyde "turned out to be anomalies rather than models—or rather they were models for the entertainment machines of the seventies, but for the wrong reasons: it wasn't their intelligence and passion that was copied, but rather their visceral formulations”—but during the late-'60s and early-'70s, it proved to be an extraordinarily powerful trend in Hollywood, one in which the American Indian films of the day took part.16

Not only were younger filmmakers getting an opportunity, so too were younger executives who replaced the old guard of studio moguls. In part, this was due to the older generation retiring or simply dying off, but it was also the result of the corporate takeover of Hollywood. Jack Warner, for example, retired in 1967, selling off his stock to Canadian production company Seven Arts, and publishing conglomerate Kinney National Services bought out Warner Bros.-Seven Arts two years later. Likewise, auto parts distributor Gulf + Western
purchased Paramount in 1966, while insurance company Transamerica acquired United Artists in 1967. In some cases, the new corporate owners hired young executives to run their studios, resulting in a new generation of ideas. For instance, after Gulf + Western's takeover, not only did the 29-year old Jaffe become Paramount's president, but Robert Evans was appointed its production chief while still in his thirties. Both Evans and Jaffe had extensive experience in the film industry prior to taking control of Paramount, but even the new corporate bosses who lacked a Hollywood background sought the youth market during the late-'60s. In James Monaco's words, "The short-lived youth culture of the late sixties further enhanced opportunities [for young filmmakers]. The new managers hadn't the slightest idea what would sell anymore; they were open to just about any cockamamie concept. Within five years, between 1968 and 1973, a new generation had taken over the reins of power."\(^{17}\)

Another trend that allowed filmmakers to produce the edgy, explicit American Indian films of the Vietnam era was the end of the Production Code and the loosening of censorship, which gave filmmakers increased freedom. In its 1952 "Miracle decision," named after the Roberto Rossellini-directed film at the center of the case, the Supreme Court overturned a 1915 ruling that denied First Amendment protection to motion pictures on the grounds that they were nothing more than commercial products. The Court now determined that films could simultaneously be commerce and art, thereby extending them First Amendment protection and allowing producers to sue censorship boards that had banned their pictures. Later court decisions during the 1950s also loosened the definition of obscenity, which often served as a catchall excuse for censorship, ruling that something was only obscene if it had no socially redeeming value whatsoever, and, further, that sex did not automatically equate with obscenity.\(^{18}\)
During the 1950s, studios and filmmakers also began to take on the industry's self-imposed Production Code. In 1953, United Artists released Otto Preminger's sex comedy *The Moon Is Blue* without the Production Code seal, and did so again in 1955 for Preminger's *The Man with the Golden Arm*, which starred Sinatra as a heroin addict. These piecemeal challenges revealed that the power of the Production Code was waning, as theater owners were willing to screen pictures lacking the Code's seal, and audiences were willing to attend. Through the early-'60s, Hollywood took a cue from Europe and began to explore more sexually explicit subject matter, and in 1965, *The Pawnbroker* received a Production Code seal despite including a scene of nudity. As Paul Monaco writes, this "indicated that cultural shifts were finally being acknowledged in the very quarters that had been holding Hollywood films hostage to what many people regarded as entirely outmoded and puritanical standards." By 1966, the Motion Picture Association of America (MPAA) liberalized the Code and dispensed with it altogether in 1969, replacing it with the age-based ratings system—G, PG, R, X—that still exists in a modified form today.¹⁹

Some filmmakers certainly explored more explicit subject matter simply because they were able to do so in this new environment, but others did so due to the economic struggles Hollywood faced during the decade. Throughout the '60s, they sought topics that television could not touch, and, at the end of the decade, the growth of the pornographic film industry posed a challenge that pushed Hollywood to keep pace, as well. Filmmakers did so in terms of sex and violence, with portrayals of both becoming increasingly frank and graphic during the Vietnam era, yet MPAA president Jack Valenti sought to draw a distinction between them. Although he labeled sex as "trash," Valenti claimed that violence was merely part of the dramatic conflict of movies and suggested that Americans saw real violence on news coverage of
Vietnam, not at the movie theater. Due to this attitude, films like *Soldier Blue* and *Ulzana's Raid* were able to depict extraordinarily gruesome acts in their exploration of white and Indian atrocities, the sort of violence that was not possible to include in movies a decade earlier. As King writes, "Few of the films associated with the [late '60s New Hollywood] Renaissance could have existed within the confines of the regime policed by the [Production Code] in the forms that made them so striking, precisely as something new and innovative." Thus, along with the end of the studio system and the film industry's move toward the youth market, the loosening of restrictions on violence made possible the American Indian films of the Vietnam era.²⁰

**The 1990s and Beyond**

The western began to go out of vogue during the mid-1970s, and with it went the American Indian film. It was not until the success of Kevin Costner's *Dances with Wolves* (Orion, 1990) that the genre experienced a resurgence. Yet while it was a critical and commercial smash, *Dances with Wolves* largely mimicked *Little Big Man*, in theme if not story. Like Penn's picture from two decades earlier, it follows a white man, Lt. John Dunbar (Costner) who is alienated by the corruption of white society and joins a tribe of noble Sioux in order to find himself. The film presents these Indians as a people utterly without flaw—decent, caring, and humane—a stark contrast to the degenerate, racist or insane white men who populate the prairie. Michael Mann's adaptation of *Last of the Mohicans* (Twentieth Century Fox, 1992) likewise embraced traditional stereotypes. Its heroic Indians, Chingachgook (Russell Means) and Uncas (Eric Schweig) are consummate noble savages and its villain, the terrifying Magua (Wes Studi), is a particularly bloodthirsty one. While these three Indians are, indeed, important characters, they still only support the movie's white protagonists, Nathaniel (Daniel Day-Lewis),
Chingachgook's adopted son, and Cora (Madeline Stowe) the daughter of a British officer. Moreover, at the film's end, *Last of the Mohicans* endorses the myth of the Vanishing Indian, for Chingachgook explains that he is the last member of his tribe, while "The frontier is a place for people like my white son and his woman and their children," thereby symbolically passing ownership of America to the white man.21

The majority of American Indian films made during this late-'80s/early-'90s wave followed the standard Hollywood pattern of focusing on whites, not Indians, but *Powwow Highway* (Warner Bros., 1989) and *Thunderheart* (TriStar, 1992) diverged. Both pictures feature Indian protagonists and modern-day plots, concentrating on Indians dealing with issues facing Native Americans in the present. Journalist Julie Lew saw this as a product of the times, writing in 1990, "With such American Indian issues as the environment and tribal rights in the news these days, Hollywood film makers are reviving Old West themes and exploring contemporary Indian life with renewed avowals of accuracy." Likewise, Michael Smith, the director San Francisco's American Indian Film Institute, claimed "We're in a period where we're going to see that a commercial project on American Indians is going to make it." Yet *Powwow Highway* also revealed the dangers inherent in non-Native filmmakers producing pictures dealing with Indians, for even the best of intentions could be undone through ignorance. Director Jonathan Wacks had his script approved by a Cheyenne tribal chief and elder, and enlisted UCLA Native American studies professor Hanay Geigomah as a consultant, but still shot a scene on a sacred butte in South Dakota, angering some Native Americans, including David Seals, the Huron author of the novel upon which the movie is based.22

*Powwow Highway* is a road picture that not only grapples with the tangible problems facing Native Americans, such as the poverty and violence on the reservation, but also more
intangible ones, like the difficulty of maintaining a culture in such an environment. It focuses upon two Northern Cheyennes, the fiery Buddy (A. Martinez), a Red Power activist, and the good-natured Philbert (Gary Farmer), who is obsessed with his people's spirituality. Buddy lives only in the present, fighting to preserve his tribe's land from predatory corporate interests, while Philbert lives primarily in the past, immersing himself in Cheyenne folklore and history. Together, they drive from their Montana reservation to Santa Fe in order to help Buddy's sister, who has been wrongfully jailed. Consumed as he is with his people's current plight, Buddy has no use for their heritage. During a visit to a Sioux powwow at a school gym, for instance, he gripes, "I hate these goddamn things. Look at these people traipsing around on some basketball court. You'd think a few lousy beads and some feathers was a culture or something." 23 Eventually, Buddy is influenced by his companion's wisdom and folktales, for along their journey, Philbert insists on stopping to pray at a sacred mountain, visits the site of the infamous Fort Robinson Massacre in Nebraska, and tells the story of Wateo the Trickster. Thanks to this exposure to his people's past, Buddy is eventually able to find a balance between his Red Power anger and newfound Indian spirituality, a process that finds its completion during the film's climax when the pair break his sister out of jail. Buying them time to escape, Buddy throws a windowpane from Philbert's car at a pursuing police cruiser, and as he does so, he momentarily appears as a Cheyenne brave, dressed in buckskins, war paint and feathered bonnet while hurling a tomahawk. Up to this point in the film, Buddy has frequently spoken of Indian activism and the oppression of white America, but this sequence is his chance to finally fight back in the role of a warrior. Buddy's spiritual conversion, then, is a result of subverting his anger, accepting his people's culture, and getting in touch with their past. *Powwow Highway* does not suggest that Indians should simply look to the past rather than confronting the problems of the present or the
future, however. One of the film's key exchanges occurs when Buddy complains that his friend's folktales "don't tell us how to keep our reservations from turning into sewers," and Philbert responds, "But they do." Thus *Powwow Highway* sees Indian spirituality and traditions as providing solutions to current problems. As Farmer, a Canadian-born Mohawk, said, "People feel that the Cheyenne community is impoverished. But I found it rich. Rich in culture, rich in tradition. There's so much there to be shared. Good answers to the questions that we ask ourselves every day. We just have to listen."24

![Figure #37: Buddy (A. Martinez) transforms into a Cheyenne warrior in *Powwow Highway.*](image)

*Thunderheart*, directed by Michael Apted, was described by *New York Times* film critic Caryn James as "entertainment with a social conscience." It essentially serves as a fictional companion piece to Apted's documentary *Incident at Oglala* (Miramax, 1992), which examined the controversial imprisonment of Sioux activist Leonard Peltier for the murder of two federal agents in 1975. Both Apted and producer/screenwriter John Fusco were concerned with Native
American rights, an indication of the continued influence of the Red Power movement. Apted, who was already working on *Incident at Oglala* when he accepted the directing job for *Thunderheart*, said he was attracted to the Peltier case because, "by examining it in great detail, it becomes very resonant about the contemporary treatment of the American Indian," and he extended those feelings to *Thunderheart*, as well. For his part, Fusco lived on the Pine Ridge Reservation and was, according to Lew, "a lifelong student of American Indian religions and philosophy and is a Sioux honorary adoptee." Their politics are on full display in *Thunderheart*, not only through its story, but also through the casting of John Trudell, a participant in the occupation of Alcatraz and the national spokesman of the American Indian Movement in the 1970s, in a prominent supporting role as a militant activist.²⁵

*Thunderheart* focuses upon part-Sioux FBI agent Ray Levoi (Val Kilmer), who is assigned to help veteran agent Frank Coutelle (Sam Shepard) investigate a killing on a Sioux reservation, under the pretense that his ancestry will help him relate to the locals. Not only does Levoi know nothing about his heritage, but he even holds the Indians in disdain, sneering at the squalor they live in, mocking their traditional ways, and telling Coutelle they are "not my people." Coutelle and his allies, the reservation's fascistic pro-government Indians, use the murder investigation to target Red Power activists among the Sioux, and while Levoi initially follows their lead, he eventually comes to see the abuses being committed by the FBI, which one Indian calls "the second coming of the same old cavalry." The turning point in this process is the shooting of the house an activist school teacher by pro-government goons that leaves the teacher's young son badly wounded, an incident that radicalizes Levoi and convinces him side with the traditionalists. Apted inverted a standard trope of the American Indian film in this key scene, for rather than whites defending their homestead against Indians, now it is Indians being
attacked in their homes by the surrogate forces of white America. By the end of the film, Levoi has discovered that Coutelle was responsible for the very murder the FBI is investigating and is the central figure in a conspiracy to exploit the resources of the reservation. This leads the young agent to stand alongside the local Sioux, having "gone native" to protect his people, and just as he rejected his Sioux heritage at the beginning of the movie, at its end, it is the FBI who he declares are "not my people."  

Making his movie in the shadow of 1980s consumerism, Apted used a rejection of materialism as a key signifier of Levoi's acceptance of his Indian ancestry. Like Powwow Highway, this shift occurs through a physical transformation, but Levoi's is gradual, rather than instantaneous, and real rather than imagined. As the film opens, Levoi is a Yuppie, the epitome of the superficial '80s. He drives a flashy convertible and wears the "uniform" of the FBI—a dark suit and tie—along with an expensive watch, sunglasses and shoes which, as tribal policeman Walter Crow Horse (Graham Greene) observes after studying his tracks, "are a little too tight in the instep, but man, they look cool, and that's what counts." Levoi's contact with the Sioux, particularly Crow Horse and holy man Grandpa Samuel Reaches (Chief Ted Think Elk) helps to reawaken his Indianness. The process slowly strips away his materialism, so that by the end of the film, he is dressed in the attire of a modern-day Indian—a denim jacket, t-shirt and blue jeans—and happily trades his Rolex to Reaches, receiving the old man's peace pipe in return. In this way, Levoi has rejected the empty consumerism of white America in favor of the meaningful values and history of the Sioux. Like Little Big Man and Dances with Wolves, The film concentrates upon its protagonist's spiritual awakening, for Reaches describes Levoi as "being as far from yourself as a hawk from the moon," but unlike those pictures, in this case, it is an Indian, not a white man, accepting Indian ways. Therefore, both Thunderheart and Powwow
Highway deal with Indian protagonists and the problems faced by Native Americans in the present, including poverty, exploitation, cultural appropriation, and abuse at the hands of corrupt officials, rather than using Indians to tell stories of white protagonists and explore issues related to white America.  

![Figure #38: As he accepts his Sioux heritage, Ray Levoi (Val Kilmer) trades in the "uniform" of the FBI (left) for the attire of a modern day Indian (right) in Thunderheart.](image)

Although this wave of American Indian films did not prove to be enduring, going dormant once again in the mid-'90s, it did prove important for making movies about Indians themselves, not white America. Furthermore, during the second half of the decade Chris Eyre emerged as a Native American director, telling his own peoples' stories in films like Smoke Signals (Miramax, 1998) and Skins (First Look, 2002). Non-Native filmmakers continued to occasionally engage with Indians in respectful ways, as well, such as John Woo's Windtalkers (MGM, 2002), which dramatized the heroism of Navajo code talkers during World War II, and Clint Eastwood's Flags of Our Fathers (Paramount, 2006), which dealt sensitively with the plight of Ira Hayes, a Pima Indian who helped raise the flag on Iwo Jima in 1945 and suffered from alcoholism and guilt after the war. Exceptions still exist, however, such as Johnny Depp's over-the-top turn as Tonto in The Lone Ranger (Disney, 2013) and the controversy surrounding
the Adam Sandler comedy *The Ridiculous Six* in April, 2015, when a number of Native American actors walked off the set in protest of the film's offensive stereotyping of Indians. Even so, as Hollywood continues to make progress, perhaps it will finally reach a point where it treats Native Americans as Native Americans, and not simply as Indians in films concerned with white America.²⁸

**Conclusion**

The image of the American Indian in Hollywood films underwent a considerable evolution over the decades between 1930 and 1970. Initially, it was rooted in the competing visions of the bloodthirsty and noble savage, both of which were centuries-old concepts in American culture. During the 1930s and '40s, the bloodthirsty savage defined the genre, with pictures like *The Plainsman* and *Stagecoach* offering Indians as faceless, animalistic monsters who slaughtered whites simply because that was what Indians did, no motivation necessary. The films of this era kept these Indians in the background, using them to enhance their stories of white protagonists. By the 1950s, however, the image of the noble savage was becoming far more commonplace and important, as Indians emerged as better developed characters and, at times, even the movies' protagonists. This was particularly the case with civil rights-focused pictures such as *Devil's Doorway* and *Apache*, for they were able to effectively reveal the evils of racism and prejudice through the abuse Indians received at the hands of white bigots. During the 1960s, Indians remained important, but generally supporting, figures, guiding white protagonists on their journeys of spiritual fulfillment or helping them understand Indian culture. In some of these later films, Indians did not act all that different from earlier ones—the brutal savages in *Ulzana's Raid* and *Jeremiah Johnson* are not far removed from those of *Northwest Passage* thirty
years earlier—but the films' perspective had shifted, no longer judging them for the horrifying violence they commit.

Indians may have emerged as far more important characters over the forty years discussed in this dissertation, but the films they occupied were not actually about them, for the American Indian genre has always been about white America, not Native America. Regardless of whether it was *Cimarron*, made in 1931, or *Ulzana's Raid*, made in 1972, American Indian films do not tell us about actual Native Americans, but rather reveal the issues mainstream society was facing at the time they were made, and how the nation viewed the artificial construct of the Indian. During the 1930s, the strife of the Depression led to deeply nostalgic and patriotic movies that looked back to the past as an inspiration for the future. *Union Pacific*, for instance, glorified the construction of the transcontinental railroad, while *Northwest Passage* and *Cimarron* did the same for the conquest of the frontier. In so doing, they celebrated great accomplishments in the nation's history as a way to encourage their audiences during a time of great difficulty. Both bloodthirsty and noble Indians served as obstacles to the expansion of civilization in these films, and therefore, had to be removed by white America. The major difference between the two strains of the genre was that noble savages were often provoked into war by unscrupulous whites, and, further, than noble savage films evinced guilt over the inevitable defeat and disappearance of their Indians.

During the 1950s, the American Indian genre shifted to reflect the drastic changes that occurred in American society and culture after World War II. This was the era of the Cold War consensus and conformity, and American Indian films reflected and perpetuated the perception that the country was comprised entirely of white, middle class Christians. Some of these movies extolled the virtues of the nuclear family, which had become a bulwark against communism and
a haven from developments in the workplace and society. In them, Indians either posed an outside threat that allowed for the construction of new family units, or, in the case of Vittorio in *Hondo*, served as a wise mentor who provided advice for a white man taking on the mantle of fatherhood. Other entries in the genre engaged with the civil rights movement, arguing against bigotry and for the inclusion of minorities in mainstream America. However, they also suggested that, as a part of the bargain, minorities should abandon their traditional ways and assimilate into white society. Thus, through the family and assimilation, the movies of the postwar period embraced the conformity so central to the age.

The films of the 1960s were part of a far larger rebellion against the very consensus that those of the ’50s glorified. As the massive Baby Boom generation came of age, its members grew alienated with the values of their parents’ America. The sheer size of this generation gave weight to its revolt, and while some of the rebellion was overt, represented through the civil rights movement, the New Left and the counterculture, the majority of young people expressed their discontent indirectly, such as through their casual attitudes toward dress, sex, drugs and authority. In the context of this dissatisfaction, Indians became antiestablishment figures, the original rebels who fought against American conformity and power. In films like *Billy Jack* and *Little Big Man*, Indian life served as an alternative to the corruption of white America, while Indian spirituality provided alienated young whites with the fulfillment they could not find in their own culture. Likewise, *Soldier Blue* and *Ulzana’s Raid* used Indians to confront the Vietnam War, the former critiquing American imperialism and the slaughter of non-whites, the latter exploring the "American madness" of violence that appeared to define the nation. Despite the evolution that the image of the Indian had undergone, Hollywood was still only using it as a means of exploring the problems confronting mainstream America.
Because of this, Indians remained in the position of the Other in these films, always in binary opposition to white America. During the 1930s, whether bloodthirsty or noble, they were savages who stood in contrast to the films' civilized white protagonists. So positioned, they could form a threat that forced the disparate characters of *Stagecoach* to form a cohesive unit, serve as animalistic monsters who hampered the construction of the transcontinental railroad in *Union Pacific*, or act as a decent but doomed people who enabled Custer to demonstrate his courage, magnanimity and liberal bonafides in *They Died with Their Boots On*. By the 1960s, Hollywood had reversed this equation, as Indians now occupied the position of the civilized figure in the dichotomy, with whites now serving as the savage. Despite this, Indians were still outsiders, with Hollywood using them to engage in "reverse Othering," setting them as a superior in order to critique the problems in mainstream society. Therefore, the kindness, beauty and peace-loving ways of the Indians in *Little Big Man* and *Soldier Blue* help to reveal the corruption, violence and racism of white America. Likewise, while the Apaches remain bloodthirsty savages in *Ulzana's Raid*, the film uses them to show that "civilized" white men are capable of the same sort of brutality that they condemn as barbaric in non-whites. Only in the civil rights-oriented films of the 1950s are Indians offered an escape from the position of the Other, but in order to move from outsider to insider, they must surrender their Indianness, as Rachel does through the killing of her Kiowa brother in *The Unforgiven*. Thus, with Indians occupying a position of the Other throughout the genre, American Indian movies were never actually about them. Regardless of how they were portrayed on screen, or whether they had emerged from the background to become important characters and, in some cases, protagonists, Indians were merely a means to an end. The American Indian films in which they appeared
remained made by white filmmakers, aimed at white audiences, and focused on issues important to white society.
1 Mark Hamilton Lytle, America's Uncivil Wars: the Sixties from Elvis to the Fall of Richard Nixon (New York: Oxford University Press, 2006), 198.
3 1940 U.S. Census, United States Summary, Characteristics of the Population, 22.
6 Anderson, 55-7; Lytle, 168-73, 199.
7 Anderson, 78, 102, 109; Daniels, 97-98, 107; Lytle, 180, 217.
8 Lytle, 3, 76-7, 88-95, 271.
9 Anderson, 134, 183; Isserman and Kazin, 159
10 Sherry Smith, Hippies, Indians, and the Fight for Red Power, 4-5.
11 Anderson, 41, 142, 177; Isserman and Kazin, 145; Lytle, 305.
13 Paul Monaco, 20; Schatz, 482; Weinraub, 11.
15 Balio, 440; King, 13.
17 For a full discussion of the making and marketing of Bonnie and Clyde, see Biskind, 23-51.
18 James Monaco, American Film Now: The People, the Power, the Money, the Movies (New York: Oxford University Press, 1979), 51; Paul Monaco, 35.
19 Balio, 576; James Monaco, 82; Paul Monaco, 31-38.
20 Randall, 510-11, 516-18.
21 Balio, 440; King, 13.
22 The proper name for the “Miracle decision” is Burstyn v. Wilson (1952), while the 1915 ruling was in the case of Mutual Film Corp. v. Ohio.
23 Paul Monaco, 56-9; Randall, 524-25.
24 Gustafson, 512; King, 31-2; Paul Monaco, 62-5.
Trudell’s wife and children were killed in a house fire in 1979, which he believed to be an act of political assassination.

26 *Thunderheart.*

27 Ibid.

Works Cited

Archival Collections
Margaret Herrick Library. Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences. Beverly Hills, California.
UCLA Special Collections. University of California, Los Angeles. Los Angeles, California.
USC Film and Cinema Archive. School of Cinematic Arts. University of Southern California. Los Angeles, California.

Films


The Great Meadow. Directed by Charles Brabin. 1931; Santa Monica, CA: MGM.


Take a Giant Step. DVD. Directed by Philip Leacock. 1959; Santa Monica, CA: MGM/UA Home Entertainment, 2011.


Screenplays
Nugent, Frank S. Fort Apache Screenplay. Undated.

Interviews

Books


Susman, Warren I. *Culture as History: The Transformation of Society in the Twentieth Century*. 384

**Articles in Books**


Journal, Magazine, and Newspaper Articles
Blevins, Winfred. "Redford in His Element as a Mountain Man." Los Angeles Times, December 10, 1972, Calendar 1, 54.
"Cim Runs for 24 Hours at Paramount Denver." Film Daily 55, no. 40 (February 17, 1931): 8.
Cronon, William. "Revisiting the Vanishing Frontier: the Legacy of Frederick Jackson Turner."

_____.


_____.


"Custer's Last Stand: 'They Died with Their Boots On' Glorifies a Rash General." Life 11, no. 23 (December 8, 1941): 75.

Daly, Phil M. "Along the Rialto." Film Daily 55, no. 19 (January 23, 1931): 1.

_____.

"Along the Rialto." Film Daily 55, no. 35 (February 11, 1931): 7.


"Dix Becomes Indian Chief: Film Star Inducted into Osage Tribe During Work on 'Cimarron.'" Los Angeles Times, December 13, 1930, B24.


"Fallen Angel on Location." Time 95, no. 5 (February 2, 1970): 71.


Gallup, George. "Poll Picks 'Boom Town.'" Los Angeles Times, February 27, 1941, 1A.

"Gloria Swanson, Jose Ferrer Get Golden Globes." Los Angeles Times, March 1, 1951.

"Gov. Roosevelt Sees 'Cimarron.'" Film Daily 55, no. 29 (February 4, 1931): 2.


Hall, Gladys. "You Can Only Defeat Yourself, Says Spencer Tracy." Motion Picture 49 no. 6 (July 1940): 74.


_____.


_____.

"Jeff, the Self-Confident, Sexy Indian, Now Turns Romantic." Los Angeles Times, November 9, 1952, D3.

_____.


"Indian Film Critics Get Reply of Producers." Los Angeles Times, April 21, 1949, A8.


_____.
"Pic Cycle on Horseback." Variety 133, no. 12 (March 1, 1939), 5, 20.
_____.
Scott, John. "Millionaires Play in Film: Indians Worth $51,000,000 to Act in 'Cimarron.'" Los Angeles Times, August 3, 1930, B9.
Strawn, Linda. "Blood-and-Guts Milius at War with Hollywood." Los Angeles Times, August 5,
W., Miss L. "Letters to the Editor." Motion Picture 41, no. 6 (July 1931): 6.

Motion Picture Reviews
Bilberstein, Frank J. "What the Picture Did for Me." Motion Picture Herald 136, no. 7 (August 12, 1939): 63.
Booth, Shirley W. "What the Picture Did for Me." Motion Picture Herald 182, no. 8 (February 24, 1951): 41.
Brenner, W.H. "What the Picture Did for Me." Motion Picture Herald 126, no. 10 (March 6, 1937): 77.
_____. "A Late Look at 'Billy Jack.'" Los Angeles Times, February 4, 1972, H1.


____. "'She Wore a Yellow Ribbon,' at Capitol, Stars John Wayne as a Cavalry Captain." Review of She Wore a Yellow Ribbon. New York Times, November 18, 1949, 35.


"Errol Flynn Custer." Review of They Died with Their Boots On. Newsweek 18, no. 22 (December 1, 1941): 70.


____. "What the Picture Did for Me." Motion Picture Herald 183, no. 7 (May 19, 1951): 43.

____. "What the Picture Did for Me." Motion Picture Herald 183, no. 9 (June 2, 1951): 41.

Freiburger, E.M. "What the Picture Did for Me." Motion Picture Herald 139, no. 2 (April 13, 1940): 58.

George, Elaine S. "What the Picture Did for Me." Motion Picture Herald 195, no. 8 (May 29, 1954): Product Digest section, 11.

George, S.L. "What the Picture Did for Me." Motion Picture Herald 147, no. 6 (May 9, 1942): 51.


Graff, Tom S. "What the Picture Did for Me." Motion Picture Herald 182, no. 5 (February 3,
Niles, C.L. "What the Picture Did for Me." *Motion Picture Daily* 135 no. 11 (June 17, 1939): 68.
Records, A.H. "What the Picture Did for Me," *Motion Picture Daily* 136, no. 6 (July 22, 1939): 78.
Review of *Apache*. *Time* 64, no. 6 (August 9, 1954): 84.
Review of *Broken Arrow*. *Newsweek* 36, no. 6 (August 7, 1950): 76.
Review of *Stagecoach*. *Variety* 133, no. 9 (February 8, 1939): 17.
Review of *They Died with Their Boots On*. *Time* 38, no. 25 (December 22, 1941): 47.
_____.
_____.
_____.
_____.
_____.
_____.


Wright, W.A. "What the Picture Did for Me," Motion Picture Herald 135, no. 8 (May 27, 1939): 60.

_____. "What the Picture Did for Me." Motion Picture Herald 139, no. 3 (April 20, 1940): 49.


Websites


