Native Americans on Television
In the Late 20th and Early 21st Centuries

Jacob Franchino
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Contents

Introduction: Hollywood’s Traditional Images and Their Roots 1

Chapter One: The Multicultural Shift in American Society 7

Chapter Two: Television’s Multicultural Indian Images 24

Chapter Three: Native American Political Issues in the Late Twentieth Century 52

Chapter Four: The Modern Indian on Television 62

Conclusion 80
**Introduction:**

**Hollywood’s Traditional Images and their Roots**

“Audiences of the first films might have believed they were seeing the “real” American Indian, but what they were actually witnessing was the first of the new tribe of Hollywood Indians”  -Jacquelyn Kilpatrick

By the time motion pictures entered American life, the creation of a mythical Native American had already been well established. The Indian of pop culture’s creation, Kilpatrick’s “Hollywood Indian,” is, in some ways, centuries old, despite his arrival on film only in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Conceived in the earliest works of American Literature and ultimately born in front of the industry’s first motion picture cameras, the Hollywood Indian has, for decades, helped to reveal and, to a certain extent, direct the way Americans view Native Americans. The collectively imagined version of Native Americans revealed in the Hollywood Indian has remained apparent throughout the history of film. In many ways, it can be said that the stereotypes associated with the “Hollywood Indian” are shortcuts; they are visual and auditory identifiers that help audiences place the characters they encounter into preconceived understandings. The application of these images requires no further inquiry on the part of an audience; meaning is inherent in their appearance. The Hollywood Indian then, represents a powerful tool for television writers and directors; it can be used to elicit specific reactions and understandings in the audience. With these realities in mind, it is easy to understand why such images have proven hard to shake.

In the coming introduction the historical roots of such traditional images will be briefly explored. This exploration of images will help to illuminate both the physical and behavioral aspects of the Native American that are expressed on film. In understanding the stereotypes of
Native Americans that persist through to modern times, the traditional distinction between the Noble Savage and the Bloodthirsty Savage remains pertinent. The Bloodthirsty savage, it appears has begun to lose out to his “noble” counterpart, in recent years, but both remain a meaningful expression for creators and audiences alike. Beyond the personality traits of Native characters, however, there is a visual component that has fused itself with these character presentations. Visually speaking, popular culture has provided audiences with a composite expression of an American Indian appearance. The construction of a coherent Indian image has required the sacrifice of authenticity and the reality of a vast number of tribal ethnicities, for a singular Native American identity.

Jacquelyn Kilpatrick’s *Celluloid Indians* outlines the trajectory of Native American image creation that leads to their expression in the history of film. The number of sources that have contributed to the perception of Native Americans throughout history are undoubtedly innumerable, spanning diverse areas of life from literature and fiction to government policy. Kilpatrick argues that from the time the first reports of New World “savagery” were brought back to Europe, the construction of the “Indian” was underway. Moving forward in history, though, and focusing explicitly on representations manifest in popular culture, Kilpatrick points to certain works that can be taken both as sources of creation themselves, and as representative of the types of impressions that contemporaries held.

Kilpatrick cites James Fenimore Cooper as an important figure in the creation of the stereotypes that would define the American Indian in the decades to come. It was, Kilpatrick claims, Cooper who helped to establish the literary groundwork for the extreme poles of Indian

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characters as either noble or ignoble. As other scholars have also pointed out, it seems that the creation of the “Indian” has been accompanied by the articulation of an American identity, or a distinct American hero. This reality is apparent in Cooper’s *Last of the Mohicans* (1826), where in opposition to European aristocracy, the story’s hero is a “backwoodsman” with an abundance of Native American cultural knowledge, and a “noble savage” side-kick. Kilpatrick assesses Cooper’s intentions, stating “Cooper was building an American nationalist mythology through identification with the natural landscape and its original inhabitants.” Essentially, what Cooper did is draw a distinction between the perceived best and worst that the Native American had to offer and aligned his American hero with its “better” characteristics. The distinction that Cooper drew was important, and becomes a lasting interpretation in future cultural productions. Certainly the limited dichotomy between the “good” and “bad” Indian was not invented by Cooper, but his appropriation of the noble savage as a complement to the righteous American would have a lasting effect on the cultural representations of Native Americans in the future.

As America expanded across its vast western frontier the presentation of the Native American in literature moved with it. With stories of Indian wars ever-present in the minds of the American people, tales of Native American savagery became more and more prominent. In Robert Montgomery Bird’s *Nick of the Woods* (1837), the public received a much different image of the Native American: that of the bloodthirsty savage, accompanied by a white hero, this time, with little regard for the life of the savage. It is Bird’s work, according to Kilpatrick, that is responsible for endowing Indian characters with the pro-noun confused speech pattern that became a hallmark of Native American characters. In a similar vein to Bird, the “dime-store” novels produced during the years of westward expansion also served as a dominant vehicle for

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cultural transmission. These tales, often depending on Bird’s precedents, pushed an image of the bloodthirsty savage.

By the latter years of the nineteenth century another figure emerged that would have a marked impact on the presentation of Native Americans in popular culture. Buffalo Bill Cody’s wild-west shows provided the groundwork for the imagery that would become so powerful in the Western film genre. What made these widely traveling theatrical shows especially powerful was their employment of actual, often famous, Native Americans\textsuperscript{4}. The perceived authenticity afforded to what may now seem like obvious theatrics, surely helped cement in the minds of audiences the images presented. As the popularity of the Wild West Show faded, the turn of the century brought the motion picture and entire new venue for the construction of the Native American image.

As film became a dominant cultural medium, the notion of what it meant to be a Native American had already been well established in the minds of the audience. They had a firm grasp of both the noble and the bloodthirsty savage. Regardless of the dichotomy between good or bad, there were other assumptions embedded in their understanding. They understood Native Americans to be naive, and generally unintelligent, a fact that was reinforced by constant “tonto-speech.” Additionally, their inferiority to whites seemed obvious, and was consistently emphasized, either in their perpetual defeat or in their role as side-kick.

The advent of film, however, represented a new canvas for the expression of the imagined Indian. The visual representation of Native Americans represented a new challenge, and the

\textsuperscript{4} Kilpatrick, Celluloid Indians, 12-13. A former U.S. Army scout and Pony Express rider, Buffalo Bill Cody brought the “wild west” to audiences across the country and the world through his shows that combined elements of the circus and the rodeo. The shows were especially popular in the increasingly industrialized east, where audiences could catch a glimpse of the “real” west. During the show’s run, such famous Native Americans as Sitting Bull, Crazy Horse, Chief Joseph, and Geronimo participated at various times. Using real Native Americans, the shows often offered fictionalized reenactments of actual battles between the U.S. Army and Native Americans. Cody’s Wild West Show helped lay the groundwork for the strong connection between Cowboys and Indians that became a hallmark of western films and television shows.
motion picture industry helped to create what has come to be referred to as the “Hollywood Indian.” Ralph E. Friar and Natasha A. Friar’s *The Only Good Indian*, reveals the way in which Hollywood ultimately dealt with this new, visual, challenge: an “instant Indian kit.” The two authors elaborate, saying:

[the instant Indian kit is] suitable for any and all Indians, which consists of wig, war bonnet or headband (beaded or otherwise), vest or shirt, breechclout, [buckskin] leggings or fringed pants, and moccasins. To top off the costume, include Hong Kong beadwork, plastic bear, or eagle claws with plastic beads and other gewgaws. Add a few streaks of paint and Viola!...you’re an Indian too.⁵

The “kit” is perhaps not quite so rigid, but the image is familiar. The expression of a Hollywood Indian led to the creation of a Native American caricature. The Hollywood Indian is a composite image, created with various parts from vast and culturally distinct tribes across North America, but that can be applied to most any role featuring Native Americans.

The Hollywood Indian, now a wholly visual realization of more than a century’s worth of image creation, enjoyed continued familiarity with the American public. By mid-century, western television shows, which readily employed the services of the Hollywood Indian, were among some of the most popular to be found. And even as the popularity of TV-westerns has waned, the images they helped to cement in the American consciousness remain apparent.

The Native American characters visible throughout the history of Television and Film have typically fit comfortably within the bounds of the Hollywood Indian. It is important to recognize, however, that although such images share a certain historical legacy, they have often been adjusted to conform to the immediate world around them. This paper will be engaged in assessing the extent to which these images have responded to changes in American culture and

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In the late eighties and early nineties, multiculturalism, taken as a broad cultural phenomenon, had come to affect the way many people viewed cultural relations in America. This fundamental change in the larger culture was inevitably reflected in the television of the day. My goal will be to assess the ways in which television writers and producers responded to such a major cultural shift in their presentation of Native American characters. Additionally, the late twentieth century was a period that saw Native Americans reemerge in popular consciousness in ways quite distinct from the past. A changing relationship with the federal government that brought Native American issues into headlines had forced Americans to view American Indians in unprecedented ways. This new view, especially in its perception of the Indian gaming industry, led to the creation of historically distinct characters on television.

The creation of new types of characters, often dealing with modern issues, and the influence of a powerful multicultural sentiment made the 1990s and the early 2000s a dynamic period for American Indian characters on television. Through a close inspection of Native American characters found on television programs during the period, I hope to express the ways in which the 1990s and 2000 have represented a meaningful change in the presentation of Indian characters, and in which ways they still embody the traditional stereotypes of the Hollywood Indian.
Chapter One

The Multicultural Shift in American Society

In the final decades of the twentieth century, the American people found themselves in a cultural fall out. The sixties had been a period of intense shake up. It was a decade that saw mass demonstrations, a rise of radical political figures, urban riots, assassinations, and ethnic awakenings. When the smoke finally settled it was not completely clear what the decade had meant. Although much of the perceived liberal dominance of the decade disappeared in the decades that followed, the effect of their actions was still evident. By the latter decades of the century, a generation born in a post-holocaust world, who had grown up in the racial and political upheavals of the sixties, the Baby-Boomer generation, was coming of age and were in a position to exert their influence. By the late 1980s a trend towards embracing multiculturalism had taken root in America. The ideals that define this movement did not, as it may have seemed to the larger public, appear out of nowhere in the late 20th century. While multiculturalism, as a tangible set of ideals, did enter mainstream culture, especially in areas of formal education, with a marked rapidity, its ideological and historical foundations were part of a much longer narrative.

To effectively understand the role multicultural thought played in shaping the images of Native Americans apparent on television in the very late 20th century, a basic history of the concept’s growth and interaction with the larger culture is necessary. Articulating multiculturalism’s ideological predecessors, and its modern proponents, as well as detractors, will illuminate the nature of its effect on the world outside of academia and policy making. With a strong understanding of multiculturalism’s history and place in American society by the late
20th century, an assessment of its role in shaping popular thought can be achieved.

By their nature, precise discussions of multiculturalism are very difficult. The ideology itself has been subject to a great deal of controversy. In the late 1980s and early 1990s, intellectuals on both the left and the right found themselves bogged down in the trenches of a “canon war” incited by the effects of multiculturalism on college campuses. In an effort to elevate non-western cultures, universities began supplementing their western culture requirements and classic reading lists with what they deemed equally valuable non-European texts. To many, this was an unfathomable action and these detractors, suspicious of such value judgments, saw these efforts as a manifestation of multiculturalism’s naïve, unchecked relativism. The American author, Saul Bellow became a face for such criticism when, in a March 7, 1988 article in the *New Yorker*, he said that if the Zulus ever produce a Tolstoy, he would read him. Bellow’s statement, in the eyes of those sharing his interpretation, called into question the legitimacy of the cultural relativism he saw at the root of multiculturalism.

Disagreements over the ideological legitimacy of multiculturalism immediately complicate any precise historical discussion of its meaning, but this already complicated subject is exacerbated further by a level of ambiguity from within. Multiculturalism, as a very broad concept, is open to a great deal of personal definition and therefore the nature of its practical application is subject to an equal level of variety. The term is used widely in various fields, including politics and education, and its meaning is not completely static as it moves from one to the other. This lack of consensus from within an already vague set of ideals presents a problem for definition.

Defining multiculturalism is no simple task. To borrow a popular idiom, it is a lot like nailing jelly to a wall. In order to effectively appreciate its role in shaping the images of Native
Americans on television however, a certain amount of jelly will have to be nailed to the wall. Since the effort undertaken in this paper, however, is to assess multiculturalism’s influence in a broad public sphere (popular culture) it does not depend on the impossible articulation of an incontrovertible definition. Instead, a broad understanding of how the ideology of multiculturalism was arrived at, and how its purveyors generally hope to practically apply it, will suffice. More important than this, however, is how it became part of the popular consciousness. A more pronounced level of precision will be afforded to the aspects of multiculturalism that were most easily understood outside of its ideological nucleus in the academy. For all of the intellectual bickering that multiculturalism spawned, its core ideals were soon appearing with a much greater level of acceptance in mainstream culture and in our case, television.

One effective way to highlight the shift that multiculturalism represents is to first evaluate the dominant mood that preceded it. From its inception, America has been a society composed of multiple cultures. Beginning with Northern Europeans, Africans, and Native Americans, America quickly developed into a nation inhabited by a litany of diverse culture groups. Despite its diverse ethnic composition, America was not ideologically a “multicultural” society. Arriving immigrants were expected to enter into, what would eventually come to be understood as, the great American “melting pot.” The melting pot image was undergirded by a policy of assimilation into, what was intended to be, a distinct American culture. This trend, like multiculturalism, had its subtly divergent streams, but all were aimed, at least rhetorically, at enveloping everyone under a singular American identity. Assimilation, by most standards meant abandoning the culture of one’s forebears and conforming to an American culture dominated by white Protestants. In terms of Native American history, even as late as the 1960s,

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assimilation was a stated goal of the U.S. government’s official policy of Termination with respect to Indian Tribes.

The ideology of cultural assimilation presents an effective foil to help illuminate an understanding of multiculturalism. Multiculturalists, in lieu of melting pot imagery, opt for a much more heterogeneous cooking metaphor: a salad bowl. In contrast to assimilative goals, multiculturalists argue for a multi-dimensional American identity; assimilation, on the terms of a majority, besides being a form of cultural domination, is unproductive. Through a “salad bowl” motif, securing the distinctness of each individual culture represented in American life would, to proponents, actually strengthen society. To multiculturalists, the singular view of a distinct American culture is without merit and is actually oppressive.

Underlying both, assimilation and multiculturalism, is an anxiety about the definition of American culture; there is an unavoidable concern with what it actually means to be an American. American history has provided us with no concrete understanding of the American identity and both assimilationists and multiculturalists alike have taken up the task of finding one. Assimilationists hoped to emphasize the commonality of a distinct immigrant past but with a common cultural future. Multiculturalists on the other hand, hoped to offer a view that allowed for continued connection to the cultural past, even in the present. The multicultural ambition was to eschew the implicit ethnocentrism of assimilation by emphasizing the presence and contributions of a plurality of cultures. The sociologist Nathan Glazer offers a helpful assessment of the essential goal of multiculturalism, stating:

Multiculturalism, for its advocates, becomes a new image of a better America, without prejudice and discrimination, in which no cultural theme linked to any racial or ethnic group has priority, and in which American culture is seen as the product of a complex intermingling of themes from every minority ethnic and racial group, and from indeed the whole world.¹

The heated controversy surrounding multiculturalism in the late 1980s and early 1990s seemed to emerge without warning. By the early 90s, multiculturalism had become a lightning rod in political discourse. Its ideals were being more readily applied and, in turn, more uncomfortably apparent to detractors. Universities were embracing new, multicultural, policies. Public schools were rewriting, or at least reassessing their curricula. The American public had, in a short period, become both consciously and unconsciously aware of multiculturalism. Despite the seeming speed of its appearance however, the foundation for multiculturalism’s remarkable growth predates the term’s fusion with popular consciousness.

In the very early 20th century opinions we might call “multicultural” today, were being expressed. Howard University’s Professor of history Daryl Michael Scott, in his work “Postwar Pluralism, Brown v. Board of Education, and the Origins of Multicultural Education,” argues for the existence of a long multicultural legacy. Scott points first to philosopher Horace Kallen, who, in the wake of World War I’s feverish nationalism, articulated an ideology of “cultural pluralism.” Cultural pluralism was imagined as an opportunity to emphasize the presence of a multitude of cultural influences in the American experience.  

This early form of pluralism, Scott argues, was admittedly weak and enjoyed very few supporters. It was only after the dawn of World War II, that pluralism gained any serious momentum as a philosophy. In the face of an enemy’s unbridled racism, cultural pluralism gained the attention of an increasing number of intellectuals. Early pluralists, like Kallen, had predicted a nation of distinct and dedicated cultural groups, but the rhetoric of ethnic singularity so prevalent in Nazism, had rendered the advocaton of ethnic homogeneity unpleasing. Scott

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effectively sums up the ideological shift, stating, “In contrast to the interwar years, when ethnic, racial, and religious advocacy groups tended to promote their own causes, in the postwar era it was common for them to join ranks with others, advocating equal rights, tolerance, and individual acceptance.”

The singular image of the American past, and its conception of American identity was revealing some cracks. It was during this period that Christians and Jews came together and revise the American narrative, attributing its moral foundation to Judeo-Christian values.

The great moral threat to society, in the eyes of the post-war pluralists, was the persistence of prejudice. With this threat in mind, social scientists began engaging the topic of inter-group relations and, in 1947, established the National Association of Intergroup Relations Officials. While the pluralist ethos failed to break into the mainstream with the vigor that multiculturalism would, its presence through the mid-twentieth century, argues Scott, served as an ideological footing for the eventual appearance of multiculturalism.

Daryl Michael Scott also points to another historical factor that contributed to growth of pluralist thought. Scott attributes the cultural pluralists’ determination to curtail racial prejudice to an interwar movement in the social sciences (anthropology and psychology specifically) towards evaluating the ways in which society and culture “harmed personalities, producing damaged people and social problems.” Prejudice then, was a societal concern; its existence contributed to the psychological damage and degradation of both individuals and culture groups.

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The acceptance of the idea that racial prejudice contributes to the defacing of personal wellness will contribute, later, to our discussion of recognition politics, a central tenant of multicultural thought.

While it is true that cultural pluralists were a bustle with activity in the postwar years, their movement, argues Nathan Glazer, had lost its traction by the end of the 1950s. Glazer, less convinced of the influence of cultural pluralism on the multiculturalism of the 1980s and 90s, argues that action for civil rights in the fifties and sixties had pushed pluralism aside. The NAACP, SCLC, and SNCC (at least initially) were pushing for integration, which is an assimilative goal. This meant that, with respect to education, blacks would receive the same education as whites or, in other words, an education that was not pluralistic.\textsuperscript{13}

The greatest historical thrust towards the multiculturalism of the late 20\textsuperscript{th} century began emerging in the late 1960s, as the integrationist era of civil rights, marked by racial cooperation for equality, gave way to radical black nationalism and a distinctive African American identity. By the late 1960s large numbers of African-Americans became increasingly unenthused with supposed legislative victories that failed to significantly improve their lives. Cultural historian Todd Gitlin asserts, “They did not want to take a back seat in American culture. There was no more patience for humiliation.”\textsuperscript{14} Assimilation, for a growing segment of the black population, meant surrendering themselves to a white majority, on the majority’s terms. What followed this civil rights shake up, was the birth of a growing African-American consciousness. The forging of a distinct African-American identity, aided by successful liberation movements in Africa proper, was underway. African-Americans began wearing dashikis, sporting “natural” hair

\textsuperscript{13} Nathan Glazer, \textit{We Are All Multiculturalists Now}. 87-89.
styles, and adopting African names. This movement on the part of African Americans was aimed at establishing a distinct cultural identity. Their new racial identity was one conceived of as a long cultural history, and became a definitive part of personal self-hood.

Gitlin argues that it was this cultural shift, towards a distinct African American identity, that ultimately gave rise to the identity politics that would come to dominate much of the political discourse of the ensuing decades, and that was intrinsically beneath the multiculturalism that would come to grip much of society. Other groups, encouraged by the activities of African Americans, began embracing their own, often ethnically distinct, groups. Puerto Ricans, Chicanos, women, and homosexuals amongst others asserted their self-hood and made political demands. The American Indian Movement, which will surface again in a later chapter, was thrust into the spotlight in the late 1960s and became recognized as the principle force of the “Red Power” movement. Underlying the proliferation of identity groups that occurred (generally speaking, the same identities that became hallmarks of multiculturalism, which would include women and homosexuals) was the growing sentiment that these collective cultural identities were an intrinsic part of the authentic self, an inseparable part of personal identity. This concern for “authentic” identity will also reemerge as a major component of the politics of recognition.

Initially, these identity groups were founded firmly on political radicalism. The Black Power movement, the Red Power movement, and the litany of politically radical groups were the face of these growing cultural identities. The radical tone, however, proved to be less than sustainable. In a relatively short time, the majority of political organizations associated with the various identity groups had either seized to exist or were suffering from a lack of efficacy and failed to remain relevant. The consciousnesses created by these movements however, proved to be much more lasting. The concept of the ethnically conscious American, had sufficiently
penetrated the American mainstream and had begun affecting the way people thought.

The distinct consciousnesses associated with this cultural phenomenon could not be assimilated. Assimilation had historically depended on the relinquishing of old cultural identifications with the goal of becoming part of the melting pot. If Americans were opting to hyphenate their Americanness with such vigor, how could there any longer be hope for a single “American” identity? Having revealed the essential failure of assimilation, the proliferation of distinct identity groups would force a confrontation with traditional views of the American past, and even more to the core---what it means to be an American. Once again, the desire to develop policies that allowed for and embraced cultural difference that had fueled the cultural pluralists was reemerging. This time however, it would not be relegated to an historical footnote and kept out of the mainstream; this time, under the auspices of multiculturalism, it would come to define the mainstream.

As the American identity was fragmented into diverse cultural enclaves it became increasingly difficult to speak confidently about a melting pot; people were unwilling to surrender to singularity. This refusal turned into a demand to be recognized. The demand for recognition became a driving force in the multicultural turn in America. In our application of multiculturalism, as a far reaching cultural phenomenon (as opposed to just a political or education philosophy alone), recognition takes a central position. Recognition, in a broad sense, can be easily understood as a willingness to accept the value inherent to all cultures. Charles Taylor, in his 1992 essay “The Politics of Recognition,” carefully outlines the philosophical assumptions recognition is rooted in. These assumptions, in the eyes of Taylor, work together to justify the application of recognition politics.

The assumption that must first be articulated in order to express the validity of
recognition is a realization that all political thought in the United States has to be framed in terms of universalism in order to be granted any value. America has, from its dawn, been a deviation from societies that formally award honor (e.g. nobility) and instead claimed to bestow dignity on all citizens. Taylor gives voice to his claim, insisting “With the move from honor to dignity has come a politics of universalism, emphasizing the equal dignity of all citizens, and the content of this politics has been the equalization of rights and entitlements. What is to be avoided at all costs is the existence of “first class” and “second-class” citizens.”

Obviously, it can be argued that reality has not always lived up to this ideal, but the fact remains that universalism is always present as a sentiment. Nathan Glazer in, We Are All Multiculturalists Now, echoes, although to a different end, Taylor’s sentiment when he argues “...our founding documents are cast in general terms, appealing to universal principles.”

Glazer admits that the effort to live up to this universalism has been ongoing and not without failure, but insists upon the constant rhetorical presence of the ideal.

A second factor in the growth in relevance of recognition is the aforementioned proliferation of the idea of the authentic identity. The understanding that people are intrinsically tied to or are inseparable from their cultural identities becomes a point of great significance in the politics of recognition. The importance of identity is related to another previously mentioned factor: the realization that society can affect or degrade individuals psychologically. If Americans are increasingly affirming their culture as a major determining factor in their identity, then it can be argued that non-recognition, on the part of the dominant culture, is negatively affecting this identity. Taylor articulates this argument stating “[Recognition’s] refusal can inflict damage on those who are denied it,” and then further adding, “The projection of an inferior or...

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16 Nathan Glazer, We are all Multiculturalists Now. 157.
demeaning image on another can actually distort and oppress, to the extent that the image is internalized.”

By refusing to recognize the value of a group, individuals in that group are, as a consequence, also denied an affirmation of their value. Similarly, unjustly held negative views of a group could also inflict damage on the individual. Just as simple non-recognition of cultural value could be negatively internalized, stereotypical and racist understandings of groups impeded recognition and could also be internalized.

Beyond the potential damage non-recognition can inflict on minority identities, its refusal presents us with, perhaps, far greater implications. Opponents of recognition argue that it is, in fact, a violation of universalism because it emphasizes cultural distinction amongst citizens. This, as Taylor calls it, “difference blind” version of liberalism asserts that recognition, and by extension multiculturalism as a whole, are enemies of equality. Proponents of multiculturalism however, point to the damage to identity doled out by non-recognition. If certain portions of the citizenry are damaged, as multiculturalists argue, by the refusal to practice recognition, they are relegated to a lesser status than cultures that are recognized. This status deprivation is a violation of universalism because it succeeds in creating second-class citizens. This is essentially the same logic of universalism that was applied to justify social programs that were aimed at rescuing people from the systemic traps of poverty which also seemed to create second class citizens.

While Taylor’s essay also concerns itself to a great extent with other issues associated with recognition, like the validity of cultural preservation as a legislative goal, it is his articulation of the concept’s social component that is of most relevance here. The application of recognition, as it was explained in the preceding paragraphs, is paramount. Under this policy of recognition lies an important assumption, or as Taylor carefully refers to it, a “presumption.” This presumption (which is phrased as such because, in Taylor’s eyes, it needs to be justified

through study in order to be elevated above the level of condescending patronization) is that all cultures possess value. Such a presumption, to Taylor is rooted in the following logical assumption:

But merely on a human level, one could argue that it is reasonable to suppose that cultures that have provided the horizon of meaning for large numbers of human beings, of diverse characters and temperaments, over a long period of time—that have, in other words, articulated their sense of the good, the holy, the admirable—are almost certain to have something that deserves our admiration and respect, even if it is accompanied by much that we have to abhor and reject. Perhaps one could put it another way: it would take a supreme arrogance to discount this possibility \textit{a priori}.\textsuperscript{18}

To Taylor then, it is only reasonable to assume that all cultures possess value, since they have worked to provide meaning for such large numbers of people over long periods of time.

The other great implication of multiculturalism is the breakdown of a singular American historical narrative. This phenomenon is, in large part, a product of multiculturalism’s devotion to the politics of recognition. As scholar Daniel T. Rodgers puts it, the history education of the late 1980s and 1990s had become defined not by a single, but by a plurality of perspectives, resulting in a disaggregation of History into histories.\textsuperscript{19} This shift was aided by a number of factors. First, it was part of a larger deterioration of traditional America that had been brewing, especially since the 1960s, in American society. But this breakdown’s connection to the growth of identity politics and the resulting multiculturalism cannot be understated. As people consciously tried to live up to the demands of recognition it seemed unfair to ignore non-European contributions to history. Similarly, non-Europeans were, themselves, demanding a more prominent role in the history of both their country and the word. White Europeans were no longer the sole protagonist in the American narrative. The contributions of non-whites could not, in good conscience, be ignored argued multiculturalists.

More than just inclusion however, a change in perspective was necessary. Taking as an example Native Americans, the need for an altered perspective, or perhaps voice, becomes clear. Native Americans had always been a part of the narrative. Their story, however, had essentially been subordinate the European narrative because it was told from a European, or white perspective. This was not peculiar to Native Americans. African Americans, Mexicans, Chinese, and a litany of other culture groups, had all been left out, or misrepresented in the accepted American narrative. It is this disaggregation of history into histories that is most readily reflected in the larger public and its ties to multiculturalism are undeniable. The recognition of a need to reevaluate historical conventions and heroes and redirect historical emphasis was overwhelmingly apparent in the public by the 1990s.

All of the protest and intellectual formulations that surrounded multiculturalism, however, would be, to us, without relevance if there had been no marked effect on the general public. This however, is not the case; it must be conceded that multiculturalism fostered an overwhelming level of reaction, but as the ideological smoke cleared, the nature of American society had undoubtedly changed. Multiculturalism had changed the way Americans dealt with cultural difference. No longer was it acceptable to promote a vision of the American past or present that was dominated by singularity; the “melting pot” had been willingly replaced by the “salad bowl”. Obviously, the success or the genuineness of the effort can be debated upon, but the change in the norms of acceptability is much less debatable.

A 1994 New York Times article entitled “School Board Will Recognize Other Cultures, but as Inferior,” seems a strange piece of evidence to demonstrate the allegedly huge effect multiculturalism produced in American life, but strange as it may be, it certainly succeeds in doing so. The article’s value in this regard, can be found on more than one level. The article
highlights an effort by the Lake County School Board to combat a 1991 Florida state mandate that public schools teach about other cultures. According to the New York Times article, the law insists that curricula help students “eliminate personal and national ethnocentrism so that they understand that a specific culture is not intrinsically superior or inferior to another.”\footnote{New York Times Regional Newspapers, "School Board Will Recognize Other Cultures, but as Inferior." New York Times (1923-Current file), May 13, 1994.} In the first place, the subject of the article is a conservative reaction against what is, essentially a multicultural educational mandate. That this reaction is worthy of recognition in the first place, as both Todd Gitlin and Nathan Glazer agree, is itself a demonstration of the growing multicultural consciousness in American culture.\footnote{Nathan Glazer, We Are All Multiculturalists now. 3-4. Todd Gitlin, The Twilight of Common Dreams. 41.}

Perhaps even more striking than the fact that the original multicultural law was passed or that reaction against it was deemed newsworthy is the reaction against the reaction from within Lake County. Lake County, as both Nathan Glazer and the New York Times article point out, is a rural, inland county and not, as Glazer puts it, a cosmopolitan county. With this demographic reality in mind, it becomes even more noteworthy that both teachers and voters reacted so harshly to the new, non-multicultural policy. According to a follow up on the original article a number of teachers expressed concern with the new curriculum, and a few months after the original decision to modify the curriculum, voters elected new board members that had pledged to repeal it. The fact that this rural county had demonstrated any, let alone a voting majority’s worth of, opposition to a seemingly traditional education policy is certainly revealing. In his analysis of the situation, Glazer posits that it was perhaps an unwillingness on the part of the voters to become an “emblem of backwardness,” that had fueled the reaction.\footnote{Nathan Glazer, We Are All Multiculturalists now. 3.} Even if he is correct, and their opposition was somewhat disingenuous, their reaction is still a demonstration
of the changing expectations produced by multiculturalism. To refuse multiculturalism, is to embrace backwardness.

The situation in Lake County Florida was not a peculiar one. In the early nineties, concerns about multiculturalism in education were abundant. In cities like New York and Oakland heated debates about social studies curricula raged. Voices on the left called for multicultural consideration in curricula and were increasingly appeased. In 1987 the California officials established a multicultural standard that text book publishers would have to meet in order to be considered for a contract with the state. The only publisher that was willing to meet the standard in the short period of time required was Houghton Mifflin. The project was overseen by Gary Nash, a noted multiculturalist and historian who was well acquainted with the task of revising traditional American history.\(^{23}\) The new textbooks that were to make their way into California public schools were truly a milestone. Gitlin outlines the multicultural achievements in a seventh grade world history book: “the seventh grade world history volume included fifty-three pages on sub-Saharan Africa (10.6 percent of the entire narrative), Fifty-six pages on Islam (11.2 percent), thirty pages on China (6.0 percent), and thirty four pages on Japan (6.8 percent),” and then adding for comparison “where a previously adopted world history text had devoted only one of its forty chapters to African history and ancient American Indian cultures combined, one-eighth of the seventh grade book was devoted to the Indians, or Native Americans, alone.”\(^{24}\) The new series had gone to great lengths to ensure that all cultures were appropriately and substantially represented.

The California history text book series was a major shift in the state’s educational emphasis, and not surprisingly, the adoption of the text book series was shrouded in controversy.

What is surprising, however, is that the controversy (which was specific to the Oakland School Board where African Americans students represent the majority) came almost entirely from the left. It was not conservatives, outraged by the challenges to a European dominated historical narrative that appeared in droves to voice criticism of the series; it was voices from identity groups on the left, who felt that, even still, the books had failed to fairly represent their cultures. The merits of the criticism are of little importance to my purpose, but their existence alone is telling. The multicultural expectations of the public had developed so quickly and so consciously, that even a landmark shift in elementary history books towards a multicultural ideal, was still perceived as a failure to a large portion of the public.

The multicultural sentiment had, in a very short time become an unavoidable presence in the popular consciousness. While it would be difficult to effectively gauge the degree to which the general public actually embraced the ideology of multiculturalism, its reshaping of the expectations and norms of behavior with respect to inter-cultural relations was apparent. In 1893 The World’s Columbian Exposition in Chicago was, essentially, a massive celebration of the 400th anniversary of Columbus’ “discovery” of the “New World.” The undertaking required the construction of dozens of buildings. It lasted for six months and attracted millions of visitors. In 1992 however, a much different circumstance surrounded this anniversary. There was no celebration that attracted millions from around the country and the world. Indigenous peoples protested celebration of the occasion, and for the most part, it passed with little fan fare. Many even saw the occasion as an opportunity to express the Native American perspective on the event. The National Council of Churches of Christ in the U.S.A in a statement to their members said of the holiday that “we are called to review our full history, reflect upon it,” and recognize that, “What represented newness of freedom, hope and opportunity for some was the occasion
for oppression, degradation and genocide for others.”  
By the early 1990s Columbus Day no longer represented the triumph of western culture in the New World alone. Multiculturalism had come to demand that the event also recognize the historical reality for the indigenous peoples of the New World as well.

Nathan Glazer, who, as far as multiculturalism goes, fell on the conservative side, ruefully concedes in the title to his 1998 book, *We Are All Multiculturalists Now*. Glazer is certainly not endorsing the movement or its ideals, but is acknowledging the fact that history has demanded that multiculturalism become a dominant force in American life, or as he is primarily concerned, in American education. Glazer argues that a failure to successfully integrate, specifically African Americans, with any practicality had made emphasizing multiculturalism an unavoidable step. In his final chapter, Glazer sadly articulates this reality stating, “It seems we must pass through a period in which we recognize difference, celebrate difference, we turn the spotlight on the inadequacies in the integration of our minorities in our past and present, and we raise up for special consideration the achievements of our minorities and their putative ancestors.”

Glazer recognizes, while not necessarily agreeing with its ideology, that multiculturalism had affected a change in society’s norms. These new norms regulating social acceptability would not be confined to any area of American life; they would become part of day-to-day existence. Television, the entertainment medium most readily available to the masses in the early 1990s, was to become one of many voices for this social shift. As peoples’ expectations and understandings of cultural relations changed, the images brought into their homes would also inevitably be affected.

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26 Nathan Glazer, *We Are All Multiculturalists Now*. 159.
The new consciousness that multiculturalism had induced meant that the portrayal of Native Americans and their issues would inevitably be subject to reevaluation. Simple portrayals of Native Americans that relied on stereotypical understandings were becoming much less acceptable to a multicultural viewing public. Such clichéd applications of the Hollywood Indian were more likely to be received as backward or even racist, and such a sentiment would be directed at writers, producers, and perhaps even the networks hosting the shows. As we saw in the case in Lake County, Florida, avoiding such designations can be a powerful motivator. But beyond just avoiding backwardness, it is no doubt the case that many people in the television industry genuinely saw value in transmitting a more accepting and multicultural image. In comparison to previous decades, the 90s and 2000s featured very few Native American characters and sub-plots, but the few characters that were given life on the small screen were often created in an image that was undeniably distinct from their predecessors.

Even the dearth of characters may be a product of multiculturalism. In previous decades using Native American characters and imagery was simple. There was no obligation to avoid devaluing the culture or humanity of Native peoples. Writers could give quick meaning to Indian Characters and their actions by depending on stereotypes that had been crafted since the earliest days of European-Indian relations. An ominous silhouette of feathered horseman on the top of a hill meant imminent danger for a wagon train; no contextualization for the inevitable attack was necessary. Indians could quickly enter the action of a plot, affect it, and just as quickly fade away without further mention. By the late 20th century however, this avenue was no longer so
open; the task of applying Native Americans or their culture had now become complicated.

In this chapter, the goal will be to demonstrate the ways in which writers and producers coped with the challenges of presenting Native Americans in a multicultural age. In many instances, television shows, armed with a multicultural ambition, take Native issues head on. Audiences were increasingly being presented with an image of Native Americans that was consciously constructed in order to challenge the conventions that had dominated popular culture for centuries. In other cases, the realities created by multiculturalism are simply inherent in the presentation of Native characters and not necessarily part of any explicit multicultural goal. While the success or failure of these ambitions is certainly debatable, the fact that multicultural ideals often undergirded their efforts is subject to much less controversy. Multiculturalism had become part of the general consciousness; it had dictated that cultural value could not be singularly restricted. Even when television producers did fail to do justice to Native Americans, often times magnificently so, their failures were in many cases misguided attempts to adhere to multicultural ideals.

The products of multiculturalism’s effect on Native American presentation on television take a number of forms. In the first sense, multiculturalism had placed an emphasis on the importance of cultural heritage. With this ideal in mind, the importance of maintaining and respecting one’s cultural heritage, in this case, that of Native American characters, is often stressed. This emphasis is not limited to the personal, however; a respect for the cultural values in a broad sense, is also emphasized, since only a small portion of the viewing public is actually Native American. Demonstrating the value of Native American culture and articulating the importance of that culture to Indians themselves, therefore, is often a point of focus for shows that are making use of American Indian characters.
The second way that multiculturalism branded television episodes that dealt with Native Americans is in the presentation of history. As I tried to make clear in the previous chapter, multiculturalism had opened up an historical dialogue; it demanded that the singular historical narrative of America be reevaluated and given diverse perspectives. This goal was not limited to public school history texts. In the multicultural age, Native American characters on television became a distinct voice for American history. Television shows that dealt with natives were often actively engaged in giving an Indian perspective on the American experience. The conquest of the west and the subjugation of an entire race of people was no longer glossed over with ease; in a multicultural age, the voice of the Indian in American history was not to be ignored.

The final way that multiculturalism affected the American Indian on television is the attempt by producers to disrupt the stereotypes that have plagued Native Americans for centuries, and especially since the advent of the moving picture. Stereotypes rely on unsophisticated understandings of a specific group. Consequently they present members of that group in a way that is predetermined and deprives characters of humanity. From the articulation of multiculturalism in the previous chapter, this deprivation of humanity is understood to produce negative psychological effects in those being portrayed by such stereotypes. To many television producers, undermining the stereotypical Native American seemed a righteous goal and, therefore, they employed characters whom they hoped would succeed in this task. Again, the success of such an ambition, in this area especially, is highly debatable, but it is clear that a multicultural consciousness is often at play, despite many shortcomings.

Over multiple seasons and through spin-offs and made-for-TV movies, the characters on
the series *Saved by the Bell* were welcomed into the living rooms of millions each Saturday morning. The distinct personalities and teen hi-jinx that explained the show’s allure to its audience were almost always fused with a serious-minded message. An episode from the show’s second season, which aired in 1990, represents a strong source for evaluating the effects multiculturalism had on Native Americans in television. The episode, entitled “Running Zack,” is focused on pushing a multicultural message to the audience. With this ambition, the writers place Native Americans at the plot’s center, and through a character referred to on the show as “Chief Henry” they engage in their task.

The episode’s plot is centered on a “family tree” project that requires students to give an oral presentation on their family’s ancestral roots. After coming across a picture of an American Indian and remembering having heard stories about a “distant Indian relative,” the character Zack, with the assistance of the show’s resident clown, Screech, nonchalantly decides to present on his Native American ancestry. Zack’s initial presentation works to indicate what the writers see as an unsophisticated and stereotypical understanding of the American Indian. At the onset of the presentation, Screech, Zack’s Indian model, assumes a very stiff, serious pose as Zack asserts, “I come from a long line of fierce warriors and great hunters.” After using lip stick to apply war paint to Screech, he elaborates further stating, “They roamed the wide open planes in search of their daily food.” Zack then hands Screech a novelty tomahawk, which is used to split an apple. At this point, an obviously disapproving teacher, Mrs. Wentworth, jumps in: “Whoah Tonto. Me gotta question, what was the name of your tribe?” Mrs. Wentworth recognizes that Zack’s understanding of the American Indian comes, at least to some degree, from stereotyped images in pop-culture and this is made clear by her reference to the *Lone Ranger*. She also uses the stereotypical “plain speak” of Native Americans to poke fun at Zack’s poor presentation. Her
interest in a tribal specificity is aimed at highlighting the fact that Zack’s presentation paid no attention to the fact that a single image of an American Indian is impossible since there are a vast number of culturally and geographically unique native peoples. Ultimately, Zack was projecting an image of Native Americans that he had gleamed from popular culture onto his purported Indian ancestors which, as he accidentally revealed, he knew nothing about.

Mrs. Wentworth refers Zack to a friend, “Chief Henry,” who can help him form a more sophisticated understanding of his Indian heritage. This sets the stage for the writers to demonstrate to the audience an alternate view of a Native American. In the following scene Zack encounters an old man with long hair, wearing a T-Shirt, jeans, a motorcycle vest and an LA Dodgers baseball cap, hardly the image demonstrated by Screech in the previous scene. The following exchange takes place:

Chief Henry: Oh, [You’re] the kid who thinks he’s part Indian. Hey, with that blonde hair, you must be from some Malibu surfing tribe. Hang ten dude.
Zack: You’re supposed to be an Indian, why you wearin’ a Dodger hat?
Chief Henry: Well, because a Raider helmet’s too hot.

Immediately, a jocular tone is set by Chief Henry, a tone noticeably different from Screech’s serious pose and plain speak in the previous scene. Additionally, his manor of dress, especially the Dodger cap, is a glaring departure from the image achieved by the lip-stick painted warrior from Zack’s presentation. Later in the same scene, after finding a bead work headband amongst his things, Zack asks Chief Henry if he learned to weave on the reservation. Without flinching, Chief Henry comically responds that he learned the craft at UCLA, adding further that they have a “great arts and crafts department there.” This scene also succeeds in removing the Native American from the historical context that they are so often relegated to in popular culture. Chief Henry, as is later made clear, is an authentic Indian with a seemingly strong knowledge of his culture. He is also a modern human being, one who attended a major university and likes
professional sports. The writers of *Saved by the Bell* have created a character who is conscious and proud of his Native American heritage, but who is also distinctly “American.”

As the episode progresses, Chief Henry educates Zack and, as the writers hope, the audience, about his Native American heritage. It turns out that Zack, according the Chief Henry, is a descendant of the Nez Perce and Chief Henry tells him about the famous Chief Joseph of the Nez Perce. In his final presentation Zack takes the task much more seriously. He spends the majority of his presentation telling a history of the Nez Perce tribe and Chief Joseph. This history is one that takes the perspective of the Indian. Zack says “My people were forced off their land so settlers could mine for gold.” His presentation is essentially a history lesson for the viewer. With multicultural goals in mind, the writers were presenting a history that placed emphasis on Native Americans, and gave voice to a major figure in that historical narrative, Chief Joseph.

The Episode “Running Zack” encompasses each of the three areas of multiculturalism’s effect. Both the characters of Chief Henry and, eventually, Zack find the value and importance of being aware and proud of their heritage. The writers demonstrated the stereotypical understanding of Native Americans, and then, with the character of Chief Henry, attempted to dismantle such stereotypes. Finally, the episode attempts to give a native perspective to American history. *Saved by the Bell* however, is a TV show aimed at children, and as such, it is blatant in its messages, and conscious in its educational ambitions. The show’s goals are direct and transparent. They are also distinctly educational and “preachy.” In shows that aren’t necessarily pushing a particular moral so fervently, the multicultural voice, although definitely present, is much quieter.

A episode from the fourth season of HBO’s *the Sopranos*, originally aired in 2002, offers
another source in evaluating the ways in which multiculturalism affected the portrayal of Native Americans on television. The action of the episode, entitled “Christopher,” is driven, on the surface, by a Native American protest of the Columbus Day parade in Newark, New Jersey. The members of the Soprano crew are outraged by the protests, viewing them as an assault on their Italian heritage. They spend the remainder of the episode engaged in attempts to silence the protesters. Throughout the episode however, an almost comical series of dialogue continues between various characters, each representing different cultural groups, over whose “people” had, historically, suffered the most. The episode also works as a platform for a Native American view of history. On a number of circumstances, the writers have woven into the dialogue descriptions of Christopher Columbus that come from a Native American perspective. At one point, fictional Professor of Anthropology at Rutgers University, Del Redclay, is seen on a political talk show describing Colombus as a “genocidal colonial general.” Later in the episode Tony Soprano’s son, AJ, is reading from Howard Zinn’s A People’s History of the United States. Outraged by AJ’s subsequent characterization of Columbus as a slave trader, Carmella, his mother, relays her indignant disbelief of the situation to Tony stating, “His history teacher, Mr. Kushman, is teaching your son that if Columbus was alive today, he would go on trial for crimes against humanity, like Milosevic.” This is not exactly a glowing account of an American hero.

The Native American view of history in the Sopranos, is not necessarily geared at educating the viewer as it was in Saved by the Bell, however. The divergent perspectives on history found in the Sopranos are basically contextual; it is an effort to demonstrate the sources of the conflict with respect to the Native Americans’ Columbus Day protests. Even in this role however, multiculturalism is at the root. The show’s writers were conscious of the change in the way many people were viewing history as a result of multiculturalism. This is evidenced by the
fact that AJ, a young boy still in school, was being given a multicultural education and was having a hard time seeing Columbus as the hero his parents had known. When Tony reaches out to a corrupt Newark assemblyman about silencing the protests, the usually complicit conspirator refuses, pointing out that with Native Americans, its “very sensitive stuff.” The assemblyman makes it clear that the view that the Native Americans are expressing with their protest, is not one that is entirely offensive to a large number of people. The episode, however, does seem to espouse itself to the multicultural view of Native American history. Its main characters, who are hardly painted as intellectually sophisticated (a fact that is inescapably obvious to regular viewers), are the only voice in opposition to Native Americans, and their views come across, especially to an audience with a multicultural consciousness, as unsophisticated and crude.

An episode of the television series the West Wing, however, is even more explicit in its history lesson than the Sopranos. “The Indians in the Lobby,” a 2001 episode from the show’s third season, features a subplot that deals directly with Native American issues. The episode takes place the day before Thanksgiving, and as in the Sopranos, the writers make use of an American national holiday whose history is intimately tied to Native Americans. The episode features two Native Americans, Maggi and Jack Lonefeather, of the Munsee-Stockbridge people, who are refusing to leave the Whitehouse lobby until they are granted a meeting to discuss legal issues pertaining to their tribe. The interaction between the two Indians and CJ, the white house press secretary who is given the job of making the problem “go away,” becomes a platform for the dissemination of Native American history. Jack Lonefeather gives the following narrative of his tribe’s history to CJ, and in turn the viewing audience:

Jack Lonefeather: We’re Stockbridge-Munsee Indians...When we were moved to Wisconsin, we signed the Treaty of 1856. In return the government was supposed to protect our reservations, provide education and health care, and we would still be a sovereign nation, but then the Dawes Act came.
CJ: You were forced to sell the land?
Jack Lonefether: We went from 46,000 acres of tribal land to 11,000. The Dawes Act was also supposed to civilize us. Henry Dawes said to be civilized we must cultivate the land, wear civilized clothes, drive Studebaker wagons, and drink whiskey.

In this short dialogue the show’s writers have outlined a history which is tribally specific in its presentation, but also an accurate representation of general U.S. Policy towards Native Americans in the nineteenth century. This exchange is important within the context of the episode, in that it forces CJ, to acknowledge the continued government neglect that the pair of Native Americans outline, and to sympathize with them and make sure they are granted the meeting that they are asking for. The writers have also used the Native American subplot to reveal to the audience a rarely heard Native American narrative.

Additionally, the reference to Henry Dawes’ suggestion that the Indians become “civilized” is also meant to have meaning for a multicultural audience. Lonefeather’s recitation of Dawe’s claim underscored that the goal was, essentially, to make Indians over in the image of whites. An audience with a multicultural consciousness understands why this is wrong: it requires a Native American’s denial of the distinctness and importance of their Indian culture. Heeding Dawes’ advice would obviously, so it seems to an audience in the late 20th century, be damaging---especially, as Maggi points out in the scene, the advice about whiskey.

The establishment of a multicultural version of history took center stage in the 2005 TNT mini-series Into the West. The six-episode, twelve-plus hour event, was, at its heart, a seventy year history of the American west. Starting in 1820 and spanning until 1890, the story is represented in a dual, but intertwining narrative. The first narrative is that of the Wheeler family, narrated by Jacob Wheeler, who frame the white history of westward expansion. The other narrative, voiced by Loved by the Buffalo, is the story of a particular band of Lakota Indians.
The two narratives become intimately weaved together while still maintaining their individuality. The particular historical narrative that is outlined is very much in line with multicultural ideals. It is a history of westward expansion that ignores no participant. African Americans, Irish, and the Chinese are all given recognition for their various roles in the development of the American west. It is however the history of Native Americans that receives the greatest focus.

While the actions of “traditional Americans” are the driving force behind the plot’s progression, a narrative of Native American history is just as central. The mini-series touches on the major events of Native American history, both the good and the bad, of most of the 19th century. The series is not perfect, and at times its presentation of Native characters is painfully one-dimensional, but throughout the entire twelve hours, the goal of giving an Indian perspective on westward expansion is apparent. In the series’ fourth episode the plot introduces the audience to such Native American heroes as Black Kettle, Red Cloud, Crazy Horse and the American officers that served as their rivals were typically subject to villainous characterizations. While the reality of such one dimensional depictions is debatable, the point is that the history being presented was coming from the Indians’ perspective.

Multicultural ideals, consistent with the importance of cultural identity, were also prevalent throughout the series. Jacob Wheeler, during his exploration of the West, meets and marries Thunder Heart Woman, a Lakota. Right before he is separated from his wife and three children, Wheeler says to his daughter: “Young Margaret Light Shines, you mind your mother. And never forget who you are. You’re one part Lakota, and one part Virginia.” Jacob Wheeler, created to be received as a hero by modern audiences, implores his daughter not to forget how important her Lakota culture is, even as she is living in white society.

Later, in the fifth installment to the series, the Indian and white narratives collide again
when Robert Wheeler, Jacob’s nephew who is working in the Carlisle School (an actual school that was meant to Americanize native children), forms a friendship with one of the students named George Voices That Carry. George is proving to be an uncooperative student and is caught encouraging other children to resist attempts at assimilation. While the school’s tough and self-assured master, Richard Henry Pratt (the school’s real life founder), is outraged by George’s behavior, he agrees to allow Robert Wheeler take the reins in dealing with George. Wheeler, who like his Uncle Jacob, is meant to be viewed as a hero by modern audiences, has the following talk with George:

**Robert:** I’m a simple man, but I know this: Knowledge is power. And if you don’t study our ways, how will your great-grandchildren know the meaning of your holy wheel? How will they know of your history? Of your great Victories?

**George:** We tell these things.

**Robert:** That’s not enough, George. See, ‘cause what we call history is written by those who win the battles. So you must make your voice heard. Your must preserve your culture. You must write it down, in English. Not for Pratt, but for your children and their children.

Robert Wheeler is intended to be a voice of wisdom amongst other characters in the school. He tells George how important it is to “preserve” his culture and his advice makes perfect sense to a multicultural audience who, unlike the majority of non-Indians at Carlisle, understand there to be value in that culture.

Two years before *Into the West* hit audiences, another made-for-TV mini-series (also Lakota centered) had made its way to the small screen. The two-part event, entitled *Dreamkeeper*, went to great lengths to both demonstrate the culture of Native Americans and highlight the importance of preserving it for its people. The mini-series follows Pete Chasing Horse and his grandson, Shane, as they make their way to the All Nations Pow Wow in New Mexico. The story, at its core, is a coming of age tale focused on Shane. Pete Chasing Horse, a story teller, uses Indian stories and myths (though the tribal focus of the stories is not limited to
the Plains tribes) to instill in his grandson the importance of his heritage, while also helping him deal with the internal problems Shane is dealing with. Throughout the early part of the story, Shane makes it abundantly clear that he has no interest in taking the journey with his grandfather, warning in one instance “It’s gonna be the trail of tears.” The plot taking place in the present day is supplemented by the stories that Pete tells Shane during their journey. Over the course of their travels, Shane begins to develop a respect for his grandfather, and realizes the value of the lessons in his grandfather’s stories. When Pete Chasing Horse dies right before their arrival, Shane takes on the task of passing the stories along. His acceptance of this role demonstrates a change in his character from the unsure and angry teenager he was at the start. He finds meaning and power in the tales of his people’s past, and the stories themselves serve as a source of cultural education for him as well as the audience.

The intention of the series to demonstrate the value of Native American culture is apparent enough, but a 2003 New York Times article about the series, entitled “Ancient Myths; Made in America” (December 28), reveals the extent to which the show’s producers were focused on such a goal. According to the article, 2,500 Native Americans were involved in the production of the series. Executive producer, Robert Halmi, and writer John Fusco, claimed to have spent two years living and interviewing elders and storytellers on the Pine Ridge reservation in South Dakota. Halami even boasts that he kept fifteen elder advisors, from a variety of tribes, on staff during the production. In describing his excitement about the project to the New York Times, Halmi said “It’s so important that young Indians today know that they have a great culture.” Dreamkeeper was, from its inception, an effort to assign, or perhaps expose the value of Native American culture to the viewer. With this task in mind, it would inevitably affect the ways in which the Native American characters were presented.
The painstaking efforts of those involved in the production of *Dreamkeeper* also led to an attempt to undermine Native American stereotypes. The nature of the story is immediately helpful in this task. By fusing the past, represented in the Pete Chasing Horse’s stories, with the modern world of Native American life, audiences are given a view strikingly different than they are used to. The opening scene, on the Pine Ridge reservation, offers a picture of the everyday life of a living, breathing group of people who are regularly confined in popular culture to historical roles, or in roles dealing specifically with their history. In lieu of tepees and wigwams, there are houses and trailers; instead of horses, there are pickup trucks and muscle cars. The story was very much about a modern teen-ager engaged in a personal struggle that is not necessarily unique to any specific group of people. Shane wrestles with such universal issues as trying to date a girl whose father does not like him, coping with the effects of having an alcoholic father who abandoned his family, all the while growing up as an Indian on a reservation.

The multi-dimensional nature of the characters allows viewers to relate to them as humans, and not necessarily simply good or bad, the nomenclature so typically used to assess Native American characters. While Pete Chasing Horse is clearly meant to be seen as a wise elder, or perhaps even a spiritual advisor in the story, his role as such is not established through any magical connection to the earth. This distinction is made early in the series when Pete says to Shane, “It’s gonna rain.” Shane responds sarcastically:

**Shane:** Ha, what? The Spirits tell you that?
**Pete:** No, the bullet I got in my hip in France tells me that. Hurts like hell when It’s gonna rain.

Pete Chasing Horse’s response immediately removes all risk that the audience might simply view his character as a magical Indian. He is not guided, unceasingly, by a connection to nature that is often assigned to “wise” Indian characters. He is a real person, capable of making rational
judgments about the world around him. In addition to setting him apart from other stereotypes, the piece of dialogue also reveals to viewers that Pete had served America in World War Two, a contribution that they might, in turn, attribute to some of his real-life Native American counterparts as well.

The late 20\textsuperscript{th} century saw very few recurring Native American characters on television. One of the few series to feature recurring characters was the CBS show \textit{Northern Exposure}, which aired from 1990 to 1995. Over six seasons, viewers were introduced to a multitude of Native Characters who inhabit the show’s fictional town of Cicely, Alaska. The show’s protagonist, a yuppie New York doctor named Joel Fleischman, is forced to work off his medical school loans, which were paid for by the state of Alaska, by working in the small town of Cicely. Dr. Fleischman’s comical and at times uncomfortable attempts to cope with his alien surroundings are the show’s central conflict, especially early in the series.

From the first episode, the show features two notable Native American characters that remain in the series throughout its run. These characters are unmistakably Indians, but are also just as obviously not stereotypical. The audience, and Fleischman’s, first introduction to the Native character Ed immediately disrupts any notions viewers might typically have about such a character. In Ed’s opening scene he goes on a minute-long rant that reveals an encyclopedic knowledge about American pop culture, and during which he Moves seamlessly from Rap, to “R&B classic,” Richard Berry, to the television series \textit{St. Elsewhere}. As the series progresses Ed continues to demonstrate his affinity for popular culture. Ed, it turns out, is an aspiring film maker, and in an episode from the first season, as he is trying to write a screenplay, he imagines the town’s people as character from \textit{Indiana Jones}. In an episode later in the series \textit{Citizen Kane} helps Ed to cope with a personal struggle. Not unlike \textit{Dreamkeeper}’s protagonist, Shane, Ed is
very much a normal teenager who happens to be a Native American.

The show’s other major Native American character, Marilyn, works as the receptionist in Fleischman’s office. Marilyn, like Ed, and even to a greater extent, is a character who is unquestionably Native American, but still lives rather conventionally in a modern world. Her character at times fits comfortably into a viewer’s expectations of a Native American. She speaks in short and pointed phrases, and is often a source of wisdom for other characters in the show, especially Fleischman. These potential stereotypical traits, like curing the town of a flu-like epidemic with a special mud bath, are, however balanced out by other, non-stereotypical specificities. Marilyn’s personality is not static, and in an episode from the show’s third season titled “Get Real,” Marilyn falls in love with a “flying man” from a traveling circus that is in town. As Annette Taylor points out in her essay “Cultural Heritage in *Northern Exposure,*” Marilyn’s character is anything but one-dimensional, spanning the range of human emotion. Taylor asserts, “Although she is a woman of few words, Marilyn is not stoic like Tonto. Marilyn registers a range of emotions and attributes. She was noticeably angry when [a local businessman], during an early mayoral election, implied that all native people voted alike,” and later adds, “She can be warm and generous, impatient and calculating. She has outwitted both Fleischman and Maurice, but she has also charmed them.”

Even if Marilyn may possess some traits consistent with Native stereotypes, it is impossible to understand her through them. The audience cannot understand Marilyn as a stereotype. Her character is distinctly human.

*Northern Exposure* treated its Native American characters in way that prevented viewers from thinking in stereotypes. It gave them real problems and real emotions. The show allowed

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its Native American characters to maintain their cultural distinctness, but did not, as a consequence restrict them from participating in a modern American society. The show’s maintenance of their “Indianness” and the breaking of stereotypes are undoubtedly a consequence of the era’s multicultural consciousness. Taylor, offers the following evaluation of the show’s achievements:

*Northern Exposure* takes Native Americans seriously and views native culture as a viable and beneficial companion. It celebrates both the similarities and differences of all peoples and cultures and lauds the value of the culturally diverse community. Popular culture’s longtime schism between Indians and everyone else, between wilderness and civilization, between tradition and science is acknowledged, but dismissed.

As Taylor makes clear, the show’s writers have embraced multiculturalism’s “salad bowl” imagery. There is no mistaking the fact that Native Americans are a major and important part of Cicely’s community, and there is no mistaking that they are distinct from other cultures in the community. All the cultures exist with one another, and benefit from their interactions.

This mutually beneficial cultural exchange is fully evident in an episode, from 1990, entitled “Brains, Know-How, and Native Intelligence.” In the episode, Ed’s Uncle Anku, a traditional medicine man, is ill and showing troubling symptoms (blood in his urine). Throughout the early scenes, as he fails to convince Anku that modern medicine can offer him any help, it becomes clear to Dr. Fleischman that despite his apparent reluctance, many of the same values in Anku’s medical practice can be found in his own. The two doctors discuss the use of placebos, psychological tactics, and ways of offering comfort and clarity to their patients. The episode’s writers made sure to express that although Anku is definitely a *real* medicine-man, he is not an overly stereotypical one. When Anku, in confidence, reveals to Dr. Fleischman that he just has “a little prostate cancer,” Dr. Fleischman suspiciously asks him how he arrived at such a diagnosis. Anku cleverly responds “I had a dream. Then I read a couple of tea leaves.”

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before cracking a smile and explaining, “And I saw a specialist in Anchorage when I went to pick up the chicken. Got ya!” Anku is no stereotype. He understands the value of modern medicine, even if he decides not to accept its treatment.

Later in the episode, as Dr. Fleischman un成功fully tries to convince him to get help, Anku convinces his fellow doctor to partake in an Indian dance with him. The uptight Dr. Fleischman is hesitant and initially awkward, but eventually accepts the invitation. During the dance, Anku sneaks out and leaves, a now angry Fleischman, chanting and dancing in a circle by himself. Despite the resentment he harbors after being abandoned during his dance, Fleischman decides not to relent in his effort to help Anku. Unable to avoid the situation any longer, Anku finally says to the meddling Fleischman, “We all die,” adding:

Anku: I’ve been practicing medicine for almost fifty years. I’ve treated everything under the sun. Most of the time, people got better; sometimes not, but they always listened to me. They believed in me. I always treated them my way. I’d rather die than lose face with them.

Fleischman: What are you talking about? You’d rather die than lose face? Nobody would rather die. This is stupid; it’s nuts. Either you are crazy or you are a coward and we both know you aren’t crazy. It’s just pride Anku. It’s just stupid pride.

Affected by Fleischman’s evaluation of his behavior, Anku, in a later scene, finally agrees to receive treatment for his cancer, and adds, “Pride is a powerful narcotic, but it doesn’t do much for the auto-immune system.” Similarly, after reconciling with Maggi, the show’s female lead, following an episode long squabble, and appearing to abandon his resentment for the town of Cicely at large (for the duration of the episode anyway) Fleischman admits “If they taught [dancing] in medical school, we’d probably all be better doctors.” His dialogue reveals that, although he did not immediately recognize it, Anku had helped him to abandon his pride when he pressured him into dancing; Anku had explained to Fleischman earlier that one way he practices medicine is to “plant seeds” in people’s heads. Fleischman and Anku, two doctors
representing two very different cultures and approaches to healing, had each helped the other to grow as characters. The episode, as Taylor broadly argued of the series as a whole, places the two distinct cultures in a mutually beneficial relationship.

While Multiculturalism has produced an unmistakable change in the way Native Americans are presented on television, it would be a gross overstatement to infer that it had facilitated a complete transformation. To a noticeable extent, many of the same images of Native Americans that had dominated popular culture in the century, or even centuries, prior were still rearing their heads. These images had, after all, been crafted over generations and had immersed themselves firmly into popular consciousness. That such deep-rooted images would persist in some capacity, despite the world around them is no real surprise. Audiences, especially television and film audiences, have come to expect certain things of Native Americans. These expectations have proven difficult to shake completely, even for a number of the episodes and series that have already been mentioned. It is important to note however, that even in a discussion about the persistence of old stereotypes and imagery, the multicultural shake-up is sometimes felt.

The strict dichotomy between the noble savage and the blood-thirsty savage has remained relevant in many depictions of Native Americans through the present. With multicultural concerns in mind however, the blood-thirsty savage has been the recipient of a minor reconsideration. In many cases, when a blood-thirsty savage is applied to a storyline, it comes with a justification; there must be some sort of circumstantial impetus revealed that fuels what would otherwise be seen as savage violence. To an audience in a society harboring multicultural ambitions, overly-positive stereotypes are much more palatable than blatantly negative ones. Bearing this reality in mind, it seems that the Noble Savage has, generally,
become the preferred representative of Native American culture for television shows that adhere to the “good” “bad” dichotomy.

The CBS series *Dr. Quinn, Medicine Woman*, unique in that it was one of the few shows of the period to have recurring Native American characters, was, in effect a canvas for demonstrating the traditional presentations of Native American characters. The show followed the day to day life of its female protagonist, a New England educated female physician, who had moved west to the frontier of Colorado. The historical nature innate to the setting, made the presentation of Native American characters an almost unavoidable consequence. The character who comes to represent the show’s Native American presence is a Cheyenne Indian named Cloud Dancing.

Cloud Dancing is endowed, throughout his term as the show’s resident Native voice, with the characteristics of the Noble Savage. His persistently stoic and reserved nature is presented constantly, despite being equally subjected to constant tragedy. In an episode from the show’s first season, entitled “The Prisoner,” the viewer sees for one of the first times Cloud Dancing’s unbelievable capacity to maintain his noble reserve. After General Custer attacks the encampment of Black Kettle, a real life Cheyenne Chief, he takes a number of Indian captives alive, including Cloud Dancing. After insisting upon taking care of a wounded Cheyenne, Dr. Quinn is compelled to stop when General Custer points a gun at Dancing Cloud’s head and threatens to kill him unless she treats the Army soldiers first. With a man whom he just saw attack and kill an encampment of his fellow Cheyenne pointing a gun at his head, Cloud Dancing sits calmly, staring unemotionally at him. If there were any doubt to be had about Cloud Dancing’s noble demeanor, it is erased in a later scene in the episode.

After refusing to offer Custer any information about the whereabouts of certain
“renegade” Cheyenne who are carrying out attacks on settlers, the General marches Cloud Dancing in front of a firing squad. Byron Sully, the show’s male hero, who is a close friend of the Cheyenne and speaks their language, quietly beseeches the still reserved Indian to “tell them anything, lie to them.” Cloud Dancing, with almost no emotion responds “No. I see the truth. Goodbye, my friend,” and then calmly awaits his fate. The execution however, turned out to be a bluff. Custer had hoped to scare information out of Could Dancing, but against such an impossibly noble foe, Custer never stood a chance.

Cloud Dancing’s demeanor remains consistent throughout the entire series. He maintains an incomprehensible level of stoicism. Finding himself as a victim of an unwarranted Army attack and marched in front of a firing is only the beginning for Cloud Dancing. As S. Elizabeth Bird summarizes effectively “Cloud Dancing suffers the loss of an unborn child because of his wife’s malnutrition, the death of his adult son from saving [Dr. Quinn’s] life, and finally, the death of most of his village, including his wife, at the hands of white soldiers.” Despite all of the horrible circumstances with which his character is tortured over the course of the series, Cloud Dancing, without exception, maintains the impossible characteristics of the Noble Savage.

A connection between Cloud Dancing and James Fennimore Cooper’s Last of the Mohicans can also be drawn. Cloud Dancing seems to serve as a side-kick to the show’s male lead, Byron Sully. Like Cooper’s version of the American hero, Hawkeye, Sully is a character defined by his frontiersman nature, inability to fit comfortably with the values of his white contemporaries, and an abnormal level of interaction with, and knowledge of, the region’s native people. Sully seems most comfortable amongst the Cheyenne and speaks their language.

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Throughout the entire series, he maintains a relationship with Cloud Dancing that, excluding his relationship eventual wife, Dr. Quinn, is stronger than any other he has. Much like Hawkeye’s noble savage side-kick Chingachgook, Cloud Dancing is a rigidly noble character, who remains a constant and loyal companion to his white friend. The role of Cloud Dancing as a side-kick to Sully is especially pronounced in the beginning of one particular episode, Sully defeats Cloud Dancing in a tomahawk-throwing contest; the victory places Sully in a position of superiority over Cloud Dancing, even in an activity that is distinctly “Indian” in nature. In addition to his portrayal as a rigidly one-dimensional noble-savage, Cloud Dancing, as Byron Sully’s Indian side-kick, also embodies another, well-established, aspect of the Hollywood Indian.

In an obvious sense, as the most vocal and visible Indian character on the show, Cloud Dancing’s image is representative of the rest of his people simply as a consequence of his voice’s prominence. Beyond the individual representation of Cloud Dancing though, the Cheyenne people at large are represented in a similarly romantic fashion throughout the series. Bird insightfully points out, the Cheyenne in *Dr. Quinn Medicine Woman*, are generally treated as part of the aesthetic back drop of the show. As part of their role in such a capacity, their presentation is often overly romantic and receives a treatment similar to that of the Colorado frontier landscape. This tendency in the show, according to Bird, is part of a history of the romantic presentation of Native Americans, stating: “From early times, a convention has been to depict Indians in groups, as an aesthetic element in a picture or a story that is not theirs.” This claim is given a great deal of support by the show’s opening credit sequence. While it does key in on certain individual characters in the show, affording them close-ups, Native Americans are not presented in the same fashion. There is a single shot, revealing a number of Indians on

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horseback. They are not presented as individual people, worthy of close-ups, but instead are presented as a monolithic aspect of the frontier environment.

Although romantic images of the Noble Savage figure most prominently in *Dr. Quinn Medicine Woman*’s presentation of Native Americans, there is also a dependence on the image of the bloodthirsty Savage. This particular role is played by Cheyenne “dog-soldiers,” or, as they are also refereed to, renegades. Throughout the series, these renegade Cheyenne are treated as a completely separate entity than Cloud Dancing and his fellows. The role of the renegade Cheyenne is in direct opposition to the noble image presented by Cloud Dancing. Speaking of the atrocities of the “dog soldiers” in an early episode, Sully says, “The ones who kill are renegades, [Black Kettle] has no control over them.” Their actions, almost always characterized by brutality, are presented as something completely deviant from the other Native Americans in the series. Their behavior is, as Sully makes clear, not condoned or capable of being controlled by the other, righteous Indians.

In the previously described episode with General Custer, it was the alleged activities of these renegades that led to his decision to attack the Cheyenne camp. Custer, who was unwilling to make the distinction between the two distinct groups of Indians, unjustly attacked the peaceful encampment in retribution for a raid carried out by the renegade Cheyenne. Unlike Custer, the audience has been properly equipped by the writers to understand that not all of the show’s Indians are the same. The existence of the dog-soldiers, or “bad” Indians, however, works, on some level, to justify the atrocities of the army. The audience could easily come to the conclusion that, if the “bad” Indians had just behaved, like their noble brethren, the Army and the Cheyenne would have remained at peace.

In a twopart episode from the show’s second season the savagery of the “dog soldiers” is
on full display. In the episode, entitled “the Abduction,” Dr. Quinn is taken hostage by a group of renegade “dog soldiers.” The leader of the group is a warrior named One Eye who sports an eye-patch. Any negative impressions about this particular dog-soldier’s moral character that viewers might have had based on his appearance are confirmed when he makes an aggressive advance toward Dr. Quinn. When Cloud Dancing’s son, who was traveling with the renegade band, allows her to escape, One-Eye retaliates by killing him. There is nothing exhibited that is noble or praiseworthy by any of the dog-soldiers, and only a moral outsider, Cloud Dancing’s son, demonstrates any positive characteristics. Whether the Native Americans of Dr. Quinn Medicine Woman were portrayed as noble or bloodthirsty, one thing remained sure: they were all one-dimensional.

The TNT mini-series Into the West, similarly took up the theme of westward expansion. While there was a great deal of effort put into emphasizing the Native American perspective on white Westward expansion, it does, at times, depend on old stereotypes and the same dualistic view of Native Americans, although not nearly with blatancy or regularity of Dr. Quinn Medicine Woman. Generally speaking, all of the characters in the mini-series are subject to relatively rigid character traits. In fact, it could be argued that the main protagonist of the white narrative, Jacob Wheeler, is less multi-dimensional than his Native American counterpart Loved By the Buffalo, who spends the series struggling to understand how to best serve his people during a period of constant crisis. However, while the series does focus intensely on a number of Native American characters and their personal problems, there are still instances where the legacy of the Hollywood Indian is evident.

There is a vague, but still apparent dichotomy between “good” and “bad” Indians. The band of Lakota that the story follows are generally portrayed as good. At times, especially early
in the series, they are presented as naive, and somewhat impractical. In the beginning of the second installment, titled “Manifest Destiny” an Indian narrator reveals that surrounding tribes had begun trading with the whites, while the Lakota had largely abstained from trade. As the following scene opens, the band’s leaders are debating the decision to start trading with whites, and a Lakota man, named Running Fox, declares “Our rivals are gaining advantage over the Lakota by trading with the whites.” Running Fox’s brother, Dog Star is uninterested and refuses to follow the “white man’s road.” When Running Fox asks his brother what he will do when the Crow and other enemies come with rifles, Dog Star responds, with conviction that “He will trust the Great Spirit, and fight with lance and arrow.” Ultimately the tribe opts to side with Dog Star and refuses to conduct trade at the American fort. In the attempt by the show’s writers to express the ideological strength of their chosen band of Lakotas, in reality they present them as impractical, and unreasonably committed to their traditions. That the tribe would decide to put aside the safety of their people, while their enemies stockpile advanced weaponry, because they are dedicated to preserving their traditions, makes them noble to a fault. Additionally, their morally-based refusal leads the viewer believe that the Crow, who are willing to trade with whites, do not possess such moral standards; they are willing to put material value above cultural value. This leads to the show’s presentation of the bloodthirsty savage.

In a scene from the previous episode, the viewer is given a picture of the Crow that makes it clear that there is a general distinction to be made between the “good” and “bad” Indians. As Thunder Heart Woman (sister of Running Fox and Dog Star) and her husband, a French Trapper, are traveling through the woods they spot a group of Indians in the distance. Although the group never appears to notice them, the two duck down and peer nervously at the distant warriors. Then, as ominous music plays, Thunder Heart Woman whispers fearfully aloud, “Crow.” In the
very next scene the two are awakened in the middle of the night. And immediately a party of Crow warriors burst in, taking Thunder Heart Woman and her baby captive after violently hacking her husband to death with a tomahawk. It is important to point out that, although the Lakota do participate in violence and fighting over the course of the series, they are never involved in such an unsolicited and seemingly cold-hearted attack. There is a clear distinction drawn between the two tribes, with the Lakota being portrayed as noble and morally driven, while the Crow are overly violent and willing to, seemingly trade away their valuable culture for better tools of violence.

A 1999 episode from the fourth season of the long-running teen series, *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*, also made use of the blood-thirsty savage. In the episode, entitled “Pangs,” a construction crew is breaking ground on the new UC Sunnydale (the show’s fictional College) Cultural Center. In the process the crew unleashes a vengeful Chumash Indian spirit. Much like the show’s demons, vampires, and witches, the Indian spirit will serve as Buffy’s, the teen “vampire-slayer,” enemy. In his first on camera appearance Huss, the Chumash spirit, uses a traditional Chumash knife, which he steals from a museum display case, to slit the throat of an anthropologist and remove her ear. In his next appearance he is discovered by Buffy as he is hanging a priest. Finally, the spirit summons an entire army of Chumash Indian warriors who began a reign of terror on the town of Sunnydale.

The episode’s plot, however, was also operating under multicultural influence. Like other television episodes that deal with Native Americans, “Pangs” is set on the days leading up to Thanksgiving. The date assures the show an opportunity to discuss the history of Native American plight through lines like the one Willow, one of the show’s permanent characters, delivers: “Thanksgiving isn’t about a blending of two cultures, it’s about one culture wiping out
another. And then, they make an animated special about the part with the maze, and the big belt buckles. They don’t show you the next scene, where all the bison die and Squanto takes a musket-ball in the stomach.” Throughout the episode, a history of the atrocities committed against the Chumash people is revealed. At one point, following a great deal of research about the tribe’s relations with Europeans, Willow reveals to Buffy that “The few Chumash who tried to rebel were hanged. When a group was accused of stealing cattle, they were killed: men, woman, and children.” Buffy is exceedingly uneasy about trying to stop the evil spirit for whom she continues to sympathize with. She clarifies her apprehension, explaining to another cast member, “I like my evil like I like my men: evil. You know, straight up black hat, tie you to the train tracks, ‘soon my electro-ray will destroy Metropolis’, bad. Not all mixed up with guilt and the destruction of an indigenous culture.” When finally, during Thanksgiving dinner, Huss returns with his raiding party to attack Buffy and her friends her reluctance is undiminished. She pleads to the vengeful spirit, “Maybe I wasn’t clear before about how terrible we all feel,” and even offering hopefully “You can have casinos now!”

As the onslaught of arrows rains down however, the point is made clear: the Chumash spirits, despite the seeming justness of their actions, are too evil not to be defeated; they are beyond redemption. Ultimately, Buffy and friends have to destroy the spirits. “Pangs” gave audiences a picture-perfect image of the blood-thirsty savage. He was one-dimensionally evil and, together with his fellow warriors, he aimed to inflict violent harm on the people of Sunnydale. What was distinctly different about this version of the blood-thirsty savage from his predecessors was the inclusion of a justification for his actions. This justification though, ultimately proves to be shallow. It is made clear to the viewer that, like his blood-thirsty brethren from the past, Huss is irredeemably evil. It can be said however, that in a multicultural
age, the application of the blood-thirsty savage seems, at the very least, to be fraught with a certain level of discomfort.

Another historic failure of popular culture’s presentation of Native Americans has been a general ambivalence towards the cultural diversity of Native Americans. As the “Hollywood Indian” was created, any concern with maintaining a level of cultural authenticity for characters was abandoned. Since the general public was unfamiliar with the specifics of the numerous tribes of America, all that mattered to directors was making sure they looked like “Indians” in the general sense. This issue, however, was in many ways improved upon by the last decade of the 20th century. In 1990 *Dances with Wolves was released*. The movie used real Native American actors, real native languages, and was generally committed to an authentic presentation of Native Americans in the film. The huge success of the movie likely served as encouragement to present Native American characters with a greater level of cultural accuracy. While this was certainly a step in a new direction, a level of cultural ambivalence, nevertheless, still persisted.

The series *Northern Exposure*, perhaps more than any show since, has succeeded in presenting multi-dimensional, non-stereotypical Native American characters on a regular basis. Although the show’s goal to present such characters was evident, there was one area where it fell slightly short: its lack of dedication to authentically representing the cultures of its Native American characters. Alaska, as an enormous land mass, possesses a number of different Native cultures. Annette M. Taylor explains how the show’s creators have appropriated various aspects of these distinct cultures that, to an astute reader with specific cultural knowledge, would place the show’s setting in various geographical locations across Alaska despite being in the same town for six seasons. In an attempt to offer perspective on the geographical liberties taken in the show, Taylor argues that the nature of their mistakes is “akin to fabricating a Canadian town in Mexico
or identifying New Yorkers as the majority population of Louisiana: It is ridiculous.”\textsuperscript{33}

Beyond the geographically inaccurate cultural references, Taylor also accurately points out that the specific tribes that the show’s two major Native American characters belong to are unknown to the viewer throughout the entire first half of the show’s six season run. Taylor articulates a specific instance of the culturally ambiguous nature of one of the shows Native characters, Marilyn, stating “Early in the series [she] wore a Cayuse-Nez Perce costume during a powwow attended by six-foot-tall Crows---novice actors from Montana. Marilyn then performed a dance characteristic of the Washington-Idaho area Native Americans.”\textsuperscript{34} To the majority of the audience this was likely perceived as a real representation of the Alaskan Native culture, but, as Taylor makes comically clear, it is not.

\textsuperscript{33} Annette Taylor, “Cultural Heritage in \textit{Northern Exposure},” 239.
\textsuperscript{34} Annette Taylor, “Cultural Heritage in \textit{Northern Exposure},” 239.
Chapter 3

Native American Political Issues in the Late Twentieth Century

Besides being represented through a multicultural lens, the late twentieth century also saw the nature of the presentation of Native Americans on television shift in another way. Native Americans had entered public consciousness in new ways. People were no longer imagining Native Americans simply as a part of the American past, but increasingly as part of the modern world. This shift in perception, while perhaps aided by the same ideological factors as multiculturalism to some extent, was not a calculated effort on the part television writers or producers. This change was the inevitable consequence of the dynamic landscape of Native political issues in the middle and late 20th century.

As was the case for many other culture groups, the mid-century period represented an era of heightened social activism for Native Americans. This activism helped to bring American Indians to the public in completely new ways. With Native Americans forcing themselves into the public eye as political actors, viewing Native Americans in a modern context became unavoidable. Native Americans were a vocal and active part of the American political sphere; they were no longer a quiet relic of the American past, and viewing them as such became increasingly difficult. The activism of Native Americans, and the visible oppression of the U.S. government’s Indian policies during the mid-century period (especially when viewed in the context of the civil rights era) led to a new era of relations with the Federal government. The policies that followed, and which would broadly be referred to as Indian self-determination, also worked to create a new image of Native Americans in the public sphere.

The policy returned a level of tribal sovereignty to federally recognized tribes while
establishing a complementary role as a protectorate for the federal government. As Indians increasingly took their issues to the courts, with an unprecedented level of success, and legislators began responding to their issues with a seemingly improved sense sympathy, Americans become more acutely aware of the Native American presence in the modern world. Native Americans, it seemed to a growing portion of the public, were increasingly benefiting from their status as Indians. Special fishing rights were awarded to some tribes. The notion that Native Americans were afforded special status in school admissions grew. Finally, as Native American gaming became both present and profitable, the public began forging modern stereotypes of Native Americans.

In the coming pages, the goal will be to outline the historical circumstances and events that led to the forging of the modern Indian stereotypes presented on television. Starting with the activism of Native Americans, I hope to demonstrate the sources of the rising politically oriented image of Native Americans. Then moving towards the changing relationship and interaction with the Federal government and legal system, the goal will be to demonstrate the sources and realities associated with the image of Native Americans as beneficiaries of their special relationship, and as successful economic actors.

Politically conscious Native Americans were certainly not unheard of before the 1960s. For years, Native Americans had acted through political channels to secure and protect their rights. In the early nineteenth century the Cherokee Indians had fought to keep their land in Georgia. In the first decades of the twentieth century, a generation of Native Americans educated in Indian boarding schools, who came to be recognized as the “Red Progressives,” worked to bring Native American issues to the public. In the immediate post-war era a group of Indian
intellectuals had cooperated to establish the National Congress of American Indians. The realization that political activism and legal avenues presented opportunities for Native Americans was certainly not a secret to American Indians. By the 1960s, however, this avenue of potential action had been substantially opened up, or, at the very least was encountering a much more receptive societal audience.

The 1960s were undeniably an era of political unrest, as minority groups acted to correct the wrongs and formal discrimination that they felt was directed at them. In the 1940s, 50s, and into the 60s the U.S. government had established a policy of Termination with respect to Indian tribes. Broadly, the policy was meant to rapidly assimilate Native Americans into the American mainstream. To achieve this political end, a number of actions were taken. The first was the establishment of an Indian Claims Commission that was intended to quickly and permanently put an end to Indian land claims, although it ultimately failed to completely or effectively achieve this goal.\(^{35}\) Secondly, it aimed at terminating the trust relationship that the U.S government had with Indian tribes, whom Congress now felt were successful enough to exist independently, without dependence on the federal government.\(^{36}\) Lastly, a policy of relocation was instituted. The goal of relocation was to hasten the movement of Indians from reservations into urban areas where they could more rapidly assimilate.\(^{37}\)

To a large number of Native Americans, this policy was plainly oppressive. However, as Collin Calloway points out, it was in many ways counterproductive to its own stated goals:

The government’s termination and relocation policies largely backfired, generating increased resistance and organization among many American Indian groups. As happened when Indians were sent to boarding schools, a new generation of Indians emerged with a new, unifying experience. Mass migration of Indians fostered a growing


pan-Indian identity and a determination to preserve Indian community and heritage. Termination had actually worked to unify Native American resistance against it. As more and more Indians began relocating to urban environments, especially as a result of official policy, Native American enclaves proliferated in cities and helped to foster a more conscious Indian identity. The nature of wide-spread social activism in the 1960s, and reaction against termination culminated in a visibly apparent culture of political activism amongst Native Americans.

By the late 1960s, this Native American activism, like the Black civil rights struggle, had developed a radical tone. In 1969 a group of Native American student activists took over Alcatraz Island and penned a “Proclamation to the Great White Father and to All his people.” The proclamation was sarcastically constructed to mock the unfairness of the historical treatment of Native. The goal of the “siege” was to attract attention to Native American grievances through the media attention it garnered. The American Indian Movement, formed a year earlier, used similar tactics that relied on media attention to achieve their goals. In 1972 AIM embarked on its “Trail of Broken Treaties,” from Minneapolis to Washington D.C. to publicize their grievances, which they outlined in a twenty-point document. AIM members occupied the Bureau of Indian Affairs office for six days before returning home with the assurance that officials would review their demands.

In 1973 AIM took on the tribal governments set up by the BIA. Following a controversial murder and AIM banishment from Pine Ridge reservation, AIM leaders chose the site of Wounded Knee, South Dakota to stage a protest. As Calloway points out, the site, home to the famous Big Foot Massacre, had recently achieved a great deal of publicity as a result of

Dee Brown’s book *Bury My Heart at Knee*. AIM took over the village, declared its independence from the United States, and established its territorial borders based on the 1868 Treaty of Fort Laramie.\textsuperscript{41} The siege lasted for seventy one days, and resulted in two Indian deaths at the hands of the FBI. The tenseness, location, and length of the protest made it a major news story. The events at Wounded Knee brought the American Indian Movement the level of public attention that it had desired. The siege also marked an end for the American Indian Movement as a visible political force, and elicited a great deal of both external and internal criticism.\textsuperscript{42}

The movement and its actions may not have directly brought about any desired political ends, but its influence in a broader context of Indian activism is important. Calloway credits the movement as helping to grow a cultural consciousness that did work towards achieving goals, such as a greater level of self-determination and steps towards tribal sovereignty. More specifically, with respect to the view of Native Americans that would come to be represented on television, the activities of AIM had more definite consequences. The image of the political Indian operatives, especially using media attention or the threat of media attention to promote their cause, is rehashed with some regularity on television. The activities of AIM and other activist groups, had helped create this new image. People had been given a different context in which to view Native Americans in that was unquestionably distinct from their historical images.

The same political atmosphere that had helped give birth to the political movements of the 1960s also had real consequences in public policy. The era had helped promote a new commitment to reform and a reevaluation of past policies. This sentiment was logically extended to policies dealing with Native Americans, although perhaps not with the vigor Native Americans

\textsuperscript{41} Colin G. Calloway, *First Peoples: A Documentary Survey of American Indian History*. 419.

would have liked. By the late 60s, termination had come to be viewed as a failure, both politically and morally. The United States government began reassessing its role in Indian affairs. This reevaluation inherently held in it two concerns: What role should the government have in protecting and providing for Indian tribes, and what level of control should Native Americans have in determining their own activities? As a consequence, the U.S. government began moving towards a policy that embraced the concept of Indian self-determination. Claims for tribal sovereignty and a return to the role of the Government to act as a trust for Native Americans became more readily embraced.

Richard Nixon’s “Special Message on Indian Affairs,” which he delivered in July of 1970, adequately demonstrated the shifting nature of the Federal government’s policy towards Native Americans. Nixon, speaking of the diminished role the government had played as trustee in the previous decades of termination asserted,

Termination implies that the Federal government has taken on a trusteeship responsibility for Indian communities as an act of generosity toward a disadvantaged people and that it can therefore discontinue this responsibility on a unilateral basis whenever it sees fit. But the unique relationship between Indians and the Federal government is the result instead of solemn obligations which have been entered into by the United States Government. Down through the years through written treaties and through formal and informal agreements, our government has made specific commitments to the Indian people.43

Nixon argues that the role of the U.S. government to act as a permanent trust for America’s Indian tribes is a legal and moral duty. As a consequence, Nixon is both renouncing the ideology of termination and embracing the historic role of the Federal government as a trust.

Nixon, however, takes his argument a step further by claiming that the Government, acting in its role as a holder of a trust, had often fostered dependence on the part of Native Americans, “In many cases this dependence is so great that the Indian community is almost

entirely run by outsiders who are responsible and responsive to Federal officials in Washington, D.C, rather than the communities they are supposed to be serving.” Nixon argues that a return to policies that rely heavily on a role for the Federal government and not on the tribal communities themselves, are similarly ineffective. Finally, speaking of self-determination, Nixon says “This, then, must be the goal of any new national policy toward the Indian people to strengthen the Indian’s sense of autonomy without threatening this sense of community.”

In the years that followed Nixon’s speech, Congress acted to create laws that protected the autonomy of Native Americans. The Indian Education act of 1972, for instance, provided money for Indian children to attend public schools. Similarly, in 1978, the American Indian Religious Freedom Act, ensured the right of Native Americans to freely express and practice their religions which “included but not limited to access to sites, uses and possession of sacred objects, and the freedom to worship through ceremonials and traditional rights.” In 1994, following a Supreme Court decision that stated that it was not a violation of constitutional rights to prosecute someone for the use of illegal drugs as part of religious practice, Congress passed the Native American Free Exercise of Religion Act. The act protected Native American rights to use peyote as part of religious ceremonies. This, and other similar laws gave specific rights to Indians that were not awarded to the general public. The U.S. government was making promises to protect Natives’ rights to govern themselves (although within the bounds of the Bill of Rights).

With increasing success, Indian tribes began taking advantage of the legal system. Calloway elaborates on the nature of this move, pointing out “In the new social and political climate of reform created by the upheavals of the 1960s and 1970s, judicial opinion was more

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sympathetic to the notion that the nation should live up to its treaty commitments.”

Legal victories in the ensuing decades resulted in millions of dollars for a variety of tribes, and the restoration of certain rights ensured in treaties. With all this legal activity in the newspapers, it would have been impossible to remain oblivious to American Indians in the modern world. To a casually aware public, it may have seemed that Native Americans were being compensated in large numbers by the Federal government. While it is true that an unprecedented level of legal success was being achieved, these successes were relatively limited when compared to the persistent problems of poor education and poverty found on so many reservations that can. Nevertheless, the idea that Native Americans were increasingly reaping the benefits of their relationship with the Federal government had penetrated public consciousness.

This legal maneuvering in the age of “Indian self-determination” would also come to play a role in the growth of the Indian gaming industry, which would eventually represent the source of the most pervasive new image of Native Americans represented in modern times. By the very late twentieth century, Native Americans were being found on television, with surprising regularity, as casino owners. This new image reflects a certain reality. As Indian tribes were increasingly responsible for their own economic destinies, gaming emerged as a means by which a level of wealth could be achieved. Gaming on reservations, it seemed, could operate without the legal limitations it suffered outside the reservation. In 1979, the state of Florida hoped to challenge this idea when it met the Seminole tribe in court. State law in Florida prohibited jackpots greater than $100, and the Seminoles were offering a $10,000 prize at their bingo hall. After the state shut down the hall, the Seminoles took their case to the court, where the Supreme Court decided against Florida and upheld the Seminoles’ right to operate their bingo hall without

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state interference. Nearly a decade later, in 1987, a similar case emerged in California. In California vs. Cabazon the Supreme Court handed down a decision that protected the right of Native Americans to operate gambling in any capacity, without state or county interference, as long as gambling of any form was legal in that state.

These two landmark cases provided the impetus for the passage of the Indian Gaming Regulatory Act (IGRA) in 1988. This congressional act hoped to mediate the growing Native American gaming industry. It did nearly guarantee the right of Native Americans to operate gaming activities on their lands, but it also provided a role for states. If a tribe intended to operate a casino, which the law regards as Class III gaming, they must enter into good faith negotiations with the state they are in. The result of the negotiations is the formation of a compact that permits gambling while also placing it under state jurisdiction. While IGRA did attract a level of criticism rooted in the belief that it violated states’ rights, it is also important to realize that Indian tribes were also surrendering a certain level of sovereignty by submitting to the negotiated compacts. In the following decade, however Indian gaming would grow astronomically, and help bring in huge profits for a number of Indian tribes.

Indian gaming is a multi-billion dollar industry. Through gaming, many tribes have been able to develop much stronger economic situations for themselves. While it has certainly not been an economic cure-all, and is not unanimously supported by Native Americans, gaming has given many tribes an economic foundation on which they have improved the lives of their members. It, however, cannot be emphasized enough that this has not been the reality for all tribes. Reservation poverty is still a major problem for tribes across the country. This stark

reality, though, is typically over-shadowed by the prominence of Indian gaming in the public mind. The larger American public is presented much more often with the image of the Indian casino than with native poverty. Since non-Indians make up the vast majority of Indian casino patrons, it is obvious that huge numbers of Americans are aware of Native Americans most readily as the operators of the casinos that they frequent. Even for those who aren’t gamblers, advertising for Indian gaming ventures is unavoidable. With such a powerful role in the American consciousness it is no wonder that a great deal of the Native American presence in popular culture, and on television specifically, deals with Indian gaming.
Chapter 4

The Modern Indian on Television:

By the late 20th century Native Americans were taking on a new role in public consciousness. Previously, Native Americans had been largely relegated to roles and presentations that placed them in the historic American past. In the unconscious minds of many, Native Americans were simply relics of American history. The latter part of the 20th century saw a change in this reality, though. Native Americans were emerging from the dregs of history and an awareness on the part of the larger public had developed. Increasing Native American activism, a changing relationship with the Federal government, and economic ventures, had all worked to insert Native Americans, in a modern context, into the minds of the public. As the larger culture become more acutely aware of the particular ways in which Native Americans were participating in modernity, those means of participation began forming the foundations of new understandings and stereotypes. These new stereotypes became applicable almost exclusively to the portrayal of Native Americans and Native American issues cast in modernity. As is to be expected, these stereotypes would manifest themselves throughout the entire culture and especially in television.

The growth of new character types, as they appear on television, can be broken down into a few different areas. The first area that I will highlight is the presentation of Native Americans in roles of political activism. The birth of Native Americans as an “identity group,” both capable and visibly engaged in securing political and social interests had become apparent to most Americans. Not surprisingly, this awareness on the part of the general viewing public, would soon be realized on the small screen. The utilization of Native Americans in roles that involve political activism resonate with the public, and the perceived realistic foundations of such
presentations grant meaning to their display. To most culturally aware viewers, the idea that Native Americans would be participating in demonstrations, protests, or even litigation would not come as a surprise. With this reality in mind, inserting characters or plots that make use of such a role could be done both easily and effectively.

As the course of Native American history changed following the federal government’s abandoning of Termination in favor of self-determination, new manifestations of the modern Native American emerged. As a result, a few different recurrent images began taking hold. First, and somewhat broadly, a conception grew that Native Americans were unfairly benefiting from their identification as Indians; it seemed to many that Native Americans were receiving special treatment not afforded to the rest of the public. This particular image often takes on a negative connotation in both its presentation and in its assumption. While such a characterization is unfair, its roots lie in the fact that the Federal government has assumed a role of protecting the sovereignty of tribal entities while exhibiting less interference than had occurred in the past. To an only partially interested general public, this is often interpreted very simply, and wrongfully, as “no taxes.” Discerning the reality of this relationship is extremely difficult and even in the legal world is subject to constant debate, but regardless of its actual nature, its interpretation as a unique, beneficial relationship for Native Americans is what often comes across in television.

Similarly, the growth of another role for Native Americans has emerged as a result of increased legal grounds for tribal autonomy. This role presents Native Americans as shrewd

\[\text{\footnotesize 51 National Congress of American Indians, “Policy Issues: Taxation,” National Congress of American Indians, http://www.ncai.org/Taxation.31.0.html (accessed March 14, 2011). While tax issues are more complicated for Native Americans, many do, in fact, pay taxes. As sovereign entities, like state and local governments, tribe's revenues are not subject to federal tax. Individual Indians, however, are subject to federal income tax unless they both live and derive their income on reservation land.}\]
capitalists. As economic actors, ones who seemingly benefit from their special tax exempt status, Native Americans are increasingly portrayed as ruthless, sometimes corrupt, businessmen. This image is most prominently displayed in the role of Native Americans in the gaming industry. As the legal grounds for Indian gaming strengthened and the explosion of Native American gaming ventures took off, the public became unavoidably aware of Native Americans’ role in modernity. This new role for Native Americans, however, has not been without its negative consequences. Native Americans’ participation in the gaming industry has, on television anyway, subjected them to many of the same stereotypes and motifs that are associated with such an industry. Additionally, and not specific to Casino operators, is the belief that Native Americans are in a unique position to “game the system,” and that they use such a position to unfairly gain an advantage over their non-Indian counterparts.

With viewers acquainted with the idea that Native Americans were vocally demonstrating their political interests through various forms of protest, the fact that such a reality would be applied in the writing of television seems inevitable. In the previously mentioned episode of *the West Wing*, the political nature of the two Native American characters is revealing. The two Stockbridge-Munsee Indians were staging a protest in the White House lobby. The pair had a meeting, set with a member of intergovernmental affairs, that had been canceled and they refused to leave until they “got satisfaction.” Both Jack Lonefeather and his partner, Maggi Morning Star Charles, are portrayed as well educated and politically savvy. Their protest, by no coincidence, takes place on the day before Thanksgiving. The selection of this particular day possesses obvious consequences, as the White House press secretary sarcastically acknowledges in frustration by stating, “Indians on the day before Thanksgiving. Wow, ironic.” Thanksgiving, especially in a multicultural world, presents an opportunity for Native American voices to be
heard, and this fact has not escaped the “Indians in the lobby.”

The political techniques employed by the two Native Americans in this episode, harken back to the tactics that were employed by AIM and other Red Power protestors. When CJ, the White House press secretary, invites Jack Lonefeather and Maggi Morning Star into her office to reschedule their appointment, the two Indians abruptly refuse and opt to stay in the lobby. As Maggi begins making her case once again, she is cut off by CJ who says:

**CJ:** Yes, listen. This isn’t a good place for this. This is a lobby.

**Maggi:** I know what this is, I have a degree from the University of Michigan.

**Jack:** Ms. Craig, If we give up this ground we lose our one bullet in our gun. We need to be in view of the press.

The two Native Americans are keenly aware that the threat of media coverage is the best way for them to get their voice heard. The denial of Native Americans on the day before Thanksgiving would be fodder for the press, a fact clear to both CJ and the two Native American protestors. To the two Native Americans, the media represent a “bullet in their gun,” and as such, it is able to ensure that CJ take them seriously and do her best to keep the situation quiet. Jack Lonefeather and Maggi Morning Star represent a powerful political force. An audience, especially the kind of politically interested audience that might watch a show whose premise deals directly with political affairs, could appreciate the potential realism of Native American characters, as well as the merits and foundations of their political approach.

The previously mentioned episode of *the Sopranos*, “Christopher,” also provides the viewer with an image of the politically active Native American. Much like the episode of *the West Wing*, this particular episode is also staged during a national holiday loaded with implications for Native Americans: Columbus Day. Reading from the *Newark Star Ledger*, Bobby, a member of the Soprano crew reads aloud a story about the Native American protest that serves as the vehicle for the plot’s progression:
Bobby: The New Jersey Council of Indian Affairs has announced plans to disrupt Monday’s Columbus Day Parade in Newark. Council chairman, Del Red Clay, professor of cultural anthropology at Rutgers says, council members and supporters will lie down in the path of Columbus Day marchers “in protest of Columbus’ role in the genocide of America’s native peoples.” To launch their protest Native Americans and their sympathizers plan to begin a death watch tomorrow, over the statue of Columbus in Christopher Columbus Park.

The Native American protestors, acting through an organized group, have chosen to publicly protest the celebration of Columbus Day. The tactics of this fictional group of protestors also harkens back to the style of protests employed the 1970s. The group is using the media to bring publicity to their demonstration. First, efforts are being reported on in the newspaper, and later in the show, Del Red Clay is shown on a television talk show justifying the righteousness of his groups protest.

As was the case in the West Wing episode, there is a recognition amongst politicians that the tactics of Native Americans do possess political strength. When confronted with the problem by mob boss Tony Soprano, a usually complicit politician uncharacteristically refuses to step in, stating “it’s a real potato” and “it’s Native Americans, very sensitive stuff.” Perhaps the most striking thing about the role of Native American activists in this episode is that they come out on the winning end. Despite a concerted effort, on the part of the members of the Soprano crew throughout the episode to disrupt or impede the protests, they ultimately fail. While Tony Soprano’s crew is not necessarily unaccustomed to losing battles throughout the series, it is certainly no minor feat that the Native Americans came out on top. Embedded in both of these shows is a belief that Native Americans are both engaged in political activism and also wielding a level of political power in such situations to achieve their desired ends.

While the casting of Native Americans as radical political activists provides a certain interpretive leeway for the audience in terms of positive or negative imagery, and may not ascend
to the status of a stereotype per say, the same cannot be said of some of the other images that have emerged. To many, it seemed that rather than suffering from discrimination, Native Americans were the recipients of special treatment and were in fact benefiting from their identification. Obviously, this conception did not emerge out of nowhere and as I pointed out in the previous chapter, such interpretations were not completely rooted outside of reality. The fairness of such views, however, is questionable. With poverty and unemployment numbers on many reservations at much higher rates than off, the idea that Native Americans are sitting back and luxuriously leeching off the government certainly holds within it a level of irony. However misleading this interpretation may be, the reality of its existence is unquestionable. With regularity modern Native Americans are imagined as lazy wards of the state.

The same episode of *the Sopranos* that already served to demonstrate certain aspects of multiculturalism and political activism also displays some of the more negative conceptions of Native American issues. In the episode’s opening scene, the audience is introduced to the same prevalent stereotypes of modernity that negatively paint Native Americans as beneficiaries. In the scene, the members of Tony Soprano’s crew are discussing Native Americans when Christopher, the youngest member of the group tries to add some perspective:

**Christopher:** You gotta’ admit, they did get massacred, the Indians.
**Silvio:** It’s not like we didn’t give them a bunch of shit to make up for that. Land, reservations, and now they got the casinos.
**Vito:** What the fuck we ever get we didn’t have to work our balls off for?
**Bobby:** I wouldn’t mind sittin’ on my ass all day smokin’ mushrooms and collectin’ government checks.

At Bobby’s final appraisal the group of men reveal their agreement with approving laughter. It is again important to reiterate, that a regular, perceptive viewer of the show, is meant to understand that the group’s characterizations are coming from a place of ignorance. Throughout the series, their lack of sophistication takes on a prominent role, but the dialogue in this specific scene is
still revealing. The episode’s writer uses his mobsters to give voice to real sentiments that many people have with respect to Native Americans, or that, at the very least, would not sound strange to viewers. While the views expressed by Silvio, Vito, and Bobby are not necessarily realistic representations of actual Native life, they are products of the changing nature of Native issues in the late 20th century. The idea that Indians are sitting around “smoking mushrooms and collecting government checks,” however absurd it may be, comes from a real-life interpretation of the ways Native Americans had reentered the imaginations of the American public.

The statements made by the three men hold within them a number of negative stereotypes. First is an unrealistic belief that the government has offered land, reservations, and casinos to compensate for atrocities and wrong doings they have been subjected to; to Silvio, these government “perks” are incorrectly viewed as reparations. The other negative stereotype is that Native Americans, besides being provided “reparations”, are lazily collecting them while using illegal drugs with ensured impunity. Ignoring the factual inaccuracies of these statements, it is important to recognize that these imagined images are the products of a relatively new relationship between Native American Tribes and the Federal government and are historically unique.

The impression that Native Americans are unfairly benefiting from their cultural identification has been expressed in another sense as well. An understanding that Native Americans are accepted into colleges and universities with greater ease than members of other groups has grown in the public mind, and a number of television shows over the past two decades have made, at least passing, references to this understanding. A 2000 episode from the fifth season of FOX’s King of the Hill, for instance, serves to demonstrate this belief. In the episode, the character Nancy and her secret Native American lover, John Redcorn, with whom
she had a child, are discussing his right to spend time with their son. The issue is complicated by the fact that their son believes Nancy’s husband, Dale, is his father. When Nancy warns John Redcorn to remember that “[their child] is Dale’s son,” Redcorn replies “Say that now, but when it comes time to get him into college let’s see what box you check.” John Redcorn seems to believe that his Native American heritage will afford his son greater educational opportunities. The acceptance of this belief, expressed by the Native American character John Redcorn, has also revealed itself in the presentation of white characters claiming Indian ancestry in order to gain admissions to a school. The assumption that undergirds such portrayals, whether a white person is claiming tribal affiliation or an actual Native American is the one seen receiving such treatment, is that Indians “have it easy.”

In an episode from the second season of the ABC series Modern Family, which aired in late 2010, this assumption was put on display. The series is a comedy that focuses on three distinct, but related families and is shot in a “mockumentary style”. In this particular episode, one of the show’s families, a gay couple, are working to get their adopted Vietnamese daughter, Lilly, into a prestigious and highly selective preschool. As a gay couple, with a minority daughter, the two men feel confident that she will be accepted, boasting “Lilly’s Asian, we’re gay. In the school admissions poker game, we’re the winning hand.” When the pair see the competition, “disabled, inter-racial lesbians with an African kicker,” however, their confidence is shattered. Later in the episode, when interviewing with an admissions official, the two men are asked what “sets them apart?” One of the men, Cameron, responds in a stoic, stereotypical tone “My white man name is Tucker. I am one sixteenth Cherokee. Ready for child to soar---like eagle.” In the “school admissions poker game” the two fathers imagine they are playing, it is Native Americans who, to them, represent an Ace. With this metaphoric distinction, the show’s
writers reveal their belief that amongst potential applicants to a school, Native Americans will have the easiest time getting in.

A similar circumstance can be found in an 2005 episode of the NBC series Will & Grace entitled “Sour Balls.” Coincidentally, like Modern Family, the show combines homosexuality with Native Americans in order to create a more favorable identity for college admissions. Two of the show’s protagonists, Will and Jack, move from New York to a small blue collar community upstate. When a local man, Barry, finds out the two men are homosexuals he enthusiastically promises them that they will be made to feel welcome, adding that “there’s a real good chance our son Jason’s gay.” The man’s son, Jason, immediately protests, promising his father that he is not gay. Upon hearing this, Barry admonishingly replies “Hey! You want to go to college? Then you’re gay---and Native American.” Along similar lines, in the 2006 pilot episode of the CBS series The New Adventures of Old Christine, the same, familiar, scenario reveals itself. Christine proudly explains to her son, who is about to enter an exclusive private school, that “Three-hundred kids applied to your school. Only two got in, and you’re one of them!” When her son expresses confusion about why he would have been accepted this school despite such unfavorable odds, Christine explains, “Honey because you’re smart, friendly, and if anyone asks, you’re one-sixteenth Native American.”

The scholar Dustin Tahmahkera, in his article “Custer’s Last Sitcom: Decolonized Viewing of the Sitcom’s Indian,” points to this specific episode, stating “After hearing Christine’s misinformed mentioning of Indigenous “benefits” and the promotion of ethnic fraud, audiences can erroneously assume that being just 1/16th Native American will generally provide excellent opportunities in a very competitive world.”52 While such an assumption, as

52Tahmahkera, Dustin, “Custer’s Last Sitcom: Decolonized Viewing of the Sitcom’s Indian,” [American Indian Quarterly 32, no. 3 (Summer 2008) 324-351] 328.
Tahmahkera points out, could be drawn directly from the dialogue in question, it might even be argued that such an assumption already existed in the minds of the audience. The fact that Christine lied about being Native American is a punch-line, and is received with audience laughter on the show. It seems that the audience was expected to understand the joke because it confirmed a belief that already exists in the wider public: that, as Tahmahkera puts it, Native Americans are generally afforded “benefits” and “excellent opportunities in a very competitive world.”

If there is one of image of Native Americans that was to be consistently found on television by the mid nineties and beyond, it was that of the “casino Indian.” The claim that Americans were increasingly espousing the modern Native American with gaming is evidenced by the commonality with which Indian casinos appear on television by the late 90’s and early 00s. In a period when the scarcity of Native Americans on television, in any capacity, was alarming, there were multitudes of Native American casinos to be found. More than a dozen shows in this period have applied story lines that explicitly deal with or make notable mention of Indian casinos.53

Beyond explicitly portraying Native American gaming ventures, shows have both directly and indirectly recognized the growing acceptance of the image. In Dreamkeeper, when Shane asks to borrow money, his mother answers sarcastically “Oh, yeah. There’s a million dollars of casino money under my dresser. Just leave me a few thousand.” Since Shane’s family is clearly

not wealthy, the dialogue is meant to be funny, but the joke points to the perception a growing number of people hold of Native Americans. In television of this period, being an Indian increasingly means being involved in gaming. While there is an obvious source for this type of imagery, it has led to the development of additional assumptions about Indian gaming. The application of economically motivated Native Americans has worked, in some ways to counter traditional stereotypes about Native Americans, and this fact has troubled the public in some ways; the concern that acting on economic ambitions in some way undermines the value, as it has been understood through generalizations and stereotypes, of Native American culture is unsettling to many. Additionally, with Indians becoming more and more wedded to the gaming industry, they are also being subjected to the types of stereotypes associated with gambling culture in general. Economic opportunism, corruption, and violence have all worked their way into the Images of Native Americans through their role in gaming.

Imagining Native Americans as economic actors has proven troubling for many. As capitalists, Native Americans seem to be challenging traditional understandings of Native culture. This concern, unsurprisingly, has been embodied on the small screen. In an episode of the Comedy Central animated series *Drawn Together*, it is revealed to the show’s cast of fictional cartoon celebrities living together in a mock reality show, that their house sits on an ancient burial ground. After being haunted by Indian spirits, the group decides to offer the spirits a “crappy patch of dirt” in their backyard. The “chief” Indian spirit accepts their offer and replies, “We will take our sacred land and honor it, just as our ancestors would have wanted.” A viewer would at this point be expected to draw on their knowledge of Indian culture, which is probably fueled largely by stereotypes of the historic Indian, to imagine the way Native Americans might honor sacred land. The scene, however, immediately cuts to a giant modern building, with a
massive sign reading “Lost Indian Souls Casino.” The gang of misfit cartoon characters who surrendered the land exclaim in disbelief “A casino?” Moments later a narrator steps in to elaborate, seemingly answering their question with the description “A gaudy mockery of their once great culture!” Beneath the surface of this dialogue is the recognition that Indian gaming does not fit comfortably with the image of Native Americans that has been reinforced for years in the American consciousness. The show expresses an anxiety about imagining the actions of Native Americans being driven by economics.

An episode of another animated series, the Simpsons, voices similar concerns. After their original vacation plans hit a road block, the Simpson family pulls off the highway and into an Indian Casino called “Caesar’s Pow-Wow.” When their daughter Lisa, the show’s intellectual voice, opts to stay in the car she admits “something troubles [her] about Indian gaming.” Although Lisa does concede that the revenue is helpful to the tribes, she still harbors concerns. The show goes further to demonstrate the irony of imagining Native Americans as economic actors. While revealing a vision of Bart Simpson’s future to him, the casino manager (a Native American) slips in an advertisement for his casino. Momentarily outraged by this, Bart asks in disbelief, “You put an Ad in my vision?” The casino manager adds that the idea came from his underachieving brother, “Dances with Focus Groups.” While this particular example does not explicitly verbalize the conflict as plainly as Drawn Together, there is a recognition of the ways in which economically motivated Native characters challenge traditional conceptions. Viewers would likely interpret or at least understand the sacred nature of a vision, such that an interruption of it by a commercial would seem strange.

Another recurrent sentiment that can be found in television shows dealing with Indian gaming is the belief that the potential for profit has opened the door for economic opportunists to
take advantage of gaming. In the Sopranos, during their episode-long effort to silence Native American protestors, the gang finds its way into talks with Chief Doug Smith, “tribal chairman of the Mohunk Indians and CEO of Mohunk Enterprises.” The sharply dressed, and untypical (in that he appears to be white) Native American business man reveals to Tony Soprano that he runs a “quarter of a billion dollar casino” with a large Italian-American customer base he is interested in keeping happy. Silvio, an associate of of Tony’s, suspiciously points out “No offense Chief, but you don’t look much like an Indian.” The following dialogue ensues:

Doug Smith: Frankly, I’ve passed most of my life as white, until I had a racial awakening and discovered my Mohunk blood. My grandmother, on my father’s side, her mother was a quarter Mohunk.

Tony: And all this happened when the casino bill passed, huh?

Doug Smith: Better late than never.

This particular dialogue, even without being able to perceive the expressions apparent on film, hints that this tribal chairman only found a need to embrace his Native American heritage after there were financial benefits to be made. The character all but admits this assumption is true when he offers a sinister grin before delivering the line “better late than never.”

A 2005 episode of King of the Hill, also concerned with Indian gaming, presents a character who is subject to suspicions similar to those about Doug Smith from the Sopranos. The Native American character John Redcorn, a recurring persona on the show, decides to open a casino on his tribal land in order to provide a venue for his band to play. After writing an E-mail to the fictional Tribal Gaming Corporation, John Redcorn is confronted by three well dressed white men led by Henry Mankiller. When a suspicious member of Redcorn’s band asks Mankiller “exactly what kind of Indian are you,” he quickly responds “I’m 1/64 Creek on my mother’s side,” before immediately moving on to question John Redcorn about his casino. Henry Mankiller offers to assist Redcorn in the building of his casino, telling him “We can
accelerate the process. We are, after all, in the dream building business. You see, we’re a one-
stop shopping for everything casino. We can save you the hassles of dealing with the White
man’s loan offices by financing everything through our tribal development division.” Redcorn,
desperate to have a regular venue for his band to play to, and not necessarily make gaming
profits, takes out a loan with Mankiller. After his casino opens and right before his band is about
to take the stage, law enforcement officials bust into his casino and shut it down, pointing out to
Redcorn that there is no Indian gaming in the State of Texas.

In the next scene, as John Redcorn and his band mates are sitting, demoralized, on the
casino stage, Mankiller walks in and laments “This is a sad sad day. The White Man never stops
putting you down,” to which John Redcorn replies:

  **Redcorn**: The white man? How could you not know there was no gaming in
Texas?
  **Mankiller**: Look, the dream business is not exactly detail oriented. Anyway, just
stopped by to give you a friendly reminder. You still owe me $23,000.”
  **Redcorn**: I could sue you.
  **Mankiller**: Possibly, but you’d spend years in the white man’s courts, fighting
the white man’s lawyers, which we have a lot of.

John Redcorn has been misled by a greedy opportunist. The show places a dishonest character,
who is clearly meant to be perceived by the audience as white, in the Indian gaming industry.
His identification as 1/64th Creek is there to make sure the viewer understands that for all intents
and purposes, he is white. Mankiller ironically uses the term “White Man” and it is clear to the
audience he is inauthentic in taking advantage of Indian gaming. It is perhaps no coincidence on
the part of the writing, that Redcorn maintains his independence from the negative gaming
stereotypes and is instead a victim of a white character who embodies the negative stereotypes
associated with gaming.

The apparent sense that Indian gaming is inherently fraught with greed is also well
represented on television. Both of the examples from *the Sopranos* and *King of the Hill* demonstrate this sentiment. Henry Mankiller misleads John Redcorn in an effort to secure financial gain. In *the Sopranos*, it is eventually revealed that Doug Smith’s gesture of assistance to Tony was a thinly veiled effort to gain favor with the Mob boss in hopes of convincing him to help coerce the singer Frankie Valli to perform at his casino. The concern that greed is an inherent part of Indian gaming, though, is not limited to seemingly white opportunistic characters.

An episode of the Comedy Central series *South Park*, entitled “the Red Man’s Greed,” offers a source for evaluating such sentiments, beyond the simple evidence of its title alone. The episode seems to be pointing out, with a level of satire, that Indian gaming has in effect turned the tables on the traditional relationship between Native Americans and whites; gaming allows Indians to take money and property from whites. The goal of the tribe running the casino is to construct a super highway directly from their operation in South Park to Denver, because city-people have more money. If there was any doubt to be had about what the show’s writers were trying to do, it disappeared when the tribe’s leader, Chief Runs-With-Premise, decides to clear the town of South Park out the way of his highway construction by giving them blankets infected with the disease SARS. Although the show is purposefully, and in an over-the-top fashion, demonstrating what they find to be an ironic role reversal they are still painting the tribesman as greedy. They are, in a sense, conceding that Indian gaming is fueled by greed, even if they equate it to the greed that drives the ventures of “white men.” The satire lies in their construction of direct parallel to white behavior, and not in their portrayal of Native American gaming operations as greedy.

The apparent greed associated with gaming invites another image that emerges in
conjunction with Indian gaming, corruption. The image of corruption in gambling culture is strong, and is unsurprisingly extended to the stereotyping of Indian gaming as well. The aforementioned episode of *the Sopranos* displayed a tribal chairman, in charge of a casino, who was willing to forge a relationship with a known mob boss. In *King of the Hill*, Henry Mankiller knowingly misleads John Redcorn, and even admits that what he did was probably worthy of lawsuit. In *South Park* as well, the violent and illegal behavior of the casino operators is, by any definition of the word, corrupt.

Displays of corruption in Indian gaming can also be found in an episode from the USA series *The Dead Zone*. Although Native American characters do not figure prominently in the episode, entitled “Dead Men Tell Tales,” the plot does revolve around a fictional legislative bill in Maine that would allow Indian gaming. As part of the back drop for a murder investigation, the show’s main character, a psychic named Johnnie Smith, becomes privy to the fact that organized crime is helping to finance and push for the gaming legislation. The series is structured in a fashion that allows the viewer to see the past (in this case the events leading up to the particular murder) through the psychic visions of its protagonist. Through one of Smith’s visions, while investigating at the Hollow Horn Resort Casino in Massachusetts, it is revealed that legislative figures, organized crime, and the head of the casino are all secretly working together. There is only one Native character in the show and his role is peripheral to the central plot, but his involvement is certainly not without implication. Smith described the casino as “one of the biggest in the North-East,” and then later reveals that its chief operator is associated with both organized crime and corrupt politicians. This connection, although pivotal to the investigation, is not presented as a great shock, and this reveals a certain presumption: that it should come as no surprise that corruption would be present in Indian gaming.
In a 2006 episode from the short lived CW series *Veronica Mars*, viewers also receive an image of a corrupt Indian gaming figure. As part of a season long investigation into multiple homicide by the show’s high school detective, Veronica Mars, a Native American casino owner becomes indirectly involved. In an attempt to establish an alibi for one of the investigation’s suspects, an associate of Veronica, Keith, meets with a Native American casino owner named Lobo. It is revealed that the character in question, Terrence, owes a substantial amount of money to Lobo and may have been meeting with him at the time of the murder. Keith asks Lobo to turn over surveillance tapes that would settle the matter. In response, the casino owner threateningly warns him, “Frankly, I’m not sure [Terrence] wants to owe me any more than he already does.” Ultimately though, with the interest of keeping Terrence out of prison and ensuring he can collect on his debt, he turns over the tapes. The tapes, despite picturing Terence in a meeting with Lobo at the time of the incident in question, cannot be used. They cannot be used because, as Terrence later reveals, Lobo is on the state’s “unsavory characters” list for allegedly fixing a college basketball game in the eighties; any evidence of their meeting would turn Terrence, a professional baseball player, into “the next Pete Rose.”

In his very brief appearance in the show, the audience learns two things about Lobo beyond the fact that he is a Native American casino operator. First, it is made very clear, that above all, he is concerned with money. His ability to, with little effort, vindicate a man of murder charges is only of interest to him after he is reminded that a conviction will prevent that man from repaying his debts. The only other piece of evidence available to the audience to make judgments about Lobo is a revelation that he has been listed by the state as an “unsavory character” because he allegedly fixed a basketball game. It is also not inconsequential that Lobo’s alleged crime involved gambling, the foundational element of gaming operations. Lobo,
the Native American casino owner, therefore is ostensibly driven by a lust for money, and willing
to break the law in order to get it.
Conclusion:

Multiculturalism produced a clear, discernible effect on the ways Native Americans are represented on television. This is especially true for stories and characters set in the past. American television producers and audiences have demonstrated a much greater willingness to accept a Native American perspective on history. Additionally, in many cases, writers and producers have tried to both disrupt stereotypes and reveal the value of Native American cultures. As has been previously addressed however, the multicultural effect was by no means complete. In many ways, the same stereotypes and concerns still exist, but often adopt a multicultural context or offer a justification. Native Americans are often still subjected to very simple moral characterizations of either good or bad; it is still relatively untypical for Native Americans characters to receive three-dimensional character treatments. Despite these failures however, in general, multiculturalism has produced a much greater willingness to sympathize with Native American characters.

The sympathy taught by multiculturalism, however, is extended with much less ease when modern Indian characters, especially those in the gaming industry, are at question; the adjusted expectations precipitated by multiculturalism are much easier to ignore in stories set in the present. As the Federal government has afforded Indian tribes a greater level of sovereignty and control over their own affairs, a number of Americans have seemed to latch on to the idea that Native Americans are receiving unfair, or unreasonable benefits. A belief that Indians have uniform exemption from taxation, the unchecked right to use illicit drugs, and a free-pass to the school of their choice are just some of the misinformed views that fuel the modern stereotypes of
Indians. Indian gaming has unfortunately worked to establish a firm image of Native Americans. Perhaps more than any circumstance in the twentieth century, gaming has kept American Indians in the forefront of the minds of Americans. Generally speaking however, this image, of the Native American casino, has worked to produce persistently negative portrayals on television.

There is a “disconnect” in the public consciousness between the Indians of the American historical landscape and their descendants here, in the modern world. Ward Churchill alludes to this disconnect when he argues “North American indigenous peoples have been reduced in terms of cultural identity within the popular consciousness—through a combination of movie treatments, television programming and distortive literature—to a point where the general public perceives them as extinct for all practical intents and purposes.” While Churchill’s evaluation does not account for the proliferation of Native American characters placed in modernity, his claim still holds resonance. The historical Native Americans who are familiar to the public are, as he says “extinct” in the minds of most. It seems obvious that, on some level, audiences could not possibly avoid the realization that there is a direct connection between the Native Americans they learned about in their history class and the ones that have reentered the public consciousness in the last two decades. While the connection may seem clear enough, there exists an equally recognizable tendency for audiences and producers to view the two (historical and modern Indians) as wholly separate groups of people.

That Native Americans associated with gaming are readily, and unfairly, viewed with the negative character traits of the bloodthirsty savage has not escaped the writers of at least one television series. An episode from the FX series It’s Always Sunny in Philadelphia that aired in late 2010, seemingly looks to highlight the absurdity of such portrayals. In the episode the

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show’s characters begin filming their own sequel to the *Lethal Weapon* film series. The central conflict of the episode is a debate between the characters concerning the propriety of performing the role of Roger Murtaugh (Danny Glover’s character from the film series) in black-face; they even show their completed film to a high school audience hoping to get their take on the issue.

The villain they have created for their remake is a Native American casino owner played by Danny DeVito. The braided wig and buckskin jacket that DeVito’s character wears is an embodiment of Friar’s “instant Indian kit.” Beyond his stereotypical appearance, he is purely evil; his mission throughout the “film” is to poison the city’s water supply. At one point, one of the show’s characters even pleads to the villainous Indian, “You’re supposed to be a noble people!” The irony of the episode is impossible to miss. While the characters are focused on their concerns about the racism associated with black-face, they ignore the blatant racism associated with their villainous Indian casino owner. The episode begs the question, why is it so easy to view characters associated with Indian gaming so negatively?

The ease with which television writers and producers portray the Indian gaming figure in a negative light is somewhat perplexing, especially given the apparent obligation not to overtly portray other, historically oriented, Indian characters in such a fashion. Perhaps the willingness to negatively portray modern Indians is, itself, a legacy of more deep-rooted stereotypes about Native Americans. When the narrator in *Drawn Together* says that the “Lost Souls Casino” is a “Gaudy mockery of their once great culture” it seems that perhaps overly romantic views of Native American culture are still at play. The Indians in the show had previously promised to “honor the land” as their ancestors would have. The audience is expected to realize that gaming represents a deviation from the honor and respect that their Native ancestors had for their land and their culture. It may, therefore, seem that their engagement in economically driven behavior
separates modern Indians, morally, from their ancestors. Indian gaming, or any capital venture
for that matter, violates a romantic understanding of Indian cultures that many in the public
possess and allows audiences to view historical Native Americans as distinctly different from
their modern counterparts. Put simply, it may seem to audiences that modern Native Americans
have allowed themselves to be corrupted, and are no longer worthy of the respect that their
ancestors are treated with. “Red Man’s Greed,” the episode from the series *South Park*, hints at a
slightly different conclusion, however.

The episode’s ironic role reversal places Indians, not whites, as the greedy exploiters. As
the show attempts to highlight, it is now Indians who, through gaming operations, are exploiting,
and participating in the moral degradation of a people. The show’s writers, it seems, are placing
modern Native Americans at the level of whites during the period of conquest and westward
expansion. Such a role reversal, although expressed hyperbolically in the show, points to a belief
that Native Americans are no longer the “victim.” Removed from their historical roll as victims
of white greed and racism, it seems that modern Native Americans are less likely to receive the
sympathy afforded to their historical counterparts by television writers and, ultimately, by
audiences.

Although the most prominent, gaming revenues are not the only factor contributing to the
view that Indians are no longer American history’s helpless victims. The belief that Native
Americans have a leg up in college admissions or that they are completely exempt from taxes,
for example, facilitates the assumption that beyond not being victims, Native Americans are
actually at an advantage. Recall the question that Vito, from *the Sopranos* asks: “What the fuck
we ever get we didn’t have to work our balls off for?” It is not unlikely that many Americans,
like Vito, wrongly feel Native Americans have it easier than most, or as Bobby (also from the
Sopranos) says, just “[sit] on [their] ass all day smokin’ mushrooms and collectin’ government checks.” Such uninformed views makes it easy for non-Native audiences to stomach and ultimately accept, the less-than-positive portrayals of Native American characters cast in modernity. While it is certainly not a secret that poverty and unemployment on reservations is rampant, it is not this image that comes across on television. Similarly, issues of taxation, especially in the case of casinos, are much more complicated than the average audience member is aware of. The image of modern Native Americans that audiences hold, and that is often reinforced by television shows, is not founded in reality. The explanation then, as is almost always the case in issues such as this, is ignorance. It is ignorance that allows misconceptions about Native American issues to persist, and it is therefore ignorance that ultimately allows television shows to misrepresent those same issues and, more unfortunately, Native Americans themselves.

One series that dealt with both Native American history and modernity, and, as far as stereotyping is concerned, seemed to succeed on both levels is Dreamkeeper. The series, set partially on a reservation, offered three-dimensional, completely human characters, whom audiences could not mistakenly assume were “living large” off government benefits and gaming revenues. The story focused exclusively on Native American characters and was presented from their perspective. Dreamkeeper, perhaps better than any other work on television in the last two decades, represented Native American characters, and Native issues with fairness. This distinction is not coincidentally related to the efforts on the part of the series’ writer and producer to collaborate and receive guidance from actual Native Americans. It was once standard procedure for Native American characters on film to be played by white actors. This practice was, over time, abandoned. In the future, following the lead of works like Dreamkeeper,
hopefully Native Americans will similarly be given more opportunities to help create Indian characters, as well as play them. *Dreamkeeper* stands as a testament to that which is possible when characters, stories, and dialogue are not constructed out of ignorance.
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