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# Images and Counter-images: Ohiyesa, Standing Bear and and American Literature

BO SCHÖLER

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## INTRODUCTION

Who can control the savage in his fury!  
Then he is like the tiger who has drank  
Of human blood—nought else can satisfy  
(N. Deering, *Carabasset*, 1830).

Savages, beasts, Amerindians, Indians; these are some of the appellations by which the aboriginal inhabitants of what has been designated the New World have come to be known. By right of conquest, Europeans have empirically determined the nomenclature pertaining to the land they claim to have discovered, and two of the main characters in this drama, Vespucci and Columbus, have had a direct influence on the naming of the new-found land and its human dwellers.

However, words and names are more than just symbols. They are also expressions of attitude. And the Europeans came to America with pre-conceived notions of the nature of the people they were about to encounter. Naturally, the experience of what they actually saw qualified these notions, but did they see more than they wanted to or could see? After all, their frame of reference did not include many of the things they were exposed to in the "New Land." They were consequently forced to incorporate the American experience into their own conceptual universe in an attempt

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to come to existential terms with it. Being alien to the Europeans' experience, the objects exhibited by America had to be named in order to be controlled. And the names had to be of European extraction to satisfy this goal. Furthermore, since the Europeans came to conquer, the conceptual domination had to include an inherent moral justification for the physical domination. While there can be no doubt about the fact that the newcomers were extremely influenced by what they saw, it appears equally as obvious that this influence was reflected only very little in the conceptual treatment of the experience. Or in other words, the Europeans, who voyaged across the Atlantic, have refused to acknowledge their huge debt to America, though it is there for everyone to see.<sup>1</sup>

The literature written about America and what we may generically term Native Americans<sup>2</sup> in many ways reflects the schisms the colonizers were confronted with. On the one hand, they were fascinated by what they saw, and on the other, they could not help but assert their proclaimed superiority. Ideas about the land and its inhabitants were quickly formed, and literature developed these ideas into images which soon hardened into stereotypes. The basic content of these stereotypes has changed very little over the last 500 years, although the vestiges in which they have been presented seem to have altered according to a consistent pattern. As long as the stereotypes remained unchallenged, the above-mentioned justificatory function was easily fulfilled. When the objects of the stereotypes, the Native Americans, started to rebel against the dehumanizing images in an attempt to establish counter-images, the situation became more complex, however, and some adjustments had to be made.

The purpose of this paper is dual: a brief overview of the literature written about Native Americans up till 1925 and the development of the central images; and, in part 2, six literary works by two Siouan authors, Ohiyesa and Standing Bear, are analyzed in order to establish a paradigm of Siouan counter-imagery. Part 3 presents conclusions and evaluations.

## I. IMAGES OF THE "INDIAN" IN AMERICAN LITERATURE

Farewell (said the Indian) I'm none of your mess;  
On victuals, so airy, I faintish should feel,

I cannot consent to be lodged in a place  
Where there's nothing to eat and but little to steal

(Philip Freneau, "The Indian Convert").

Relations between Native Americans as a whole and Whites have been governed by an all-embracing dichotomy between savagism and civilization.<sup>3</sup> Native Americans have persistently been perceived by immigrating Europeans as savages or half-beasts, the classification of whose souls as human was dubious for some time. The objective of the dichotomy was and is to justify the dispossession and extermination of the aboriginal peoples since it is argued that savages cannot make effective use of the land. Furthermore, in the eyes of the Whites, the behavior of the "savages" lends credibility to the assertion that they are agents of the Devil himself. Hence arises the noble and Christian duty to finish them off.

The American experience is one of violence. The urge to control and conquer, which has driven the White man west from the time of his discovery of America, relies on violence for its resolution. As Richard Slotkin argues, the generative power of White America seems to be violence itself, and it has chiefly been directed toward Native Americans.<sup>4</sup> Indeed, the first pervasive literary image of Native Americans, namely the Pocahontas Magna Mater, rests heavily on a metaphor of violence. The image also introduces the two basic types of "Indians" which exist in the popular mind even today, the Noble Savage and the Ignoble Savage. The two antithetical derivations from the same origin epitomize everything the generic Native American is thought to be: stoic child of nature and fierce, revengeful beast of the wilderness.

Douglas Leechman lists eight distinct literary images of the "Indian" and asserts that they are chronologically distributed.<sup>5</sup> The first is the amicable native of the early encounters. The second represents the rather advanced Mayan and Aztec cultures which had made "astonishing progress" (!)<sup>6</sup> in the exact sciences, and who exhibited a degree of civilization. The third image is that of the Noble Savage, which, according to Leechman, is solely a child of the minds of European philosophers and which demonstrates "ideal men leading ideal lives."<sup>7</sup> Next comes the Cruel Fiend, who corresponds to what we have termed the Ignoble Savage. The fifth image is the one disseminated by James Fenimore Cooper. By the time Cooper wrote his *Leatherstocking Tales*, the "Indian menace" no longer existed in the east, and, concludes Leechman, the "Indian" could be portrayed more realistically and with more

attention to his virtues. Longfellow's Hiawatha is the sixth image. Contrary to Cooper, Longfellow did not wish to depict the real "Indian" but rather what he might have been. Actually the image is very close to the Ignoble Savage. Number seven is the Buffalo Bill Indian who, dressed in Plains Indian outfit, is an elaboration of Cooper's Indian. Finally, Leechman maintains, the Indian today is a mixture of the preceding seven types and altogether a complex figure.

Leechman's classification is based on a narrow literary reading of "the Indian in literature," and he hardly examines social and anthropological data. His paradigm therefore seems quite a bit overlapping and in cases redundant. For instance, it is difficult to distinguish the Cooper Indian from a mixture of the Noble Savage and the Ignoble Savage, and his characterization of Cooper's descriptions as realistic would presumably meet some opposition among the Native American peoples depicted.

Alfonso Ortiz approaches images of Native Americans from a historical and anthropological angle, and he consequently finds five different sources of imagery likewise chronologically arranged.<sup>8</sup> The Tupinamba of coastal Brazil furnished the first consistent image, feathers and nakedness being pervasive symbols. The period lasted from 1500 till 1607 when the coastal Algonquins took hold of the popular mind. The Pocahontas myth is the most important *literary* image, whereas history portrayed the Algonquins negatively as Ignoble Savages. Around 1700, the Iroquois became the focal point, and the Noble Savage image fully developed. As with the other images, this was because the Iroquois Confederacy was most directly in the way of westward expansion, and lesser important nations—seen from the European point of view—were cast into the same mould. The final defeat of the Iroquois in 1784 shifted the attention to the south to the "five civilized tribes" and most prominently, the Cherokee. This period is interesting because in spite of an astonishingly quick adaptation to White ways, the five nations were nonetheless destined to lose. Comparatively few instances of violence occurred here which is why the image failed to attract the literary public. With regard to literature, Ortiz finds that the Iroquois image developed directly into the fifth and remaining image, the Sioux, simply leap-frogging over the Cherokee period.

The Sioux image is by far the most powerful, and although it started to gain ground around 1865, it is still with us today. The constantly warring, befeathered horserider on the open plains,

clad in war shirt and breech clout, occasionally hunting buffalo far away from his tepee and known for his relentless cruelty and warlike nature, is at the core of this image. The swift animal extension of the savage's legs adds to his association with the wild, forbidden nature.

Ortiz' division of images adds a needed dimension to Leechman's classification, since it expresses in much clearer terms why of all nations it was the Sioux who produced the first Native American authors of counter-images. A quick look at American literature until the middle of the 19th century will offer a background against which to understand the later development.

Apart from a few narratives about Pocahontas and Puritan descriptions of savage cruelty, not much literature deals with the Algonquin period. In 1682, however, Mary Rowlandson wrote the first captivity narrative—*The Narrative of the Captivity and Restoration of Mrs. Mary Rowlandson*—and the phenomenon immediately caught on. Hundreds of similar stories appeared, all in the vein of Iroquoian imagery.<sup>9</sup> In this period, two authors deserve mentioning, Philip Freneau and Charles Brockden Brown. Freneau, like Rousseau, saw the Native American as a Noble Savage and essentially utilized him to chastize White society and culture. Brown's 1799 novel *Edgar Buntley* successfully employed the Native American as fictional material in an attempt to create an American novel. According to Robert F. Berkhofer, Brown also cherished hopes of economic gains, however, and consequently he depicted the colonists' conception of the savage and gave no detailed descriptions of Native Americans that would offend the reader.<sup>11</sup>

The first half of the nineteenth century saw a surge of Indian drama, the majority of which dealt with the Pocahontas myth and similar old historical events. The actor Edwin Forrest made drama popular because of his great talent, but around 1850 the Iroquoian imagery had become distinctly anachronistic and Pocahontas, et al., were laughed off the stage.<sup>12</sup> Time had come for a change of imagery and the Plains Indians were in the process of being discovered and exploited by the image casters.

James Fenimore Cooper, considered the father of the American novel, was the first author who consciously utilized Plains material for a novel. While four of his five *Leatherstocking Tales* took place in the Iroquoian woods, the 1827 novel *The Prairie* was based on Siouan and Pawnee material, as the title suggests. With regard to sources, Cooper embraced Pawnee and Siouan delegations to the

east, including the famous Pitalasharo,<sup>13</sup> whose bravery readily captured the mythopoeic mind. *The Prairie*, written in a period of transition of attention from one topographical area to another, contains both Iroquoian and Plains images. Moreover, Cooper perfected the idea of the Noble Savage and the Ignoble Savage for literary use. Cooper's novels were the best sellers of the day, and other authors were quick to emulate his style. A new image was born, and the literary development took off in two different directions.

### Formula Literature

In 1869, Erastus Beadle introduced the dime novel on the literary market. It was a weekly publication containing a single formulaic historiette about a White, male hero who successfully confronts Indians and other mischievous villains to save a White captive, usually a woman. The print order for a dime novel was 60,000, but in many cases the demand was so big that they had to be reprinted several times.<sup>14</sup> One novel, *Seth Jones*, sold more than 400,000 copies, and probably the greatest dime novel writer, Prentiss Ingraham, was responsible for over 600 novels; he was reputed to have written a 35,000-word tale in 24 hours. Evidently, huge sums of money are involved here, and we are dealing with mass communication in the most literal sense of the word. Stereotyped images of "cowboys and Injuns" were disseminated on a very large scale, and as the genre developed and competition increased, the frenzy of killing reached new heights. Apparently the publishers' concept of a good novel was directly proportionate to how many Indians were killed, and to how the stories became more and more formulaic.

Finally, during the nineteenth century, what began as a phenomenon based upon historical facts in the seventeenth century (and gained impetus through such figures as Daniel Boone and David Crockett), evolved into a genuine American culture hero. His realm of action was the middle landscape between civilization and savagery and his magic stick the six-gun. Key word: violence. Significantly enough, his exploits were totally dependent upon the professed inferior position of the savages who were depicted as one-dimensional, flat characters and who were reduced to function in a setting in which the hero could have his fling.<sup>15</sup> Furthermore, the prairie became the unique topographical locus of action and

the image/stereotype of the Indian increasingly became a monocultural phenomenon: the befeathered, warlike Sioux.

The image-casting function and penetration of the dime novels is comparable to the ubiquitous barroom mirror illustrating Custer's last stand. In the States, Buffalo Bill's Wild West Show possibly exerted the greatest influence in the dissemination of the Sioux image along with the more than one hundred competing Wild West Shows. But while Buffalo Bill and a few other shows did visit the big cities in Europe, Europeans were far more exposed to literary than to visual influence. It can safely be ventured, however, that dime novels and Wild West Shows were the most influential agents in visiting the Sioux image upon Whites and Native Americans alike.

It is only natural that the motion picture industry should exploit this thematic and economic goldmine right from the industry's hesitant beginnings, and ironically enough it was probably the success of the scores and scores of Westerns produced during the first two decades of the 20th century that pushed the Wild West Shows out of business. Another and perhaps just as important factor, which contributed to the downfall of the touring shows, was the advent of World War I, which made the crossing of the Atlantic a much too perilous affair.

Western novels have enjoyed unabated success even to the present day, however, and while the White culture hero has come a little more to the fore, Plains Indians and violence are still the principal plot makers.

### "Serious" Literature

While the uniform culture hero and the quantity of novels that were read characterize formula literature, highbrow literature presents a much more varied picture. Thoreau was an avid student of Native Americans as his 2,500-page notebook on the subject clearly illustrates. Although he mostly concentrated on the Iroquoian and Cherokee imagery (witness his novel *The Maine Woods*), he did travel west in 1861 where he came into contact with the Sioux. His untimely death in 1862 prevented him from exploiting the new imagery, but he no doubt epitomizes the trend of his time.

Joaquin Miller, in his *The Sioux Chief's Daughter* and *Kit Carson's Ride*, also dealt with the Plains image, but the final focusing in on the Sioux was signaled by John G. Neihardt's trilogy *The*



*Song of Three Friends*, *The Story of Hugh Glass*, and *The Song of the Indian Wars*. In high mimetic epic, Noble Savages and Ignoble Savages are depicted and manifest destiny explicated in environmentalist terms. Descriptions of the allegedly wild life on the Plains abound, and bloodthirsty, cruel, pagan, dishonest, beastly savages wander freely among simple, innocent children of nature. The sustaining images are all Sioux of origin as indeed some of the characters are famous Sioux chiefs of the period. For the sake of contrast to the following analysis, two couplets describing Crazy Horse may be cited. They show us the cunning Ignoble Savage driven by bestial hatred.

That lean, swift fighting spirit of the Sioux,  
His wizard eyes, the haggard face and thin,  
Transfigured by a burning from within  
Despite the sweat-streaked paint and battle grime.<sup>18</sup>

Crazy Horse, having received a fatal wound, delivers a death speech in which the inevitable doom of the Sioux is spelled out. Fielder and Zeiger's contention that to the poet a dying Indian is worth much more than a dead Indian, rings especially true here!<sup>19</sup> The speech runs as follows:

I had my village and my pony herds  
On Powder where the land was all my own.  
I only wanted to be left alone.  
I did not want to fight. The Gray Fox sent  
His soldiers. We were poorer when they went;  
Our babies died, for many lodges burned  
And it was cold. We hoped again and turned  
Our faces westward. It was just the same  
Out yonder on the Rosebud. Gray Fox came.  
The dust his soldiers made was high and long.  
I fought him and I whipped him. Was it wrong  
To drive him back? That country was my own.  
I only wanted to be let alone.  
I did not want to see my people die.  
They say I murdered Long Hair and they lie.  
His soldiers came to kill us and they died.<sup>20</sup>

In this passage, Neihardt reveals the compassionate, humanistic White attitude toward Native Americans which learned Americans of the time had come to adopt, and which gave birth to numerous societies such as "Friends of the Indians."

Another "sympathetic" look on Native Americans was espoused by Hamlin Garland, who in all his works focused on Plains Indians. Thus, despite the embracing title, *The Book of the American Indian* (1923) describes primarily Sioux representatives of this disparate group. Garland sings a definite farewell to Native Americans, and as he was generally acknowledged to present the true picture of the Indian, he was read by many important persons of the time such as Roosevelt.<sup>21</sup> The works sold very well—one of them more than 100,000 copies—and Garland probably had a great influence on the popular conception of "the Indian."

In the history of Indian literature, three exceptions to the rule of Siouan imagery must be mentioned. Helen H. Jackson wrote *Century of Dishonor* (1881) and *Ramona* (1884), the former dealing with the wrongs done to the wards of government and the latter using California Indians as a setting for an inherently White love story. They stand out as proof of the existence of other sources of imagery than the Sioux. Adolph Bandelier's *The Delight Makers* (1890) is remarkable because of its subject matter, Pueblo Indians in pre-Columbian America, and because Bandelier the anthropologist was able to present an apparently true picture of the peoples involved, although he vastly overplayed the role of witchery among the Pueblos. *The Story of the Ancient People* (1893) by Edna Proctor deals with the Hopis and the Zuni, and ends the cycle of Southwestern imagery. Bandelier and Proctor were not very well received by the reading public nor by publishing houses and this is probably due to the fact that their descriptions did not conform to the received notion of the "Indian."

In the area of visual images, George Catlin, Frederic Remington, and Karl Bodmer have exerted an immense influence. All three of them wanted to capture and preserve Native Americans in print before they finally disappeared, but interestingly enough the thousands of pictures they produced all represented the well-known Plains stereotype. Consciously or unconsciously, they responded to the popular image of the Indian. The long-range impact of these painting and photographing pioneers has become even more marked, however, because their pictures have been copied in dozens of Western movies to make them more "authentic" (cf. for instance "A Man Called Horse").<sup>22</sup> Naturally, this second-hand plagiarism makes it even harder for the public to separate myth from reality.

Thus, around the turn of the century, formula literature, serious literature, the visual arts, and traveling Wild West Shows had effectively instilled the Sioux image in the mind of the public, and

the way in which the Sioux were depicted generally had little to do with actual facts. For in the process of image casting, authenticity and integrity are only incidental. The mass media had become a major force in the achievement of social control, and vested interest and profitability—two elements which in a unique manner have shaped the whole American experience—were more evident than before and just as relentless in their application.

This was the kind of opposition Luther Standing Bear and Charles A. Eastman (Ohiyesa) were up against, when they decided to write about the Sioux from the insider's point of view in an effort to save their people from the dehumanizing stereotypes.

## II. THE COUNTER-IMAGERY OF OHIYESA AND STANDING BEAR

... True civilization lies in the dominance of self and not in the dominance of other men (Standing Bear, *Land of the Spotted Eagle*).

The novels of Ohiyesa and Standing Bear in many ways stand apart from the literary tradition so far discussed. First of all, four of them—*My Indian Boyhood*; *From the Deep Woods to Civilization*, *My People the Sioux*, and *Land of the Spotted Eagle*—are partly autobiographies and the remaining two—*The Soul of the Indian* and *Indian Heroes and Great Chieftains*—are interpretations of actual events, belief systems, and persons. This places the writings somewhere between the two realms of fiction and non-fiction, and introduces the inevitable question of truthfulness. To what degree can we, the readers, take the content of these works to be authentic and true?<sup>23</sup> And how does it influence our interpretation that we know that the works are based on historical facts? Naturally, some of the things described can be tested against other sources, but exactly because (some of) the novels are consciously presented as autobiographies and because so little is written elsewhere about traditional Sioux life, the question of authenticity is rather complex. The factual appearance of the novels no doubt increases their impact on the reader who is trained to distinguish between fiction and nonfiction.

In a certain sense it may be argued that the novels represent what we have come to know today as docu-dramas; their form inscribes them in American literary tradition, but their content transcends the boundaries of this tradition and sets them apart in the readers' mind.

It is part of the hypothesis upon which the following analysis is based that the novels represent conscious efforts on part of the authors to present counter-images to the received perception and understanding of Sioux, and in a broader sense, Native American life. At the risk of committing "intentional fallacy," it may be stated that the subtle mingling of personal memories, anthropological data, and political statements and analyses appears to be designed to achieve this goal. The following comparative analysis will discuss the counter-images and the way in which they are presented in an attempt to define the view of the authors.

In terms of literary history, Ohiyesa is one of the first Native American authors to get his writings published, and he certainly was the first Sioux to enter the literary scene with so much attention. In that sense, Ohiyesa is the father of a tradition of Sioux writers who have stepped forward during the 20th century to inform about traditional Sioux life and to criticize American society. It seems that Standing Bear, Ella Deloria, and Vine Deloria, Jr., for example, are well rehearsed in Ohiyesa's writings and that they continue the tradition initiated by him.

## Ohiyesa

Charles A. Eastman (Ohiyesa) was born in 1858 as a Santee Sioux near Redwood Falls, Minnesota. After 15 years of traditional Sioux life, Ohiyesa was sent to school by his father, and after 17 years of education he graduated from Boston School of Medicine in 1890. He received much support and help from Easterners during his school years, but as a newly graduated physician he soon learned that the White man's world was not so ideal as it had been presented to him. He was forced from one job after another, and often he was pressed to use his "Indianness" to solve financial problems.<sup>24</sup>

He remedied these problems through his prolific writings, however. Over a period of 28 years, he wrote 11 novels and numerous articles which were all related to his Siouan background,<sup>25</sup> but after his 1921 separation from his wife, he stopped writing. From following the development in his books, one gets the impression that he had expressed all the things he wanted to express. During the preceding decade, he had become more and more disillusioned with White civilization, and he spent much time alone in his secluded cabin near Granite Lake, Minnesota. Wilson (1977), his biographer, suggests that Elaine Goodale Eastman, Ohiyesa's wife,

did most of his writing and that this was why he stopped so abruptly in 1921.<sup>26</sup> However, when examining the imagery and content of Ohiyesa's novels and comparing them to other Siouan stories, for example, by Standing Bear and Black Elk, it becomes clear that the style and feeling that emanate from the books are inherently Siouan. Elaine Goodale, a Bostonian, might have been of editorial assistance to Ohiyesa, but it is beyond doubt that he is responsible for the original idea and the content of the novels.

Ohiyesa's first novel, *Indian Boyhood*, deals with the first 15 years of his life which he spent with his uncle and grandfather. In the small preface to the book, Ohiyesa acknowledges that traditional Native American life is no longer possible, and subsequently he wishes to present a picture of how the "natural and free man" lived before White contact.<sup>27</sup> Throughout his writings, Ohiyesa often remarks on what he calls the "transition period,"<sup>28</sup> meaning the time when the Sioux people became increasingly exposed to White influence, an influence which had devastating demoralizing and corrupting effects on Native Americans and their natural surroundings. It is evident that by writing about his boyhood he wishes to illustrate the way things used to be in order to break down the stereotype of the Sioux that is a result of this period.

One device used by Ohiyesa is to confront and denounce false beliefs. He cites the White belief that Native Americans have no system of education (p. 41). He proceeds to illustrate that Siouan education is a life-long process which commences in the pre-natal stage. Moreover, he contends, Native American skills are not "instinctive and hereditary" (p. 43), but the result of continuous learning. Thus, he dispels the myth of the Noble Savage and the environmentalist idea that natural life bestows animal-like qualities of the senses upon human beings.

The child's sense of logic and ability to express concepts in a succinct way is also trained (p. 67), we are informed, whereby it is implied that Native Americans are not given to emotion and irrational behavior. Reticence and continence (pp. 157-65) are instilled into every Siouan person, and these virtues expressly contradict the image of the rowdy and promiscuous savages of the woods. Ohiyesa emphasizes the cultivation of history and literature as important aspects of Siouan culture (pp. 100-110) belying one of the fundamental principles upon which the categorization of Native Americans as savages is founded. Another instance is the author's insistence upon the existence of a government and a code of laws according to which every Siouan community is organized (p. 220).

The strict education every Sioux is given also includes willingness to sacrifice all material tokens of wealth as evidenced in the offering (p. 87 ff.) and the giving away of, for example, a horse on festive occasions. The materialism of Whites is very much scorned. Contrary to the Sioux, who are taught to be brave and fearless, Whites are said to be cowards (p. 46) and apt to become cannibals in cases of distress (p. 14). Native Americans' love for their fellow human beings finds expression in the custom of adopting and caring for captives and the very way in which wars are fought with the stress on counting coup and not killing (pp. 22-23).

Already here, in this first novel, Ohiyesa delivers hard attacks on the professed humanity of the White race, showing that judged by White standards the Sioux are much more forgiving and humane. Probably due to his stoic and grave appearance when at war, the Sioux has been characterized as a humorless person. This is far from correct, Ohiyesa claims, but each action has its proper time and place, and the place to rehearse jokes is around the campfire among friends and family according to the code of dignified behavior (p. 229 ff.).

*From the Deep Woods to Civilization*, which describes Ohiyesa's experiences with White Christian life from his 15th year of age, bears evidence of the 14 years which had passed since he wrote *Indian Boyhood*. *From the Deep Woods* is more tightly, chronologically structured, and it is more outspoken in its criticisms of White society. Ohiyesa is successful in conveying a sense of development in his attitude toward his new existence. Although the novel is more autobiographical than *Indian Boyhood*, he still finds room to comment on general problems. It is important to note this development in Ohiyesa. Siouan time conception is cyclic and this naturally influences the way in which narratives are perceived and rendered. Similarly, Western literature follows the Western notion of time—chronological and linear. So when Native American authors "fail" to structure their stories linearly, they are often rebuked for this and called disorganized (cf. for example Standing Bear, *Land of the Spotted Eagle*, in the preface by Richard N. Ellis, p. xii). Apparently Ohiyesa wished to appeal to the discriminate White readers when he "organized" his account chronologically, and thus add to its impact.

Ohiyesa's first day at school failed to impress him because he found nothing brave or strong about the opportunities offered him (p. 23). He found it preposterous when he heard that the mechanics of the world could be broken down into small units although *he*

knew that the world only existed as a whole (p. 20). Indeed a clash of world views!

Throughout the book the concept of civilization is defined and redefined, and it is this concept that is the real theme. When Ohiyesa is housed and fed by a White family, who refuse to accept payment for their services just as a Sioux would do, and who have so many beautiful things in the house, he immediately decides that civilization is good (p. 39). It is necessary to remember that going to school had been represented to him by his father as equal to going on the war path. It was a way of showing bravery, and a full-hearted effort was imperative. Seen in this light, Ohiyesa's acceptance of civilization might better be appreciated. In principle, Christian doctrines appeared to be very similar to the essentials of his own upbringing, so why not accept Christianity since it had obviously given the Whites so much? Furthermore, the blending of languages and cultures in the college milieu seemed to vouch for an international brotherhood of man, and who could turn such an opportunity down (pp. 57-58)?

Ohiyesa had not yet been to the east, however, and a few unpleasant surprises were in store for him. In spite of all the good intentions, civilized people did not seem to be happy in the big city of Chicago, but the sheer vastness of White civilization spelt death for the Native American in Ohiyesa's mind. Assimilation was the only way!

Once graduated and fully acculturated and back at Pine Ridge as a physician, Ohiyesa's eyes are opened to the dark sides of civilization. Patronage, graft, and fraud flourish among White men, and he realizes that inept, politically appointed officials are to be blamed for the Wounded Knee Massacre (p. 117). Ohiyesa's own position is always ambiguous, however. An official representative of the White oppressors and administering the mixed blessing of "White medicine," he finds himself antagonized by his own people.

The discovery of grand-scale fraud and the subsequent "white-washing" of the culprits, the autocratic power of the agent, and his exposure to the profound corruption of high-ranking public figures force him to redefine civilization, however, expressed in the graceful pun "the savagery of civilization" (p. 139). This appears to have been the second turning point in Ohiyesa's life. From now on he seeks to preserve his cultural identity, and he attempts only to engage in enterprises that further the Christian ideal of civilization. (For example, agent for YMCA.)

By presenting his own development from noncritical acceptance of White values to his brutal awakening to the hard realities, Ohiyesa has performed quite a literary scoop. The impact on the reader is very powerful, and the indictment of White hypocrisy comes across subtly. To complete the counter-image, Ohiyesa states that Jesus must have been an Indian because His ways are the same as Indian ways (p. 143). Or in other words, it is implied that Whites ought to learn from Native Americans and not the other way around. The irony is, as Ohiyesa puts it, that,

Some persons imagine that we are still wild savages, living on the hunt or on rations; but as a matter of fact, we Sioux are now fully entrenched, for all practical purposes, in the warfare of civilized life (*From the Deep Woods*, p. 165).

The symbolism of the concept of civilization as it is developed in *From the Deep Woods* is the strongest counter-image in the novel, and it correlates perfectly with the straightforward statement on page 188 that Native Americans were much closer to the ideal of civilization than the Whites before the disastrous influence of the latter on the former. In this book more than any other, however, the dualism of Ohiyesa's position is evident. He is convinced about the incompatibility of "the Way" and "the way things are," and he therefore works for the adaption of Native American ways to White ways and not the other way around. For this he was rebuked by Native Americans (p. 148).

*From the Deep Woods* is an indictment of Western hypocrisy and materialism, but Ohiyesa ends up advocating civilization in spiritual terms because he still believes in the international brotherhood of man and thereby also in Siouan ways. In keeping with the dualism that this belief implies he assuringly ends the book with this line: "... so long as I live, I am an American" (p. 195).

The complexity of a choice between two cultures, which tormented Ohiyesa in *From the Deep Woods*, is totally absent in *The Soul of the Indian*, which was written five years earlier. Expressly produced to correct the many wrong statements about Native American beliefs, the book primarily describes Sioux religion. A point of criticism, which may be directed against Ohiyesa, is that he often lumps all Native American peoples together under one heading, "Indian," and in his eagerness to present counter-images the author treats Siouan culture as a representative of all Native American cultures. In doing so, he inadvertently responds to the



public image of the Indian as being a Sioux and in a sense solidifies the stereotype. Nevertheless, religion permeates all aspects of Sioux life, and an understanding of this is a *sine qua non* for any understanding of the Sioux people. Ohiyesa emphasizes that Native Americans knew God before the coming of the White man (*The Soul*, p. 86). In essence, faith in the supreme principle is universal; it is only the execution of this faith that differs from one culture to another. Sioux religion is pantheistic. All creations in the universe are living beings who are part of the great scheme. In sum, everything has a soul. Wakan Tanka, the Great Mystery, is a state of being that must be sought in solitude, we learn. By contrast, Christianity is a monotheistic enterprise whose fulfillment depends upon the congregation of people, the stewardship of a priest, and the existence of an edifice of worship. The direct supplication to God is highly blasphemous (*From the Deep Woods*, p. 41), and it does not conform to the principle of reciprocity which according to Siouan belief must characterize religious life. All energy must be directed toward achieving harmony. This is quite a refutation of the image of the godless savage roaming the prairie in quest of human prey!

Ohiyesa scorns Christianity for its materialism. Poverty is demanded by Sioux religion since the amassing of wealth corrupts the soul. Hence the central statement of *The Soul* is that in terms of religious practice, Native Americans by far excel Whites. Sioux people perceive of every act as a religious act, as opposed to the Sunday worship of Christians, and the former's respect for life in all its multiplicity of forms makes them truly civilized.

Another central counter-image has to do with the concept of medicine and medicine men. According to Ohiyesa, most postcontact medicine men are frauds who perform for money and glory and not in the spirit of Wakan Tanka. All kinds of curing have come to be seen as "medicine" by Whites although strictly speaking only herbs and the like are medicine. The greatest part of curing is psychological. It is the readjustment of an unharmonious soul and mostly prophylactic in nature. Sioux public rites are few (Black Elk mentions seven<sup>29</sup>) and they center around the sacred pipe and the vapor bath. Most communication with Wakan Tanka takes place in solitude and involves prayer and vision-seeking, but Ohiyesa nevertheless emphasizes that Sioux religion is directly comparable to Christian rituals (pp. 78-82). Finally, physical and mental health depend upon religious observance. Once more it is implied that Sioux life was superior before the "transition period."

With characteristic irony Ohiyesa entitled a chapter "Barbarism and the Moral Code" (p. 87). The title nicely sums up another basic counter-image. The savagism/civilization dichotomy touched upon already holds that Native American cultures are unstructured and lawless. In a few pages Ohiyesa demonstrates that civilization is lawless and barbaric, if any: White promiscuity vs. Sioux chastity (cf. Maiden's Feast); White dishonesty vs. Sioux capital punishment for lying and cheating (*The Soul*, p. 114; *Indian Boyhood*, p. 71); White injustice vs. Sioux justice for all (cf. Crow Dog's execution of Spotted Tail, *The Soul*, pp. 110-11); indiscriminate White killings vs. thirty days of mourning over a killed enemy (*The Soul*, p. 106). Also contrary to common belief, Ohiyesa claims rights of property exist, but values are obviously different. For example, it is not considered stealing to take food when one is hungry. The principle of reciprocity must be extended to friends as well as enemies.

Just as the code of laws is unwritten, so is the Holy Scripture, which is a living book. Although he treated the issue in both *Indian Boyhood* and *From the Deep Woods*, Ohiyesa finds it necessary to reiterate his words that oral literature is just as legitimate as written literature. The existence of material things such as an alphabet does not vouch for spiritual harmony and purity. Siouan Genesis is no less true because it has been transmitted orally instead of in print.

*The Soul of the Indian* is an impressive defense of traditional Sioux life, and it successfully proves that only the advent of the two great White "civilizers," whiskey and gunpowder, could have corrupted this life. It is the "transition-period Indian" that Americans have based their judgment of the traditional Indian upon, and ironically enough the representatives of civilization have failed to recognize in their imperial self-conceit that White savagery is the cause of the present distress.

While *The Soul of the Indian* must be considered the centerpiece of Ohiyesa's counter-imagist campaign, *Indian Heroes and Great Chieftains* in a straightforward way adds another dimension to our knowledge about Native Americans. By presenting the biographies of "some of the greatest chiefs of modern times in the light of the native character and ideals,"<sup>30</sup> Ohiyesa quite obviously wanted to furnish positive role models for Native Americans, but also to illustrate to all the world that Native Americans have a history of their own and great heroes just like any other group of peoples. A quick look at the chosen personalities reveals 1 Ojibwa, 1 Nez

Percé, 3 Cheyennes, and 10 Sioux, or in other words, all Plains people (with the possible exception of the Nez Percé, who did enter the Plains in the course of their long retreat). During his extensive travels, Ohiyesa came into contact with almost all cultural areas in the U.S., so his choice seems somewhat limited. In his other works he does mention Tecumseh and Pontiac, for example,<sup>31</sup> and he must have known or known of other great personalities, so why this ethnocentrism? Apparently, Ohiyesa responded to the prevailing image of *the* Native American as a Plains figure or took deliberate advantage of the focus on that image. In any case, there must be some truth to the contention that without this specific focus Ohiyesa's many books might not so easily have been published and accepted by the reading public.

As in his other novels, Ohiyesa begins by explaining and lamenting the demoralizing effects of the transition period. Some marginal chiefs usurped absolute power with the encouragement and assistance of the ubiquitous White officials and cavalry, an unthinkable thing in the old days, he claims. Accordingly he wished to illustrate how men became chiefs and heroes. The unifying characteristics of these men, and consequently the ones that represent positive role models, include bravery, intelligence, physical fitness, generosity, self-denial and modesty, refinement, patriotism, abilities as an orator and strategist, and the power of vision. These values are clearly universal, hence the equality of Sioux and other peoples. Tracing the biographies of some fifteen Native Americans might not seem much of a counter-imagist accomplishment, but seen in the context of the uniquely negative descriptions of Native Americans—and particularly those of the Sioux people which abounded during the 1880s through the 1920s, the darkest years in Native American history—the effect of such biographies cannot be over estimated. On the one hand, they prove the greatness of Native American cultures and thus restore self-confidence and pride to the people. On the other, the sheer existence of such a book scatters the White illusion of moral, intellectual, and physical superiority. No longer is just one version of the (hi)story being told, and the colonizers' moral alibi has suffered a lasting blow.

In his later years, Ohiyesa helped found, and for some time was the president of, the Society of American Indians,<sup>32</sup> and during this period he became even more outspoken in his criticisms of the BIA and the institution of Indian Agents. In numerous articles he pointed out the injustices of the reservation system and drew attention to America's debt to the Native American, a debt which

Felix Cohen has illustrated brilliantly as well.<sup>33</sup> Mention of just one article will suffice here to illustrate the kind of topics Ohiyesa brought up.<sup>34</sup>

The American Eagle, though other countries may utilize basically the same insignia, is Native American in origin, he asserts.<sup>35</sup> The eagle is a Pan-Indian symbol, and to the Sioux it signifies "nobility of spirit, perfect courage, dignity and poise, vision and wisdom."<sup>36</sup> Only if a warrior had performed a great deed was he entitled to wear an eagle feather, and the language of feathers is well-developed and precise. The eagle spirit, symbolizing absolute dignity, is worshipped and not the eagle itself. Likewise, the spotted eagle carries the souls of the dead to the world beyond "down south" (cf. *The Land of the Spotted Eagle*), just as the golden, black, and bald eagle represent east, west, and north and life, darkness, and winter, respectively.<sup>37</sup>

The spirit of the eagle has guided Native Americans for millenia, and now White Americans have adopted it in order to be part of the great power, Ohiyesa concludes. This argument is contiguous to the one about the spirit of place discussed above, which a variety of critics have found Americans to lack: Standing Bear, D. H. Lawrence, Vine Deloria Jr., Richard Slotkin, just to mention a few.

As the analysis of this cross section of his writings will have demonstrated, Ohiyesa was fully aware that he was writing for a White audience, and it must have been due partly to general interest in the topic (since 1890, "Indians" had been museum pieces and objects of romanticized contemplation, a trend Ohiyesa contributed to by collecting "rare specimens" of "authentic" Indian worship for ethnologists!) and partly to his subtle way of communicating criticism of the Whites that his books were so well received. There is a conspicuous lack of books published by representatives of other Native American peoples during this period.

Ohiyesa led a tumultuous life. Having been exposed to the Siouan way of life for 15 years, and loving the beauty and freedom of it, he was completely uprooted and planted among Whites to have their values inculcated in him. He then chose the White way only to become disillusioned and feel out of place, finally to return to nature's way. By then he had become dependent upon wage labor, however, and during the last ten years of his life he had to use his "Indianness" to survive. Thus, the man who had come to emblemize Siouan resistance in print died friendless and penniless in 1939.<sup>38</sup>

## Standing Bear

...The very resistance the Indian has made to save the things inalienably his has been his saving strength—that which will stand him in need when justice does make its belated appearance and he undertakes rehabilitation (*Land of the Spotted Eagle*, p. 251).

Luther Standing Bear, Oglala<sup>39</sup> Sioux born between 1860-1868, wrote only four books: *My People the Sioux* (1929); *My Indian Boyhood* (1931); *Land of the Spotted Eagle* (1933); and *Stories of the Sioux* (1934). The books represent the culmination of an eventful life. Having been sent to school back east—he was among the first group of Carlisle students—and having learned, on the reservation, the completely useless trade of tinsmithing, he returned to the Rosebud Reservation to become an assistant teacher. Later, he worked as an agency clerk, storekeeper, rancher, and assistant minister. Like Ohiyesa, Standing Bear learned the hard way that there were not many jobs available for young, educated Native Americans.

In 1902, he therefore joined Buffalo Bill's Wild West show and traveled around in Britain for eight months (*My People*, pp. 247-67). This employment opened new doors for him, however, and he moved to California to become a movie actor. Here, he also became a member of a lecture circuit and spoke widely on mostly Native American topics (*My People*, p. xiv). This was probably where his sharp opinions about Native American issues were developed.

Standing Bear's novels represent an extraordinary feat because this man, who had participated in the stereotyping of the Indian through his involvement with show business, managed to maintain his integrity and acute sense of cultural identity even in the midst of Hollywood superficiality.

Both *My People the Sioux* and *Land of the Spotted Eagle* are partly autobiographies, and they describe the same pattern of traditional life, the breaking down of old customs, and suggestions for an amelioration of Sioux life that were apparent in Ohiyesa's works. In structure and organization they resemble Ohiyesa's works as well, right down to the ethnological data presented. Standing Bear makes many points of his own, however, and education is a recurrent issue.

Like Ohiyesa (and many other educated Native Americans, such as Ely S. Parker and Carlos Montezuma), Standing Bear became a "progressive" who was in favor of the allotment of land in sever-

alty to the Sioux and the adoption of White ways, which he found could not be avoided. One way of doing this—which he himself had found useful—was to obtain an education. Although he was thus in favor of the Pratt school in Carlisle and the principle upon which it was built, he suggested various changes in procedure.

First of all, Native Americans ought to be offered a double education, he said, and the teachers ought to be native people (*Land of the Spotted Eagle*, pp. 252-54), just as all jobs on the reservation ought to be held by native people. This suggestion has only recently been instituted, and is still in the process of being carried out. And, Standing Bear continues, furnishing the death blow to American self-conceit:

Why not a school of Indian thought, built on the Indian pattern and conducted by Indian instructors? Why not a school of tribal art? Why should not America be cognizant of itself; aware of its identity? In short, why should not America be preserved? . . . . in denying the Indian his ancestral rights and heritages the white race is but robbing itself. But America can be revived, rejuvenated, by recognizing a native school of thought. The Indian can save America (*Land of the Spotted Eagle*, pp. 254-55).

Written in 1933, when the image of the dying Indian was still very prevalent, this counter-image must have been extremely provocative. In effect, Standing Bear is saying that White civilization is dying, and by letting Native American principles rule, not only Native Americans but the whole world could be saved. The argument about education is thus completely reversed: Let Native Americans educate Whites! His argument has bearing on the bilingual programs in today's schools as well. Ideal as it may seem on paper, the program often fails because Standing Bear's suggestions have not been heeded. Middle-class values are being taught in English as well as the native language by instructors who, it seems, do not want to become cognizant of themselves nor of the land. The program may be bilingual, but the underlying attitude of its pushers is one of cultural absolutism. Americans still resist becoming part of the land and the people they have colonized.

Siouan ability to cope—to adopt and conform to new circumstances—is epitomized by Standing Bear and by his father, Chief Standing Bear the First. Both remained Siouan at heart while they advanced themselves in the White world. The modern Native American relies on modern amenities with the same naturalness as he used to carry his bow and arrows (*Land of the Spotted Eagle*,

p. 253); his "Indianness" is retained although attempts to stifle it have been numerous.

Standing Bear nevertheless feels the need to revitalize Native American identity and urges everybody to preserve their cultural uniqueness (*Land of the Spotted Eagle*, pp. 258-59) because he finds the melting pot theory to be detrimental to both Native Americans and Whites alike. To attempt to forget and change one's identity is moreover sacrilegious, he says, because "only the hand of the 'Supreme Power' can transform man; only Wakan Tanka can transform the Indian" (*Land of the Spotted Eagle*, p. 248). In the 1930s, few people were prepared to accept this argument. It was the general attitude that Native Americans had to change fundamentally to survive. Fortunately, this belief has been proved wrong.

The biggest event in Standing Bear's life was when he became a full citizen of the United States, a goal he had been working toward for a long time (*My People*, p. 252). The irony of American citizenship, which was denied Native Americans for many years, naturally is that they *are* Americans, and this point is devoted much attention by Standing Bear. He gives the argument a slight twist as is his habit by maintaining that only people who are firmly rooted in the land through the dust of endless generations belong and are citizens in a real sense. But Standing Bear concludes, unfortunately "the man from Europe is still a foreigner and an alien. And he still hates the man who questioned his path across the continent" (*Land of the Spotted Eagle*, p. 248).

Both Standing Bear's books are kindled by the innumerable injustices done to Native Americans. Standing Bear's understanding and sensitive treatment of Siouan heritage—past and future—sparkles a flame bright and clear. The books spell hope, a hope which is now slowly materializing for Native Americans.

## Conclusion

Ohiyesa and Standing Bear were not writers of fiction in the traditional Western sense. Their scope was greater. Utilizing facts as sources and essentially writing about facts, their works were very politically and socially involved. The phenomenon of political fiction has developed within the last decade or so, so these authors were half a century ahead of their time as regards literary accomplishment. Especially Standing Bear's recommendations and sugges-

tions have recently been implemented, although not directly due to him.

Ohiyesa and Standing Bear no doubt saw it as their duty to their people to demythologize the image of the Sioux in the eyes of the world. However, they did much more than that. They delivered a complete comparison between their own and Western culture finding the consistent pattern that in all areas of importance to the Sioux—and to Westerners too, for that matter—Sioux culture was a viable option to “civilized” culture.

In spite of the supposed development of the knowledge about the problems Native Americans face and the intervening 50 years of corrections, the books are still just as readable and interesting today as when they were written. This is the true mark of high quality and the final proof that the authors were hitting the core of the matter. Cultural survival of their people was the eventual goal of the writers, and this can only be insured through a high level of understanding and commitment. The six books constitute an early contribution to the effort of explaining the unique cultural values of an oppressed people to its oppressors, and their consciousness-raising function has hardly been equalled by the scores of books published during the last decade on the same subject. Judged by political as well as literary standards, Ohiyesa and Standing Bear were true pioneers.

#### NOTES

1. For a short but succinct enumeration of some of many things borrowed or stolen from America and renamed to make them appear European of origin, see Felix Cohen, “Americanizing the White Man.”

2. The confusion of terms is still with us today. In this paper, however, “Native American” will be preferred over “Indian” although the term may be used when paraphrasing other sources. “Sioux” will be used to designate the whole Dakota nation.

3. This argument is based upon Roy Harvey Pearce, *Savagism and Civilization*.

4. Richard Slotkin, *Regeneration Through Violence*.

5. See Douglas Leechman, “The Indian in Literature.”

6. *Ibid.*, p. 157.

7. *Ibid.*, p. 159.

8. Alfonso Ortiz, “The Dark Side of the Moon.”

9. Albert Keiser, *the Indian in American Literature*, p. 33.

10. *Ibid.*, p. 23.

11. Robert Berkhofer, *The White Man's Indian*, p. 85.

12. Keiser, *The Indian in American Literature*, p. 82.

13. Pitalesharo, a Pawnee, stopped the practice of human sacrifice among the Pawnees when he saved a young Sioux girl about to be offered.



14. Henry Nash Smith, *Virgin Land*, pp. 90-91.
15. John Cawalti, *The Six-Gun Mystique*, p. 38.
16. John Price, "Stereotyping of North American Indians in Motion Pictures," pp. 154-55.
17. This section is primarily based upon Keiser, *The Indian in American Literature*, pp. 208-299.
18. *Ibid.*, p. 273.
19. Ralph E. Friar and Natasha A. Friar, *The Only Good Indian*, p. 16.
20. *Ibid.*, p. 275.
21. Keiser, *The Indian in American Literature*, p. 287.
22. Friar & Friar, *The Only Good Indian*, pp. 34-39.
23. The question of truth as an absolute phenomenon has haunted literary critics since the Age of Positivism. Although the question seems somewhat irrelevant to the present writer, it must nonetheless be considered to fully appreciate the counter-imagist impact of the novels. It must be assumed that a similar question puzzled early 20th century readers.
24. See R. Wilson, "Dr. Charles Alexander Eastman," pp. 192-93, 207; David Reed Miller, "Charles Alexander Eastman," p. 68.
25. Wilson, "Dr. Charles Alexander Eastman," p. viii.
26. *Ibid.*, p. 207.
27. Ohiyesa, *Indian Boyhood*, Preface.
28. For example, *From the Deep Woods*, p. 187; *Soul of the Indian*, p. xi.
29. See Black Elk, *The Sacred Pipe*.
30. *Indian Heroes and Great Chieftains*, p. 1.
31. See *From the Deep Woods*.
32. Wilson, "Dr. Charles A. Eastman," p. 2.
33. Cf. note 1, Introduction.
34. "The American Eagle: An Indian Symbol." Some of the titles of his other articles speak for themselves: "The Indian's Plea for Freedom"; "Justice for the Sioux"; and "The Indian as a Citizen."
35. "The American Eagle: An Indian Symbol."
36. *Ibid.*, p. 90.
37. Standing Bear, *Land of the Spotted Eagle*, p. 122.
38. Miller, "Charles Alexander Eastman," p. 70.
39. Standing Bear claimed that he was an Oglala, but in the preface to *My People the Sioux* Richard Ellis contends that he might have been Brule.

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