

Cowboys and Indians: Toys of Genocide, Icons of American Colonialism

Author(s): Michael Yellow Bird

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Cowboys and Indians

Toys of Genocide, Icons of American Colonialism

Michael Yellow Bird

White domination is so complete that even
American Indian children want to be cowboys.
It's as if Jewish children wanted to play Nazis.
—Ward Churchill, *Fantasies of the Master Race*

Colonialism is the invasion, subjugation, and occupation of one people by another. In *Postcolonialism: An Historical Introduction* (2001), Robert J. C. Young concludes that the United States of America, the world's last remaining significant colonial power, continues to dominate external territories without the consent of the indigenous inhabitants.¹ However, one does not have to go abroad to analyze the practice of American colonialism since the exploitation and control of Indigenous Peoples² in the United States continues unabated. This essay examines cowboys and Indians as part of the colonial canon asserting white supremacy and Indigenous inferiority. I begin by telling how my encounter with a bag of toy cowboys and Indians reminded me that Indigenous Peoples face the humiliation of American colonialism on a daily basis. I next recount how a master cowboys and Indians narrative was used to support and maintain the oppression of people in

the tribal community where I was raised. I end with a discussion concerning the importance of decolonizing cowboys and Indians.

TOYS OF GENOCIDE

It seems I am constantly offended by the colonial representations and words used to describe (or more accurately subjugate) Indigenous Peoples in the United States. Images such as big-nosed Indian sports team mascots and words like "redskins" and "squaw" quickly come to mind. Cowboys and Indians have, for me, come to symbolize America's past and present infatuation with colonization and genocide.

For the past year, I have been accepting invitations from an Indigenous colleague and her family to come to their place to visit and have dinner, go hiking, watch cult videos, celebrate birthdays and holidays, and meet relatives from out of town. The drive from my place to theirs generally takes about a half-hour when traffic is light. Dinner is always good, and visiting includes a number of interesting topics. Sometimes we discuss global or tribal politics or the environmental degradation of Mother Earth. Other times we talk about our responsibility as First Nations intellectuals and the microassaults we experience from everyday colonial society or about our teaching and research in the academy and the effects that resistant students and colleagues have on our attempts to decolonize their thinking and our academic disciplines. Inevitably, our conversation always turns to how American colonialism has damaged our reservation communities: alcoholism, poverty, poor health, internalized hatred, social factionalism, and the brain drain (the exodus of our most talented tribal members from our communities due to the lack of opportunity or challenge, being from the wrong family, or jealousy). It seems we frequently imagine how we might return home to help our people. But this dream usually ends at about 9:55 p.m. when I am saying good-bye and getting in my car to go home.

One of my favorite things to do before I visit my friends is to pick up a half-gallon of gourmet ice cream, usually cookies and cream, for an after-dinner dessert. I would consider ice cream to be the only true benefit of colonialism, except many Indigenous Peoples are lactose intolerant and diabetic. I am almost always late when I arrive, but it never fails that I am met at the door by the children, who scream out my name and give me a big body or leg hug. This past Christmas my partner and I brought gifts for the family. Neither of us celebrates this holiday so it is a challenge for us to think of ways we can counter American corporate consumerism and sweatshop imperialism. Imbued with this holiday spirit, we purchased presents from some socially responsible-looking artists in a parking lot near the organic food market where we shop. We looked at several gifts before deciding that we would get everyone a turtle pendant to wear around their neck, a sym-

bol of long life among many tribal peoples. Mom and Dad got glass turtles while the children's were carved from stone. As part of the children's gift pack, we gave them each a gender-specific toy, made by some multinational conglomerate, which sparked more excitement among them than the stone reptiles.

A couple of weeks ago, on my way over for my ritual dinner and visit, I stopped to get the ice cream. Remembering the children's delight when they received their toys at Christmas, I first went in search of a present for each. I walked down the toy aisle until I found the Matchbox car section where I picked out one for each of the two boys, and then carefully sidestepped my way farther down the aisle looking for an appropriate gift for the daughter. I stopped at the bubbles section and picked out the largest bottle, which was on the highest shelf. Pleased with my selections, I turned toward the freezers of ice cream and came face-to-face with several near-identical plastic bags full of little red toy Indians and blue cowboys. I was momentarily stunned as I gazed at this nauseating display of Americana. However, a panoply of interactions between the receptors and neuropeptides in my gut and brain caused me to smile with delight because I had been talking about these little genocidal toys just a few weeks earlier with students in my Diversity and Oppression class. After explaining to them my most "neutral" scholarly disdain for these toys, I attempted to put these seemingly benign little figures into a larger cultural context that I thought might help students see more precisely what I was attempting to convey. You might call it a teaching moment. Often, I find it is effective to help students understand the oppression of Indigenous Peoples by paralleling our situation with that of other more well-known groups of color.

I said, "Imagine if children could also buy bags of little toy African-American slaves and their white slave masters, or Jewish holocaust prisoners and their SS Nazi guards, or undocumented Mexicans and their INS border patrol guards." I paused a moment for greater effect. "Imagine if the African-American set included little whips and ropes so the white slave masters could flog the slaves that were lazy and lynch those who defied them. Imagine if the border guards in the Mexican toy set came with little nightsticks to beat the illegal aliens, infrared scopes on their rifles to shoot them at night, and trucks to load up those they caught." I continued, "Imagine if the Jewish and Nazi toys included little barbed-wire prison camps and toy trains to load up and take the prisoners to the toy gas chambers or incinerators, batteries not included." When I finished I asked for feedback on what I thought was a most brilliant exemplar and repartee to American colonialism. To my dismay no one answered or showed any emotion. Students seemed paralyzed. I waited as they remained fixed and dilated giving me "the thousand-yard stare." Their lack of response caused me

to wonder if it were possible to create permanent disconnect between receptors and neuropeptides in people by sharing such toxic images and words.

I set down the toy cars and bubbles and grabbed one of the bags of cowboys and Indians and carefully tilted it toward me to read the front of the package. As I read, I pulled the bag from the small metal display rod so I could see what the little figures were wearing and the weapons they were brandishing: cowboy hats and fully feathered war bonnets; six-guns and rifles, bows and arrows. These guys were ready for battle. I turned over the bag, interested to read who manufactured them (Magic) and where they were made (China), since half the toys sold in the United States (about \$20 billion worth in 2001) *are* made in China under brutal sweatshop conditions made possible by the avarice or, in economic terms, the “bottom line” of several different prominent American toy companies. As I gazed at the figures, I thought about all those young Chinese women forced to work in these American toy factories for seventeen cents an hour, sixteen hours a day, seven days a week, for months at a time; workers who spend all day in 104-degree room temperatures around machines that cause hearing loss and chemicals that make them sick and faint on the job; workers who agonizingly perform the same job operation three thousand times a day and work an overtime schedule that leaves them with as little as two or three hours of sleep per night. Workers who are worn out and used up by the time they reach age thirty to thirty-five and are quickly removed and replaced by a constant stream of younger workers.³ I wondered how many young Chinese women have died or been poisoned by breathing in the toxic chemicals in molten plastic while they poured the red liquid to make the Indians and the blue to make the cowboys; all this so American kids can practice killing Indians.

I decided to buy the cowboys and Indians and take them to my class for a show-and-tell session, thinking I would let my students play with them and then discuss what malevolent tendencies came alive in their play. I also thought that discussing the connection between these little genocidal toys and the exploitation of Chinese women by American multinational toy companies would be interesting, especially if I were able to input my theory that a reason these figures are tolerated is due to the subconscious demands of white American supremacy over Indigenous Peoples. I walked confidently to the checkout stand, but as I got closer I began to psychologically deflate, remembering that I am closely related to those little red guys in the bag while the white cashiers, despite their lack of cowboy hats, dirty faces, boots, and six-guns, are relatives of those little blue guys: the ones who killed my kind. I placed the ice cream down first and threw all the toys together hoping that the cowboys and Indians wouldn't draw too much attention from the cashier. Everything totaled twelve dollars. Twelve dol-

lars! I uttered an inaudible ouch as the cashier cowboy quickly colonized the portion of my economic livelihood I earned through my decolonization work with non-Indigenous university students.

I mistakenly pulled out a one-dollar bill from my wallet, thinking it was a twenty. The cashier stared at me as I put it back, but not before I looked at the picture of George Washington, remembering that cowboys call this guy one of the founding fathers of the United States while the Seneca called him "Caunotaucarius" (the town destroyer). I recalled a conversation with a Seneca brother who informed me that the father of this country sent American troops through his people's territory burning down villages, destroying all crops and stored foodstuffs, killing many, and leaving the rest to starve through the bitter winter.

I pulled out a five and searched for another and a couple of ones with no luck. Ah yes, Abraham Lincoln, the great emancipator pictured on the five-dollar bill, "freed" black slaves and gave orders to hang thirty-eight Dakotas following the so-called Dakota Uprising in Minnesota. This hanging was called the "greatest mass execution in U.S. history," and, according to the *Guinness Book of Records*, lynching these Dakotas made "Old Honest Abe" the record holder for the largest hanging of people from one gallows.⁴ During Lincoln's presidency, the Dakota were mistreated, cheated, and abused by white settlers, Indian agents, and traders who had pushed them off their lands, leaving them only one-tenth of their original territory. They were starving because the wild game was gone from their hunting grounds, which were claimed by white settlers. They were also deceived in the treaties that they made with the United States and did not get annuities and food promised to them. When Dakota chief Little Crow requested food from Indian agent Thomas Galbraith for his starving people, he was condescendingly told by trader Andrew Myrick that they should "eat grass or their own dung."⁵

I put back the five and finally pulled out a twenty and gave it to the cashier who put it in the register while she counted my change. As I waited, I remembered that Andrew Jackson, the brave Indian fighter on the twenty-dollar bill, was called the "devil" by the Creek Nation because of his wanton slaughter of unarmed Creeks. "At the Battle of Horse Shoe Bend, Jackson and his troops surrounded eight hundred Creeks and killed almost all of them, including women and children. Afterward his soldiers made bridle reins of skins taken from the corpses; they also cut off the tip of each dead Indian's nose for a body count."⁶ Jackson was also responsible for illegally driving the Cherokees off their homelands in Georgia and force-marching them to Oklahoma, but not before five to eight thousand (mostly elders, children, and women) died on the "trail of tears." As I collect my change, it occurs to me that I got rid of the Cherokee/Creek killer, but now have three more town destroyers and one more Dakota executioner.

I finally arrived at the home of my friends and received the customary affectionate hugs and greetings from all. I handed over the ice cream to the parents to be refrigerated and dug the toys out of the bag to hand out to the kids. Forgetting the cowboys and Indians were in the bag, I took them out at the same time as the other toys. The youngest, responding like other young feral boys his age, immediately yelled "these are mine," snatched them out of my hand before his brother and sister could react, and dove toward a corner protecting his cache while we all looked on. I quickly responded, saying, "Oh, those little toys are for my students; I have another really nice toy for you." However, when he saw that the car I was holding was much smaller, he hunkered down on his prize and cried "no, no, no" as his mother attempted to extricate the bag from his little, powerful, white-knuckled clutch. As he and his mother wrestled for supremacy over the toys, I quickly intervened saying, "It's OK, you can have them . . . he can have them," which brought some relief for all. When calm returned, I explained to mom and dad that I would never buy cowboys and Indians for myself and that these little guys were for a multifaceted split-plot factorial experiment hypothesizing the post hoc basal levels of aggression and hypo-organic racism elicited from my students following their play with these little guys. Even though I said this with a straight face, both mom and dad said, "Oh yeah, sure you were; we know you were taking them home so you could have those little Indians torture those poor little cowboys."

Later in the evening, when visiting between us adults waned, the two boys brought me their large sky blue Tupperware container of toys and asked me to play with them. I agreed, and we sat at the dining table looking at all the different little cars, trucks, and animal figures. I cringed as I observed that they had already added the cowboys and Indians to their collection. I began to pray silently that we wouldn't play with these guys because I knew I would want the Indians to kill all the cowboys, and it wouldn't be pretty. As the boys looked over the toys, I sent them powerful silent thoughts intended to discourage them from wanting to play with these little figures. My telekinetic abilities failed, and the boys took them out and separated them into what seemed like positions of battle. I watched without protest even though my fierce anticolonial perspicacity told me that these are the toys of genocide, icons of colonialism, and little boys should not be allowed to play with them because it will create a subconscious desire to kill real Indians. As I pondered these thoughts, I suddenly realized that I could experiment with how the boys play with these toys. When all the figures are on the table, I ask, "What shall we do with these guys?" Neither answers. Realizing I need to coach them a bit, I ask, "Who are the bad guys and who are the good guys . . . which guys are supposed to get killed?" My research questions are suddenly contaminated when the

boys quickly reach into the Tupperware container and pull out a brontosaurus and a T. rex and began knocking down everybody, saying, "We have to kill them all." Unable to restrain my latent tendencies of revenge, I grabbed a pterodactyl and started making what I think are pretty good pterodactyl sounds while I used my guy to peck out the eyes of the cowboy who most looked like John Wayne.

COWBOYS AND INDIANS: THE MASTER NARRATIVE

The colonizer's falsified stories have become universal truths to mainstream society, and have reduced Aboriginal culture to a caricature. This distorted reality is one of the most powerful shackles subjugating Aboriginal people. It distorts all Indigenous experiences, past and present, and blocks the road to self determination.⁷

Years ago, when I was a child, my play with toy cowboys and Indians would have ended much differently than my above story. Having been inculcated with the master narrative, or what Howard Adams calls "the colonizer's falsified stories," my cowboys would have heroically killed the dinosaurs and then the Indians. Like many children on the North Dakota reservation where I grew up, my young mind had been intellectually conscripted by the local Bureau of Indian Affairs school to battle the delusion that we Indians were equal in standing to whites. Like most reservation schools during this era, not only was our education inferior and biased, it was also well versed in the oppression, control, and intellectual and cultural domination of us little brown prisoners. We quickly discovered that what we believed was not important unless it was about the great deeds of George Washington (the town destroyer) or Abraham Lincoln (the Dakota executioner) or other significant dead white guys. We learned that we did not know anything of value, nor did we have anything important to contribute from our culture unless it supported the myths of white supremacy. In junior high school we continued to learn we were primitive, superstitious people who should be thankful that God was on the side of the white people who came to the "new world" to settle and help us have a better life.

In high school, lectures or readings rarely mentioned Indigenous Peoples except at Thanksgiving when we were told that this day was special because (white) Pilgrims came here to escape religious persecution and then had a fine dinner with the Indians. Of course, we were never told just how expensive that fine dinner was. Years later, after reading the works of historian Alfred W. Crosby and demographer Henry F. Dobyns, I learned that all along the Eastern seaboard, during the time of the Pilgrims, the infectious diseases of whites wiped out

between 60 to 90 percent of the Indigenous populations while colonists simultaneously murdered and terrorized children, women, and other unarmed Native civilians. For instance, in 1623 Captain William Tucker brought his soldiers to a Powhatan village to negotiate a peace treaty. After the treaty was concluded, he convinced the Indians to drink a toast and served them poisoned wine. About two hundred died instantly. Tucker's men then killed another fifty and brought home a number of the heads of their victims.⁸

The master narrative confirmed Indians were inferior to whites by way of a seemingly inexhaustible supply of western movies and TV programs that showed huge numbers of Indians could be easily defeated by a few cowboys with large, shiny, phallic-shaped pistols and an endless reserve of bullets. As a child I observed that whenever the TV Indians battled with the TV cowboys, not only did we spectacularly lose, but to add insult to this injury we were also presented as screaming, grunting, unreasonable savages who unjustly assaulted and/or killed what seemed like the most helpless, likeable, and innocent white people in the world. The TV Indians were the poorest of war tacticians, buffoons really, who would unfailingly ride directly into a great volley of bullets only to be killed over and over again in movie after movie. As I grew older it crossed my mind that the white stuntmen playing Indians who were repeatedly shot from their horses must have really hated us whenever their back problems or arthritis flared up in their later acting years.

Master narratives are incomplete without music. Vital to defeating and dehumanizing Indians were appropriate tunes. Cowboys got the heroic or sweet-sounding compositions while Indians got the evil harmonies, the kind played while the innocent, big-bosomed, blonde white woman was being prepared to be stewed in a huge cauldron in front of a tipi with several savages dancing around her. However, even as a colonized child I wondered if these dancing "savages" were really Indians since none appeared to have any sense of rhythm. As young boys we watched the loser Indians in many westerns and, like many of our other young colonized Indian brothers who grew up on other reservation communities, we cheered for the cowboys whenever they kicked our people's butts.

Perhaps what gave the master narrative the greatest credibility was that most of the men in my small reservation community made an everyday affair of wearing some vestige of cowboy apparel: hats, boots, shirts with mother-of-pearl buttons, silver belt buckles with golden inlaid bucking bulls or horses, and hand-tooled leather belts with an individual's first or last name engraved in western-style letters. Wanting so much to emulate the dress of our male role models, whom we noticed often occupied the alpha position in our community because of how they behaved, talked, and dressed, we young boys took

to nagging our parents about getting us cowboy boots and clothes. For many of us, harassing our parents was fruitless since few could afford to buy the more expensive apparel. In a lot of families younger brothers and sisters often got hand-me-down clothes from older siblings or from what we called the mission barrel (used clothes that we would dig out from big round containers that the local Congregational Church filled up each week from donations given by white people). Whenever one of our "homeboys" got new boots or a hat or a shirt, the rest of us would gather around him to inspect his new assets, and then we would head home and complain to our parents that we wanted cowboy boots or clothes.

The everyday discourse of people in my community was also highly supportive of the master narrative. Many of the men called each other "cowboy," and some would self-identify as an Indian cowboy. Often when male children cooperated or did some good deed they would be praised by being called cowboys. One of the groups that policed our appearance were the older men in my community who would often say that we (young boys) didn't look like cowboys at all but instead "looked like girls" whenever our hair got even the slightest bit long. My grandfather, a product of Indian boarding schools who sported a crew-cut hairstyle, never failed to rescue us from this name calling. I remember many hot summer days when he would round up us boys (his grandsons) and take us to my mother's house and give us "marine-style" haircuts (which we called skimmers) while my mother and our older female relatives looked on and praised our cooperation saying, "Gee, you look good now, you look just like a cowboy." However, getting our heads shaved was never a pleasant experience since it felt like being emotionally robbed of our spirit and our ability to say no. With tears running down our little brown, dirt-stained faces, we would walk out of the house, eyes cast down, feeling humiliated and violated, looking like small brown skinheads. I don't ever recall any adults saying to us, "Gee, you look good now, you look like an Indian."

I also recall that many times when a small boy was crying his heart out due to bonking his head against a chair or the floor, mothers or fathers, grandparents, or other older relatives would often try to get him to calm down by saying, "Oh, cowboys don't cry. Look at the cowboy, look at the cowboy." The cowboy discourse followed me into young adulthood, and I recall as a teen that whenever I stayed with a particular uncle to help him with his ranch chores, he often communicated to me in no uncertain terms that, when I worked for him, I had to act like a cowboy. This often meant I didn't eat or rest much, and if I got hurt I had to "tough it out." In fact, I remember the first time I asked my uncle if I could take a break from my work and get food, he firmly reminded me, "Cowboys don't need rest and cowboys don't need to eat." From that point forward, I did not question him but instead

carefully observed that he was a cowboy, and if I wanted to be one I had to do as he did. Despite this uncle's loyalty to this image and lifestyle, he experienced a lot of racism and taunting from some of the white cowboys he interacted with because, to them, he was just an Indian posing as a cowboy. And because only whites can be "true" cowboys, he settled for being an "Indian cowboy" whenever he felt the sting of racism.

Fortunately, my desire to be a cowboy or to have any association with this image quickly faded during my teen years following my reading of Vine Deloria Jr.'s *Custer Died for Your Sins*.⁹ During this same time I was fortunate enough to be exposed to different Indigenous spokespersons and groups, such as the American Indian Movement (AIM), who were advancing powerful political ideas that supported and extended Deloria's critique of American colonial society. Deloria's book was important to me since I found it to be a brilliant, honest, and courageous work that exposed, fiercely critiqued, and neutralized the myths and lies of the master narrative that, for the first fifteen years of my life, had made me into a compliant little Indian, inculcated with the belief that I was an inferior member of society because of my race. The words and ideas of other Indigenous leaders and groups gave me the permission that I needed to begin letting go of the shame that was imposed on me by the colonizer for being an Indian. In the end, both enabled me to begin searching for similar thinking that would prepare me to become intelligently outraged at the lies, distortions, and omissions that Americans had carefully and resolutely forced on our peoples.

DECOLONIZING COWBOYS AND INDIANS

Because decolonization requires a telling of the truth and completely calling into question the colonial structure,¹⁰ it took some years before I stopped wearing cowboy apparel, believing the colonial master narrative, and referring to myself or other Indigenous Peoples as "Indians," "American Indians," "Native Americans," "cowboys," or "Indian cowboys." It also took some years for me to understand that colonialism is a sickness, an addiction to greed, supremacy, power, and exploitation and that cowboys and Indians are one of the colonizer's drugs of choice. Cowboys and Indians are this nation's most passionate, embedded form of hate talk.

Colonialism has taught many Indigenous Peoples to be silent, passive, compliant victims who participate in, excuse, enable, or ignore the colonizer's addictive behaviors. Left unchecked, colonialism has continued to flourish, devastate, and suppress Indigenous Peoples, keeping them in the perpetual role of "the Indian," causing many to say, do, and think things they never would if their minds and hearts were free from American colonial rule. There are, however, antidotes to colonialism

that Indigenous Peoples can and must employ: courage, intelligent resistance, development of a counterconsciousness and discourse, and a fierce ongoing critical interrogation of American colonial ideology.

No matter how they have been portrayed in the past or present, cowboys and Indians are the consummate example of American colonialism. They represent the overt and hidden hatred and fear that many Americans harbor toward Indigenous, dark-skinned peoples. They are symbolic of the white colonizer's claim of superiority and Indigenous Peoples' inferiority. Cowboys have remained, in the hearts of most Americans, an evocative representation of American values: love of freedom, fairness, individualism, toughness, enterprise, forward-looking attitude, and whiteness. Indians, on the other hand, have remained the savage, primitive, losing, dark-skinned, evil, antagonistic enemy. More recently, we are accused of being rich casino tribes who are ripping off the state tax base, getting people addicted to our gaming, and using our "massive profits" to become unduly politically influential in American colonial politics. My response to such complaints is: can you spell E-n-r-o-n?¹¹

I would guess there are few American boys who grew up before the 1970s who did not play cowboys and Indians: U.S. presidents, vice presidents, Supreme Court justices, congressmen, police chiefs, religious clergy, and schoolteachers—the folks that now run this country. It is not unreasonable to expect that this "star-studded" group killed a lot of Indians during their boyhood war games believing it was the right thing to do. In fact, the cowboys and Indians phenomenon has been directly implicated as contributing to the killing of other dark-skinned people in other parts of the world who have been regarded as impediments to American colonial progress. During the Vietnam War the United States often thought of Vietnam in images of the American West and cast the Vietnamese in the role of Indians.¹² It was common for American soldiers to refer to enemy territory (free-fire zones) as "Indian Country" and for American soldiers to brutally massacre Vietnamese while fantasizing they were killing Indians. One of the most infamous massacres embodying the cowboys and Indians theme was My Lai, where American soldiers murdered as many as five hundred unarmed civilians—old men, women, and children. A unit of Charlie Company, First Battalion, Twentieth Infantry, the soldiers responsible for this slaughter, said that My Lai was inevitable because the Viet Cong were regarded as Indians.¹³ In *Facing West: The Metaphysics of Indian Hating and Empire Building*, Richard Drinnon says that one way the Indian-hating fantasies among American soldiers in Vietnam was fulfilled was by cutting off the ears of an enemy, which was equated to the scalping of an Indian.¹⁴ Recently, Hanoi accused ex-U.S. senator Bob Kerry of war crimes against Vietnamese civilians.¹⁵ Kerry and his men (a SEAL team) are blamed for rounding up and slaughtering twenty

unarmed women and children in Thanh Phong village on February 25, 1969. Whether Senator Kerry's team called these villagers "Indians" is unknown; more than likely they called them "gooks," a term equivalent to "redskins."

Calling the enemies of the United States "Indians" and their lands "Indian Country" did not end with Vietnam. I remember the cowboys and Indians theme came up during C-Span television coverage of the American invasion of Iraq in early 1991. On the afternoon of February 19, I was at home listening to several military officers briefing reporters in Riyadh, Saudi Arabia, regarding the upcoming strategies of Operation Desert Storm. At one point during the presentation, Brigadier General Richard Neal said that the U.S. military wanted to be confident of a speedy victory once they committed land forces to "Indian Country." What he said had no visible effect on the audience: cameras kept snapping pictures and reporters kept on taking notes. However, I was shocked and outraged and became even more so as I thought about how this country had manipulated young Indigenous men and women and their tribal communities to take part in this hysterical American invasion of Iraq even though their own tribal lives, lands, sovereignty, and resources were, and still are, controlled and threatened by the colonial policies and arrogance of the United States of America.

Recently, a First Nations student who knew I was writing this article stopped by my office to share a cowboy, Indian, and Muslim "joke" that he had heard on the radio:

There was a cowboy, an Indian, and a Muslim standing at the edge of the world. The Indian said my people were once great in number but now are few. The Muslim said my people were once small in number but now are great. The cowboy said that's because we haven't played cowboys and Muslims yet. (A joke told on a local hip-hop radio station in Phoenix, Arizona, 2002)

Our discussion about the meaning of this anecdote soon led to how the United States is colonizing the Middle East and that this joke is not that far from the truth since select members of the Arab world now seem to have become the "new Indians." As we talked it became clear that since September 11, the colonial press was doing its part to make sure that this nation continues to love cowboys and hate Indians. For instance, immediately after the attack on the World Trade Center and the Pentagon, the king of the cowboys, George W. Bush, reminded Americans that they are the greatest people in the world and that "America was targeted for attack because we're the brightest beacon of freedom and opportunity in the world." He promised vengeance, stat-

ing, "The search is underway for those who are behind these evil acts. I've directed the full resources of our intelligence and law enforcement communities to find those responsible and to bring them to justice. We will make no distinction between the terrorists who committed these acts and those who harbor them."¹⁶

Not long after Bush's statement, the *New York Post* began assisting in the search for these evil people by publishing articles describing Geronimo or Goyathlay (Chiricahua) and Tecumseh (Shawnee) as terrorists equivalent to Osama bin Laden. When I brought this issue up at a social work conference on cultural diversity, stating that such things increase America's hatred for Indigenous Peoples, some white "native" New Yorkers in the audience trivialized my concerns, telling me that this newspaper is not taken seriously so I shouldn't worry about it. Of course, I was exasperated with this comment since it is typical colonizer behavior; instead of listening, they are constantly telling us how we should feel or behave and what we should or should not take seriously. It is never difficult to decode or make explicit the real consciousness of America when it concerns Indians, and, I am convinced, the *New York Post* did this story just in case Americans forgot whom they are supposed to hate. In fact, Indian hating has always been central to the thematic universe of this nation, and what Bush says, what the *New York Post* says, and what cowboys and Indians say is that Indians (people who are not white) are still America's enemies whether they are dead or alive.

America has carefully made sure that Indigenous Peoples continue to fulfill the role of a racial and cultural scapegoat in the game of cowboys and Indians. However, it is hardly an amusing situation since Indigenous Peoples experience numerous humiliating assaults from colonial society, for instance, control and manipulation of their tribal governments by the U.S. federal government, land and resource theft and destruction by U.S. multinational corporations, control and exploitation of tribal gaming and economic revenue by state governments, poorly funded on-reservation substandard schools that continue teaching the prevaricated history of the colonizer, and the continued use of racist images and words to describe Indians.

As colonized peoples, many of us have internalized and adapted to the colonizer's dominant ideology, which has perpetuated our subjugation and repression. As a result we have developed a certain sense of internalized denigration and personal contempt within our consciousness resulting in self-effacing and destructive behaviors. However, this can change if Indigenous and non-Indigenous Peoples intelligently resist American colonialism and begin the process of decolonizing cowboys and Indians, beginning by telling the truth about the racist intent of the cowboys and Indians phenomenon. We must also intelligently interrogate and reform the colonial structure of this nation and challenge the written false histories of the American colonizer. Indigenous

Peoples must consciously refuse to be little red plastic toy Indians participating in the racist American myths and policies of white colonial supremacy. Whites must refuse to be little blue plastic toy cowboys blindly accepting their position of privilege in society and, instead, truthfully amend this nation's history and practice of colonialism while seeking justice on behalf of those they have colonized here and abroad. Until this is done, cowboys and Indians will continue to be toys of genocide, icons of colonialism.

EPILOGUE: COWBOYS AND INDIANS, THE SEQUEL

On March 19, 2003, following months of unsuccessful attempts to goad, force, and bribe the United Nations, its closest allies, and the rest of the world into authorizing its war against Iraq, the United States of America exercised its policy of "pre-emptive" strike by dropping four two-thousand-pound "bunker buster" bombs on a private house built on an underground bunker in southern Baghdad. The strike, which began the second U.S.-led invasion of Iraq in the past twelve years, was launched by George W. Bush and his war council in the hopes of "decapitating" the regime of the Iraqi leader Saddam Hussein who, along with his sons, was thought to occupy the house. To maximize decapitation, forty Tomahawk cruise missiles launched by U.S. warships and submarines in the Red Sea and northern Persian Gulf struck Iraqi command structures near the bunker at almost the same time.

The pretext for the U.S.-led invasion and occupation of Iraq was that Saddam Hussein is a brutal dictator, is connected to Osama bin Laden and the terrorist attacks of September 11, and possessed weapons of mass destruction that he would provide to terrorists to use against the United States. However, some U.S. citizens, and most of the rest of the world, believe the reason for the Bush war was to demonstrate the "shock and awe" of the U.S. military, to take control of Iraqi oil fields, and to expand the American empire in the Middle East. After killing and maiming thousands of Iraqi soldiers and innocent unarmed civilians, along with the destruction of much of the critical infrastructure of Iraqi cities and towns, the Bush administration has proclaimed the fall of the Hussein regime and declared the end of major combat operations. However, U.S. soldiers and Iraqi citizens continue to die fighting one another in Iraq while the United States has failed to find any weapons of mass destruction or to make any credible link between Hussein and the terrorism of September 11. The United States, which is now spending a billion dollars a week to occupy Iraq, has not been able to stabilize the country, may be there indefinitely trying to do so, and has almost no international support for postwar construction efforts. Moreover, many of the "liberated"

Iraqi people are demanding that the U.S. occupation forces now leave their country.

In between all this, on March 24, 2003, five days into the American invasion of Iraq, cowboys and Indians "the sequel" resumed when Paul Strand, a reporter from the Christian Broadcast Network (CBN.com), spoke "Indian hate talk" to Pat Robertson by satellite telephone:

PAT ROBERTSON: Our CBN News war correspondent Paul Strand is embedded with the army's mechanized Third Infantry Division. He's traveling along with them. And Paul, can you tell us approximately where you are now?
PAUL STRAND: We're, I would say, dozens of miles from Baghdad. I just talked to our commander, and he asked that I not be too specific about direction or distance; I think you can understand that. So far, everywhere we've gone we have seen artillery ahead of us and then artillery behind, and we're getting reports that there's fighting in all of the cities that we've already been through. So, I guess if this were the Old West, I'd say there are Injuns ahead of us, Injuns behind us, and Injuns on both sides, too, so we really don't want to give the enemy any hints about where we are.¹⁷

N O T E S

- 1 Robert J. C. Young, *Postcolonialism: An Historical Introduction* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 2001).
- 2 I do not use the terms "Indian," "American Indian," or "Native American" when I write or speak of the Indigenous Peoples who reside in what is now referred to as the United States of America. I consider these names to be counterfeited, colonized identities imposed by European Americans who attempt to keep Aboriginal Peoples in a perpetual state of colonization through the use of such racist labels. Instead I use the terms "First Nations" or "Indigenous Peoples." In this essay I use "Indian" as a term of subjugation.
- 3 For a detailed report of the American toy industry in China, see *Toys of Misery: A Report of the Toy Industry in China*, authored by the National Labor Committee, New York, January 2002 (<http://www.nlcnet.org>).
- 4 *The Guinness Book of Records* (New York: Bantam Books, 1993). Also see Dee Brown, *Bury My Heart at Wounded Knee: An Indian History of the American West* (New York: Henry Holt, 1991).
- 5 Brown, *Bury My Heart at Wounded Knee*, 40.
- 6 Ronald Takaki, *A Different Mirror: A History of Multicultural America* (Boston: Little, Brown, 1993), 85.
- 7 Howard Adams, *A Tortured People: The Politics of Colonization* (Penticton, BC: Theytus Books, 1995), 1.
- 8 Takaki, *A Different Mirror*.
- 9 Vine Deloria Jr., *Custer Died for Your Sins: An Indian Manifesto* (New York: Macmillan, 1969).
- 10 Frantz Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth* (New York: Grove Press, 1968).

- 11 The now recently bankrupt energy company Enron, the largest electric trader in the United States in the late 1990s, was President Bush's most generous campaign contributor and spent millions of dollars influencing both Republicans and Democrats to pass legislation favorable to its corporate interests. Enron has declared the biggest bankruptcy in U.S. history, and is accused of defrauding its stockholders of hundreds of millions of dollars and losing the retirement savings of thousands of its employees because the 401(k) plan of the company held so much Enron stock. Common Cause's electronic news service reported that Enron has gotten much for its political contributions: exemption from Commodity Futures Trading Commission (CFTC) oversight, direct benefit from congressional rollbacks of electronic trading of futures (Commodity Futures Modernization Act of 2000; known as the "Enron Exclusion" in the bill), direct benefit from the National Energy Policy opening up access for energy traders to regional transmission lines and breaking up monopoly control of electricity transmission networks, a \$254 million tax break in a House-passed stimulus package in 2000, lucrative foreign contracts due to manipulation and threats from the Bush and Clinton administrations (for instance, in Mozambique, "the Clinton administration threatened to cut Mozambique's aid in 1995 if the world's poorest country did not award a pipeline contract to Enron"). Enron received favorable treatment from the Texas Supreme Court: "grandfather" loopholes in state law allowed it to exempt itself from pollution control within its Houston-based plants; former employees were hired into government energy positions in Texas; and Enron received millions in "corporate welfare" from baseball fans in Houston (for instance, "In 2000, the Houston Astros inaugurated their new Enron Field, which was financed with \$180 million in public tax dollars and \$100 million from Enron. In return, Enron landed tax breaks and a \$200 million contract to power the stadium"). See <http://www.commoncause.org/publications/jan02/011802.htm>.
- 12 David Espy, "America and Vietnam: The Indian Subtext," in *The Journal of American Culture and Literature Uprising: The Protests and the Arts*, ed. David Landrey and Blige Mutluay (Buffalo: Poetry/Rare Books Collection, State University of New York, 1994).
- 13 Statement of Robert B. Johnson, Captain, U.S. Army, West Point Class of 1965, "Free Fire Zones? We Called It Indian Country: America's Vietnamese Killing Fields," U.S. House of Representatives, War Crimes Hearings, April 29, 1971, <http://www.iwchildren.org/veterans/goodcadindian.htm>.
- 14 Richard Drinnon, *Facing West: The Metaphysics of Indian Hating and Empire Building* (New York: Schocken Books, 1990).
- 15 Associated Press, "Hanoi Accuses Ex-Sen. Kerry of War Crimes," *Arizona Republic*, June 1, 2002, A26.
- 16 From the text of President Bush's address, the Tuesday night after the terrorist attacks on New York and Washington, <http://www.cnn.com/2001/US/09/11/bush.speech.text/>.
- 17 "Indian Country of America," posted April 9, 2003, <http://fourdirectionsmedia.com/?1049898023>.