

SEEING WITH THE STEREOTYPIC EYE:
THE VISUAL IMAGE OF THE PLAINS INDIAN¹

Fraser J. Pakes

We create the world that we perceive, not because there is no reality outside our heads, but because we select and edit the reality we see to conform to our beliefs about what sort of world we live in.

Mark Engel

INTRODUCTION

One of the reasons the Plains Indian has become the Indian in the eyes of much of the world is because of the very powerful visual images evoked by the term "Plains Indian." We "see" the tipis, the horses, the beadwork, the physical environment, but above all, we see the Indian himself. What is seen are "the pictures in our heads." Sadly, such pictures too often prove to be the stereotypes affecting our relationships with and our attitudes towards the Indian people of North America.

This paper is concerned primarily with the contributions made by the non-Indian world to the building of an image of the Plains Indian. The artists, sculptors, illustrators, photographers, film and television producers, as well as the world of advertising and business, have all made their impact upon this image. The image has run the gamut of extreme positivism to extreme negativism, but in doing so has never escaped permanently from what has come to be termed a "stereotype." That is, it is an image conforming to a fixed or general pattern which lacks any individual distinguishing marks. Essentially, it is a standardized mental or visual picture held in common by members of a group and representing an oversimplified picture of another group.²

Such a stereotype normally has two outstanding features. First is the fact that, while stereotypes of the Indian waver

between one of the Indian being backward to one of being a noble survivor of a priceless culture, it is a concept almost entirely expressed in negative terms, dealing with what people do not have or do not do. Not infrequently, for instance, Indians were not seen as European because they did not practice agriculture. Second, the stereotype always has some truth in it, however small. The problem is that it is truth blown out of all proportion so that it comes to stand for an entire people. The sets of beliefs accompanying the stereotypes are usually stated as categorical generalizations, the beliefs being usually oversimplified. The white man often has first acted according to popular ideas of what is an Indian and then added qualifications, such as "bad Indian," "lazy Indian," or whatever.³ In other words, we do not tend to see first and then define -- we define first and then see. When we use a stereotypic image for the Indian, it may distinguish an ethnic group, but not always so. Often we refer to those Indians who are not successful (by our standards) and who are poverty-stricken. Thus the term Indian speaks not to ethnicity but to socio-economic factors. Wax notes that, in some regions, the word "Indian" is used not to identify people of that descent but only those who are impoverished and ethnically distinct.⁴ Thus many Dakotans use "Indian" to denote Sioux they perceive as poor and "backward," while Northwestern Oklahomans perceive the Tribal Cherokee in a similar light. This should alert us to the fact that, as a word in ordinary language, "Indian" sometimes refers to a distinct ethnic group, but more often refers to a series of social distinctions of an invidious character.⁵

To eradicate stereotypes, it is necessary first to identify them and second to discover what distinguishing characteristics of Indians elicit such stereotypic concepts. Also, stereotypic concepts are complicated by the fact that the victims themselves maintain the stereotype. In some instances, Indian people not only have maintained the image given them by the white man, but also have taken the image full circle by strongly proclaiming that it is, in fact, traditional!

EARLY IMAGES

Generally, European artists led fixed lives, often confining themselves to studios while living on the patronage of prince and church. Few were willing to give up lucrative positions and make the dangerous journey across the Atlantic to the newly "discovered" land of America. Indicative is the fact that neither Vespucci nor Columbus was accompanied by anyone capable of portraying on canvas the human life that was encountered in the New World.

Possibly the first actual representation of an Indian occurred in a woodcut by Guilano Dato in 1493, produced shortly after Columbus' visit to the New World. It depicts the King of Spain, seated on his throne and looking out across the ocean to the shores of the New World where a group of aboriginal people parade across the scene. What is interesting about this woodcut is that there is absolutely no attempt to accurately portray either the appearance or clothing of the aboriginal people. The engraver, who obviously had never left Germany, was content to merely adopt both the current European image and clothing. The same disregard for authenticity is evident in another engraving of the period which portrays Indian men as German burghers of the time. In other words, rather than concern themselves with the actual physical appearance of the Indian, the artists of the day were more intent on depicting the Indian in exotic and fanciful clothing, using the natural environment they envisaged as staging. Moreover, though the Indians may look like German burghers, they invariably are shown to be cannibalistic, a characteristic attributed by early explorers to most newly "discovered" aboriginal peoples. Although this early period did produce some realism, most notably the portrayal of Indians with feathers on their heads, for the most part, Indian imagery continued to be based on fantasy, rather than direct observation. This was true of woodcuts illustrated in volumes by Ramusico (1550), Oviedo de Valdes (1535), Von Staden (1557), and Thevet (1558). It was also reflected in the fact that, by the late sixteenth century, the imagery most used to symbolize the quintessence of "America" itself was a depiction of an Indian

woman set against the backdrop of a bucolic environment. Sometimes she was presented as warrior, sometimes as an innocent, sometimes as both simultaneously.

THE INDIAN AS APOLLO

The period from the sixteenth to the early nineteenth centuries saw a remarkably uniform approach to the Indian visually. This uniformity, in part, is explained by the fact that the Indian was not yet seen as a threat to those who would come to covet his lands. He had a culture to which the European longed to return, and as such, he was commonly depicted in classical, old-world, terms. Not untypical, for example, was the work of artist John White whose water colours portrayed the Indian as part of the Graeco-Roman tradition. White had accompanied Raleigh on his second expedition to the Roanoke Colony in North Carolina (renamed Virginia) expressly for the purpose of recording the habits and customs of the Indians. Yet, despite his personal observations of the Indian, his painting perpetuated a distorted Indian imagery. In White's work, the Indian stands before us as an ideal ancient, with a Herculean body type and cast in a classical pose. This image of the muscular Indian was to be a pervasive one, lasting even to the present. In White's day, physical anthropology as a science was still a long way off, and apparently, neither White nor Europeans generally were much interested in the fact that the Indian of the Americas was more characterized by delicate and small bone structure than by the muscular figures of Greek and Roman mythology.

White's work was imitated by others. Although some artists produced an imagery that was at least close to the descriptive reports of white travelers in the Americas, as a general rule the image of the Indian in this period continued to follow the formula that showed a Golden Age of Greece revisited. Mirroring the classical morality of Sparta, along with the cult of the antique of Athens, there was no sense of some barbarian culture. All is grace and beauty and order. Indicative of the pervasiveness of this imagery is the fact that, in 1763, a visitor to Rome on viewing the Appollo Belvedere exclaimed, "My

God, how like it is to a Mohawk warrior." ⁶ Also indicative is the portrait of an Iroquois who visited England in 1710 (Plate 1). He is standing in front of an English woodland backdrop and wearing his blanket in the style of a toga. ⁷

THE INDIAN AS NOBLE SAVAGE

At the beginning of the nineteenth century the Indian came to be perceived in a different light. While still having an enviable society, that society began to be seen more as a wilderness Garden of Eden rather than as a classical Greek society. It is at this point too that we begin to see the Plains Indian emerging as the Indian. Such is the strength of the current Plains Indian image for us that it is sometimes difficult to realize that, between 1541 and 1803, there was no known picture of a Plains Indian or his society. Indeed, in the early years of the nineteenth century, some important expeditions and travelers to the Plains (e.g. Michaux in the Alleghanies, Perrin du Lac in Louisiana, Lewis and Clark, Zebulon Pike, and Long) appear to have had little interest in visually recording the tribes they met. ⁸ Not until 1823 did the first portrait of a Plains Indian woman appear -- a portrait of Eagle of Delight, an Oto Indian, painted by Charles Bird King. ⁹ In 1823, the first plains tipi appeared in an engraving from Titian Peale's water colour rendition of a Sioux lodge (Plate 2). Two of the most characteristic visual symbols of Plains Indian life also appeared later. The first picture of a Plains Indian on a horse appeared in 1829 (Plate 3), while an Indian in a Plains-style war bonnet was first seen in the 1822 portrait of Petalesharo (Plate 4), done by Charles Bird King who had a certain tendency to monumentalize his subjects. As for an illustration of a Plains Indian buffalo hunt on horseback, this appeared in 1832 in a Titian Peale lithograph (Plate 5). These dates are important because they very much underscore the phenomenally short period it took to have the Plains Indian accepted as the Indian. ¹⁰

The change that swept the artistic studios of the nineteenth century had to do, in part, with the Romantic Age and the

philosophies of such thinkers as Rousseau who used the phrase "noble savage" to describe the Indian.¹¹ The white man at this time was seeking out those who seemed to have a different frame of mind from that of the so-called civilized man, a mind that was attuned to the more basic elements of man's life. Romanticism attempted to depart from the norms of rational analysis of the world. It sought truth and meaning in the emotions and individual inspiration through which it was thought one could penetrate beyond the apparition of nature to a more profound and transcendent truth. (Louis Agassiz, who was certainly a romantic scientist, spoke of nature as the "thoughts of the Creator.") Thus the term savage was used to indicate the opposite of civilized, and was certainly not applied in the derogatory manner later in fashion. The search for the savage, emanating from the feeling of many nineteenth-century people that there had been a falling away from a state of nature and from a primeval condition where man had been at once free, innocent and pure,¹² inevitably focused on the continent of North America. On the western Plains many believed they had found what William Goetzman termed, "A Romantic Horizon," though in some ways an idealized Indian had to be invented. Between the 1830s and the late 1840s in particular, the region was visited by the major artistic chroniclers of the pre-reservation period. They included George Catlin (1832-39), Karl Bodner (1833-1834), Peter Rindischbacher Kurz (1846-52), Paul Kane (1845-1848) and Alfred Jacob Miller (1837-1838). Miller had accompanied Captain William Drummond Stewart on his travels in the far West in 1837. As a precursor of the news photographer, he was one of the only painters to see a fur caravan and a summer rendez-vous, and practically every sketch he made in 1837 was a veritable on-the-spot news report. These artists were mostly delighted in what they found and provided the world with a positive image of the Indians whom they observed.¹³ Certainly they presented them in all the romantic backdrop and colour they could, but having some ethnographic interest in their subjects, they also provided a most accurate image of the Plains Indian of that time. Here was a melding of the classic with the romantic. Rindischbacher, for

instance, who had come from Switzerland to the Earl of Selkirk's colony on Red River in 1821, produced work which joined accurate observations with the conventions of classical academic aesthetics. His Indians are athletes. His antiques are romantic ones. The work of Karl Bodner, Paris-trained and aware of both classicists and romantics, above all reached a degree of accuracy that has never been surpassed. At the same time, his paintings of human scenes are more like friezes and are definitely heroic. Catlin, who used an "impressionistic field-sketching style,"¹⁴ produced more than 135 pictures during his eighty-six day stay on the Upper Missouri. Though there are artistic deficiencies in Catlin's work,¹⁵ the faces in his portraits are generally faithful renditions, so much so that descendants of the Indian subjects were later able to recognize their family members from his drawings.¹⁶ At the very least, a Catlin Crow Indian is a Crow Indian. Catlin was so impressed with what he saw that he wrote of the need to create a "Nation's Park containing man and beast in all the wild and freshness of their nature's beauty."¹⁷ Both Catlin and Bodmer saw the Indian as an extension of the European classical hero transferred to a picturesque environment on the western plains.¹⁸ In terms of the length of stay, it was probably Eastman who spent more time among the Indians of the Trans-Mississippi than any other artist. He tended to portray the day-to-day life of the Indians, and perhaps because of his military rather than artistic priorities, his work tends to be more straightforward than dramatic.¹⁹

THE ADVENT OF PHOTOGRAPHY

While the artists were capturing Plains Indians on canvas, the advent of photography was making its presence felt in the East. Plains Indians travelling to Washington D.C. were met by a new breed of chronicler who prevailed upon them to sit for their portraits. Regrettably, the earliest photographs of the Plains Indians did not necessarily bring the authenticity one would imagine. With the lengthy exposure times needed at this period, the Indian subjects were forced to sit with metal braces on the chairs holding their heads steady for the photograph.

Small wonder that a stereotype began to prevail that the Indian was an unsmiling, serious character! Moreover, as more than one recent paper has demonstrated, the early photographers were not adverse to falsifying the record for effect.²⁰ They did this in a number of ways. Sometimes it was the use of identical props; sometimes the touching up of the portrait with embellishments, such as face paint; sometimes the placing of a wrong costume in a wrong area. Small wonder that succeeding curators and historians using such photographs in sometimes less than rigorous fashion have been led to perpetuate fictionalized concepts from this early period.

It was the Indian man who was to be the most stereotyped in the visual sense. Early and late photography of the Plains Indian woman shows that she was far less prone to being portrayed, let alone falsely portrayed. This was also the case with the children and babies of the Plains Indians.²¹ One reason for this was that for most artists and photographers it was the male who appeared to be the "peacock" and more artistic in appearance. A typical comment of the times was, "On seeing a warrior dressed in all his finery walking with his wife, who as comparatively plain in her dress and ornament, I could not but think this was following the order of nature as in the peacock, the stag, and almost all animals, the male is lavishly decorated while the female is plain and unadorned."²² Richard Harding Davis has left us a particularly insightful comment on the effect that the appearance of the Indian had upon the contemporary white people of the late nineteenth century. It is worth quoting in full:

It is impossible when one sees a blanket Indian walking haughtily about in his buckskin, with his face painted in many colours and with feathers in his hair, not to think that he has dressed for the occasion, or goes thus equipped because his forefathers did so, and not because he finds it comfortable. When you have seen a particular national costume only in pictures and photographs it is always something of a surprise to find people wearing it with every-day matter-of-course ease, as though they really preferred kilts or sabots or moccasins to the gear to which we are accustomed at home. And the Indians in their fantastic mixture of colours and beads and red flannel and feathers seemed so theatrical at first that I could not understand why the army officers did not look over their shoulders. 23

Photography, as it progressed from essentially copying painting styles and mannerisms, soon began to take on a more documentary role. The picture of a Pawnee village (Plate 6), with its unromantic gloom, rain and mud, certainly exemplified this; it is entirely untypical of the usual village scene portrayed by artists. Later still, the photographers with improved equipment, were able to capture moments too fleeting for the artist, a fact reflected in photographs that belie the impression that the old-style Indians were grave and humourless.²⁴ A scene at a Blackfoot celebration (Plate 7), for example, dares to show the Indian actually laughing and smiling.

In the late nineteenth century, when the Indian was safely locked up on the reservation and the government was attempting to put a good public relations stamp on its work, the photographers began to find themselves in the role of propagandists. Now an effort was made to show that the Indian was being civilized by the white man. The photograph of a Crow Indian family at home demonstrates this well (Plate 8). Here surely was proof that the Indian, with his fine furniture, tea service and tablecloth, was giving up his old ways. Such "before and after" photographs were most frequently taken in the schools to which the young Indians were transported and held for lengthy periods. A photographer was usually on hand as a matter of course to record the student's arrival. Some weeks later, the photographer would be called upon to take an "after" photograph to demonstrate the rapid change brought about by the marvels of civilization. Clearly, the quickest way to prove a civilizing influence on the Indian was to show the superficial change: the white man's clothing, a hair cut for the boys and a "civilized" hair style for the girls. Tom Torlino, a Navajo (Plate 9), was typical of the type of subject demonstrated.

At the same time, candid photographs were also being taken. This was reflected in the casual pose of Quannah Parker and his wife on the porch of their home in Oklahoma (Plate 10). Equally unhackneyed was the photograph of a ping-pong game being played during an intermission of the Buffalo Bill Wild West Show. Perhaps more than any other, it very much dispells

what was stereotypical about the Indian. And there was even a certain type of ethnographical photography, exemplified by quasi-pornographic pictures that found a less academic circulation among the soldiers away from home on the Plains.

THE INDIAN AS SAVAGE

Even as the first photographers were hesitantly taking their equipment to the American West, the pressure of settlement was beginning to take its toll on the Indian. By the 1850s and certainly by the 1860s, friction between white and red was beginning to affect the relationship between the two races, a fact perhaps best underscored in white reactions to events at Little Big Horn. No longer was the Indian seen to be part of a Golden Age or a romantic figure of the wilderness, for the harsh realities of war had made him appear to be a savage in a negative way. Stories were reaching the East of the atrocities thought to be the work of the Indian. Scalped and mutilated bodies provided fuel for the illustrators and photographers of the time. Stories of attacked wagon trains and the aftermath of such attacks had widespread coverage in Eastern magazines and newspapers. And all of these perceptions, accurate or not, had their effect upon the growing negative stereotype that stood in contrast to the largely positive one of previous years.

During the period from the 1860s to the end of Indian resistance on the Plains in both Canada and the United States, what was reported of the Indian was largely related to his warlike and barbaric character. This was the period of much negative illustration and painting, in which the white forces were depicted as forces of right. It was an image that has stayed with us to this day, even though more recent years have seen a weakening of this negativism.²⁵ The Indian, after all, had only been "noble" before white contact or during the early stages of encounter between the cultures, or when he was safely dead or historically past.²⁶ While he had been a physical threat to the expansion westward, newspapers such as the Topeka Weekly Leader felt free to use a negative image of him that was

at no time equalled by the negative visual stereotypes of the period. Indians, according to to the Leader, were

a set of miserably, dirty, lousy, blanketed, thieving, lying, sneaking, murdering, graceless, gut-eating skunks as the Lord ever permitted to infest the earth, and whose immediate and final extermination all men, except Indian agents and traders, should pray for. 27

THE VANISHING INDIAN

And then suddenly the resistance on the plains was all over. Overnight it seemed as if the general public had undergone a change of heart. Now that the Indian had been defeated, he was no longer a threat to be eradicated. He was tragic; he was surely to vanish. Artists and sculptors began to produce images of the Indian in this light. Now appearing were statues of Indian men and women cast with a dejected, fatalistic and downcast look. The prevailing view of the Indian was one that portrayed him as a romantic ruin, the ruin of a noble race. Nothing more epitomizes this than the famous "End of the Trail" equestrian statue by James Earle Fraser (Plate 11). Indeed this has become a pervasive symbol for the Indian of today, as well as for white people mourning the passing of the frontier. As was observed of a slightly different aspect of the Indian and his life, "The Anglo Saxon smashes the culture of any primitive people that gets in its way and then, with loving care, places the pieces in a museum."²⁸ Whether the mood was of dejection or something more uplifting, the prose waxed poetical and purple. This is nicely illustrated in a an early twentieth-century photograph of a mounted Blackfoot Chief described in an accompanying caption as a "Dark-Hued Nimrod Carved in Living Bronze."²⁹ Joseph K. Dixon coined a new term which he used as the title of his book describing a major Indian gathering: "The Vanishing Race." The voices of doom were to be found everywhere. After all, the most romantic feature of the Indian was his decline.³⁰ Poetess Ella Higginson perhaps best expressed the feeling of the time:

Into the shadows ... those last dark ones go drifting ... Mutely uncomplaining they go. How shall it be with us when they are but a memory and a name? May not those mournful eyes to phantoms grow when, wronged and lonely they have drifted on into the voiceless shadows whence they came. 31

Curtis, perhaps the most famous photographer of the Indian, has left us with views that exemplify this. Not untypical was a picture of Navajo riders disappearing into the canyons of their lands. It was in reference to this kind of photography that Curtis remarked, "And here is the Vanishing Race which symbolizes my whole work -- sets the pace as it were."³² The finality implied by these words was not entirely conclusive, for in another photograph by Curtis the vanishing Indian is portrayed as having re-emerged from the canyons of death! Indeed, the pessimism of this period was short-lived, for the Indian did appear to be bouncing back from the brink of destruction.

COMMERCIALIZATION OF THE INDIAN IMAGE

Suddenly, the figure of William Cody steps on the scene. Buffalo Bill, as he was better known, had been toying with the concept of the Wild West show even while the Indian Wars were in progress. Now, with the Indians locked up on the reservations, and the real danger removed, it seemed to be a good time to remind the general public at large of the glories of the old frontier. How better to do this than to take some of the real warriors and travel with them in eastern Canada and in Europe? These shows, which had begun in 1883, and had been complimented by the tremendous popularity of the dime-novel adventures of Buffalo Bill and others, seemed ready for new impetus. But this, of course, was the absolute worst thing that could be done with the Indian, at least as far as the American government was concerned. Here government officials were trying to show the American public that the Indian was being civilized by the authorities -- "Kill the Indian and save the Man"³³ -- and along comes Buffalo Bill, hoping to publicize the fact that the Indian was still a warrior at heart.³⁴ Not only that, he wanted to take Indian warriors, who had killed Custer and his men, and parade them as celebrities. Nevertheless, despite initial government opposition, show business interests and commercialism prevailed. Not only was Buffalo Bill permitted his way, but he was also allowed to use that prime example of barbarity, Sitting Bull himself. The results were not only to make Buffalo Bill a wealthy man, but also to give him the honour of having perhaps

the greatest single influence upon the stereotype of the Plains Indians until the coming of Hollywood. More people saw live Indians in more places than they had ever seen before. The impact of the Plains Indian performers was to be felt on Indians from other areas who witnessed the shows. For instance, a Cheyenne with the Wild West Show is credited with having introduced the war bonnet to the Cape Breton Indians in the 1890s. And the impact upon both the Easterners and Europeans was immense. For them the Indian was a Plains Indian! He was, from then on, to stand as the epitome of his race. As important as anything else was the fact that the Wild West Show did provide the general public of the time with the "real thing" -- the very Indians who had so recently been in combat with the army.

Of special significance in advertising a Plains Indian image is Iron Tail, a Sioux Indian. He is important because it was his face that was used to decorate an American coin (Plate 12), and thus stand for the "American Indian." Equally noteworthy is another Sioux, Hollow Horn Bear who became familiar to millions by his appearance on another important piece of national economy, the postage stamp, again depicting the "American Indian" (Plate 13).

But the stamp and the coin were only the most widespread of the Indian images that were now to flood the markets of North America and elsewhere. In many cases it was the Indian, and the Plains Indian at that, who provided the images on the packaging. At other times, it was his traditional symbols that were used to stand for his presence -- war bonnets, tomahawks and beadwork designs.

Sometimes the artifacts belied an accurate understanding of the culture, as in the case of one particular Czechoslovakian stamp juxtaposing Plains Indians and their plains tipi with a woodland area canoe (Plate 14). Replicas of totem poles from the Pacific Coast often figured as merchandise in retail stores, despite the fact that, in the business and commercial world, the Indian does not really exist at all outside his

image. Indeed, perhaps nowhere else has the image of the Plains Indian been more promulgated than in the world of commerce.

This is especially evident in the case of paperback covers of Indian books. Whether the book concerns Indian poetry, Indian oratory, Canada's Indians, or Indians in general, it is a Plains Indian or a symbol of him that invariably dominates the cover. One edition of Man's Rise to Civilization³⁵ exemplifies this well. In a book that discusses a wide variety of Indian peoples, including the Aztecs, what is presented centre stage on the collage of Indian scenes but a large portrait of an obviously Plains Indian? A softcover version of The American Indian Today³⁶ is one of the most telling, showing as it does, a Plains Indian tipi through the entrance flap of which can be seen a household stove and oven. In the same scene, a woman in traditional dress is being watched by a little girl in frilly western-style dress.

Within the period following the defeat of the Indians on the Plains and the civilizing of the survivors,³⁷ comes the birth and development of the Hollywood phenomenon. John Price has estimated that some four hundred movies on Indians were made up to the late seventies. Of these, over eighty-five per cent were centered on the Plains Indians. Here, of course, the visual image of the Indian became the most powerful influence seen. For much of the twentieth century a very negative image pervaded the medium. Moreover, the Western very early on became largely allegorical, in that a separate reality was brought into existence. The Indian rapidly became a symbol rather than an individual. Thus he frequently appears to emerge out of nowhere -- from behind a hill, out of a forest -- fight his fight, and if he were not killed, return to nowhere.³⁸ He had no domestic life, no childhood, no loving family; he was simply part of an uncivilized background.

While it would be logical to suppose that our increasing cinematic sophistication has led to an increasing accuracy regarding the Indian and his life, this is not the case. As far as appearance and costume were concerned, there was a far greater accuracy during the early days of the Western than those

that followed. For one thing, the Indian actors were genuine. In the 1920s film, "The Covered Wagon," Cheyenne and Arapaho Indians were used. At that time, the older members of the Indian cast were actually buffalo Indians, Indians who had experienced the pre-reservation life and were themselves warriors who had fought the United States Army. Not only did they themselves appear on the screen, but also they were able to use their ceremonial clothing and war paraphernalia. The audience viewing such films was able to see the real thing, as had been true of those attending the Wild West Shows.³⁹ Had the practice of using actual Indians continued, it would be interesting to conjecture whether or not the image of the 'Hollywood Indian' would be any different from what it is today. However, the gradual realization by directors that white actors and actresses could do a better job of being Indians on the screen brought about another stereotype! The white actors themselves, often steeped in the Indian lore of their own imaginations, presented a striking and stereotyped image of those they were impersonating. And it was an imagery that was communicated not only to white audiences but also to the young and not-so-young Indian audiences. Not infrequently, this resulted in Indian people themselves adopting a stereotype as a feature of their own tradition. In the 1970s, for example, when the militant Indian groups were hitting the headlines across North America, a common item of revolutionary dress was the headband, often beaded. To young Indians, such headbands were traditional and "Indian." Yet such headbands were not, in fact, traditional to the Plains Indians, as the many photographs and paintings of the nineteenth century demonstrate. The headbands had first come into use as a means to keep the wigs of white actors on as they rode their horses in the film battles. But to many young Indians of the seventies, this was forgotten or unrealized. To them it had nothing to do with the white man at all.

THE CONTEMPORARY SCENE

If "Broken Arrow"⁴⁰ was to be a watershed Western movie for the Indian in 1950, then Bury My Heart at Wounded Knee was

to be the equivalent in the literary world of the sixties.⁴¹ Almost as soon as the book appeared in stores, it became acceptable to be Indian.⁴² Among the public at large, there was an appreciation of the Indian as he was and wanted to be. At the same time, there was a "coming out of the closet" by whites who suddenly remembered that they could claim some Indian blood in their family lines.⁴³ While the stereotype of the feathered, buckskin clad Indian prevailed at endless powwows, parades, and Western Days, it became possible too for an Indian, such as Will Sampson, to take on the most unhackneyed and unsterotypical role of the Indian inmate in "One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest."⁴⁴ Today, with the demise of the Western, more and more movies offer Indian actors and actresses parts which have little in common with the old-time, feathered and blanketed, savage. Our visual image of the Indian today is a much wider one. While still including the stereotypic images always popular with the public, it at least introduces us to Indian wives, doctors, writers, contemporary dancers and the like. True, the buckskin and feather war bonnet remains a potent image of the Indian. The war bonnet alone is often sufficient to stamp the wearers as Indian, as is evident in a photograph of veterans on parade (Plate 15). It used to be fashionable to talk of pan-Indian outfits of which the chief's costume (war bonnet, buckskin shirt and leggings)⁴⁵ was a classic example. Certainly, in lineups at parades and powwows such an outfit does appear to create a uniformity among a wide variety of tribes that might be represented.⁴⁶ Vogt, however, makes us aware of a problem in all this:

... a high proportion of these elements are drawn from Plains culture [and have] become symbols of Indianness to the Indians themselves to a degree that bears little relationship to the aboriginal facts. And it is probable that their importance as symbols derives in part from the fact that these elements are central features of the prevailing white-American stereotype of the American Indian. They are the feature of Indian culture which white tourists expect to find when they attend intertribal ceremonies, and Indians are rewarded by the whites for behaving in conformity to the stereotype. 47

CONCLUSION

In closing we have once again to examine the current state of affairs regarding the visual depiction of the Indian today. Can we accept as being representative of an Indian the photograph of Two Bear Woman taken in 1900 (Plate 16)? Can we accept the picture of a Mohawk steel worker as the Indian he is (Plate 17)? And what of the image of Michael Greyeyes, a Cree ballet dancer? Do these three portray the Indian as the mind's eye would were we to say to someone that we were going to show him a photograph of an Indian? Or are we more likely to pre-conceive the image to look like the photo of a war bonneted Indian, such as that in Plate 18. The fact that this portrait is not of an Indian at all, but rather of Pablo Picasso, ⁴⁸ be-decked in an outfit given to him by actor Gary Cooper, is almost immaterial. The images have become hopelessly confused for some and we are no longer sure what to call the image which confronts us. We are still unable to remedy successfully the "exasperating and dehumanizing" situation whereby the Indian is "constantly...treated as an image rather than as a person" and ⁴⁹ has to agree "to play Indian in order to be Indian."



Plate 1 Sa Ga Yean Qua Pra Ton, King of the Maquas. Photograph by L. Verelst (1710).
Source: Public Archives of Canada.



Plate 2 First published illustration of a Plains Indian tipi. Watercolour by Titian Peale, 1819-1820.
Source: Smithsonian Institution, as published in John C. Ewers, Indian Life on the Upper Missouri. (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1968), Plate 34.



Plate 3 First published illustration of a Plains Indian warrior on horseback. Source: Smithsonian Institution, as published in Wendell H. Oswalt, This Land Was Theirs (New York: John Wiley and Sons, 1978), p. 583.



Plate 4 First published illustration of a Plains Indian war bonnet, worn by Petalesharro (Generous Chief), a Pawnee. Photograph by Charles Bird King. Source: Herman J. Viola, The Indian Legacy of Charles Bird King (New York: Doubleday and Co., 1976), p. 33.



Plate 5 First published illustration of a buffalo hunt from horseback. Lithograph by Titian Peale, 1832. Source: John C. Ewers, Indian Life on the Upper Missouri (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1968), plate 35.



Plate 6 Pawnee earth lodge village. Photograph by William H. Jackson. Source: Smithsonian Institution



Plate 7 Blackfoot Indian Scalp Dance.
Source: Public Archives of Canada



Plate 8 Crow family at dinner. Photograph by Richard
Throssel, 1910.
Source: Smithsonian Institution

Plate 9

Tom Torlino (Navajo)
 Before and After. A
 Cumberland County
 Historical Society
 photograph. Source:
 Anonymous, "Carlisle"
 Industrial School:
 A Quick and Com-
 plete Asssimation,"
 Ontario Indian, 5,
 no. 7 (1982), 44.



Plate 10

Quanah Parker and his
 wife on the verandah of
 their home, 1890. Pho-
 tograph by Hutchins or
 Lanney.
 Source: Smithsonian
 Institution.





Plate 11 "The End of the Trail." Statue by James Earle Fraser, in Fraser Memorial Studio, Cowboy Hall of Fame, Oklahoma City, Oklahoma.
Source: Fraser J. Pakes



Plate 12 Iron Tail, the model for the United States' buffalo nickel.



Plate 13 Hollow Horn Bear, the model for the fourteen-cent stamp honouring America's Indians.



Plate 14 Czechoslovakian stamp, showing tipis and woodland canoe.



Plate 15 Blackfoot Veterans
Source: Fraser J. Pakes



Plate 16 Two-Bear Woman (Piegan). Photography by Edward S. Curtis, ca. 1900.
Source: Public Archives of Canada.

Plate 17 Mohawk Steel Worker.
Photograph by David
Grant Noble.
Source: Anonymous,
"Mohawk Steelworkers
of Manhattan," Four
Winds, 2, No. 4
(1982), 37.



Plate 18 Picasso. Photograph by
David Douglas Duncan.



NOTES

1 This paper is a modified version of a slide lecture given under the title of "Visual Stereotypic Image of the Indian," at the Native Studies Lecture Series 1983-84, "Native Peoples Past, Present and Future," the Native Studies Department, University of Saskatchewan, Saskatoon, 19 January 1984.

2 Walter Lippman is credited with introducing the term 'stereotype' in 1922 (needless to say man had indulged in the activities involved in the concept long before he was informed of the correct term for his actions and their consequences). Another working definition of a stereotype is "our standardized reactions to experiences which determine how future experiences will be interpreted." Four main aspects of stereotypes have been recognized: 1. Uniformity -- the degree to which one's view agrees with the responses. 2. Direction -- the response which may be positive or negative. 3. Intensity -- the strength of the response. 4. Quality -- the response's content.

3 Malcolm McFee, Modern Blackfeet: Montanans on a Reservation (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston Inc., 1972), p. 32.

4 Murray L. Wax, Indian Americans: Unity and Diversity (Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey: Prentice-Hall Inc., 1971), p. 5.

5 "Most American Indians who still have a closed bounded tribal outlook refer to themselves as 'people' ... they simply mean 'persons.' Other tribes are referred to by specific names, but the name for their own society and the name we could best translate in English as 'human being' is the same." Robert Thomas in Deward F. Walker, The Emergent Native Americans: A Reader in Culture Contact (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1972), p. 740. Again, Wax has commented that the urban Indian is "likely to refer to his country cousins as 'old fashioned,' 'backward' or 'residual Indians' ... however if at one moment the townsman derogates the country people, at the next he is likely to give them the accolade of being 'real Indians' or 'real fullbloods.'" Wax, p. 78.

6 Rena Newmann Coen, "The Indian as the Noble Savage in Nineteenth Century American Art," Diss. University of Minnesota 1969, p. 40.

7 Sa Ga Yean Qua Pra Ton, King of the Mawuas; one of the "Four Indian Kings" invited to London, England, during Queen Anne's reign.

8 An important exception in this period was Lambert who in 1816 did record the Indian in the first stages of his "dissolution" after contact with "civilization."

9 In 1821 under the auspices of the War Department an Indian Gallery was formed in Washington. Thomas L. McKenney, in charge of Indian Affairs, thought that the likeliness of visiting Indian chiefs should be preserved. Many of the paintings were done by King. The accessions ceased in 1837, and in 1858 the collection went to the Smithsonian and was added to the collection of John Mix Stanley's canvasses. A fire in 1865 destroyed a good many of the paintings and only about thirty of King's survived. The famous McKenney and Hall's Indian Tribes of North America was published in the late 1830s and early 1840s.

10

These "firsts" were initially noted by John Ewers. See his Indian Life on the Upper Missouri (Norman, Oklahoma: University of Oklahoma, 1968), Chapter 15.

11

In fact Rousseau did not originate the idea -- but he found its closest approximation on the North American continent. He attempted to portray another frame of mind than that of civilized man, a more basic one. The term "savage" then was not used at the time as a negative term. George Catlin defined a "savage" as a "wild man ... endowed by his Maker with all the humane and noble traits that inhabit the heart of the tame man." David Miller, "The Fur Men and Explorers Meet the Indian," in Daniel Tyler, Red Men and Hat Wearers: Viewpoints in Indian History. Papers from the Colorado State University conference on Indian History, August 1974. (Fort Collins, Colorado: Colorado State University, 1976), pp. 29-30.

12

Coen, p. 1.

13

For example: "She (the Indian woman) would be an excellent model of a Venus, ideal woman of a primitive race; a perfect 'little wife.'" Rudolf F. Kurz, Journal of Rudolf F. Kurz -- An Account of His Experiences Among Traders and American Indians on the Missouri and Mississippi Rivers During the Years 1846 to 1852 (Lincoln Nebraska: University of Nebraska Press, 1970), p. 224. Catlin remarked of the Crow that "They may be justly said to be the most beautifully clad of all the Indians in these regions." Letters and Notes on the Manners and Customs of the North American Indian, 1, (New York: Dover Publications, 1973), 191. Maximillian's Journals also supported this opinion.

14

Coen, p. 86.

15

See, for instance, William H. Truettner, The Natural Man Observed: A Study of Catlin's Indian Gallery (Washington D.C.: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1979), pp. 110-126. Also, Royal B. Hassrick, The George Catlin Book of American Indians (New York: Watson-Guption Publications, 1977), pp. 20-21.

16

For a detailed analysis of this see John Ewers, "George Catlin, Painter of Indians and the West," Annual Report of the Smithsonian Institution for 1955 (Washington D.C., 1956), pp. 483-528.

17

Catlin, 1, 261-62. This concept of keeping the Indian people frozen in time for the benefit of the outside world is similar to the charges leveled elsewhere at anthropologists who "were believed to be conspiring selfishly to keep the Indian 'in the blanket' as ethnological specimens." Hazel W. Hertzberg, The Search for an American Indian Identity: Modern Pan-Indian Movements (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 1970), p. 24.

18

Coen, p. 87.

19

Seth Eastman (1808-1875) is perhaps best known for the illustrations he provided for the massive six-volume work written by Henry R. Schoolcraft, History Condition and Prospects of the Indian Tribes of the United States (Philadelphia: B. Lippincott and Co., 1851-1856). See also Patricia Janis Broder, Great Paintings of the Old American West (New York: Crown Publishers Inc., 1979), pp. 20-21.

20

See Joanna Cohan Scherer, "You Can't Believe Your Eyes: Inaccuracies in Photographs of North American Indians," Studies

in the Anthropology of Visual Communication, 2, No. 2 (Fall, 1975), 67-79. Also, Margaret B. Blackman, "Posing the American Indian," Natural History, 89, No. 10 (October, 1980), 69-74.

21

There were certainly written accounts of the women with derogatory remarks upon their appearance. Often these accounts referred to "dirty" faces "unkept, matted" hair, "scarred" arms and legs. However these observations were frequently reported by visitors during the period of fierce inter-tribal wars or during the Plains Indian wars with the United States Government, when many warriors were losing their lives in conflict. The observers were noticing the widows of these warriors who were made highly visible from the others by the observance of mourning practices. Some observers were aware of this: "We noticed that many of the women had their faces deeply gashed and covered with clotted blood, in mourning ... they presented a revolting sight,..." James W. Abert, Through the Country of the Comanche Indians in the Fall of the Year 1845 (San Francisco: John Howell Books, 1970), p. 47. Children often fared somewhat better in such accounts. One writer described the Indian children of one camp "as the brightest spot in my entire Western trip. They are the prettiest and most beautifully barbaric little children I have ever seen" (emphasis added). Richard Harding Davis, The West From a Car Window (New York: Harper and Bros., 1892), p. 153.

22

Miller in Tyler, pp. 29-30.

23

Davis, pp. 151-181.

24

"The image of the granite faced grunting redskin has been perpetuated by American mythology." Vine Deloria, Custer Died For Your Sins (New York: Avon Books, 1970), p. 148.

25

A comprehensive analysis of the attitudes of the military to the Indian warrior has yet to be written. It is obviously too simplistic to assume that they would be permanent opponents. Cash has noted that some soldiers were men of honor and treated opponents accordingly. "They could understand his (the Indian) doing his duty as he saw it. Indeed one may say that the fraternity of the fighting man frequently overcame the hostility of two cultures meeting in violent embrace." Cash in Tyler, p. 95. The aftermath of the conflict on the Plains saw a good deal of visits between old soldiers, Indian and white, sharing reminiscences. Many soldiers in their later years were staunch supporters of the Indian causes. Buffalo Bill remarked in Toronto that, "In nine cases out of ten when there is trouble between white men and Indians, it will be found that the white man is responsible. Indians expect a man to keep his word. They can't understand how a man can lie. Most of them would as soon cut off a leg as tell a lie." Henry Blackman Sell, Buffalo Bill and the Wild West (New York: The New American Library, 1959), p. 170.

26

Robert F. Berkhofer Jr., The White Man's Indian: Images of the American Indian from Columbus to the Present (New York: Vintage Books, 1979), p. 90. The novels of the late nineteenth Century certainly promulgated the belief that a tough approach to the Indians was best. Brian Street, The Savage in Literature: Representation of 'Primitive' Society in English Fiction, 1858-1920 (London: Routledge, Kegan, Paul, 1975), p. 47.

27

Quoted in A. Irving Hallowell, "The Backwash of the Frontier: The Impact of the Indian on American Culture," Annual Report of the Smithsonian Institute for 1958 (Washington, D.C., 1958), p. 90.

28

Oscal B. Jacobson quoted in John Anson Warner, The Life and Art of the North American Indian (London: Hamlyn, 1975), p. 90.

29

This photograph was taken around 1900. The magazine in which it appeared is unknown.

30

Coen, p. 3.

31

Quoted in Brian W. Dippie, "This Bold But Wasting Race," Montana, 23, No. 1 (January, 1973), 12.

32

Ibid., p. 12. Quoted from a letter written by Curtis in 1900 to J.P. Morgan.

33

The opposition to such views is exemplified in the words of Francis Leupp, Commissioner of Indian Affairs in 1905. "I like the Indian for what is Indian in him ... let us not make the mistake, in the process of absorbing them, of washing out whatever is distinctly Indian. Our aboriginal brother brings, as his contribution to the common store of character, a great deal which is admirable, and which only needs to be developed along the right line. Our proper work is improvement, not transformation." First Annual Report, Commissioner of Indian Affairs, quoted in Hertzberg, pp. 17-18.

34

No doubt the government of the time was concerned about the perceived fragile line between civilization and savagery. The writer, John Buchan, was one of a number to make the proposition that even when the Native seems to have been educated into western habits, his new found culture is only a veneer. "When the clothes come off, so, too, will the culture." Quoted in Street, p. 117.

35

Peter Farb, Man's Rise to Civilization ... (New York: Avon Books, 1969).

36

Edited by Stuart Levine and Nancy O. Lurie (Baltimore, Maryland: Penguin Books Inc., 1970).

37

John A. Price, "The Stereotyping of North American Indians in Motion Pictures," Ethnohistory, 20, No. 2 (Spring, 1973), 153-171. In terms of ethnographic documentary filming, Felix-Louis Regnault filmed a Wolf woman making pots at the Exposition Ethnographique de l'Afrique Occidentale in 1895. The Walapai snake dancers were among the first American Indians to be recorded on movie film, and in 1914 Curtis filmed the Kwakiutl in his The Land of the Head Hunters. In 1923 Hodge produced a film on the Zuni for the Heye Foundation. Flaherty's Nanook of the North, produced in 1922, remains perhaps the single most famous (and to some critics infamous) film made of the North American aborigine. Emilie de Brigard in Paul Hockings (ed.), Principles of Visual Anthropology (The Hague: Mouton Publishers, 1975), pp. 13-43.

38

While making the Western McClintock with 287 Indians, John Wayne saw fourteen Navajo Indians newly arrived from Monument Valley. He did a double take and then remarked, "Hey, didn't I kill you twelve pictures ago?" Everyone laughed. Jon Tuska, The Filming of the West (Garden City, New York: Doubleday Company Inc., 1976), p. 554.

39

The actor Tim McCoy and some of the Indians went to Europe for a year to promote The Covered Wagon. He also did a prologue in cinemas before presentations of the film, where he conversed with Indians using the sign language. Taska, p. 554.

40

"Broken Arrow" dealt with the story of the friendship between Tom Jeffords and the famous Apache chief, Cochise. The film was notable for its sympathy for and sensitivity toward the Indian people, and for the fact that it was the Indian who emerged as hero in the audience's mind.

41

While not the first to cover the events of the American Indian wars, Dee Brown's Bury My Heart at Wounded Knee (New York: Holt, Rinehard and Winston, 1970) was published at the "right time." It aroused the emotions of the mass reading public and ushered in a new period of sympathy for and interest in the Indian and his history and culture.

42

However, Vine Deloria Jr. cautioned that while most readers of Brown's book were moved to want to help the Indian, "no one could see the connection between the Indians they were reading about and the Indians who lived down the street a way." Deloria Jr., "Twentieth Century," in Tyler (1976), p. 157.

43

A current update on "18 Americans you didn't know were part Indian" is available in Amy Wallace et. al., The Book of Lists #3 (New York: Bantam Books, 1983).

44

The Public Broadcasting System (p. B.5) television series Hollywood and the Indians, used this film as a positive example of the sort of roles Indian actors and actresses were hoping to find in the future.

45

The whole issue of "pan-Indianism" and whether or not it exists today as a dynamic force is too large for discussion in this paper. Certainly there appears to be a growing uniformity in some aspects of the visual appearance of contemporary Indians. The war bonnet has become almost a world symbol for the Indian. Fancy-dance outfits have become remarkably standardized over most of North America. Navajo jewelry has certainly come close to being justifiably termed the Indian jewelry. That artifacts themselves may reinforce the stereotypic message is made abundantly clear in a study such as John White's in which an analysis of cartoons with Blacks and Indians in them concludes that there is a tendency to stereotype "Blacks with physical features and Native Americans with artifactual ones." "Playboy Blacks vs Playboy Indians: Differential Minority Stereotyping in Magazine Cartoons," American Indian Culture and Research Journal, 3, No. 2 (1978), 54.

46

By 1900 the Sioux Indian was a Sioux and he was an "Indian." Further, the symbols of being a Sioux and being an "Indian" were consistent with one another. By the mid-part of the twentieth century, there had been a general cultural leveling in the Plains area. Thomas in Walker, p. 741.

47

In Walker, p. 96.

48

Photo by David Douglas Duncan -- one of ten thousand photographs he took of the artist over a three-month period in the 1950s.

49

The comments of the noted "Pan Indian," Arthur Parker (Seneca), quoted in Hertzberg, p. 319.

