

Framing Cinematic Indians within the Social Construction of Place

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Native American images have become ubiquitous in the marketplace of goods, with raven-haired maidens adorning grapefruit boxes and aftershave bottles shaped like war-bonneted braves. But Indian iconography extends beyond hawking trinkets to the marketplace of ideas and ideology. Perhaps one of the most fertile arenas to examine such ideology is within motion pictures.

Cinema, and particularly Westerns, have captured American Indians in an often timeless and one-dimensional space. In writing about stereotypes, Raymond William Stedman observed that Western films characterize Indians as a homogenous group portrayed as vicious, indolent, stupid, and savage. While movies “ensnared and then filmically embalmed” the Indian forever in Hollywood’s image (1982, 155), the real crime is the constant torrent of mediated images that depict a lop-sided version of history: “The enormity, variety, and near-universality of the literary crime against the Indian cannot be fully recognized until one has let hundreds of books and films and dramas pass before his eyes” (123).

Stedman’s “lop-sided” history reveals fundamental differences in Native and Euro-American values that emerge from distinct conceptualizations of “place.” By examining the role of place in cinematic Westerns, we begin to understand deeply held beliefs that not only permeate cinema, but continue to unfold in modern-day controversies involving Native American issues, such as the battle over the bones of Kennewick Man.¹

I begin this discussion with an overview of the role of cinema in popular culture. This is followed by an examination of “place” in the social sciences and in Native American scholarship, which is woven into the rhetoric of how the West has been constructed in twentieth-century films. I offer a conceptualization of the native as “denizen” and the settler as “citizen,” which affords a discussion of place as hearth and place as property. The West is then examined within filmic depictions, where the notion of place privileges land-as-property and relegates the native view to quaint mysticism. The treatise ends with thoughts about the impact of such cinematic portrayals in Indian Country today, noting how the contest over dueling ideologies continues to unfold in the social construction of the Indian.

The Role of Cinema

A useful starting point is to situate cinema in the context of mass media and popular culture. In 1948 Harold Lasswell theorized that media provide surveillance, correlation, and transmission functions—acting as watchdogs of government (surveillance), interpreters of events (correlation), and conveyers of norms, myths and values (transmission). Nearly four decades later Wilson and Gutierrez (1985) added that mass media provide an economic service to their shareholders and publics as well as an entertainment function. Today scholars agree that mass media serve multiple functions, including the construction and conveyance of social meanings observable in cultural artifacts. Cinema, for example, provides a channel through which the five functions unfold: surveillance, correlation, transmission, economic, and entertainment.

And, films do more than that. With its story-telling (narrative) function, cinema offers works of art and “richly layered cultural practices” (Corrigan and White 2004, vii). Such practices result from the nexus of cinema with culture: it is not only the film, but its relationship to culture that interests us. Noted scholars Gerald Mast and Marshall Cohen observed that what is significant from a cultural perspective is, “the way films shape or reflect cultural attitudes, reinforce or reject the dominant modes of cultural thinking, [and] stimulate or frustrate the needs and drives of the psyche” (1985, xi). As a form of narrative, cinema joins the objective with the subjective, merging the historical with the personal (Enrikin 1991).

Cinema thus embraces a double-edged social constructionist frame: messages and meanings are constructed within film, and audiences actively sort, discard, and construct meaning in their interactions with film (Baird 1996; Blumer 1969; Edgerton and Jackson 1996; Mead 1934). Writing about film, Robert Scholes called this process “narrativity,” in which the perceiver “actively constructs a story from the fictional data provided by any narrative medium. A fiction . . . guides us as our own active narrativity seeks to complete the process that will achieve a story” (1975, 393).

The thrust of the current discussion is the social construction of the native and the settler within place, for which Western movies transmit values, interpret history, and provide entertainment. Put another way, cinematic dramas have created a slice of entertainment that has become integral to a constructed reality that, in turn, serves to inform audiences how to think about cowboys and Indians.

The Underpinnings of Place

I turn to geographer J. Nicholas Entrikin for an explication of place as location in time and space fused by the individual and the collective construction of place: the intersection of the social with the personal. Place also provides the context for understanding social relationships. By examining Indian-settler relations within the context of place within cinematic depictions, we can appreciate human existence without the detached and distant eye of the rational positivist (1991, 3).

The role of place cannot be overstated because the concept is so crucial in explicating what is meant by the American West. Historians Richard White and John M. Findlay (1999) struggled with the construct of place in setting the debate for their collection of articles on power and place in the West. They suggested that place, as a human construct regarding the physical, transforms the abstract into something more specific and limited. Place is concrete, moving beyond abstraction or a set of perceptions. And place is the central, locating position of a region or a people within a space. Place is the arena of regional identity, the fulcrum of comfort and safety, and the site where individual and collective identities are based (Entrikin 1991, Ryden 1999). Writing about science, Jhon Goes in Center, an Oglala Lakota, noted, "Our ancestors were very sensitive in their relationships with the land. They systematically organized experiential information about cycles, seasons, connections, and strategies in their cultures. Experience was evolved into knowledge, and knowledge was evolved into wisdom" (2001, 120).

For the Indian and settler, both occupy place, but each values place in distinctly different (and even oppositional) ways (Coleman 1997, Coleman and Dysart 2005). That is why I have distinguished the Indian from the non-Indian as denizen and citizen. Denizen (Indian), which stems from the old French for within (*denz*), and Middle English (*denizeine*) for inner part, refers to the person within the space—an inhabitant of the space. Citizen, on the other hand, earns its meaning from the French for city (*cit  *), and "one entitled to the rights and privileges of a freeman" (Merriam-Webster 2002).² This conceptualization of denizen and citizen can be traced to German sociologist Ferdinand T  nnies, who sought to explicate the shift from kinship and agrarian-based societies to the emergence of the industrial society. T  nnies described *Gemeinschaft* (community) as human relationships that depend on kinship and close-knit social networks. Values, morality and norms are derived from the "natural order,"

meaning, instinct, tradition, and the group. Tönnies used the term *Gesellschaft* (society) to explain the type of social relationships that developed from the change in reliance on kinship to a reliance on non-familial social groups engendered by the Industrial Revolution. Personal will is transmuted from “essential will” to the will of the state or society: the change from normative to legal rule and from natural order to social order (DeFleur and Ball-Rokeach 1980, Tönnies 1887).

Tönnies privileged *Gesellschaft* society over *Gemeinschaft* community, and such privileging (while eschewed by some, including anthropologists Mary Douglas [1985], and Claude Levi-Strauss [1962]) underpins the dialectic of scientific rationality and cultural rationality. Each rationality contributes an epistemology—a grounding of knowledge—in the scientific or the cultural. According to this perspective, scientific rationality embraces positivism, objectivity, facts, and evidence, while cultural rationality is characterized by myths, feelings, subjectivity, and religion. In writing about the dueling rationalities, Plough and Krimsky invoked Habermas’ view on the fundamental division between science and culture (1987, 8). In brief, scientific rationality presumes that, for example, anthropologic matters such as the bones of Kennewick Man can be studied “independently of context.” In contrast, cultural rationality does not separate the context from the issue at hand. Similarly I argue that, while scientific rationality may claim to be devoid of sentiment, the perspective is shot through with such valorizations as progress and control. In other words, while the scientific rationalist claims to be objectively positivist, such views are culturally bound. Native scholar Keith James argued that objectivity is raised to a superior position, yet “scientists and engineers often invoke this ideal as a talisman to confer a veil of sanctity on their work despite abundant evidence that the human mind, even a scientist’s, is inherently subjective in all its operations” (2001, 48). The duality of rational versus cultural aptly describes the history of Indian-settler relations in the American West (Coleman 1996). A profound illustration of this privileging is seen in mass media depictions of these relationships, particularly films of the Western genre. We witness the elevation of *Gesellschaft* over *Gemeinschaft*, where the scientific takes primacy over the cultural (a way of thinking that continues to unfold in popular culture and real-life dramas about Indian and non-Indian relationships).

From the perspective of *Gemeinschaft*, denizens would have a well-defined notion of what place is. Tönnies (1887) described place as a *Gemeinschaft* of locality that arises from a collective ownership of land: “Land is of substantial reality, playing an important conditioning role in man’s life” (86). In contrast, for the citizen, place becomes equated with land-as-property. The transformation from place to property moves the *Gemeinschaft* hearth to the *Gesellschaft* contract. Tönnies privileged this movement toward contract as “progress.” The journey from hearth to contract thus resulted in the contestation over place as illustrated in the disputes between denizen and citizen. The transformation of “place” to land-as-property, from hearth to contract, and from

Gemeinschaft to Gesellschaft separates what geographers call the inhabitant from context. Entrikin situated this loss of identity within the framework of the modern, noting, “modernity is associated with the description of specific place and region and the construction of generic places” (1999, 52). Similarly ecologist Paul Shepard observed that prehistoric humans were native to their place. Today, place “no longer exists as the womb of childhood and the setting for myth,” Shepard asserted. While disparate populations might be linked by satellite television or mobile telephones, “The economic unity of humankind, the multinational corporation, and the technology of travel and communication join us to all parts of the earth yet leave us homeless” (1998, 12). Left homeless, we are also heartless. Osage scholar Robert Allen Warrior described the division between rationalities by examining American Indian traditions in contrast to Christianity. The native perspective is a “place-centered American Indian religious experience” while the settler views a “time-centered Western European Christianity” (1995, 71-72).

In their book on Indian education, Vine Deloria Jr. and Daniel R. Wildcat equate place with the ontology of indigeness. “Indigenous people represent a culture emergent from place. And they actively draw on the power of that place physically and personally” (2001, 31-32). Critical to their thesis is the vitality and puissance of what emerges from place: “Place is not merely the relationship of things, resources, or objects, it is the site where dynamic processes of interaction occur—where processes between other living beings or other-than-human persons occur” (144).

In summary, place is infused with multiple meanings: one view emerging from the deeply interwoven relationship of community to location, and another marked by legal contract and ownership of a commodity. The construction of place that unfolds in cinema aptly illustrates the deep division between these epistemologies.

Land and the Western

The relationship of denizen and citizen to land is seen repeatedly in Westerns, and viewers know well that at the base of the conflict is contestation over land-as-property. For Indians, thematically and morally, the subject is place: home and hearth. For the non-Indian the subject is unconquered, pristine, virgin lands that constructed the West as an agrarian paradise (Hornberger 1950). Cinematic relationships are grounded in the construction of the Western land movement, and it is critical to our understanding of how the Western film is informed. Henry Nash Smith’s influential *Virgin Land* (1950) provided bountiful evidence that the frontier had been a constant reminder of the importance of agriculture to Euro-American society. The construct nourished an agrarian philosophy and myth that defined the character and destinies of the nation (123-250). That the West was “wild” and required “taming” necessitated the subjugation of the original inhabitants and a reinvention of the American hero: the leather-stockinged

character from the pages of James Fenimore Cooper and the self-invented Buffalo Bill Cody. Frederick Jackson Turner's frontier thesis instilled the justification of westward settlement, noting that the expansion westward, with its new opportunities and continuous reach for the simplicity of primitive society, would "furnish the forces dominating the American character" (1893, n.p.). The wilderness captivated the colonist, finding him:

In European dress, industries, tools, modes of travel, and thought. It takes him from the railroad car and puts him in the birch canoe. It strips off the garments of civilization and arrays him in the hunting shirt and moccasin.

The citizen thus appropriated the vestments of the denizen to tame and transform the wilderness, and, arguably, to appropriate the Indian. This is particularly apparent in *The Last of the Mohicans* (1936, 1992) and *Northwest Passage* (1940) where the Euro-American characters Hawkeye (Randolph Scott and Daniel Day-Lewis) and Robert Rogers (Spencer Tracy) are swathed in fringed buckskins in pseudo-Indian attire.

Such descriptions infuse cinema with images that flesh out Turner's thesis of the uniquely American experience—the citizen freed from European shackles. Films celebrate the novelty of the New World: here to be explored, conquered, and owned.

The country's most noted creator of the Western genre, John Ford, showed in *The Searchers* (1956) how the settlers viewed their unique relationship with the West. In the following scene, Ethan Edwards (John Wayne) tells a mother and father that their adult son is dead:

Edwards: Got your boy killed.
Mr. Jorgensen: It's this country that killed our boy.
Mrs. Jorgensen: We be Texicans. Texicans is nothin' but a human man way out on a limb this year, next, maybe for a hundred more. But I don't think it'll be forever. Someday this country's going to be a fine good place to be. Maybe it needs our bones in the ground before that time can come.

The conversation strikes a chord for civilization, where the denizen is subdued and the land cultivated. The theme permeates Western fiction, providing a counterpoint to the West: it must be civilized. Translation: Indians must be civilized. In *Broken Arrow* (1950), for example, a homesteader notes: "We're bringing civilization here. Clothes. Carpets. Hats. Boots. Medicine . . . Whiskey." Thus, progress is equated with the material artifacts of *Gesellschaft*.

Many scholars have noted that Indian relationships with land directly opposed the European "preferred use." In her book on celluloid Indians, Jacquelyn Kilpatrick observed that the appropriation of land is

[j]ustified by the labor invested by the settler who has made the unchartered wilderness his home and assumed his position as the “natural” proprietor. The land becomes the fruit of his labor; the physical and emotional investments give him a moral right to it (1999, 43).

An example from *Northwest Passage* (1940) affirms this moralistic view. In the following scene, settlers are depicted as innocent victims. Robert Rogers (Spencer Tracy) explains to his men that soldiers should expect to die, and have to “take their chances.” Citizens, however, are portrayed as innocents:

But your folks on the border farms, they weren't fighting anybody. They were clearing woods, and plowing and raising children, trying to make a home of it. And then one night Abenaki tomahawks hit the door. If it was over quick they were lucky.

In contrast, the denizens get little sympathy as victims of the Euro-American land grab. When Roberts and his men find an Indian village, he says: “We’re under orders to wipe out this town so see that you do it. Kill every fighting Indian and kill them quick and kill them dead.”

The acts of civilization are wrought by the purposeful denigration of the Indians in order to subjugate them. The transformation of the media-constructed noble Redman of the Atlantic coast, who offered sustenance to starving immigrants, to the bloodthirsty savage who robbed the wagon trains, served to justify the removal of the denizens from their homelands. Cinema served this ideology well, depicting the denizen as a vestige of pre-history, resistant to taming and nourishing the land in “appropriate” ways. In a similar vein, Berkhofer remarked that the wild Indian possessed more land than could be used in approved fashion. In 1889, historian, and future President of the United States, Teddy Roosevelt opined in *The Winning of the West*:

The truth is the Indian never had any real title to the soil; they had not half so good a claim to it, for instance, as the cattlemen now have to all eastern Montana, yet no one would assert that the cattlemen have a right to keep immigrants off their vast unfenced ranges. The settler and the pioneer have at bottom had justice on their side; this great continent could not have been kept as nothing but a game preserve for squalid savages (n.p.)

Appropriate land use takes the spotlight in films. In *Geronimo* (1998), one of the miners tells the Chiricahua Apache that: “We make things out of this

country—was nothing here before us and wouldn't be nothing if we left it to you." One of the most influential creators of the image of the West and the characterization of place was novelist Zane Grey, who wrote in the late 1800s and early 1900s. Grey is considered the most prolific Western writer, and he had a profound influence on cinema, having provided more than 100 stories for motion pictures. Thus, Grey's construction of the West "deeply matters," according to scholar Kevin S. Blake (1995), who considered him a "place-defining novelist." Grey's stories crystallized a set of symbols for the American West. In the same way that Richard White and Patricia Nelson Limerick noted that Frederick Jackson Turner and Buffalo Bill Cody "each erased part of the larger, more confusing and tangled cultural story to deliver a clean, dramatic, and compelling narrative" (1994, 9) so too did Grey strip the West to its elemental parts: The heroic cowboy, deadly gunman, polygamous Mormon, and noble Indian (Blake 1995). Grey's countless Westerns celebrated the cowboy and voiced sympathy for the Indians who were, nonetheless, relegated to the past. The film *The Vanishing American* (1925), adapted from a Grey novel, portrayed denizens as weak, ready to be devoured by the strong. To drive home the point, the Indian leader is killed at the film's climax. Similarly Walt Whitman's poem *Starting from Paumanok* (1856) pays tribute to the pioneer who replaces the denizen—relegated to a distant past:

A world primal again, vistas of glory incessant and
 branching,
 A new race dominating previous ones and grander far,
 with new contests,
 New politics, new literatures and religions, new
 inventions and arts . . .
 See, streamers streaming through my poems,
 See, in my poem immigrants continually coming and
 landing,
 See, in arrière, the wigwam, the trail, the hunter's hut, the
 flat-boat, the maize-leaf, the claim, the rude fence, the back-
 woods village

Framing the Other

Films in the Western-genre style exemplify the Manichean divide between good and evil, white and red, and denizen and citizen. Indians are one-dimensional, often savage, sometimes noble, but nevertheless framed flatly and thinly.³ Indian and non-Indian relationships reveal the threads in the Gemeinschaft-Gesellschaft seam in which distinct worldviews unfold.

Indians fill the role of serf to feudal lords who take the form of cavalry officers or Jesuit missionaries. Indians are property, wards, or children, and such notions permeate cinematic relationships. In *Tell Them Willie Boy is Here*

(1969) the Indian agent Elizabeth Arnold (Susan Clark) refers to tribal members as “her” Indians. Similarly, Sheriff Christopher Cooper (Robert Redford), in arguing with the agent, says, “You and your goddamn Indians and your goddamn talk . . . [Willie] belongs to me.” And in the most convoluted of relationships, the adult Little Bear of the film *Indian in the Cupboard* is the doll-sized plaything of the boy Omri (Taylor 2000). Critics have frequently taken to task the film industry for the narrow depiction of Indians. For example, legal scholar Rennard Strickland (Osage) asserted: “All these images have at least one thing in common. They are primarily the invention of non-Indians and, as such, represent an historical attempt to define the Indian and Indian policy from a non-Indian perspective” (1982, x-xii).

While one perspective of cinema is that films generate and maintain a status quo and thus perpetuate a hegemonic harmony, Kilpatrick’s assessment is that popular culture maintains and reproduces symbols that serve to transmit and thus justify governmental policy, such as the appropriation of lands from the Indians:

The West made a perfect crucible for the development of a mythology intrinsically American. The “frontier” provided a challenge against which Euro-Americans, particularly white males, could pit themselves. The natural environment supplied its own challenges, but it was the cultural frontier that established the identity of the American West and the settlers and the cowboys who pushed that frontier westward (1999, 5-6).

And by “pushing the frontier” in cinema, settlers’ land claims meant extermination and removal of the denizen, justified by Euro-American values regarding how place is felt and lived, and further warranted by scientific rationalities—such as Manifest Destiny and social Darwinism—concerning the “natural” superiority of the white race.

That denizens were considered savage is unequivocal: from Robert Rogers’ (Spencer Tracy) description in the 1940 movie *Northwest Passage* of “red hellions . . . who hacked and murdered us, burned our homes, stole women, brained babies, scalped and roasted officers over slow fires” to the Governor in *Pocahontas* (1995) who declares the savages as “filthy, little heathens . . . barely human.”

The Hollywood Western is thus the nexus of modernity, materialism, and morality, with each taking on its own symbols and meanings (Warshow 1962). Modernity separates the settler from place-as-context; while materialism includes the very land, vegetation, and forests, and, by extension livestock, gold, silver, and oil. Morality is played out in the application and exploitation of such materials and in human relationships. Gold takes center stage in several Indian-

settler films, including *They Died with Their Boots On* (1941) and *Pocahontas* (1995). Gold in *Pocahontas* provides the rationale for invasion of the New World “chock-full of gold,” where the invaders yearn for wealth (“we’ll be free and rich”). In *They Died with Their Boots On* the promise of gold in the Dakota Black Hills started a gold rush and a war of extermination of the denizens.

Materialism sets the stage for the morality of the West, where the denizen needed vanquishing to make room for the railroad (*They Died with Their Boots On*, 1941); the mail (*Broken Arrow*, 1950); mining (*Thunderheart*, 1992); the farmer (*Northwest Passage*, 1940); the homesteader (*The Searchers*, 1956); and Christianity (*The Black Robe*, 1991). Materialism is thus infused with morality, and the stage is set for the justification of Indian removal. The natives of *The Vanishing Race* (1925) are seen as “encumbrances to the soil, to be cleared away like the sage brush and cactus.”

Ward Churchill blamed Hollywood for reducing the Indian to a cartoon character. A distillation of his arguments follows: (1) cinema is objectively racist on all levels, linking fiction with fact, (2) scenes such as the stagecoach ambush are “so totally ingrained in the American consciousness as to be synonymous with the very concept of American Indian,” (3) most films cover only a 50-year period with no context of a native past, (4) few films examine post-allotment Indian life, (5) all Indians become an amalgamation of the pseudo-Plains warrior, and (6) Indians are uniformly portrayed as irrational, cruel, vicious, crude, and primitive (1992, 231-241). Such cruelty is permanently etched in cinematic images of torture by scalping (*Northwest Passage*, 1925), live burial (*Broken Arrow*, 1950), rape (*The Searchers*, 1956), and bludgeoning (*Pocahontas*, 1995).

Depictions revealed in cinematic tales of the West occupy a range of discursive tracts, from children’s books to newspaper stories, and such tales most certainly influence audiences’ perceptions of Indians. While few scholars have quantified the effects of cinematic imagery of Native Americans, sociologist JoEllen Shively’s field study showed non-Indian and Indian audiences alike rooting for John Wayne when viewing a classic Western. Shively asserted that Indian full-bloods in the study cleaved to “the fantasy of being free and independent like the cowboy and the familiarity of the landscape” (1992, 728-729). In discussing Westerns more generally, Indians found such films fake, while non-Indians perceived Westerns as “authentic portrayals of the past” (729). Shively noted that for the whites, “Western films are like primitive myths: They affirm and justify that their ancestors’ actions when ‘settling this country’ were right and good and necessary” (729). Such myths continue to resonate today.

The ability of the Euro-American to define what is Indian gives the superior rhetorical privilege clearly evidenced in Westerns, even revisionist dramas such as *Dances with Wolves* (1990), where Indians are accorded pseudo-equal status. But as film scholar Armando José Prats (1996) noted in an essay on the “refigured Indian,” the white man’s discursive position remains unchallenged. *Dances’* protagonist John Dunbar (Kevin Costner) provides the principal voice

through which the Western drama of Lakota life unfolds, just as the non-Indian perspectives of *Little Big Man*'s (1970) Jack Crabb (Dustin Hoffman) and *A Man Called Horse*'s (1970) John Morgan (Richard Harris) set the narrative tones. That a white man's perspective would provide the story's center reveals film producer Sandy Howard's (*A Man Called Horse*) theory that "world audiences will better be able to relate to the Indian through the white man. If a story is just about Indians, then it is hard for a Caucasian to relate to" (Jorgensen 1970, as cited in Friar and Friar 1972, 237). The characters played by Costner, Hoffman, and Harris not only speak for the Indian: they are more eloquent than the Indian could ever hope to be. Such protagonists become experts as the "Men Who Know Indians" (Slotkin 1998). In short, they have the power to name, define and frame the Indian according to non-Indian standards. As viewers we often "know what is Indian" through the settlers' eyes.

In a rare moment, however, the indigenous concept of place is revealed by the elder in *Little Big Man* (1970). For the denizen the moral center is unveiled as earth, sky, wind, and water. The loss of "center" is mourned by Old Lodge Skins (Chief Dan George), who notes that white men "are strange." When asked why, he replies, "They do not seem to know where the center of the earth is." Here the metaphor of earth reveals multiple core tenets of *Gemeinschaft* and cultural rationality for the denizen: earth as the heart of life, the crucible for meaning and the location of morality. The elder returns at the film's climax to address the differences between denizen and citizen:

The human being [Cheyenne], my son, believes everything is alive. Not only man and animals but also water. Earth. Stone. And also the things from them like the hair [he picks up a scalp]. But the white man. They believe everything is dead. Stone. Earth. Animals. And people. Even their own people. If things keep trying to live white man will rub them out. That is the difference.

Whites are bereft of morality, according to the film. Critics Margo Kasdan and Susan Tavernetti noted that "the moral emptiness of white American society is a primary theme" of *Little Big Man* and evidenced by what Entrikin called the loss of specific place (1988, 129). In writing about the West, scholar Kent C. Ryden (1999) affirmed that place "matters deeply." Whether figuratively or actually, the sense of place is one stage upon which social relationships unfold. And, for the West, land as property became the operationalization of place. Yet in that transformation, inhabitants of property lost the moral connection to place.

Where Imagination Meets the Real

A profoundly different set of social meanings assigned to place can be arranged along the dichotomy of scientific rationality and cultural rationality per-

spectives—both artifacts of Tönnies' social rubrics, *Gemeinschaft* and *Gesellschaft*. Popular culture—including novels, news, poetry, and films—creates a socially constructed pioneer or Pawnee, each deriving meaning from a range of forces: from the pen of the screenwriter to the voice of the actor, and from the political backdrop of the time the film was created (the Red Scare or the Vietnam War) to deeply held values such as the benefits of progress. Such forces are brought to bear in the definition of place, which include the social constructions of the West, and valorizations of ownership and entitlement. Place, therefore, is also a social construction and subject to a blend of ideas and events that combine to fashion what we come to know of as “place.”

Place has provided a superlative platform for a discussion of social relationships in light of the construct's linkage to the Indian and settler. Place has allowed us to consider the Indian as denizen—the original inhabitant of the territory—who gleans deep meaning and identity from the very place itself. The intimacy, significance and legitimacy of space and place grounds the Indian (Tinker 1996). Place also allows us to consider the non-Indian settler, for whom place is transformed as “property.” In this sense, land comes to represent place infused with its sanctioned use. When place becomes land it also becomes material, and the owners become citizens by fiat: They are accorded legitimacy through the *Gesellschaft* mechanism. Moreover, the primacy of the citizen over denizen becomes further justified by biological determinism wherein only the fittest thrive—a hypothesis fueled by its scientific legitimacy (Lutz 1999). Being “fit” is equated with the ability to cultivate land appropriately and to transform place to its material use.

In contrast, Indians could not become citizens: they were withdrawn from homelands considered sacred and integral to self, then herded onto barren properties under federal jurisdiction. Indians will have lost, by 1990, more than 96 percent of the aggregate land base enjoyed in 1600 (Churchill 2002, 113). Conquest of territories and artifacts continues today, with lands once held in trust turned over to non-Indian commercial interests, such as copper mining (Coleman 1994).

Such is progress. The journey from hearth to contract depicted in Western films elevates the commodification of land-as-property to its highest perch. Two important transactions arise from this privileging: the first is the privileging across social relationships, where one group seizes legitimacy. The second act arises from the positioning of one group as the standard against which other groups and views are judged. Such transactions are entwined: in the act of legitimizing one group over another, the dominant becomes the standard for comparison. It is well understood that the socially and politically dominant group holds sway over those with less power (operationalized as the lack of resources and lack of ability to vocalize objections), but more subtle and perhaps menacing is the power to name and the power to define. Indeed, the ability to define the West privileged the settlers' conceptions of place over the native meanings

accorded to place, and “the ability to control meanings of such settings is an important expression of power” (Entrikin 1991, 52). When filmic images continue to portray Indians in the Old West mold of a dying race (e.g., *Dances with Wolves*), modern Indian images fuse with stereotypes from the frontier. A glance of contemporary headlines about native issues ushers forth such relics of the past: “Crazy Horse Saloon sitting duck for Sioux attack” (a 2004 protest over the name of a bar); “Where’s Tonto? You won’t find out at the new Indian Museum” (about the new National Museum of the American Indian in Washington) and “Ugh, Wilderness!” (recent Alaska oil drilling approval near native peoples). Real-life dramas continue to relegate denizens to a preserved past where their values concerning place and their location within place are outmoded or scientifically irrelevant.

Current controversies reveal progress and positivist frames, often dismissing Native concerns as quaint myths. Following are a few examples of conflicts that pit scientific rationality against cultural rationality: A gold mine on a sacred site in California’s Imperial Valley (Lucas 2002); the construction of a sewage plant on ancestral grounds in Washington (Welch 2001); oil exploration that threatens rare pictographs significant to the Crow, Eastern Shoshone, Northern Cheyenne, Comanche and Oglala Sioux (Buncombe 2001); new superhighways that endanger archeological petroglyphs sacred to the Pueblo peoples (McQuaid 2000); a subdivision on Seminole homelands (DeWitt 2005); and a proposed \$126 million apartment complex scheduled to be built at the site of ancient native ruins (Froelich 1999). Such news stories reveal conflict in the *Gemeinschaft* and *Gesellschaft* vein, as arguments become framed in scientifically rational versus culturally rational terms.

The epitome of such framing is seen in news coverage of Kennewick Man, whose remains were disputed in courts for eight years until a judge in 2004 ruled that the bones should be turned over to scientists for testing (for a synthesis, see Coleman and Dysart 2005). News coverage relegated Indian concerns to mysterious spirituality and political motivations that failed to rise to scientific rigor. Native arguments were called “anti-science” while the forensic anthropologists were lauded as seeking a “win for all science.” The Kennewick Man story was framed as an “epic struggle between science and religion” where “science won” (Westneat 2004).

Indian ontology continues to be viewed through the lens of the anthropologist and journalist, and modern images are stitched by the patchwork of pictorials gleaned from newspapers, television, textbooks and movies. While often relegated to the past, the irony, however, is that Indians have not vanished and continue to struggle in the twenty-first century against appropriation of their land, religion, artifacts, and culture while shouldering the burden of stereotyped imagery that invokes mythical, mystical, and irrational caricatures. As Michael J. Riley observed in a film critique, cinematic representations permeate conceptions of the Indian in popular culture and on the part of the perceiver:

The process of depicting Native Americans, even in its beginnings prior to film, carried with it a striking similarity to the freely creative cinematic representations of Native America as allegorical fiction in treatments such as *The Vanishing American*. In all cases, cultural preconceptions have shaped both the reinvention of historical details, as well as the way they are read through the cultural interpretations of their audiences (1998, 61).

In the case of the Indian, it is the history of Euro-American values that form the basic conceptual categories, classificatory schema, explanatory frameworks, and moral criteria by which past and present non-Indians have perceived, observed, evaluated, and interpreted Native Americans (Berkhofer 1978, xvi). In short, the white man's Indian is a creation of the imagination. As Edward W. Said observed, the construction of the Other is based on "a set of references [and] . . . characteristics" wrought from "imagining" (1979, 177).

Notes

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1. Kennewick Man is the 9,300 year-old skeleton found in Kennewick, Washington, and the subject of court battles between local tribes that want him repatriated and a group of scientists who wanted to examine the remains. In July 2005, the skeleton was turned over to a scientific team for testing.

2. Ironically Indians have not long been either "freemen" or citizens. Although the 15th Amendment to the U.S. Constitution, which was enacted by Congress in 1869 and ratified in 1870, stated the vote shall not be denied or abridged on account of race, color, or previous condition of servitude, many states did not enforce the law, with some arguing Indians were not citizens. The Indian Citizenship Act of 1924 allowed states to grant citizenship to Native Americans who requested it. Nevertheless, "most states continued to refuse to recognize Indians as citizens," according to attorney and scholar Jeanette Wolfley. In 1948 an Isleta Pueblo from New Mexico, Miguel Trujillo, filed a suit in federal court after being prohibited from voting. The Court ruled in favor of Trujillo, which is considered a landmark decision in Indian voting rights history (Wolfley 1990, 181).

3. Rare exceptions to this one-dimensional Indian include films directed by Native artists, such as Chris Eyre's films *Smoke Signals* (1998) and *Skins* (2002), and Sherman Alexie's *The Business of Fancy Dancing* (2002).

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