9-1-1992

IG/Noble Savages of New Mexico: The Naturalization of "El Norte" into the Great Southwest

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Working Paper #121 Fall 1992

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WORKING PAPER SERIES

Southwest Hispanic Research Institute
The University of New Mexico
Albuquerque, NM 87131-1036

(505)277-2965

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IG/NOBLE SAVAGES OF NEW MEXICO: THE NATURALIZATION OF "EL NORTE" INTO "THE GREAT SOUTHWEST"

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I INTRODUCTION: FRONTIERS AND FRONTERAS[1]

Between the much belated bestowal of New Mexico's statehood in 1912 and World War I, the first cinematic images of Indian and Hispanic New Mexicans flickered in darkened movie houses across the nation (Dispenza 1984). The military annexation of the region was consolidated over a half century earlier, but its psychological annexation to the American imagination was still in progress. As the land was resurveyed to map the new Anglo ownership, so native cultures were dehistoricized, naturalized, and confined within the parameters of a new social order. Dime novels, historical treatises, ethnic humor, and movies are much more than American entertainment constructed around Indian and Mexican cultural others (Robinson 1973). Rather, they are components in a massive process which was shifting the axis of cultural orientation and representation a full ninety degrees: "El Norte" was fast becoming the "Great Southwest."

Back on the screen, the narrative conventions and technical innovations of the film medium were still tentative

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[1]. This study evolved from panel discussions with Tomás Atencio and Erlinda Gonzales-Berry as part of "Images of New Mexico: A Film Event" in May of 1986. Special thanks to them and to former State Historian Stanley Hordes and Joseph Dispenza who organized the festival to make New Mexico's early films available to the public.

and in the process of refinement. The cultural representations, however, were already fully formed, radiant with all the persuasive power of the hegemonic forces that had begotten them. The following scenes from two of the first movies made in New Mexico complement each other in disjunctive symmetry. The first is from A Pueblo Legend, made by D.W. Griffith himself in 1912:

> In the mystical and primeval setting of Isleta Pueblo, "before the coming of the Spaniards," as the title frames tell us, a Sun priest emerges from the darkness of the kiva to greet the brilliance of the celestial orb, hands uplifted and trembling. As he exhorts a young warrior to embark on a quest to obtain the "Sky Stone of Happiness," a beautiful Indian girl (Mary Pickford) overhears and plans to look for the stone herself.

This first two-reeler ever shot in New Mexico shares the rarified pictorial qualities seen in the sepia-toned, idealized portraits of Indians by Edward S. Curtis from the same era. Picture postcard water maidens with painted jars balanced on their heads pose conveniently whenever the action leads to the banks of the Río Grande. The Hispanic New Mexican (or Mexicano) counterpart to this scene is strikingly distinct. Filmed in 1913 in Las Vegas, New Mexico, by Romaine Fielding, this "greaser" film is entitled The Rattlesnake - A Psychical Species:

> As the industrious Anglo surveyor stakes out his newly acquired land claim, a demented Mexican (Romaine Fielding) with a large rattlesnake wrapped ominously around his neck lies in ambush. As he aims his pistol to shoot his foe in the back, his former lover, now the wife of the Anglo, inadvertently moves in the way and blocks the attack. Thwarted again, the cowardly Mexican sulks off into the bushes.

Such characters were already part of a formidable arsenal of popular and literary images of noble savages and black legend villains that had serviced the propaganda needs of five centuries of Anglo-Spanish geo-political rivalry both before and during the imperial projects in the Americas (Juderías y Loyot 1912). These stereotypes had always been indispensable weapons of ideological warfare. What is remarkable is their clever accomodation to the cinema, and their adaptation to the historical imperatives of the American frontier and the specific case of New Mexico even as it achieved the necessary degree of Americanization to become a state.

In mainstream American cultural studies as well as "western" movies, the frontier "pageant" of western expansion is presented as the valiant and colorful struggle of the individual vs. society or the individual vs. nature and its creatures (Indians, grizzlies, and Mexicans). The historical reality of the frontier and the subtext of the "westerns," however, is border conflict; the annexation and settlement of northern Mexico and the subjugation of its native populations. The underlying question is the status of these groups and their place in the new society; factors which are negotiated in documents as diverse as treaties and screen plays. In the broad arena of political and popular culture, borders are continually redrawn and set "at various points between miscegenation, segregation, deportation, and death" (Noriega

1992: xv). The inhabitants of this complex and dangerous no-man's-land are type cast in the American imagination as the familiar company of greasers, bandidos, seductive ladies, jolly loafers, noble chieftains and princesses, drunken savages, and dark avengers that march from the pages of the dime novels of the 19th century to the movie screens of the 20th (Pettit 1980).

II NOBLE INDIANS AND IGNOBLE MEXICANS

In New Mexico, from the first decades of American commerce after 1821, a cultural dichotomy was cut between Indians and Mexicanos to construct a enduring new paradigm of Indianism (idealization and defense of Indian culture) and Hispanophobia (denigration and attack of Hispanic culture) which has lasted until the present. This operation severed an Indo-Hispano political, social, and economic alliance which evolved in the era between the Pueblo Revolt of 1680 and the American occupation of 1846. By the early 19th century, the Spanish and Pueblos were so close that in 1812, the wealthy rancher diplomat, Pedro Pino, wrote in his report to the Cortes de Cádiz that the Pueblo Indians "casi no se distinguen de nosotros" (they are barely distinguishable from us), unusual words for a conservative monarchist (Pino 1812, 1849:2).

The wedge was set early by Anglo-American traders and travelers on the Santa Fe Trail like Josiah Gregg and Susan

McGoffin, who expressed admiration for the exotic Pueblos and disdain for the Mexicanos (Bloom 1959, Kenneson 1978). The wedge was driven deeper by the military occupation force, whose commanders and spokesmen such as Colonel E.V. Summer eloquently articulate the new vision of 1847:

> The New Mexicans were thoroughly debased and totally incapable of self-government, and there is no latent quality about them that can ever make them respectable. They have more Indian blood than Spanish, and in some respects are below the Pueblo Indians; for they are not as honest or as industrious. (qtd. in Sunseri 1973:79).

Of all the imagined character flaws of the Mexicanos, miscegenation was (and still is) the most primal and most indelible. In an often quoted passage, longtime Kit Carson associate, George Brewerton, captured the American conception of mestizaje when he wrote that the mixed bloods of New Mexico possess:

> ...the cunning and deceit of the Indian, the politeness and the spirit of revenge of the Spaniard, and the imaginative temperament and fiery impulses of the Moor... (qtd. in Pettit 1980:11)

Mestizos are despised precisely because they bridge the gap cleft between Indian and Hispanic New Mexicans.

By the coming of the railroad in 1880 and the closing of the frontier (or rather, frontera), the useful paradigm of Indianism and Hispanophobia matures and develops even as its modes of expression shift. The raw-edged discourse of the military period becomes more refined and subtle with each passing decade. Militant confrontation gives way to mystification, but underneath lies the same status quo. As

Charles Lummis walked along the newly laid railroad tracks from Chicago to New Mexico, he inscribed his notebooks with what soon became the "tourist version" of the same paradigm, the "Southwest mystique." Its first and foremost prophet, Lummis was equally fascinated by the Southwest's desert panoramas and the earthy vitality of their noble and ignoble inhabitants. The ranks of the authocthonous nobility were made up of Indians. He found the Pueblos to be:

> ...peaceful, fixed, house-dwelling and home-loving tillers of the soil; good Catholics in the churches they have builded with a patience infinite as that of the Pyramids; good pagans everywhere else (Lummis 1928:5).

Their mystical ceremonials are described in the same glowing light that suffuses the romantic New Mexican landscapes. The inverse category of the dichotomy is filled by the un-picturesque Mexicanos, portrayed in less than idealized terms as:

> ...in-bred and isolation-shrunken descendants of the Castilian world-finders; living almost as much against the house as in it; ignorant as slaves, and more courteous than kings; poor as Lazarus, and more hospitable than Croesus; Catholics from A to Izzard, except when they take occasion to be Penitentes-and even then fighting to bring their matted scourges and bloody crosses into the church which bars its door to them (Lummis 1928:6).

His widely read travel books set the stage for a mass phenomenon, the "ethnic tourism" of the Southwest, one of the region's most enduring and lucrative industries. One of the first major collectors of folklore, folk music, and folk art, Lummis proclaims: "That of the Mexicans is scant; but that of the Indians infinite and remarkably poetic (Lummis 1928:25)."

To this day the Hispanic weaving or santo still fetches significantly less in the tourist marketplace than the corresponding Indian weaving, pot, or kachina.

The characters have been defined and the stage is set. All that remains is to translate them into visual and photographic terms. Bring on the artists and photographers. Train tickets are provided free of charge in exchange for art work for the famous Santa Fe Railroad calendars and posters. Curtis' sublime portraits of Indians are financed by none other than J.P. Morgan. America obviously has an important stake in the construction of the "Great Southwest" and the representation of its cultures. The romantic images of the Taos and Santa Fe schools become prototypical. In this frame, the picturesque Indian is cast in a totally mythological or idealized setting. His eyes are transfixed on the sky or a distant horizon. The very few Mexicanos portrayed by these artists tend to pose as individuals in a more sociologically accurate setting as the servants of the art colony. In the paintings, they wash clothes, hoe the fields, and only rarely gather to relax or play music (Rodríguez 1989). Given this over-determined mise-en-scene or tableaux, all that remains is to put these images into motion on the silver screen.

Noble Savages: the beautiful Hopi Princess in search of the mystical "Turquoise Sky Stone" of happiness. (Mary Pickford in "A Pueblo Legend" 1912). Courtesy of Richard Salazar, New Mexico State Records Center and Archives.

Ignoble Savages: Happy Tony, the crazed and forlorn greaser, with the rattlesnake hung around his neck (Romaine Fielding in "Rattlesnake" 1913). Courtesy of Richard Salazar, New Mexico State Records Center and Archives.

III A PUEBLO LEGEND[2]

D.W. Griffith and crew, including a very youthful Mary Pickford, arrive at the Albuquerque Depot in May of 1912. A boxcar full of their supplies is parked on the siding a few miles south of town near Isleta Pueblo. (Sun)light. Camera. Action. Synopsis (note: quotes are from title frames):

ACT I

"Before the coming of the Spanish, at the Spring Dance of the Green Boughs" at Isleta Pueblo, a young stranger girl from Hopi falls in love with a handsome War Captain (Great Brother). The Sky Priest emerges from his Kiva and orders him to go in quest of the "Turquoise Sky Stone," mystic symbol of happiness which lights doorways. The girl overhears.

Great Brother leaves on the quest with his warriors and is ambushed by their "hereditary enemies," the Apaches. His party takes refuge in some rocks and sends a messenger for help. The messenger is killed. Lovesick, the girl risks death by leaving the pueblo to find Great Brother. She sees the fracas, and reaches the rocks and safety. She escapes to the pueblo and brings reinforcements. In the ensuing battle, the Great Brother's friend is taken captive.

ACT II

Back at the Pueblo, after the victory celebration, the Great Brother rejects the ceremonial wedding blanket and his own happiness until his friend is free and his mission completed. He folds it and gives it to the girl. He then sets off alone to rescue his friend, followed by a group of warriors.

The girl talks to the Sun Priest who gives her the "toy image of the Sky God" to whom she prays for the Great Brother's success. She spreads honey in a corn husk in front of the kachina, sprinkles it with corn

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[2]. Biograph Company, New York 1912. Director-D.W. Griffith. Indian girl-Mary Pickford. The Great Brother's Friend-Robert Warren. The Great Brother-Wilfred Lucas. New Mexico State Library.

meal, wraps it, puts a feather on top, and lifts it up.

In the mountains, the Apaches dance over their captive. The Great Brother arrives, stabs the guard and frees his friend. Furious, the Apaches give pursuit. The Pueblo warriors leave Isleta and encounter the Apaches in another pitched battle. Again the girl prays with the feather. The battle ends in a peace talk and the Pueblo and Apache warrior join hands.

The warriors return to Isleta for another victory celebration, but Great Brother continues his quest for the sacred Sky Stone. The girl returns to her altar to plant a second feather and miraculously discovers the Sky Stone buried underneath it. The continued absence of Great Brother saddens her.

Finally, he returns empty handed to the Pueblo, and laments his failure by the river. The girl hears him, goes to see him, and brings him back to the Pueblo. She shows him the Sky Stone and where she found it. She brings out the wedding blanket and he wraps both of them in it.

At the river, the Spring Dance of the Green Boughs continues as water maidens with jars balanced on their heads watch. FIN

D.W. Griffith's portrayal of the Indian as the "Mystical Other" is so overt as to become immediately ludicrous in the eyes of the 1992 audience, a sense that must have been shared at least in part by the 1912 audience. The residents of Isleta Pueblo in 1912 became offended soon after filming began because they sensed that the film might be a parody of their culture. After complaints were filed with tribal authorities, D.W. Griffith was actually detained by them for several hours at the Pueblo. Somehow he convinced them that it was a "serious film" and was freed.[3]

Parody or not, the sublime quickly slides into the inane.

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[3]. Former Isleta Pueblo Governor, Charlie Jojola, made these comments in an interview which serves as a preface to the New Mexico State Library's circulating copy of A Pueblo Legend. No such interpretive preface was made for The Rattlesnake: A Physical Species.

The mysterious "Sky Stone" must be found so that peace will come, happiness will be assured, and the romance will be consummated between Big Brother and little Stranger Girl. Big Brother, the War Chief, leaves home on the quest and incurs the wrath of the fierce Apaches. Ironically, the adopted Indian girl discovers the "Sky Stone" buried right at home. Moral: "In the search for happiness, look no further than your own front door." The trivial garbed in buckskin and feathers is disguised as the profound.

Happily, Mary Pickford's wink and flirting smiles puncture the aura of ingenuous reverence and the film returns to the arena of romantic entertainment. Both audiences are amused. Why are we are edified by such innocence? The display of stereotypes such as the "noble savage" is a mechanism that helps to reduce the validity of native cultures. The gratification this process generates stems from its subtle assurance of cultural superiority, a kind of psychological surplus-value available to the colonizing culture and its accomplices (Flores 1974:189-223). In 1912 we admire the moving images and marvel at the exotic cultures of "our own Southwest." In 1992 we chuckle at the noble savages. Such innocence is betrayed in a reading of the subtext of this film and its historical unconscious. First, the other (ignoble) savage must be screened.

IV RATTLESNAKE - A PSYCHICAL SPECIES[4]

In 1913, Romaine Fielding, the great star and chief stuntman of Lubin Studios, produced, directed, and starred in "Rattlesnake," his first western. Las Vegas, the location of the film, was the largest and most prosperous city in New Mexico, and was for several years the movie capital of the United States before the industry relocated to California. To compete with the action packed Tom Mix movies which moved to Las Vegas in 1914, Fielding decided to make a psychological thriller. (Sun)light. Camera. Action. Synopsis:

ACT I

A large rattlesnake slithers mysteriously through some rocks.

José woos his girlfriend, the daughter of the grandee at the hacienda. His rival, "Happy Tony" steals away her attentions with a posy and ingratiates himself with her father.

Later José ambushes Tony who cools his passions at a stream where he pauses and stoops on all fours to drink. Furious, he hurls down a large rock, hitting him on the head. Tony never fully regains his senses from this blow. As José climbs down the hillside to finish off his rival with a knife, he is fatally bitten by a large rattlesnake. When Tony awakens still dazed, he realizes that the rattler has saved him. Sensing a mysterious bond with the serpent, he fondles and kisses it and carries it coiled around his neck. It senses his devotion and refuses to bite him.

Meanwhile, an American civil engineer, John Gordon, comes to the hacienda to talk to the grandee. The señorita flirts with him and says, "I'm going to the mine and will show you the way." She guides him to a mine in the mountains where Tony spies them. José dies and John, his helper, and the señorita come upon the scene. John pulls out his pistol and demands an explanation. Tony

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[4]. Lubin Films, Lubin Manufacturing Co., USA. Producer, director-Romaine Fielding. Happy Tony-Romaine Fielding. New Mexico State Library.

says, "He tried to kill me and snake killed him," showing them the snake as the señorita recoils.

Back in town Tony's mother and sister visit him and are shocked to see the snake. He lifts it triumphantly, explaining how it saved his life. His mother scolds him.

At a scenic overlook, John tips his hat and politely asks the señorita, "May I call at your home?" He shakes her hand. She nods.

That evening, the señorita pleads with Tony to get rid of the snake. She says, "Tony, until the snake is dead, I will never speak to you again," and turns away sobbing. John comes for her dressed in a suit and tie. [Some footage seems to have been lost here. As evidenced by surviving stills, it probably contained scenes from the mine.]

ACT II

Hiding in the bushes, Tony spies on John, who is busily surveying. With a look of hatred on his face, Tony pulls a pistol and aims it at John, but lowers it in disgust. The señorita, now a señora with a baby on her hip, appears to visit her husband, John, in the field. He plays with his little daughter.

"Seven years later," Tony's sister and mother appear to pay him a visit. They bring food and water to the ruined stone house where he now lives. He is half clothed and completely demented, still entranced by the snake. Nearby, the surveyors have finally completed their work. John returns home to his happy home, wife, and daughter. They are now living at the hacienda.

That night Tony wraps the snake in a blanket and sneaks off to the hacienda. In a touching scene, mama and daughter say good night to John, who sleeps in his own separate room. Outside, Tony stalks the house, crawls in through the window, and puts the snake in his rival's bed. John hears the noise, gets the pistol from under his pillow, and looks for the intruder. In the next room, the little girl awakens and says, "Please Mama, I want to kiss Papa good-night." Papa is not in bed, so the little girl jumps in.

Outside, John whistles for a policeman who he tells, "There is a thief in or around this house." While they search, Tony is horrified when he sees the little girl in John's bed. He rescues her from the snake.

As John and the policeman burst in on Tony with pistols drawn and Mama grabs her baby, he says to John, "My love for the child is greater than my hate was for you." The snake then bites Tony on the arm and John helps bind the wound. The little girl says, "Mama, I like man," as Tony hugs her, kneeling. The policeman takes him away.

> "Six months later," with the death of the snake and the loss of his right arm, we have the Happy Tony of old. At a Garden Party, while the adults are talking, the little girl puts her arm around Tony's neck and he suspiciously takes her off into the bushes. Mama notices her absence immediately, then finds the two in the bushes, playing innocently. FIN

Fielding's portrayal of the Mexican as "Depraved Other" is consistent with other "greaser" films of its time. The 1992 audience is shocked, but not necessarily surprised to see a rather complete set of overt negative stereotypes depicted through the character of Happy Tony. Mexicans are (naturally) lazy, oversexed, filthy, vicious, thieving, violent, and cowardly, with a tendency to carry knives. Such portrayals were protested by the Mexicano communities of the day in New Mexico and Texas as soon as they were noticed. Spanish language newspaper editorials in Texas specifically campaigned against "greaser" films in local theaters (Limón 1973). Similar editorials in New Mexico protested derogatory depictions found in print: the journalism, travel writings, and political speeches of the day (Meyer 1978).

What is unusual about "Rattlesnake" is not the use of stereotypes, but the manner in which they are articulated in deliberately "profound" psychological and symbolic terms. Fielding anticipates Ingmar Bergman in his overt use of symbols, creating a kind of psycho-greaser-western. To overwhelm and puzzle the viewer, there is no better choice than the ambivalent and multivalent symbol of the serpent in its Southwest incarnation: the rattlesnake. At its most

primordial level, the snake symbolizes the energy of life itself, and on its darker side, the principle of evil inherent in all worldly things, at least in the Western mind. Fielding's subtitle, "A Psychical Species," suggests a further twist, in view of this curious, classic definition:

> Physically, the snake symbolizes the seduction of strength by matter, thereby providing us with a palpable illustration of the process of involution; and of how the inferior can lurk within the superior, or the previous within the subsequent... (Cirlot 1971:286).

After a terrific, potentially fratricidal blow to the head with the rock thrown by José Tony becomes permanently delirious. This dramatic pretext allows for the elimination of reason as his motivation. He is thus reduced to a purely physical existence and reconnected with his lower urges. When he regains consciousness, he forms the mysterious bond with the snake that saved him from certain death at the hands of his rival. Tony wears the snake around his neck for the next eight years as the story proceeds. Its presence seems to give him a sense of invincible power and masculinity. It embodies that enigmatic "ascending force rising from the area governed by the sexual organ up to the realm of thought..." (Cirlot 1971:288). In the Jungian analysis, "psychologically, the snake is a symptom of anguish expressive of abnormal stirrings in the unconscious, that is, of a reactivation of its destructive potentiality..." (Cirlot 1971:287). Tony regresses, and the base instincts of revenge and treachery of the "typical Mexican" emerge. His repeated attempts to kill

his Anglo rival can now be interpreted as abnormal or deviant; as primitive sexual jealousy rather than resistance to the Anglo-American domination of the Southwest. Tony's antagonist, John Gordon, has the double role of sexual rival who gets the Mexican woman and her father's "hacienda" and the civil engineer who surveys the geographic spoils.

The sexual dimension of the American conquest and annexation of northern Mexico is a major preoccupation, both overt and subliminal, of the 19th century popular culture and political discourse that underlie these films. Mexico was such an insignificant threat to the military security of the United States, that the Mexican-American War had to be justified on other grounds. In the Victorian imagination, the war was waged to redeem perverts, not to avenge wrongs or defend territory. The threat was therefore perceived as a moral one and the political debate in American statehouses took on somewhat lurid qualities. In an 1838 novel by Anthony Ganilh, one impassioned character echoes this discourse, arguing that the Divine Duty of the United States was to conquer not only Mexico, but the rest of Latin America as well:

> In point of chastity, the most important and influential qualification of Northern nations, we are infinitely superior... Lust is, with us, hateful and shameful; with you [Mexicans and Latin Americans] it is a matter of indifference. This is the chief curse of the South; the leprosy which unnerves both body and mind... The Southern races must be morally renewed and the United States will commence the great work (qtd. in Pettit 1980:22).

The doctrine of Manifest Destiny proclaimed that Mexico should

be punished for its depravity. The Mexicans were unfit to keep what they had inherited from Spain. Military conquest was thus equated with moral and sexual redemption.

The theme of redemption is strong in Rattlesnake, and it is visibly perceivable in the physical bodies of the characters. The body politic, the new Anglo-American political order, literally inscribes itself on the physical bodies of its citizens and subjects (John 1987). The Anglo surveyor is the only character whose body language seems "normal" and "rational." Tony's woman is visibly redeemed (ie. Americanized) by marrying him. Thanks to her new marital/cultural relationship, the uncontrollably sexual body language she displayed to her Mexican suitors suddenly becomes modest and stately. The subsequent procreation of her body, the darling little coyote (halfbreed) daughter, is assured of a secure place in the new society which will in turn use her existence to legitimize its "natural" succession and hegemony in the "Great Southwest." Even Happy Tony adores her to the point of feeling kinship with her. She is his lost daughter. No cries of miscegenation here. Mestizaje with the Anglo-American has another name: salvation.

Before the invention of sound tracks, bodies were the main signifiers in silent film. The conventions of acting in this medium prescribe a rather histrionic style, but the slinking, writhing, and fawning of Mexican characters stand in marked contrast to the dignified Americans. Tony's woman is

rescued from this perdition by John. Tony is redeemed with the death of the rattlesnake and the loss of his right arm. As soon the Mexican man is totally emasculated sexually, loses his woman, his right arm (and labor), his land and his political power, his salvation is complete and his gestures finally match those of the Americans. The transition from carefree hidalgo to perverted thief to humble houseboy is completely and overtly corporeal.

As with A Pueblo Legend, the audience of Rattlesnake is secure and gratified in its not-so-subtle sense of cultural superiority. After marveling at the mystique of the noble savages, feelings of magnanimity well up with the redemption of the ignoble savages. The analysis of these films could well end here in the black and white play of stereotype and cinematic psychoanalysis. However, a deeper probe into the historical subtext of the films reveals the powerful process of naturalization that has literally "Won the West" for America.

V CONCLUSION: MYSTIFICATION AND NATURALIZATION

By the turn of the century, the frontier (la frontera) was opened and closed, military operations were complete, and the task of naturalizing the Indians and Mexicans of the Northlands was well underway. No longer a security threat, Indians had been successfully relegated to the internal exile of their tribal homelands under a system which could be fairly

termed "American apartheid." It was safe to idealize them now. Because of their numbers, Mexicans proved to be more troublesome. They had to be rendered landless and powerless before the process of American-ization could proceed. Between 1891 and 1904, the US Court of Land Claims was successful in alienating them from the majority of the land holdings nominally guaranteed them by the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo.

The major strategy in this battle for hegemony was dehistoricizing native peoples. Because a portion of their roots were European, it was a challenge to dehistoricize and make "savages" out of Mexicans. Even the most minute technicality could invalidate a land claim. Any pretext was admissible in the attempt to denigrate and subjugate; even moral and sexual fantasy. This task was easier with the Indians, whose readymade status as "savages" justified any treatment that the government saw fit.

The major tactic in this struggle of ideas may be designated as Mystification, "a cultural process which perpetuates the social order by suffusing it with a shared sense of awesome, transcendent meaning..." (Rodríguez 1989:94). Mystification as it occurs in popular culture determines the construction and representation of cultural others in the ideological process which achieves their naturalization.

In A Pueblo Legend, history is obliterated and

substituted with mystery. The action takes place in the remote past "Before the Spanish came." The quest for the "Turquoise Sky Stone" of happiness leads to the outside world and inevitable conflict with the Apaches, the "hereditary enemy." They are not historical foes, but natural foes. The moral may be "In the search for happiness, look no further than your own front door" but the historical sub-text of the same is "Go no further than your own reservation." This coincides with U.S. military policy of the late 1800's: containment and segregation of Indian groups on tribal homelands. Crossing those boundaries and leaving the reservation was considered a hostile act punishable by death. The "Sky Stone" of the Pueblo romance insures that no such transgression takes place. It is a sublime, transcendent touchstone of the new social order.

In Rattlesnake, the complex problem of dehistoricizing Mexicans is achieved through the setting and with simple blunt force trauma. The generalized setting is achieved by not identifying the specific place of action (as happened in Pueblo Legend). Anyone who has been to Las Vegas can identify the scenery, but this could just as easily be Texas, or California, or Arizona. The opening scenes transport us to the "Halcyon Days" of Spanish haciendas and opulent grandees, wherever they may have been. The charro-like costumes are also hard to place exactly. What is readily apparent is the sense of doomed decadence of the happy, oversexed Californios,

Nuevomexicanos or Tejanos. Their demise or decline is viewed as a natural progression or succession. Although the period is vaguely historical, it is tinged with the mythical aura of the golden days of ill-deserved wealth and fancy fandangos.

The process of mystification in Rattlesnake is achieved through the "awesome" symbol of the serpent. A simple, theatrical blow to the head (when José hits Happy Tony with a rock) creates the historical amnesia which allows the rattler to emerge with full symbolic force in the story. With this melodramatic device, history is effectively psychologized. Psychoanalysis becomes the explanation for cultural conflict and justification for political subordination.

The rattlesnake saves Tony from the fratricidal intentions of José. He mistakenly assumes it to be the mysterious guardian of his manhood and strength. It is actually the sign of his impotence. The Mexican women of the story, including mother, sister, and sweetheart, all shrink from its coils in fear and loathing. Strangely, the snake only protects Tony from other Mexicans; its power is useless against Americans. When he places it suggestively in John's bed, it refuses to strike either him or his daughter. After hanging ominously around Tony's neck for eight years, it bites him in punishment for his ill wishes towards the Americans. The snake saves him from such perfidy by taking away his right arm, his symbolic capacity for action and work. This snake is suspiciously selective in its attacks. It is a perfect agent

of American duplicity and sexual morality. It vilifies Mexicans and neutralizes their resistance as it stands guards over the new social order. Through the process of mystification, history is erased and naturalization is completed. Even the slithery denizens of the great deserts of the Southwest will rise up to defend the legitimacy of its new masters.

VI POSTSCRIPT

Eight decades later, the paradigm of Indianism and Hispanophobia is still firmly entrenched in the cultural landscape of New Mexico. "Ethnic tourism" is a multi-million dollar industry from which few natives have benefitted. The commodification of native cultures has resulted in the post-modernist fur and feathers fad known as "Santa Fe Style."

The current situation for the Nuevomexicano has been dubbed the "tri-ethnic trap," a kind of selective ethnophilia which favors noble over ignoble savages (Bodine 1990). Hispanic New Mexicans are surrounded with daily reminders of their subordinate status while their Indian neighbors are idealized and admired. Although the controlling paradigm of admiration and disdain was devised long ago, it is recast and resurveyed with every new book and film that appears. The natives of the "Great Southwest," restless with the terms of their (mis)representation, are anxious to transgress the cultural boundaries assigned to them by Anglo-America. Eager

to define and represent themselves, the struggle for the critique, production, and control of cultural imagery continues to intensify.

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