

INDIAN POSSESSION AND PLAYING: AN AMERICAN TRADITION FROM
TOM SAWYER TO TODAY

by

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ABSTRACT OF THE THESIS

Indian Possession and Playing: An American Tradition from Tom Sawyer to Today

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Toni Morrison's deconstructionist analysis of the Africanist presence in nineteenth century texts is complemented by analysis of Nativist presence in the same time period and beyond. While the Africanist presence, or lack thereof, helped white authors express the venture for a democratic freedom, the Nativist presence has helped—and continues to help—white authors articulate an American identity which is romantic and distinctly their own, separate from Europe. A number of texts published in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries portray Native Americans in a paradoxical way: the figure is simultaneously the quintessential villain, savage and untrustworthy, and a romantic object of play, resistant to civilization and therefore a figure to be possessed and emulated. At the core of this paradoxical representation is Mark Twain's *The Adventures of Tom Sawyer* (1876). The novel's villain, Injun Joe, is the epitome of evil, yet the Native American is still the object of Tom's imagination and infatuation. Even while Injun Joe is conveniently left to starve and die in an isolated setting, literally blocked from the rest of the civilization, Tom continues to "play Indian." Twain's novel appears at the transitional period between the nineteenth and twentieth centuries and it captures the ideologies of playing Indian and more specifically, the American ideologies within children's literature. This perpetuation of playing Indian lessons in children's literature is one which should be challenged and critiqued.

The project will begin with an interrogation of the literary-historical roots of this cultural tradition, as found in *Moby-Dick*, *The Last of the Mohicans*, and *Hobomok*. Then, *Tom Sawyer* will be employed as the transitional piece between the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, linking the literary-historical accounts with more contemporary novels and films that exacerbate this trope,

including *Little House on the Prairie*, *The Catcher in the Rye*, *The Indian in the Cupboard*, *The Bean Trees*, Disney's *Pocahontas* films, and Twentieth Century Fox's *Night at the Museum*. Rounding out the study is *The Absolutely True Diary of a Part-Time Indian*, which proves that the American fantasy continually permeates American children's literature and culture.

Acknowledgment and Dedication

I would like to take a moment to thank everyone who had some hand in preparation of this project. Thank you to Dr. Keith Green who, unknowingly, inspired me to begin this study in January 2010. Thanks to Dr. Carol Singley—I appreciate all of your help, time, and support during my entire two and a half years of graduate work at Rutgers-Camden, especially the last few months while I prepared my master’s thesis. To Dr. Holly Blackford—there are not enough words to express my sincerest gratitude to you for all of your time, attention, suggestions, guidance, and support during our year working together. I am certain that this project would not have been a success without you! Thanks, also, to my family and friends who have always supported my academic and personal endeavors. Ralph—you were my rock through this entire process. Thank you for everything.

I dedicate this project to my younger self, who always knew she could—and would—write something great one day.

One of my first memories of “playing Indian”—although completely unaware at the time that such a phrase existed—was the day before Thanksgiving in second grade. Our parents joined us in our classroom for the afternoon, and our task was to transform a simple brown grocery bag into an “Indian” vest: one we believed an Indian would have worn at the first Thanksgiving. Although we had been given the choice between a Pilgrim and an Indian, no one thought that a Pilgrim was even close to interesting. In fact, being an Indian meant that we could disguise ourselves as the “mythic” American figure: the figure that many people admired in books and museums but had never seen except through culturally-contrived lenses. By “becoming” Indians, we unintentionally took on the stereotypically “savage” behavior of this figure, as noted when our teacher announced during our party of apple cider and homemade cornbread, “Just because you look like Indians does not mean you have to act like them. Please sit quietly with each other and eat your snacks.” Surprisingly, after this day, I do not recall many other instances of learning about Native Americans, other than the occasional news story about a reservation. It was not until I enrolled in a graduate course about the role of Native Americans in American literature that I realized my knowledge about Native Americans was indicative of my white, middle-class upbringing.

In January of 2010, I began this study of perceptions of Native Americans in literature, particularly in children’s literature, because I wanted to delve deeper into what it meant for me to “play Indian” all those years ago. It struck me that for one second-grade afternoon, I had been immersed in a white fabrication of Native American culture, learning their positive contributions to our understanding of early America—totem poles, teepees, guides, interpreters. Yet all this afternoon really amounted to was apple cider, cornbread, and a disposable brown vest that would wear and tear after only a few weeks. This realization led to further clarification about my upbringing; I understood that like

many other white, middle-class school children, I was trapped in a legacy that misrepresented and romanticized Native Americans within the context of perpetuating an ideal uniquely understood as “American.” Native Americans have been and continue to be represented in a paradoxical way: the figure is simultaneously savage and giving, natural and untrustworthy, villainous and romanticized as an object of childhood play, resistant to civilization and therefore a figure to be possessed and emulated. They are objects of play and display that permeate American literature and culture. Completely unaware at the time, I was enacting a script that began the moment European settlers forced Indians to vacate their land and yet be used for entertainment purposes. The Native American figure has been used to define what children come to understand as American identity itself.

“Playing Indian”: The Historical Framework

International “playing Indian” began when settlers first brought Indians, some educated and integrated into white society and some captives, back to Europe in order to entertain white society there. In response to this practice, Rayna Green claims, “The demand was created for seeing Indians who remained, whatever their desires, in their ‘savage’ state, a demand that remains unabated to the present” (Green 33). The demand for children to “play Indian” is an even more disturbing glimpse into the perpetuation of American fantasy. “Playing Indian” is a very important activity in both American literature and culture. Green calls “playing Indian” a ‘performance,’ that she insists “represents one of the ways in which we can demarcate the boundaries of an American identity distinct from that which affiliates with Europe” (30). She proposes that since the earliest of European settlement, “playing Indian” by non-Indians has been one of the most intriguing forms of traditional expression that seems to exist across boundaries of class, gender, race, age, and other cultural signifiers. Further, it is an activity that is important internationally and nationally, an activity exported and imported. In fact, a pertinent example of non-native “playing” was seen during the Boston Tea Party, December 16, 1773, when many men in the Boston Harbor area disguised themselves as Mohawk Indians, boarded three vessels loaded with British tea supply, and dumped the tea into the water. Many American activists believe that the Boston Tea Party is a symbol of protest. However, white fantasy does not wish to envision Native Americans as protestors in school replications of history; they wish to see Native Americans as conforming to white ideology.

Not only have Indians been used internationally to distinguish “Americanness” from their European origins, they also have been highly romanticized figures in national literature. The romanticization of the Native American figure is seen through various

forms of colonization—possession, play, display, and voluntary disappearance—throughout nineteenth-century texts. For example, Lydia Maria Child's *Hobomok* (1824), focusing mainly on the nobility of an Indian named Hobomok, showcases this phenomenon perfectly. Hobomok's own people misunderstand and fear him. Nevertheless, he serves as a guide, interpreter, and diplomatic liaison for the Pilgrims in Plymouth Rock, New England. He even marries a white woman and has a son with her. Yet, when her true love is found, he ultimately "returns" her to the settlers and disappears forever. Similarly, James Fenimore Cooper's *The Last of the Mohicans* (1826) features Hawkeye, the romanticized frontiersman, known for his strength and fearlessness but only heroic insofar as he is Indianized. If he had not learned all he knows from the Indians with whom he spent time, he would not necessarily be considered "heroic." Additionally, Chingachgook, the stoic and noble "red man," escorts the traveling Munro sisters. Chingachgook's son Uncas is the last of the pureblood Mohicans, and when he dies in battle, the noble race dies as well. Not only is the noble savage extinct, but he also voluntarily bequeaths the land to Hawkeye, causing the race's removal from the land.

The term "noble savage" fuels the Native American trope seen in children's literature since the early nineteenth century. The term "noble savage" first appeared in John Dryden's poem *The Conquest of Grenada* (1672), but the term has been erroneously connected to Jean-Jacques Rousseau, an eighteenth-century, Genevan philosopher. After the term appeared in Dryden's poem, the understanding of "noble savage" was a reference to the "other," a Native American who was willing and happy to remain in his natural state yet was also "savage" or a heathen. As a development upon this ideal, Rousseau argued that only proper civilizations and working together in a society would make men good, rather than remaining in their animalistic and natural state. Although

Rousseau never used the term “noble savage,” his ideals developed further into the late eighteenth century and well into the nineteenth century.

The cultural fantasy of the noble Native American sacrifice of land and spirit is best seen in Herman Melville’s *Moby-Dick* (1851), which Toni Morrison has used to situate American identity in the nineteenth century. Melville’s novel details Queequeg, the ship’s harpooner, as the mediation between savage and civilized. Queequeg’s role eventually fades in importance, yet his coffin-turned-life buoy helps save Ishmael, the white narrator whose whaling voyage stands for a vision of democratic brotherhood. *Moby-Dick* fits into a broader pattern of American texts in which a white man depends on a racial “other” in order to claim legitimacy and heroism in an American context. In her deconstructionist criticism *Playing in the Dark: Whiteness and the Literary Imagination* (1992), Toni Morrison analyzes great American authors and their texts, such as those by Herman Melville, Nathaniel Hawthorne, and Mark Twain, in order to show that white Americans were dependent upon the African “other” in order to be successful. She suggests, “Africanism is the vehicle by which the American self knows itself as not enslaved, but free; not repulsive, but desirable; not helpless, but licensed and powerful; not history-less, but historical” (Morrison 52). Her interpretation of American literature and culture is that they reflect American ideology: dominant white self-images rely on the oppressed minority to situate democratic freedom, brotherhood, power, and similar positive attributes because such positive qualities can only be known through examples of what they are *not*. Morrison aptly locates white fantasy in Mark Twain’s *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*. The only way for Huck to develop any moral compass is to use Jim as his foil: “it is absolutely necessary...that the term *nigger* be inextricable from Huck’s deliberations about who and what he himself is—or, more precisely, is not” (55). Morrison emphasizes the absolute need to use the “other” as a point of reference.

Although Morrison marks the “other” in *Huckleberry Finn*, this disturbing paradigm is even more evident in Mark Twain’s *The Adventures of Tom Sawyer* (1876), a text published in a transitional period between the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. *Tom Sawyer* captures the ideologies of “noble savage,” “playing Indian,” and the continuation of American mythologies in children’s literature, a practice that should be challenged and critiqued. What Morrison defines as the Africanist presence can be applied to the far less obvious Native American trope in children’s literature and culture, where “playing Indian” is institutionalized and encouraged in organizations such as Boy Scouts of America, which developed camps for children to “play Indian” and other forms of make-believe with peers. *Tom Sawyer* uses the titular character as the forerunner of this cultural phenomenon. Tom incorporates his white, middle-class values and the influence of his town’s villain, Injun Joe, into his childhood imagination and play. He is the literary model on which children’s Native American fantasy is built; therefore, he is the prototypical camper. Similar to “playing Indian” which became standard practice in schools seeking to define American festivals like Thanksgiving, camps defined American childhood through Indianization, prefigured by the outdoor play of Tom Sawyer.

This study deploys Twain’s *The Adventures of Tom Sawyer* as the transition between American romanticism and its insinuation in children’s literature. Tom is a prototypical camper—not the tent-pitching kind; rather, he leaves home for a short period of time and heads to the field with his friends and engages in boyhood activities, most notably the game of “pretend.” The “other” that Tom uses as his point of reference, similar to Huck and Jim, is the novel’s villain, Injun Joe. He is the epitome of evil, and he is left alone to starve and die in a cave, conveniently removed from the rest of the civilization. Yet he remains the object of Tom’s imagination and infatuation. Tom’s removal from society for a short period reflects the Emersonian romantic ideals of self-

reliance in nature, but it also reflect the idea attributed to psychologist G. Stanley Hall that boys need to rid themselves of their inner “savage” before returning to civilization, a place where savagery has no place.

Hall’s views of “adolescence” helps support the claim that Tom is a prototypical camper and a “Good bad boy,” a phrase coined by Leslie Fiedler. The period called “adolescence” is a time when young, impressionable minds must grow into civilization from their “savage” state. Influenced by evolutionary theory, Hall supported the idea that childhood was a concept that could not clearly be defined and that the best place to rear the child was in the home because of a child’s savage tendencies. Children were to learn civilization, but not at too early an age; that way they could progress from childhood into adulthood without neurosis or repression. The development of scouting and camps in America was different from the para-military ideals in British scouting. The “nineteenth century summer camps catered almost exclusively to boys, removing them from the comfortable, feminized homes and immersing them in rustic, all-male environments” (Van Slyck 24). They were an outlet for adolescents to gather with those who had similar interests and hobbies as themselves, explore these interests away from home, and potentially learn “survival” skills employed by Native Americans, including hunting, archery, tent-pitching, and fire-making. Indianizing had become instrumental in raising “vigorous men,” men who at one point “played Indian” as boys and therefore participated in a tradition that began with the colonists.

Tom is viewed as the model “Good bad boy” because he is similar to America viewing itself as an unruly youth in its beginning but ultimately learning what is right—the hegemony of the (adult) social order cannot, and should not, be challenged by the unruly spirit or actions of the youth. Additionally, Tom’s masculine mischievousness is fueled by the Indianizing in the text, the enjoyment in “playing Indian” with peers in

nature. This narrative of male adolescence was institutionalized for youths in the late nineteenth century when British camps and scouting interests emerged in America. These camps were predicated on the idea articulated by G. Stanley Hall that non-Natives should act out as though they were natives so that boys' inner savages would find an outlet and ultimately be civilizable.

Contemporary literature and films do not help this trope; they exacerbate the problem of the Nativist presence in American culture. Laura Ingalls Wilder's *Little House on the Prairie* (1935) develops the colonization practice of possession; J.D. Salinger's *The Catcher in the Rye* (1945) reveals display and social isolation; *Night at the Museum*, a film produced by Twentieth Century Fox (2006), promotes the Indian woman, Sacagawea, as an object of display; Lynne Reid Banks' *Indian in the Cupboard* (1980) circulates ideas of possession, play, and adoption as a newer form of colonization that masquerades as benign and maternal; Barbara Kingsolver's *The Bean Trees* (1988) disturbingly combines the rhetoric of play and child adoption as a form of "maternal" colonization; and Disney's *Pocahontas* films (1995 and 1998) conclude my study as an eroticized display of Indian sexualization, narratives that consumers of Pocahontas dolls, toys, and other fabrications of the Native fantasy continue to play beyond the screen. Many of the colonization practices involve children and therefore reproduce cultural fantasy. *The Adventures of Tom Sawyer* encourages most of the colonization practices of the contemporary literature, such as the misrepresentation, display, possession, and play of the Native American figure.

Tom Sawyer as the Prototypical Camper and Endorser of Native American Stereotype

Approximately three years prior to the installment of boys' camps and organizations into mainstream American society, Mark Twain wrote and published *The Adventures of Tom Sawyer* (1876). This novel presents a child who is the product of a middle-class, white value system which endorses the stereotype of Native Americans. In a few select scenes and passages, it is clear that Tom exhibits the characteristics of the real boys (outside of the fictional novel) who "play Indian" in camps.

The Adventures of Tom Sawyer is considered a classic in American literature for many reasons, but one of the most important is how the presentation of the ideals to which Toni Morrison refers in *Playing in the Dark*: the white, middle-class adolescent, Tom, needs the "other," Injun Joe, in order to define who or what he is and who or what he is not. Tom lives with Aunt Polly, a woman who attempts to instill religious and moral composition into her mischievous nephew. In addition, Tom is friends with Huck, with whom he temporarily leaves home to experience nature, to learn survival skills, and to expand their imaginations without the influence of civilization. The Emersonian ideals of self-reliance and nature exist when Tom is just as "playing Indian," a legacy Twain would bequeath to late nineteenth-century children's literature and culture.

One of the most important passages for understanding how Tom fits within a culture that supports "playing Indian" is found in chapter eight. In this scene, Tom is deciding what role he will play if he were to "[disappear] mysteriously" (65). This passage forecasts later events in the novel because Twain suggests elements of romanticism—Tom is living the typical middle-class life of attending school and church and he consistently attempts to act out his imaginative fantasies—all while concurrently incorporating white society's stereotypes of American Indians. The first example of romanticism is Tom's imagination, which is evident through his detailed descriptions of

the character roles he wishes to play. He first attests that he will be a soldier, but he then decides there is something better. He will “join the Indians, and hunt buffaloes,” as well as engage in other “Indian” tasks (65). Here, Tom expresses his plans of make-believe for when he momentarily leaves home, the time when he will experience nature and self-reliance. Nature and self-reliance are central components of the romanticized “savage” that he is trying to portray.

A romanticized “savage” is a concept that is developed from the earlier concept of “noble savage” in which the Indian figure may possess qualities unsuitable for a civilized society yet is a figure that willingly sacrifices himself or disappears to appease this white counterpart. In *Tom Sawyer*, Injun Joe does not quite conform to the “noble savage.” Instead, he is forced to remain alone and starved, ultimately left to die away from the remainder of the white—and supposedly civilized—society.

Twain embraces the white middle-class societal values of placing the Native American figure into the “noble savage” role by having Injun Joe be the object of Tom’s imagination and infatuation and by having him disappear. Helen Harris, author of “Mark Twain’s Response to the Native Americans,” states, “In the character Injun Joe, Twain demonstrated the typical Indian’s treachery, murderousness, cowardice, and depravity” (Harris 499). While some of Twain’s earlier works portray Indians and other minorities with much more hostility, *Tom Sawyer* is still able to capture Twain’s use of stereotype. Additionally, Anita Moss claims, “Because Injun Joe is an Indian, society refuses to give him useful employment, then refuses to feed him, and finally punishes him and hides its own painful guilt in the name ‘vagrant,’ which appears to justify its treatment of the Other” (Moss 41). For Tom and his society, Injun Joe is a physical representation of the evil projected upon minorities by whites and other people of social stature. Therefore

Injun Joe also represents the consequences of such mistreatment, as seen towards the end of the novel when he is enclosed in a cave and dies from starvation.

The cave scene at the end of the novel has a dual purpose in this novel. First, Injun Joe is isolated from white society. Because he is the “other,” he will be unable to operate fully within society, at least from the viewpoint of those with more importance. His marginalization forces him to return to his “savage” state, although Twain writes him to have the same characteristics as the stereotypical Indian—treacherous and sneaky. However, the condemnation from society is only one part of the American infatuation with Indians. The other feature of this scene is display and exhibition: “Injun Joe was buried near the mouth of the cave; and people flocked there in boats and wagons from the towns and from all the farms and hamlets for seven miles around” (208). In this scene, Indians are seen as appropriate objects of “display.” Joe’s death in the cave becomes an attraction to which many people come.

Not only is Tom’s imagination influenced by the mistreatment of Indians, it is also influenced by the glorification of their disappearance. After Tom considers becoming an Indian, he proposes another personality he would like to undertake—one that was “gaudier.” Tom decides that he will become a pirate who will travel the seas and “make people shudder!” (65) Although Tom believes that being a pirate is “gaudier” than being an Indian, it is still important for the reader to consider how the definition of “gaudy” relates to both Tom’s imagining of Indians and his society’s biased perceptions of Indians.

The term “gaudy” has a very important function in *Tom Sawyer*. Two of its possible definitions are most relevant to the novel and time period in which Twain was writing. According to the *Oxford English Dictionary*, “gaudy” can be defined as “brilliantly fine or gay, highly ornate, or showy” (OED). The second definition means

“full of trickery,” (OED) although this definition has been obsolete since the late nineteenth century. The last notable use of this second definition was seen in 1882, six years after the publication of *Tom Sawyer*. It is fair judgment, then, that Twain used this term because of its irony: that Indians are more than brightly dressed or boisterous in their behavior; they are sneaky and untrustworthy. Moreover, the gaudiness of Indians is what fuels both Tom and the continual obsession of Americans to “play Indian,” through make-believe.

The pivotal scene of romanticism and “playing Indian” is located halfway through the novel. This scene allows the reader to make a clear connection between Tom and camp children because there are direct correlations between imagination use, creativity, community, and freedom. Part of “playing Indian” for Tom, especially in this particular scene, is to endorse societal assumptions about American Indians through mimicry of physical appearance and manners. Not only does Tom adorn his body with mud to appear like an Indian chief, he also “smok[es] a pipe of peace.” The reason for smoking the pipe was to create hospitality between him and his friends. More importantly, the pipe was smoked because there “was no other process that ever they had heard of” (119). We have to wonder why the boys had been exposed to only one peace-making method. In one regard, Tom and the others are ignorant of real Indian ways because the only experience they have ever had is with the town’s villain, Injun Joe, whom Twain writes as a one-sided figure: savage. Also, they can only imagine the “gaudiness” of Indian chiefs and therefore assume all Indians act the same. Further, Twain is again critiquing the white middle-class values by indicating that Tom is raised to have more freedom than a young boy typically would and therefore is so “bourgeois” to be correctly educated on the subject of American Indians so that he will not make assumptions about them.

Tom is not limited to use of his mind or imagination while setting up camp with his friends; instead, he also engages in physical activities, such as fishing and cooking, in order to survive while away from Aunt Polly. Early in the novel, Tom contemplates all of the various people he would like to be. First, he thinks that he should be a soldier, and then he decides to be an Indian to “hunt buffaloes ... hideous with paint,” but he ultimately chooses a persona even “gaudier” than an Indian—a pirate (65). Tom names himself a “pirate” name and travels on the river. However, we see in the camp scene that he wishes to “knock off being pirates, for a while” in order to be an Indian again (118). This scene depicts Tom and the others’ fullest attempt at “playing Indian” by undressing and then striping themselves with black mud. Ann McGrath writes, “By outward indicators such as costume and actions, they switch identity in minutes” (17). McGrath’s point states that children can change their physical appearances, even slightly, in order to become a different identity, which is exactly what happens with Tom and his friends. The significance of changing from a pirate to an Indian stems from the fact that a pirate is purely an imagined role that Tom never experiences, whereas a real Indian half-breed is the savage of his own town.

Tom is able to experience his freedom and “play Indian” in the company of his closest friends, which allows those experiences to be much more satisfying than if he were alone. Not only does Tom give himself a “pirate” name and act like an Indian, he also performs these make-believe actions in the company of Huck and Joe, which is significant because children tend to cope with frightening situations and learn better when with their peers. With their participation, Tom is able to make a bond with other people who share his experiences and secrets unknown to the adults when he returns home. Sharon Wall, author of “Totem Poles, Teepees, and Token Traditions” suggests, “part of the essential meaning of camp was that it was more than a collection of unconnected

individuals; above all, it was a community” (526). This community is one in which children feel comfortable to express their thoughts and creativity as well as create bonds with other children who share their same interests.

There are other significant instances regarding Tom’s involvement in peer bonding. Twain writes, “There comes a time in every rightly constructed boy’s life when he has a raging desire to go somewhere and dig for hidden treasure...Tom took him to a private place and opened the matter to him confidentially. Huck was willing” (Twain 150). Not only does this scene describe Tom’s desire for childish play and adventure, but it also shows Tom’s search for someone with whom he can share the experience. Additionally, even just mentioning his idea to Huck in confidence shows trust and communication, which are two elements of a strong relationship between two people. An earlier scene depicts Tom and Huck making an oath to never discuss the murder committed by Injun Joe. Tom uses one of his needles to prick his finger in order to sign his initials “T.S.” on the oath. After his initials are in place, “he showed Huckleberry how to make an H and an F, and the oath was complete” (78). This bond between the boys is even more distinct than verbal connection. This example shows a physical sign that they are sworn to the agreement and to the bond made between each other, a bond predicated on the silencing of the Indian figure.

Peer bonding is so important for Tom and other (real) adolescent boys because it allows them to join together to “play Indian” and engage in other fun, outdoor activities. The emergence of scouting camps for children in the period after the publication of *Tom Sawyer* helped to foster male adolescence, newly viewed as an important, transitional period between childhood and adulthood. One of the earliest camps established was the Woodcraft Indians, founded in 1902 by Ernest Thompson Seton, a group “which celebrated Native American culture as a model of simplicity, nobility, and respect for the

environment” (Van Slyck 27). Groups like the Woodcraft Indians shared the goal of instilling a Native American value system in a centralized way. However, what boys actually learned was quite different, as Van Slyck discusses:

By encouraging campers to find their authentic selves by temporarily adopting Indian ways, summer camps encouraged white children to see themselves as the rightful inheritors to North America, thus downplaying the violence involved in the conquest of Indian lands and erasing white responsibility for that violence. (33)

The prototypical camper, the character who embraces the ideology of groups like the Woodcraft Indians, is Tom Sawyer, who “plays Indian” as fluently as he white-washes the “continent” of the fence before him. Ultimately, the growth and popularity of boys’ organizations helped promote the induction of girls’ organizations, groups that embarked on achieving similar results.

The development of camps gradually moved from strictly boys’ environments into environments for girls as well, beginning in the early twentieth century. The employment of private girls’ camps “embraced the opportunity to reform gender roles” and “encouraged campers to develop into capable and fun-loving women who would help raise the next generation of vigorous men” (Van Slyck 24). The encouragement of “gender-role bending” was really an attempt to help girls develop into women who would be able to defend their homes just as well as men—not physically as for the military, but emotionally. Girls needed strength to provide a stable and functional environment in which to rear children. Camps became a place for them to learn how to raise their sons into strong, independent citizens, who would in turn defend their own homes. Camp activities were strictly gender-defined; whereas the males would have their council ring, the center of the camp where the fire and the camp community meet together, in an obvious location, the girls’ council ring would tend to be out of sight. The gendered interpretation of the camp’s aesthetics deflected attention from the racial implications,

which again, allowed campers to subconsciously remove guilt or responsibility for inheritance of North America.

The inheritance of North America is greatly attributed to the work of the early pioneers, the group of people who moved westward towards California, in hopes of claiming new land. Susan A. Miller's *Growing Girls: The Natural Origins of Girls' Organizations in America* notes that the implementation of girls' organizations and camps went hand in hand with the pioneering and industrialization of America at the time. The incorporation of domestic skills in the camps later translated into the home where the girls would raise their families. The inherent tension between promoting girls' camps to develop hearty character and "pioneering" homesteads to promote middle-class culture is most evident in pioneer literature for girls, especially the popular series by Laura Ingalls Wilder, the subject of the following section.

Girls, the Pioneer Story, and Laura Ingalls Wilder

In the late nineteenth century, many people embarked on a crusade to settle the frontier, including the family of author Laura Ingalls Wilder, whose name has become part of the American children's literary canon and is continually associated with the mythologized American frontier. Having been a pioneer girl, Wilder uses herself as the basis for her work in the *Little House* series, which covers her time from childhood into young adulthood, when she experiences the pioneer world, becomes a domesticated woman, and encounters and displaces the Native Americans. Her experiences with the Native Americans show the novel's extreme fear of the wild, while simultaneously and paradoxically taking delight in the obsession with Native Americans.

Laura Ingalls Wilder's personal experiences with Native Americans, as detailed in her beloved pioneer story *Little House on the Prairie* (1935), are indicative of the tension between her fluctuating identifications with her two parents. Pa's disposition is representative of the "wild" because he is able to convince Ma, originally from an urban, sophisticated, and domesticated environment, to pioneer and settle the natural, untamed frontier. His desires foil Ma's disposition, which is to domesticate both the land and her children, even in the presence of "wild" Indians. As Laura learns about survival on the frontier, she is also self-identifying as the mediation between the "wild" and domesticity.

Little House represents the dual representation of Native Americans as savage and romantic, further emphasizing Laura's perspective of Pa and Ma. When the family members pack their belongings and head west to Indian Country from the Big Woods of Wisconsin, Pa tells Laura that she will have the chance to see a real papoose. She knows that her father had seen Indians as a boy, but she has not yet had the opportunity: "She knew they were wild men with red skins, and their hatchets were called tomahawks. Pa knew all about wild animals, so he must know about wild men, too" (Wilder 56). This

statement is one of the first major stereotypes seen in this novel. Laura has only heard about Indians as being wild people and she also knows that Pa is the only one “qualified” to show her, so for the remainder of the novel, she desperately continues to ask about them and the papooses. Additionally, the year the Ingalls spend in Indian Country tests their opinions of and relationships with the Indians they see. Ma is extremely conservative in her desires to deal with the Indians, whereas Pa remains the voice of reason. Laura, on the other hand, is the future possessor of Indians, as showcased in a few pivotal scenes.

Pa’s depiction of Indian Country is one of the first noticeable dichotomies in *Little House*. After crossing the Mississippi and believing that their family dog, Jack, has drowned, Pa is quiet for some time but finally retorts, “And what we’ll do in a wild country without a good watchdog I don’t know” (Wilder 27). Pa’s statement insinuates that there are little to no white settlers and therefore the only things “wild” enough for a watchdog are the Indians. Additionally, he tells Ma that Independence, the town (civilization), is forty miles from where they set up house. Independence represents the complete opposite of the wild country in which the Ingalls family find themselves. After this one distinct moment when Pa insinuates the “wildness” of Indians, he generally respects and understands them, even to the point that he “did not believe that the only good Indian was a dead Indian,” (301) contrary to others’. On the other hand, Ma believes they are vagrant and nothing else.

Ma’s impressions and fears of Indians come into focus in a scene halfway through the novel: she does not feel comfortable around the Indians nor does she like them. Wilder opposes the Indians, representatives of the wild, and Ma, representative of domesticity and industrialization of the land. After Pa leaves one morning, two Indians approach and enter the house. Ma and Baby Carrie are inside, while Mary and Laura are

outside playing. Mary and Laura have been given strict instructions to keep Jack restrained while Pa is gone, yet “[Laura] knew she must do something. She did not know what those Indians were doing to Ma and Baby Carrie. There was no sound at all from the house” (135-36). Laura’s fear of harm is quite questionable at this moment. Until this point, she has not had direct dealings with any Indians at all; she relies solely on the opinions of her parents. However, neither Pa nor Ma says anything too stereotypical or harmful about them. In fact, Ma’s simple comments include “Whatever makes you want to see Indians?” and “I just don’t like them” (46). Ma’s comments are harmful to the Indians’ reputation and even though she has no real justification for her distaste in Indians, she repeatedly makes her opinion known. Even later in the novel, the narrator tells us, “Jack hated Indians, and Ma said she didn’t blame him” (227). Therefore, in the moment of contact with the Indians, Laura allows her mother’s judgments to influence her own thoughts. Ma’s opinions are not the only opinions that help sway Laura’s interpretation of the Indians; she is also influenced by views of Pa, views that oppose Ma’s.

Sometimes it is apparent that the presence of the Indians is not harmful at all, yet societal and generational misconceptions of them skew Laura’s and Mary’s interpretations of them. For example, in a key scene, Laura and Mary enter into the house to see two Indians standing behind Ma in their moccasins and freshly-skinned skunk furs, while Ma prepares cornbread over the fire. When the Indians finally part from the house, Pa returns from hunting and asks Ma if they have been visited by any Indians. Ma informs him that two had come into the house and that she was terrified. Her response is consistent with her previous opinions of Indians. Pa responds, “You did the right thing. We don’t want to make enemies of any Indians” (143). This response shows Pa’s respect for the Indians; he understands that white settlement is moving onto the Indians’ land. He

realizes that respect for the Indians will ensure the survival of himself and his family and that refusal of them could be detrimental. Pa knows that the Indians could retaliate with violence if they were to “make enemies” with them. This understanding of trouble is further solidified when he learns that Laura had considered turning Jack loose to bite the Indians. Pa reinforces to his daughter that if she had done such a thing, there would have been “bad trouble” (146). His directions for his daughter come from the understanding that if there had been any violence placed upon the Indians, more Indians would have come to harm, or even kill, the entire Ingalls family. This scene reaffirms white societal values: if the Ingalls family, and all whites for that matter, are not careful, the “wild” Indians could and would harm them.

The following scene categorizes the Native Americans into a vanishing people whose only remains are artifacts of their culture, pieces to be collected and possessed. One hot, summer day, Pa takes Laura and Mary to the camp where the Indians had been. Both Laura and Mary are excited to go, and upon their arrival to the camp, they see the remains of a people that had moved on, perhaps even forced to move on because of the encroaching settlement of whites. The remains of rabbit bones, ashes from the fires, and other items all prove that they are a disintegrating people. In addition, there are many colorful beads left behind that Laura and Mary collect and use as miniature artifacts of the vanished Indians. When they return home, they present the beads to Ma and “[They] were even prettier than they had been in the Indian camp” (179). This statement is important: whereas the beads are simply remains of diminishing people and only somewhat beautiful, somehow they become even nicer in the possession of whites. The whites’ possession of the beads signifies that they can claim the beauty of these artifacts because they have control over them and the Indians no longer do. The beads, once of everyday and perhaps ceremonial use to the Indians, become like museum pieces to the whites.

Laura and Mary's collection of Native American beads proves to be another instance that removes the Native American people, and any trace of them, from the white society encroaching upon them. When Ma sees the beads, Mary says that she wants Baby Carrie to have hers, and then against her true desires, Laura, too, suggests that Baby Carrie have her beads as well. Together, the girls' bead collection makes enough to string a necklace together for Baby Carrie. However, Ma says that Baby Carrie is too little to wear them. As a result, Ma puts the beads in a drawer until Baby Carrie is old enough to wear them. The beads are the only tangible items remaining after the Indians' departure, and as a result, they are respected and revered as special for a few short moments. Then, just as the Indians themselves, the beads disappear for a later time.

The ultimate objectification of the Native American people appears at the end of the novel when Laura attempts to capture and keep an Indian baby as if it is an object like the beads. Throughout the novel, Laura's desire to see a papoose completely consumes her mind. When the Indians ride away at the end of the novel, right before the Ingalls move on as well, Laura finally sees a papoose in a basket that is hanging from its mother's horse. As she looks into the baby's eyes, Laura connects with it and says, "Pa, get me that little Indian baby!" (308). She not only wants something—nay, someone—whom she cannot have, but she *demand*s that the baby be given to her. Then, she begs, "It wants to say with me. Please, Pa, Please!" (308) Surprisingly for her, after numerous attempts of begging, Pa denies her access and she begins to cry. This scene depicts Laura as representative of the arriving whites who believe they are entitled to capture, possess, and make "play things" out of Indians and their belongings and with no real reason; she only wants the papoose because she wants it for herself and because she assumes that it wants her back.

Laura identifies with the papoose because she, like it, is the mediation between the wild and domesticity. On one hand, Laura wants to be like the Indians and her father, all of whom are moving further west. Going west means embracing the wild, untamed land and requires self-reliance to survive away from civilization. On the other hand, Laura is like her mother in wanting a baby of her own to take care of. The fact that the baby is a Native American baby emphasizes the need for a white maternal figure to care for a small, helpless, “poor” Indian. While the Indian baby negotiates Laura’s divided identification with Pa and Ma, the papoose that Laura wants but cannot have proves a more far-reaching negotiation of American identity as a white vision displacing and objectifying Indians even as it pretends to cherish and idealize Indianizing roots in the wilderness.

Museums and Holden Caulfield

Laura and Mary's bead collection and Laura's attempt to claim and possess an Indian baby are forms of colonization similar to those found in museums across the country. The capturing of Native American relics and replicas perpetuates the problem of Native American (mis)representation, possession and display. Because the trope of the Native American in a museum anchors a vision of a longed-for childhood in *The Catcher in the Rye*, a mid-century text that became a statement for post-War youth culture, this discussion will trace the trope of the extinct Indian in the vision of Holden Caulfield.

Memories of the American past—travel, exploration, Pilgrims, pioneers, and Native Americans—are captured in documents, like narratives, letters, and verbal stories, as well as museums in which the items and figures contained within are literally captured behind a glass case. The cases help preserve the memory of American history.

Unfortunately, in the case of the Native Americans, museums serve as a paradox: while preserving the nature and information about the Native American people, the displays trap and parade their memory as “objects” to be appreciated and admired but still appropriated by the white majority. For example, in a popular novel, *The Catcher in the Rye* (1945), Holden Caulfield compares his own personal struggles with the struggles of the Native Americans he so distinctly remembers from his childhood. The plight of the Native Americans mirrors his own fear of extinction, along with a desire to reserve a pure, native past that never existed.

Holden's distinct memories of his childhood field trips to the Museum of Natural History in New York City are the source of his identification with the Native Americans in the display cases. Holden experiences some kind of transcendence when he recalls all of the glass displays, specifically of the Native Americans. Holden has such fond memories of the Native Americans because he recognizes that he shares points with them:

just as the Native Americans are isolated from the rest of the museum in their own special wing, Holden is also isolated from his peers; therefore, he can only associate with his kid sister, Phoebe, and people who are older, like his favorite teacher. However, even his teacher turns out to be a “phony” like everyone else. Additionally, Holden is desperately attempting to find his own identity and purpose, just as Native Americans have struggled for centuries for their place among the mainstream American society. The glass in the museum is similar to the invisible barrier Holden is trying to cope with in his own life, in the process of moving out of childhood into adulthood. Unfortunately for Holden, like the museum that houses his precious Native Americans, he wants everything to remain the way it is, so that he is not forced to grow up and make an authentic version of himself. He will forever search for the authenticity that he admires in his museum scene. Ultimately, the construction of Holden’s narrative is similar to the Native American display because his story is contained under strict observation in a psychiatric ward and therefore is on display himself.

Holden has a tendency to label everything in his life—events, people, and ideas—and by doing so he makes evident the impending failure to find his place among his peers and in his life. Throughout the novel, Holden says that people are all “phonies” but Holden is the biggest phony of all. In the development of his story, we see that Holden first begins as a random, nameless, faceless boy similar to a Native American he describes, and eventually, through a series of events over the few days before his breakdown, he searches for an identity, sexually and personally, even though he is afraid to move from child to adult. Holden’s obsession with “phonies” is because he is actually looking for authenticity in the people he knows. The only encounter he has ever had is with the Native American exhibit and the other museum artifacts that are enclosed behind

the display cases. He is searching for an “authentic” self, and through his story we see how he struggles to do so.

Holden begins his story with the day he leaves Pencey Prep—and by leave, he means he gets expelled. So, gradually, Holden begins telling us all of the highs and lows of being a student at Pencey Prep and how he went to visit Old Spencer to give him the news of his expulsion. At this point in his story, Holden says, “Sometimes I act a lot older than I am—I really do—but people never notice it. People never notice anything” (Salinger 9). Here is one of our first encounters with Holden’s “outstanding” personality. Holden is not quite accurate in his statement; although Holden seemingly has better relationships with those who are older than he, it is by dumb luck, charm, manipulation, or perhaps a combination of all of them, he associates better with elders than with people his own age or of similar circumstances. Until he realizes that even his favorite teacher is also a “phony” and not as authentic as he presumes, Holden believes that those who are older have gained the knowledge and wisdom to be their authentic selves, as he is searching for.

Holden’s recollection of previous visits with Old Spencer emphasizes the unappreciated presence of Native Americans. Holden explains that on previous occasions, he and other guys would visit and “[Mr. Spencer] showed [them] this old beat-up Navajo blanket that he and Mrs. Spencer’d bought off some Indian in Yellowstone park” (7). This generalization of Native Americans is one of several that Holden makes throughout the text. Although we find out much later that he was actually intrigued by the Native Americans, for now the term is “some Indian.” The implications of this term “some” mirrors the Native presence in all of America and American literature—barely visible, if at all, and with no real distinction as separate cultures and people who have faces and names. The term “some” simply means a random Indian who happened to be in

Yellowstone coincidentally at the same time as Mrs. Spencer needed to buy a souvenir. Furthermore, the blanket marks a token of their culture, as do the beads found by Laura and Mary, even while Native Americans cultures are not truly respected. However, contained in the museum, they have the ability to share their culture with whoever wishes to be educated.

The visit to Spencer at Spencer's request shows how Holden attempts acceptance and association. This meeting is one of the first instances where the reader sees Holden indulge people who are older. He "plays the game," so to speak, so that the adults believe that he has it all together, that he is not psychologically disturbed, yet they almost always know that Holden's outward appearance and attitude are part of his act. Holden tells Spencer, "You didn't have to do all that. I'd have come over to say good-by anyway" (9). We can tell by the way Holden speaks and from other instances later in the visit, when he is narrating background information or what he really was thinking, that he wishes to give the impression that he does not care too much about anything. One example of his disinterest in the discussion he has with Spencer regarding a grade. He says, "So I shot the bull with him a while. I told him I was a real moron, and all that stuff...The old bull" (12-3). Even Holden admits that he was simply shooting the breeze, making Spencer believe that he cares about something, when all along he does not. There are times, though, that we have to question his motives to "impress" Spencer and other elders, something he also did in the first instance. Similarly, he suggests that he does not really care that people, especially his dad, tell him that he still acts like he is twelve, which he also openly admits he does. He says, "I don't give a damn, except that I get bored sometimes when people tell me to act my age" (9). For not caring, Holden spends a great deal of time suggesting that "People always think something's all true" in regards to his juvenile behavior. This scene is one of many occasions where Holden pretends not to

be bothered, when in fact he really is. It is one of the many times where he is undoubtedly unhappy with himself on the inside. The internal struggle Holden faces is reminiscent of the everlasting, outward struggle of the Native Americans to find their place against mainstream white society.

When Holden arrives in New York City and he is searching for Phoebe, he describes the Native Americans in concordance with the general American way: in general terms, as nameless and faceless. After he asks another young student where Phoebe might be, he is informed that she is probably in the museum. Holden knows exactly which museum it is—the one with the Indians. As in the beginning of the story, Holden classifies the Native Americans in general terms, but this time, they are used to identify exactly which museum Phoebe is probably visiting. Holden's memories of his own childhood museum visits is important for two reasons: first, he feels a connection with Phoebe because she is experiencing what he did in the past, and second, he experiences his moment of transcendence—seeing the glass cases where “everything always stayed right where it was” (121). In this moment of transcendence he realizes that he must grow up and not remain in adolescence. The glass that Holden broke when his brother Allie died was symbolic of adolescence trapped, but he realizes that in order to find his true identity, he must change. The Native Americans, like Allie, are trapped behind their glass cases because people expect them to be, and therefore they are unable to integrate.

Holden's fond memories of the museum rely on the unchanging nature of the museum itself. However, he also realizes that while nothing inside changes, he has and so will Phoebe. Holden recalls the Indian room that he and his class passed through in order to watch a video in the auditorium. He says that the room was filled with many Indians. There was one in particular that he remembers: “a squaw weaving a blanket. The squaw

that was weaving the blanket was sort of bending over, and you could see her bosom and all. We all used to sneak a good look at it, even the girls, because they were only little kids and they didn't have any more bosom than we did" (121). The squaw is pre-industrial, so in her attempt to make the protective blanket, she encompasses part of the American past, as well as a figure that Holden admires because he prefers older women, and her exposed breasts show her as a sign of uninhibited sexuality, something that he is unable to experience at this point in the novel. Additionally, Holden understands that this squaw is contained forever behind the big glass, separate from the rest of the museum, so that whoever comes to visit can see just what he had years before. As a result, Holden reverts to a state of avoidance of growing up, rather than his initial transcendence.

The Eskimo who sits outside the auditorium in the museum is another memorable Native American figure from Holden's childhood because the Eskimo remains the same. Holden mentions "Nobody'd be different," including the Eskimo, who was "sitting over this hole in the icy lake...and fishing from it" (121). Holden's obsession with the unchanging figures is obvious in his fascination with the older Eskimo who is working hard for his food. The icy lake reminds the reader of the glass cases where the Eskimo and the other Native American figures are stuck forever in that one place in the museum. Children, parents, and many others pass by the Native American glass cases, suggesting that the Native Americans are "afterthoughts" not worthy enough for careful pause and observation by passers-by.

Along with the transcendence of seeing things as they always were, Holden recognizes that those who visit the museum must change, unlike the Native Americans. Holden says, "The only thing that would be different would be you" (121). "You" refers to the museum visitor—not the unchanging displays and certainly not the Native Americans. Holden emphasizes that visitors would not necessarily be older or have

changed in a drastic way, just that they would be somewhat different. However, when it comes to Phoebe, he realizes how “she’d be different every time she saw it...Certain things they should be able to stay the way they are. You should be able to stick them in one of those big glass cases and just leave them alone” (122). Holden considers that whenever Phoebe visits the museum that she will be different, somehow tainted by the world, and he does not want that to happen. He wants her to stay ten years old, just as she is. More importantly, Holden does not want to see himself change any more than he already has. He said that he would have only gone into the museum if he knew Phoebe had been inside, so it is probably the case, then, that he wants to be stuck behind one of those big glass cases with her as well so that he does not have to change either.

Holden’s admiration of the displayed Native Americans in the Museum of Natural History is somewhat visualized in the 2006 film *Night at the Museum*. This film was produced sixty-one years after the publication of *The Catcher in the Rye* and uses the Museum of Natural History as the main setting. In two scenes featuring Sacagawea, it is evident that film also represents Native Americans as figures to be contained and displayed.

While the purpose of the film is to show how history literally comes to life at night, not all displays have the ability to leave their casings and interact with the others. In fact, the only display that does not have this ability, at least not until the last few scenes of the movie, is the one that contains Lewis and Clark and their tracker ally, Sacagawea. Her inability to communicate or leave this display until the last minute, and only when the others need her tracking abilities, indicates the myth that the Native American is stuck in a place that leaves them secluded from the rest of American society, and by leaving her there, she will forever remain untouchable.

The first problem with Sacagawea's display is that it is completely removed from all of the other exhibits. When Larry, the museum night watchman, asks Sacagawea for help, she motions as if she does not comprehend what he is saying. Visually speaking, the insinuation is that the indigenous woman does not understand the words or actions of the white man. However, this insinuation is incorrect. She simply cannot hear behind her glass surroundings, yet instead of breaking the glass to release her, he simply walks away. Then, while the rest of the exhibits are released and free to roam about, Sacagawea remains trapped, observing the rest of them only from afar. Surprisingly, a number of the other exhibits include people from history who would not have been able to speak English, such as Attila the Hun. However, even he was able to leave his glass display. This fact further emphasizes that Sacagawea was only worthy of interaction with Larry when he needed her help. Otherwise, keeping her away from the hustle and interaction of any kind is the best option.

The second noticeable problem with Sacagawea's display is that she is exploited behind her glass display. While inside, Sacagawea prances back and forth as though she were an animal locked in a cage at the zoo. Theodore Roosevelt, when he comes to life, admires her but is afraid to directly make contact with her. He consistently observes her from a distance and watches her with a lustful eye. The movie's depiction of Roosevelt and Sacagawea is historically inaccurate because the real people did not live during the same century. Still, the movie portrays their relationship to be one in which an older white male completely objectifies the young woman of color, as many novels and films have portrayed for centuries.

Playing With Toy Indians

Objectification of Native Americans does not pertain strictly to women or Native American figures in museums. In fact, Lynne Reid Banks' 1980 children's novel *The Indian in the Cupboard* combines the ideas of display, like in *The Catcher in the Rye*, as well as objectification of the Native figure, in the form of possession and play.

Similar to Salinger's exhibit of Native Americans in the Museum of Natural History, the cupboard in *The Indian in the Cupboard* acts as a display case, except worse—it is opaque. The cupboard's owner, Omri, is given an American Iroquois toy Indian for his birthday, and he decides to use an old bathroom cupboard as the Indian's "home." Omri quickly learns that locking the Indian in the cupboard brings it to life. During the Indian's moments of "realness," Omri is in complete control, especially when he consistently reiterates "my Indian."

Although Omri believes he knows about how real Indians lived years ago, his assumptions mirror the misconceptions of many non-Natives. For instance, right before the last chapter of the novel, Omri and Little Bear discuss becoming friends with those who were previously enemies. Omri suggests, "You both make little cuts on your wrists and tie them together so the blood mingles, and after that you can't be enemies ever again. It's an old Indian custom...It was in a film I saw" (Banks 209). The narrator tells the reader that Little Bear appeared baffled and replied, "Not Indian custom. White man idea. Not Indian" (209). In this instance, as in other textual examples of Native American stereotypes, Omri allows misrepresentations to dictate his conception of "fact" and what he "knew" about Native American traditions, even though his ideas are completely wrong. For Omri, and many American children, film creates concepts of "Indian" customs, although they sometimes are far from accurate.

Omri's play practices are forms of colonization. In addition to controlling his Indian's "realness" and the Indian's disappearance behind the cupboard, Omri acts "maternal" and becomes Little Bear's adoptive "mother." Not only does Omri feed Little Bear food from the kitchen, he also carries Little Bear to school and he enforces discipline between his toys so that they will be civil with each other. For example, Omri tells the cowboy, "You're going to eat with the Indian" (123), to which the cowboy objects that he will not eat "with no lousy scalp-scafflin' Injun" (123). The cowboy's resistance suggests the white refusal to accept Native Americans as anything savage and dangerous. However, Omri does not accept this resistance. He retorts, "Now you eat together or you don't get any at all, so make up your minds to it. You can start fighting again afterward if you must" (124). Surprisingly, Omri acts like an authoritative parent in the first half of the novel, enforcing guidance, acceptance, and civility, but in the second half he reverts to the typical white idealism that whites and Indians will forever be at odds with one another.

Besides the ongoing worry of responsibility for Little Bear, the most important "motherly" act is finding Little Bear a wife. Little Bear informs Omri about the Iroquois marriage tradition: "With Iroquois, mother find wife for son. But Little Bear mother not here. Omri be mother and find" (103). Omri does not immediately believe he could be Little Bear's mother, but ultimately he provides the female Indian girl for Little Bear. This selection process disturbingly sexualizes the Native American figure, similar to Pocahontas; it is based strictly on physical appearance. Once Little Bear has his new wife, Omri decides that none of them need to be real people anymore, so he changes his Indians back to plastic to send them "home."

Omri's decision to send away his adoptive play objects signifies his discontent and disinterest in caring for the Native American figure. Similarly, Barbara Kingsolver's

1988 novel *The Bean Trees*, published six years after *The Indian in the Cupboard*, revisits “maternal” colonization in the forms of play and child adoption, ultimately revealing that vanished Native Americans are a means for promoting the (imagined) purity of the American past.

Possession in the form of Adoption

The Indian in the Cupboard is a unique combination of playing house, through the temporary “motherly” care, and “playing Indian,” and through the use of children’s toys. Kingsolver’s novel encapsulates both obvious and obscure forms of colonization as experienced by the Native female: playing *with* the Indian female through temporary adoption. The Indian female is a three-year-old Cherokee child who is adopted by Taylor Greer, a young woman looking to make a new life in Tucson, Arizona. Taylor says, “The Indian child was a girl. A girl, poor thing” (Kingsolver 31). This statement already signifies that there was something “sad” about being an Indian girl, but the reader is not quite sure at this moment what this statement means. Later, while Taylor is giving the girl a bath, she sees visible signs of sexual abuse. Until Taylor takes the girl to a social worker, she is unaware of who abused such a little child and then abandoned her. The social worker, Cynthia, tells Taylor such things happen on Indian Reservations where “maybe one out of every four little girls is sexually abused by a family member. Maybe more” (232). After learning that the abuse was from someone the girl knew, the reader is presented with the first form of colonization, which is the control over the Native female’s body through means of sexual domination. Even though the abuse of an Indian was by an Indian, the girl’s young age makes the reality appalling, but, Taylor’s statement about her being a “poor thing” is clear. “Poor thing” aptly describes the abandoned little girl, and, subsequently, the abandonment produces a second form of colonization or the lack of free will. The little girl’s biological age automatically suggests limited spoken language, but it also emphasizes the inability to speak on one’s own behalf in negative situations.

Seemingly good intentioned, adoption is actually another form of colonization in this novel. Presenting the Native American in this story as a little girl infantilizes the

Native American people as a whole; it insinuates that they are small and helpless with no voices or opinions of their own and they need whites to “save” them from their wretched lives, and there is an ironic denial of the sexualization of females in the larger culture.

The idea of adoption reflects the paternalistic attitude of whites who believed in “civilizing” the “savage” people, which can be seen in many other media. At first, Taylor makes every effort to put a full adoption into effect until she learns from Cynthia that legally she is unable unless she has the written permission of the child’s legal parents or guardians. Cynthia suggests this task will be difficult because Indian Reservations do not always keep proper documentation and records on birth and death certificates. In the meantime, Taylor names the girl “Turtle” and dresses her in T-shirts that were too long for her but had “turquoise with red letters” which were good Indian colors in Taylor’s mind (31-2).

A resistance to the white conventions is present in Taylor’s attempt to have Turtle “play Indian.” By dressing Turtle in “good colors,” she makes Turtle appear authentic. However, Taylor’s plan to authenticate Turtle did not always work: “Cynthia always called Turtle by her more conventional name” (241). Instead of calling her by the adoptive name, Turtle, Cynthia always refers to the little girl as “April,” which is surely Western rather than a Native name.

The resistance lasts only so long until Taylor colonizes Turtle in the most profound way: by choosing for herself and for Turtle the group(s) to which they are best fit. Taylor’s choice silences Turtle, similar to the way Turtle’s own people silenced her voice and free will when they abandoned her. This decision is multi-layered, which makes this part of the novel complicated. On one hand, Taylor resists the traditional white idealism of “saving” a Native American through her contemplation of the adoption she originally wanted. Taylor’s feelings are expressed in her self-reflection: “I was crazy to think I was

doing this child a favor by whisking her away from the Cherokee Nation” (60). Taylor realizes that she no longer wants the responsibility of raising a child on her own. More importantly, Taylor sees from the Indian perspective. Yet, by deciding to return Turtle to the Cherokee Nation, she has made the ultimate decision for the young, innocent, and helpless child who cannot speak for herself or express her opinion on the matter. Taylor even considers her own relation to the Cherokees when she states, “Although, of course, I supposedly had enough Cherokee in me that it counted. I know I would never really claim my head rights” (274). Taylor decides to reject her one-eighth Cherokee heritage that could have been used to her advantage; she could have “played Indian.” However, Taylor decides that Turtle needs to be with her own people for the most meaningful life.

Just as Omri becomes a surrogate or adoptive “mother” to his toy Indian, Taylor becomes the adoptive mother of Turtle, caring for her and making sure that no harm came to her. However, Taylor decides that “playing house” for a little while was too much to bear, and ultimately returns Turtle to her own people. Although Omri believes that his Indian is real, he plays with it as if it were a toy. His friend Patrick recognizes the “fakeness” of the Native American all along, so Omri ultimately transforms it back to a plastic toy. Turtle, in contrast, is a real person that Taylor plays with and ultimately discards. The disregard for real Native Americans perpetuates the centuries-long mythology and fantasy of Native Americans.

Visual Representations and Sexualization

The helpless, fragile child in *The Bean Trees* is not the only helpless female in modern media. Disney's 1995 and 1998 films, *Pocahontas* and *Pocahontas II: Journey to a New World*, exemplify the visual representation and overly sexualized version of the helpless, Native woman. They portray the white idealist imagery of colonization and of native women who were "witness[es] of the North American colonial project" (Donaldson 524). Native stories, like *Pocahontas* and that of Sacagawea, "have more to do with the position and motivation of the teller than with the women about whom the story is told" (Downs 397). The motivation of Walt Disney Pictures is to relay what the American people constantly long to see. The theme of *Pocahontas* is undoubtedly colonization. The first form, and most obvious, is the occupation of land by the white settlers in Virginia. When they arrive, Governor Ratcliffe asserts that he is taking over the land and all its riches by claiming, "Nothing, not wind, nor rain, nor 1000 bloodthirsty savages will stand in our way" (Disney). Ironically, the settlers are aware of Natives living there, but still exercised their plan of sabotage the land, looking for gold that did not really exist. They use tools and canons to dig up the land and blow down the trees; they destroy everything in sight, but still claim that they are the rightful ones to "civilize" the Natives. After meeting with Pocahontas, John Smith tries to tell his men that the natives will actually be helpful. He says, "They know the land; they can help us navigate rivers" (Disney). In any other example of Natives helping the whites, it typically appears that the Natives assimilate and cooperate with the whites' plan of expansion and settlement. However, Disney creates Smith seemingly without the ulterior motive—he wants the two sides to combine forces. This position does not come right away, however. When he first arrives, he has other plans for the Natives.

Smith's first few encounters with Pocahontas presents other forms of colonization which he and the settlers intended to enact. Within minutes of meeting, Smith and Pocahontas are learning one another's language and customs for greeting others, like Smith showing her how the English say "hello" using a handshake. Her compliance with learning English shows assimilation to his culture without her realizing it may be for purposes of further destruction and settlement. He tells her, "We'll show your people how to use the land properly, how to make the most of it... We'll build roads and decent houses" (Disney). These statements are more than likely with good intention—again, showing the paternalistic ideology of "saving" the Natives. However, Pocahontas angrily replies that her people's houses are in no need of fixing. Smith, still believing his way is the right way, responds, "You think that because you don't know any better" (Disney). As the spokesman for the other settlers, Smith is not only making a statement against the Natives' way of life, but subtly he is also telling Pocahontas that her opinion is worthless, which makes her voice silent. Unbeknownst to Pocahontas, this silencing shows her assimilation to the white language and customs, which inevitably removes her free will to choose another path, as well as the control over her voice when he rejects her position on the Natives' way of living.

Two forms of colonization over the Native female fuel a scene that depicts a private moment shared between Smith and Pocahontas. The bravest Indian warrior, Kocoum, sees them and decides to attack. This meeting is the first instance in which Pocahontas has a voice and free will to speak out against the violence between the opposing peoples, but unfortunately, this progressive behavior is soon forgotten. Pocahontas struggles to stop Kocoum from killing Smith, but he uses violence against her by thrusting her to the ground away from him. In this moment of violence, Pocahontas

becomes a victim—and an item of competition between the men—even though her attempts are to cease the confrontation.

Another example of control over a woman's body comes in the form of violence and sexual domination. The whites' use of weaponry is too advanced for the bows and arrows and homemade knives of the Native Americans. The whites in *Pocahontas* are compared to a dangerous animal of destruction. The old wise man of the tribe performs a ceremonial ritual with the smoke of the teepee fire. He tells the tribe, "They prowl the earth like ravenous wolves, consuming everything in their path" (Disney). While he speaks the second half, "consuming everything in their path," the image of the "smoke wolf" devours a Native woman holding her baby. The choice to equate whites with a strong animal that hunts and kills its prey insinuates a violent and sexual control over the women's bodies. The image implies that prior to killing the women, the whites sexually abuse them and or physically torture them. Although the colonization seen thus far in the movie signifies the mistreatment of Native women, none compares to the critical form of colonization employed by the film: sexualization of the Pocahontas figure.

Disney uses a few forms of colonization in the portrayal of Pocahontas to fantasize and sexualize the story, which contributes to the white idealist imagery of Native women. The need for marketing ploys distorts the imagery of the Natives and the life of Pocahontas. Few instances in the story of Pocahontas's life are historically accurate. In general, the images of the Natives are archetypal stereotypes, such as gathering around a fire to pray, or are images of mockery, like Pocahontas's use of a willow tree as her source of motherly comfort. This image of Pocahontas can be further examined in regards to how Disney shows the control of her body and spirit.

Physical attributes that are clearly "Indian" control Disney's depiction of Pocahontas, which is essentially another form of control of the Native figure. First, her

physical image is essential to the movie because otherwise, John Smith may not have “fallen in love” with her. Her long, dark hair, and her deep, seductive eyes create a highly sexualized image. “Young, virginal, and exotic, she, like the land of North America, has not yet been explored by man” (Downs 402). Therefore, the love could be questioned because Kristina Downs actually advocates for lust or something equivalent. Second, the love story that is infiltrated into the “historical” account of Pocahontas allows the fantasized vision of this native woman to be at the forefront of the film’s purpose—a “love story.” John Purdy hints “Pocahontas’ attraction to the modern man is presented as inevitable as the colonization of the Americas” (Purdy 105). However, their “love story” is meant to show both parties’ relinquishment of hate in order for their love to flourish, to which Purdy further suggests, “out of this coupling, a nation is born” (107). Their relationship will allow John Smith to have sexual control of her body, whether or not she recognizes the signs of it. At the end of the movie, she does reject his request to return to England with him, which gives her a voice and free will once more. Disney uses other forms of colonization in its film besides male subjugation; it uses mental and subjugation as well.

Alongside typical Indian ideologies of the female body, this film displays the control over the female mind and spirit, under the domination of both white and Native males. According to the old wise man of the tribe, Pocahontas has “her mother’s spirit. She goes wherever the wind takes her” (Disney). The audience is never explicitly told the whereabouts of Pocahontas’ mother, although it is evident that she has been deceased for some time. When her true mother is absent, which leaves Pocahontas’s mind and spirit are in the care of mostly male figures, like her Chief father, the old wise man, Kocoum, and finally John Smith. The only female figures in her life are her best friend and Grandmother Willow, the enormous willow tree from whom she seeks advice and

comfort. Her father's opinion of the whites is one that she is supposed to listen to, especially when he says, "These white men are dangerous. No one is to go near them" (Disney). Pocahontas does not speak against her father's wishes, but rather, she resists his requests when she first refuses Kocoum's marriage proposal offered by Kocoum and then subsequently meeting secretly with John Smith at night. After several secret meetings, Smith and Pocahontas share a kiss. Kocoum and Smith's comrade, Thomas, witness this event, and in turn they decide to fight one another as representatives of the opposing sides. The fighting leads to Thomas shooting and killing Kocoum. This catastrophe leaves Pocahontas feeling responsible for the tragedy. She deliberates alone and with Grandmother Willow, expressing her helplessness. By portraying the scene of shame, the film supplies a further misconception of Native women by making them seem lost and confused by their own actions—guilty, helpless, and shameful. All of these negative attributes proposes the necessity of white society to "save" them from their grief and misfortune.

Pocahontas II: Journey to a New World exacerbates the problem of "Indians on display." This film details Pocahontas' journey to England with a new white, male companion, John Rolfe. Her trip is a "matter of diplomacy," as stated by Rolfe between King James and the people of England and her own father and people. She intends to speak with the King, directly, to prevent the armada from further invading her tribe's area. She travels on behalf of her father, which ultimately will be to her own dismay. The evil Ratcliffe returns with one of his schemes: to invite Pocahontas to the Hunt Ball, a very prestigious and important social event, where she will have to prove to King James, through proper dining, dancing, and social etiquette, that she and her people are "civilized" and do not deserve the imposition of the armada.

This sequel is not as rich in examples of colonization or display scenes, with the exception of the Hunt Ball. For hours, Pocahontas prepares her attire, hairstyle, and makeup for this special occasion so that simultaneously she can show that she was the “different” guest yet just as civilized as all the others. Her powdered face surely helps in her proper display—the white powder lightens her dark skin so as to help mask her true identity. Beautiful and lavish clothing replaces the simple leather dress and moccasins. Even though Pocahontas aesthetically “fits the part” of a civilized woman, Ratcliffe and the other officials keenly observe all of her movements. Ratcliffe’s secret bear-baiting show proves to be too much for Pocahontas to handle, and ultimately, her desire to aid the tortured bear deems her to be a “heathen and savage,” just as most have believed her to be all along. Instead of having the opportunity to speak with King James and use the art of persuasion, compromise, or even negotiation, Pocahontas is the ultimate puppet at the hands of whites. The temporary fix of clothing and actions did not do matter to the English because they could not understand her refusal to accept the mistreatment of an innocent animal, an activity they considered “civilized.”

The Absolutely True Diary of a Part-Time Indian: Final Thoughts

The Absolutely True Diary of a Part-Time Indian, a novel written in 2007 by Sherman Alexie, rounds out the end of this study. Alexie's personal experiences as a Spokane Indian are visible through his main character, Junior. Unlike the other novels discussed in this study, this novel allows the Indian character to speak candidly about what it means to be an Indian within mainstream white society. Junior struggles with the stereotypes and realities of what it means to be an Indian within mainstream America. For instance, he tells the reader about his struggle to keep his friendship with his reservation friend, Rowdy, and he discusses the issues of race and feeling of disconnect with his peers at his new white school, because he is the only other Indian besides the Indian mascot. Many of the comments Junior makes about himself and his people on the reservation solidify my understanding of the negative representation of Native Americans in literature and culture. Ultimately, he brings my vest activity back to the forefront: he, too, questions white culture's glorification of the first Thanksgiving. He says, "I always think it's funny when Indians celebrate Thanksgiving. I mean, sure, the Indians and Pilgrims were best friends during that first Thanksgiving, but a few years later, the Pilgrims were shooting Indians. So I'm never quite sure why we eat turkey like everyone else" (Alexie 101).

The obsession with glorifying the American past in festivals like Thanksgiving mirrors the white obsession Junior marks in another scene. When Junior attends his grandmother's funeral, an older white man named Ted claims he knew Grandmother Spirit in life and he also tells Junior, "I love Indians. I love your songs, your dances, and your souls. And I love your art. I collect Indian art...And I have old powwow dance outfits" (163). Ted claims that he has a powwow dance outfit that belonged to Grandmother Spirit and he was present at the funeral to return it. However, it is

discovered that the dance outfit could not have belonged to her because it did not have the beadwork of a Spokane. Ted's obsession with keeping the outfit for many years signifies his desire to capture the mythology of the Native American culture, but worse, letting it go indicates the detachment from the Native Americans. His speeding away after his mistake further indicates the desire of the whites to remove themselves from Native Americans and their way of life.

My reflections on my childhood memory of "playing Indian" and the white obsession with Native American mythology and ideologies leave with me some reservations about why Thanksgiving is celebrated, in the same way Junior does. While the turkey and the trimmings are delicious and able to bring families together, my personal past—and the national past it opens for analysis—indicates that the problematic legacy of playing Indian has yet to be redressed.

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