The captivity narratives of Cynthia Ann Parker: settler colonialism, collective memory, and cultural trauma.

Treva Elaine Hodges

University of Louisville
THE CAPTIVITY NARRATIVES OF CYNTHIA ANN PARKER:
SETTLER COLONIALISM, COLLECTIVE MEMORY, AND CULTURAL TRAUMA

By

Treva Elaine Hodges
B.A., The University of Alabama, 2006
M.A., The University of Alabama, 2008

A Dissertation
Submitted to the Faculty of the
College of Arts and Sciences of the University of Louisville
in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements
for the Degree of

Doctor of Philosophy
in Humanities

Department of Comparative Humanities
University of Louisville
Louisville, Kentucky

August 2019
THE CAPTIVITY NARRATIVES OF CYNTHIA ANN PARKER:
SETTLER COLONIALISM, COLLECTIVE MEMORY, AND CULTURAL TRAUMA

By

Treva Elaine Hodges
B.A., The University of Alabama, 2006
M.A., The University of Alabama, 2008

A Dissertation Approved on

July 23, 2019

by the following Dissertation Committee:

__________________________
Dissertation Co-Chair
Dr. Susan Jarosi, Department of Art History, Hamilton College

__________________________
Dissertation Co-Chair
Dr. Lara Kelland, Department of History, University of Louisville

__________________________
Dr. Frank Kelderman, Department of English, University of Louisville

__________________________
Dr. Kristine Stiles, Department of Art, Art History, and Visual Studies, Duke University
DEDICATION

This dissertation is dedicated to my partner and best friend,

Edward Howard Byers

who taught me a healthier performance of humanity.
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I would like to thank my mentor Dr. Susan Jarosi, for her guidance, patience, and persistence in seeing me through to completion of this project when I know the demands on her time were many. I would also like to thank my other committee members, Dr. Lara Kelland, who has, on more than one occasion, indulged my impromptu office visits and has freely passed along encouragement and praise, Dr. Frank Kelderman, who has shared selflessly his knowledge and well-worn extra copies of much needed books, and Dr. Kristine Stiles, whose thoughtful reflections on trauma provided the impetus for this project. I would also like to express my thanks to my spouse, Ed Byers, for showing his faith in me and nurturing me during the most intense days of this project. Also, many thanks to my family and friends across the US who reached out to offer reassurance, advice, and comfort, and who overlooked their missing birthday cards for a year. Specifically, I thank my daughter, Miranda, whose directive, “Just write your paper, Mom!” provided the extra boost I needed to finish. Finally, I am thankful to Ron Parker and Cindy Parker Famero who shared their time and experiences with me in honor of their grandmother, Cynthia Ann Parker.
ABSTRACT

CULTURAL TRAUMA AND COLLECTIVE MEMORY IN THE CAPTIVITY NARRATIVE OF CYNTHIA ANN PARKER

Treva Elaine Hodges

July 23, 2019

This dissertation explores representations of the captivity narrative of Cynthia Ann Parker, an Anglo woman captured as a child by Comanche, with whom she lived in a kinship relationship until her forced return to Anglo society twenty-four years later. The project draws upon trauma theory to explain the persistent appeal of Parker’s narrative. Interpretations analyzed include the original historical account of Parker’s narrative, and appearances in the genres of opera, film, graphic novel, and historical fiction. The dissertation reveals how appearances of Parker’s narrative correspond to periods in US history in which social change threatened the dominant position of Anglo American men. The primary argument is that captivity narratives serve to reinforce hegemonic Anglo masculinity promoted by the American settler colonial system.

The dissertation is divided into six chapters organized chronologically to demonstrate the significance of Parker’s narrative in various historical moments. Chapter One provides a historical overview of Parker’s story and briefly reviews the impact of captivity narratives. Chapter Two explores the first formal historical account of Parker’s narrative and discusses the significance of myth to conceptions of Americanism during the Progressive Era. Chapter Three examines Julia Smith’s interpretation of Parker’s
narrative via her opera, *Cynthia Parker*, to show how expansion of rights for white women between World Wars I and II failed to translate to equal rights for all due to the persistence of the racial hierarchy established by the settler colonial system. In Chapter Four, John Ford’s film *The Searchers* demonstrates how Parker’s narrative helped reinforce the social position of Anglo men returning from World War II. Chapter Five looks to alternative forms of Parker’s narrative in the graphic novel, *White Comanche*, and historical fiction, *Ride the Wind*, to demonstrate how Anglo writers, even when attempting to center Native people as agents in Parker’s story, continue to reinforce negative stereotypes that perpetuate the supremacy of Anglo masculinity. The final chapter briefly looks at the current political and social climate of the US to demonstrate how the long-term insidious trauma inherent in the settler colonial system continues to impact racial and gender hierarchical performance.
# TABLE OF CONTENTS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>ACKNOWLEDGMENTS</th>
<th>iv</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>ABSTRACT</td>
<td>v</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LIST OF FIGURES</td>
<td>vii</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CHAPTER I “INTRODUCTION”</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CHAPTER II “RECAPTURED MEMORIES”</td>
<td>29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CHAPTER III “PIONEERING NOSTALGIA IN THE PERIOD BETWEEN THE WORLD WARS”</td>
<td>58</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CHAPTER IV “SEARCHING FOR LOST MASCULINITY”</td>
<td>93</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CHAPTER V “APPROPRIATING CULTURAL TRAUMA”</td>
<td>126</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CHAPTER VI “CONCLUSION RECONSTRUCTING CULTURAL TRAUMA”</td>
<td>162</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>REFERENCES</td>
<td>176</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CURRICULUM VITA</td>
<td>192</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
# LIST OF FIGURES

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>FIGURE</th>
<th>PAGE</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Photo of Cynthia Ann Parker and daughter taken in 1861</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Comanchería 1740-1840</td>
<td>136</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Rape of Captives – Comic Panel from <em>White Comanche</em></td>
<td>138</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Pease River Attack – Comic Panel from <em>White Comanche</em></td>
<td>139</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Chief Paha-Yuca – Comic Panel from <em>White Comanche</em></td>
<td>142</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Parker as Pure Comanche – Comic Panel from <em>White Comanche</em></td>
<td>145</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. Quanah at War – Comic Panel from <em>White Comanche</em></td>
<td>147</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. <em>Ride the Wind</em> book cover</td>
<td>155</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
CHAPTER I
INTRODUCTION

On May 19, 1836, approximately one month after Anglo-American settlers violently established the Republic of Texas through war with Mexico, a large group of Comanche, along with their Native allies, raided Parker’s Fort near present day Groesbeck, Texas, and took captives from among the settlers who inhabited the fort.¹ Of those taken, nine-year-old Cynthia Ann Parker became the most famous. Her Comanche captors adopted Parker into their family and when she matured she married a Comanche man with whom she had three children. Seventeen years after her initial abduction, Parker encountered American traders interested in ransoming her, yet reports document that she rejected their offer and chose to remain with her adopted Comanche family.² Seven years later, having lived in a kinship relationship with Comanche for a total of twenty-four years, Parker was forcefully returned to American society when a group of Texas Rangers found her with her two-year-old daughter in a raid of a Comanche hunting camp on December 19, 1860. In an attempt to ease Parker’s rehabilitation into Anglo society, the Texas legislature granted her a portion of land and an annual stipend of $100

¹ Jo Ella Powell Exley, Frontier Blood: The Saga of the Parker Family (College Station: University of Texas A&M Press, 2001), 53.
² The first reports of sightings of Parker by traders are recounted in James T. DeShields, Cynthia Ann Parker: The story of her capture at the massacre of the inmates of Parker’s Fort; of her quarter of a century spent among the Comanches, as the wife of the war chief, Peta Nocona; and of her recapture at the battle of Pease River, by Captain L.S. Ross, of the Texian rangers (St. Louis: Printed for the Author, 1886), 32, and Glenn Frankel, The Searchers: The Making of an American Legend (New York: Bloomsbury, 2013), 63.
to be managed by her uncle and brother-in-law.³ For the next ten years, Parker’s Anglo family members shuffled her and her daughter, Topsannah (Prairie Flower), through various relatives’ homes. Parker never fully reintegrated and repeatedly asked to be allowed to return to her sons and husband, but her requests were denied. Family diaries note that after Topsannah died of influenza and pneumonia in 1864, Parker entered a deep state of mourning until her own death by influenza in March of 1870 at the age of forty-four.⁴ Parker and her daughter were buried in the family cemetery near Frankston, Texas, until Parker’s son, Quanah, petitioned to have their bodies reinterred in a graveyard near his own home in 1910. Later, the remains of all three were moved to the Fort Sill Military Cemetery where they rest today.

Parker’s life story, documented in a variety of forms, serves as a testament to the trauma of the American settler system. One of only two photographs produced of Parker after her return to Anglo society in December 1860 was taken on the trip that transported her from Camp Cooper to her uncle Isaac Parker’s home in Birdville, Texas (Figure 1).⁵ During a brief stop on their journey, Parker sat in A.F. Corning’s photography studio in Fort Worth and suckled Topsannah at her breast while curious locals gathered to stare.⁶ In the photo the young mother gazes hard at the camera, her face expressionless, her lips sealed and not smiling. The dress she wears is unbuttoned at the top to allow Topsannah to nurse, and Parker’s “large and muscular” hands embrace her daughter comfortably.⁷

---
³ Frankel, The Searchers, 80.
⁴ Exact dates of Topsannah’s and Parker’s deaths are unknown. Some sources place them in 1864 and 1870 respectively while others say 1863 and 1871. Parker’s grave marker lists 1870. Exley, Frontier Blood, 165-179. See also Margaret Schmidt Hacker, Cynthia Ann Parker: The Life and the Legend (El Paso: Texas Western Press, 1990), 35.
⁵ Exley, Frontier Blood, 169.
⁶ Frankel, The Searchers, 81.
⁷ Frankel, The Searchers, 81.
The most notable feature of the photograph for some viewers was Parker’s fabled bright blond hair – cropped short in the tradition of Comanche mourning and appearing dark due to her practice of applying grease. Newspaper reports and family diary entries written after her return mention Parker’s insistence on keeping her hair cut short and document the existence of scars on her arms and breast. Parker’s Anglo family members interpreted these two notable physical features – her unconventionally short hair and the marks on her body – as proof that she endured abuse while living among the Comanche. The photograph symbolizes the way that Parker’s personal and private traumatic experience became publicized as a collective trauma for Anglo settlers through the spread of her captivity narrative.

Figure 1. *Cynthia Parker and Prairie Flower*. Photograph by A.F. Corning, 1861. The Texas Collection, Baylor University, Waco, Texas.8

8 Photo taken in 1861 at A.F. Corning photography studio in Fort Worth Texas located in the Bernard-Lane Papers, Accession #39, Box #20, Folder #10 in The Texas Collection, Baylor University, Waco, TX.
Building a Captive Nation

At the heart of every sharing of Parker’s story lies the personal trauma she endured in both her initial captivity and in her violent return to her Anglo family. Verifiable facts about Parker’s abduction as a child, her life among the Comanche, and her return twenty-four years later are few. In the place of documentation, authors of Parker’s captivity narrative drew upon their own imaginations to construct a story that romanticizes Parker’s experiences. Most versions of the narrative highlight the traumatic moments of Parker’s life by including only three pivotal events: the attack on Fort Parker that resulted in the death of several of the fort’s residents and the captivity of Parker and four others, the raid by Texas Rangers on the Comanche hunting camp on the Pease River that returned Parker to Anglo society, and Parker’s failure to reintegrate among her Anglo family. Most narratives overlook the possibility that Parker lived a fulfilling life as a fully accepted member of the Comanche community in which she lived. The limited knowledge about this period of Parker’s life has not, however, prevented some authors from narrating what they imagine her experience might have been. The standard narrative of Parker’s life, therefore, is largely an invented tale that serves more to reinforce the beliefs of its authors than to tell of her history.

Whether in the form of fictionalized accounts, autobiographical retellings, or paintings, captivity narratives such as Parker’s have in common expressions of fear and anxiety that unite white Americans by justifying the violent dispossession of Native lands.

---

9 Five settler men were killed and several other men and women wounded. The Comanche and their allies experienced no losses. In addition to Parker, other captives included her brother, John, her cousins Elizabeth Kellogg and Rachel Plummer, and Plummer’s infant son, James Pratt.
and the establishment of anti-Indian policies. In addition to Parker’s story, popular captivity narratives involving Comanche include those written by Sarah Ann Horn and Parker’s cousin, Rachel Plummer. Several features distinguish Parker’s story from those of Horn and Plummer, however: the duration of her captivity, her full integration into a kinship relationship with her captors, the celebrity status of her oldest son, Quanah, the Comanche chief credited with bringing the last resistant Comanche into the reservation system, and the fact that narrators construct her story from second-hand remembrances or speculation and conjecture since she left no first-person account. The testimony of Parker’s Anglo family members and soldiers or Texas Rangers who interacted with her following her forced return to American society informed much of the initial formulation of the narrative. Additionally, authors have often augmented Parker’s story with the documented experiences of other captives like Horn and Plummer who gave first-person accounts of their time with the Comanche. It is therefore important to emphasize that all the retellings of Parker’s story are based primarily on the assumptions and projections of Anglo authors.

Captivity narratives played an important role as early as the American Revolution by helping to develop a new national identity: dramatic stories of capture and rescue became a “literature of catharsis” that offered Americans a means of rhetorically

11 Sarah Ann Horn, A Narrative of the Captivity of Mrs. Horn and Her Two Children (St. Louis: C Keemle, 1839). Sarah Ann Horn was taken captive in 1837 and lived among the Comanche for seventeen months in the guardianship of an older widow; Rachel Plummer, Rachael Plummer's narrative of twenty-one months servitude as a prisoner among the Commanchee Indians, (Austin, TX: Jenkins Pub. Co., 1977). Rachel was taken captive along with her son, James Pratt, Elizabeth Duty Kellogg, and Cynthia Ann and her brother John, during the raid at Parker’s Fort. She spent thirteen months among the Comanche before her recovery.
constructing their divine right to claim land previously settled by Indigenous peoples.\textsuperscript{12} Their popularity reflects their significant contribution to shaping hegemonic American ideologies, particularly with regard to the mobilization of constructions of race and gender in the establishment and maintenance of American nationhood. Captivity narratives expose ideological expectations for how best to perform a unique American identity. As texts of cultural memory, they reveal as much about their moments of production as they do about the moment they commemorate. Literary scholar Robert J. Denn, for example, recognizes captivity narratives as a genre of American literature that serves propagandistic purposes by contrasting “ideal” American behavior against that of Native people in order to construct and delineate what is right and morally acceptable.\textsuperscript{13} Additionally, rhetorical scholar Brenda M. Boyle credits the captivity and rescue trope with reinforcing dominant and normative expectations for the performance of masculinity and femininity in American society.\textsuperscript{14} The narratives construct a performance of Anglo masculinity based on strength, loyalty, and rugged survival skills and employ white women and Native people as screens against which Anglo men test their heroism. The ethnographic merits of captivity narratives reveal the role that race plays in establishing notions of Americanism. Literary scholar Yael Ben-Zvi argues that captivity narratives serve as a “discursive bridge” between cultures, which create identities of “foreignness” for both captives and captors through the descriptions of their encounters with one

\textsuperscript{12} Richard VanDerBeets, \textit{Held Captive by Indians: Selected Narratives, 1642-1836} (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1973), xi.


\textsuperscript{14} Brenda M. Boyle, "Rescuing Masculinity: Captivity, Rescue and Gender in American War Narratives," \textit{The Journal of American Culture} 34, no. 2 (2011): 149.
another. Historian Wendy Lucas Castro demonstrates this comparative function by showing how even seemingly benign cultural comparisons, such as clothing, contribute to the creation of collective identities.

Nations develop with intent and purpose as ideological constructs, not as organic structures naturally linked to history and inherent to human populations. Historian Molly K. Varley explains that nation building requires a “collective identity” that joins individuals through a “common history.” Historical narratives such as captivity stories help create this shared identity because they “naturalize our social structures by providing a sense of belonging” that in turn maintains the nation-state. Essentially, history does for nations what memory does for an individual by influencing behaviors and beliefs through its periodic symbolic return in cultural artifacts. Captivity narratives thus perform a variety of ideological functions in the process of establishing a collective, distinct American identity.

The belief that trauma inherent in the captivity experience caused permanent “spiritual and physical pollution” of the captive permeates these representations. Stories often include descriptions of “death and dismemberment” of a captive’s relatives, and rape or torture of the captive, despite testimony from some rescued captives that refuted

---

15 Yael Ben-Zvi, “Ethnography and the Production of Foreignness in Indian Captivity Narratives,” *American Indian Quarterly* 32, no. 1 (2008), ix-x.
such claims.\textsuperscript{22} Nineteenth-century examples, in particular, often incorporate “sexual or cultural sensationalism,”\textsuperscript{23} much of which has been attributed to the fact that most captivity narratives are written by someone other than the captive, thus disallowing the captives from offering testimony of their own experiences.\textsuperscript{24} The resulting melodramatic imaginative retellings of trauma narratives romanticize captives’ experiences and aim to generate a false empathic response in their audiences. Varley argues that the persistent, occasional return of narratives and images of Indian captivity offer “a concrete way to define ‘Americanism,’” because they renew “frontier qualities” of heroic masculinity and Christianity and justify the violence of settler colonialism.\textsuperscript{25} This dissertation expands Varley’s argument by exploring the role that trauma plays in the captivity trope.

The role that trauma plays in captivity narratives shifts the locus of trauma from real individual psychological trauma to an imagined collective trauma that functions to reinforce dominant cultural ideologies. This dissertation brings to bear a specific focus on the function of trauma in order to understand more fully the social effects and lasting implications of sharing narratives about traumatic events. In doing so, my research contributes to discourses on the persistent appeal of captivity narratives by examining a range of cultural productions across a variety of genres that represent Parker’s traumatic captivity narrative, giving particular attention to how their evolution over time reflects the specific cultural and historical contexts from which they emerge. The specific case studies I examine are: \textit{Cynthia Ann Parker: The Story of her Capture at the Massacre of}

\begin{flushleft}
\footnotesize
\textsuperscript{22} Varley, \textit{Americans Recaptured}, 10.  \\
\textsuperscript{23} Varley, \textit{Americans Recaptured}, 6.  \\
\textsuperscript{24} Varley, \textit{Americans Recaptured}, 22-23.  \\
\textsuperscript{25} Varley, \textit{Americans Recaptured}, 5-6.
\end{flushleft}
the Inmates of Parker's Fort, the first full-length historical text written about Parker’s experience by James T. DeShields in 1886; Cynthia Parker, a one-act opera composed by Julia Smith in 1939; The Searchers, a film starring John Wayne and directed by John Ford in 1956; White Comanche, a graphic novel written and illustrated by Jack Jackson in 1977; and Ride the Wind, a historical fiction novel written by Lucia St. Clair Robson in 1982. As examples of cultural trauma, together these representations demonstrate recurrent anxieties over gender, race, and citizenship.

Interpreting Parker’s Story

Nearly a century and a half after Parker rejoined Anglo society, another famous captivity narrative dominated national headlines as Private First-Class Jessica Lynch was retrieved from an Iraqi hospital where she was held as a prisoner of war for nine days in 2003. Like Parker, the heroic tale of Lynch’s rescue has been adapted into literature and film, and the narrative of Lynch’s captivity similarly focuses on the trauma she endured at the hands of her non-white captors. Unlike Parker, however, Lynch was able to give her own account of her experiences and has repeatedly denied that she endured traumatizing abuse by the hands of her captors. Despite Lynch’s objections, many narratives of her nine-day captivity continue to highlight an imagined mistreatment. In examining the lasting social implications of traumatic captivity narratives, this study unpacks their persistent appeal in American imaginations.

The trauma inherent in the hero/rescue narrative trope reinforces gendered Anglo-American social supremacy. Captivity narratives abuse women’s daily lived experiences as the targets of patriarchal violence that demands control over their bodies. The threat of

---

26 Boyle, "Rescuing Masculinity,” 151.
rape present within nearly all forms of the narratives helps reinforce gender and race
division by reminding women of their vulnerability and reinforcing notions of danger
associated with non-white men. Since they construct white men as heroes and rescuers of
white women, captivity narratives elevate specific forms of masculinity and femininity
that grant white men access to all women’s bodies and white women superior social
position in relation to members of marginalized racial and ethnic populations. My study
exposes the duplicitous reliance of captivity narratives upon the cultures of trauma in
which women and people of marginalized racial and ethnic groups live to maintain
systems of white masculine supremacy.

In addition to contributing to existing scholarship on trauma, gender
performativity, and racialization, my work also responds to calls from Native scholars to
raise attention to the lasting traumatic legacies left by settler colonialism on the North
American continent. Historian Lorenzo Veracini distinguishes between colonialism and
settler colonialism by noting that, while both systems involve the establishment of
dominance over Indigenous Peoples, the latter “covers its tracks” by symbolically erasing
the relationship of control through assimilation of the Native into the dominant culture.27
Recognizing this distinction, historian Frederick Hoxie challenges scholars to evaluate
the history of the United States through the settler colonial framework for the ways in
which it unmasks the dependence of nation building upon the consolidation of a national
racial identity.28 Interpretations of Parker’s captivity narrative offer a means to address

28 Hoxie, “Retrieving the Red Continent,” 1159.
this racialized process due to her position in both Anglo-American and Comanche communities.

As mentioned previously, Parker’s narrative has only ever appeared through Anglo authorship informed by sources provided by her Anglo family members and privileged by western epistemologies. This dissertation demonstrates how this influence affects not only the way in which authors construct Parker’s narrative, but the means by which Anglo-Americans appropriate the story for their own social benefit. The study exposes the need for alternative considerations of Parker’s narrative. Whereas Comanche oral tradition did not hold Parker in a position of high esteem beyond her role as Quanah’s mother, and Quanah himself entails complicated narratives of forced assimilation among contemporary members of the Comanche Nation, texts that tell of her captivity must include Comanche experiences and epistemologies in order to disrupt the settler colonial system. Admittedly, Parker’s narrative only exists as a product of settler colonialism and the truth of what she experienced remains forever lost to individual memory. Rather than simply stop writing her story, however, this dissertation acknowledges the possibility of a more ethical telling that addresses the trauma of the settler system.

Historical accounts of Parker’s captivity have undergone significant alteration as researchers compare the elements of her story that can be substantiated through evidence with those that rely on invention. Although reports circulated in newspapers immediately

29 As a woman, Parker held no significant social rank in Comanche society and her significance has been reinforced largely by Anglo-Americans. Most of what is known about her in Comanche narratives derives from Anglo sources. Many contemporary Comanche disapprove of celebrations of Quanah Parker because they interpret his assimilation as betrayal. This information obtained from Ron Parker, Personal Interview, in Person at Pease River Memorial Event, April 27, 2018.
following Parker’s return to Anglo society in late 1860, the first formal account of Parker’s story appeared in James T. DeShields’s *Cynthia Ann Parker: The Story of her Capture* in 1886, twenty-six years later. DeShields drew from first-hand accounts of the initial attack on Fort Parker in 1836 given by Victor M. Ross, Major John Henry Brown, and General Lawrence Sullivan Ross; the fight between Texas Rangers and Comanche at the Pease River where Parker was taken back into American custody in December 1860; and Parker’s life and subsequent death after her reintegration. As a result, much of DeShields’s version focuses on the men involved in efforts to ransom Parker from her initial captors rather than on Parker herself.

Cultural change in the twentieth century prompted new historical accounts of Parker’s narrative as the people who authored the studies and ideas about who should be written into history changed. Margaret Schmidt Hacker’s *Cynthia Ann Parker: The Life and the Legend*, published in 1990, best represents this shift. Although evidence from DeShields’s book appears in Hacker’s, her text focuses primarily on Parker, rather than the men responsible for her recovery from the Comanche. In addition, because Hacker’s account relies heavily on archival sources, she draws attention to how speculation and conjecture about Parker’s time with the Comanche have sometimes influenced the captivity narrative. For example, Hacker notes that newspaper accounts that associated scars on Parker’s arms with her cruel treatment among the Comanche overlooked the harsh realities of strenuous daily life for Comanche women and Comanche mourning.

---

30 DeShields, *Cynthia Ann Parker*.


32 Hacker, *Cynthia Ann Parker*. 
rituals.\textsuperscript{33} While Hacker’s use of archival sources provided a more robust historical account of Parker’s life, historian Arlette Farge reminds scholars that archives do not reveal an objective truth, but instead create opportunities for historians to “tell of the truth,” as they bring forward the often-competing perspectives documented in a variety of documents.\textsuperscript{34}

More recent presentations of Parker’s captivity have recognized these realities, informed as they are by poststructuralism’s influence on historiography, providing alternate approaches to the writing of her history.\textsuperscript{35} Two examples can be found in Jo Ella Powell Exley’s \textit{Frontier Blood: The Saga of the Parker Family}, published in 2001,\textsuperscript{36} and Glenn Frankel’s \textit{The Searchers: The Making of an American Legend}, published in 2013.\textsuperscript{37} Both Powell and Frankel draw from traditional textual sources, including DeShields and Hacker, but the authors also rely upon sources not often considered in previous studies: Powell consulted extensive manuscript sources for her story, and Frankel included unpublished manuscripts and filmography among his source material. The inclusion of new forms of evidence by these authors responds to critiques that have arisen as historians have turned their attention to the ways that interpretations are influenced by sources that are themselves imperfect constructions of subjective experiences.\textsuperscript{38}

\textsuperscript{33} Hacker, \textit{Cynthia Ann Parker}, 33. Hacker cites the \textit{Clarksville Northern Standard} (Texas) of April 6, 1861, but explains that Parker could have received her scars in her role as a Comanche wife and that they are not inherently the result of torture or mistreatment.

\textsuperscript{34} Arlette Farge, \textit{The Allure of the Archives} (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2013), 29.

\textsuperscript{35} Martha Howell and Walter Prevenier, \textit{From Reliable Sources: An Introduction to Historical Methods} (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 2001), 14-15.

\textsuperscript{36} Exley, \textit{Frontier Blood}.

\textsuperscript{37} Frankel, \textit{The Searchers}.

\textsuperscript{38} Howell and Prevenier, \textit{From Reliable Sources}, 149.
Settler Colonialism, Rememory, and Cultural Trauma

This dissertation confronts systemic inequities for members of marginalized racial, ethnic, and gender groups caused by the historical legacy of settler colonialism. I have, therefore, purposefully chosen terminology and vocabulary with the intent to expose the lasting social, political, and economic damage of a system that nurtures oppressive hierarchies. I adopt Patrick Wolfe’s definition of *settler colonialism* as an invasion of Indigenous land made apparent through social structure, not a single event.\(^{39}\) Unlike colonialism, in which an established nation temporarily occupies Indigenous territory in order to exploit the resources of the land and people, settler colonialism produces conditions which favor permanent occupation.\(^{40}\) The “logic of elimination” that characterizes settler colonialism manifests in a “land-centered project” that seeks to eradicate and replace Indigenous societies while simultaneously retrieving and appropriating elements of Native culture in order to establish and express independence from the original colonial state.\(^{41}\)

The American settler colonial system thrives on the maintenance of a racial hierarchy that creates advantages for people socially constructed as *white*. This dissertation demonstrates how cultural productions such as captivity narratives reinforce the idea that white Americans are the true and natural occupants of the North American continent. Historically, however, opinions of who is considered white have changed based on unique cultural and social contexts. For this reason I adopt the descriptive

\(^{40}\) Veracini, “Introducing Settler Colonial Studies,” 3.
\(^{41}\) Wolfe, “Settler Colonialism and the Elimination of the Native,” 389-393.
modifier *Anglo, Anglo settler, or Anglo-American* to refer to white, English-speaking people who have assumed the dominant social position within the American political system. This distinction recognizes the complicated nuances and evolutions of racial and ethnic identities in the United States and acknowledges a system in which people now considered to be white, such as Irish Americans or certain Francophone peoples, were raced differently at the time of their migration to the North American continent but who have assimilated into positions of power. Taking into consideration the preference of members of the Comanche Nation who informed this study, I adopt the term *Native people* or *Native peoples* to refer collectively to the Indigenous people who occupied the land that is now the United States prior to colonial invasion.

Parker’s captivity narrative promotes a settler colonial system that perpetuates *white supremacy* in the strict denotative understanding of the phrase. In using the term I draw upon critical race theory, which recognizes that living as a member of a privileged class that maintains its status through oppressive relationships with others differs from “being an oppressive person who behaves in oppressive ways.”

In this context, white supremacy indicates a more general and broader system of power than the social movement that seeks to violently promote the superiority of the white race as performed by members of neo-Nazi organizations, for example. In short, the settler colonial system in the United States perpetuates a structural advantage for people classified as white that reinforces their superiority over other racial and ethnic groups. As a scholar who benefits from this system due to my own social location as a white woman, I believe it necessary

---

to embrace such explicit language to address the uncomfortable truths of the persistent legacy of settler colonialism.

Captivity is an inherently violent and trauma-inducing experience and depictions of captivity offer a medium through which dominant Anglo-American settlers reshape the violence of their own actions against Native people into something “necessary” for progress and civilization. Such narratives erase the collective trauma experienced by Native people as they responded to the violent dispossession of their land, attempted annihilation of their cultural practices, and the extreme loss of life that characterize settler colonialism. Instead, the narratives focus on the personal trauma experienced by Anglo settlers, usually women. The result offers Anglo-Americans a means by which they transform the individual trauma experienced by the captive into a collective threat on all Anglo-Americans. In what trauma theorist Dominick LaCapra describes as “traumatropism,” this process transforms trauma “into the sublime or the sacred,” and makes “martyrs or saints” of the traumatized victim. As a social process dependent on symbolic distribution, cultural trauma develops as an “exercise of human agency” when groups of people who come to believe that their collective identity has been harmed in some way construct a traumatic narrative initiated by, but not directly linked to, some event. The purposeful mediation of traumatic circumstance through symbolic representation and collective memory offered through captivity narratives allows Anglo-Americans to construct their own cultural trauma from the settler colonial system.

Despite their presentation as biographies of captive Americans, the narratives maintain an

---

emphasis on the experience of captivity in ways that imply an ever-present threat. Anglo women like Parker offer the most popular victims in the captivity trope due to their ability to reinforce ideals of American identity through their simultaneous presentation as feminine in their psychological “frailty” and capture, yet masculine in the “independence and strength” upon which they draw to survive their experience. Captivity narratives thus commemorate the captivity, rather than the captive, and that commemoration becomes the “conduit” through which ideal “Americanness” is spread.

Captivity narratives underscore how people’s engagement with a traumatic past in cultural productions, which they believe to be presentations of history, shapes their collective identities. Indeed, as this dissertation illustrates, trauma becomes the very fulcrum around which collective identity – specifically white masculine identity – emerges, and symbolic recollections of trauma in the form of Parker’s captivity narrative shared in the public sphere create and reinforce group identity through a process of collective remembering. As art historian Kristine Stiles has argued, scholarship on trauma since the 1990s has provided space for “widespread application of trauma theory in the humanities and beyond.”

Cultural signs of trauma cannot be easily removed from the social context in which they appear. Narratives of Parker’s captivity are, themselves,

---

47 Fictionalized accounts of Parker’s traumatic narrative are frequently interpreted as historically accurate. For example, in its entertainment review of Julia Smith’s opera, *Cynthia Ann*, the February 27, 1939, edition of *Time* magazine applauded the show for providing a “true to fact” remaking of local history. Customer reviews of Lucia St. Clair Robson’s *Ride the Wind* said that the “deeply researched” romance novel taught them about Native American culture and American history. On the cover of his graphic novel, *White Comanche*, Jack Jackson boasts that his account is a “true story.” Responses such as these to cultural productions not intended to provide historical accuracy in the events they depict indicate that what counts as history for people is not limited to academic sources.
cultural signs of trauma, and as actual signs of trauma these narratives point to the actual trauma experienced by Parker. According to Stiles, cultures of trauma “denote traumatic circumstance manifest in culture – discernible at the intersection of aesthetic, political, and social experience” and “bear witness” to the ways in which trauma affects communities and people.⁴⁹ Stiles coined the term “cultures of trauma” to describe the existence of “representations and cultural productions emanating from social and political events located in, and imprinted with trauma.”⁵⁰ Stiles argues that the signs and symbols of psychological trauma pervade western cultural practices through active circulation within a social collective. I extend Stiles’s charge to help understand the cultural role of Parker’s story in the decades after her lived experience. Even observers not well versed in Comanche mourning practices of disfigurement can interpret Parker’s shorn hair and scars as symbols of personal trauma, even if they misappropriate the cause.

The analysis of Parker’s trauma narrative takes into consideration differences between cultures of trauma, as introduced by Stiles, and cultural trauma. According to sociologist Jeffrey Alexander, cultural trauma develops from a unique process of memory sharing prompted when a social group experiences a “horrendous event” that significantly alters their group identity and makes trauma a key feature of their shared experiences.⁵¹ More formally, cultural trauma is defined as “a memory accepted and

---

⁵⁰ Stiles, “Shaved Heads and Marked Bodies,” 47.
⁵¹ Jeffrey C. Alexander et al., Cultural Trauma and Collective Identity (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2004), 1.
publicly given credence by a relevant membership group” based on an event or situation in the past that is “a) laden with negative affect, b) represented as indelible, and c) regarded as threatening a society’s existence or violating one or more of its fundamental cultural presuppositions.” Cultural trauma evolves in the period of latency that follows an initiating event that, over time, becomes rhetorically linked to group identity. Ron Eyerman extends Alexander’s work by explaining how cultural trauma refers to “a dramatic loss of identity and meaning, a tear in the social fabric, affecting a group of people that has achieved some degree of cohesion.” Eyerman argues that as a process, cultural trauma seeks to “reconstitute or reconfigure” group identity through “collective representation” in order to repair “the tear in the social fabric.”

Collective memory plays an essential role in the construction of cultural trauma. Eyerman explains that, in regard to slavery in the United States, “the memory of slavery and its representation through speech and art works” grounds African American group identity. Similarly, Anglo-Americans rely on the memory of frontier captivity narratives to reinterpret the past in a way that shapes a collective wound to their group identity. Cultural trauma is established by “carrier groups” that claim a “fundamental injury” to their collective identity in a rhetorical process that establishes the specific nature of their pain and attributes responsibility to an “antagonist” who caused the injury. Within the cultural trauma process, carrier groups also establish the “nature of the victim” by linking

52 Alexander et al., Cultural Trauma and Collective Identity, 44.
54 Eyerman, Cultural Trauma, 4.
55 Eyerman, Cultural Trauma, 2.
56 Alexander, Trauma: A Social Theory, 18-19.
identity characteristics of those who experienced the initiating event first-hand with those of a wider collective who, although they do not maintain first-person memories of the event, retain similar identity characteristics.\textsuperscript{57} This shaping of the “master narrative” represents a subjective process dominated by agents who hold social power. This dissertation examines the different iterations of Parker’s narrative across historical time periods in order to reveal the way that white carrier groups have negotiated and renegotiated the traumatic claim, attribution of responsibility, and nature of the victim. In effect, Anglo-American authors of Parker’s narrative have appropriated her personal trauma and the collective trauma inflicted upon Comanche by Anglo settler dispossession into a loss of their own in a rhetorical reshaping of Parker’s lived experiences such that the periodic reappearance of Parker’s narrative serves to reinforce a misconstrued cultural trauma for Anglo-Americans.

The kidnapping of Parker from her Anglo family demonstrated Anglo settler men’s inability to ensure the safety of women and children under their protection and drew attention to the danger of the settler colonial mission. Narratives of Parker’s capture reinterpret the event and harness it as a collective trauma for white Americans invested in forming a national identity. Patriarchal settler communities depended upon white womanhood for the advancement and continuation of the colonizing mission. White mothers in particular not only offered the means by which Anglo civilization spread, their presence on the frontier signified a taming influence upon white men – a respectable feminine balance to the rugged masculinity required to bring the land under Anglo control. \textit{Parker’s captivity narrative rhetorically constructs her removal from her Anglo...}

\textsuperscript{57} Alexander, \textit{Trauma: A Social Theory}, 18.
family as a symbol of the collective trauma experienced by Anglo-Americans who claim her loss as a wound to their social order. The process that creates cultural trauma depends upon symbolic reinforcement of group identity in the public sphere. The sharing of Parker’s traumatic captivity narrative through multiple generations reinforces the original fear of loss by generating an empathic response that perpetuates Anglo-American fear of racialized Others. My analysis exposes a previously unaddressed permutation of cultural trauma by revealing how perpetrators of trauma can swap positionality with victims in order to employ trauma narratives strategically in the service of building a collective national identity.

Periodic circulation of Parker’s captivity narrative has transformed her personal trauma into a cultural trauma for Anglo-Americans. Parker’s capture from Fort Parker on May 19, 1836, certainly produced fear and anxiety for her family and friends at the fort and no doubt left them traumatized. The first narrative of the event, however, did not appear until fifty years later. The resurrection of the Fort Parker attack through the vehicle of Parker’s captivity narrative responded to Anglo anxiety about shifts in social power following the Civil War and, as this study demonstrates, each version of the traumatic captivity narrative corresponds to similar anxieties present in the period in which it appears. Rhetorically, the narrative conflates the traumatic experiences of Parker with a wound to Anglo society: in the same way that they most often attributed the visible marks of trauma on Parker’s body to evidence of her torture among the Comanche, Anglo-Americans have used her captivity as justification for white supremacy against
primitive foes. Native people understand the marks differently— as indicators of Parker’s self-expression of despair over being removed from her Comanche family.

Cultural trauma theory centers around how original traumas are represented in collective memory as a means of signifying membership in a social group. By drawing attention to the process through which cultural trauma emerges, Alexander creates space to reconstruct the symbols that communicate collective trauma and revise the traumatic narrative so that it alters group identity. Since cultural trauma is symbolically constructed through strategic rhetoric, Alexander argues that reframing of the master narrative can “redirect” the message toward “new forms of moral responsibility” when an existing narrative is exposed as problematic. In the case of captivity narratives, this idea suggests that strategic re-telling can place emphasis on the cultural trauma experienced by Native people rather than falsely claim an injury to Anglo-Americans. Stiles’s notion of cultures of trauma complicates Alexander’s idea that cultural trauma can be overcome through strategic symbolic reconstruction. Stiles argues that signs of a culture of trauma, such as a shaved head or scarred body, cannot be separated so easily from the social forces and collective memory that attaches meaning to the symbols. For centuries white authors have drawn upon the power provided by the settler colonial culture of trauma to shape a narrative that names Anglo settlers as victims of Native people’s aggressive behavior. This tradition is not as easily undone as Alexander’s process implies. Stiles

58 Frankel, The Searchers, 78.
60 Alexander, Trauma: A Social Theory, 98.
61 Alexander, Trauma: A Social Theory, 30.
notes that “[n]either an individual nor individuated groups of self-selected people can escape the history of cultural tradition by merely claiming to have done so.”

The agency to construct a cultural trauma depends upon the resources available to a group. Carrier groups benefit from easier access to the means of narrative production. For this reason, Anglo authors have historically had an advantage in the crafting of captivity narratives. Parker never wrote her own story, and her captivity narrative has always been shared by Anglo authors. Individuals, regardless of social status, are therefore “born into” stories passed down through historical agents who control the resources. Contextual changes over time affect how stories are told and for what purposes, as demonstrated by the various authors and genres in which Parker’s story has appeared. Regardless of when and how the narrative appears, all versions reveal the way in which agents of a particular time draw upon a useable past to confront issues in their present timeline. Collective trauma, therefore, is not a specific or guaranteed outcome of a violent event, but rather a “challenge to meaning” that produces collective anxiety.

This dissertation also therefore draws upon Maurice Halbwachs’s theory of collective memory, which addresses how memory is shared, processed, and transferred symbolically between groups of people through a process of memorialization. Whereas collective memories allude to historical events, groups derive meaning from history based upon interpretations of their needs and interests within the present.

---

62 Stiles, *Shaved Heads and Marked Bodies*, 64.
64 Alexander, *Trauma: A Social Theory*, 15.
66 Eyerman, *Cultural Trauma and Collective Memory*, 7.
Throughout this dissertation, I argue that Parker’s captivity narrative has become a device by which fear of similar trauma and loss shape expectations of ideal masculine and feminine behavior among Anglo-Americans through an interlacing of gender and race. The theories of cultural trauma and cultures of trauma offer a useful lens for examining how Parker’s trauma narrative has been appropriated as a collective loss for Anglo-Americans since it is the sharing of her individual trauma that endears her to those who encounter her story in historical accounts. My concern with texts that create a useable past for their audiences makes space for the inclusion of non-typical historical sources. Recent scholarship increasingly recognizes that interpretations of the past are “sharpened” when historians include a variety of source material. Lori Ann Garner argues that historical narratives in all forms hold great value and challenges scholars to reconsider what counts as history in order to expand historical research methodology. In their groundbreaking study of how Americans learn about the past, *The Presence of the Past: Popular Uses of History in American Life* (1998), Roy Rosenzweig and David Thelen note that people encounter history in a variety of formats, not all of which are academic. In addition to seeking history in a variety of formats, Rosenzweig and Thelen observe that people use the past to “shape the present and imagine a future.”

---

67 Reviews of fictional literature about Parker available at online purchase sites often express sadness over the horrific experiences that are narrated in the stories. Readers often note that they cried when they read her story.
concept of the useable past provides the justification for analyzing artifacts within the contexts of their production.

The appearance of Parker’s narrative in a variety of genres throughout the nineteenth and twentieth centuries provides a wealth of primary source material. In identifying texts for this study, I specifically chose those that offered opportunities to observe how genre affected the sharing of Parker’s story. The inclusion of historical text, opera, film, graphic novel, and fiction demonstrates the broad appeal of captivity narratives throughout American history and among diverse audiences and social contexts. To supplement the primary texts, I include observations made as a participant in a memorial event for Parker hosted by the Quanah Parker Society. This annual event at the Pease River location at which Texas Rangers recaptured Parker offers researchers and curious Anglo-Americans an opportunity to learn from Parker’s Comanche descendants. I obtained additional primary historical sources from the Julia Smith Collection, held at the University of North Texas, and Baylor University’s Texas Collection, which contains the “Jack and Gloria Parker Selden Collection,” that documents the activities of the Parker family and includes several artifacts related to Parker.

**Chapter Outline**

This dissertation is organized chronologically based on significant cultural shifts that influenced a number of returns to Parker’s narrative in popular culture. Varley argues that such historical periodization offers an effective means of determining how “the function of [a] genre has changed over time,” which is a goal of this analysis.\(^\text{72}\)

Additionally, since the study examines the performance of gender and issues related to

race, it is important to recognize that women’s and marginalized populations’ experiences and social locations depend upon shifts in historical and cultural contexts.73

Chapter two, “Recaptured Memories,” analyzes James T. DeShields’s original historical account from 1886, Cynthia Ann Parker, in order to show how captivity narratives re-emerged as a tool of American identity construction after the close of the frontier era. At the turn of the twentieth century, to overcome the effects of modernism, Progressive Era Anglo-Americans looked to romanticized stories about their conquest of Native people in order to celebrate their cultural superiority and reinforce Anglo-American dominance.74 The chapter demonstrates how DeShields’s narrative drew upon the function of myth to alleviate anxiety produced by perceived threats to Anglo men’s dominant social position. I argue that DeShields’s narrative helped manage shifts in gender norms by reaffirming the right of Anglo men to maintain their dominant status as the founders and protectors of civilization. The chapter teases out notions of manhood that shaped understandings of Americanism in the period and shows how a collective trauma for Anglo-Americans develops from rhetorical artifacts that appropriate Parker’s traumatic experience.

In the third chapter, “Pioneering Nostalgia in the Period Between the World Wars,” I reveal how social advancement for women in between World Wars I and II created space for alternative imagining of Parker’s narrative. Julia Smith’s one-act opera, Cynthia Parker reveals the persistent negative effects of a settler colonial system that

privileges Anglo-American hegemonic masculinity. Smith took extreme creative license with her interpretation of Parker’s narrative and altered the timeline and ending in a way that centered the experience on Parker herself and demonstrated sympathy for the displacement and dispossession of Native people. I argue that, despite these features, Smith’s version perpetuates negative stereotypes of Native people that ultimately affirm white supremacy.

Chapter four, “Searching for Lost Masculinity,” examines how an interpretation of Parker’s captivity narrative helped to redefine Anglo-American masculinity following World War II. As reflected in John Ford’s film, The Searchers, alterations in women’s roles in the workplace necessitated during the war created a social need to remind women of their femininity. Concurrently, demands for equal rights and integration threatened to uproot the long-standing dominance of Anglo-American men. Ford’s film drew upon the mythos of the American cowboy to shape a version of masculinity for Anglo men who returned home traumatized from World War II.

The final textual analysis in chapter five, “Appropriating Cultural Trauma,” includes Jack Jackson’s graphic novel, “White Comanche” written in 1977, and Lucia St. Clair Robson’s novel Ride the Wind from 1982 to address changes in Parker’s narrative brought about during the development of social movements rooted in identity politics. In the wake of the Civil Rights, anti-war, feminist, and Red Power movements of the 1970s and development of New Age ideology in the 1980s, the shaping of Parker’s story turned toward a celebration of Native culture. This chapter examines those changes in the context of the effects of settler colonialism. During this period, Parker’s narrative appeared in a variety of new forms that included visual art. I argue that these sources
expose how, even when intended to be resistive, narratives about captivity often perpetuate dangerous stereotypes and serve to bolster the privilege of Anglo authors.
CHAPTER II
RECAPTURED MEMORIES

Cynthia Ann Parker’s life ended in 1870 when her body succumbed to the effects of influenza at the home of her sister Orlena O’Quinn.¹ Parker’s story began fourteen years later when her only living son, Quanah Parker, published a request for a photo of his mother and baby sister in the June 1884 edition of the Fort Worth Daily Gazette.² Quanah’s request revived Texans’ interest in his mother’s captivity narrative and inspired James T. DeShields to write the earliest historical account of Parker’s captivity by Comanche and her eventual return to her Anglo family twenty-four years later.³ Since DeShields’s 1886 publication numerous historians have taken up Parker’s story, and, 133 years later, her captivity narrative has appeared in a variety of genres and adaptations, including opera, fiction, graphic novel, and film. The persistent appeal of Parker’s captivity narrative in its different manifestations contradicts historian Molly K. Varley’s assumption that the “pathetic” end of her tale somehow made her story “less appealing” than other such narratives.⁴

¹ Margaret Schmidt Hacker, Cynthia Ann Parker: The Life and the Legend (El Paso: Texas Western Press, 1990), 35. (Hacker 1990)
³ James T. DeShields, Cynthia Ann Parker: The story of her capture at the massacre of the inmates of Parker’s Fort; of her quarter of a century spent among the Comanches, as the wife of the war chief, Peta Nocona; and of her recapture at the battle of Pease River, by Captain L.S. Ross, of the Texian rangers (St. Louis: Printed for the Author, 1886), vi.
This chapter demonstrates how DeShields’s narrative functions as a text that processed, managed, and alleviated a shared trauma brought on by Gilded Age and Progressive Era changes in attitudes about democracy, belonging, and citizenship. Interdisciplinary trauma studies scholarship illustrates how Parker’s captivity narrative reflected social anxiety of the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth century America. The narrative helped manage shifts in gender norms, worry over indigeneity, and the closing of the frontier. Ultimately the narrative served to re-establish white male authority. An examination of DeShields’s text reveals how mythmaking drew on the constitutive power of collective memory to construct a cultural trauma for Anglo American men when radical social change threatened to overturn their position of dominance. The chapter begins with a historical contextualization of the narrative, offers a review of how myth functions within the text, and reveals how symbolic reinforcement of public memory helped shape ideas about group trauma.

The revival of interest among Texans in Parker’s captivity narrative at the turn of the twentieth century mirrored a pattern of resurgence of the genre across the nation. Literary scholar Roy Harvey Pearce describes the typology of captivity narratives and explains how they evolved over time to reflect the needs of the society in which they were produced.5 Although interest in the genre waxed and waned with changes in cultural contexts, the traditional formula of nearly all captivity narratives follows a predictable sequence that begins with a description of a bloody attack on Anglo settlers by Native people, includes gruesome descriptions of death, violence, and the captivity of

at least one member of the settler community, and concludes with a heroic rescue.\footnote{Varley, \textit{Americans Recaptured}, 46.} According to Pearce, captivity narratives underwent three distinct shifts in purpose since the birth of the genre during British colonial occupation of America. Pearce notes that initial versions produced in the late-seventeenth and early-eighteenth centuries were “Puritan religious documents” designed to “demonstrate God’s goodness and mercy” and justify Anglo settlement as a Divine right, while narratives penned in the mid-eighteenth century focused more on the cruelty inflicted upon captives by Native people.\footnote{Varley, \textit{Americans Recaptured}, 45-46.} These versions served to “engender hatred for Indian enemies” during the shift from British rule to American self-sufficiency and played an important part in early United States’ nation building by constructing violence by Native people as uncivilized savagery, while the violence of settler dispossession was framed as morally justified and necessary for the growth of the country.\footnote{Varley, \textit{Americans Recaptured}, 46.} By the twentieth century, captivity narratives returned to the more “straightforward” style of the earliest versions but included a slight variation in format.\footnote{Varley, \textit{Americans Recaptured}, 46.}

During the early period of American colonization, captivity narratives helped justify the inherent violence and dispossession that organized the American economy, settlement, and political structure.\footnote{Ned Blackhawk, \textit{Violence Over the Land: Indians and Empires in the Early American West} (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2008).} Narratives written in the latter part of the nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries followed the traditional pattern but also included detailed Anglo settler family histories and lengthy descriptions of geography and location.\footnote{Varley, \textit{Americans Recaptured}, 46.} Cruelty and savagery remained significant features of these narratives, but did not appear in the stories “until well after the historical importance of the event or captured person

\footnote{Varley, \textit{Americans Recaptured}, 46.}
had been established through connection to a contemporary place or community or family.”

This feature provided the narratives with an additional feeling of authenticity by establishing the legitimacy of the Anglo settlers as founders of civilization. Additionally, authors of captivity narratives during the early 20th century focused on “historical fact” rather than sensationalized violence and sought to demonstrate the truthfulness of their narratives. The primary purpose of the captivity narrative shifted from establishing an enemy of Native people to confirming the legitimacy of a nation established through violent origins.

DeShields’s publication of Parker’s captivity narrative corresponds with social anxiety brought on by the close of the frontier era and follows the pattern of other early 20th century narratives. In what historians commonly classify as the Progressive Era, roughly 1890 to the 1920s, fears of a cultural crisis that would cause the decline of democracy spurred by rapid industrialization and the quick growth of urban areas prompted reform efforts that sought to restore a sense of lost “morality and civic purity.” These fears originated with dramatic shifts in the US economy and labor market. In 1840, seventy percent of the US labor force consisted of agricultural workers but by 1900 that number decreased to thirty-seven percent as manufacturing labor increased. Prominent social theories of the early Progressive Era such as Frederick Jackson Turner’s momentous lecture on “The Significance of the Frontier in American

---

12 Varley, Americas Recaptured, 47.
13 Varley, Americas Recaptured, 47
14 Varley, Americas Recaptured, 50.
History,” delivered in 1893, and Theodore Roosevelt’s narrative history *The Winning of the West*, published between 1885 and 1894, credited westward exploration and agrarian Anglo settlement with successful American nation building. Roosevelt’s sentiments in particular reflected the general belief that a distinctive American culture developed out of the “hard conditions of life in the wilderness.” Progressives feared that the fledgling American nation would deteriorate as people abandoned farming and “settled into decadent, corrupt city life” brought on by the effects of a modernist economy that pulled citizens from established agrarian areas into national and regional urban areas. DeShields’s narrative strongly reflects this attitude. The author praises the Parker family’s determination to leave urbanization in the east in order to help “penetrate” and tame the wild lands of Texas through agrarian settlement.

Anglo American men in particular needed to demonstrate strength of character in the absence of a frontier experience that some believed facilitated their personal development “through strife” and “through hard and dangerous” work. In the early part of the nineteenth century ideas of “testing and proving one’s manhood” flourished in the wake of threats to Anglo men’s social positions. Historian Ronald Takaki noted that the turn of the century “generated cycles of economic instability, massive unemployment,

---

21 Dorsey and Harlow, “We Want Americans Pure and Simple,” 58.
and production gluts” that resulted in “[s]ocial unrest and violent class conflicts.”23 Migration toward urban centers by southern blacks and immigration increased labor competition and resuscitated feelings of “moral and physical dangers” associated with “unsavory strangers” that previously characterized the clash between Anglo settlers and Native people in the frontier zone.24 At the same time, wealthy, educated, Anglo women entered the public sphere in new ways. The independent “New Woman” drew from traditional ideas of women as “moral guides” to vocalize desires for radical social change as they rallied for suffrage and prohibition.25 The expansion of equal rights and the public presence of immigrants, African Americans, and women threatened Anglo American men’s dominant social position.

Sociologist Michael Kimmel notes that ideas about “manhood” are socially constructed and women and marginalized masculinities often become “screens” against which straight, middle-class, native born, Anglo men measure their own character, and upon which they project their fears of inadequacy.26 When threatened, dominant groups often push back and reassert their superiority. Kimmel argues that the performance of such “hegemonic masculinity” by Anglo American men has social and psychological consequences “in the relationships between different groups throughout our history.”27 Progressive Era captivity narratives offered a means by which “anti-modern” sentiments could look back at a mythic frontier experience to remind Americans that Anglo men

23 Takaki, A Different Mirror, 209-210.
24 Varley, Americans Recaptured, 37.
25 Varley, Americans Recaptured, 37
26 Kimmel, Manhood in America, 4.
27 Kimmel, Manhood in America, 2-4.
remained important figures in American culture. Male Parker family members in DeShields’s narrative served as models for men to emulate.

Stylistic changes to captivity narratives in the early 20th century also reflected a shift in the relationship dynamic between Anglo settlers and Native people. Federal removal and relocation programs instituted between 1828 and 1887 pushed tribes onto western reservations in order to make way for Anglo settlement. Legislation such as the 1871 Indian Appropriation Act denied tribal sovereignty and facilitated a boom of Anglo migration via newly laid railroad tracks across the western United States. Railroads initiated the destruction of buffalo herds upon which many western tribes depended and the influx of Anglo settlers proved impossible to dislodge once their settlements closed in available open spaces with fences, roads, and houses. Industrial growth in the west proved difficult for Native people to resist without significant cultural adaptation. Under such pressure tribal leaders often reluctantly agreed to surrender rather than suffer further loss through war. The Comanche, among whom Parker spent the majority of her life, resisted until June 2, 1875, when Parker’s son, Quanah led the last remaining band of Comanche to live on a reservation in Oklahoma. As removal and relocation gave way to assimilation and allotment programs that stripped many Native people of their remaining land rights, the threat of attack waned and Anglo settlers simply had no further need to fear Native people.

28 Varley, Americans Recaptured, 33.
29 Takaki, A Different Mirror, 95.
31 Jo Ella Powell Exley, Frontier Blood: The Saga of the Parker Family (College Station: University of Texas A&M Press, 2001), 261.
32 Varley, Americans Recaptured, 47.
This was the context in which DeShields revived Parker’s traumatic captivity narrative. DeShields credited the motivation for his book to Quanah’s search for his mother’s photograph and boasted that he “laboriously and with much pains-taking, sifted out and evolved” his tale of “plain, unvarnished facts.” Although reports circulated in newspapers immediately following Parker’s celebrated return to Anglo society in late 1860, DeShields’s book was the first formal, comprehensive account of her captivity narrative. Primary source material for DeShields’s book derived from personal interviews with Lawrence Sullivan “Sul” Ross, the man credited with finding Parker, and was supplemented by notes provided by other military and government leaders and Parker family members. DeShields’s book has been much quoted in the years since its publication and it forms the foundation of many later accounts and cultural productions analyzed in subsequent chapters. The book, however, has received criticism for perpetuating misinformation through “fabrications, altered reports, and refashioned diaries.” Culturally, DeShields’s narrative helped to define Americanism as a racialized identity achieved through gendered performance. The book allowed Progressive Era Anglo men to resolve perceived social problems that threatened their position of dominance by manufacturing a solution from a historical event. Lessons from Deshields’s frontier narrative helped legitimize Anglo men’s position of power in the early 20th century by drawing on a mythic frontier experience in which men like them were heroes.

33 DeShields, Cynthia Ann Parker, vi.
34 DeShields, Cynthia Ann Parker, vi.
Mythmaking and Cultural Identity

Araminta McClellan Taulman, member of the Parker family, once said that “there have been more different erroneous stories written and printed about Cynthia Ann Parker than any other person who ever lived in Texas.” Historians Paul H. Carlson and Tom Crum agree with Taulman and suggest that DeShields’s book contributes to this problem. In particular, Carlson and Crum argue that DeShields’s account of Parker’s “highly dramatic and sentimental return” to her Anglo family became an often repeated “popular and happy success story” that failed to account for the realities of Parker’s life.

DeShields’s narrative strips Parker’s story of veracity and reframes it in the style of “legend, and folklore” in a way that allows her captivity narrative to function as a mythic origin story.

Mythmaking plays an important role in captivity narratives. Framing captivity narratives as a triumph over savagery helped define Americanism at the turn of the century during a period of social and cultural unease. While earlier versions of captivity narratives helped establish a collective American identity, the violence inherent in nation building “must be repaired by a story of heroism” that often requires the insertion of individual family stories to “create continuity between the collective long ago and the now.” Narratives such as DeShields’s inserted these notions of heroism and bolstered the social position of dominant Anglo men through mythmaking. Literary scholars Rene Wellek and Austin Warren define myth as “any anonymously composed story telling of origins and destinies” that offers explanations “of why the world is and why we do as we do.”

---

37 Carlson and Crum, “The ‘Battle’ at Pease River,” 34.
38 Carlson and Crum, “The ‘Battle’ at Pease River,” 34.
39 Varley, Americans Recaptured, 3-4.
Myths “become the touchstones for human behavior within a community and the criteria for meaning in that community’s existence.” DeShields draws upon the experiences of the Parker family settlers to remind Anglo Americans of their importance in both the creation and maintenance of American democracy. Based on DeShields’s interpretation of events, without the Parker family’s determination to settle the Texas frontier, civilization would have given way to primitive savagery. The revival of Parker’s captivity narrative reminds Anglo readers of the need to reassert their dominance in order to maintain the health of the nation established by “daring and hardy pioneers.” As a source of “powerful epistemological rhetoric,” myths reveal a community’s fundamental ideologies about “identity, morality, religion, and law.” Progressive Era captivity narratives offered community members a vision “of social structures, domestic organizations, and worldviews” that helped them understand “how women and men could and should relate to one another.”

DeShields’s interpretation of Parker’s captivity narrative uses the rhetorical features of mythmaking to reinforce an idealized American society that maintains patriarchal white supremacy. Cultural critic and historian Richard Slotkin claims that mythic narratives consist of three basic elements: the universe, the protagonist, and the narrative. The universe describes the environment in which the story takes place and typically offers incentive for an agent to take action. The protagonist represents the hero

---

41 Dorsey and Harlow, “We Want Americans,” 62.
43 Dorsey and Harlow, “We Want Americans,” 62.
of the narrative and “becomes the archetype with whom the audience can identify.”\textsuperscript{46} The protagonist’s behavior in the narrative communicates what is expected for success in the community. Finally, the narrative itself shares the moral lesson of the story and establishes a common goal for community members.\textsuperscript{47} Applying Slotkin’s criteria to DeShields’s narrative reveals how the text drew upon the power of myth to reinforce hegemonic ideals of Americanism.

In establishing the universe for Parker’s captivity narrative, DeShields follows the typical pattern of early 20\textsuperscript{th} century captivity narratives. The preface and opening chapter ensure authenticity, provide an extensive geographical description of the location of Parker’s Fort and establish the Parker family as brave adventurers who bring the hope of civilization to unsettled land.\textsuperscript{48} In the preface, DeShields bolsters the validity of his narrative by describing the primary sources from which he obtained information and assuring readers that the account warrants their trust. The close of the preface promises that a reader “is not reading fiction, but facts which form only a part of the tragic and romantic history of the Lone Star State.”\textsuperscript{49} This statement corresponds to the determination of early 20\textsuperscript{th} century captivity authors to authenticate their stories and draws on the pathos of the origin of Texas forty years prior to establish a connection between past and present. With this foundation in place, DeShields begins his first chapter by explaining the historical importance of both the fort location at the edge of the frontier and of the Parker family’s settlement.

\textsuperscript{46} Dorsey and Harlow, “We Want Americans,” 62
\textsuperscript{47} Dorsey and Harlow, “We Want Americans,” 62
\textsuperscript{49} DeShields, \textit{Cynthia Ann Parker}; vi.
In order to bolster the inherent right of the Parker family to the land they occupied, DeShields dedicates four pages of his short text for geographical and family information. The text briefly tracks the Parker family’s migration from Tennessee in 1818 through Illinois and into Texas in 1833. In addition to establishing the family’s strength through their determination to stay in Texas, DeShields mentions that they “belonged to one branch of the primitive Baptist church,” thus rooting them in a morally superior position for his predominantly Anglo-Christian audience.\(^{50}\) The text includes a detailed description of the layout of the fort and a full census of every Parker family member who resided therein. DeShields equates the Anglo settlers to spiritual caretakers of the Texas frontier where they “engaged in the avocations of a rural life” such as farming and hunting in “Arcadian simplicity, virtue, and contentment.”\(^{51}\) Anglo settlement disrupted existing Indigenous social structures, lifestyles, and religious practices. This rhetorical move by DeShields erases the violence of settler dispossession and grants Divine authority to Anglo settlers’ encroachment on Native people. The narrative helped assure Anglo Americans that they had the moral blessing to maintain their social dominance.

DeShields positions Anglo settlers as the \textit{protagonists} in Parker’s narrative. As the primary heroes of the story, the Anglo settlers of the Parker family become a model for others to imitate. The residents of Fort Parker are “hardy sons of toil” who spend their days cultivating the fields outside the fort and their nights resting peacefully within its walls.\(^{52}\) The settlers display the physical and spiritual characteristics that Progressive Era

\(^{50}\) DeShields, \textit{Cynthia Ann Parker}, 9.
\(^{51}\) DeShields, \textit{Cynthia Ann Parker}, 11-12.
reformers hoped to instill in the American population. Women in the Parker family attend to the domestic chores inside the fort and men labor in the fields and ensure the safety of the women and children. DeShields attributes any maliciousness to Native people and credits the Parker family settlers for serving as the “advance guard of civilization.”

DeShields’s account of the attack on Fort Parker during which Parker and four other family members were taken captive provides an idealized vision of manhood. This modeled masculinity responds to fears regarding the perceived cultural degeneration brought about by increased immigration and the more public roles of racially marginalized people and women that were characteristic of the Progressive Era. The heroes of the story demonstrate courage in the face of death, physical strength, clear thinking in the wake of chaos, and the ability to suspend emotion. True to the period’s notions of healthy masculinity, any behaviors that contradict these equate to moral weakness.

On the morning of the attack on Fort Parker, ten men and one boy went to work in the fields quite some distance from the safety of the fort while six men and approximately twenty-five women and children remained in the fort. At approximately ten o’clock in the morning the working men and those busy in the fort were taken off guard when a large group of Comanche accompanied by members of other local tribes reached close proximity to the fort undetected. DeShields’s description of the Native people in this

53 DeShields, Cynthia Ann Parker, 12.
54 Kimmel, Manhood in America, pp. 102-104 provides an explanation about how notions of “manhood” evolved during the Progressive Era in response to claims of hyper-feminization introduced by immigrants, racial minorities, and women during the period.
55 See Kimmel, Manhood in America, for discussion about the fear of the “sissy” among Progressive Era men (104).
56 Hacker, Frontier Blood, 53.
57 Hacker, Frontier Blood, 53.
initial encounter reflects racist and xenophobic anxieties of the era. According to the narrative, the Comanche men wave a white flag of peace, ask for directions to a nearby campsite, and request some beef to eat while “artfully feigning the treacherous semblance of friendship.”58 The narrative describes the Comanche men as mimicking the “servile sycophancy of a slave” and equates them to “the Italian who embraces his victim ere plunging the poniard into his heart.”59 When Benjamin Parker, one of the six men inside the fort, refuses to comply with their requests for assistance, DeShields explains that the Comanche men kill him and then charge the fort once “their savage instincts [are] aroused by the sight of blood.”60 These descriptions establish the Comanche as antithetical villains to the Anglo settler heroes of Fort Parker.

DeShields’s narrative allows Anglo men to demonstrate their heroic masculinity by juxtaposing their performance against a racialized interpretation of Native men. In the Progressive Era, beginning around 1890, Anglo Americans became “obsessed with the connection between manhood and racial dominance.”61 This feeling carried over from extreme racial unrest during the Reconstruction Period following the Civil War. When the war ended in 1865, emancipation of African American slaves produced anxiety over the potential “destabilizing force” they would have on American society.62 Racial stereotypes of African Americans produced in literary propaganda served to maintain a social divide between Anglo and African Americans.63 In “a wave of toxic racism,” many

58 DeShields, Cynthia Ann Parker, 13.
59 DeShields, Cynthia Ann Parker, 14.
60 DeShields, Cynthia Ann Parker, 14.
of these stereotypes were transferred to Native people during the early 20th century when Anglo Americans again felt the threat of social destabilization. People in the period began to explain ideal manhood by linking gender and race through discourse that promoted the racial supremacy of civilized white men. The presence of “the Indian” in the frontier environment presented “the most terrifying evil” against which heroic Anglo settlers fought. Many accounts reduced Native people to a form of “preternaturally animalistic” humanity. DeShields’s depiction of the Comanche party’s loss of control after the death of Benjamin Parker renders them as violently unpredictable as a shark following a blood scent. According to DeShields’s narrative the Comanche men also exhibit undesirable, stereotyped characteristics of treachery and laziness commonly associated with African Americans and immigrants in the Progressive period. Thus, Native people on the Texas frontier existed as the ultimate challenge for industrious Anglo settlers. Dorsey and Harlow explained that “[t]o knowingly set oneself up against such evil demanded great courage;” a trait essential to the American man. The ethics of the Progressive Era reformer suggested that if a man could successfully overcome the dangers of the hostile frontier experience then he was worthy of representing the ideal American. DeShields’s book provided the model to follow.

In contrast to the villainous Comanche, the settler men at Fort Parker exhibit the highest standards of American masculinity. The Parker men demonstrate their courage by facing death in the willing defense of the women and children at the fort. DeShields uses the word “brave” seven times in the brief narrative to describe the Parker settlers and

65 Dorsey and Harlow, “We Want Americans,” 67.
67 Dorsey and Harlow, “We Want Americans,” 67.
other Anglo men. At the onset of the attack, “[b]rave Silas Parker” dies just outside the fort “while he was gallantly fighting to save Mrs. Plummer.”68 Samuel M. Frost and his son Robert, who are also in the fort at the time of the attack, “met their fate while heroically defending the women and children inside the stockade.”69 Some of the men outside the fort also receive credit for their courage. One of the Parker men successfully escorts his family five miles down the nearby Navasota River away from the fort, and neighbor David Faulkenberry defends Parker’s mother, Lucy Parker, and two of her children from a smaller band of Comanche who break off from the larger group to collect captives.70

The men of Fort Parker further demonstrate their manhood by showing their physical strength, maintaining clear thought in the wake of chaos following the attack, and through their successful suppression of emotion in the aftermath. Surviving men receive the credit for collecting the wounded after the Comanche party depart, a feat that requires carrying injured people in their arms long distances to safety. Abraham Anglin and Evan Faulkenberry, neighbors to the fort, return to the stockade to “get provisions and horses and to look after the dead.”71 Such descriptions establish the Anglo men at the fort as heroes of the story and project a standard for other would-be heroes to follow.

As was typical of early 20th century frontier narratives, some women exhibit idealized American character as well by behaving in masculine ways. Although she becomes one of the captives, Rachel Plummer, Parker’s cousin, “made a most manful

---

70 DeShields, *Cynthia Ann Parker*, 17.
resistance” after Silas Parker dies trying to protect her.\textsuperscript{72} Plummer’s fight with her captors demonstrates Progressive Era captivity narratives’ goal of reminding “readers that the moral virtue in the United States came from ‘manly’ behavior” where “manhood” became linked not to biological sex but to character.\textsuperscript{73} Likewise, members of other racial groups could prove themselves worthy of praise by demonstrating acceptable civilized behavior. DeShields’s narrative provides such an example through the account of Tonkawa chief, Placido, a “faithful and implicitly trusted friend of the whites.”\textsuperscript{74} Placido fights as an ally with Texas Rangers against Comanche and, despite his Native identity, DeShields documents that he “conducted himself throughout the series of engagements with the bearing of a savage hero.”\textsuperscript{75} Like the Anglo men at Fort Parker, DeShields describes Placido as “brave” and even equates him and his warriors to chivalrous medieval knights.\textsuperscript{76} Importantly, however, DeShields’s narrative adeptly avoids placing Placido on equal footing with Anglo soldiers. Placido and his warriors, although “brave,” also fight like “demons,” and Placido ultimately fails the test of manhood when he becomes “a victim to the revengeful Comanches.”\textsuperscript{77}

In addition to using Native men as screens against which to reveal preferred masculine behavior, DeShields’s narrative villainizes Anglo men who fail to meet expectations. The most “terrifying” idea for Progressive reformers “was the specter of the sissy.”\textsuperscript{78} Fears of cultural feminization contrasted hegemonic masculinity against those considered weak, dependent, or helpless. Men who exhibited these characteristics not

\textsuperscript{72} DeShields, Cynthia Ann Parker, 14.  
\textsuperscript{73} Varley, Americans Recaptured, 131.  
\textsuperscript{74} DeShields, Cynthia Ann Parker, 37.  
\textsuperscript{75} DeShields, Cynthia Ann Parker, 43.  
\textsuperscript{76} DeShields, Cynthia Ann Parker, 43-45.  
\textsuperscript{77} DeShields, Cynthia Ann Parker, 45.  
\textsuperscript{78} Kimmel, Manhood in America, 104.
only failed to be *men*, but failed to be *American*. In DeShields’s narrative of Parker’s
captivity readers receive further reinforcement of this ideal in the example of fort resident
L.D. Nixon. Nixon is the first man from the fort to reach Lucy Parker as she flees with
her children from the small group of Comanche who seek captives during the attack on
Fort Parker. DeShields quotes Abraham Anglin extensively and explains that Nixon
proves useless in Lucy and the children’s defense, since it is in his presence that
Comanche men “compelled the mother to lift behind two mounted warriors her daughter
Parker, and her little son John.”79 In his interview with DeShields, Abraham Anglin
maintains that if not for David Faulkenberry’s brave interference after two of the children
were taken, the small group of Comanche would have made captives of all four of Lucy
Parker’s children, raped and killed her or taken her as a slave, and killed L.D. Nixon.
Later in the narrative Nixon is found in a hiding spot and “had not been seen since his
cowardly flight.”80 With this anecdote, DeShields essentially uses Nixon as a scapegoat
upon which to blame Parker’s abduction.

DeShields reinforces the importance of Anglo men by writing Parker into a
supporting role within her own narrative. Much of DeShields’s account focuses on the
men who were involved in efforts to ransom Parker from her initial captors rather than on
Parker herself, with Lawrence Sullivan “Sul” Ross becoming the most significant
character of the narrative. Texas historians Paul H. Carlson and Tom Crum argue that the
focus of the text purposefully capitalizes on Parker’s traumatic narrative to bolster Ross’s
credibility and political career.81 Having previously served as a Texas Ranger,

79 DeShields, *Cynthia Ann Parker*, 16.
81 Carlson and Crum, “The ‘Battle’ at Pease River,” 34.
Confederate General, and state Senator, Ross formally announced his campaign for governor of Texas in February of the same year DeShields published his book.\textsuperscript{82} Carlson and Crum suggest the concurrence of the publication warrants suspicion. In their analysis of DeShields’s book, Carlson and Crum note significant alterations to the narrative of Ross’ involvement in the military engagement during which Parker was recaptured by Texas Rangers. Rather than a great military coup that left the Comanche people “forever broken,” the “Battle of Peace River” in which DeShields portrays Ross as primary hero, in reality equated to a “massacre” of a few Comanche women and children.\textsuperscript{83} Carlson and Crum question how the encounter, documented in official reports as only a brief military engagement between Texas Rangers and Comanche women and children, became in “collective consciousness” a major battle that “destroyed the Comanche hegemony in northwest Texas.”\textsuperscript{84}

**Nationalist Narratives and Public Memory**

The re-telling of Parker’s captivity story as mythic narrative outlined cultural and social goals considered appropriate for Americans in the early 20\textsuperscript{th} century. DeShields establishes clear expectations for a gendered and racialized American identity. Myth offers community members “a sense of importance and direction” and provides a “a communal focus for individual identity.”\textsuperscript{85} In many ways myths create and reinforce social roles as well as define who fits within which roles. Much of myth’s constitutive force derives from its narrative function, for humans have long been considered “story-

\textsuperscript{82} Judith Ann Benner, *Sul Ross, Soldier, Statesman, Educator* (College Station: Texas A&M University Press, 1983), 150.
\textsuperscript{84} Carlson and Crum, “The ‘Battle’ at Pease River,” 34.
telling animals.” Rhetorical scholar Sonja K. Foss argues that the most effective narratives allow “a personal involvement in the narrated world.” Narratives offer people ways to relate to one another and to their cultural environments because they appeal to “people’s sense of reason and emotion” and help justify our values and beliefs. Therefore the strongest and most persistent narratives are those that allow individuals to see significant characters in the story as mirror images of themselves. Through this process of identification, community members develop a social script legitimized through historical foundations. Mythic narratives serve as tools for collectives to remember past events and provide a means to develop and maintain public memory.

Historical narratives such as Parker’s traumatic captivity narrative provide more than recreational reading or entertaining stories. The discourse of Parker’s story offered a means through which people in the Progressive Era could use the allure of historical truth to organize themselves into social positions based on shared remembrances. As the current dissertation demonstrates, people often reimagine the past through the lens of their present-day circumstances in order to tackle problems they perceive as similar to something they’ve already overcome. This creation of what twentieth century scholars would call the “useable past” suffers the limits of the “interpretive conventions” present.

---

within the period in which it is reproduced. Communication scholar and former journalist Barbie Zelizer notes that memory works through the various vehicles that “give collectives a sense of their past.” Memory scholarship has long recognized the social aspect of memory by drawing attention to the way that community members engage in acts of public remembrance as a means of securing and reinforcing their place within the collective. French sociologist Maurice Halbwachs’ foundational work on collective memory establishes an important link between narratives and acts of remembrance. Halbwachs argues that “memory is recalled by individuals ‘externally’ through publicly-accessible symbols and narratives, and reconstructed only through the social framework of one’s group associations.” By engaging with artifacts or discourse that commemorate historical events, individuals develop and sustain a “conscious sense of the past” that helps them make sense of and organize their present positions in social groups. Readers in the early 20th century found in DeShields’s narrative historical reinforcement and justification for maintaining the dominance of Anglo American men. The story positions Anglo men as the creators of the modern American Nation. DeShields in effect makes a genetic argument that repudiates the existence of Native people and reinterprets history to affirm the rights of Anglo Americans.

94 Geoffrey Cubitt, History and Memory, Historical Approaches (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2007), 9.
Historical fact alone does not provide meaning. Meaning derives from the features of narrative including plot, characters, and the ideology reinforced in the discourse.  

Therefore, although they are linked through the narrative process, *history* does not always equate with *memory* and both exist only as subjective interpretation.  

Historian and trauma studies scholar Dominick LaCapra observes that rather than enforce historical accuracy, memory “points to problems” that retain great emotional value for a community.  

When collective remembrances are rooted in traumatic history like Parker’s, the trauma itself becomes the fulcrum around which group membership is organized.

**Narrating Traumatic Memory**

*Trauma* has been defined empirically as “a disruptive experience that disarticulates the self and creates holes in existence” and psychologically as “an emotional state of discomfort and stress resulting from (unconscious and conscious) memories of an extraordinary, catastrophic experience that shatters the survivor’s sense of invulnerability to harm.”  

Both Parker’s initial captivity and her violent return to her Anglo family inherently involved potentially traumatizing events. What distinguishes Parker’s story from other narratives involving Anglo women and children captured by Comanche such as that of her cousin, Rachel Plummer, is that Parker never provided an account of her experiences. Much of Parker’s captivity narrative has been informed by the testimony of those who interacted with her following her reintegration into American

---

society, or has been augmented by the documented experiences of other captives rather than from Parker herself. In his narrative account of the captives’ lives following the attack on Fort Parker, DeShields wrote, “Of Cynthia Ann Parker (we will anticipate the thread of the narrative).”

Parker’s story, therefore, is less about her and more about the people who felt traumatized by her loss.

DeShields’s narrative of Parker’s captivity transforms her undocumented and mostly unknown individual experience into a collective trauma for Anglo settlers. Because they believed her rightful place in society to be among them, Anglo settlers could not envision anything other than a horrific life for Parker among her Comanche family. DeShields describes an early effort to ransom Parker and imagines that “while [the presence of the white negotiators] was doubtless a happy event to the poor stricken captive, who in her doleful captivity had endured everything but death, she refused to speak a word.”

Similarly, DeShields imagines Parker’s relationship with her husband as one of base subjugation and writes that she must have performed “for her imperious lord all the slavish offices which savagism and Indian custom assigns as the duty of a wife.” Unsuccessful efforts to ransom Parker again fifteen years following her captivity are attributed to the maliciousness of the Comanche with whom she lived. Despite first-hand testimony that Parker refused ransom because she wanted to remain with her children and negotiators who said she assured them that her husband was “good and kind,” DeShields’s narrative explains her reluctance to rejoin Anglo society as a consequence of a “wild life” among the Comanche that left her with only “the vaguest

100 DeShields, *Cynthia Ann Parker*, 30.
remembrance of her people.”102 In reality, Parker’s life among the Comanche was likely no more traumatizing after her adoption than life for any other Comanche woman in the period since captives adopted as community members “carried no visible stigma” of their original racial background.103 Parker’s marriage demonstrated that, like other adoptees, she faced “few obstacles for social fulfillment and elevation.”104 As a captive who entered into a kinship relationship with her captors and resisted attempts to reconnect her with her Anglo family, Parker failed to exhibit the strength of character desired by Progressive Era readers.105 Parker’s character therefore performs a supplemental and largely symbolic role in her own narrative. LaCapra describes such narrative occurrences as “traumatropism,” a process in which “trauma may be transfigured into the sublime or the sacred, and the traumatized may be seen as martyrs or saints.”106 Mythic narratives often evolve following a crisis or threat “that disorients and harms” a collectivity and seek to recover utopian societies through a sacrificial victim.107

Much like other Progressive Era nationalist narratives, Parker’s captivity story originated from a “masculinized memory” that positioned women in symbolic roles as “icons of nationhood.”108 As “symbolic mothers of the nation,” Anglo women embody traditional notions of honor, thus “women’s shame is the family’s shame, the nation’s shame, the man’s shame.”109 Although narratives of Anglo men’s captivities exist,

102 DeShields, Cynthia Ann Parker
103 Hämäläinen, The Comanche Empire, 177.
104 Hämäläinen, The Comanche Empire, 177.
105 Varley, Americans Recaptured.
106 LaCapra, Writing History, Writing Trauma, xiv.
107 LaCapra, Writing History, Writing Trauma, xii and 52.
women’s narratives maintained greater popularity through the Progressive Era. Varley attributes this attraction to the “titillating” and “voyeuristic” features of stories that positioned virtuous Anglo women as victims of Native men’s animalistic behavior.\textsuperscript{110} Sexual innuendo alone, however, does not explain the persistent appeal of captivity narratives and Varley acknowledges that “something more complicated” explains their prevalence.\textsuperscript{111}

Trauma is the element that attracts readers to Parker’s story. The collective memory of the Fort Parker attack represented a wound to the social identity of Anglo men. The attack reminded men of their vulnerability and threatened their masculinity. Although DeShields and the majority of his readers did not directly experience the traumas of the Fort Parker attack, the narrative enables the appropriation of Parker’s personal trauma by symbolically reinforcing idealized Anglo-American identity in the public sphere. Parker’s traumatic captivity narrative thus tapped into anxieties brought about by significant social change and reinforced the fear of cultural loss among Progressive Era Anglo readers. This collective loss equated to a form of cultural trauma.

According to sociologist Jeffrey Alexander, \textit{cultural trauma} develops from a unique process of memory sharing prompted when a social group experiences a “horrendous event” that significantly alters their group identity and makes trauma a key feature of their shared experiences.\textsuperscript{112} Cultural trauma theory centers around how original traumas are represented in collective memory as a means of signifying membership in a

\textsuperscript{110} Varley, \textit{Americans Recaptured}, 131-132.
\textsuperscript{111} Varley, \textit{Americans Recaptured}, 131.
\textsuperscript{112} Jeffrey C. Alexander et al., \textit{Cultural Trauma and Collective Identity} (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2004), 1.
social group. Alexander theorizes that cultural trauma does not manifest from individual suffering, nor does it depend upon factual accuracy. The power to transmit trauma to a collective rests in “symbolic renderings” such as “speeches, rituals, marches, meetings, plays, movies, and storytelling of all kinds” that emphasize not what happened, but what “should be.” Dramatic retellings of traumatic historical events have “extraordinarily powerful effects” on the organization of collective identities. Alexander argues that critical deconstruction of the symbolic transmission of cultural trauma creates opportunities to navigate through the trauma process.

For collectives that acknowledge cultural trauma, working through trauma requires the successful “transformation of the trauma into a narrative memory” that allows the traumatic experience to be fully integrated into a person or group’s understanding of the past. When narratives of traumatic events become valorized through the mythic process of traumatropism, however, they often result in a repetitious process of ineffective grieving. Dominick LaCapra distinguishes between historical traumas that represent actual loss and those that reflect social-structural absences. LaCapra clarifies that “losses are specific and involve particular events, such as the death of loved ones,” while absence equates to a metaphysical or abstract idea that “becomes an object of fixation” that “downgrades” the significance of particular historical losses. When people confuse an absence for a loss the conflation aids the appropriation of

114 Alexander, Trauma, 4.
115 Alexander, Trauma, 4.
117 LaCapra, Writing History, Writing Trauma, xv.
118 LaCapra, Writing History, Writing Trauma, 49-51.
trauma by people who did not experience the instigating event first-hand.\textsuperscript{119} While historical losses can be acknowledged and mourned through a grieving process, absences produce anxiety not connected to any tangible injury. Rather than “working through” trauma, attempts to mourn absences generate a “misplaced nostalgia” for a utopia that never existed.\textsuperscript{120} Obsession over absence creates an “endless melancholy” or “impossible mourning” that avoids addressing historical problems or actual historical losses.\textsuperscript{121} DeShields’s account of Parker’s traumatic captivity narrates the absence of an idealized American identity based in heroic masculinity rather than a clear historical loss. Readers who were unrelated to the Parker family did not suffer the immediate, first-hand effects of Parker’s capture in 1836, so they had no reason to mourn her loss. Instead readers found themselves in a melancholic state over the fear of losing an idealized masculinity that, in fact, exists only as a symbolic construction.

The Progressive Era need to reinforce an American identity as Anglo in origin based on the performance of heroic masculine behavior represented an unmitigated desire for a lost utopian society that never existed. If trauma is a disruption in anticipated human experience, then DeShields’s narrative corroborates feminist therapist Laura Brown’s assertion that expected human experience refers to “the range of what is normal and usual in the lives of men of the dominant class: white, young, able-bodied, educated, middle-class, Christian men.”\textsuperscript{122} DeShields’s narrative of Parker’s captivity and return to Anglo society obscures the violence of settler dispossession and justifies the abuse of Native

\textsuperscript{119} LaCapra, \textit{Writing History, Writing Trauma}, 65.
\textsuperscript{120} LaCapra, \textit{Writing History, Writing Trauma}, 46.
\textsuperscript{121} LaCapra, \textit{Writing History, Writing Trauma}, 46-48.
people as a necessary requirement for American progress. In doing so, the narrative allows perpetrators of violence to participate in the story as victims of rather than agents of trauma. The result is a perpetual melancholia repeated in the historical return of captivity narratives during periods of social unrest that threaten to uproot dominant Anglo-masculinity. Revival of Parker’s captivity narrative often corresponds to periods of social unrest that threaten Anglo men’s dominant social position. As subsequent chapters show, this return represents an arrested process of unproductive mourning over the absence of an idealized power relationship that exists and is maintained primarily through symbolic repetition.

LaCapra explains that the social anxiety and melancholia that results from acting out traumatic absence generates an “arrested process in which the depressed, self-berating, and traumatized self, locked in compulsive repetition, is possessed by the past” such that it “remains narcissistically identified” with the notion of loss.123 Deconstruction of trauma narratives, however, can expose actual historical losses and provide a means of working through the trauma. LaCapra specifically encouraged the questioning of “founding traumas” that play “ideological roles” of establishing good vs. evil.124 For this reason subsequent chapters analyze reappearances of Parker’s narrative during periods of great social change in the United States. Analysis reveals that, even when written from a perspective of resistance, the narrative promotes white supremacy by confusing absence with actual loss. Critical evaluation of artifacts used to communicate cultural trauma and “socially engaged memory work” can expose where absence is conflated with loss.125

123 LaCapra, Writing History, Writing Trauma, 65-66.
124 LaCapra, Writing History, Writing Trauma, 81.
125 LaCapra, Writing History, Writing Trauma, 66.
DeShields’s account of Parker’s captivity provides an important starting point for understanding the ways that Parker’s captivity narrative has perpetuated an imagined cultural trauma for Anglo Americans while also disregarding the lasting impact that settler colonialism has had on Native people. Critical analysis of the various adaptations of Parker’s story affirms Varley’s observation that the narratives commemorate the captivity, rather than the captive, and that commemoration becomes the “conduit” through which ideal “Americanness” is spread.126 Subsequent chapters examine this feature by analyzing repetition of Parker’s story in opera, fiction, film, and graphic novel formats. Despite their presentation as biographies of Cynthia Ann Parker, the narratives maintain an emphasis on the experience of captivity. The rhetorical sleight of hand made possible by the captivity narrative structure leads audiences to believe they encounter the story of a person who was traumatized, when in fact, they receive a subliminal, symbolic reminder of the importance of maintaining white, masculine supremacy. Because captivity narratives construct individual trauma as a state caused by racialized others that can be repaired by heroic white men, Anglo women like Parker offer the most convenient victims due to their ability to help reinforce ideals of American identity through their feminized racial identity. The versions of Parker’s story analyzed in historical context thus inform understandings of racialized and gendered social relationships in the United States.

126 Varley, Americans Recaptured, 20.
CHAPTER III

PIONEERING NOSTALGIA IN THE PERIOD BETWEEN THE WORLD WARS

One century after her initial abduction, Parker made a dramatic return into the public sphere on the stage at North Texas State Teacher’s College in Denton, Texas when Julia Smith’s opera *Cynthia Parker* premiered on Thursday, February 16, 1939. Once again Anglo Americans could relive adventures of the bygone Frontier Era. Revival of Parker’s captivity narrative offered audience members an opportunity to exercise their nostalgia for a romanticized historical period which had become, at least in collective consciousness, a lost utopia. Economic instability, high unemployment, and social upheavals of the period between World Wars I and II generated perpetual melancholia associated with unresolved feelings of loss of a mythicized Anglo-American masculine identity. The resulting blow to Anglo men’s sense of legitimacy intensified perceived wounds to their social positions and prompted a return of the cultural trauma felt at the end of the Frontier period. Resulting anxieties revived the need for narratives that reinforced men’s importance within their communities.¹ This time, however, in keeping with social changes of the period, the tale was written by a woman and presented in a genre not often associated with traditional captivity narratives.

Smith’s opera reflects the strategic periodic return of captivity narratives in correlation with significant historical events and during periods of social change. The opera exists in three versions. The score for the opera’s 1939 premier consisted of a prologue and one act with long sections of dialogue. Smith revised her original score into a two-act composition in 1945, and an extended, full-length three-act production in 1978. The two-act version was never performed, but the University of Texas at Austin hosted a performance of the full-length opera to commemorate the Texas Sesquicentennial in 1985. The two performances of the opera effectively confirm that Parker’s captivity narrative has strong symbolic capital for the state of Texas. Parker’s initial captivity in 1836 corresponded with the Texas Revolution during which Anglo colonists from the US living in Mexico mounted an armed resistance against the Mexican government that ultimately established the Republic of Texas. Anglo Texans take great pride in the rebelliousness that marked the state’s origin and folklore often commends the men credited with heroic action needed to create the Republic. Numerous songs, poems, stories, and films document the exploits of hyper-masculine founding heroes like Jim Bowie, Davy Crockett, and Sam Houston. Smith’s revival of Parker’s tale for the Texas Centennial celebration and its return fifty years later for the Sesquicentennial festivities reveals the significance of the captivity narrative to Texas history.

---

2 Katie R. Buehner, “Accessibility and Authenticity in Julia Smith’s Cynthia Parker” (University of North Texas, 2007), 13.
5 Smith began writing the opera for the Texas Centennial celebration in 1936 but did not complete the score in time. See McCutchan, “Texas Legend Revived in Opera.”
The premier performance of *Cynthia Parker* exploited Texas heritage and Anglo pride and served to affirm the state’s mythic and often romanticized origin. The location, plot, and cast all boasted strong nativist ties to the state. The opera’s premier in Denton, Smith’s birthplace, celebrated the composer’s long-term familial ties to the state. In an interview during the Sesquicentennial celebration Smith explained the significance of the story to her family history when she bragged of her own “great loyalty to Texas” and described her family’s migration to the territory in ox wagons. Smith was exceptionally proud to note that her grandfather “sold horses to Teddy Roosevelt to storm San Juan Hill.” The opera starred native Texan and Metropolitan star Leonora Corona as Parker, and boasted the revival of a valuable part of Texas history. Among the audience that filled the auditorium sat Quanah Parker’s last living wife, one of his sons, and Cynthia Ann Parker, III, great-great grandchild of Parker. Smith incorporated elements of James T. DeShields’s historical account of Parker’s abduction and captivity into a heavily dramatized adaptation of the narrative. The plot of the opera begins after Texas Rangers recaptured Parker in December 1860. In the opening scene, Captain Sul Ross of the Texas Rangers violently returns Parker and her daughter, Prairie Flower, to her Anglo family and implores them to perform their “Christian duty” and assume responsibility for the women. After successful persuasion, Parker and Prairie Flower live with Parker’s brother and sister-in-law Ed and Mary Parker for several years. During their time with their Anglo family, Parker and Prairie Flower lament their circumstances and make

---

6 McCutchan, “Texas Legend Revived in Opera.”
7 McCutchan, “Texas Legend Revived in Opera.”
8 Julia Smith, Program for *Cynthia Parker*, 1939, Julia Smith Collection maintained by the University of North Texas.
10 Julia Smith, *Cynthia Parker*, 1939, 4.
frequent attempts to escape. The opera ends when Parker’s son, Quanah, arrives with a
group of Comanche warriors to take his mother and Prairie Flower back to live among
the Comanche. Parker reunites with her son, but dies tragically after being shot by a stray
arrow in the attack. Following her death, Quanah and Prairie Flower carry their mother’s
body away to be buried among her Comanche family in the foothills of Anadarko.11

This chapter examines the 1939 score of the opera to reveal how Smith’s
arrangement served to legitimize the social position of Anglo men during the period
between the world wars. The chapter contextualizes the opera’s composition during a
period of social disruption linked to the advancement of equal rights for women before
demonstrating how Smith’s reliance on negative stereotypes of Native people negated her
efforts to center them as agents within the score. Ultimately the production advanced the
career of Smith but did little to advocate for other marginalized populations.

Social Unrest between the Wars

Anxiety over perceived lost masculinity generated by changing social roles in the
Progressive Era temporarily abated when the United States officially entered World War
I in April, 1917. The specter of the “sissy” manufactured in part by the close of the
frontier, increased urbanization and industrialization, and changes in social structures,
disappeared into the field of battle where men could at least claim to perform heroic
actions and therefore be honorable Americans. In war men exhibited bravery, strength,
and fortitude against foreign enemies in defense of their homeland and families.
Individual performance mattered little and celebrated wartime victories “allowed a
generation of men to rescue a threatened sense of manhood.”12 The decade following the

11 Smith, Program for Cynthia Parker.
12 Kimmel, Manhood in America, 165.
war witnessed men’s continued success in the wake of strong economic stimulus and innovation motivated by the war. A burgeoning peace-time economy offered job growth that provided ample opportunity for men to continue their success by providing for their families. The transitioning economy spurred enthusiasm for innovation and created opportunities for leisure activities among the middle class. Homes updated to electric lighting, more families were able to purchase automobiles, and radios became fixtures in nearly all middle-class homes. The period also brought notable social change for women when ratification of the Nineteenth Amendment in 1920 granted them the right to vote.\textsuperscript{13} The “Roaring Twenties” was characterized by a sense of optimism among the middle class. This optimism, however, was short-lived.

Changing social relationships between men and women presented challenges to heteropatriarchal ideas of femininity and masculinity in the decade following World War I.\textsuperscript{14} Newly enfranchised women who conveyed nonchalant attitudes about virtuous moral codes presented a threat to traditional notions of modesty and politeness.\textsuperscript{15} Women subverted established cultural standards by cropping their hair into short bobs, shortening the length of their skirts, and by entering public spaces in record numbers. By 1920, approximately half of the college student population and one-third of employed Americans consisted of women.\textsuperscript{16} Smith took advantage of social changes and graduated


\textsuperscript{14} \textit{Heteropatriarchy} is defined as “the social systems in which heterosexuality and patriarchy are perceived as normal and natural, and in which other configurations are perceived as abnormal, aberrant, and abhorrent.” See Maile Arvin, Eve Tuck, and Angie Morrill, “Decolonizing Feminism: Challenging Connections between Settler Colonialism and Hetero-Patriarchy,” \textit{Feminist Formations} 25, no. 1 (2013): 8–34, 13.


\textsuperscript{16} Kimmel, \textit{Manhood in America}, 169.
from North Texas State Teacher’s College in 1930. After receiving her Bachelor’s degree in English, the pianist took the advice of her piano teacher and attended the Julliard School of Music to earn a performer’s certificate, then an advanced degree in music education. The “New Woman” of the decade was a “fast-talking, cigarette-smoking libertine” who had a college education and a desire to leave sequestered domesticity behind.¹⁷ The image of the “flapper” and her riotous lifestyle became emblematic of the decade’s break with tradition.¹⁸ Smith represented the modern “It Girl” of the period.¹⁹

As a student, Smith composed a few orchestral pieces and wrote music textbooks for children. When reflecting years later about her composition of Cynthia Parker, Smith said she thought of her production as a somewhat radical step for a woman to make at the time and boasted of her bold attempt to prove “that a woman had talent and intelligence enough to compose an opera.”²⁰ Women exerted their independence in many ways including separation from traditional domestic roles. As divorce rates rose and young women waited longer to get married, efforts to resist the changes manifested in a variety of forms. Between 1920 and 1930 several states passed laws that mandated women teachers resign or be fired after they married, magazines began to advertise domesticity as a valuable commodity, and Mother’s Day, previously designed to recognize working mothers, underwent a strategic marketing makeover to celebrate “traditional” motherhood.

---

¹⁷ Kimmel, Manhood in America, 169.
²⁰ Ann McCutchan, “Texas Legend Revived in Opera”.

63
and encourage women to return to the home.\textsuperscript{21} The onset of the Great Depression at the end of the decade exacerbated domestic tensions.

Men who might have maintained their masculine pride amid radical changes in the home by turning to their performance on the job were denied the opportunity by significant changes in the economy. The economic crash of 1929 and the decade-long depression that followed brought plummeting wages and soaring unemployment. Levels of unemployment rose sharply from approximately 16 percent to near 25 percent in only three years following the crash.\textsuperscript{22} For the next decade these rates remained high with nearly one in four American men out of work. Just as the home presented challenges to traditional masculinity when women began to exert small levels of independence, the workplace also no longer offered “a reliable arena for the demonstration and proof of one’s manhood.” The Great Depression was “emasculating” for Anglo-American men who, at both work and home, equated themselves to “impotent patriarchs” unable to fulfill their duty to provide for and protect their families.\textsuperscript{23}

Economic decline in the decade left men unable to hold their roles as income earners yet somehow failed to extinguish women’s small gains in social power. Poor and working-class mothers in particular became “guardians of the beleaguered home” when rationing and extreme poverty threatened the well-being of their children and families.\textsuperscript{24} In the late 1920s through the early 1940s working-class women generated a “surge of activism” on behalf of their families by staging food boycotts, hosting anti-eviction

\textsuperscript{21} Kimmel, \textit{Manhood in America}, 174-176.
\textsuperscript{22} Kimmel, \textit{Manhood in America}, 166.
\textsuperscript{23} Kimmel, \textit{Manhood in America}, 171.
demonstrations, organizing barter networks, and demanding food and rent price controls. Despite their successes, popular publications of the day mocked the idea of a social movement led by housewives and continued to suggest that the women undermined the authority of their husbands, sons, brothers, and fathers with their public appearances.

In addition to blaming women for men’s ill fortune, a surge of anti-immigrant and racist sentiment intermingled with anxieties about gender drove Anglo men who still had jobs to fight, violently if needed, to remain employed. Strong appeals to native-born rights and anti-immigrant propaganda gendered immigrants as either excessively feminine or dangerously hyper-masculine in attempts to preserve available jobs for Anglo-American men who demonstrated the perfect version of American masculinity against these perceived delinquencies. Nativism like that demonstrated culturally in the 1939 performance of Cynthia Parker also brought about legislative action against immigrants such as more restrictive immigration laws that sought to limit Asian migration and repatriation programs that targeted Mexicans living in the U.S. Concurrently, African-American men provided “a most potent screen against which middle-class white men played out their insecurities about their masculinity.” Widespread migration of southern African-Americans to northern cities following the Civil War had increased their population in urban areas where they competed for scarce jobs with Anglo workers.

26 Orleck, “We Are That Mythical Thing Called the Public,” 190-191.
27 Kimmel, Manhood in America, 167.
28 Takaki, A Different Mirror, 306.
29 Kimmel, Manhood in America, 167.
30 Ronald Takaki, A Different Mirror, 311.
As the previous chapter indicated, social anxieties are often managed through cultural productions that shape or maintain dominant ideologies. Without war to demonstrate their manhood, Anglo men in the period between the world wars turned to other forms of propaganda to affirm their value to society. Smith’s opera provides a noteworthy artifact for exploration because her composition taps into and maintains hegemonic masculinity in a uniquely raced way that simultaneously reflects the privileges and challenges of her own social position as a white woman.

**Opera as Usable History**

By the 1930s opera had become a form of popular entertainment in American society. As early as 1735, European companies performing compositions of foreign origin traditionally known as “Grand Opera” entertained elite audiences on the east coast. In the early twentieth century the colloquial and regionally focused “Beggars Opera” supplanted the popularity of the traditional form and remained trendy for several years. This evolved American opera interspersed vernacular dialogue with “lyrics set to traditional melodies or familiar airs.” The inclusion of popular music styles, lewd lyrics, and ordinary characters in the new American style attracted a new audience from among the working class. Stepping away from the elite attitude of Grand Opera, the American style made opera more accessible to a casual observer. This more “accessible” opera offered audiences an experience that was both “entertaining and participatory.” The stylistic features of American opera were comforting and familiar to the audience, which

---

34 Choragus, “Opera in English,” 1.  
made them more easily understood. Smith’s approach in her composition of *Cynthia Parker* demonstrates her commitment to making opera relatable to common audiences. Like other American operas, *Cynthia Parker* draws upon familiar music styles of the period and incorporates regionally familiar visual settings that help to authenticate the story. Smith’s composition appealed to a mixed audience because it includes local “musical themes, cowboy songs, Native American music, and referencing” that draw upon collective remembrances of Texas history. Through the combination of familiar music, visual settings, and colloquial language, Smith asks the audience “to accept the opera as an historical account of their American past.”

Smith’s desire to use a popular form of entertainment to convey a *useable* past enabled the audience to overlook the harsh realities of an event caused by settler colonial actions. In the early 1990s historians Roy Rosenzweig and David Thelin discovered through a large-scale research survey designed to learn more about American perceptions of history that most Americans prefer to learn about the past by taking an active or participatory role. Respondents to the survey expressed a fondness for the feelings of authenticity they receive when historical narratives are presented in experiential ways that allow them to feel transported into the past. Smith’s development of Parker’s captivity narrative into an opera demonstrates how this preference represents a long-standing trait of American audiences. Smith’s production of *Cynthia Parker* in the more familiar American opera style facilitated the audience’s engagement because viewers

---

were “not constantly asked to disassociate performance from reality.”⁴⁰ Performance studies scholar Rebecca Schneider refers to this process as “affective engagement.”⁴¹ The sensory experience provided by non-traditional historical narratives such as opera, theatre, and art, allows audience members to feel transported out of their present circumstances and into (or close to) a different temporality. Costumes, dancing, music, and historically accurate props borrowed from the college’s Historical Collection along with the physical presence of Parker’s Comanche descendants in the audience allowed viewers of Cynthia Parker to feel as though they were present in a moment of the past.⁴² This “cross-temporal slippage” generates an emotional connection that stirs feelings of nostalgia when applied to re-enactment of historical events.⁴³ Nostalgic remembrances are often activated when people look to an embellished memory of the past to cope with discomfort in their present.⁴⁴ Smith’s opera offered the audience a temporary, entertaining reprieve from the stress of modern life by providing a sentimental encounter with their mythical past. Few features of Parker’s life, however, could be considered entertaining. The encounter with Parker’s story in Smith’s opera allowed Anglo audience members to appropriate her personal trauma into an imagined collective loss through pantomimed mourning. When experiential history involves revisiting traumatic events, the collapsing of temporal distinctions can prompt a virtual experience that “gives way to

---

⁴² Prop items from the period including guns, bowls, spinning wheels, and furniture were borrowed from the Historical Collection at North Texas State Teachers College according to the program for the 1939 performance.
⁴⁴ Patricia M.E. Lorcin, “Imperial Nostalgia; Colonial Nostalgia: Differences of Theory, Similarities of Practice?,” Historical Reflections 39, no. 3 (Winter 2013): 97–111, 97-98.
vicarious victimhood” in which “empathy with the victim seems to become an
identity.” In what cultural anthropologist Renato Rosaldo calls “imperialist nostalgia,”
colonial agents engage in a process of “innocent yearning” to “mourn the passing of what
they themselves have transformed.” In Smith’s opera, Parker’s death signifies a double
loss. In addition to serving as a martyr for the inevitable triumph of progress over nature,
her death represents the destruction of Comanche culture. Native people existed for
Smith’s Anglo audience (and in many ways still do) as extinct members of a mystical
past who were “exterminated” by settler progress. Smith’s use of visual and auditory
stimuli coupled with narrative embellishments and factually inaccurate plot changes
significantly altered Parker’s actual lived experience and continued the appropriation of
her traumatic narrative by allowing her Progressive Era audience to transfer their
empathy for her into a collective loss for Anglo Americans. Although a certain degree of
empathy helps people work through collective traumas, witnesses must retain an
awareness that the instigating events happened to another person or people in the past.
Internalization of another person’s trauma serves only to trap subsequent generations into
useless repetition of secondary victimization.

Smith used the creative license afforded to her as a musical composer to edit
Parker’s story in a way that made her real experiences more palatable for an Anglo
audience. Details of Parker’s return to her Anglo family are exaggerated, Prairie Flower
is depicted much older than in real life, and, just as in DeShields’s elaborate account,

45 Dominick LaCapra, Writing History, Writing Trauma (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press,
2001), 46-47.
47 Kathryn Milun, “(En)Countering Imperialist Nostalgia: The Indian Reburial Issue,” Discourse 14, no. 1
48 LaCapra, Writing History, 46-47, 78.
Texas Ranger Lawrence Sullivan “Sul” Ross assumes a much more notable role than what military documents reported. Smith acknowledged the extreme creative license she took with her adaptation but defended her choices because the “original facts did not provide a satisfactory climax and resolution.” For Smith, a satisfying ending was found in returning Parker to the Comanche family she longed to see again following her capture at the Pease River. In reality, Parker and her daughter, Prairie Flower were brought back into Anglo society after their capture at the Pease River in December 1860 when Cynthia was approximately 34 years old and Prairie Flower was a toddler, not an adolescent as depicted in the opera. The pair passed through the households of several Parker family members, none of whom were named Ed and Mary, until settling with Parker’s youngest sister, Orlena O’Quinn. Since she was a child, Prairie Flower adapted quickly to her Anglo relatives but Parker had more difficulty and never stopped trying to escape or asking to be taken back to her husband and sons, something reflected accurately in Smith’s opera. Unlike the dramatized ending in the opera, Prairie Flower died in 1864 from complications related to influenza and pneumonia and Parker followed in 1870. Both were buried among their Anglo family members in Fosterville Cemetery near Frankston, Texas. Neither Parker nor Prairie Flower reunited with Quanah after their abduction on the Pease River. Smith’s revised ending reveals the difficulty Anglo Americans have confronting the treatment of oppressed groups. Smith chose to alter the ending of Parker’s experience because she considered the factual ending of the story too

50 Jo Ella Powell Exley, Frontier Blood: The Saga of the Parker Family (College Station: University of Texas A&M Press, 2001), 165-179.
51 Quanah successfully petitioned to have his mother’s and sister’s bodies reinterred to a graveyard near his own home in 1910 and later they were placed along with Quanah’s remains at the Fort Sill Military Cemetery.
depressing. An accurate portrayal of the narrative would remind the audience of the disastrous effects of a misogynistic settler colonial system that denied Parker the agency to make her own choices and inflicted irreparable harm on Comanche culture. Smith said of her adaptation, “In real life, Cynthia lived to be an unhappy old woman whose desires were never fulfilled. Now that’s not a very dramatic way to finish an opera, so I changed the ending.”53 Smith re-wrote Parker’s account in order to make the history more useful for her audience.

Despite the obvious plot adaptations, Smith’s Cynthia Parker reflects changes in social attitudes toward women and Native people during the period between World War I and World War II. Excitement over Smith’s production of Cynthia Parker garnered media attention at the regional level when notice of the performance ran in the Dallas Morning News and the Dallas Times Herald.54 National media through the New York Press and Time Magazine also drew attention to the historic performance of Texas’ first opera.55 Smith, along with women performers in the opera, was featured on the college’s WOR radio station in a segment titled “Women Make the News.”56 Women indeed made the news frequently during the period between World War I and World War II. Inspired by the hope of equal representation offered by the ratification of the Nineteenth Amendment, many American women continued to challenge social conventions throughout the period between the world wars. Women’s increased presence in public places like the opera house signified the continued rise of equality that many Anglo men

56 “Miss Smith, Author of Opera, to Arrive Here to Assist in Final Rehearsal Sessions,” The Campus Chat, February 3, 1939, 17 edition.
feared, and women seemed determined to change conservative perspectives of femininity.\textsuperscript{57} Despite their persistence and the comparative freedoms many like Smith experienced, women ultimately failed to achieve full freedom from social “confines of sex, marriage, family, and traditional work,” though their efforts to do so warrant notice.\textsuperscript{58}

\textit{Cynthia Parker} represented Smith’s effort to break into a male dominated field, and her plot adaptations demonstrated her belief that women’s desires should be placed on equal footing with those of men. Smith considered herself a “pioneer” for women in the music industry and advocated for women’s inclusion in music composition and performance throughout her life.\textsuperscript{59} In many ways Smith’s production of \textit{Cynthia Parker} reflects her personal ideology. The opera features white women prominently in the narrative, calls attention to Anglo settler dispossession of land, and complicates traditional captivity narratives with creative turns on the characteristics of the genre. Smith’s use of “pioneer” to describe her work, however, is particularly apropos to the opera as a whole. Despite her stated intentions, Smith produced an opera that continued to perpetuate racist and sexist ideologies. As an upper class, Anglo-American woman, Smith proved unable to acknowledge the ways in which her own social position benefitted from the continued systematic oppression of other marginalized groups.\textsuperscript{60}

Smith’s pioneering efforts that gave her a space in the world of opera came at the expense of Native people. In the early part of the twentieth century music became a popular way

\textsuperscript{58} Corydon Ireland, “Modern Girls Project Views Women Between the Wars.”
\textsuperscript{59} McCutchan, “Texas Legend Revived in Opera.”
\textsuperscript{60} For more information on the ways that Anglo women advocates in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries achieved social freedoms for themselves at the expense of other marginalized groups, see Louise Michele Newman, \textit{White Women’s Rights}. 72
for Anglo Americans to engage with Native cultures, but efforts to incorporate Native themes or performance often resulted in overly romanticized images that dehumanized Native people.\textsuperscript{61} The surge of interest in Native people within the operatic genre created opportunities for Native women to demonstrate their talents in the largely Anglo dominated field despite the tendency to exploit their culture. Singer Tsianina Redfeather performed and toured in France for American soldiers during World War I on behalf of the Society of American Indians and briefly enjoyed significant media attention for her performances.\textsuperscript{62} Gertrude Simmons Bonnin (Zitkála-Šá) made opera history with her joint composition of \textit{The Sun Dance Opera} which translated Native ritual and music into the style of grand opera in 1913.\textsuperscript{63} These contributions often suffered the effects of “artistic colonialism” when white men such as Bonnin’s composition partner, William F. Hanson, assumed credit for the productions.\textsuperscript{64} Likewise, Smith, not Comanche members of Parker’s family in the audience at her performance, ultimately reaped the benefits of her production. Smith’s opera therefore demonstrates women’s attempts to bring social change and reveals the shortcomings of a system of unequal representation.

Smith’s creative license with Parker’s captivity narrative allowed her to do something not possible in a more historically accurate version – write Parker into the position of protagonist. Like traditional captivity narratives, the opera begins in the aftermath of a bloody attack, includes gruesome descriptions of violence and death, and

\textsuperscript{61} Michelle Wick Patterson, “‘Real’ Indian Songs: The Society of American Indians and the Use of Native American Culture as a Means of Reform,” \textit{American Indian Quarterly} 26, no. 1 (Winter 2002): 44–66.

\textsuperscript{62} Patterson, “‘Real’ Indian Songs.”


\textsuperscript{64} Hafen, “A Cultural Duet Zitkála-Šá and the Sun Dance Opera,” 103.
features the captivity and eventual return of a hostage. Cynthia Parker deviates from the traditional form, however, by framing the narrative as a captivity perpetuated by Anglo-Americans. Rather than document the experiences of an Anglo woman captured by Comanche, Smith situated her timeline in the aftermath of Parker’s violent return to her Anglo family. This structure allowed Smith to draw attention to the duality of cultures in which Parker lived and gestured toward an acknowledgement of the reciprocal violence perpetuated by Anglo settlement of Native people’s land.

Throughout the opera Smith demonstrates a sympathy for Native people not found in captivity narratives produced through the Progressive Era but indicative of changing cultural attitudes. Through Parker, Smith acknowledges land dispossession perpetuated by Anglo settlement. In Scene I, following the Prologue, Parker reluctantly joins Captain Ross, her brother Ed Parker, and his wife Mary Parker amid a party of local community members and Texas Rangers gathered to celebrate the Rangers’ recent victory against a Comanche raiding party. Captain Ross boasts of his plans to “clean up the whole bunch” of Comanche and Parker asks, “Why are you so cruel to Injuns? They didn’t hurt you until you took their land – land that belonged to them – you took it away – stole it!” In a notable contrast to the genre, Smith seems to establish the Anglo settlers as aggressors and perpetuators of violence against Native people. After Mary Parker chastises Cynthia Ann for her rude remarks to Captain Ross and reminds her that she would not be alive without his rescue, Parker responds, “Alive? Alive – perhaps I am – in body. In spirit, I have been dead for ten long years – ever since Cap’n Ross killed my

---

66 Smith, Cynthia Ann, 33.
husband – great chief, Peta Nocona – forced my sons to flee – and brought me, Preloch, and the little Prairie Flower here as captives.”  

Smith makes clear that Parker’s preferred place in society is among her Comanche family by positioning her as a “captive” among her Anglo relatives. This perspective is reinforced musically within the score through the juxtaposition of two distinct themes: one that reflects Parker’s “desire to return to the Indian lodges” (Preloch theme), and another that appears when she “is reminded of her childhood or her identity as a Parker” (Cynthia theme). Notably, the Cynthia theme disappears from the score in later scenes, and the Preloch theme played “in a full orchestral presentation” settles the debate over where Parker thinks she belongs.  

Though tempting to view Smith’s adaptive turn of the traditional captivity narrative as a social critique, a contextual awareness of the changing sentiments toward Native people during the early twentieth century reveals that Smith’s narrative continues to reinforce Anglo-American racial dominance. 

In the twentieth century the purpose of captivity narratives underwent a significant change. Prior versions served to reinforce the need to fight against Native communities who posed a threat to American expansion or to establish a social blueprint for behavior becoming of “good” Americans. From the Revolutionary Period through the Progressive Era, captivity narratives helped construct Native people simultaneously as “dignified nobility” and participants in “inhuman savagery.” Decades after the last of the Indian Wars ended and after years of enforced assimilation and allotment programs, Anglo-Americans needed an alternative way to imagine Native people who no longer

67 Smith, Cynthia Ann, 33.
presented a violent threat. Historian Philip Deloria explains that Anglo-Americans had two options for constructing Native identities: the “material and real” Native people who comprised a “diverse set of tribes and individuals” with whom white settlers had interacted for hundreds of years, or the “ideal” Native person based on “a collection of mental images, stereotypes, and imaginings” generated only loosely from real people.\textsuperscript{71} As Smith demonstrated with her opera, when “real” Native people proved too depressing, white Americans opted for the “ideal.”

The realities of federal assimilation and allotment policies ultimately revealed disastrous effects that left Anglo-Americans with unmitigated feelings of guilt. In June 1926, Secretary of the Interior, Hubert Work, conducted a survey designed to measure the social and economic status of Native people. The resulting report, popularly called the Meriam Report, revealed the detrimental effects of federal policies and motivated the federal government to take action in an effort to alleviate the extreme poverty experienced by Native people living on reservations.\textsuperscript{72} The resulting Indian Reorganization Act of 1934 (Wheeler-Howard Act or “Indian New Deal”) halted the previously adopted allotment and assimilation programs implemented by the Dawes Act.\textsuperscript{73} John Collier, President Franklin D. Roosevelt’s Indian Affairs Commissioner, used the reorganization act as a means of promoting “cultural pluralism” and believed that assimilation into modernity and “preservation and intensification of heritage” were not exclusive choices.\textsuperscript{74} Collier’s act “authorized federal funding for tribes to purchase lands”

\textsuperscript{71} Deloria, \textit{Playing Indian}, 20.  
\textsuperscript{73} Takaki, \textit{A Different Mirror}, 225.  
\textsuperscript{74} Takaki, \textit{A Different Mirror}, 225.
and allowed tribes living on reservations who voted to accept the act to reorganize their sovereign tribal governments.\textsuperscript{75} Collier considered the IRA a benevolent turn toward providing tribes with the right of self-determination.

Within the context of the Indian Reorganization Act rested an acknowledgement of Anglo settlement’s disruption of Native people’s cultural development. Collier’s advocacy and concern with culture and heritage preservation made space for tribal communities to revitalize cultural and religious practices that had been prohibited in prior assimilation programs such as boarding schools, which had a particularly strong disruptive outcome for many Native communities.\textsuperscript{76} As public sentiment began to acknowledge the abuses perpetuated by structures that prohibited the use of traditional languages, rituals, and spirituality, Collier’s plans received more welcome. Collier believed that Americans “should be proud and glad to have this different and native culture going on” at their side and thought of Native communities as “precious” additions to the broad American cultural context.\textsuperscript{77} Unfortunately, restoration of many of the traditional practices for which Collier advocated proved impossible due to their total eradication in the interim years.\textsuperscript{78} Collier’s plan ultimately failed to recognize the significant impact of settler colonialism on Native cultures and continued to position Native people as social outsiders within the larger American context.\textsuperscript{79}

\textsuperscript{75} Takaki, \textit{A Different Mirror}, 225-226.
\textsuperscript{76} Scott Richard Lyons, \textit{X-Marks: Native Signatures of Assent} (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2010), 49.
\textsuperscript{77} John Collier, \textit{From Every Zenith: A Memoir and Some Essays on Life and Thought} (Denver, CO, 1963), 126, 203.
\textsuperscript{78} Deloria, Jr. and Lytle, “American Indians in Historical Perspective,” 15.
\textsuperscript{79} Settler colonialism differs from traditional colonialism in that the former “erases” distinctions between the colony and the parent state by repressing, co-opting, and eradicating indigenous nations and setting up a new and independent nation state. See Lorenzo Veracini, “Introducing Settler Colonial Studies,” \textit{Settler Colonial Studies} 1, no. 1 (2011): 1–12.
Among Collier’s mistakes was the notion that culture is a tangible item that can be lost and recovered at any point. Indigenous literary scholar Scott Richard Lyons draws attention to the ways that collective identities and cultures are socially constructed through “discourse, action, and history.” Lyons notes that the construction of culture as “a vulnerable social construct” fails to account for natural and forced evolutions and, in regard to Native people, denies the lasting impact of settler colonialism on community practices and beliefs. This conceptualization also fails to acknowledge the ways that Native people have actively accepted changes brought on by modernity and new social institutions. Instead of recognizing the rights of Native people to organize themselves and legitimizing Native communities, the Indian Reorganization Act equated to “a kindler, gentler colonization” that denied Native people the agency to define their own cultures. “Real” Native people proved too laden with complexity for Anglo-Americans to accept, for to acknowledge the reality of their lives meant to own the guilt of settler colonial dispossession. Faced with this impasse, white America created an “ideal” Native person who provided an “exterior authenticity” constructed “outside American society and temporality.” The romanticized and idealized Native person allows Anglo-Americans to co-opt the cultural trauma of settler colonization by turning themselves into unwilling, yet required heralds of civilization. Smith’s nostalgic production of Cynthia Parker helped conceal the guilt of settler colonialism by displaying a comfortable version of Comanche culture for her mostly Anglo audience. The opera’s performative aspects downgraded the violence of dispossession by trading real Comanche people for images

80 Lyons, X-Marks, 40-43.
81 Lyons, X-Marks, 74-75.
82 Lyons, X-Marks, 181.
83 Deloria, Playing Indian, 105.
locked into historical permanence at the moment in which they were first encountered by Anglo settlers.\textsuperscript{84} This creative move allowed Anglo viewers to mourn the very thing altered by their presence and to make use of the history to reinforce their social position during a period in which they felt threatened.

Cultural artifacts and representations “bear witness” to the ways that trauma affects communities and people.\textsuperscript{85} Captivity narratives in their various forms offer a means for Anglo-Americans to reinforce the vision of “ideal” Native people and symbolically appropriate the trauma of settler colonialism. Cynthia Parker proved no exception. The sympathy Smith showed to Native people in her opera served primarily to reinforce the “stylized image” of the “noble savage” that gained popularity in the early twentieth century.\textsuperscript{86} The image of the noble savage “represented the ambivalent success of American imperialism” and became demonstrative of “an urge to idealize and desire Indians” and a simultaneous “need to despise and dispossess them.”\textsuperscript{87} The guilt of settler dispossession exposed through the material circumstances of real Native people intensified the need to justify the violence perpetuated by Anglo settlers during the nation’s formative years. Smith’s opera emphasized Parker’s dual identity in a way that made the annihilation of the Comanche and other Native people a tragic, yet necessary process in the pursuit of civilized settlement. Construction of ideal Native people situates them firmly as historical relics of America’s past as obstacles overcome by Anglo innovation and cultural superiority. This perspective of Native culture as something lost

\textsuperscript{84} Rosaldo, \textit{Culture & Truth: The Remaking of Social Analysis}, 69.
\textsuperscript{86} Young, “Cynthia Parker Makes History, Seeks Voice.”
\textsuperscript{87} Deloria, \textit{Playing Indian}, 104, 4.
to time encourages attempts to salvage the “disappeared” cultures and helps explain the praise Smith received for reviving Parker’s captivity narrative a century after her initial abduction.\textsuperscript{88} Smith’s opera received praise for remaining “sympathetic to the historic tone” of Parker’s story and for including Parker’s Comanche relatives in the evening’s events.\textsuperscript{89} Anglo-Americans who boast of their efforts to recover parts of Native people’s history often claim “benevolence toward Native peoples” yet do so in ways that “reaffirm white dominance” by subordinating a distorted vision of Native culture.\textsuperscript{90} Representations of Native people appear in the opera as overly imaginative stereotypes rather than realistic depictions of Comanche culture.

*Cynthia Parker* combined sound, image, text, and the allure of historical validity with live performance, to perpetuate exaggerated stereotypes of Native people. Composition of instrumental arrangements in the opera “ignored the creative agency of Native Americans by altering borrowed melodies or disregarding their overall contexts.”\textsuperscript{91} The score contains numerous “tom-tom” drum rhythms and war whoops. Parker shrieks, “Ai-ee, Ai-ee!” throughout her aria, not only signifying her as identity as Comanche but marking her as “less civilized” than her Parker family members for her inability to express her grief through anything other than “unintelligible symbols.”\textsuperscript{92} Additionally, the spoken dialogue and visual props used in the opera emphasize a romanticized identification with nature often attached to Native people. Just before Quanah arrives, for example, Parker tells Prairie Flower that she saw “Indian writing” on

---

\textsuperscript{88} Deloria, *Playing Indian*, 105.
\textsuperscript{89} McCutchan, “Texas Legend Revived in Opera.”
\textsuperscript{92} Buehner, “Accessibility and Authenticity,” 32.
the path to the creek that morning that said they would know the time of their rescue when “the hoot owl sounds and the wolf cries.” The opera also perpetuates ideas of Comanche men as unpredictably animalistic. One of the Rangers recounts a recent raid against an Anglo family in which Comanche warriors killed women and children, then “got down on their knees an’ drunk up whole puddles of blood!” after the sight of it “drove ‘em crazy.” Plot points within the opera collapse the experiences of distinct Native nations and communities into an essentialized, white-washed version of “Indian.” In scene three, for example, the Corn Song “represents the worshipful attitude the Indians had toward the Great Spirit when He blessed them with sufficient rain to make the corn (their most important food) grow bountifully.” The Comanche, however, did not engage in agricultural practices prior to colonization and subsisted primarily on a bison-based diet. Such depictions of Native culture enact “a metaphorical collapsing of the human, Native American presence” into a mythical yet unrealistic image of Native people that entices audience members to enact fantasies rather than confront the uncomfortable truths of reality.

Anglo-Americans consistently turn to and celebrate romanticized images of Native people rather than engage with reality in order to alleviate their collective guilt. Native American scholar Shari Huhndorf refers to the process by which Anglo-Americans reconcile the violence of nation building through “self-justifying fantasies” as “going native.” The stereotyped images of Native people in Cynthia Parker signify a

---

93 Smith, *Cynthia Parker*, 47.
94 Smith, *Cynthia Parker*, 23.
95 Smith, *Cynthia Parker*, Opera Program, 1939.
98 Huhndorf, *Going Native*, 2-5.
primitive society overcome by American ingenuity and persistence in a natural evolutionary process. Unlike real Native people whose presence revealed the negative consequences of settler dispossession followed by years of forced assimilation, the “noble savage” erases the horrors of colonialism and replaces poverty, disease, and death with a more palatable image of Native people. Smith’s opera encourages her Anglo-American audience members to escape from pressures and anxieties of their present lives and experience a moment of their shared history that reveals their destiny as helpless agents in the inherent arrival of civilization. “Going native” in the twentieth century became an effective way to define Anglo people as the only legitimate Americans, naturalize the conquest of Native people, and reinforce race-based hierarchical power relations within American culture.99 Essentially, the “death of the primitive, staged over and over, enables the birth of the Western subject as spectator/conqueror” in a legitimizing experience.100

Parker’s captivity experience offered Smith a vehicle by which she could narrate the tensions between Anglo Texas settlers and Comanche in a way that ultimately justified Anglo settlement and erased Native people from the contemporary timeline. Smith invited audience members to “go native” by drawing attention to the cultural duality in which Parker lived. Parker, white by birth and Comanche by behavior, represents a pathway by which Anglo-Americans can vicariously mitigate their cultural guilt. Although the opera demonstrates respect for Parker’s desire to return to her Comanche family after her capture by Captain Ross, the narrative sends her back as a corpse. Parker’s life, experiences, and body therefore become a metaphor by which Smith locates Native culture in a fixed moment of the past. The Comanche culture dies along

99 Huhndorf, Going Native, 6.
100 Huhndorf, Going Native, 115.
with Parker in order to make room for a distinctly superior Anglo-American civilization. “Going native” in this manner communicates and legitimizes this racial domination.¹⁰¹

Parker’s inherent whiteness, contrasted against her embracing of Comanche cultural practices, becomes a recurring theme throughout the opera. When Sul Ross and his assistant, Lieutenant Kelher, bring Parker to her brother’s home the Lieutenant observes, “She looks Indian, but you can tell underneath she’s really white.”¹⁰² Parker’s whiteness also offers the imperative through which Ross and Kelher persuade her brother Ed to assume responsibility for her care. The Rangers appeal to Ed Parker’s sense of responsibility as patriarch of the family and point out the physical features that confirm Parker’s racial identity. Ross calls attention to her noticeably blue eyes and blonde hair.¹⁰³ In behavior, however, Parker is clearly Comanche. Kelhar marveled, “How she rode that pony; shootin’ like the very divil too!” during the attack in which they captured her.¹⁰⁴ As Comanche, Parker falls victim to the racial stereotypes associated with Native People. When Parker demands to be released to return to her sons and resists her confinement, Mary Parker exclaims that “she’s as wild as a coyote” and suggests that she would “soon scalp us as to look at us.”¹⁰⁵ Present within these exchanges is the underlying assumption that Parker’s white identity is natural and correct and her determination to return to her Comanche family represents her refusal to accept the social position of her birth. Given the choice, Parker would leave her civilized Anglo family behind in favor of a mythical and magical life among the primitive Comanche. For the

¹⁰¹ Huhndorf, Going Native, 15.
¹⁰² Smith, Cynthia Ann, 3.
¹⁰³ Smith, Cynthia Parker, 3-4.
¹⁰⁴ Smith, Cynthia Parker, 3.
¹⁰⁵ Smith, Cynthia Parker, 3-4.
Parkers, her refusal to reenter Anglo society willingly represents a cultural betrayal that transforms her into an enemy. Unable to reconcile Parker’s repeated attempts to escape and unhappy with her determination to see her sons again rather than live “with her own kind,” Mary becomes convinced that “them savages musta’ bewitched her.”106 Parker’s mourning also becomes racialized when an intolerable Mary, who considers Parker’s children to be “bastards” born out of Christian wedlock, disregards the losses she has experienced by quipping that she’s “been in one of her Injun moods” all day when asked why Parker refuses to celebrate the Rangers’ defeat of a Comanche raiding party.107 Parker’s devotion to her sons and husband, normally a feminine trait for which she would receive praise, become a sign of her cultural contamination and reflect her inability to perform not only as Anglo, but as woman.

Gender performance within Smith’s opera plays a significant role in affirming the narrative of civilization and reinforcing conservative social ideologies of the depression era. Historian Gail Bederman argues that race and gender are “interwoven so tightly in discourses of the civilized and the primitive that they have been impossible to disentangle.”108 The discourse of American civilization links Anglo-Protestant ideals of the heterosexual “reproductively directed marital unit” to distinct binary gender performance.109 Men demonstrate their strength and superior social position through the protection of women and children, and women nurture their dedication to the home in a delicate, spiritual submissiveness.110 Native family structures often defied these rigid

106 Smith, Cynthia Parker, 32.
107 Smith, Cynthia Parker, 32.
110 Bederman, Manliness and Civilization, 25.
binary roles and thus became an inherent primitive flaw to be overcome by Anglo influence and control.\textsuperscript{111} Smith’s opera does little to overcome these oppressive ideologies.

Embedded within the theme of Parker’s inherent whiteness lies a social construction of femininity, and her racialization and endangerment reinforce another. A comparison of the three women in the opera reveals how the intersecting influences of race and gender construct Native women as primitively inferior. Anglo matriarch Mary Parker meets the criteria for a civilized woman. Mary is “a ‘good’ woman,” a “conscientious” housewife, a graceful dancer, and well-practiced in “old-fashioned courtesy” and “feminine coquetry.”\textsuperscript{112} In a reflection of the feminist ideologies of the period, however, Smith gave Mary’s character more social freedom than typically associated with a model American woman. Unlike Parker and Prairie Flower, who are expected to assume a submissive role within the family, Mary is granted some small liberties to express her opinions because of her symbolic function as a white, upper class woman who embodies hegemonic thinking. Mary initially adamantly objects to taking Parker into her home and explains that she is “scared to death” of her sister-in-law.\textsuperscript{113} When Ed Parker persists, Mary threatens to leave him if he agrees to accept charge of the woman and child. Mary also becomes a voice of logic in contradiction to her husband’s emotional appeals as she observes the danger of holding Parker and Prairie Flower, noting that “her sons’ll never rest ‘till they get her back again” even if they must “kill us to get her away from here.”\textsuperscript{114} Mary, however, is not beyond the control of a firm

\textsuperscript{111} Rifkin, \textit{When Did Indians Become Straight?}, 8.
\textsuperscript{112} Smith, \textit{Cynthia Parker}, 10, 22.
\textsuperscript{113} Smith, \textit{Cynthia Parker}, 3-4.
\textsuperscript{114} Smith, \textit{Cynthia Parker}, 4.
masculine influence. In the end, Mary submits to Captain Ross’s mandate for her to perform her “Christian duty” to care for Parker, though she remains “fearful that Cynthia will someday prove scandalous.”  

Parker, though not overtly scandalous, stubbornly refuses to assimilate back into her role as a white woman. In her many musical and spoken lamentations Parker bemoans her Anglo family’s inability to understand her, pleads with Captain Ross to spare her sons, shares her desire to “see the open plains again,” and regularly plots her escape. In contrast to Mary, Parker’s efforts to exert independence are perceived as evidence that she has gone “crazy” as a result of Comanche influence. Smith redeems Parker through her birth status. As a white woman, Parker maintains certain privileges not available to Native women. When Captain Ross and Lieutenant Kelher return Parker to her brother’s home she is bound and tries to escape. Kelher twists his captive’s wrists until she “moans faintly in pain” and Captain Ross cautions, “Don’t hurt her, Lieutenant. Remember she’s a white woman.” This statement implies an acceptance of violence against Native women that does not exist for Anglo women. Smith affirms this sentiment later in the opera when Rangers recount their battle adventures and one man jokes that he’s “always at the tail end of the fight holdn’ some squaw by the hair.”

Prairie Flower, Parker’s daughter, must also navigate her dual Anglo and Native identities, though she must do so differently than her mother. Prairie Flower demonstrates little tolerance for her life among her Anglo relatives. Following an argument with her

115 Smith, Cynthia Parker, 4, 10.
116 Smith, Cynthia Parker, 33, 42.
117 Smith, Cynthia Parker, 32.
118 Smith, Cynthia Parker, 3.
119 Smith, Cynthia Parker, 22.
Aunt Mary, the young woman shouts that she hates “all the white race” because the other children refer to her as a “squaw” and laugh at her when she tells them her mother is an “Indian Princess.”\textsuperscript{120} The term, “squaw,” used several times in the opera, becomes a way to mark Native women’s lower position on the social hierarchy. Attaching the word to Prairie Flower denies the complexity of her dual identity and firmly roots her as the primitive foil to Mary Parker’s civilized femininity. The word “squaw” originated from an Algonquian word for “woman.”\textsuperscript{121} By the early twentieth century, the word, stripped of its cultural distinction, became a derogatory referent with the connotative force of the word “bitch.”\textsuperscript{122} During the period in which Smith wrote \textit{Cynthia Parker}, “squaw” was connected to the idea of sexual violence and frequently referred to a homogenized image of a Native woman “who masochistically allowed herself to be abused” by men.\textsuperscript{123} The Rangers’ story about “holdn’ some squaw by the hair” thus connotes images of violence made acceptable by the woman’s Native identity. The attachment of the label “squaw” to Prairie Flower entails both racist and sexist associations. Prairie Flower, despite her mother’s birth privilege, is unable to overcome the pollution of her father’s racial identity. Ed Parker affirms the young woman’s social position when he reminds her that her mother “is a white woman” and that she is only “her half-breed child.”\textsuperscript{124} Prairie Flower’s awareness of the distinction is apparent through her description of her mother as an “Indian Princess,” the Anglo-fictionalized antithesis to the Native squaw.\textsuperscript{125}

\textsuperscript{120} Smith, \textit{Cynthia Parker}, 47.
\textsuperscript{121} Nancy J Parezo and Angelina R. Jones, “What’s in a Name? The 1940s-1950s “Squaw Dress,”” \textit{The American Indian Quarterly} 33, no. 3 (Summer 2009): 373–404, 276.
\textsuperscript{122} Parezo and Jones, “What’s in a Name?,” 380.
\textsuperscript{123} Parezo and Jones, “What’s in a Name?,” 380.
\textsuperscript{124} Smith, \textit{Cynthia Parker}, 47.
\textsuperscript{125} Smith, \textit{Cynthia Parker}, 47.
Cultures of Trauma

Discursive constructions of femininity in captivity narratives such as *Cynthia Parker* situate women perpetually at risk. Mary Parker’s position in the Anglo-Protestant American social hierarchy makes her the target and desire of “savage” men from which her husband and Captain Ross must constantly offer protection. In contrast to Mary Parker’s civilized femininity, *Prairie Flower* and other Native women represent objects of spoil upon which violent acts are not only allowed, but normalized. These polarities play out through Parker who is victimized in her initial abduction, socially tainted by her sexual relationship with her Comanche husband, and then exposed to the trauma of “rescue” by Texas Rangers. Though she left no first-hand account of her traumatic narrative, through repetition in various cultural artifacts, Parker’s experiences become representative of the culture of trauma in which women live.

Captivity narratives symbolically reinforce the cultures of trauma linked to performances of patriarchal hegemonic masculinity that drive the settler colonial system. The existence of “cultures of trauma” differs notably from Alexander’s theory of “cultural trauma.” Art historian and trauma theorist Kristine Stiles introduced the idea of “cultures of trauma” to explain “traumatic circumstance manifest in culture” that becomes “discernible at the intersection of aesthetic, political, and social experience.”

Whereas Alexander argues that cultural trauma represents a symbolic sharing of trauma across generations and suggests that collective traumas can be overcome by a purposeful rhetorical reshaping of the narrative, Stiles contends that visual manifestations of the symptoms of trauma are rooted deeply in cultural community consciousness. The agency

---

126 Stiles, “Shaved Heads and Marked Bodies,” 47.
to construct or revise identity is confined by social forces embedded in “a complex overlapping cultural network of experiences, contexts, and conditions.”

Smith, with her dramatic and historically inaccurate adaptation of Parker’s traumatic captivity narrative, proved unable to escape the confines of a racist and sexist social system, else in light of the liberties the composer took with the narrative, Parker might have lived “happily ever after” with her Comanche family. Settler colonialist narratives pardon and normalize “the destruction and occupation of territories and bodies” through discourse that couples Anglo supremacy to male supremacy. “Phallic rule is fundamental in cultures of trauma” and it generates from patriarchal ownership and possession of women. Doctrines that privilege men over women appear in numerous cultures and are not unique to Anglo-American communities, however, in order to participate as “American,” men must perform the correct version of masculinity. In the construction of a hegemonic middle-class, Protestant, American masculinity, whiteness has “long been an intrinsic component.” Captivity narratives assist in the production of American manhood by constructing a pure and powerful masculinity in comparison to the unbridled savagery of Native men.

Though Cynthia Parker does not erase violence by Anglo settlers and suggests that Comanche retaliation was somewhat justified, it constructs violent acts performed by Comanche differently. Violent behavior performed by Anglo men becomes a healthy demonstration of manhood while violence enacted by Comanche men represents

131 Bederman, Manliness & Civilization, 239.
uncivilized barbarism. At the lawn party in their honor, one of Ross’s men brags about his Captain’s heroic deeds recounting how Captain Ross once witnessed an infant “bein’ drug nekkid through the cactus by a rope,” after which he charged the Comanche man performing the act and “split that savage’s belly from his chin down – wide open” with his sword, giving the warrior the outcome he “deserved.” The Ranger explains how Ross’s heroic response inspired his men who “killed ev’ry last one of those varmints” then “pitched their carcasses in one pile an’ burned ‘em like stinkin’ cattle.” The framing of this incident shapes Captain Ross’s behavior as that of an executioner delivering justice and the Comanche man’s behavior as unjustified, uncontrollable savagery. This distinction establishes Native men as a screen against which Anglo masculinity can be measured and discounts alternative cultural performances of masculinity. In his landmark study of Comanche history, Pekka Hämäläinen notes that, much like Anglo-Americans, Comanche social code linked a man’s honor to his ability to protect his family. Loss of a loved one to an enemy “was a source of unbearable shame” which “demanded massive retribution” frequently found by “covering the dead with enemy bodies” or by replacing a lost loved one with a captive. Hostage taking therefore offered a means for both Comanche and Anglo men to enact their respective masculinities confirming Stiles’s allegation that “wars are fought for, among other things, privileged use of the bodies of women.”

132 Smith, Cynthia Parker, 23.
133 Smith, Cynthia Parker, 23-24.
135 Stiles, “Shaved Heads, Marked Bodies,” 50. See also Hämäläinen, The Comanche Empire, Men and boys were also taken as captives to be adopted, used as slaves, or for ransom; however, in relation to women captives, men had more liberty. Parker’s brother, John, was ransomed within a few years of the attack on Fort Parker but was allowed to return to the Comanche at will.
In life and in fiction Parker has been consistently situated between warring populations who lay claim to her. Parker’s own agency gets repeatedly lost in narratives that serve only to appropriate her individual experiences into a symbolic trauma for the collective. War creates circumstances that inherently generate trauma and cultural productions offer a means of closure.\footnote{LaCapra, \textit{Writing History, Writing Trauma}, 13.} Settler colonial practices in the United States certainly beg for discourse that works through the violence of dispossession and resulting systematic oppression. In order for a text to “work through” a traumatic historical event, however, it must do so in “a manner that accurately and critically engages” the initiating events.\footnote{LaCapra, \textit{Writing History, Writing Trauma}, 123.} Julia Smith’s \textit{Cynthia Parker} serves only to perpetuate the feelings of melancholia that result when absence is conflated with actual loss. Rather than an acknowledgement of the way in which war creates a culture of trauma for women, Smith’s adaptation works within the systematic confines of oppression to perpetuate racist and sexist ideologies, making it yet another narrative device through which Anglo-American men could act out their social anxieties and fear of inadequacy. Smith, like many white women advocates and “pioneers” of industry, found herself unable to acknowledge that “neither sexism nor racism will be rooted out unless both sexism and racism are rooted out together.”\footnote{Bederman, \textit{Manliness & Civilization}, 239.} Smith’s reliance upon inaccurate stereotypes of Native people brought her personal success at the expense of another marginalized population. Though \textit{Cynthia Parker} disappeared from the opera scene after its premier and was only revived once at the University of Texas in 1985, Smith successfully used Parker’s captivity narrative as a tool by which to gain entry into a field dominated by men. The
opera launched Smith’s career and she ultimately received national attention for numerous compositions, books, individual performances, and for her noteworthy advocacy on behalf of women composers.139 Through Cynthia Parker Americans in between the world wars found a narrative that legitimized the social position of anxiety-ridden Anglo-American men until, six months after the opera’s premier, World War again offered men the means by which to demonstrate their worth.

CHAPTER IV
SEARCHING FOR LOST MASCULINITY

While Julia Smith celebrated the successful and historic premier of her opera, 
*Cynthia Parker*, film director John Ford readied to make history in Hollywood. Ford’s 
release of *Stagecoach* on March 2, 1939, revived the western film genre after a period of 
stagnation and jumpstarted the career of renowned actor John Wayne.¹ Seventeen years 
after reviving the western in *Stagecoach*, Ford and Wayne partnered to bring an 
interpretation of Cynthia Ann Parker’s traumatic captivity narrative to film with *The 
Searchers*. The film debuted in May 1956, and has retained popularity as one of Wayne’s 
best performances.² *The Searchers* film production began with Ford’s interest in Alan 
LeMay’s novel of the same name. By the time he published his book in 1954, the western 
had become one of the “most bankable” genres for film and literature and LeMay had an 
extensive resume as both author and screenwriter.³ LeMay became intrigued by Parker’s 
captivity narrative when he learned of her story during a trip to the Texas Panhandle for 
research on a different project in 1950.⁴ Rather than focus on Parker, however, LeMay’s 
interest centered on the story of her uncle, James Parker, the troubled rebel of the family 
who spent years looking for Parker alone until declining health forced him to stop in

212. 
⁴ Frankel, *The Searchers*, 182.
In his version of Parker’s rescue narrative LeMay dramatized James’s adventures, changed the names of Parker family members, added new characters, altered the setting and sequence of events, and moved the timeline forward to the post-Civil War period. Ford adapted LeMay’s novel into a highly successful and influential film that inspired a significant alteration of the genre that more accurately reflected post World War II conceptions of masculinity.

In keeping with the conventions of traditional captivity narratives, The Searchers begins with a Comanche attack on an Anglo family living at the edge of the Texas frontier during which the family’s two daughters are taken captive and everyone else brutally killed. The gruesome scene is discovered by the narrative’s protagonists, Ethan Edwards, Ford’s characterization of James Parker played by John Wayne, who is a brother to the family’s patriarch, and his adopted nephew, Martin Pawley, a fictional addition to the Parker narrative. Following a brief funeral, Edwards and Pawley set out on a six-year search to recover the captive girls. Early into their search the men locate the discarded body of the older girl, Lucy Edwards, but their quest to find her younger sister Debbie, who represents Cynthia Ann Parker, ultimately reunites them when they discover her living in kinship with a Comanche family. Debbie’s initial refusal to abandon her Comanche family and rejoin her uncle and cousin prompts her uncle to attempt to kill her rather than allow her to continue living as Comanche. Ultimately her cousin successfully

---

5 Jo Ella Powell Exley, Frontier Blood: The Saga of the Parker Family (College Station: University of Texas A&M Press, 2001), 128.
6 Frankel, The Searchers, 199.
7 In LeMay’s novel the main character is Amos Edwards. Ford changed Amos’ name to Ethan in his film but the relationship to the Edwards family remained the same.
8 In LeMay’s novel Debbie is living with her adopted father, Scar, and has been betrothed to a young Comanche warrior but is not yet wed. In Ford’s film Debbie is one of Scar’s wives.
helps Debbie recall her early childhood memories and, in an emotional ending, Debbie is restored to her proper place in Anglo society.

The present chapter provides an analysis of Ford’s film in order to show how the rescue trope embedded within captivity narratives interlaces race and gender in an inseparable pairing that reinforces white male supremacy. *The Searchers* offers an intriguing artifact of analysis due to its reframing of acceptable masculine behavior following World War II. Social context of the 1950s demanded a different form of white hero in order to legitimize the position of Anglo men who felt threatened by radical change inspired by the Civil Rights movement and post-war feminism, but who had returned traumatized from the war. Although Ford’s film is an adaptation of LeMay’s novel, this examination is not concerned with the degree of fidelity the director maintained in his production. Instead, this review recognizes the film for its ability to make its own meaning through a unique context and medium. The decision to favor the film was based on the study’s goal to examine Parker’s narrative in a variety of genres and in recognition of the power of audio-visual experiences to offer complex contextualization in an immersive experience. The chapter contextualizes the production of Ford’s film and reveals how it symbolizes the post-war culture of trauma.

**The (New) Old West**

As a literary, television, and film genre, the western provided the setting for the creation of America’s own mythic hero – the cowboy. Unlike their real-life counterparts

---

who, in the mid to late 1800s worked as transient herders, the cowboy created for
literature and film was a “fierce and brave” man of “impeccable ethics,” a champion of
masculinity who willingly adventured into uncharted territory to “tame it for its less-than-
masculine inhabitants.”\textsuperscript{11} The inherent celebration of Anglo settler victory over their
“primitive” Native enemies found in captivity narratives integrated as seamlessly into the
western genre as it did into early colonial pioneer narratives. The fictional cowboys that
emerged in the early twentieth century replaced pioneers in a mythical re-creation of the
frontier experience.\textsuperscript{12} The western grounded “the enduring foundational myth that the
American frontier was an untouched, pure new world, and a place to test one’s mettle and
faith.” \textsuperscript{13} The genre provided an outlet for Anglo American men to celebrate their
superior status until the United States’ entry into World War II turned the national focus
to the war effort. Once again war provided “temporary respite” for the melancholy
associated with fear of lost masculinity.\textsuperscript{14} When the war ended, however, returning
soldiers found that reentry into their home communities proved more of a challenge than
they anticipated.\textsuperscript{15}

World War II, more than any war previously fought, demonstrated the
 technological power humans have to annihilate one another. Advances in weaponry,
 logistical support, intelligence, and communication along with the wide-scale destruction
 that followed the first deployment of an atomic bomb produced collective anxieties that
 lasted long after the war ended. The “ethos of the Holocaust and nuclear age” ushered in

\textsuperscript{11} Michael Kimmel, \textit{The History of Men: Essays on the History of American and British Masculinities}
\textsuperscript{12} Kimmel, \textit{Manhood in America}, 211.
\textsuperscript{13} Frankel, \textit{The Searchers}, 186.
\textsuperscript{14} Kimmel, \textit{Manhood in America}, 190.
\textsuperscript{15} Kimmel, \textit{Manhood in America}, 190.
an “age of trauma” during which threats, though not always visible, feel omnipresent.\textsuperscript{16} Those who witnessed the conflict on the front lines faced challenges of overcoming their personal experiences with the effects of war. Many veterans found it difficult to cope with the “psychic wounds” they acquired in battle.\textsuperscript{17} “War shock, difficulty reintegrating, unexplained lethargy, emotional mood swings, and nightmares” became common symptoms of trauma for returning soldiers.\textsuperscript{18} Ford confronts these behaviors with his depiction of Ethan Edwards who returns to his brother’s farm a troubled Confederate veteran whose service in the war is shrouded in mystery. Edwards tends to wander and regularly accepts odd jobs that favor his bachelorhood, but in deep fidelity to his family, he always makes his way back to work for his brother. The protagonist has little regard for “traditional social constraints,” is “cold, suspicious, and often gratuitously insulting” to the people around him, and calls to mind the “surly” and mysterious “renegade” who “seems to have something to hide.”\textsuperscript{19} Many westerns in the period following World War II foregrounded heroes working to overcome their psychological problems amid radically changing social environments.\textsuperscript{20} These “darker westerns” reflected part of a larger trend that developed the image of a “disturbed” hero.\textsuperscript{21} Depictions of violent attacks involving rape, murder, and massacre present in many westerns “bear witness” to American

\textsuperscript{18} Kimmel, Manhood in America, 191.
\textsuperscript{21} Eckstein, “Introduction,” 5.
cultures of trauma in the period following World War II. Honoring the 1950s trend toward “dark” or “psychological” westerns, Edwards seems perpetually tormented by an unnamed trauma. He openly resists integration into society and acts out in highly emotional mood swings. Edwards’s post-traumatic responses represent collective anxiety over the absence of an idealized masculinity rather than a true historical loss, however, and his dissatisfaction and resistance embodies the “masculinist and racist” response often found in periods of civil rights expansion. As “a white triumphalist genre,” the western capitalizes on the historical trauma of settler colonialism and sensationalizes violence against people of marginalized races and women to create an image of post-war heroic masculinity that empowers white men.

World War II ultimately proved to be a watershed event in the quest for civil rights. After the war, African American soldiers, many of whom had received commendation for their honorable service, returned home to segregated communities where they called attention to the hypocrisy of the battle for democracy abroad when they were denied equal representation in their own country. For decades following the Civil War southern states kept African American advancement in check with strict Jim Crow laws and Black Codes that regulated access to public spaces. Citing the right of individual states to make their own laws, many Anglo Americans vehemently opposed any federal intervention. Anxiety over social advancement for African Americans

22 Stiles, “Shaved Heads and Marked Bodies,” 47.
25 Takaki, A Different Mirror, 389.
26 Takaki, A Different Mirror, 385.
extended well beyond the legal allowance of Jim Crow into the early decades of the
twentieth century and debates over states’ rights reignited during the Civil Rights
Movement.27 In 1956, the year The Searchers was released, eleven southern states
pledged “their undying opposition to racial integration” in the Declaration of
Constitutional Principles, commonly known as the “Southern Manifesto.”28 In direct
response to the Brown v. Board of Education supreme court decision that desegregated
public schools two years prior, the Manifesto claimed that the court had abused its
judicial authority and signaled that resistance to integration was not a reflection of racist
ideology but rather a “patriotic stand” in defense of the US Constitution.29 The mass
resistance by anxiety-ridden white Americans who perceived federal desegregation
policies as a violation of individual states’ rights echoed the reactions of “disgruntled
Southerners” who resented federal intrusion following the Civil War.30 Just as states
fought to maintain segregation with Jim Crow laws, they resisted changes required of the
Brown v. Board decision. Ford links the two periods with his portrayal of Edwards. When
he arrives at this brother’s ranch three years after the end of the Civil War, Edwards
evades questions about his life in the interim years and gifts his service medal to young
Debbie as if it’s only a trinket. Edwards is recalcitrant about the Confederacy’s loss.
When the captain of the Texas Rangers attempts to swear him in as a deputy to pursue
cattle thieves, Edwards quips, “A man’s only good for one oath at a time and I took mine
to the Confederate States of America.”31 In a moment that foreshadows his persistence in

27 Carol Anderson, White Rage: The Unspoken Truth of Our Racial Divide (New York: Bloomsbury USA,
2016), 67.
29 Anderson, White Rage, 80.
30 Buscombe, The Searchers, 9.
the search for Debbie, Edwards says of his participation in the Confederacy’s surrender, “I don’t believe in surrender.”\textsuperscript{32} The war clearly has not ended for Edwards, and his radical behavior allowed disgruntled Anglo Americans in Ford’s 1950s audience to make use of the character to tap into their own unmitigated racial prejudices.

*The Searchers* exposed social anxieties related to race relations in the United States.\textsuperscript{33} Arguments about states’ rights served only to mask racist reactions to federal desegregation policies. The unspoken fear among white Americans was that increased interaction between members of different races would encourage inter-racial fraternization. In *The Searchers*, and other westerns, the taming of wild spaces by heroic, strong white men provides the basis for performance of hegemonic masculinity. The guaranteed continuity of the civilized order depends upon the maintenance of white supremacy and racial purity. By the 1950s the American frontier was an idea of a distant past. The cowboy therefore serves as a reminder of the duty Anglo men have to preserve civilization established by their pioneering ancestors. Present throughout the storyline is an irrational fear and hatred of interracial sexuality, “particularly of ‘dark men’ with white women.”\textsuperscript{34} In this case, fiction mirrored fact as aversion to miscegenation proved a salient issue in the period in which *The Searchers* premiered. One of the most notable violent reactions to the threat of inter-racial sexual encounters occurred in the period between the publication of LeMay’s novel and the release of Ford’s film. In Mississippi in 1955, two white men kidnapped, brutally beat, and lynched fourteen-year-old Emmett

\textsuperscript{33} Eckstein, “Introduction,” 8.
\textsuperscript{34} Eckstein, “Introduction,” 7.
Till, who was accused by Carolyn Bryant, a white woman, of allegedly whistling at her. 35 This heinous act revealed the vitriol many whites felt for integration. Though miscegenation is a significant theme in *The Searchers*, the Motion Picture Production Code “frowned on” any depiction of sexual encounters between African Americans and whites at the time of the film’s production. 36 The formula of the captivity narrative provided the screen needed to express hatred for miscegenation by allowing Native men to signify African Americans. Historian Arthur Eckstein notes that critics have cautioned against readings that reduce Comanche characters in the narrative to “empty signifiers” of other marginalized races, but he further argues that the film behaves allegorically and is therefore fairly read as a gesture toward these social anxieties. 37

Ford complicates the topic of miscegenation by writing the character Martin Pawley as one-eighth Cherokee and by casting a brilliantly blue-eyed Henry Brandon as the Comanche chief, Scar. With these characterizations the film acknowledges the long history of Native/white intermarriage, but does so with a clear racial bias. For as long as Anglo colonial settlers have encountered Native people, miscegenation and intermarriage have occurred with varying degrees of social acceptance. Adoption of people from other ethnic groups was a common practice among Comanche, with adoptees enjoying full rights and access to social advancement in the community. 38 Among Anglo society there exist several accounts of white men taking Native wives, and white women’s missionary activities among Native communities in the late nineteenth century increased the public

35 Carol Anderson, *White Rage*, 77. Till was tortured and murdered by Bryant’s husband, Roy Bryant, and her brother-in-law, J. W. Milam.
acceptance of intermarriage when women like Elaine Goodale and Alice Fletcher entered into relationships with Native men. The key to social acceptance of Native/white intermarriage, however, lies in notions of assimilation. In order to achieve full social acceptance, inter-marriage works when Native people assimilate into Anglo culture. Both Pawley and Scar are the products of inter-ethnic sexual encounters, yet they receive different treatment in the film. Scar, as a threat to the safety and security of white women, must be eliminated. Pawley, though Edwards frequently calls attention to his ethnic identity with racist remarks, ultimately redeems himself with a successful performance of heroic masculinity. Ford grants Pawley access to white privilege, and an attractive, young white wife, because he works to protect and maintain the settler system by joining Edwards on the search for Debbie and is the one to kill Scar. The Searchers aligns the performance of hegemonic masculinity with a racial bias that seeks at all costs to preserve the sexual purity of white women and validate white civilization.

The Searchers drew upon the allegory of the captivity narrative to help shape America’s image of hegemonic masculinity by reinforcing white men’s social position in the wake of post-World War II anxieties. The cowboys of westerns in the post-World War II era validate a slightly altered form of Anglo masculinity – that of the broken hero. The Searchers’ version of the heroic American cowboy looked different than westerns produced before the war, meeting Americans’ desire for heroes who more closely resembled the men returning home. Significantly, these men, as well as the events

---

narrated in the story and the social and political contexts in which the novel and film were produced, were deeply “imprinted” with trauma.\(^{41}\)

**Wounded Men and Regulated Women**

The image of the cowboy constructed through characters like Edwards offered a different idea of socially acceptable manly behavior than Progressive Era frontier narratives like DeShields’s book. In the place of the heroic agrarian pioneer, westerns “offer a fantasy of freedom” from restrictive social structures.\(^{42}\) Edwards, despite his anger and malcontent, proves that Anglo men deserve a place of merit in society regardless of their behavior. Instead of working through his resentment, Edwards seems doomed to experience his traumatic return in a “melancholic paralysis” or “manic agitation” that results when a social-structural absence is confused with an actual loss.\(^{43}\)

In addition to enduring traumatizing events in the Civil War, Edwards suffers from the actual loss of his family. During the attack on his brother’s house Comanche kill everyone except the youngest girls, Lucy and Debbie, whom they take captive. Edwards disrupts his mourning process by cutting the funeral ceremony for his family short in order to begin the search for the missing girls. Symbolically this act represents Edwards’s inability to mourn his losses effectively. Instead, Edwards directs his anger toward himself and assumes the blame for his family’s death. This internalization reveals a conflation of actual loss with the absence of an idealized masculinity, one that Edwards has failed to perform. Much of Edwards’s discontent stems not from his experiences of

\(^{41}\) For more on how cultural productions reflect contextual trauma see Stiles, “Shaved Heads and Marked Bodies,” in *Concerning Consequences*, 47.


\(^{43}\) Dominick LaCapra, *Writing History, Writing Trauma* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2001), 64.
loss, but his unmitigated “illicit desire” for his brother’s wife, Martha. The attraction between Edwards and Martha is made clear through the “coy girlishness” with which she greets him, the forced “ritualized formality” of his response, and her tender caress of his war jacket when she thinks no one is watching. During the brief part of the story in which Martha is alive, the home is filled with a “disturbing tension” from “suppressed eroticism” between the pair. Edwards’s respect for his brother motivates him to suppress his desire for Martha so that it “festers” and drives him “half-mad with longing and grief” after he discovers that Comanche men have raped, murdered, and dismembered her. Martha’s death signifies for Edwards not just the loss of a family member, but the absence of the feminine balance to his own masculinity.

Women, though few in number, play a significant but largely symbolic role in The Searchers. In the western mythos, if rugged white cowboys tame the wild frontier for weaker members of society, then women, through their inherently refining influence, prove essential in the taming of the cowboy. Heteronormative, Anglo, Christian families provide the basis for cultivating a civilized frontier, and families without mothers or men without wives are frequently depicted as “completely lacking in humanity, perverse and destructive.” Though Martha Edwards’s death represents a deeply felt loss for her family, it becomes conflated with social-structural absence when removal of the taming influence she provides results in Edwards’s psychological exploitation of her trauma. Edwards is more distressed over the realization that Martha’s attackers raped her than

over her death. Scar, the primary Comanche villain of the narrative, who raped Martha, enacts an illicit desire held back by Edwards’s code of ethics. His unrelenting search for Debbie, therefore, serves the ulterior function of providing an opportunity to seek revenge on the man who sexually violated Martha in a way prohibited to Edwards. Ford more fully explores this tension by deviating from LeMay’s book and adding Ethan’s ritualistic scalping of Scar at the end of the film. During the final attack on the Comanche village at the end of their search, Pawley kills Scar in a fight to free his cousin. In “one of the most shocking sequences” of the film, Edwards locates Scar’s dead body, dismounts from his horse, lifts Scar’s head, draws a knife, and mutilates the dead man’s body.49 This “symbolic act of castration” satiates Edward’s ravenous desire for revenge.50 As evidenced by the presence of children in the Edwards home, Scar was not the only man to have sexual access to Martha. Edwards, though disgruntled in unrequited love for his brother’s wife, accepts and respects her relationship with his brother, an Anglo man. Race plays an undeniable role in Martha’s rape. Edwards appropriates the trauma inflicted upon Martha’s body into a wound on his own identity, because it demonstrates his inability to protect her from racial pollution and his vengeful desecration of Scar’s body embodies the masculine ideal of violent retribution often attributed to western cowboy heroes.51

Debbie’s life among the Comanche represents a continued insult on Edwards’s masculinity. The urgency to find Debbie stems from the fear that as she matures she will become “sexually available” to the men who captured her and risk both sexual and racial

50 Buscombe, The Searchers, 21.
pollution.\textsuperscript{52} In order to perform successfully as a man, Edwards must return Debbie to his protection and remove her from Scar’s household where, after six years, she lives as one of his wives.\textsuperscript{53} When Debbie initially refuses to leave willingly, Edwards attempts to kill her rather than have her remain sexually available to the Comanche. Pawley reminds his adopted uncle, “Debbie’s your blood kin!” to which Edwards responds angrily, “Not anymore. She’s been living with a Buck!” The story’s “happy ending,” in which Pawley eventually convinces Debbie to return to Anglo society and thereby removes her from further racial contamination, also restores Debbie to her proper place in society.\textsuperscript{54}

Unlike previous versions of Parker’s captivity narrative, \textit{The Searchers} presents a more disciplined perspective of white women’s bodies. In the Progressive Era when DeShields wrote his book, white women often obtained limited freedom and respect if they demonstrated strength of character associated with manly behavior. In what Molly K. Varley names the “manly mother” persona, Progressive Era notions of masculinity linked to Americanism expected white women who became the targets of captivity to defend themselves, and captivity narratives praised them when they succeeded.\textsuperscript{55} Rachel Parker’s “manful” resistance to her own captivity offers an example of this belief in DeShields’s text.\textsuperscript{56} Smith’s opera, \textit{Cynthia Parker}, written in the period between the

\begin{footnotesize}
\begin{itemize}
\item[53] In Ford’s film Scar has taken a now 17-year-old Debbie as one of his wives by the time Ethan and Martin find her. In LeMay’s novel Scar is Debbie’s adopted father but has betrothed her to a young, unnamed Comanche man.
\item[54] Eckstein, “Introduction,” 3.
\item[56] See Chapter Two, “Recaptured Memories,” in the present dissertation. James T. DeShields, \textit{Cynthia Ann Parker: The story of her capture at the massacre of the inmates of Parker’s Fort; of her quarter of a century spent among the Comanches, as the wife of the war chief, Peta Nocona; and of her recapture at the battle of Pease River, by Captain L.S. Ross, of the Texian rangers} (St. Louis: Printed for the Author, 1886), 14.
\end{itemize}
\end{footnotesize}
world wars when white women enjoyed increased access to public spaces, granted white women more agency as long as they embodied hegemonic behavior. The opera’s character, Mary Parker, Anglo sister-in-law to Parker, enjoys at least a few social transgressions as long as she maintains the racial hierarchy. The Searchers responded to a different cultural need. In order for men to perform their masculinity following World War II, women needed to return to and remain in the domestic sphere. The experiences of Martha, Lucy, and Debbie Edwards reinforce the need to regulate women’s bodies and behavior. Strong male-centered heteronormative family structures offered a way for Anglo men to secure their identities and mark their successes following their return from the war. In the social turmoil following World War II, reintegration of returning soldiers into their communities was thought to be made easier “through the heroic compassion and generosity of the moral women who waited patiently and preserved the home front.”

Women, however, did not just wait patiently at home. Wartime labor shortages opened jobs to numerous women who were previously unemployed or employed in traditional domestic positions. Invigorated by the “taste of independence” and “feeling of self-confidence” they achieved by earning their own wages, learning new skills, and working alongside people from diverse backgrounds, many women resisted the expected surrender of their positions to men returning home after the war. Throughout the 1950s, post-war propaganda and mass media made targeted efforts to remind women of their need “to return to docile domesticity” in order to “placate their wounded men.”

---

58 Kimmel, Manhood in America, 191.
59 Takaki, A Different Mirror, 366.
60 Kimmel, Manhood in America, 191.
Warnings about the hyper-feminization of society began to appear in magazines, journals, and opinion columns. In this context the western became “the apotheosis of masculinist fantasy.” In a Foucauldian sense, *The Searchers* advocates for the return of white women to the domestic sphere where white men can and should protect their “docile bodies.” The femininity celebrated in the film manufactures white women’s bodies in a way that “mandates fragility” which naturally produces women who cannot defend themselves. *The Searchers*, rather than serving as an entertaining fictionalized historical narrative, functions more as a balm to the wounded ego of the heteropatriarchal Anglo man.

**Film as a Memory Device**

Unlike previous versions of her story, *The Searchers* made Parker’s captivity narrative available to a broad national audience for the first time. Earlier adaptations tended to maintain a regional spread, particularly in the state of Texas where the narrative functioned as a tale of the state’s mythic origin. DeShields’s book served the primary purpose of bolstering the political career of Lawrence Sullivan Ross and Smith’s opera, though influential in launching her career, was only performed for a live audience two times. The appearance of the narrative in the format of film increased not only the size of the audience, but the influence of the story’s ideology. The medium of cinema has the power to reveal little known historical events and transport them to distant communities in a unique way. Television and film offer access to collective memories through an

---

experience that is both immediate and intimate. Film enables collective recall of historical events differently than literature because it allows mass distribution of a visual-turn-virtual experience. The images on screen can elicit an emotional response from viewers who then embrace the illusion of reality. Circulation of historical narratives and images through mass media thus affects people’s interpretation of the past. When mass mediated productions feature traumatic histories, misinterpretation can occur as viewers project their own contemporary feelings and beliefs backwards through time.

Visual representations of trauma-inducing historical events allow audience members to encounter the “traces” of trauma from the past. Memory studies scholar Alison Landsberg argues that film, as an “experiential mode” of engaging history, promotes the development of “prosthetic memories,” which she defines as “personally felt public memories that result from the experience of a mediated representation of the past.” Through the development of prosthetic memories people do not simply learn history, they assume a more personal memory of a past they did not experience. Landsberg uses the metaphor of a prosthetic device to describe this memory creation because it often marks traumatic history not experienced first-hand, but that is “worn on the body” in a sensory response that becomes both personally interchangeable and interpersonally exchangeable. Prosthetic memories therefore have a significant

---

69 Landsberg, *Engaging the Past*, 3.
70 Landsberg, *Engaging the Past*, 20.
influence on a person’s own subjectivity, behavior, and ideas about social norms.\textsuperscript{71} As a means of accessing the past, prosthetic memories encourage the use of history to explain the present. History represents, among other things, a person’s interpretation and explanation of the past as shaped by personal biases, interests, and viewpoints.\textsuperscript{72} History frequently “follows where current events lead it.”\textsuperscript{73} Notions of what counts as history have evolved over time as revolutions in technology have altered audience’s preferred means of accessing historical information.\textsuperscript{74} \textit{The Searchers} allowed post-World War II audiences to make use of (an admittedly imagined) historical event to shape understandings of their present circumstances. The use of history in the film, however, promotes unethical representations of marginalized populations that encourage the maintenance of white male supremacy. Experiential modes of history have the ability to generate an empathic response that can encourage ethical thinking by asking people to engage in a critical evaluation of colonization practices, but the “illusion of understanding” they offer often results in over-identification with “the other’s victimization” which “turns one’s gaze inward” in an unproductive secondary traumatization.\textsuperscript{75}

People make use of historical narratives to explain their present circumstances in unique ways based on features of their lives that are most salient at the time in which they engage with the narratives. For this reason, Anglo audiences respond differently to the film than Native people who view it. \textit{The Searchers} allows Anglo men to appropriate the

\textsuperscript{71} Landsberg, \textit{Engaging the Past}, 9.
\textsuperscript{73} Button, “Creating More Useable Pasts,” 5.
\textsuperscript{75} Landsberg, \textit{Engaging the Past}, 20.
cultural trauma experienced by racially marginalized populations through the process of prosthetic remembering. Collective traumas are not discovered, but are socially constructed by groups who maintain power over cultural productions. Through creative cinematography and plot manipulation “obscures the fact that white settlers and their government, for personal and public gain, destroyed many Indian civilizations and damaged others.” The symbolic nature of cultural trauma means that initiating events may be imagined or real. Like DeShields’s book and other representations of Parker’s narrative, Ford begins his film not with Anglo settler arrival into already settled Indigenous communities, but with a Comanche attack on a seemingly innocent Anglo home. In his essay, “Native American Reactions to The Searchers,” Tom Grayson Colonnese observes that Native people who watch or read The Searchers “are aware that these supposedly peaceful ranchers, interested only in making a living through raising cattle, are living on land that has been seized.” From this perspective, initiation of aggressive action is not performed by Comanche, but by white settlers who took possession of the land through violence. The position of the spectator thus determines the interpretation of events in the story. Films, in particular, have the ability to influence interpretation due to their reliance on visuality. Communication and media studies scholar Barbie Zelizer argues that images retain a unique power to confirm the reality of “inherently uncertain, hypothetical, or emotional” events due to their ability to call forth

public memory of “complex and multidimensional phenomena” through condensed vignettes.\(^8\) Anxiety ridden Anglo men in the post-World War II era who felt threatened by a perceived lack of social capital received reinforcement of their fears when Native people in *The Searchers* were allowed to signify all other non-white races as perpetual sources of trauma for Anglo Americans.

Native people serve primarily as signifiers for other threatening races in *The Searchers*. After World War II the average American’s interest in Native people waned.\(^8\) The image of the “noble savage” supplanted reality in the minds of most Anglo Americans and Native people slipped further into the past as national policy turned from reorganization efforts to termination. John Collier’s attempts to revitalize cultural traditions and create opportunities for tribal sovereignty through the Indian Reorganization Act halted when domestic budget cuts required to fund the war prompted a call for the cessation of federal assistance programs.\(^8\) Through a series of legislative actions between 1950 and 1954 the federal government discontinued formal recognition of many smaller tribes, removed authority over civil and criminal problems from tribal oversight, and increased governmental intrusion into tribal health and education issues.\(^8\) Agents in power construct and control dominant discourses and the federal government’s Termination program suggested that Native Americans were a population of people left behind in the nation’s past, relevant only to history books and mythic narratives of the

---

\(^8\) Zelizer, “The Voice of the Visual in Memory,” 163-164.
\(^8\) Deloria, Jr. and Lytle, “American Indians in Historical Perspective,” 18-19.
country’s origin. As a symbol of civilization’s dominance over the frontier, the western perpetuated this notion. Not surprisingly, Native people view westerns much differently.

For Native people, the western serves as a reminder of the cultural trauma they have experienced as a product of settler colonialism. Colonnese compared Native people watching westerns to “Jews watching movies about the Holocaust.”\(^{84}\) Unlike Jewish people in representations of the Holocaust, however, most westerns portray Native people in negative ways as the “violent, aggressive villains” of the American origin story.\(^{85}\) Signs embedded throughout *The Searchers* reveal cultures of trauma for Native American viewers. Colonnese, along with three other friends from different Native tribes, watched the film and recorded their observations.\(^{86}\) Right away the setting of the film called forth traumatic land dispossession characteristic of settler colonial violence. Despite the screen overlay that establishes “Texas 1868” as the setting, Ford used Monument Valley in far northern Arizona as the location for his film. The images reminded the panel participants that “Ford ‘discovered’ Monument Valley for white America” by introducing it as a popular backdrop in his films.\(^{87}\) The film was shot on the Navajo Reservation and used Navajo residents speaking their own language as “extras” to represent non-specific Comanche in village and battle scenes. The popularity of the film attracted white visitors and turned the area, previously “one of the most isolated places in the United States,” into a popular tourist attraction.\(^{88}\) In the same way that Parker’s short hair shown in the photo

\(^{84}\) Colonnese, “Native American Reactions to *The Searchers,*” 335.

\(^{85}\) Colonnese, “Native American Reactions to *The Searchers,*” 335.

\(^{86}\) Colonnese, a Santee Sioux, was joined by Bernice Elke (Oglala Sioux), Augustine McCaffery (Comanche), and Scott Pinkham (Nez Perce) in a viewing of the film after Art Eckstein asked him to contribute an essay for his edited book on the film. The group’s reactions are recorded in Colonnese, “Native American Reactions to *The Searchers,*” 335–42.

\(^{87}\) Colonnese, “Native American Reactions to *The Searchers,*” 336.

\(^{88}\) Colonnese, “Native American Reactions to *The Searchers,*” 336.
taken after her return to Anglo society serves as “a signal” of her “mourning” and “despair” to Native people through the years, images and depictions of Native people in *The Searchers* signify the return of their collective trauma.\(^{89}\)

Trauma involves a process of reappearance and forgetting and American history often seems to be an “endless repetition of previous trauma.”\(^{90}\) Dominick LaCapra cautioned that everyone is not entitled to a subject position associated with specific historical traumas.\(^{91}\) Working through cultural trauma requires recognition of a distinction between actual historical loss and structural absences. Parker’s captivity narrative allows the appropriation of the Parker family’s real losses suffered during the attack on their fort by Anglo Americans because it shapes the events as a wound on Anglo American people. Without question, Anglo settlers who lost family members in their efforts to claim Indigenous-settled land experienced trauma. Anglo viewers of *The Searchers* or any of the iterations of Parker’s captivity narrative described in the present dissertation, however, cannot fairly claim access to that particular trauma. The temptation for Anglo men in particular to attempt to use Parker’s history to make sense of and organize their present circumstances in various historical settings disguises the persistent effects of a settler colonial system that continues to reinforce hegemonic ideologies. LaCapra notes that “[e]veryone is subject to structural trauma” such as that inherent in the settler colonial system, but that everyone cannot claim status as a “victim” in such systems.\(^{92}\) Anglo men in the 1950s might have experienced symptoms of trauma based on

---

\(^{89}\) Colonnese, “Native American Reactions to *The Searchers,*” 340.


\(^{91}\) LaCapra, *Writing History, Writing Trauma,* 78.

\(^{92}\) LaCapra, *Writing History, Writing Trauma,* 79.
any number of instigating events, but the actual historical experiences (imagined or real) of people in the past do not entitle them to claim the status of victim in a system that maintains their right to superior social status. In order to overcome systematic oppression, collectives must practice a form of “cognitive processing” that re-writes the trauma narrative and acknowledges the difference between historical loss and socio-structural absence. This process proves difficult when traumatic representations are thoroughly embedded “in a complex overlapping cultural network of experiences, contexts, and conditions.”

The Value of a Woman

As a reflection of the complexity of heteropatriarchal oppression of settler colonialism, westerns often use Anglo women as the excuse for civilization’s essential triumph over non-white races. Women in westerns exist as “tokens of traditional patriarchal exchange between men” and symbolize distinctions of “the private, the domestic, the familial, and the sexual,” depending upon their race and social position. Despite being the character around which the entire narrative takes shape, Debbie “barely exists” in The Searchers, representing nothing more than “the object of value” transferred between “good” and “evil” kingdoms. As an Anglo woman, however, Debbie has value that not only makes her recovery imperative, but justifies the use of extreme violence to return her to her community of origin. Ford makes Debbie’s superior position clear by contrasting her treatment to that of Comanche and Mexican women in the narrative.

93 Landsberg, Engaging the Past, 15.
During the search for Debbie, Edwards and Pawley often enter Comanche villages disguised as traders. Following one such encounter, the men pack to leave and, as they ride out, Pawley realizes that he has “accidentally” traded for a Comanche wife. The woman, who accepts the name Look due to Pawley’s tendency to begin most of his sentences with that word, follows dutifully behind the men and busily makes camp for them that evening. Edwards teases Pawley unmercifully about the presence of “Mrs. Pawley.” In contrast to the idea of a Comanche man partnering with a white woman, Pawley’s short-lived “marriage” to Look plays out as a humorous vignette within the broader storyline. Look, as a non-Anglo woman, does not present a threat to the existing social system. Ford presents the character as “fat, comically modest,” “sexually unattractive,” and therefore inconsequential. Look has no agency or desire of her own as evidenced by the perceived normality of her following along with her new husband and accepting her new name. As confirmation of her purely anecdotal role in the film, Edwards and Pawley dismiss her, chase her away, but eventually find her dead body in a Comanche village raided by Anglo soldiers. Ford further reinforces the superiority of white women with his portrayal of Mexican women within the film. A visit to a Mexican saloon by Edwards and Pawley provides a source of sexual temptation for Pawley in the form of a young Mexican woman who dances seductively around him playing castanets. The young woman serves no other role in the storyline other than to represent “an offensively stereotypical ‘hot-blooded’ Hispanic woman.” Such women exist not

99 In LeMay’s novel the woman, Estrellita, is a prostitute with whom Pawley has sex.
100 Colonnese, “Native American Reactions to The Searchers,” 342.
as essential plot points, but as stereotypes against which to display the superiority of Anglo women. *The Searchers* makes clear that Anglo women have greater value than women of other races and reinforces their role in maintaining the white supremacy required of continued civilization.

Women determined to stay in the public sphere following World War II demonstrated a form of independence unwelcome to traditional heteropatriarchal ideals. When emotional appeals fail to persuade women to maintain their place in the home, cultural productions turn to the use of other methods to assert men’s control. Captivity narratives draw upon the social stigma and fear of rape to reinforce control of women’s bodies for the empowerment of Anglo men. The earliest narratives mediated the development of a new nation based in white supremacy through the theatrical and sentimental presentation of rape as a means of vilifying Native people. 101 Progressive Era versions such as DeShields’s book used images of abused women to justify settler colonial displacement of Native people and reaffirm notions of Americanism linked to white male authority. Even narratives designed to center Native people, as shown through Smith’s opera and the artifacts examined in the final chapter of this dissertation, employ the specter of rape as a means of control. Historian and women’s studies scholar Carol Smith-Rosenberg explained that “the fearful project onto the bodies of those they have named social misfits their own desires for social control.” 102 As demonstrated by the visceral reaction to thoughts of miscegenation in the period after World War II, one of the

---


greatest fears of Anglo men was the loss of sole sexual access to Anglo women. The sentimental and theatrical use of rape as a plot point in *The Searchers* inscribes victimization of white women’s bodies as an unavoidable reality of encounters with non-white men, a device that ultimately warns the viewer against miscegenation. This narrative trope serves dual purposes of reminding Anglo women that they need protection that only Anglo men can provide, and it reinforces the hegemonic masculinity expected of Anglo men.

The threat of rape in *The Searchers* provides the greatest motivation for the men to find Lucy and Debbie following the attack on the Edwards family home. In the immediate aftermath of the attack, Edwards cuts the funeral short and leads a search party determined to find the girls as quickly as possible because Lucy’s age makes her immediately a sexual target of the Comanche men who have taken her captive. The inclusion of this plotline in the film provides audiences with a representation of trauma with which they are familiar because rape has always been a reality of the warfare required of colonial missions.\(^{103}\) Martial rape serves as a “cross-cultural language of male domination” often used to disrupt an enemy’s social structure due to notions of pollution that have historically resulted in alienation of family members and as sufficient justification for men to reject women with whom they have existing relationships once they are tarnished by the act.\(^{104}\) The rape and murder of women in *The Searchers* sends a message to white female audiences that they might be next without the protection offered by Anglo men, thus functioning as a regulation device for their bodies and behavior.\(^{105}\)

\(^{103}\) Erhard, “Rape, Republicanism, and Representation,” 514.
\(^{104}\) Claudia Card, “Rape as a Weapon of War,” *Hypatia* 11, no. 4 (Fall 1996): 5-18, 7.
\(^{105}\) Card, “Rape as a Weapon of War,” 6-7.
The “fundamental functions of rape” are “to display, communicate, and produce or maintain dominance” for the purpose of “exploitation, expulsion, dispersion” or other forms of oppressive control.106 Rape, or even the persistent threat of rape produces “traumatogenic effects” that “do violence to the soul and spirit” of women in a form of “insidious trauma.”107 The subordinate position of women is therefore maintained in a social structure that orients them toward service to men from whom they receive protection.108 Rape in captivity narratives functions as a “domestic protection racket” by which Anglo men benefit.109 The Searchers, like other traditional captivity narratives, does not explicitly describe the rape event, but makes the threat ever-present allowing it to work as a reminder to white women that they are safest at home under the protection of their brothers, husbands, or fathers. Use of rape as a plot point is insidious because it establishes dominance by drawing on the lived experiences of women to remind them that the only control they have over their bodies is that which is “granted by men.”110

The Searchers establishes Anglo men as the only agents for whom economic and physical resources allow the pursuit of freedom.111 Characterizations based on race and gender link women to civilization and home as they do men to freedom and masculinity. White men’s bodies therefore receive distinctly different treatment in The Searchers. White men, as the protagonist heroes, cannot “be the object of value except briefly,” while women “cannot except briefly be a seeker, a searcher” or find themselves in a

111 Buscombe, The Searchers, 3.
“place of performance” where they might prove themselves through action. Ford depicts masculine heroes in *The Searchers* in the “armor of rough denim, leather chaps,” rarely seen without their guns or boots. Only when wounded and receiving treatment, as when Edwards is shot in the final raid on Scar’s village, or when bathing as Pawley does in a symbolic “cleansing ritual that marks the passage from the wilderness to civilization,” does Ford expose white men’s bodies. The distinction in treatment reveals the passive role of women in the rape scenario compared to the active role required of men.

Rape as a narrative device in *The Searchers* establishes the protagonist Anglo cowboy as the hero and reinforces expectations for manly behavior. Anglo men who prove inadequate as protectors ultimately pay the price for their failure. Death or captivity of an Anglo woman represents a loss to the necessary family structure required for continuation of a civilized community and a failure of hegemonic masculinity. Civilization therefore depends upon the cowboy’s ability to protect white women as existing anchors of domestic tranquility or as potential mates for their future homesteading. *The Searchers* reinforces this perspective through the relationship between Lucy and her betrothed partner, Brad Mathison. Lucy’s mother, Martha, met her fated end during the attack on the Edwards family homestead after which Edwards and Pawley find her stripped and mutilated body. Martha’s violent rape, death, and dismemberment confirms the men’s belief that all white women of sexual maturity will endure similar torture at the hands of Comanche men and buttresses the need to recover Lucy and

---

112 Henderson, “*The Searchers, an American Dilemma,*” 53.
Debbie quickly. After only a few days into their search the men’s fears over Lucy’s fate are confirmed when Edwards locates her discarded body along the trail. In an attempt to spare Lucy’s fiancé, Mathison, from disgrace and keep the others focused on the search for Debbie, her uncle discretely buries Lucy’s body and rejoins the group. Later that same evening, Mathison returns from scouting and excitedly announces that he has found the Comanche camp and saw Lucy walking among her captors. Realizing that Mathison has actually seen a Comanche man wearing Lucy’s clothes as a disguise, Edwards is forced to divulge his discovery. Mathison becomes aphasic at the initial revelation, then stammers, “Did they --- was she ---,” to which Edwards retorts angrily, “Shut up! Never ask me what more I seen!”

Though unable to speak the word, Mathison knows that his fiancé was raped before she died and the knowledge of her violation and death drives him mad. At the news, Mathison impulsively tears out alone to attack the Comanche camp as the others listen helplessly from a distance to the sounds of shouts, a few gunshots, then an eerie silence that signifies Mathison’s death. Ford bans Anglo men who fail in their role as protectors from participating in the domestic family structure of civilization. For Mathison, who proved unable to protect and recover the woman for whom he accepted responsibility, death presents the only honorable outcome. Edwards likewise ultimately bears the consequence for his inability to defend his sister-in-law and his oldest niece, as Ford dooms him to the solitary life of a perpetual bachelor and allows him to walk away alone from the family homestead after returning Debbie in the film’s closing scene.

Pawley’s character best represents the successful performance of World War II-era Anglo masculinity through the image of the broken hero. The Edwards family

adopted Pawley as an infant after a Comanche attack resulted in the death of his entire family. With no living memory of the attack, Pawley experiences the return of his traumatic experience through psychological and physical symptoms over which he has little control. Whereas LeMay more fully addresses Pawley’s symptoms in his novel, Ford’s film relies on a collective understanding of the symptoms of trauma to provide a brief, but effective glimpse into Pawley’s psychology.\footnote{In LeMay’s novel Pawley experiences symptoms of Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder when exposure to certain sounds, images, and smells cause him to have blackouts.} During the first battle scene between the Anglo search party and a band of Comanche men they encounter, all of the men except Pawley eagerly engage one another in a shootout. Pawley, who has taken cover behind a log, becomes overwhelmed by emotion, finds himself unable to shoot, and dramatically throws his head down on the log and covers his eyes with an exasperated sigh. Since audiences share the knowledge that Pawley survived an attack by Comanche as an infant, the gesture reads as a traumatic recall of his earlier experience. Pawley undergoes a transformation in the film from inexperienced, impetuous and traumatized youth, to wizened hunter, strategist, and protector. Ford achieves this evolution for his character through a combination of modeling from Edwards, physical trials of the search, and through Pawley’s innate Native identity traits. In what Indigenous scholar Michael Sheyahshe calls “Mohican Syndrome,” Ford creates a supremely talented man out of Pawley who lives and presents as Anglo, but who taps into a form of innate Native qualities attached to his Cherokee lineage to demonstrate the superiority of white masculinity.\footnote{Michael A. Sheyahshe, Native Americans in Comic Books: A Critical Study (Jefferson, NC: McFarland & Company, Inc., 2008), 13.} Pawley exhibits characteristics that represent Anglo American stereotypes of Native people. In the opening scene of the film Pawley arrives, late for dinner, dressed
in a loose shirt that he wears buttoned at the neck, covered in dust and riding in wildly on a barebacked horse. Edwards does not show an immediate fondness for his nephew and mocks him as a “half-breed” or “blanket head” in their early interactions, but eventually overcomes his prejudice when Pawley proves his manhood by killing Scar.118 In the years spent with his uncle in the harsh environment of the prairie searching for his cousin, Pawley combines his innate Native identity with a successful performance of hegemonic masculinity to earn the rewards afforded to white settler men. Through his rugged masculine performance, Pawley ultimately gains access not only to an attractive Anglo wife, which ensures the promise of civilization’s continuity, but to all women as evidenced by his relationships with Look and the Mexican waitress.119

_The Searchers_ gave Anglo men in the 1950s the kind of hero they needed to affirm their superiority and justify the racist, misogynistic, and homophobic ideologies upon which white supremacy depends. Anglo men in the decades after World War II experienced anxiety related to social changes that mirrored concerns felt by Progressives at the turn of the century.120 With their superiority and authority threatened by demands for Civil Rights and a perceived femininization of society, dominant men made use of past notions of Americanism to bolster and maintain their social positions in an extreme backlash against liberal ideologies. The threat of communism and beginning of the Cold War provided cover for creation of new oppressive policies and maintenance of old systems. Playing on Americans’ fear of lost democracy and their nationalist pride, men like Senator Joseph McCarthy linked communism to integration, feminism, and other

118 John Ford, _The Searchers_, Western, 1956.
119 LeMay closes his novel with the implication that Martin and Debbie develop a love interest. In Ford’s film, Martin marries his neighbor Laurie Jorgensen.
120 Kimmel, _The History of Men_, 101.
perceived social failures such as homosexuality.\textsuperscript{121} Progressive leaders who advocated for radical social change and integration in all public areas and neighborhoods frequently found themselves the targets of communist investigations. Many white Americans, especially southerners, associated segregation with the natural order of American society.\textsuperscript{122} People who represented “gender failure” also experienced the vilification of anti-American labels when McCarthy and his cohorts attacked intellectualism and linked it to “effeminacy.”\textsuperscript{123} Above all, Anglo American men renounced traits perceived as “soft,” “fruity,” or that contrasted the morality ascribed by Judeo-Christian values.\textsuperscript{124} The resulting “cult of masculinity” celebrated characteristics such as “violence, aggression, [and] extreme competitiveness” believed to represent true American spirit.\textsuperscript{125} The Searchers responded to these sentiments by allowing 1950s viewers to tap into the frontier myth told through a captivity and rescue narrative to make sense of their social situation. The film affirms the social position of white men by making them the protagonists of the narrative and reducing women and non-white people to supporting roles that enable the heroes to perform a violent, aggressive, and dangerous version of masculinity that encourages racist and sexist behavior.

The extreme social conservatism of the 1950s could not last and the frontier myth itself witnessed new challenges as marginalized groups began to call attention to the inherent oppression present within ideologies that promoted American exceptionalism in the decades of the 1960s and 1970s. Learning to recognize the insidious representations

\textsuperscript{121}Kimmel, \textit{Manhood in America}, 200.


\textsuperscript{123}Kimmel, \textit{Manhood in America}, 200.

\textsuperscript{124}Kimmel, \textit{Manhood in America}, 200.

\textsuperscript{125}Kimmel, \textit{The History of Men}, 92-93.
of trauma such as those present within *The Searchers* offers hope for working through collective historical inequities. Traumatic circumstances leave traces that “can resonate through whole cultures,” however, and even narratives designed to be resistant often suffer the long-term effects of a settler colonial system rooted in oppressive control.\(^\text{126}\) As the final chapter of this study demonstrates, Parker’s captivity narrative, when told from the perspective of Anglo authors, remains deeply entrenched in notions of white, masculine supremacy.

\(^{126}\) Pollock, *After-Affects/After-Images*, 16.
CHAPTER V
APPROPRIATING CULTURAL TRAUMA

In previous chapters I analyzed the symbolic use of Cynthia Ann Parker’s captivity narrative and linked its return to historical periods in which the expansion of opportunity for racially marginalized groups and women threatened the dominant social position of Anglo men. These versions focused on the experiences of heroic Anglo settlers either by making Parker a supporting character in her own narrative or by substantially altering the historical context and plot. During the New Age movement of the 1970s and 1980s, Parker’s captivity narrative experienced a change in format as authors shifted the focus of their reimagined histories, reflecting a new and oftentimes fetishizing interest in Native experiences. In this manner, underground comic creator Jack Jackson’s *White Comanche*, published in 1977, and historical fiction author Lucia St. Clair Robson’s novel *Ride the Wind*, published in 1982, both focused their narratives on Comanche culture rather than Anglo settlement. These efforts to center Native people in the narrative, however, continued to perpetuate negative stereotypes that ultimately benefited Anglo Americans.

Captivity narratives tend to overlook the trauma inflicted upon Native communities by settler colonial actions, and versions produced in the 1970s and 1980s proved no exception. Like their predecessors, the versions of Parker’s story analyzed in this chapter constructed a collective trauma for Anglo American settlers, but they used a
different rhetorical strategy. The narratives depicted Native culture as a lost object of the past, the absence of which represents an injury to Anglo Americans. Parker’s participation in Comanche culture signified not a violent separation from her Anglo family in these stories, but a spiritual awakening. Non-Native participation in Native culture in these fantasies fetishizes Comanche as “purveyors of ancient wisdom” that, once obtained, provides a uniquely enlightening experience for the non-Native participant.¹ This exploitation reinforced the superiority of Anglo Americans through the use of negative stereotypes of Native people and failed to account for their existence and resiliency by constructing Native culture as something erased by settler colonialism.

White Comanche and Ride the Wind treat Native people differently than traditional captivity narratives. The narratives make efforts to humanize Comanche characters by including elements of their culture that do not focus solely on violence. Both stories include references to daily domestic life, specific lifestyle habits, endearing family interactions, and spiritual practices. Both artifacts introduce features of traditional Comanche cultural practices as something that, if adopted, will make white people better. White Comanche, written and illustrated by Jackson, was published by well-known underground comic publishing company, Last Gasp in 1977. Jackson’s 32-page black and white comic was a one-shot story that boasted of telling “the true story of Cynthia Ann Parker and her life with the wild Comanches of Texas.”² The narrative begins with the attack on Fort Parker and traces Parker through her childhood and into maturity among her adopted family. Jackson included Parker’s courtship with Peta Nocona, the birth of

Quanah, and the attack at the Pease River that brought Parker back to her Anglo family. The story concludes with the death of Prairie Flower and Parker. White Comanche testifies to the durability of captivity narratives by revealing the genre’s malleability for a variety of formats.\(^3\) Five years after Jackson published his comic, Parker’s story appeared in a new genre when Lucia St. Clair Robson published her historical fiction novel, \textit{Ride the Wind: The Story of Cynthia Ann Parker and the Last Days of the Comanche}. Robson, a librarian at the time, encountered Parker’s story first through a story in a Time Life book in her reference collection.\(^4\) During a visit to the Ballantine-Del Ray publishing office in New York to reconnect with an acquaintance in 1979, Robson teased out the idea of a historical fiction account of the narrative.\(^5\) \textit{Ride the Wind} also begins with the Comanche attack on Fort Parker in May, 1836. Robson describes in detail the violent raid that resulted in the death of several Parker family members and the capture of Parker along with four other residents of the fort. The bulk of the book focuses on Parker’s life among the Comanche and imagines details of her childhood, adolescence, marriage to Peta Nocona, motherhood, recapture by Captain Sul Ross at the Pease River hunt camp, and death among her Anglo relatives. Unlike other versions of Parker’s story, the novel extends the timeline to provide a brief synopsis of Quanah Parker’s life and ends with his surrender to the reservation in 1875. \textit{Ride the Wind}, Robson’s first novel, received the Spur Award for best historical western in 1982, made the \textit{New York Times} Best Seller.

\(^3\) Bird, “Gendered Construction of the American Indian in Popular Media,” 68.  
\(^4\) Lucia St. Clair Robson, Personal Interview, Telephone, May 28, 2019.  
\(^5\) Lucia St. Clair Robson, Personal Interview, Telephone, May 28, 2019.
list, and joined the list of one hundred best westerns of the twentieth century. The book received favorable media attention and has retained significant popularity with readers. Cultural shifts of the late 1970s and early 1980s created an exigence for changes to the format of Parker’s narrative. Like authors of captivity narratives before them, Jackson and Robson introduced their narratives in the wake of changes in the dominant social order that threatened the structures of power that reaffirm white supremacy. Conservatism of the 1950s had a significant impact on popular cultural forms. Extreme censorship of public media in the 1950s helped to spread a spirit of rebellion that fueled a youth countercultural movement. Social upheaval and violent protest during the 1960s ushered reform that overturned some of the rigid cultural standards reinforced by Judeo-Christian conservative values of the previous generation. Countercultural resistance to long-established religious and social orders combined “bohemian and social revolt” in a blurring of culture and politics to influence social change. Young, liberal, white members of the middle and upper-middle class in particular resisted racial and gender hierarchies maintained by their parents and became concerned about the rights of workers, women, marginalized racial and ethnic groups, students, and those living in poverty. Changes in federal policy toward Native people reflected activists’ efforts to draw attention to the experiences of previously overlooked populations. Native people organized into a pan-tribal activist network led by groups such as the American Indian Movement (AIM). The collective Red Power movement developed an “increasingly

---

7 Jenny Sharpe, Allegories of Empire: The Figure of Woman in the Colonial Text (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1993), 3.
media visible” resistance to “extant patterns of termination, neglect, interference, exploitation, and dispossession” that characterized federal policy regarding Indigenous peoples. A series of legislative changes coincided with these resistance efforts and helped tribal governments emerge “in the closing decades of the twentieth century in a much better position and with higher status than they had entered it.” The 1968 Indian Civil Rights Act required states to secure tribal consent prior to assuming jurisdiction over Native-owned land, and the 1972 Indian Education Act and 1975 Indian Self-Determination and Education Assistance Act restored decision-making power for public assistance programs to tribal governments. While federal policy looked toward self-determination, the New Age movement turned appreciation for Native people into appropriation of their cultural practices.

In addition to more liberal legislative change, countercultural rebellion shunned traditional religious structures that historically reinforced racial and gender hierarchies. The New Age spirituality that emerged in the 1970s reflected a desire to break away from traditional conservative social values. The New Age movement lasted into the 1980s when the “postmodern culture of late consumer capitalism” left many “white affluent suburban and urban middle-aged baby-boomers” with feelings of detachment from their communities and dissatisfaction with cultural traditions. Their quest for alternative spiritualities drove young white New Age followers toward Native cultural practices that reinforced their desire for natural and holistic lifestyles. New Age philosophy embraced

---

Native people as guardians of knowledge and a nature-based spirituality that could overcome the frustrations of modern life.\textsuperscript{14} Pseudo-Native clothing, ritual, and healing practices allowed frustrated white youth to “go Native” in a cosmopolitan performance that provided the veneer of cultural respect following the social movements of the 1960s and early 1970s but ultimately failed to dismantle white supremacy inherent in the settler colonial system.\textsuperscript{15} Appearances of Parker’s captivity narrative in this period became a vehicle through which artists and authors fulfilled New Age escapist desires but, in order to serve that function, the format required a significant change.

**Captivity Narratives in Underground Comic Books**

Jackson’s *White Comanche* offers an example of how New Age ideology pushed back against the traditional social values of the previous generation. In the mid-1960s a new form of comics designed to resist censorship of the genre replaced the watered down, heavily censored cartoons of their parents’ books.\textsuperscript{16} In 1954 the Comics Magazine Association of America adopted the Comics Code Authority that substantially limited the content and tone of the books. Comic books had existed in various forms for generations as a genre that cultivated “mythic heroism.”\textsuperscript{17} Fantasy, myth, humor, and a bit of history characterized the themes found in early comic books and Native Americans appeared often in the publications of the 1950s. The appeal of the western branched from literature and film into comics as a means of using Native people as “plot devices” that made the protagonist white man “more heroic.”\textsuperscript{18} The comic code’s restriction on “profanity,

\textsuperscript{14} Bird, “Gendered Construction of the American Indian in Popular Media,” 70.

\textsuperscript{15} For more on the concept of “going native,” see Shari M. Huhndorf, *Going Native: Indians in the American Cultural Imagination* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2001).

\textsuperscript{16} Arffman, “Comics from the Underground,” 173.


obscenity, smut, vulgarity” and “all scenes of horror, excessive bloodshed, gory or gruesome crimes, depravity, lust, sadism, [and] masochism” resulted in a sanitized depiction of the engagement between white settlers and Native people in the books.  

Cute cartoons allowed by the code proved ineffective at providing the kind of social awareness sought by authors in the 1970s. Comic creators like Jackson wrote against the comics code to produce books that more accurately reflected the social upheaval of the period. Jackson recognized that the stories of marginalized populations inherently involved the kind of violence prohibited by the comic code. Commonly referred to as “underground” comics, new storylines and art “critiqued the prevailing values of surrounding society” and accentuated the experiences of marginalized populations.  

Although they “never became a mass market product,” underground comics represented a “blurring of boundaries between art and popular culture.” Jackson produced one of the first underground comic books in 1964 and enjoyed a prolific but brief career as both author and publisher. Jackson’s artistic interest focused on plots with “strong ideological implications” and most of his books differed from traditional comics because they did not favor “fantasy, adventure, and horror.” His focus on “revisionist historical tales” set in the American Southwest earned Jackson the reputation as “the best and most committed history writer” of comics. Comic historian Joseph Witek contends that Jackson’s productions privileged an “overtly politicized rendering” of social groups and included the stories of Native people in order to recognize the way they were

---

19 Arffman, “Comics from the Underground,” 172.
20 Arffman, “Comics from the Underground,” 170.
21 Arffman, “Comics from the Underground,” 181.
22 Arffman, “Comics from the Underground,” 177.
24 Witek, Comic Books as History, 4, 58.
“dispossessed and marginalized in American History.” What should have provided historical liberation for Native people’s stories, however, became yet another gross misapplication of negative stereotypes presented through Jackson’s version of Parker’s captivity narrative.

Like many cultural artifacts, comic books reflect the ideologies of the period of their production. Comic books combine words and pictures into a powerful artistic and literary form capable of a wide variety of narrative effects, including the reinforcement or shaping of group identity. The constitutive force of comic books to shape collective identities stems from their ability to “inspire and teach” audiences “with a clearer view of ingrained societal and cultural attitudes.” Comic books essentially provide “snapshots of popular society.” Indigenous studies scholar Cornel Pewewardy argues that an accurate understanding of contemporary Native peoples’ lifestyles and worldviews cannot occur without critical examination of the ways in which images of Native people have been used in the past. Jackson’s inclusion of underrepresented Native American storylines, though intended to be resistive, became one of many American pop culture artifacts that targeted white college-educated liberals yet continued to perpetuate negative cultural stereotypes.

Captivity narratives that deny the resiliency and contemporary existence of Native people through the use of negative stereotypes of their culture exploit Native people for

25 Witek, Comic Books as History, 4.
26 Witek, Comic Books as History, 3.
27 Sheyahshe, Native Americans in Comic Books, 3.
28 Sheyahshe, Native Americans in Comic Books, 3.
30 Sheyahshe, Native Americans in Comic Books, 190.
the benefit of non-Native audiences. Comic books of the new left were no exception: they frequently included representations of Native people as caricatures written into the roles of menacing and frightening racial threats, as “childlike dupe[s],” or as sidekicks for the heroic white cowboy.31 These images were “created by and for white culture,” and did not reflect historical accuracy or an effort to represent specific Native communities.32 Anglo audiences have “naturalized” popular images of Native people and are often tricked into accepting them as “authentic” when authors situate them in the context of history.33 The captivity narrative in particular offers a vehicle by which inaccurate images become standardized.34 Native people who view these images, however, resist their dehumanizing characterizations. In his critical study, Native Americans in Comic Books, Michael Sheyahshe, a member of the Caddo Nation of Oklahoma, argues that when exploring representations of cultures “it is imperative to gain perspective from a member of the group being misrepresented.”35 Sheyahshe calls upon critics to assess the treatment of Native people in comic books and other popular culture artifacts by carefully examining the roles and behaviors assigned to them in the storylines for evidence that Native American characters were written into roles that reinforce their sense of humanity. Jackson’s White Comanche, despite the author’s known tendency to advocate for underrepresented groups, failed in this regard, as the comic perpetuates many of the common negative stereotypes about Comanche people and culture. White Comanche reinforced the social dominance of Anglo Americans by constructing Comanche culture

33 Bird, “Gendered Construction of the American Indian in Popular Media,” 64.
35 Sheyahshe, Native Americans in Comic Books, 191.
as a consumable product that elevated the humanity of white readers. The book used Parker’s narrative as a symbol to reinforce the idea that adopting elements of Native culture improves the lives of white people. Jackson’s interpretation encouraged Native-obsessed readers to mourn the imaginary loss of Comanche culture rather than recognize the actual mistreatment of Parker or acknowledge the real and lasting impact of settler displacement on Native people.

Jackson’s interpretation of Parker’s narrative drew upon the allure of historical veracity to placate his audience’s desire for consumable Native culture. The book demonstrates how writers of history often blend fact, fiction, and imagination to provide a useable past for their audiences. In a preface to the story, Jackson included a map of the Comanchería, the traditional territory of the Comanche as it existed from 1740 until 1840 with a listing of the five major Comanche bands (Figure 2); a copy of the photograph of Parker and Prairie Flower taken in 1860 after her return to Anglo society (Figure 1); and a summary of Parker’s captivity narrative provided by T.R. Fehrenback, author of Comanches: Destruction of a People. These features lent an air of authenticity to the book. The book’s images, plotlines, and vocabulary appealed to existing perceptions of Native cultures without encouraging critical thought needed to inspire the overturn of white supremacy. Instead, the book enabled white readers to make use of the historical lesson it provided to bolster their preconceived notions about Native culture. Throughout the comic Jackson employs representations of Native people that perpetuate the stereotype of the noble savage.
Jackson constructs Comanche characters in *White Comanche* as simultaneously savage in their interactions with Anglo settlers and honorable in their desire to protect their way of life. The book describes the Comanche as a “menace” to the settlement of Texas and constructs them as “a far more deadly foe than the shattered legions of Mexico.”\(^{36}\) The attack on Fort Parker by Comanche men leaves a scene of “desolation, death, and destruction.”\(^{37}\) Following the raid on the fort the captive children witness the rape of the older women captives, Elizabeth Kellogg and Rachel Plummer, by Comanche men in a panel that depicts Parker’s horrified face with off-side cries by the women, “Oh


my God..[sic] Please..[sic] No! No..[sic] Oohh…” (Figure 3).\textsuperscript{38} Whereas these depictions reveal Comanche men’s violent and abusive treatment of Anglo settlers, Jackson excuses their behavior by equating their actions with noble efforts to defend their communities and culture. In contrast to Comanche men, Jackson constructs Anglo masculinity as impulsively dangerous and unreasonably violent. During the Texas Ranger raid of the Comanche hunt camp at the Pease River, Anglo men strike indiscriminately at women and Mexican slaves. Captain Sul Ross shoots and kills a Comanche woman riding double before also pursuing and killing the man who attempted to save her while pointing out a third rider and cautioning his troops, “Don’t shoot that one! It’s a white woman!” (Figure 4).\textsuperscript{39} Jackson shows Ross and his Texas Rangers knowingly pursuing Comanche women and children, shooting anything that moves, except Parker, who they spare because they recognize her as a white woman. Unlike Julia Smith’s opera, \textit{Cynthia Parker}, which constructs violence against Native women as acceptable in contrast to violence against Parker, Jackson’s interpretation villainizes Ross and the Rangers by describing the Comanche man who attempted to save the women as a “heroic warrior.”\textsuperscript{40} Jackson’s contrast of Comanche masculinity against Anglo men provided his audience with a noble image of Comanche men that corresponded with their reverent attitude toward Native cultures. This depiction overlooks the collateral traumatic effects of war on women and children and fails to account for the existence of multiple problematic masculinities. During the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, before surrendering to reservations, Comanche men demonstrated their strength and social status through violent raids on

\textsuperscript{38} Jackson, \textit{White Comanche}, 7.
\textsuperscript{39} Jackson, \textit{White Comanche}, 26.
\textsuperscript{40} Jackson, \textit{White Comanche}, 26; See Chapter Three, “Pioneering Nostalgia in the Period Between the World Wars,” for analysis of violence as reinforcement of racial hierarchies among women.
enemy communities. The taking of captives during raids provided men not only with resources for trade through ransom negotiations, but with “symbolic currency” to appease the loss of Comanche family members. Ritualistic and public rape of women captives of all races often played a part in the performance of Comanche masculinity as it symbolically reinforced Comanche men’s power and encouraged captives’ family members to negotiate more liberally for their return to prevent their continued torture and abuse. Captives intended for adoption also experienced a degree of ritualistic torture designed to help them shed their attachment to their culture of origin and be assimilated into their new Comanche family. Regardless of the social outcome, Parker endured significant trauma in the name of masculine performance. Jackson’s rhetorical reshaping of Comanche masculinity allowed readers to imagine a less harmful, less dangerous Native culture; one more worthy of their own adoption.


---

42 Hämäläinen, The Comanche Empire, 251.
43 Hämäläinen, The Comanche Empire, 45.
44 Hämäläinen, The Comanche Empire, 257.
Jackson represented Comanche people not only as violent yet noble warriors, but as innately shamanistic people with mystic abilities. Following her adoption by a Comanche family, Jackson molds Parker into “nothing but pure Comanche” by the forces of the natural landscape in which she matures.\textsuperscript{45} This strategy for showing her transformation from Anglo to Comanche differed from previous captivity narratives that usually explained Parker’s refusal to re-join her Anglo family as a result of malicious indoctrination by her captors. Historically, these prior versions came closer to accuracy. Comanche adoption practices involved a process by which captives endured torturous treatment that allowed for the symbolic redemption of lost relatives for whom the captive replaced, and as a means of rebirth into their new community.\textsuperscript{46} Jackson’s plot choice rejected historical accuracy in favor of fantasy that downplayed Comanche agency and

\textsuperscript{45} Jackson, \textit{White Comanche}, 11-12.
\textsuperscript{46} Hääläinen, \textit{The Comanche Empire}, 177.
contrasted federal policies of the period that leaned toward promoting Native self-determination. The idea that Native people maintained a mystic connection with the natural universe placated New Age fantasies.

In order to reinforce their mystic qualities, Jackson attributed the characteristics to Comanche characters in addition to Parker. When Parker’s son Quanah reaches adolescence, his grandfather and father teach him how to draw upon his “medicine” through a vision quest. The vision quest commonly appears as a narrative trope that marks a Native boy’s passage to adulthood. Quanah’s grandfather, Iron Jacket, is assumed to have “heap medicine” that prevents him from being shot and killed in battle.\(^{47}\) Peta Nocona, the boy’s father, teaches him about the eagle’s totemic characteristics. These representations equate to a “generic Indian ‘spirituality’” that reflect New Age fascination with and fetishization of Native cultures.\(^{48}\) Sheyahshe argues that these depictions reduce Native people to broad generalizations that overlook the nuances of their many cultural variations, and notes that, among Anglo Americans, “no one assumes that there is a latent priest/scientist/doctor ready to emerge without a moment’s warning.”\(^{49}\) Native people live in complex social systems that span centuries of intertribal interactions and colonial influences. Anglo stereotypes that promote a construction of Native people as a single culture distort and dehumanize their existence.\(^{50}\) Often, visual artifacts like comic books maintain these stereotypes through verbal reinforcement in their art panels.

\(^{48}\) Sheyahshe, *Native Americans in Comic Books*, 55.
\(^{49}\) Sheyahshe, *Native Americans in Comic Books*, 55.
\(^{50}\) Sheyahshe, *Native Americans in Comic Books*, 16.
Jackson’s comic includes several stereotypes that reinforce preferences for a universal Native culture in the vocabulary that accompanies the visual art. Words used to identify Native people in the story include the generic markers, “squaw,” “papoose,” and “injuns.”\textsuperscript{51} Use of these derogatory labels essentializes Comanche culture into a larger inaccurate and singular Native culture.\textsuperscript{52} \textit{White Comanche} also uses language alongside visual art to mark Comanche people as ignorant and to incorporate humor at their expense. In a panel that depicts an Anglo trader visiting Parker’s village, the trader approaches chief Paha-Yuca and greets him, “How, chief,” to which the overweight chief responds, “Welcome, brothers. You got candy?” (Figure 5).\textsuperscript{53} This panel overlooks the impact of abusive trading practices that frequently spread disease, and the depiction of Paha-Yuca seems ignorant to the disastrous federal management of reservations that resulted in high rates of chronic health problems and extreme poverty.\textsuperscript{54} Native people in the book also speak in broken English phrases often referred to as “Tonto speech” after the childlike sidekick of classic western hero The Lone Ranger.\textsuperscript{55} Tonkawa men who join Anglo soldiers to fight Iron Jacket and Peta Nocona tell their allies, “Iron Jacket have heap medicine. No can kill,” and “Maybe so, Jacket of Iron, but head just plain bone.”\textsuperscript{56} Peta Nocona, though his internal thoughts appear in full, grammatically correct English, speaks to Parker in the same broken pattern when she tells him she wants to name their son Quanah and he replies, “It’s good wife… you do real good.”\textsuperscript{57} Negative stereotypes of Native people such as these mark them as primitive simpletons made extinct by Anglo

\textsuperscript{51} Jackson, \textit{White Comanche}, 7, 11, 20.
\textsuperscript{52} Sheyahshe, \textit{Native Americans in Comic Books}, 16.
\textsuperscript{53} Jackson, \textit{White Comanche}, 14.
\textsuperscript{55} Sheyahshe, \textit{Native Americans in Comic Books}, 16, 39.
\textsuperscript{56} Jackson, \textit{White Comanche}, 21.
\textsuperscript{57} Jackson, \textit{White Comanche}, 16.
civilization. The benefit to Anglo Americans exists in the form of a nature-based, ancient spirituality that can help them overcome the anxieties of the modern world. The permanency of these stereotypes proves difficult to overcome due to the effectiveness with which they establish a clear racial binary.

Settler colonial systems endure through the successful symbolic positioning of colonized people as features of the past. Maintenance of strict binaries help achieve this goal. Colonial ideologies enforce epistemologies that prioritize dualism based on the assumption that recognition of a superior collective requires the existence of a racialized control group: an “us” must establish a “them.” According to critical theorist Homi Bhabha, in his collection of essays *The Location of Culture*, stereotypes in colonial settings construct the colonized “as a population of degenerate types” in order to justify

---

their conquest and the establishment of new social systems.\(^5^9\) When confronted with images of people who do not look like them, colonizers construct the colonized identity in an “arrested, fixated” representation that forces race to become the enduring sign of difference.\(^6^0\) The notion of “fixity” is central to the success of the stereotype. Bhabha describes this concept as a sign or symbol of difference that “connotes rigidity and an unchanging order.”\(^6^1\) Stereotypes become “fixed” in a culture through their systematic repetition, and \textit{White Comanche}, though intended to indemnify Comanche culture, fails to overcome the rigidity of the dualism upon which the settler colonial system thrives. Bhabha argues that that the stereotype is “the primary point of subjectification” in colonial settings because it exposes a “desire for an originality which is again threatened by the differences of race, colour and culture.”\(^6^2\) Racialized stereotypes allow colonizers to recognize a perceived lack of racial purity and mask the difference in ways that “restore the original presence.”\(^6^3\) Racial differences persist as a salient feature of the narrative within \textit{White Comanche}, and Parker’s participation in both Anglo and Comanche communities provides the pathway through which Jackson exploits Native culture.

The racialized differences present within \textit{White Comanche} represent a binary identity construction that benefits Anglo Americans. This binary constructs Anglo Americans as natural and divinely entitled to social dominance over groups of people raced differently. Anglo readers satiated their desire for encounters with Native

\(^5^9\) Homi Bhabha, \textit{The Location of Culture} (New York: Routledge, 1994), 101.
\(^6^0\) Bhabha, \textit{The Location of Culture}, 107-108.
\(^6^1\) Bhabha, \textit{The Location of Culture}, 94.
\(^6^2\) Bhabha, \textit{The Location of Culture}, 107.
\(^6^3\) Bhabha, \textit{The Location of Culture}, 106.
spirituality and lifestyle without giving up the comfort of their dominant racial position. The depiction of Parker’s relationship with her Comanche relatives represents Anglo concepts of adoption and kinship, not Comanche. In Comanche communities, capture of people from other ethnic groups often symbolized “a move from one kinship network to another” rather than a negotiation of racial identity.\(^64\) Membership depended not on racial features, as in settler society, but on the behavior of the person.\(^65\) Since she entered an adopted kinship relationship among them, to be Comanche, Parker had only to act as a Comanche person. *White Comanche* devotes four pages to the documentation of Parker’s transition into a Comanche community member. From the time she sheds her calico dress and accepts one of buckskin, Parker, now Naduah, “rapidly makes the transition to her new culture.”\(^66\) After learning the language, Parker receives instruction in how to skin and process buffalo and decorate clothing and items with beadwork and painting. Accompanying her new parents, Parker adapts to the nomadic life of the Comanche and learns to appreciate their mythology and recreational activities. Despite her successful performance of Comanche behavior, however, Parker’s “pale skin, blue eyes, and blonde, grease-smeared hair” forever mark her as an outsider (Figure 6).\(^67\) Jackson’s depiction of Parker contrasts with the photograph taken of her in 1861. *White Comanche*’s image of Parker shows her sitting proudly astride a pinto pony. The artist drew her following traditional Anglo standards of beauty; lean, pale, long limbed, and with large breasts. In two of the panels Parker has war paint on her face, a tradition not used by Comanche women. Notably, Jackson depicts Parker throughout the story with cropped hair, a

\(^64\) Hämäläinen, *The Comanche Empire*, 16.
\(^65\) Hämäläinen, *The Comanche Empire*, 83.
\(^67\) Jackson, *White Comanche*, 12.
symbol of trauma among Comanche. When Peta Nocona first notices Parker as a young woman he thinks, “Hmm… not bad for a white girl.”\(^6^8\) Later when he reflects on his son’s future, Peta Nocona ponders, “How cruel it will be for you, my son, to do battle for my people against the people of your mother.”\(^6^9\) Parker does not become “pure Comanche” as narrated, but exists in a place of superior difference. In what Sheyahshe called “Mohican Syndrome,” Parker absorbs “all things seemingly positive about Native culture by some sort of osmotic metamorphosis” that allows her to become a superior being who represents the best of both Comanche and Anglo societies.\(^7^0\) What looks like a comic about Comanche people is instead a celebration of white supremacy.

![Image](image.png)


*White Comanche* obscures racial dominance through a creative sharing of a fictionalized version of Parker’s personal experience. The comic positions Parker as the


\(^{6^9}\) Jackson, *White Comanche*, 22.

hapless victim of captivity by both Comanche and, later, her own Anglo family. This rhetorical choice conceals the violence of settler dispossession by making a martyr out of Parker. The narrative tracks Parker’s transition from Anglo child to Comanche woman but never loses sight of her inherent whiteness. By allowing her to assume all of the positive elements of Comanche culture by “going native” without losing her Anglo identity, the comic “displaces and dispossesses” Native people.\textsuperscript{71} This effect is represented by Parker’s superior performance as Comanche. By the time she matures, Parker outclasses other Comanche women in both skill and beauty, winning both recreational games and the heart of the community’s most eligible bachelor. Her superiority transcends her gender and Parker outperforms even her husband by beating him at horse races. When Parker returns to her Anglo family, her experience among the Comanche allows her to tap into a raw natural power that helps her excel among them as well. Her sister-in-law marvels at Parker’s domestic skill at spinning and weaving and her brother Silas, Jr. boasts, “She can use an axe good as most men” when he sees her chopping wood.\textsuperscript{72} Feminist readers who encountered Parker in Jackson’s comic met a strong, independent woman whose successes appealed to their desire to see women’s liberation. Gender performance in this case, however, concealed the racial oppression of Native people within the narrative.

Jackson granted Parker power, but only through dominance over her Comanche family and friends. The ability to cross cultures in order to reinvent a better, more powerful version of oneself is a power permitted only to Anglo people.\textsuperscript{73} Native women

\textsuperscript{71} Huhndorf, \textit{Going Native}, 189.
\textsuperscript{72} Jackson, \textit{White Comanche}, 30.
\textsuperscript{73} Huhndorf, \textit{Going Native}, 183-184.
and men in the narrative do not achieve social status akin to Parker and serve only as a
means by which to shape Parker’s identity. Lest any reader remain confused about the
contemporary social relevance of Native people, Jackson situated them firmly as relics of
the past. After soldiers return Parker to her family, Peta Nocona, “who never recovers
from the loss of his fair Naduah,” dies of an infected wound, leaving his son Quanah to
lead the community.74 Metaphorically, Peta Nocona’s death symbolizes the tragic end of
his entire culture.75 Jackson sealed the fate of Comanche culture in the final panel of the
comic that shows several mounted Comanche men dressed for war following a stern-

faced Quanah, who Jackson describes as the “last chief of the Comanches.” (Figure 7).76
Jackson’s rhetorical choice served as an erasure of Comanche culture. When Anglo
writers situate Native characters as the “last” of their kind they inadvertently bolster their
own racial and cultural superiority.77 The panel also locks Comanche into a perpetual war
and overlooks their survival and the many ways that they have demonstrated resiliency
since Quanah led them onto the reservation.


---


75 Bird, “Gendered Construction of the American Indian in Popular Media,” 69.


77 For more on the concept of “lasting” of Native people see Jean O’Brien, *Firsting and Lasting: Writing Indians Out of Existence in New England* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2010)
Captivity Narratives in Historical Fiction

Audiences who sought to escape rising consumer capitalism by tapping into romanticized imaginings of Native American culture and spirituality found additional reinforcement in Robson’s *Ride the Wind*. Robson’s interpretation attentively includes notable historical events in her chronologically organized story. *Ride the Wind* contains rich ethnographic details about many features of historical Comanche culture including daily life, migration patterns, rituals, superstitions, and myths. Language in particular produces a strong appeal to historical fidelity. Robson bolsters the novel’s feeling of authenticity by providing translations for many common names and phrases obtained from a Comanche language dictionary. The novel provided the feeling of cultural immersion for readers seeking a stronger connection to Native peoples’ experiences. Readers join Parker in learning the language of her new family as her adopted mother, “pia,” adds an onion, “kaka,” to the stew she’s cooking and boils water for coffee, “too-pa.” Like other Native languages, the Comanche language bears the marks of settler colonialism through its near forced disappearance. Federal assimilation programs of the late 1800s privileged the use of English and significantly reduced the number of fluent speakers of Comanche. Ironically, Comanche and other Native languages proved indispensable in World War II due to the US military’s reliance on them for sending coded messages. In order to restore their language to “living” status, the Comanche

---

Nation has maintained an active language revitalization program since 1993. Native languages are rooted in unique cultural epistemologies. Anglo Americans who seek to learn or use the languages outside of tribal guidance participate in further exploitation of Native culture.

*Ride the Wind* also contains several stereotypical representations of Native spirituality. Parker learns from her adopted grandmother, Medicine Woman, to follow the direction of the dung beetle’s horns to find the location of buffalo herds, carefully avoids speaking the name of those who died so as not to trap their souls on earth, and possesses the unique ability to help delivering mothers relax during childbirth due to her calming presence. Parker also demonstrates a strong connection with nature. Animals gravitate to her as a child and she surprises her family by adopting an orphaned antelope as a pet. Stereotypical representations of Native people often bestow them with animal guides or “sidekicks” to demonstrate their innate connection with the natural world. When Peta Nocona first sees Parker riding her own pony toward him with an antelope galloping at her side he takes it as a “good omen” because he is of the Quohadi, or Antelope Comanche. Although he was a member of the Quohadi Comanche, this fictionalized narrative device stems from the imagination of the author and demonstrates the influence of essentialized spiritual stereotypes on her own ideology.

---

82 Native languages often include complex grammar systems that do not correspond to English or other Euro-derivatives. For example, what might be an inanimate object in English could be an animate object in a Native language due to spiritual beliefs, which changes the way words behave in sentence structures.
83 Robson, *Ride the Wind*, 104, 155, 204.
85 Robson, *Ride the Wind*, 167.
Robson’s book responded to audiences differently than Jackson’s comic by prominently featuring women’s lives and experiences. Cooking, hide tanning, childcare, and childbirth receive as much attention as weapon design, hunting, and preparation for battle. Robson gives significant attention to the maternal and sororal relationships Parker forms with her adopted mother, aunt, grandmother, and cousin, Star Name. Women seeking alternative forms of spirituality and medicinal practice received in *Ride the Wind* detailed descriptions of totemic rituals designed to ensure the health of their children, such as squatting for natural birth rather than lying prone, and hanging the newborn’s umbilical cord from a sacred tree to bless the child’s growth and development. The novel provided readers with Native cultural information they desired on topics like child discipline and herb collection which tapped into their desires to break away from traditional cultural practices dominated by strict Judeo Christian doctrine. As in *White Comanche*, Parker performs exceptionally well among her Comanche kin and her skills both in traditional women’s domestic duties and in training horses and marksmanship earn her the right to join her husband on some of the smaller raids alongside his warriors. In a notable difference from *White Comanche*, Parker’s Comanche cousin, Star Name, although not as adept as the novel’s protagonist, accompanies the warriors with her husband as well. The inclusion of women characters as primary agents in the story appealed to feminist readers who indulged in the “alternative gender models” of Robson’s text and other Native adoption stories like it that appeared in the period.86 Feminist ideologies of the 1980s focused on pluralism and inspired an increase in the

---

86 Huhndorf, *Going Native*, 178.
“mobilization” of women in traditionally male dominated institutions.87 Throughout the 1980s the percentage of women who considered themselves “feminists” increased and the period witnessed an overall expansion of “gender consciousness” that inspired “structural shifts in family composition and career patterns.”88 Parker, Star Name, and the other women in Robson’s book modeled 1980s feminist women’s desires for liberation.

Through the female characters in Ride the Wind, Anglo women readers enjoyed a vicarious deliverance from the oppression that the 1980s feminist movement worked to overcome. Robson’s narrative provided readers with a feeling of authenticity that transported them from the stress of their real lives to a useable past that offered an emotional escape. Negotiating access to public places proved rewarding but challenging for women in the 1980s. The feminist movement that grew in the countercultural revolution increased women’s participation in education, public workplaces, and political offices.89 Ride the Wind responded to women’s empowerment by giving readers a female protagonist who defied gender norms. Parker nurtures her family, demonstrates emotional strength in moments of crisis, and proves herself physically capable of riding alongside men. As with most significant social changes, however, steps taken toward women’s liberation met with resistance from groups of men who resented feminist ideology.

Women’s demands for accountability for the violence historically allowed by hegemonic masculinity dictated changes in acceptable behavior for men.90 Bolstered by academic work that cited a biological imperative for maintaining traditional gender roles, many

88 Katzenstein, “Feminism Within American Institutions,” 30, 32.
90 Kimmel, Manhood in America, 231.
men argued that innate masculine tendencies toward aggression and violence could only be tempered by passive, nurturing women, therefore women stepping out of the domestic sphere threatened social disruption. Presentaiton of this idea as scientific fact reinforced fears of hyper-feminization and subtly encouraged violence against women. In correlation, the years between 1976 and 1980 witnessed a sharp increase in the number of reported crimes involving rape committed against women.

Newly politicized feminists facing retaliation and resistance from men found inspiration in strong fictional female characters in Robson’s text. Fiction often mirrors life, but it also offers a means to imagine the future. Historical fiction offers a genre through which stories can help people cope with truths they find “otherwise unbearable, unspeakable, or unimaginable” because it translates the past into a useable lesson for the present. Historical texts often strive to divorce imagination from interpretation. Historical fiction allows readers to engage in an affective exploration of the past because the dramatization provides a believable link between what a reader experiences now and what a similar person experienced then. Robson’s imaginative retelling of Parker’s history provided a temporal bridge between the past and the present by allowing white women to believe they could tap into the same liberating gender performance. Parker’s character in Ride the Wind met little resistance and actually received encouragement to

---

92 Lawrence A. Greenfeld, “Sex Offences and Offenders: An Analysis of Data on Rape and Sexual Assault,” Bureau of Justice Statistics Executive Summary (US Department of Justice Office of Justice Programs, January 1997), https://bjs.gov/content/pub/pdf/soo.pdf.
transgress traditional Anglo gender roles among the more liberating social structure of her Comanche community.

Robson’s narrative also empowered hetero women’s sexuality with the inclusion of graphic sexual encounters. Robson’s primary audience initially consisted of white women, a fact not at all surprising to the author considering the book’s cover which provides the illusion that the book is a “bodice-ripping romance novel.”95 The full-color cover depicts Parker riding alongside her husband with young Quanah sitting in front of her (Figure 8). Both riders sit astride on barebacked well-muscled Comanche ponies ahead of a large band of mounted Comanche men dressed for battle with lances and shields. Parker’s striking blonde hair rests across the front of her large breasts in thick braids wrapped in deerskin, mirroring the style of Peta Nocona’s braids. Peta Nocona, mostly obscured by Parker and Quanah sits slightly taller than his wife and both look off into the distance as a blazing red and orange sun sets behind them. Both Parker and Peta Nocona conform to traditional Western standards of beauty: long limbed, asymmetrical facial features, toned and muscular bodies. Despite Robson’s classification of her novel as historical fiction, her inclusion of descriptive sex scenes subverted the traditional material for the genre. Inclusion of illicit extra-marital affairs, seduction, and romance spoke to women readers’ desire to express their own sexuality more fully. Women in the early 1980s developed a revived “sense of property in their own person” after the 1973 Roe v. Wade Supreme Court decision and availability of the birth control pill granted them more power over sexual reproduction options.96 Women writers of western fiction responded by producing more progressive novels that took a “more daring” approach in

95 Lucia St. Clair Robson, Personal Interview, Telephone, May 28, 2019.
96 Kimmel, Manhood in America, 230.
their depictions of miscegenation. These accounts, however, nearly always conform to heterosexual gender role stereotypes that inadvertently perpetuate patriarchal control. Indeed, the men in Robson’s novel appear perpetually aroused and assume a dominant role, often having to persuade their timid partner to overcome her shyness. When Peta Nocona asks to marry Parker she initially refuses him. Determined to change her mind, Peta Nocona sneaks under the side of Parker’s tipi one night, muffles her startled scream with a “hand clamped tightly over her mouth,” and gropes her “swollen ravine” until she succumbs to him after his fingers provide her first orgasm. Peta Nocona’s best friend, Eagle, also persuades a young wife of their respected chief to become his lover after demonstrating his ability to please her sexually despite her initial refusal. The heterosexual, patriarchal model of relationships in the novel perpetuates settler colonial idealization of the “reproductively directed marital unit” as a symbol for civilization and implies that anything that differs from this model, as many Native cultures did, threatens progress. The sex scenes in Ride the Wind, although a bold inclusion for western historical fiction, serve only to reinforce the idea that men ultimately control women’s sexuality.

98 Dana A. Ménard and Christine Cabrera, “‘Whatever the Approach, Tab B Still Fits into Slot A’: Twenty Years of Sex Scripts in Romance Novels,” Sexuality & Culture 15, no. 3 (September 2011): 240–55, 242.
99 Robson, Ride the Wind, 335-336.
100 Mark Rifkin, When Did Indians Become Straight?, 5.
Like *White Comanche*, Robson’s novel did not shy away from the violence of settler colonialism. Women authors of fiction often appear more “sympathetic” and “more respectful” of the Native cultures they explore.101 *Ride the Wind* demonstrates sympathy toward Comanche communities by confronting the realities of the impacts of European disease on Indigenous people, Anglo settler displacement and destruction of

---

buffalo populations, US treaty violations, and US military exploitation of Tonkawa people in their efforts to dispossess Comanche people of their land. Despite their violent raids, torture of captive Anglo and Tonkawa men, and abuse of adult captive women, Comanche characters are the heroes of Robson’s narrative. The “imaginative play” historical fiction authors take with their material often fails to account for the full range of oppressive power produced by settler colonial systems.\(^{102}\) The respect afforded Comanche people by Robson’s sympathetic inclusion of the historical impact of Anglo settlement ultimately masks its long-term effects.

Although many of the traditions and behaviors Robson describes have historic fidelity, the author turned to her own imaginative interpretation to describe Comanche familial structure. Robson’s book liberated white women characters by subtly privileging an Anglicized heteropatriarchal, middle-class lifestyle that reinforced Anglo dominance. Unless Anglo authors involve Native community members from the population about which they write in the production of their narratives, they risk projecting their own ideologies into the narratives in a way that discounts the unique cultural features of the Native community. When writing about Native American women, in particular, Anglo authors often distort Native family structures and gender roles to reflect their own desires for monogamous, heterosexual relationships that hold women in social positions more agreeable to hegemonic structures.\(^{103}\) Robson consulted extensive historical accounts and archival material when researching Parker’s narrative, but she did not consult with members of the Comanche Nation.\(^{104}\) The resulting narrative demonstrates the lasting

\(^{102}\) den Heyer and Fidyk, “Configuring Historical Facts Through Historical Fiction,” 141.

\(^{103}\) Hämäläinen, *The Comanche Empire*, 249.

\(^{104}\) Lucia St. Clair Robson, Personal Interview, Telephone, May 28, 2019.
power of settler colonialism over Native communities as it reinforces Anglo American concepts of family and home.

Robson’s depiction of marriage relationships in *Ride the Wind* reinforces white supremacy by drawing upon the Anglo settler model of patriarchal monogamy. When authors like Robson write Native people into the past they imply that settler colonialism existed as an event on a fixed timeline. Settler colonialism represents a long-standing structure, not a single event. Robson inadvertently reveals the long-standing impact of the settler system on Comanche people through Parker’s marriage to Peta Nocona. One of the myths about Parker’s relationship with the Comanche that has persisted through several iterations of her story is that Peta Nocona loved her so much that he took her as his only wife. Robson’s novel reinforced this myth by including passionate love scenes between the two and by offering the first full narrative of Peta Nocona’s search for his wife following the Pease River attack. This interpretation of the couple’s relationship stands in stark contrast to Comanche familial practices and serves only to placate the imaginations of Anglo readers.

The settler economy motivated changes in Comanche family structures in the early nineteenth century. Comanche men practiced polygamy, and in the period in which Parker lived among them, the practice expanded due to a booming trade economy inspired by European contact. Comanche practice of polygamy remained common even following their surrender to the reservation with the most notable example being

---


Quanah Parker, who had a total of nine wives.\textsuperscript{107} A Comanche man measured his social success by the number of horses and wives he accumulated.\textsuperscript{108} Traditional activities of Comanche men included hunting, providing protection, raiding for revenge or wealth, and horse breeding.\textsuperscript{109} Managing the subsequent “market production” increased the need for women’s labor since women typically managed the processing of meat, making of lodges and clothing, and oversaw the daily domestic chores around camp.\textsuperscript{110} As a well-respected chief of his own band, Peta Nocona likely had several wives. Texas historian Tom Crum argues that, based on typical Comanche social structure, Peta Nocona most likely took Parker as one of his “chore wives” to help his first wife with the more drudging domestic work.\textsuperscript{111} Most captive girls, though adopted into full kinship, assumed the role of chore wives when they matured.\textsuperscript{112} As a consequence, Peta Nocona’s treatment of Parker has been much debated. Quanah Parker also maintained that his father only took one wife, but among the Comanche community people remain unsure.\textsuperscript{113}

The disagreement over Parker’s position as Peta Nocona’s wife reveals the insidious nature of the settler colonial system. The permanence sought by Anglo settlers requires their full sovereignty, yet the continued presence of Native people serves as a constant threat to the success of the settler system.\textsuperscript{114} In order to reconcile this disruption, Anglo Americans must demonstrate their superiority as “more developed, more human”

\textsuperscript{108} Brooks, Captives and Cousins, 174-176.
\textsuperscript{109} Hämäläinen, The Comanche Empire, 247.
\textsuperscript{110} Hämäläinen, The Comanche Empire, 247.
\textsuperscript{111} Tom Crum, Personal Interview with Tom Crum, In Person at Pease River Memorial Event, April 28, 2108.
\textsuperscript{112} Hämäläinen, The Comanche Empire, 257.
\textsuperscript{113} Ron Parker, Personal Interview with Ron Parker, In Person at Pease River Memorial Event, April 27, 2018.
\textsuperscript{114} Tuck and Yang, “Decolonization Is Not a Metaphor,” 5, 9.
and “more deserving” of holding power.\footnote{115} Establishing Native communities as unchanging icons of the past offers one means of erasing the threat of lost power. Captivity narratives all have this feature in common. Taking control of the narrative itself as Robson does with Parker’s marriage relationship provides another means of reinforcing white supremacy. Metaphorically, Robson’s choice represents the continuation of forced assimilation programs that demanded Native communities assume traditional Anglo social models.

White Comanche and Ride the Wind reveal how fetishized interest in Native culture fails to dismantle the Anglo masculine supremacy inherent in the settler colonial system. In order for settler colonialism to end, Native people must have permanence as real people with the agency to construct their own historical narratives.\footnote{116} Despite their recognition of some of the trauma caused by Anglo settlement of North America, Jackson and Robson both wrote Comanche people into extinction, relied on stereotypical images of Native culture, and drew from their own imaginative interpretations rather than involving Comanche informants in their productions. Captivity narratives that end with Indigenous annihilation fail to account for the “adjustment and resilience” many Native communities exhibited in the face of colonization.\footnote{117} In order to disrupt the power that settler sovereignty maintains over Native peoples’ “sexuality, legality, raciality, language, religion, and property,” Anglo authors must recognize the ways that settler colonialism has impacted even the history that informs the stories we tell.\footnote{118}

\footnote{117} Joseph P. Gone, “Reconsidering American Indian Historical Trauma: Lessons from an Early Gros Ventre War Narrative,” Transcultural Psychiatry 51, no. 3 (2014): 387–406, 403.
\footnote{118} Tuck and Yang, “Decolonization Is Not a Metaphor,” 21.
White college educated liberals interested in New Age spirituality constructed Native culture as a consumable resource that improved their own humanity. Whereas shifting values in the 1970s and early 1980s increased awareness of cultural pluralism, Anglo Americans turned to Native people, not out of a desire to work as allies to dismantle white supremacy, but as a means of managing the guilt brought on by their newly expanded consciousness. New Age ideology constructed Native people as gatekeepers for ancient, nature based spirituality and ethics, but only for the benefit of Anglo advancement. Cultural forms that centered Native people therefore only loosely gestured toward Native agency and instead continued to reinforce racist and gendered ways of interpreting the world.

Both Jackson and Robson wrote Parker’s captivity narrative in ways that exploit Native culture for the benefit of Anglo Americans. Ultimately these narratives constructed Comanche culture as something lost to Anglo people. Rhetorically, the comic and novel claim a cultural trauma for Anglo people who are now, because of the inherent progress of civilization, prevented from obtaining the redemption offered by Native spirituality. Transforming the trauma inflicted upon Comanche people by Anglo settlers into a wound of their own allows Anglo people to purge themselves of guilt. This “settler move to innocence” manifests as “distractions” that remove “feelings of guilt or responsibility and conceal the need to give up land or power or privilege.” Recognizing Native permanence begins when authors no longer make such demands on Native people and cease writing them into “vulnerable and endangered” positions. Recovery from trauma depends upon people’s ability to speak for themselves, something Cynthia Ann

---

Parker did not do in any recorded form. Healing from collective trauma requires a rhetorical repurposing of the trauma narrative that identifies clear agents of oppression, something that must be done in full awareness of the cultural meaning of signs of trauma. Captivity narratives constructed by Anglo writers obscure this distinction and result in their arrested and unproductive repetition.
In 2016 Big Byte Books publishing company released an annotated version of *21 Months a Captive: Rachel Plummer and the Fort Parker Massacre*, a re-print of Rachel Plummer’s original first-person account of her experience as a captive of the Comanche following the attack on Fort Parker. Plummer, Cynthia Ann Parker’s cousin, was seventeen years old and pregnant with her second child at the time of the attack, and therefore was not adopted into a kinship relationship but served a Comanche family as a slave until her ransom.\(^1\) Plummer documented her experiences in a personal journal before her death in 1839.\(^2\) James Parker, Plummer’s father and the man upon whom LeMay and Ford based their protagonist in *The Searchers*, also provided a personal account of the attack on Fort Parker and his search for the captives that supplements Plummer’s text. Plummer’s nieces published her account first in 1926, and the first re-

---

\(^1\) Comanche took captives for a variety of reasons including retaliation, adoption, and slavery. Those kept as slaves helped with domestic duties within the family that held them captive and were often used to improve the economic situation of their captors when they were ransomed back to their original societies. See James F. Brooks, *Captives and Cousins: Slavery, Kinship, and Community in the Southwest Borderlands* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2002).

\(^2\) Plummer lived among the Comanche as a slave for thirteen months and was ransomed by traders on June 19, 1837. In her biography, she explained that the infant born to her during her captivity was killed by her captors. Her two-year-old son, James Pratt, was one of the five captives taken during the raid of Parker’s Fort. Plummer never saw James Pratt after their captivity as he was not ransomed until 1842, after Plummer’s death on March 19, 1839. See Rachel Plummer, *Rachael Plummer’s Narrative of Twenty-One Months Servitude as a Prisoner among the Commanchee Indians* (Austin, TX: Jenkins Publishing Company, 1977).
print appeared in 1977. Unlike Cynthia Parker’s narrative, Plummer’s account has not been adapted to a wide variety of genres, however, it has reappeared in concurrent historical moments.

As this dissertation has argued, the timing of the resuscitation of captivity narratives is not coincidental. Big Byte Books boasts of their mission to bring “the very best lost history” to the twenty-first century, where the “topics are still exciting [and] relevant.” The publishers offer the book without critical commentary and only sparse annotations that clarify information, such as James Parker’s birthdate and the date of Plummer’s death. The 2016 version includes the original “Foreword” written by Plummer’s nieces, which shares their goal to “impress or refresh the minds of the people of the hardships and suffering” the people of Texas endured “in opening the way for the blessings and civilization” that they now enjoy. The preceding analysis suggests that the reappearance of the Fort Parker attack, this time through Plummer’s narrative, signifies a desire, yet again, to reaffirm the social position of Anglo men. This dissertation also reveals how interpretation of the text depends upon the unique social context existing at the time of the re-print.

In many ways the current social and political climates in the US reflect the persistent and deeply rooted effects of a settler colonial system that privileges conceptions of masculinity ascribed to Anglo heteropatriarchal ideals. In this system, access to resources favors white Judeo-Christian hetero men of the upper class. Changes in the US economy since the Great Recession in the late 2000s have driven a greater

---

share of wealth and income to members of the upper class.\textsuperscript{5} This economic shift has in turn created a downwardly mobile lower middle class.\textsuperscript{6} Current data shows that the earning rate of the top ten percent of the US population is nearly nine times what the bottom ninety percent earn.\textsuperscript{7} A large number of Americans face “serious economic vulnerability” in an economy that has stagnated income growth for the working middle class.\textsuperscript{8} Financial security limited to such a small percentage of the population creates power gluts for a privileged few, and the vastly unequal access to resources not only negatively affects members of marginalized populations who have historically been denied opportunities to establish wealth, but restricts access for many middle-class Anglo Americans. The effects of downsizing, job loss, outsourcing, plant closings and the rise of big box stores over locally owned businesses have made achieving the mythical “American Dream” much harder for the children and grandchildren of people who benefitted in the economic boom of the World War II era.\textsuperscript{9}

Despite an inequitable economic system that continues to favor upper class white hetero men, notable social change has inspired opposition to hegemonic structures. The demographic makeup of the country is undergoing a subtle but powerful evolution. Since the late 1990s immigration rates from Asian and Latin American countries have risen.\textsuperscript{10} More recent social advances for members of marginalized populations, such as the election of Barak Obama, the 2015 Supreme Court ruling on marriage equality, the

\textsuperscript{6} Kimmel, Michael, \textit{Angry White Men: American Masculinity at the End of an Era} (New York: The Nation Institute, 2013), x.
\textsuperscript{7} Bobo, “Racism in Trump’s America,” 95.
\textsuperscript{8} Bobo, “Racism in Trump’s America,” 95.
\textsuperscript{9} Kimmel, \textit{Angry White Men}, xii.
\textsuperscript{10} Bobo, “Racism in Trump’s America,” 95.
increase of women of color in elected offices with the 2018 mid-term elections, and heightened awareness about Native land dispossession in the wake of the Dakota Access Pipeline protests have revealed people’s determination to overturn systems of oppression. In light of these advances, anxiety about perceived loss of social position plagues many Anglo-American men. The increased number and public presence of non-white members of the US population has produced a fear of what historian Ronald Takaki calls the “Browning of America” among many Anglo Americans.\textsuperscript{11}

In the wake of these events, downwardly socially mobile Anglo men who suffer from changes in the economy view their social positions at risk and rally toward opportunities for resistance. The election of Donald Trump in 2016, the same year that Plummer’s narrative was reprinted, has served to organize a blatantly racist, misogynistic, and homophobic public display of masculinity. Trump’s rhetoric channels “the aggrieved entitlement of white working-class men.”\textsuperscript{12} The president’s racist depiction of Latin American migrants as criminals and rapists and his disregard for and outright policy discrimination against people with disabilities, women, and members of the LGBTQ community reinforces the presumption of Anglo masculine privilege.\textsuperscript{13} Angry young white men reveal their anxiety over perceived threats to their social position through internet tirades against women and minorities who transgress the stations to which hegemonic masculinity ascribes them.\textsuperscript{14} Much of the frustration felt by these men stems from their belief that they no longer get “what they feel they deserve” and are denied

\textsuperscript{13} Kimmel, \textit{Manhood in America}, 316.
\textsuperscript{14} Kimmel, \textit{Manhood in America}, 316.
opportunities to prove their manhood by being sole providers for their families.\textsuperscript{15} Cultural productions, such as captivity narratives, draw upon collective memory to allow men access to a form of nostalgia that emboldens their feelings of entitlement and victimization.\textsuperscript{16}

Collective memory emerges within unique cultural exigences of a social group. Anglo American men’s cries to “Make America Great Again” offer another variation on the sentiments of race and gender hierarchies expressed in captivity narratives. Whether they ascribe the honor of establishing and maintaining American civilization to hardy Anglo settler men as shown in DeShields’s and Ford’s interpretations, or they uphold stereotypical images of Native people as noble savages whose cultural influence helps improve the lives of Anglo people, as Smith, Jackson, and Robson do, traditional captivity narratives draw upon a mythic interpretation of history to reinforce white masculine supremacy. The versions of Parker’s narrative analyzed in this dissertation demonstrate that the stories bolster the social position of Anglo Americans by justifying settler displacement of Native people through a gendered performance of Americanism rooted in hegemonic conceptions of civilization, national pride, and divine right. These stories have in common features that promote the continuation of racial and gender hierarchies: reliance upon stereotypical interpretations of Comanche culture, privileging of white women as symbolic mothers of the nation, admiration for heroic white men contrasted against villainous Comanche men, and the concealment of the violence inherent within settler colonialism. The narratives examined in this dissertation draw upon the constitutive power of collective memory to appropriate the trauma experienced

\textsuperscript{15} Kimmel, \textit{Angry White Men}, x.
\textsuperscript{16} Kimmel, \textit{Angry White Men}, x.
personally by Parker and collectively by Comanche into a cultural trauma for Anglo Americans.

Collective memory requires a shared focus, not shared experiences, and this analysis of Parker’s captivity narrative in its various forms and appearances demonstrates how discourses change based on the circumstances that inform their production. The symbolic nature of cultural trauma as something not experienced first-hand, but instead passed symbolically through generations in the form of mediated representations, suggests that strategic rhetorical reshaping offers a means by which perpetuators of trauma who hold power as a carrier group can construct themselves as victims. Traditional appearances of Parker’s captivity narrative have conflated the structural absence of idealized masculinity with historical losses experienced by Parker, her family, and Comanche people in a process that has symbolically shaped a wound for Anglo American men. During times of significant social change, the reappearance of the narratives allows Anglo Americans to draw upon a useable past to reassert their right to supremacy. Collective memory thus represents a construction of past events by people in the present mediated in the minds of individuals.

Interpretations of Parker’s story, and in fact all American captivity narratives, signify the cultures of trauma produced by settler colonialism. Specifically, these narratives represent the trauma experienced by members of marginalized racial and ethnic groups and women. Every part of the settler system seeks to “destroy or assimilate” Native people and the narrative features of captivity stories participate in this annihilation by locking Native culture into a fixed moment of the past and perpetuating
negative stereotypes of Native people. The racial screen provided by Native people in the stories allows white Americans to normalize their own presence on the American continent and privileges Anglo Americans over all other racialized groups. Simultaneously, the settler system privileges Anglo masculinity and regulates control of women’s bodies to dominant white men.

Trauma scholarship recognizes that recovery requires victims to speak for themselves. Working through the traumas of the settler system cannot occur through traditional captivity narratives because the genre itself is a product of that system. All of the interpretations of Parker’s story have been produced by Anglo authors without consultation with Parker’s Comanche descendants. Parker’s Comanche relatives, however, cannot write her story devoid of the settler influence because Parker’s significance exists primarily for the benefit of white Americans for their own national narratives. Recontextualization from the Comanche perspective requires acknowledgement of the ways that settler colonialism has impacted Parker’s narrative. As an adopted Comanche woman, Parker held little historical significance beyond what she has been given by Anglo Americans who interpret, write, distribute, and enjoy her captivity narrative. As a case in point, Cindy Parker Famero, member of the Comanche Nation and one of Parker’s descendants, learned of her great-great-grandmother through Robson’s Ride the Wind. Though Famero knew much of her family history


\[19\] Ron Parker, Personal Interview with Ron Parker, In Person at Pease River Memorial Event, April 27, 2018.

\[20\] Cindy Parker Famero, Personal Interview with Cindy Parker Famero, In Person at Pease River Memorial Event, April 27, 2018.
though her father, Ron Parker, who organized and manages the Quanah Parker Society, references to Cynthia Ann Parker are typically few and only anecdotal to Quanah’s success.\textsuperscript{21} Famero, who found Robson’s book on a sale rack in a California department store, said she “learned more about [her] family in that book than [she] knew before” and that Robson’s account “filled a void” in her life.\textsuperscript{22} Robson, however, admits that she imagined and exaggerated the majority of her novel (since Parker left no first-person account of her experiences).\textsuperscript{23} Both Famero and her father, Ron Parker, nevertheless hold great admiration for Robson and believe that her novel, more than any other interpretation they’ve encountered, shows respect for Comanche culture.\textsuperscript{24} Father and daughter both also acknowledge that Parker’s popularity is stronger with Anglo audiences than it is with Comanche because “she’s white.”\textsuperscript{25} Ron Parker recognizes the impact of a settler system of raciability among his Comanche friends and relatives who disagree over Quanah’s famed memory. Many Comanche do not hold high esteem for Quanah because they see him as “half white” and as a traitor for surrendering to the reservation and assimilating to Anglo American culture by adopting Parker as his surname.\textsuperscript{26} This tension further reflects the impact of the settler system on a culture that, prior to Anglo colonization, adopted people without regard to race or ethnic origin.\textsuperscript{27}

\begin{flushleft}
\textsuperscript{21} Famero, Personal Interview.
\textsuperscript{22} Famero, Personal Interview.
\textsuperscript{23} Lucia St. Clair Robson, Personal Interview, Telephone, May 28, 2019.
\textsuperscript{24} Ron Parker reached out to Lucia Robson after he read her book and the two have become good friends. Parker refers to Robson as his “sister” and his daughter, Cindy Parker Famero, calls Robson her “aunt.” Robson visits the Parker family occasionally and is a regular participant in their memorial events and at the annual National Cowboy Symposium in Lubbock, Texas.
\textsuperscript{25} Parker, Personal Interview.
\textsuperscript{26} Parker, Personal Interview.
\textsuperscript{27} Pekka Hämäläinen, \textit{The Comanche Empire} (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2008), 177.
\end{flushleft}
Captivity narratives also symbolize the violence against women inherent in the long-lasting settler colonial system. No doubt, Parker experienced significant personal trauma in both her capture from Fort Parker in 1836 and her violent return to her Anglo family in 1860. Interpretations of her story across the genres discussed in this dissertation demonstrate how her personal trauma has been romanticized in a way that capitalized upon the culture of trauma in which women live for the advancement of Anglo men. The threat of rape present within Parker’s narrative serves to regulate the behavior and bodies of white women during periods of their social advancement. Rape and sexual violence against women remain deeply embedded in the settler colonial system. Captivity narratives provide symbolic reinforcement of the oppression, abuse, and exploitation of women prevalent in the US social order. Rape also functions as a metaphor for colonization in that, like colonized communities, victims of sexual assault experience attacks on their bodies that invade private boundaries and represent a disregard for their personhood and humanity. Captivity narratives therefore exist as symbolic reminders to women of the power and control Anglo men have maintained in the settler colonial system. The insidious trauma of this type of control remains present even within stories written by women. White women authors of Parker’s narrative such as Smith and Robson unknowingly perpetuate notions of white supremacy by overlooking the unique experiences of non-white women in the settler colonial system. Violence against Native women has become well documented in recent years as social justice initiatives work to draw attention to the persistent problem. The privilege afforded to white women in all

29 Deer, “Decolonizing Rape Law,” 150.
versions of Parker’s narrative analyzed in this dissertation reinforces the continuance of racial hierarchies that intersect with a gendered oppressive structure that grants white women limited agency for the ultimate benefit of Anglo-American men.

This project demonstrates how the trauma present within the hero/rescue narrative trope that characterizes captivity narratives serves to reinforce gendered Anglo-American social supremacy. Early American captivity narratives like Parker’s established a foundation for a genre that continues to fascinate and attract the American imagination. In addition to Jessica Lynch’s 2003 imprisonment in an Iraqi hospital, modern adaptations of the American captivity narrative include *Bringing Elizabeth Home* (2003), written by the parents of Elizabeth Smart who was kidnapped at age 14 and held captive for nine months, and *A Stolen Life* (2011), by Jaycee Dugard, kidnapped at age 11 and not recovered until 18 years later.\(^30\) This study draws attention to the ulterior implications of captivity narratives and justifies additional research to understand how the genre continues to define American culture and shape expectations for the performance of hegemonic notions of masculinity and femininity.

Ending the oppression of racially marginalized groups and women that persists in the long-standing settler colonial system means creating space for Indigenous permanency and destabilizing social structures that limit opportunities for women.\(^31\) Collective memory does not exist as a fixed object, but as a symbolic manifestation of ideological processes influenced by cultural, social, and economic factors. For this reason, alternative contextualization of problematic histories provides the key to


restorative empathic unsettlement that encourages more ethical engagements.

Contemporary Native people who encounter Parker’s captivity narrative in the texts analyzed in this dissertation recognize the symbols of trauma that mark their dispossession and forced cultural assimilation. Comanche understand the irony in the Texas government’s gift of land to Parker after her return to Anglo society, and they see her distress in her shorn hair as she nurses her daughter in her photograph. Modern women, likewise, mediate the narrative from uniquely situated social positions. Regardless of race, women know the emotional toil of systematic regulation of their bodies and limited agency they experience in the settler system. Women understand the frustration of patriarchal control that granted Parker her own homestead and stipend, but placed her under the management of her uncle and brother-in-law; they recognize the inequity of a system that required Parker to receive permission from her male guardians before attempting to reconnect with her sons and husband in the Comanche community.

Alternative considerations and perspectives can inform constructions of Parker’s narrative that offer a more ethical telling of her story. Although truth might remain unobtainable, steps taken to recognize the injustices of the settler system move the memory of the narrative toward a beneficial critical engagement. Since 2016 the Quanah Parker Society, led by Ron Parker, has worked in partnership with Texas historian Tom Crum to host a memorial event in honor of Cynthia Ann Parker at the Pease River location where Captain Sul Ross and the Texas Rangers captured her in December 1860. The event, accessible by invitation only on privately owned land, brings together curious white Texans and Comanche members of the Parker family with occasional interested historians or researchers to discuss Comanche dispossession, Texas history, and Parker’s
role in both. White men in cowboy hats and boots prepare community meals and historical interpreters give lessons on Comanche history inside a reconstructed tipi. Comanche drummers and flute players share their art around a campfire at night and Ron Parker and Cindy Parker Famero, his daughter, lead traditional Comanche rituals of healing.

If there is hope for working through the trauma depicted in Parker’s captivity narrative it comes through Famero’s role in the memorial event. Famero provides an intersectional perspective about Parker’s story unique to her social position as a Comanche woman. For Famero, the first year at the Pease River memorial event conjured feelings of overwhelming sadness as she reflected upon the losses her family suffered at the site. Although she recognizes the temporal difference that separates her from her great-great-great grandmother, Famero expressed her frustration over not only the dispossession of the land upon which the event occurs, but also in the removal of Parker from her Comanche family. Subsequent trips to the Pease River event for Famero became missions of healing. Famero leads many of the activities at the event and is determined to see the presence of women and children grow. Ron Parker defers often to his daughter’s decision making about camp activities and maintenance and it is clear that Famero inhabits a position of respect among the participants. Famero, however, holds a skeptical regard for the curiosity of white visitors, welcoming those who come to the event with an attitude of deference, but cautious of those who would exploit her. In her

---

32 Famero, Personal Interview.
33 Famero, Personal Interview.
interview for this project, Famero said she will happily share more information on a return visit “after trust has been built.”

Overcoming the misappropriated trauma recounted in Parker’s captivity narrative means accepting where social privilege has created unfair advantages and yielding to the authority of the oppressed even when doing so creates a need for conversations or actions that feel awkward or unsettling. The Pease River memorial event allows for critical conversations about Parker’s captivity narrative that have not occurred in other forms. Anglo visitors, while welcome to share their research and understandings or impressions, receive significant and important feedback from Comanche attendees. Parker’s story, though influenced heavily by the settler colonial system, receives a beneficial alternative contextualization at the event because attendees have opportunities to share the various versions of her history and gain perspective from members of the Comanche Nation. Despite these benefits, the event remains open only by invitation. The owner of the land at which the event is held, an Anglo man, works in partnership with the Quanah Parker Society and Texas historian Tom Crum to provide access to the location for the weekend. This arrangement itself, though friendly, demonstrates the deep and insidious impact of settler colonialism. As long as Comanche access to land remains mediated through Anglo resources, the settler system remains intact.

Famero and her father, despite limited access to the land, see great benefit and have optimism for future expansion of the Parker memorial weekend. Ron Parker said that he sees the presence of Anglo and Comanche people together as a sign of love.

---

34 Famero, Persona Interview.
36 Parker, Personal Interview.
Whereas Cynthia Ann Parker’s captivity narrative cannot be separated from the influence of settler colonialism, events such as the memorial weekend, when led by Comanche, demonstrate the resiliency of Comanche culture and negate perceptions that Comanche are people eradicated by Anglo settlement. Events such as this one provide opportunities to make, if not a historically accurate, a more ethical use of the past.
REFERENCES


Brosnan, AnneMarie. 2016. “Representations of Race and Racism in the Textbooks Used
in Southern Black Schools during the American Civil War and Reconstruction Era, 1861–1876.” *Paedagogica Historia* 52 (6): 718–33.


DeShields, James T. 1886. *Cynthia Ann Parker: The Story of Her Capture at the Massacre of the Inmates of Parker’s Fort; of Her Quarter of a Century Spent among the Comanches, as the Wife of the War Chief, Peta Nocona; and of Her Recapture at the Battle of Pease River, by Captain L.S. Ross, of the Texian Rangers*. St. Louis, MO: Printed for the Author.


Identity. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.


Greenfeld, Lawrence A. 1997. “Sex Offences and Offenders: An Analysis of Data on


Horn, Sarah Ann. 1839. A Narrative of the Captivity of Mrs. Horn and Her Two Children. St. Louis, MO: C Keemle.


Patterson, Michelle Wick. 2002. “‘Real’ Indian Songs: The Society of American Indians
and the Use of Native American Culture as a Means of Reform.” *American Indian Quarterly* 26 (1): 44–66.


Sharpe, Jenny. 1993. Allegories of Empire: The Figure of Woman in the Colonial Text. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.


Smith, Julia. 1939. “Cynthia Parker.”


CURRICULUM VITA

Treva Elaine Hodges

**Personal Information**

Home Contact Information: 1136 Main Street Charlestown, IN 47111 Ph: 812-896-5647 Personal email: treva.hodges@gmail.com

**Education**

*Ph.D., course work completed, Comparative Humanities, University of Louisville, Graduate Certificate in Women and Gender Studies Graduate Certificate in Public History*

*M.A., 2008, Department of Communication Studies, University of Alabama.*

Emphasis on rhetorical criticism and public address including discourse analysis, classical rhetoric and forensics education. Additional courses in interpersonal, intercultural, and organizational communication.

*B.A., cum laude, 2006, College of Communication and Information Sciences, University of Alabama*

Emphasis on rhetoric and individual performance studies. Minor in English with a focus in linguistics.

**Employment and Teaching**

(1) University of Louisville, Department of Comparative Humanities, GTA, July 2016 – Present

HUM 152: Cultures of American – two sections – Spring 2019
HUM 152: Cultures of America – two sections – Fall 2018
HUM 152: Cultures of America – one section – Summer 2018
HUM 152: Cultures of America – two sections – Spring 2018
HUM 152: Cultures of America – two sections – Fall 2017
HUM 152: Cultures of America – one section – Summer 2017
HUM 152: Cultures of America – two sections – Spring 2017
HUM 152: Cultures of America – two sections – Fall 2016
HUM 152: Cultures of America – one section – Summer 2016

(2) Ivy Tech Community College, Communication, Adjunct Instructor, August 2014 – May 2016

COM 101: Public Speaking – one section – Spring 2016
COM 101: Public Speaking – one section – Fall 2015
COM 101: Public Speaking – two sections – Spring 2015
COM 102: Interpersonal Communication – one section – Spring 2015
COM 101: Public Speaking – three sections – Fall 2014

(3) Indiana University Southeast, Communication, Adjunct Instructor, August 2013 – May 2016

SPCH 121: Public Speaking – one section – Spring 2016
SPCH 121: Public Speaking – three sections – Fall 2015
SPCH 121: Public Speaking – one section – Summer 2015
SPCH 121: Public Speaking – two sections – Spring 2015
SPCH 121: Public Speaking – one section – Fall 2014
SPCH 122: Interpersonal Communication – one section – Fall 2014
SPCH 121: Public Speaking – one section – Summer 2014
SPCH 121: Public Speaking – two sections – Spring 2014
SPCH 121: Public Speaking – two sections – Fall 2013

(4) University of Alabama, Communication Studies, Instructor, Field Experience Coordinator August 2011 – August 2013

2011/2012 – Served as Undergraduate Program Director and Assessment Coordinator for the Department of Communication Studies. Responsible for departmental assessment reports, curriculum planning, and overseeing academic advising.

COM 122: Critical Decision Making – Spring 2013
COM 123: Public Speaking Lab (two sections) – Spring 2013
COM 348: Argumentation – Spring 2013
COM 490: Field Experiences in Communication Studies – Spring 2013

CIS 100: Freshman Compass/Living Learning Course – Fall 2012
COM 123: Honors Public Speaking – Fall 2012
COM 348: Argumentation – Fall 2012
COM 490: Field Experiences in Communication Studies – Fall 2012
COM 310: Rhetorical Criticism – Summer 2012
COM 490: Field Experiences in Communication Studies – Summer 2012

COM 155: Freshman Seminar – Spring 2012
COM 310: Rhetorical Criticism – Spring 2012
COM 490: Field Experiences in Communication Studies – Spring 2012
COM 499: Capstone Seminar – Spring 2012

COM 121: Honors Critical Decision Making – Fall 2011
COM 310: Rhetorical Criticism – Fall 2011
COM 348: Argumentation – Fall 2011
COM 490: Field Experiences in Communication Studies – Fall 2011

(5) Jefferson State Community College. Communications, Adjunct Instructor
August 2012

Two sections of SPH 107 Fundamentals of Speech Communication

(6) University of Alabama. Communication Studies, Instructor/Assistant Director of
Forensics/Internship Coordinator
August 2008 – May 2011

COM 122: Critical Decision Making – Summer 2011
COM 310: Rhetorical Criticism – Summer 2011

COM 104: Forensics – Debate – Spring 2011
COM 310: Rhetorical Criticism – Spring 2011
COM 348: Argumentation – Service Learning – Spring 2011
COM 490: Internship – Spring 2011

COM 104: Forensics – Debate – Fall 2010
COM 310: Rhetorical Criticism – Fall 2010
COM 348: Argumentation – Fall 2010
COM 490: Internship – Fall 2010

COM 104: Forensics – Debate – Spring 2010
COM 122: Critical Decision Making – Spring 2010
COM 155: Freshman Seminar – Spring 2010
COM 310: Rhetorical Criticism – Spring 2010
COM 436: Independent Study – Spring 2010
COM 490: Internship – Spring 2010

COM 104: Forensics – Debate – Fall 2009
COM 310: Rhetorical Criticism – Fall 2009
COM 348: Argumentation – Fall 2009
COM 490: Internship – Fall 2009
FLC 101: Mock Trial – Fall 2009

COM 123: Public Speaking – Honors Course – Spring 2009
COM 348: Argumentation – Spring 2009

COM 104: Forensics – Debate – Fall 2008
COM 123: Public Speaking – Freshman Learning Community – Fall 2008
COM 348: Argumentation – Fall 2008

COM 123: Public Speaking – Summer I 2008

(7) University of Alabama, Communication Studies, Graduate Teaching Assistant, May 2007 – May 2008

COM 123: Public Speaking – Honors Course – Spring 2008
COM 123: Public Speaking – Spring 2008
MGT 395: Managerial Communication Strategies (studio director) – Spring 2008

COM 123: Public Speaking – Fall 2007
COM 123: Public Speaking – Freshman Learning Community – Fall 2007
COM 123: Public Speaking – Summer I 2007
COM 123: Public Speaking – Summer II 2007


(9) AmSouth Bank, Birmingham, AL – Business Analyst, August 2002 – June 2004

(10) AmSouth Bank, Birmingham, AL – Administrative Assistant, March 2001 – August 2002


(13) Oak View Veterinary Clinic, Pelham, AL – Technician/Receptionist, September 1998 – October 1999

Guest Lectures

- Anthropology 321: American Indian Women – April 12, 2018 – traumatic captivity narratives
- Communication 499: Capstone Seminar Discussion Leader – September 2, 2010
- Communication 499: Capstone Seminar Discussion Leader – August 26, 2010
- Communication 123: Public Speaking Lecture – September 18, 2009
- Communication 123: Lab Facilitator – September 18, 2009
- Communication 123: Public Speaking Lecture – August 2, 2009
- Communication 499: Capstone Seminar – War and Protest Rhetoric, WWII Rhetoric – Fall 2007
- Communication 123: Introduction to Public Speaking – Visual Aid Activity – Fall 2007
- Communication 100: Rhetoric and Society – Apologia: The Tuskegee Experiment – Fall 2006

Academic Conferences, Presentations, and Appointments

Round table participant at the Symposium on Borders, Sovereignty, and Citizenship in the Americas – University of Louisville 2018 – Native American and Public History Panel

Graduate Student Council – Representative for Department of Comparative Humanities – 2017/2018 academic year


Committee Member – National Communication Association – November 2011 – American Forensic Association Research Committee


Committee Member – National Communication Association – November 2008 – American
Forensic Association Research Committee


Presenter – Alabama Historical Association – April 2008 – “Choctaw/Chickasaw Delegation Debates of 1811”


Presenter – National Communication Association – November 2007 – “Not in My Backyard: A Dramatistic Perspective of Identity Constructions and Territory in the Aftermath of Hurricane Katrina”

Presenter – University of Alabama Thesis and Research Conference, February 2007 – “Not in My Backyard: A Dramatistic Perspective of Identity Constructions and Territory in the Aftermath of Hurricane Katrina”


**Academic Service and Awards**

(1) **University of Louisville**

   Carolyn Krause Maddox Prize for top graduate paper in Women and Gender Studies – Spring 2018
   Awarded Anne Braden Institute Social Justice Research Paper Graduate Award – Spring 2017
   Awarded Celeste M. Nichols Research Grant – Fall 2016
   GTA Academy Participant – Fall 2015

(2) **Indiana University Southeast**

   Nominated for Distinguished Teaching Award for Part-Time Faculty 2015

(3) **Ivy Tech Community College**

   Master Teacher Academy – Member – Academic Year 2015/2016
(4) University of Alabama

Service Learning Coordinator – Cottondale Elementary School – Spring 2012
Nominated for Last Lecture Teaching Award – Spring 2011
Lecture Capture Committee Member – Spring 2011
Service Learning Coordinator – Crestmont Elementary School – Spring 2011
Moral Forum Judge – Semi final and Final Round – Fall 2010
Alumni Chair – Alabama Forensic Council – Fall 2010
Kappa Delta Epsilon Honorary Educational Fraternity – Fall 2010
Undergraduate Program Committee – 2010/2011
Faculty Advisor for Undergraduate Honors 101 course – Fall 2009
Committee Member – Technology Committee – Fall 2009
Service Learning Coordinator – Central High School JAG Project – Spring 2009
Outstanding Teaching for MA Candidate – Spring 2009
Faculty Fellows in Service Learning Program Participant – Fall 2008
Moral Forum Judge – Center of Ethics and Social Responsibility – Fall 2008
Nights of Performance Benefitting Homeless Pets Coordinator – Spring 2008
Graduate Student Association – Interim Vice President and Co-chair Thesis and Research Conference Planning, Spring 2007 – Spring 2008
Graduate Student Representative – Technology Committee, August 2007 – Spring 2008
Alumni Chair – Alabama Forensic Council, May 2006 – Spring 2008
Golden Key Academic Honor Society, August 2006 – Spring 2008
Lambda Pi Eta Communications Honor Society, April 2006 – Spring 2008
Crimson Classic Speech Tournament Coordinator, October 2007
Alabama Alumni Speech Tournament Coordinator, October 2007
Sigma Tau Delta English Honor Society, August 2005 – May 2006
Crimson Classic Speech Tournament Coordinator, October 2006
Alabama Alumni Speech Tournament Coordinator, October 2006
AFA/NIET National Finalist – Informative Speaking, April 2006
DSR-TKA National Champion – Informative Speaking, March 2006
DSR-TKA National Finalist – Persuasive Speaking, March 2006
DSR-TKA National Finalist – After Dinner Speaking, March 2006
DSR-TKA National Finalist – Impromptu Speaking, March 2006
Outstanding Individual Events Team Member – April 2006
Crimson Classic Speech Tournament Coordinator, October 2005
AFA/NIET National Quarter-finalist – Communication Analysis, April 2005

(5) Jefferson State Community College

Phi Rho Pi National Silver Medalist – Poetry Interpretation, 2004
Phi Rho Pi National Silver Medalist – Informative Speaking, 2004
Outstanding Speech Team Member, 2004
Speech Team President, Spring 2004
Phi Theta Kappa Academic Honor Society, Fall 2003 – Spring 2004

Community and Civic Engagement

Advisor/Independent Consultant – Speech Team – Mississippi State University – Fall 2015
After school Elementary mentor for Blue House ministries – Spring 2013
Mentor for Tuscaloosa’s One Place 4th-5th grade debate initiative – Spring 2012
Mentor for Tuscaloosa’s One Place 4th-5th grade debate initiative – Spring 2011
Advisor/Coach – Central High School Debate Club – Spring 2010
Coordinator for SpeakUp Tuscaloosa – Hillcrest Middle School – Fall 2009
Coach for Mars Hill Bible School Speech and Debate Summer Institute – Summer 2009
Interim Youth Ministry Team, 2006-2007 – Tuscaloosa, AL
Undergraduate Speech and English Tutor, 2004 – 2007 – Tuscaloosa, AL
Coach for Mars Hill Bible School Speech and Debate Team, 2005 – 2007 – Florence, AL
Coaching/Judging for Advent Day School Speech Team, 2004 – Birmingham, AL

References

Dr. Simona Bertacco, Director of Graduate Studies, Department of Comparative Humanities,
University of Louisville, (502) 852-7161, simona.bertacco@louisville.edu.

Rebecca Carlton, Senior Lecturer, Indiana University Southeast, 4201 Grant Line Road,
New Albany, IN 47150. (812) 941-2162, rcarlton@ius.edu.

Dr. Ann C. Hall, Department Chair and Professor, Department of Comparative Humanities, University of Louisville, (502) 852-7134, ann.hall@louisville.edu.