

# The Representation of Minorities in the Golden Age Western (the 1930s-the 1960s)

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DIPLOMSKI RAD

The Representation of Minorities in the Golden Age Western (the 1930s- the 1960s)  
(Američka književnost i kultura)

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## 1. Introduction

The Western as a genre has certainly played an important role in the making of the history of the United States of America as it is considered to be a genre specific for America and Hollywood. As Moser (1) states, westerns have created a specific image of the frontier that has been presented to Americans. Nevertheless, the image has been present in popular culture long before the invention of film in the form of non-visual representations, in political discourse and in novels which were then replaced by the visual medium or in other words by film. The images of the American West that these movies present are in most cases distorted and distant from reality (although using some elements of it), or in other words the mixture of fiction and reality is what makes westerns so pleasing to the audience. By combining fiction and reality, westerns create a story of the Mythical West which promotes values such as honour, honesty and responsibility, but at the same time they promote certain ethnic, racial and gender stereotypes.

This essay will primarily focus on the ethnic, gender and racial problems displayed in Western films during its Golden Age, or to be more precise, from the 1930s until the 1960s when the Western genre dominated both the small and big screens. The role of minorities in such films can be compared to the political situation of the era when a certain film was made. It can be said that the role of minorities and the stereotypes that surrounded them have changed during the Golden Age period which will be explained in the analysis of films. To be more specific, this essay will not only focus on the amount of screen time the minorities get, but also on the way they are portrayed in films, or in other words it will consider if the minorities are generalised by their race or ethnic backgrounds. Furthermore, when talking about the Western genre and the position of minorities, we also have to talk about the importance of landscape which will be discussed in the form of the Frontier thesis, as well as the notion of manifest destiny. Another notion of great importance for the analysis of this genre that has to be

discussed is the myth of the West, or the myth by which America is believed to be created. The first part of the essay will briefly discuss the history of the genre while the second part will start off with the importance of the Frontier thesis and landscape. Next, the Myth of the West will be discussed and how it is related to the genre, and finally we will move on to the general characteristics of the genre and the representations of minorities as well as the racial, ethnic and gender based problems.

## 2. The history of the Western as a film genre

The Western as a film genre has undergone a number of changes from its beginning to its downfall, and its repeated revivals in the American cinema. The history of the Western as a film genre can be traced back to literature and writers such as Ernst Haycox, Luke Short, Zane Gray, and Will Rogers, given that, as Simon (46) states, the genre used the popularity of dime novels during the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> century. Therefore, the Western as a film genre took advantage of the popularity of the dime novels with mass audiences and the production companies started making very short movies, which were usually less than a minute long. The plot was usually set in the Wild West and told stirring stories about Indians, cowboys and outlaws (Clapham 13).

Nevertheless, in this chapter we will focus on the history of this genre as a film, not as a literary form. There are many theories as to when the genre was born, some authors (Simon 7) state that the genre dates all the way back to 1894, while others contend that the genre was born with a film by Edwin S. Porter called *The Great Train Robbery* (1903). The reason why this film is seen to have been crucial for the genre is that it was considered to be the first to have a narrative. Moreover, the film, as Fenin and Everson (9) state, set the basic

characteristics for all future Westerns. To be more precise, it created a pattern which consisted of crime, pursuit and retribution.

The films of this period were generally very short, spanning from 1 to 9 minutes. Most of the early Western films were more similar to documentaries as they mostly showed scenes of cattle roundups and buffalos grazing on big plains, while others had no plot or acting, but they simply reconstructed typical events of the Wild West, such as a stagecoach holdup or Indian savagery (Fenin and Everson 25). They were mostly set in picturesque landscapes and within tribal communities. As for the relationship to the Native Americans, the films of the early period used two approaches: one describing the Indians as savage brutes, and other depicting them as the original Americans.

By 1929 the invention of sound in movies reached the Western transforming the genre once again. The use of sound created a division in the genre to “A-Westerns” and “B-Westerns”, the first ones being high-budget films, and the other ones low-budget (Everson 124). The A-Westerns for the most part focused on history by setting up a relationship between history and the problems of contemporary life. Key themes of the A-Westerns were the pioneers and legendary Westerners (Simon 45). On the other hand, B-Westerns were low budget films (with a budget up to 150 000\$ even though most films had a much lower budget of approximately 15 000 \$) that were usually shown after the big A-Westerns, hence the name B-Western (Everson 129). How low their budget was is confirmed by the fact that these films had no remakes, flawed scenes were left in the movie, and they had no musical score (124). The low-budget films normally did not show interest in history, especially not in the conquest of the West.

Their plots were simple but were also enough to captivate audiences with the fight of good over evil. The centre of the film was the star with his horse and his companion, or better

said, his sidekick. These characteristics of the B-Western were especially appealing to the younger audiences because of their simple plots, characters and the fact that they were low budget meant that more of them could be made in a year (e.g., in the 1930s, almost 50 A-Westerns and more than a 1000 B-Westerns were made) (Simon 100). Even with its rudimentary features, or perhaps because of them, the B-Western can be considered as a fundamental part of the genre's further development as it set the foundations of the genre, and besides, all of the major stars started their careers in B-Westerns and later proceeded to act in the higher budget films.

Furthermore, it is of great importance that we mention the B Western which marked the 1930s Hollywood film. As Everson (124) mentions, the B Western was very popular because it was fairly cheap to make while at the same time it had all of the characteristics of the A Western. Even though these films had simple and unimaginative plots, they still managed to captivate the audience. In these types of films, the focus is on the star, or in other words the whole plot and action revolves around the main character or hero. As for the plot itself, it is riddled with action and the good always prevails over the bad due to the fact that the main characters undertake heroic tasks. The hero of the B Western always fights an enemy in order to rescue a woman, whose role in the B films was limited to being an object of the rescue mission.

As Conrad mentions, The Great Depression had a big impact on moviemaking, especially on the popularity of the Western which promoted notions of conquest, progress and prosperity, notions which were in complete contrast with the social and political situation of that period (5). The 1930s mark the pinnacle of the B-Western. Due to the low production costs and high profits, the B Westerns were produced in bulk while most of the production companies forgot about the epics (Fenin and Everson 198). A major change in the genre itself



that is worth mentioning is the change in the heroine character and its role in the plot of the movies.

Prior to the 1930s, the heroine was usually a beautiful yet very passive woman whose main task was to provide some sort of motivation for the main hero, or to be more precise, it was usually a damsel in distress who needed saving or had something taken away from her (Everson 192). The female characters never had a mother and the main hero's romantic interests were never emphasized. In the course of the 1930s, the female characters became more self-reliant and sexually attractive. Their role shifted from that of a passive lady to a role of an attractive partner. Nevertheless, women were still characterized as damsels in distress, but now they were usually bound to be married to a villain and needed to be saved by a heroic man who was usually in love with them (195). The big change that describes the late 1930s in contrast to previous years is that the A Westerns started to gain more importance.

What is more, the genre was redefined by *Stagecoach* (1939), directed by John Ford, which set a canonical example for all future A Westerns. The film employs several important stereotypes, or in other words, characters which symbolize those stereotypes. On the same journey, from Tonto to Lordsburg, and in the same carriage we can see a good outlaw, a kind hearted prostitute who is judged by the self-righteous, a drunkard, a gambler. The film offers a great juxtaposition of the good and the bad, where in the end those that are portrayed as bad end up being the good ones and vice versa, or to be more precise, the true selves of characters are revealed throughout the film.

According to Coyne, the late 1930s were the prime era for Hollywood and the Western as a genre due to the fact that America started to recover from the Great Depression and the threat of WWII still seemed irrelevant. That period of movie making in Hollywood

was marked by a celebration of the American democracy and Anglo-American supremacy alongside discrimination, all which can also be witnessed in the Western genre (16).

The 1930s and 1940s were especially important for the Western because many film stars such as John Wayne, Wallace Beery, and Randolph Scott made their career in the early B Westerns, which were produced by thousands yearly. The 1940s films had a dark cloud of bitterness and emptiness around them, mainly in way of acting which made the previously mentioned stars stand out, especially John Wayne's iconic gestures. The WWII period slowed down the production of Westerns mainly because most moviemakers were focused on propaganda movies and the wartime political situation (Conrad 6). The A-Westerns remained insignificant in that era, except for one masterpiece, *The Ox-Bow Incident* (1943). As much as the B-Western enjoyed popularity for more than 20 years, the 1950s marked their decay.

The post-war Western focused on A-Westerns, or feature movies, which presented a more complex social critique of the society and the political situation of the Cold War period. As Conrad states, the post-War period Western was a perfect medium to display the political situation, or to be more precise, America as a world super power (76). The post-War Westerns plots are usually set between the end of the Civil War and the 1890s. The period was of special significance for the genre because it was especially then that then films started to show more and more social critique, to be more precise, they focused on the complex moral issues in treating the Native Americans, women, as well as other minorities such as Jews and African Americans. Meanwhile, some of the A-Westerns of that time managed to present racial problems and barriers especially the ones related to the Indians as something that needed to be discussed, while others put emphasis on the duties and the role of individuals in society.

All in all, the history of the Western film genre is very long and complex as it is one of the genres that defined Hollywood film production since its beginning. The Western experienced a lot of changes, from simple and short plots in the silent period, the popularity of the B Western during the 1930s to its downfall in the post-War period which marked the birth of feature length Westerns which offered a complex social, political, and economical critique. Nevertheless, no matter its popularity, the genre has deep roots in the American national identity as it also helped its shaping.

### 3. The Myth of the West and how it helped shape the American national identity

One big factor that helped develop the American national identity is the Myth of the West due to the fact that it enabled people to make sense of their past in an imaginative way. Even though some authors make a distinction between the Myth of the West and the Frontier thesis, most authors agree that the Frontier thesis is only a part of a much bigger notion, that being the Myth of the West.

As Richard Slotkin mentions, mythology is a building block of any nation seeing as it is through mythology that the national identity is created and transmitted to new generations (3). There are several versions of the imagined West, as White (613) states, which depend on the people doing the imagining. The version that concerns this essay is that created by writers, journalists and filmmakers who have spread that image through mass media such as penny newspapers, dime novels and film. Myths are essentially stories drawn from history that have, as Slotkin (5) declares, acquired a symbolizing function. The Myth of the West created an image in the minds of Americans of wilderness, projected as a promised land awaiting immigrants in which the heroic individuals, mainly Anglo-American men, fight to tame the savage land and its inhabitants. Having said that, the Native inhabitants of the

Western lands were perceived as savages and brutes who were an omnipresent threat. The task of the pioneers was to embark on a journey through the perilous West risking their lives by possible ambushes of savages who perform war dances and scalp their enemies. In the end, the pioneers tamed the wilderness, conquered the savages, and turned the bleak land into a land of great richness, opportunities and peace. Slotkin states that these narratives of conquest, exploration, expansion, and individualism directly helped and enhanced the shaping of American national identity (8). He argues that the symbolic space enabled Americans to generate their dreams and desires, and that the Western narratives helped them understand their history, tradition, values and finally, identity (22).

Most images of the myth relate the West to the image of a garden, therefore the American farmer being the American Adam. Nevertheless, the pioneers that pushed westward and explored the new continent were more concerned with taming and subduing the nature than with agriculture or farming. Even though the agricultural frontier forms a vital part of the Myth of the West, the Western as a film puts emphasis on the heroic characters such as cowboys, gunfighters and adventurers who had a tendency to help the farmer turn the wilderness and the harsh environment into a more approachable place for living. The image of the West was identified with that of freedom and nature. The myth served well to galvanize the nation in the 19<sup>th</sup> century when the country rapidly started to grow and industrialize which made America more similar to Europe. Therefore, it was believed that the wild and primitive West was the only thing that could save Americans from the effects of the rapid industrial growth which shifted the focus from nature to city life. The West became, as White (616) states, a national mirror because what people imagined depended on their current situation.

The reason why this myth became so popular hides notions of Anglo-American racial superiority and American exceptionalism. Popular culture demanded a heroic version of

history and the frontier narratives of dime novels, and later cinema, were a perfect place for its development. As Carter explains, the Western myth has been addressed with most frequency and for the longest period of time (5). The American mind, as Hofstadter explains, was shaped by the idea of rural living, or as he calls it, the agrarian myth (23). The connection between the two myths can be found in the fact that the Myth of the West is a myth about the exploration and the taming of the wilderness in the New World which was done by the pioneers, while the Agrarian myth refers to the creation of a new and sustainable life which the farming community could provide. The farmer is an emblem of egalitarianism, hard work and a life intertwined with nature. However, even if the Western version places the farmer in the free land open for everyone, it does not exclude racial gender, ethnic or class stereotypes. That said, the myth of the West, with its distorted version of history, has shaped the American national identity in a way that the West is seen as something exceptionally American, an idyllic place, a garden of Eden where opportunities and land await those brave enough to embark on an adventure. Although it might be portrayed as an idyllic place, many of the films depict it as a vacant wilderness, a desert with numerous obstacles that the hero has to overcome in order to make it an idyllic, almost Utopian place.

The term frontier in the world of film, more precisely of the Western, might awaken images of romance, Indians, cowboys, outlaws living and fighting under the same bright blue sky and over unimaginably vast land. The frontier bears such importance due to the fact that it is considered to be the main factor in shaping the American national identity. How this is the case was convincingly and influentially explained by a theory provided by Frederick Jackson Turner in 1893. This American historian took it upon himself to explain how the frontier has played a crucial role in the creation of America as a nation and in the emergence of its national identity (Billington and Ridge 1).

In his thesis, Turner explains that in order to look into the history of America, one has to go back to the Great West (Turner). Furthermore, he defines the frontier as a meeting point between civilization and savagery and describes it as a line of Americanization. The frontier is seen, contrary to the European one which runs through densely populated land, as a boundary which constantly shifts. One of the reasons for which the Frontier has had such an impact on the creation of America and its national identity, as Turner explains, is that the advances made in exploring the land and the frontier implied a dissociation from the influence of Europe and an increase in independence (Turner). This was made in waves of people making western settlements, or to be more precise, three different classes that shaped the settlements, those being: the pioneers, families that purchased and cleared the land, and, finally, the investors and businessmen. Those that were in charge of setting up houses and clearing the land encountered many obstacles, the biggest of them being the harsh and ragged nature and the second the Indians (Turner).

All in all, as Turner explains, the Frontier attracted many emigrants due to the fact that land was cheap, and it helped grow the national identity by allowing people to distance themselves from the coastal influence of the English (Turner). In a way the exploration of the frontier helped diminish the dependence on England and also helped grow American independence and national identity because the individualism which the frontier offered has always promoted democracy, according to Turner (Turner). As mentioned before, what America lacked was history, something particular to explain its exceptionality and separate it from the European tradition.

Other authors besides Turner have argued that the New World was a place where all of the old ways, traditions and political systems had to be put aside because men had to adapt to the wilderness on a daily basis. Naturally, over the years with the expansion of the frontier and the advance of agriculture, politics and economy, a fully developed society emerged. As

Billington and Ridge explain, the unique factor that distinguished America from the rest of the world was the large area of untouched and uncorrupted land (3). It was precisely that vast land, as Turner explains, which attracted thousands of settlers with a goal of exploring, taming nature and creating a new civilization (12).

As Billington and Ridge mention, the exploration of the frontier was a long process which meant constant reconstruction of society with the result of Americanization. The frontier, speaking geographically, can be described as an area with a minimum of two and maximum of six inhabitants per square mile (Billington and Ridge 3). Looking at it from an anthropological side, the frontier was a constant moving multicultural area as it was populated by many different individuals. Billington and Ridge state that there were several types of the frontier, among which the most important ones are the fur traders frontier, the cattlemen frontier, and the miners frontier (3). Each of these frontiers had its unique characteristics, but what they all had in common was taming and subduing nature, some with a more aggressive approach than others. The frontier is of great importance for the history of America as with its exploration America was able to move away from the old European ways which kept restraining its independence in the creation of a national identity.

As Europe has always had a long history, set of traditions and generally a rich culture, America had to find something unique, something that would separate her culture from all the others. One thing which America had that Europe lacked was a vast, unincorporated, and most importantly, untamed nature, which was seen as a decisive factor of American history. Therefore, nature has in a way played a key role in creating America as a country, and not only as a country, but as a unique, even exceptional entity, and thus became the country's biggest asset (Nash 67). Long before the waves of immigrants came to America to explore the land, America was described in Europe as a sort of an Eden, a promised land of great riches, mild climate and beauty which could only be created by God (Nash 25). This utopian

image of a new promised land soon proved to be false as the land was vast and rich, but certainly neither peaceful nor pliable. On the contrary, soon after the arrival of the first pioneers in the 17<sup>th</sup> century it was proved that America was quite the contrary of a utopian place. Therefore, the New World slowly began to lose its title of a paradise. Nevertheless, the resentment that the settlers had for the rapid cultural and industrial changes in Europe were greater than the fear of exploring this new boundless and yet untamed land (Carter 10).

As Nash (24) describes, the first pioneers saw nature as the number one reason of all their problems due to the fact that it challenged them both physically and mentally. Primarily, all of the new undiscovered land was considered to be the West, nevertheless, the European immigrants embarked on a series of successful westward movements that helped shape the trajectory of American development. Nature challenged pioneers mentally in a way that all of a sudden, after years of oppression in Europe, they were given complete freedom which enabled them to act any way they wanted, usually causing their savage side to surface (Paul 156). This was in a way justified as they had to fight to survive in harsh conditions away from civilization. At first nature was seen as an enemy that had to be conquered, defeated and subdued. Not only was the landscape riddled with obstacles in forms of enormous forests, mountain ranges or wild animals that were unknown to Europeans, but it was also inhabited by Indians, people that were seen as the other. In other words, the new land was full of the elements of surprise, danger, and challenge (153).

However, as much as it was a challenging experience, the pioneers tried to look at the situation from a positive side or, in other words, they viewed the new world from a utilitarian perspective. It was usually stressed that it is precisely in nature where one could see God's work the best, and therefore America had a unique moral advantage over Europe (Nash 69). The obsession with conquering the wilderness began to fade away in the 1890s when nature was slowly converted into a resting place instead of something that had to be battled. The



Indian was no longer an enemy as city people longed for solitude and peace which could only be found in nature (Nash 143).

#### 4. What is the Western like? - general characteristics and most common stereotypes found in the genre

The Western films have a unique setting and a very recognizable set of characters. Primarily, the plot is usually set between the 1850s and 1900, although later plots are not unusual. As mentioned before, the landscape is one of the most important parts of every Western movie.

When talking about landscape, what we usually see in Westerns are open landscapes, large mountain ranges, deserts, vast plains and harsh environment. The harsh environment is often in contrast to the small and seemingly idyllic town with a bank, a church, a saloon and everything else people might need. These towns in the middle of the desert might seem peaceful, but the reality is quite different. It is usually the place where law, one of the most important notions in the West, does not yet exist. Given that fact, the cowboy or the sheriff character is the main hero who tries to maintain law and order. In essence, the frontier myth, or the dichotomy between the wilderness and civilization is the main concern of Westerns.

As the Old West has always been an interesting topic in the minds of American people, the Western as a film genre quickly gained its popularity. The search for the heroic past that fought against politically distorted reality, corruption and racism was found in the Western. This film genre, as Shatz states, was used to justify the morality tales that could not be justified in any other genre (45). The Western as a film genre changed over the course of its popularity, yet some characteristics of the genre remained consistent. As McConnell asserts, traits such as individualism, a strict moral code, objectivity, courage, justice and self-esteem have remained a constant in the genre (64). Individualism is best seen in the usual

opening scenes where a lone cowboy rides into a town. Westerns often put emphasis on the independence of the main hero, and a lonely yet self-sufficient way of living. Every character in the genre follows a strict code of behaviour, whether it is a bad or a good one. For instance, the cowboy follows the 'eye for an eye' code, or to put it differently, every man has the same rights and the same opportunities but reaching those opportunities must be done in an honourable manner. Furthermore, the characters are concerned with the 'now', with the reality and not the future. In addition, a trait that every heroic character must possess is courage. A cowboy, a sheriff or a gunfighter must both be physically and mentally courageous in order to fight the evil (67).

As every Western has recognizable landscape, the characters are also quite specific the most recognizable being the cowboy, the outlaw, the damsel in distress and the Indian all of which face certain prejudice and stereotyping in the genre. The hero generally fights savage Indians that have massacred villages, stolen cattle or even kidnapped a lady which the cowboy is eager to rescue. One of the minorities that gets stereotyped the most in this genre is definitely the Native American which is portrayed as savage, close to inhuman. They are usually dressed in modest clothing, with feathers and war paint in their faces. Natives are portrayed as primitives who need to get off the land so that the white men could prosper

Although most films stereotype Native Americans, some movies are pro-Indian. Nevertheless, Spicer affirms that even though some films might show Indians in a friendly and positive manner, no film portrays them as equal to white men (17). Another minority that gets a lot of stereotypes in this genre is the Hispanic population. They are typically seen as poor and slow-witted men who are either lazy or untrustworthy, or as bandits and outlaws who are a constant object of suspicion or prejudice. Another stereotype that follows this minority is that they are very loud and always have large families with countless children. As for African Americans, they usually only have the role of servants, hard workers or sidekicks

to the main hero which only asserts the white dominance even more. The Chinese, on the other hand, are seen as something exotic and mysterious, usually as part of some criminal organisations. They are frequently depicted as villains who are a threat to the white population.

Furthermore, even if women do not fit into the category of an ethnic or racial minority, they are very much stereotyped in classical Westerns and fall under the purview of our discussion. As Spicer states, women have very few roles in the genre, they either fulfil the role of a seductive and provocative saloon girl with questionable moral values or that of an innocent and noble wife or schoolteacher (14). Women are often portrayed as damsels in distress unable to defend themselves. They are limited by strict traditional gender roles meaning that they do not have the same opportunities or capacities as men. Women are usually the object of lust, whether in the form of a prostitute or a woman in distress. Alternatively, the images that surround them are usually that of solitude and waiting for the men to get back home safely.

In addition, a crucial part of every Western are also the sidekick characters who complement the role of the main protagonist in many different ways. The role of the sidekick usually revolves around providing a comic relief, in other words, their role is to balance the bitterness and roughness of the main character. In order to do that, the comic sidekicks usually engage in comic situations and make witty remarks. Another role that the sidekick character can assume is that of a loyal companion to the main character. Such characters normally follow the main character throughout the journey and no matter the outcome or the dangers that such a journey might cause. It is the loyal companion's job to offer moral support to the main character and guide him with his wise advice. Another instance of a sidekick that occurs in Westerns is that of an old mentor, a wise older man that possesses a lot of knowledge about the frontier and the environment and that can safely guide the main

character on his journey. Furthermore, it is not unusual for Western heroes to have Native-American sidekicks who often possess specific knowledge of the land, have highly developed survival instincts and a spiritual connection to nature. And finally, we must not forget the skilled gunman as a sidekick that offers not only moral support to the main character, but also his shooting or tracking skills. Generally, sidekicks in Westerns are used to shed more light on the personality of the main character and help develop that personality throughout the plot alongside providing more detail to the narrative in general.

### 5. *Stagecoach* (1939)

The films that will be discussed in this essay all belong to the Golden Age Western, dating from the 1930s to the 1960s. To be more specific, four films were selected, three of them directed by John Ford and one of them directed by Robert Aldrich. The reason why most of the chosen films are directed by John Ford is that he can be considered as one of the most influential directors of the genre and as the director that contributed greatly to the shaping of Western as a genre. Another reason is that most of the influential films of the Golden Age period were made by Ford. The analysis of films will focus on stereotypes regarding specific minorities and women, as well as the social context of the time when the films were released will be incorporated by discussing the changing political situation that might be reflected in the films. Therefore, the films that will be discussed represent the late 1930s, the late 1940s and the mid 1950s. The stereotypes related to female roles that will be discussed are that of a damsel in distress, a prostitute or a lady of easy virtue, the homemaker, a strong and independent woman and a woman with power to change the grim hero's personality. As for Native American stereotypes those that will be discussed are the following: bloodthirsty warriors, savages, noble savages, primitive, barbaric and uncivilized people and a threat to the American way of life. Lastly, the Latin American stereotypes that

will be mentioned are those related to Hispanic people being either outlaws and bandits or hardworking people with large families that are usually poor and uneducated.

A masterpiece and a film that changed the Western genre, *Stagecoach* which made its debut in 1939 is one of the key works of John Ford, since not only did it set a series of genre-related norms, but it also shaped Ford's filmmaking career. The film, in its essence, is an interesting interplay between several seemingly different yet so similar characters that partake in a dangerous journey. Set in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century, the movie takes us on a stagecoach journey with a plethora of different characters: a prostitute, a cowardly driver, a drunken doctor, a gambler, a lawman as shotgun, a Southern gentlewoman, a whiskey drummer, an embezzling banker and an escaped outlaw. Their journey starts in Tonto, Arizona and goes all the way to Lordsburg, New Mexico. The whole journey is even more complicated by the constant threat that the Apache tribe with its leader Geronimo present, or to be more specific, the journey is complicated by constant conflicts between the Apache and US Cavalry. To complicate the journey even more, the stagecoach is unexpectedly joined by an escaped outlaw who is then imprisoned and forced to help the stagecoach. As the journey progresses, the threat of an Apache attack grows bigger. Eventually, the stagecoach makes it to Lordsburg safely, with some casualties and surprises along the way.

The film *Stagecoach* can be described as anti-Indian and its release in 1939 created a separatist vision due to the way it portrays Native Americans which will be discussed in the following paragraph. As Aleiss states, *Stagecoach* illustrates Indians as a civilization's greatest obstacle and the biggest nightmare of settlers (169). Not only that the stagecoach has to travel through the harsh, inhospitable and rugged land, but it is also threatened by Geronimo and his men who can attack at any moment. The film does not put much attention to developing Indian characters, but their primary goal is to unite other, generally white, characters in the fight against them. Pettersson states that Native Americans are depicted in

the film as voiceless and cultureless people (12). One scene, which shows the unsympathetic view of Native Americans is when three officers talk about locating Geronimo and how a Native American standing in the background had an encounter with them. While other officers wonder how they can trust him, the other officer assures them by saying: "He is a Cheyenne, they hate Apache worse than we do" (02:05-02:08). This scene proves the theory that Native Americans are depicted as voiceless people, because not once during that scene does the Native American man talk or make any kind of sound and movement. The Native American is deprived of its voice in order to portray him as a fierce, ruthless and fearless warrior. He is defined as the Other, nothing like Western soldiers or generals. In a way, Native Americans are dehumanized making it easier for the audience to relate to other non-Native American characters. Another stereotype that occurs in the movie is when the passengers talk about the Apache chief Geronimo, calling him a butcher. By saying that, the passengers create an image that all Native Americans, especially the Apache, are fierce warriors who do not have a problem with murdering, torturing and scalping people. A negative climate around Native characters is built before even seeing them on screen, for instance, when the stagecoach arrives to the ferry dock, it is already burnt down by the Apache. Furthermore, another instance where they are portrayed as savages is when the stagecoach arrives to the Mexican's house to rest and replenish supplies, the Mexican's wife who is actually an Apache enters the scene and other start shouting "savage" (44:35-44:37). Even though that lady's only task is to give them food, care for them and make sure they get all they need, which she does, she is not welcome. This confirms that in the eyes of the Westerners, all Native Americans are the same, brutal savages (Said 35). When the Apache warriors are finally introduced to the screen, it is done in quite a dramatic manner. They are shown just moments before the attack on the stagecoach, while the camera is filming from far away and optimistic music is playing in the background. As soon as the camera shifts to

Apache warriors, the music becomes suspenseful and dramatic making it more believable that they indeed are brutal and fierce warriors. As it was mentioned before, the Native Americans in this film do not have any speaking roles, on the contrary, they are mostly shown in long shots (with the exception of a few close-ups of Geronimo) which intensifies the feeling of the Apaches as impersonal, large, savage and brutal.

Women, on the other hand, are shown in three different ways in this movie: an obedient housewife, a pious Southern gentlewoman and a prostitute. Firstly, we will discuss Dallas (Claire Trevor), a prostitute who, according to Coyne, is a symbol of the triumph of dignity over humiliation (21). Dallas is a young woman whose family was killed by Indians, she was left to fend for herself and learn how to survive, a solution which she found in prostitution. Dallas is constantly judged by others, especially at the beginning of the movie in Tonto, where the narrowminded women judged her for being a prostitute, making her feel like she is excluded from society. All members of the stagecoach, besides Doc (Thomas Mitchell) and Ringo (John Wayne), are disgusted by her appearance and are very suspicious towards her. Unlike others, Doc is her moral compass and a father figure that guides her in her life and gives advice, even though he is a drunk who also needs help and guidance. Ringo, on the other hand, finds a safe haven in her and accepts her for all she is, ignoring or even better, not caring about her profession because he himself resorted to illegal activities in order to make the world a better place for living. Coyne states that, given the political and social situation of the period when the film was made and released (the peak of The Great Depression), Dallas is a character that the audience could easily identify with (20). Both Dallas and Ringo are victims of society which made them dislocated from the rest, her being a prostitute and him being an outlaw. She is also a symbol of a feminine ideal and generosity due to the fact that no matter the insults or judgmental looks, she always puts others first and does everything she can to help them, for instance, caring for Lucy Mallory's child. Dallas is

the embodiment of a second chance, something young people in 1939 longed for due to the harsh economical situation that The Great Depression has put them through. Her character was proof that no matter the hardship somebody goes through, there is always hope for a happy ending, one she had after escaping to Mexico with Ringo.



Figure 1. Dallas and Ringo

The opposite to the character of the prostitute Dallas is Lucy Mallory (Louise Platt), a highly esteemed woman of a higher social status who is defined by her dignity, virtue and grace. She is depicted as a vulnerable woman due to her pregnancy and her striving to reach her husband. Even though she might be in a vulnerable state, she keeps calm throughout the film and in the face of the obstacles. Unlike Dallas who is the embodiment of lack of virtue, Lucy Mallory is a symbol of a good pious woman, loyal to her husband. She is marked by



the stereotype of a virtuous lady that follows traditional social norms and embodies virtue, grace and purity, and as a self-sacrificing woman that is devoted to her family. As mentioned before, most Westerns have a damsel in distress, which in this case is the pregnant Lucy Mallory that is in desperate need of protection by the male characters.



Figure 2. Lucy Mallory in Stagecoach (1939)

## 6. *She Wore a Yellow Ribbon* (1949)

The second film of John Ford's calvary trilogy, *She Wore a Yellow Ribbon* (1949) follows the story of a soon to be retired calvary captain Nathan Brittles (John Wayne). The film is set just after Custer's big defeat at Little Big Horn in 1876, a battle between the US Calvary and the united Indian forces (Sioux, Cheyenne, Arapaho). Nathan Brittles, already an

aged man and a calvary veteran, counts the days to his retirement, to which he is looking forward in the beginning. His retirement plan is complicated by frequent breakouts by the Cheyenne and Arapaho tribes that constantly attack stagecoaches and make it impossible for the US Calvary to get provisions and their pay checks. To complicate the retirement even more, Nathan Brittles is asked by his commanding officer to escort his wife and niece away from their army post, a task which Brittles undertakes unwillingly. Nevertheless, orders are orders, and he was forced to go on with the task, which he did taking all the necessary precautions. The journey is intertwined by the threat of Indian attacks and a love triangle between Olivia Dandridge and lieutenants Flint Cohill and Ross Pennell. Sadly, captain Brittles fails in both controlling the Indian breakouts and escorting the ladies to a more eastern outpost. He returns to Fort Starke to retire realising that he was once a respected man and that by retiring the respect he once had as a US Calvary veteran will slowly fade away. The missions he was entrusted with are carried on by lieutenants Cohill and Pennell, young lads in desperate need to show off and prove themselves to the rest of the company. Even though Brittles retired, he went back and joined his lieutenants once more with a mission to stop the upcoming war and make peace with his old friend, chief Pony that Walks. Upon entering the Indian settlement, the leader of the Arapaho tribe, Red Shirt, shoots an arrow at him and sends a clear message that they are not welcome there. Despite that, Brittles approaches Pony that Walks and tries to make peace. Even though he failed to come to an agreement because of young bloodthirsty men, Brittles finds another peaceful solution to prevent the war. He stampedes all of the horses out of the camp therefore forcing all of the Indians to return to the Wind River Reservation, on foot and ashamed.

Similar to *Stagecoach* (1939), the female characters in *She Wore a Yellow Ribbon* (1949) are portrayed as ladies that are faced with imminent danger and in need of male protection and rescue. This film does not show many female characters as the focus is on a

US Calvary post where naturally men were in greater numbers while women were their companions. To be more precise, only two female characters with active screen time appear in the movie, those being Olivia Dandridge (Joanne Dru) and Abby Allshard (Mildred Natwick), the wife and niece of major Allshard. These two female roles might appear very similar at first as they are both in a way tied to the Calvary, but in reality, they are complete opposites. Although Abby Allshard is only a supporting character, it is important to discuss her role because unlike in prior Western movies, she is depicted as a strong woman. In Westerns of earlier periods women were portrayed as weak, fragile and always dependent on men which is not the case in the character of Abby. She embodies a strong, self-conscious woman who blindly supports her husband. Abby assumes a common role for female characters in Westerns, that of a homemaker meaning that she stands by her husband's side no matter the circumstances. By doing that, Abby is deprived of a normal life which she mentions when saying: "I've planted 24 gardens in the first 10 years of our marriage. We never stayed long enough to see a single bloom" (27:37-27:45). To summarize, Abby is a symbol of strength, stability and a home even though she and her husband never stayed for long in one place.

The second female character that we will discuss is Olivia Dandridge. She, contrary to Abby, is a typical damsel in distress, only that her distress is love and not being able to choose between lieutenant Cohill or Pennell. Olivia is a young, charming and beautiful woman whose appearance attracts many looks. She is a direct object of sexual desire of two previously mentioned men, who she makes a fool of very easily by playing with their emotions while trying to choose which one to fall in love with. Unlike Westerns of earlier periods, *She Wore a Yellow Ribbon* portrays Olivia as quite an independent and inquisitive girl whose curiosity, sadly, is often silenced. The independence and strong spirit are especially seen in scenes where she is given orders by the Calvary, orders which she without

blinking questions and often refuses to obey at first. In one instance when a soldier yells “Women to the rear!” (49:00-49:02) after an imminent threat, Olivia starts questioning why is it that she has to go to the back, but she is immediately silenced by the soldier saying “Shut your gob! You talk too much” (49:05-49:08).

Women in the film are mostly treated as fragile and submissive by soldiers except Nathan Brittles, who has a different approach to them. Even though he is a tough and strict captain, he treats women with respect and develops a special relationship with Olivia, that of a father figure or a mentor. He consoles her in difficult times and assures her that none of the events happening are her fault, and that she should never apologize for her actions because that is a sign of weakness. Her character causes such confusion among lieutenants Cohill and Pennell that in one instance they almost have a fight and Pennell threatens to leave the Calvary. Cohill, as much as he is in love with Olivia, is tired of her games and calls her a gold digger that only cares about a man’s fortune and rank. Despite all her uncertainties, Olivia decides to marry Cohill and continue to build a life and home with him. Her character can also be tied to the political and social situation of the period in which the film was released. She is a symbol of hope and peace. The only thing that she wants is to have a peaceful life in the perilous frontier, to settle peacefully away from the challenges that life of a military wife presents, just like the post WWII period when people needed assurance that war time was over and it was time to live their lives peacefully.

With regard to the portrayal of Native Americans, compared to *Stagecoach* released ten years earlier, Ford’s technique has changed drastically. In *Stagecoach*, as was discussed earlier, Native Americans are voiceless and only appear in fight scenes. *She Wore a Yellow Ribbon* offers a more complex insight into Native American characters even though they actively appear in the second part of the film. As Aleiss states, the Native American characters in this film have a more complex and individualized personality (175). At the very

beginning of the movie the tone about the Native Americans is very grim. The film starts with talk of Custer's loss and how Indian tribes are uniting to reclaim their land. A unification of Indian tribes in the movie could be, as Coyne states, related to the threat of rising Communism in post WWII world (63). What is more, in each instance showing Indian soldiers, the music becomes very dramatic which puts even more emphasis on the threat that they supposedly present to the Anglo-American civilization. The dramatic effects are also seen in the monologue preceding the final battle which is spoken by the narrator:

Signal smokes. War drums. Feathered bonnets against the Western sky. New Messiahs. Young leaders are ready to hurl the finest light calvary against Fort Starke. In the Kiowa village, the drumbeat echoes in the pulse of young braves. Under a common banner, old quarrels forgotten. Comanche rides with Arapaho, Apache with Cheyenne. All chant of war. War to drive the white man forever from the red man's hunting ground. Only the old men stand silent. (01:28:13-01:29:06)

Unlike former Native American stereotypes, the leader of the Arapaho tribe, an elderly chief named Pony that Walks is shown as captain Brittle's old friend.



Figure 2. Captain Nathan Brittle's and chief Pony that Walks

The chief is portrayed in a respectful and friendly manner, as a man who wants peace but at the same time resents the Christian culture that is corrupting his young men. To be more specific, when he sees Nathan, he starts yelling “Hallelujah! I am a Christian” and then proceeds to invite Nathan to hunt buffalo and get drunk together (01:32:27). The message that this exclamation is supposed to send is that the white civilization and its traditions are corrupting the old Native American ways (Aleiss 176). Unlike Native Americans in previous movies, the Arapaho chief would like there to be peace, but he is afraid that young men no longer listen to him. As much as Native Americans are portrayed in a ruthless and savage manner at the beginning of the film, the end changes towards a more sympathetic image. Once Nathan Brittles drives all of their horses away and forces them to go back to their reservation, the Natives are shown as humbled and harmless.

## 7. *Apache* (1954)

Following the story of the novel *Broncho Apache* by Paul I. Wellman, the film *Apache* directed by Robert Aldrich gives the viewers an insight into the life of the Apache tribe and the hardship they underwent when Apache men were to be relocated and resettled on a Florida reservation. The movie itself begins by briefly explaining the historical context. The Apache reached an agreement with the white settlers by which they are to surrender, a fact that a great Apache warrior like Massai (Burt Lancaster) simply cannot accept. Even though all the young Apache men are bound to be resettled on a reservation in Florida, Massai manages to escape the train and embarks on a journey to save his tribe. After the escape, Massai starts the long and perilous journey back home on foot. On his way back home, he encounters a small house inhabited by natives who give him corn seeds as a symbol of

friendship, and also a symbol of home for the unification and salvation of his tribe. When finally reaching his settlement, Massai feels disappointed and betrayed after the tribe was attacked and his father killed, and brother taken captive to the point that he kidnaps Nalinle (Jean Peters) and takes her on a journey to Geronimo's land. Using Nalinle as leverage, Massai hopes to ensure peace and rescue his brother. During their journey, they are persecuted by the US Cavalry until the final confrontation near the Mexican border. This final showdown once again demonstrates Massai's resourcefulness by using nature to plan attacks against US soldiers. The dramatic effects of the fight are intensified by the desert terrain and music which showed Massai as a great warrior fighting for his people. The end of the movie leaves the viewers with a question mark above their head because Massai's fate is not precisely determined.

The most important minority in this film are certainly Native Americans, or to be more precise, the Apache tribe. The Apache tribe is shown as a group of proud individuals who fiercely defend their land, way of living and traditions and are not easily subdued by white settlers which is seen in the following dialogue:

MASSAI: "He does not speak for me. I remember others who surrendered. Shipped off like cattle to a faraway place called Florida, never to return."

SANTOS: "But at least you would be alive, Massai."

MASSAI: "You call that life?"

MASSAI: "If an Apache cannot live where his forefathers did, he is already dead."

(Apache 03:10-03:27)

Another instance where the silent Apache resistance is shown is the train ride. Young Apache men are thirsty but refuse to take water from white men as a sign of protest. The scenes when the Apache men are taken away are even more intensified by images of women and children

running along the railway tracks not being able to accept the fact that their families are being destroyed and their fathers taken away for good.

The central character of the film is Massai (Burt Lancaster), the last true Apache warrior who is refusing the forceful taking of land by the US Calvary. Massai is depicted as a highly intelligent, skilful and resourceful Apache warrior with a strong connection to his people and land. He is shown as an individual fighting to preserve the old Apache way of life in the dangerous and constantly changing world around him. As other Apache men surrendered and accepted the fact that the white men have power over them, Massai is somewhat lonely in his determination to save the Apache land and tribe. At the very beginning of the film, when he is to be taken by the train, Massai is mocked, threatened and insulted by American soldiers: “You want us to kill you, don’t you Massai? Out here in front of all your bloodthirsty brethren so that they can sing your praises and start another war in your honour. That’d be a sweet death, wouldn’t it Massai? A warrior’s death. But you’re not a warrior anymore. You’re just a whipped Injun, and nobody sings about handcuffs” (04:07-04:36).

The stereotypes that are directly connected to Massai’s character are that of a noble savage, a bloodthirsty warrior, incapable of embracing civilization. In his determination to preserve the Native way of life, Massai can be characterized as a noble savage only trying to protect and preserve his culture. Due to that stereotype, Massai and other members of the tribe are oversimplified in a way that their culture and history are shown in a romanticized way. What is more, by being depicted as noble savages they are also marked as the “other”, as an uncivilized and inferior culture to that of white settlers. Furthermore, the fact that Massai is refusing to give in to the US Calvary supports the theory that Native Americans, in this case Apache, are bloodthirsty warrior that do not understand or simply do not want to understand the notion of peace. To soften the character of the bloodthirsty warrior, Massai is



shown as an Apache man capable of love. As another stereotype, love with a white woman is meant to humanize him since presumably it can subdue the savage in a Native American warrior.

As it will be further discussed in the analysis of *The Searchers*, the leading Native American character in *Apache*, Massai, is also played by an Anglo-American actor Burt Lancaster. Whitewashing, a not so uncommon phenomenon of the Golden Age Western, was primarily used not only to appeal to the white audience but also because of the limited opportunities that Native American actors had.

Moving to the female characters in this film, it is important to discuss the character of Nalinle (Jean Peters). Although not much of her background is revealed in the film, she appears to be a white woman living in the Apache settlement but whether she was taken as a child and raised by the Apache or simply moved in with the tribe is unknown. Nevertheless, despite the cultural and language barriers, she intrigues Massai in a romantic way. Their romantic relationship is followed by harsh prejudice and hostility by the white settlers which highlights the low position that the Native Americans had in society. Even though their relationship is faced with obstacles, Nalinle is a symbol of humanization. It is her task to humanize the savage Massai by revealing his emotions and helping him resolve his inner conflicts. She can also be seen as a symbol of peace due to her intentions of making Massai change his perspective on white settlers. She is the link between the Apache and the white settlers, between savageness and civilization. The romantic interest that Massai shows in Nalinle makes him more open minded and diminishes his desire for revenge and resistance.

Unlike in other films that were discussed, Nalinle is a female character that is not a damsel in distress and does not need saving; on the contrary, she is a woman that has the ability to show a man the power of love. As a woman, she has the ability to change the last

true Apache warrior, a bloodthirsty warrior that abides by a strict moral code. Nalinle is in a way a bridge or a link between two cultures that once were not able to unite.

All in all, it could be said that Robert Aldrich's *Apache* is a pro-Indian movie due to the fact that it shows the hardship that the Apache people had to endure during the resettlement of its men and the destruction of their settlements. The Apache, once bloodthirsty warriors, are shown as people that gave up and accepted their fate even though it is not the one that they hoped for. The film's pro-Indian note can also be related to the changing dynamics in the Civil Rights movement and the awareness of racial inequalities. In other words, for a change it is the Native Americans who are shown as the ones who struggle and fight against the unjust social system that the white settlers are attempting to enforce. They are a minority, a marginalized group of people that are fighting for their rights which is parallel to the reality of the Civil Rights movement. As it was discussed previously, the 1950s Cold War climate, according to Coyne, was largely used in Westerns in a way that Native American tribes were often used as a symbol of the growing communist threat (63).

Therefore, the conflict between the Apache and the US Cavalry or, simply, white settlers can be seen as a symbol of 1950s Cold War climate in the United States. The conflict might be a metaphor of the growing communist threat, or, to be more specific, the Native Americans in *Apache* (1954) are pictured as the Other, as someone who is threatening the American way of life just like communism did in that period. As for the female character which was discussed, the change in the position of female roles in Westerns can also be related to the growing movement for women's rights during the 1950s.

## 8. *The Searchers* (1956)

Another Ford's masterpiece, a film that definitely marked the Western genre is the 1956 epic *The Searchers*. An Odyssey narrative Western that follows the journey of Ethan Edwards (John Wayne) on which his personality changes greatly offers an insight into a new phase of Ford's filmmaking and general attitude towards Native Americans on screen reflecting the ongoing social changes. The film follows Ethan Edwards, a Civil War veteran with firm moral values and a harsh personality, on a journey across the frontier in order to avenge what was done to his family. Ethan returns to his brother's ranch in Texas only to find out that his neighbours' cattle has been stolen, and in an attempt to retrieve what was lost, he realizes that he was outsmarted by the Comanche. By the time Ethan manages to return to his brother's farm, the homestead was in flames and his brother, sister-in-law and nephew were slaughtered, while his nieces were missing. He then swears that his life mission will be to find the girls and avenge the massacre. On his journey, he is accompanied by Martin Pawley, a boy that his brother saved and raised, but also a boy he despises because he is one eighth Cherokee. Shortly after they embarked on their journey, the older girl was found violated and slain, while the younger girl, Debbie, was still missing. On their journey, Martin realizes that Ethan has no intention of saving Debbie, on the contrary, his intention is to kill her because she is considered a disgrace to her family due to the fact that she lives with Indians. Five years pass when they finally find Debbie, now a grown woman living as one of chief Scar's wives and deciding to stay with her Comanche tribe, which Ethan found devastating to the point he tried to shoot her which was luckily stopped by Martin. By the end of the rescue mission, something changed in Ethan's perspective, and he decides to save her instead of killing her. Once they arrive home, Ethan slowly realizes that everyone except him has a home and he is left standing in the doorstep.

As mentioned before, Ford's way of portraying Native Americans has significantly changed over his filmmaking period and *The Searchers* is one of the films that supports this claim. Native American characters in this film are much more complex than those in *Stagecoach* and the main character, in this case Ethan, is even more brutal and racist. As much as the goal was to portray the Comanche as brutal and savage, Ford managed to depict Anglo-Americans in the same way. Both main protagonists, Ethan and Scar, share many personality traits. One is tall, strong, savage and hates white people for killing his kind, and the other is tall, strong, brutal and filled with hatred towards the Native American population. Both of them have great admiration for their families, strong beliefs and even stronger personalities. Their relationship is marked by mutual hatred and mistrust. The contempt that they have for each other is perfectly described in the following example:

ETHAN: "You speak good American for a Comanche, someone teach you?"

SCAR: "You speak good Comache, someone teach you?" (01:22:56-01:23:46)

The extreme racism that can be seen in Ethan's character disables him from being the hero and converts him into a villain (Corkin 137). The fact how much Ethan despises Native Americans is also shown in his relationship with Marthin, and later on with Debbie. At first Nathan keeps rejecting Martin's help because he is part Cherokee but what hurts Ethan most is that his niece Debbie has lived with the Natives for too long and has therefore become one of them. In his mind, Debbie is polluted and can no longer be considered family as she became Scar's wife, spoke their language and even declared that they are her family. All this makes Ethan enraged, and he vows that he will kill her and therefore kill the Indian in her, but in the end blood relations are more important than revenge and Ethan saves her.



Figure 3. Ethan considering killing his niece Debbie

Other than chief Scar, other Native Americans in the film are portrayed in the usual Fordian manner, as brutal savages that are an imminent threat to the Anglo-American population. At the beginning of their quest, Ethan and Martin first find Lucy, Debbie's older sister who was raped and brutally murdered by Indians. Despite Ethan's hatred for the Indians, he and Martin are forced to collaborate with them in order to obtain goods and information about the whereabouts of Debbie. In one such instance Martin encounters a young captive Indian girl who he decides to rescue from the Comanche raiding party. The girl named Look then follows Martin throughout the journey and develops an interesting relationship with him. Their relationship is a symbol of obstacles that individuals from different cultural backgrounds encounter in a relationship, such as language, religion and traditions. Nevertheless, their relationship is an exploration of cultural challenges, identity and finally, acceptance. Despite the language barrier which prevents them from communicating normally and different cultural upbringing they had, the two form a special relationship in which they are dependent on each other.

Furthermore, it is important to look back on chief Scar, mainly because the character was played by a white man, and not an indigenous actor. Scar was played by Henry Brandon, a German immigrant with piercing blue eyes. White actors in the roles of Native Americans were not odd at that period of Westerns due to many reasons. Given the nature of movie industry at that stage, Native Americans had little to no opportunities to be cast in Hollywood movies. Furthermore, the prejudice and stereotyping by which those characters were portrayed in movies made it even more difficult for Native Americans to be cast in roles of Indian characters; on the contrary, it was believed that by casting popular white actors in such roles, the films would benefit more economically.

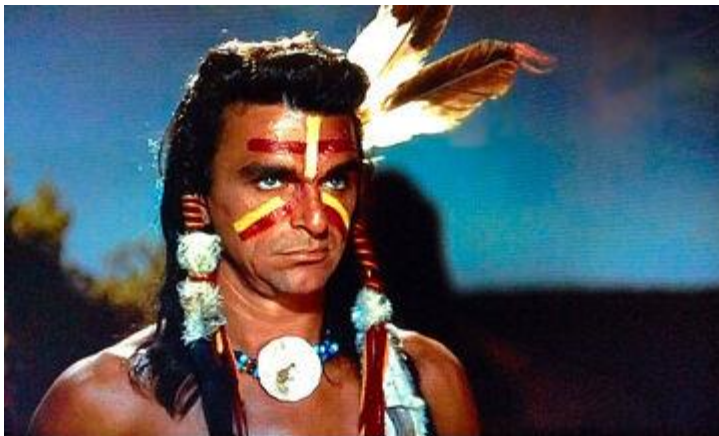


Figure 4. Chief Scar played by Henry Brandon

The female characters in this film assume various roles from strong and independent women, damsels in distress to loving mothers. Starting with Laurie Jorgensen (Vera Miles), her character is depicted as a strong and independent woman who finds herself in the middle of a love triangle with Ethan Edwards and Martin Pawley. Laurie is a woman who knows how to speak for herself and does not need a man to keep her safe. Even though he is

romantically interested in Martin, she also tries to understand Ethan and his inner struggles. What she feels for him can be described as a mixture of respect, pity and desire to resolve his problems. She is the voice of reason with her compassion with Ethan in times of hardship.

Martha Edwards (Dorothy Jordan) on the other hand, is a symbol of strength in times of hardship. She is Ethan's sister-in-law and the mother of the kidnapped girl. The role that Martha assumes in this film is that of a pioneer woman who alongside her husband made a home in the harsh frontier environment. She, as well as other pioneer women in Westerns, is shown as a loving housewife who takes care of the family and household while having to adapt to all of the obstacles that life on the frontier bears. Despite all of the hardships, pioneer women were symbols of resilience, courage, strength and keepers of family values.

Debbie, played by Lana and Natalie Wood, is the central female character of the film. As a young girl she is abducted by the Comache and later raised by them which makes her assimilate the Comache way of life along with their language. In her character the viewer can witness a clash between two considerably different cultures and a clash between civilization and the savage. The fact that she was raised by the Comanche and later became a wife of their chief makes Ethan hate her as if she was a Comanche from birth when in reality, she is his niece. While Ethan faces his conflict of constant and growing hate towards Native Americans, Debbie also faces some inner conflicts in form of loyalty. Even though she is aware of her connection to Edward as a biological family, she also considers the Comanche tribe as her family because she was raised by them and spent most of her life with them. Just like Nalinle had the power to change Massai in *Apache*, Debbie also has power to change her uncle Ethan. She is the reason Ethan's view on Native Americans softened in a sense that he chose not to kill her but instead rescued her and accepted her the way she is.

As for other minorities that appear in the film, the only minority that we can single out are the Latinos. This minority does not have much importance for the development of the plot as they mostly play background characters that are either sympathetic to the main hero or antagonistic. They are portrayed as hospitable men on which the main hero can rely on for help and accommodation. The Latino population in this film is portrayed merely as people who inhabit the borderland regions and speak broken English.

## 9. Conclusion

As the Western is a genre which in a way defined not only Hollywood but also helped shape American identity, it is vital to consider the position of minorities that has changed significantly throughout the evolution of the genre. The Western helped Americans go back to their roots and look back on history in many difficult times, such as the Great Depression and World War II, and has in a way served as a safe haven from actual social problems.

The position of minorities, especially Native Americans, Latinos and women in Westerns has evolved with the genre. As was discussed in this paper, at the beginning of the genre the above mentioned minorities had little to no importance. During the first years of the genre Native Americans were either portrayed in a sympathetic or antagonistic manner. They were shown either as brutal, bloodthirsty savages or as a trade worthy community that shows deep respect for nature. Over the years that image has changed, not for the better. During the 1930s the stereotyping of Native Americans has only intensified to the point that they were shown as a threat to the Anglo-American civilization that needed to be eliminated completely. Natives are, therefore, shown as vicious warriors that scalp their enemies, rape pious American women, burn down villages and never hesitate when the time comes to kill a white man. They are shown as barbaric and savage people that take away the opportunity of Anglo-American people to a normal, peaceful and civilized life when in reality the same



could be said for the Anglo-American population. Nevertheless, the post-war Western shows a different image of Native Americans. Even though they are still predominantly displayed as brutal savages, they are also shown as noble savages that are only fighting for what was previously taken from them. The post-war Westerns offer more complex Native characters (who were mostly played by white actors) that show the viewer the good side of the Native American population. In the period of the late 1940s and the 1950s Westerns try to depict an image of a peaceful and civilized life between the Natives and Anglo-American communities.

The paper shows that other minorities such as Hispanic Americans, Asian Americans and African Americans mostly played supporting roles in Westerns throughout the years. Mexicans are often used as comic sidekicks whose main task is to provide some humour to the grim and tough main character. Speaking broken English, Hispanic (Mexican) American characters have two fates in Westerns: they are either loveable hardworking hosts who provide safety and food for the main hero, or they are destined to be outlaws and bandits. As for Asians, none of the above discussed movies has any Asian American characters, which only supports the fact that this minority is heavily underrepresented in Westerns. However, when they do occur in Westerns, they mainly assume the same characteristics as Hispanic Americans. They are either the villains, cheap labourers, exotic women or simply background characters. As for African American characters, the segregation occurring in this period was often shown in movies in a way that African American characters would often be segregated into separate spaces. African Americans in Westerns assume the role of obedient servants, loyal sidekicks and lawless individuals transmitting the idea that they do not belong in the American West.

Not an ethnic minority, but still an important part of Westerns are also female characters that have, like Native American characters, underwent significant changes. As previously discussed, at the beginning of the genre women were portrayed as damsels in

distress that had to be saved by the hero. Women were often symbols of weakness, frailty, purity, innocence and sexual desire. Other than showing women as pious and obedient wives, women were also shown as prostitutes that found themselves on the margins of society. In the earlier period of Westerns, women were often shown as submissive to men and as dependent on them. Alternatively, they represented stability and the wish for a peaceful life in a chaotic frontier. As the years progressed, the role of women has changed substantially. During the 1940s and 1950s women were no longer voiceless and submissive characters, on the contrary, they became more independent and resilient. The role of women at that period was to challenge traditional gender roles following the Second World War in the United States.

All in all, the position of the above mentioned minorities and women reflects the political, social and economical situation of the period when films were made. It also shows America's deep connection to the Myth of the West, the importance of the frontier and nature and how it has had an impact on the creation of its identity. As in the real world, minorities were either underrepresented in Westerns or heavily stereotyped and prejudiced against.

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## 11. Abstract

This paper examines the connection that the Myth of the West and the American national identity have through the Western genre, a genre that is considered to be exclusively American. What is more, the position of minorities, especially Native Americans, is the focus of this paper due to their close connection with the frontier and the Myth of the West.

Additionally, the stereotyping of women, African Americans, Asian Americans and Hispanic Americans in representative Westerns is also considered. The paper examines the most common stereotypes that were used to portray minorities in the Western genre and how that image has changed throughout the years, focusing on the Golden Age Western which spans the period from the 1930s to the 1960s. For the analysis of the use of stereotypes and the portrayal of minorities in Westerns, four movies have been chosen: *Stagecoach* (1939), *She Wore a Yellow Ribbon* (1949), *Apache* (1954) and *The Searchers* (1956).

Key words: the Western, stereotypes, minorities, Native Americans, the Myth of the West, the frontier